Samba Showgirls
Cross-cultural practice in Australian popular dance entertainment

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Research)

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This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

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Abstract

The popularisation of Latin American dance genres in societies outside of Latin America has long contributed to evolving and appropriated styles. This research looks at such a case: the ‘Samba Showgirl’, the cross-cultural dance practice of Brazilian ‘samba no pé’ in an Australian environment. This hybrid is the result of bringing, what is at its origin, an Afro-Brazilian dance practice into the bodies of jazz and ballet trained commercial dancers. Beyond the hybridisation of samba in Australia, the way in which practitioners engage with this imported dance form is examined. Here we see how ideas of authenticity are caught up in notions of exoticism, how commercialising the form contributes to the way it is presented, and how aesthetic values of dance differ between Australia and Brazil. This research contains both ethnographic and biographic data, collected through my engagement in the Australian samba scene as both a working dancer and performance studies researcher. Performance observations, attendance at workshops and classes, qualitative interviews, as well as online analysis, have contributed to the research findings. This thesis explores the embodiment of a dance tradition in a culture and context far from its origin. I aim to explore how these performances and their participants engage with and affect broader discussions around performing in cross-cultural settings.
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Introduction

At the International Federation of Theatre Research conference in São Paulo Brazil 2017, I shared with my intimate audience, footage of an Australian samba performance featuring a very well-known and highly regarded troupe of Australian samba dancers. A few of the São Paulo university students attending my presentation, who were both conference volunteers and translators, looked on with a mixture of appreciation, alarm and amusement. During the post-presentation discussion, I was eager to ask them what they thought. One student immediately spoke up; she was the granddaughter of a significant director of the São Paulo based samba school ‘Vai-Vai’. “This is not samba,” she said, “it’s really cool and impressive, but it’s not samba”. For her, samba is about community and religion; it is an almost sacred practice that places great importance on the power of the drums and the rhythms created. The footage I showed of nine women in glittering bikinis, dancing in rehearsed synchronisation to non-Brazilian samba music, was not something she could relate to but is very much the norm in Australia. This thesis explores this norm: the Australian performance of a Brazilian practice.

In 2014 I began dancing for a Latin entertainment company, despite having only ever previously practised ballet and contemporary dance. Every week this company was booked to perform themed shows for entertainment purposes at whatever event and occasion required, as were many other groups and companies across Australia, often hired with the request to ‘get the party started’. Brazilian themed shows are one of the most requested. In these shows, samba, a music and dance genre from Brazil, is featured as the core, or sometimes only, dance number, where women dance, and men (often but not always) accompany them playing the drums. I have performed as a samba dancer at
community festivals, private birthday parties, Brazilian restaurants, a movie premiere, a book launch, a University conference, a Muslim wedding and a children’s soccer game. It would be very rare for us to see, let alone rehearse in these spaces before the performance. We have little control over the general atmosphere, where the audience is located, and how and where our entrances are organised. I have had to avoid, on several occasions, babies crawling onto the stage, waiters who walk through our performances and sudden outbursts of expression by audience members who want to join us. Dancers in this industry must become adept at adapting, changing their performance both minutes before and during a show.

Popular dance entertainment is an area that receives little academic attention. Our performances rarely engage with complex themes nor do we appear to challenge societal views. Our goal is to please a range of audiences rather than produce a radical or rare performance. However, as Sherril Dodds argues, popular dance can be seen as a place of significant social and economic contestation. Here, complex value systems are at play, both challenging social norms as well as reproducing them, over and over again.

Popular dance exists within a system of values and how those engaged in popular dance practice are not only produced by a framework of value, but also have the capacity to negotiate and re-imagine the values they encounter through their dancing bodies (Dodds 2011, p. 4).

Equally, in studying popular dance, we learn the values and workings of groups usually unaccounted for when studying more elite forms of dance. My engagement with popular dance performance and entertainment in Sydney raised questions of appropriation and exoticisation, but it also revealed evidence of a hybrid form shaped by commercialisation. These questions and revelations are interwoven with various systems of competition and value played out across the professional field and the performing bodies of my fellow dancers.
This thesis is the result of my concern with how and why Australians are appropriating the Brazilian practice of samba performance. What is it about this form that makes it so appealing, for Australian promoters, performers and audiences? Moreover, how do these appropriators negotiate and legitimise their commercialisation of this Brazilian dance practice? With a wider scope, I aim to understand how popular dance performance and their performers engage with and affect broader discussions around the performing of cultural practices in cross-cultural contexts.

**What is samba?**

For many Brazilians, samba is music before it is dance. In Australia, the dance is the predominant focus. The individuals who are regularly practising, performing, and consuming samba here, are also primarily female. In limiting my research to who the majority of samba practitioners are and the aspect of samba culture they engage with, I am revealing the extent to which samba in Australia is a restricted field when compared to samba in Brazil. It is therefore vital to highlight that in talking about samba as a dance practice I am neglecting the musical practice of samba, as well as what is mostly, the many male musicians in the Australian field. So, while I analyse samba in its limited but predominant Australian form, I would like to acknowledge that it is incredibly diverse as a dance, musical and cultural practice.

When referring to samba as a dance, it is usually narrowed down to, or associated with, one particular step that is repeatedly performed. This step has its origins in the Afro-Brazilian practice of the ‘*samba de roda*’, dating back as early as the 17th century. Here, participants form a circle and individuals and or couples take turns at entering the circle (*roda*) and dance to music (Chasteen 1996, p. 32; UNESCO 2009). Participants would not only dance the step in an individual style but incorporate various other moves
making the practice a particularly creative outlet of expression during the hard times of slavery and still today from poverty, violence and as a way of reinforcing cultural and racial identity (Browning 1995, p. 160). Since then the step has developed, particularly after the abolishment of slavery and the Portuguese acceptance of Afro-Brazilian cultural forms, but the basic rhythms and bodily coordination is much the same, as seen and described in the linked video by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation: [UNESCO 2009]. Today many forms of samba dance exist, often varying according to musical style and region of Brazil. Popular variations include, ‘samba de gafieira’ and ‘samba axé’ or simply ‘axé’.1 These versions are significantly different from the style of samba I focus on: the female practice of samba as performed by what Brazilians call ‘passistas’. A passista is considered a professional samba dancer, who has achieved a particular status in his or her samba school because of their dedication and skill. While men can also be considered a passista, they typically perform samba in a different style to women; this is often referred to as ‘malandro’.2 Particularly within Rio de Janeiro, samba as a dance is alluded to, or good dancers are considered to have, ‘samba no pé’ (samba in the feet). The reference is to the music being ‘in’ or controlling the practitioner’s feet, where they become an embodied representation of samba music with the intricate footwork guiding the rest of the body (Pravaz 2012, p. 119).

Although written physical descriptions of samba are limited, there are a few scholars who have described samba as a dance step. John Charles Chasteen describes the

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1 ‘Samba de gafieira’ holds the closest resemblance to the ‘dancesport’ appropriated form of samba. Juliet McMains (2001) describes dancesport as ‘a highly stylised version of ballroom dancing performed in competition circuits across the United States, Europe, and Asia. International Style Dancesport encompasses both the standard category, comprised of dances most readily associated with aristocratic ballrooms (e.g., waltzes and foxtrots), and the Latin division’ (p. 54).

2 Axé is also the name for a popular music genre originating in Salvador Brazil that fuses other Afro-Caribbean music genres, like calypso and reggae as well as Brazilian genres like forró and frevo (Henry 2008). The word axé derives from African Yoruba culture, which describes a positive form of energy that can be passed between individuals (Henry 2008; Rios et al. 2011).

3 A ‘malandro’ is historically a name for a thug or ruffian-type character, but despite previous negative connotations, today it is an identity that individuals adopt and is associated with dancing samba (Souza 2013).
overall visual appeal of samba when performed by professional female dancers in
carnival parades in Brazil.

This samba is lightning fast, whirling steps that give the impression, when
successfully done, of a mechanical eggbeater. Most people cannot keep up for
more than a few seconds if they attempt it at all (Chasteen 2004, p. 9).

The ‘egg-beater’ comparison describes what samba looks like through metaphor, while
Barbara Browning (a samba dancer, teacher and scholar) gives a more technical
description, breaking down the specific timing of each body part.

The dance is on a three-count – right-left-right/left-right-left – but it also weights
one count, either the first or the second triplet. It may accentuate or contradict the
weighting of the triplets in the music. As one triplet is heavier, the step slides
toward the first line of rapid sixteenths to itself and hints at that doubleness by, in
an instant, shifting the weight from the ball of the foot to the heel [...] the hips –
particularly if you are a woman – must lag slightly behind the feet so that their
triplet, while it follows the same right-left-right pattern, will accentuate or weight
a beat slightly after that of the feet (Browning 1995, pp. 12-13).

Without previous knowledge of the dance step, this description can be challenging to
visualise or get a feel for, but Browning’s explanation is highly accurate, describing the
specificities of the timing and weight distribution in samba. Coupled with Chasteen’s ‘egg
beater’ metaphor, one can get an idea of the frenzy-like bodily motion created through
this step.

**Scholarly Influence**

As samba is a relatively new player in the Australian dance entertainment scene,
with no academic research yet produced on Australian samba, I turned to where similar
studies have been conducted overseas, despite there also being a limited volume of
scholarly inquiry on samba performed outside of Brazil. Much of my scholarly influence
originates from work conducted on the cross-cultural practice and appropriation of other
Latin dance styles in Western contexts. While I reference the numerous scholars whose
work I have used in this thesis, I must particularly acknowledge the following four scholars due to their significant contributions, influences and parallels to and in this thesis.

Annie McNeill Gibson (2013a; 2013b) is one of the few scholars who has looked at samba performance in a non-Brazilian context. She studied the New Orleans samba group *Casa Samba*, in whom she recognised the negotiations of identity and culture that performing in a cross-cultural context created. As she has also performed as a samba dancer, juggling the role of practitioner and researcher, she recognises her, and her fellow dancers embodied experience in performing, appropriating and hybridising the dance. Gibson (2013a) saw her case study as ‘a reminder that geographical movement along with the physical movement of dance carries strong implications for constructions of identity’ (p. 117). Suggesting that samba cannot be understood in New Orleans, in the same way, it is in Rio de Janeiro. This thesis demonstrates how the same dance can be interpreted and understood differently in the context of another Western nation.

Bernadete Beserra’s (2014) work on samba performance in Chicago shares similar findings to my research on the Australian samba scene. Beserra found that Brazilians must adjust and shape their performance of samba in their new environment to make a space for their practice of Brazilian culture within a limited exotic market. The challenges of Brazilians negotiating their own ‘Brazilianess’ in a commercial environment away from the source is an issue that participants in my research also experienced. The sacrifices, adjustments and appropriations that make the performance more profitable and popular were considered by participants to be essential when competing in the Australian entertainment scene.

Joanna Bosse’s (2004; 2008) study on Latin dance in the United States Midwest is another case of cross-cultural practice, where individuals engage with ‘salsa’ as a leisure
or social dance activity. Bosse writes about the appropriation of salsa and the acquisition of ‘exotic Latin’ traits that white participants hope to gain from their chosen leisure activity. She incorporates Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus to analyse how the body and its experiences significantly influence not only the way we dance but how we do so collectively through shared embodied experiences. I too utilise Bourdieu’s concepts to unpack the complicated relationship my participants in the Australian samba field have in acquiring ‘authenticity’, which at times revealed synonymous with the ‘exotic’. Trained dancers acquire this Latin style as an additive to their dancing repertoire and capabilities, while others do so to be involved in what they see as a more meaningful engagement with a dance practice from outside their historical training and their locality.

Norman Urquía (2005) has also researched the cross-cultural practice of salsa but in London. His research has been highly influential to my own, particularly in Chapter III “Professional’ and ‘Authentic’ Capital’ where I also make a sociological analysis on the way in which samba practitioners mould the aesthetic of the form for their own benefit. Like Urquía, I use the theories of Bourdieu, with a particular focus, in this case, on the concept of capital. Urquía noted that salsa dancers in London were competing to define what was considered authentic, legitimate and correct, and this is equally the case in the field of Australian samba where dancers negotiate definitions of authenticity that often clash with their understandings of professional dance performance. Different dance groups coincidently saw each other’s approach to balancing or promoting these dance values as an illegitimate and inauthentic practice of samba.

In this thesis, I hope to add to the area of cross-cultural research on the appropriation of Latin American dance genres in Western leisure and entertainment environments. The four scholars above have guided my approach, as I look at samba in an Australian context. This research also strives to offer an examination of the
commercial influences on those who make a living as dancers, where industry requirements, expectations and values of the field are translated and transposed on to the bodies and dances performed. I use my experience as a dancer in this field, my observations of practice and the experience of my informants to investigate the embodied nature of dance hybrids, that are not only the result of cross-cultural performance but are commercially driven.

A Note on Methodology

During my research, my participation as a samba dancer in the field of commercial entertainment became more than a means of gaining an understanding of how practitioners in this field function, experience, and ‘think’ about their engagement in Australian samba. Participation also meant I could conduct a detailed analysis of the actual dancing of samba, its physical dispositions and the effect a dancer’s historical practice, their embodied training, has on their engagement with samba. Knowing exactly how it feels to dance samba but also being able to identify the general intricacies and particularities of how people dance has helped in conducting this research. I watched dancers perform, reflected on my own performances and conducted qualitative interviews with 15 participants across Australia. These qualitative interviews allowed for examination of the participants' perceptions and the way in which they create meaning in their experiences (Liamputtong 2013 p. 71). Each participant has been given

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4 This research project including the interviewing of the 15 participants was approved by the University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee under the project number 2016/527. Participants were based in Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Western Australia and ranged in the extent of their involvement in Australian samba, from dancer to company owner. Four of my participants were Brazilian, and the remainder were non-Brazilian. I say non-Brazilian rather than Australian as six of them also identified a connection to other nationalities and backgrounds. Throughout this thesis, I identify all my participants as Australian samba dancers, based solely on the context of where they are practising samba.
a pseudonym and when first quoted is accompanied with a brief description of their involvement in the field.

Although I examine how people dance, this thesis deals with its findings in a predominantly sociological manner. While I am investigating and studying a dance practice, I am also seeking to understand how and why a particular group of people are engaging with this dance practice, a practice which, for most of them, was not a dance connected to their culture growing up. It is, therefore, research that studies the function of a particular community of people as much as it is that of the particular dance practice. I hold a critical view of the scene throughout this thesis, as I believe this to be crucial in presenting the scene honestly and with consideration of all its workings. Nevertheless, I aim to do so with respect for my fellow dancers who operate in an area of the entertainment world that requires immense skill, training, time and energy to look, move and perform in specific ways. I also hold a high level of respect for business owners who invest their money and time into dance genres that receive little regard as artistic forms in Australia, but who are booked for various events and occasions with the expectation of a professional theatre show. This being despite (as I have experienced more often than not) no provision of suitable space, flooring and facilities for dancers. I, therefore, provide both a critical and appreciative account of this industry, balanced by my playing two roles, dancer and researcher. While there are many advantages to also being a participant in this scene, there is also the issue of my own invested engagement. Throughout this research, I have referenced groups and companies whom I critique and of whom I may still encounter as a dancer working in the Sydney entertainment scene. Although this has caused me some anxiety, I believe the critical reflexivity of the scene and throughout my research both necessary and telling.
Defining terms: hybrid and appropriation

Throughout this thesis, I explore the idea that the Australian practice of samba can be read as a form of cultural appropriation and, considering the various understandings of this term, it is essential that I briefly address the way in which I use it. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines appropriation as the deliberate reworking of earlier works of art and notes its Latin origin, ‘appropriare’, meaning ‘to make one's own’ (OEDa 2018). However, it is Richard Rogers’ (2006) theorising of appropriation that has primarily guided my understanding of the term and its use in this thesis. While Rogers recognises the negative implications for groups and individuals subject to appropriation, he also acknowledges that there are varying conditions, perspectives and participants to consider in cases of cultural appropriation.

Cultural appropriation is inescapable, but that is not to say all acts of appropriation are equal. Acts and conditions of appropriation vary in terms of the degree and relevance of (in)voluntariness, (in)equality, (im)balance, and (im)purity (Rogers 2006, p. 499).

Labelling the production and performance of samba in Australia as appropriation, in some instances, I acknowledge the taking of Brazilian culture by Australians for commercial purposes, where the dance and those dancing it are exoticised and marketed as a product, reinforcing cultural stereotypes. However, in focusing on the particular way this appropriation is occurring, and how and why groups and individuals are engaging with such appropriations, I offer a more nuanced examination, reading the ideas of the practitioners themselves with and against the usual relation of appropriation and ‘stealing’.5

I also describe Australian samba as a hybrid form. Here I refer to the joining and mixing of Australian (read Western) dance aesthetics, which in this context I argue are

5 For more on this assessment of and debate regarding what is or is not appropriation see Bruce Ziff & Pratima V. Rao (1997) and James O. Young (2010).
closely aligned with ‘showgirl’ practices, with Brazilian samba. Like appropriation, there has been much scholarly debate regarding the uses, meanings and theorising of hybridity in cultural contexts. However, rather than engage with this debate at length, or make an argument for either the positive or negative outcomes of labelling Australian samba as a hybrid dance form, I focus in this thesis on how we can identify the embodied performance aspects of these Australian dancers combined with their practice of samba as a hybrid form. As will be revealed, my research in this field notes that while a few participants see their practice of samba in Australia as a hybrid, most do not. Instead, they see or at least promote themselves as performing, their best attempt at authentic Brazilian samba. Authentic is another contested term that will be explored in more depth in Chapters I and III for what it means to these dancers in their circumstances.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter I: ‘Dancing Like a Brazilian’, is where my research begins. Here I identify the Australian appeal for practising, ‘selling’ and ‘buying’ a Brazilian spectacle as well as the approach taken by practitioners in the process of providing such a spectacle. In this chapter, I look at what it means to be ‘authentic’ in samba dance performance, both for Australian dancers and for their employers and audiences.

In Chapter II: ‘The Samba Showgirl’, I build upon the currently available scholarly descriptions of samba no pé, but with a focus on the genre as a hybridised form. Here, I take the time to describe particular elements of samba that are shared with a Western identified ‘showgirl’ practice – a form I describe in detail in this chapter. I also break down the particular differences between the way Australian samba has become a genre in itself,

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differentiated from the Brazilian forms, and I focus on the physical contrasts that are spawned from its new location, cultural values and tastes.

The final chapter in this thesis, Chapter III: ‘Professional’ and ‘Authentic’ Samba, is where my sociological approach to the research takes president. I take the ethnographic findings, and the embodied analysis offered in Chapters I and II and explore these using the theoretical tools of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu’s work combines embodied experiences with social structuring through his concept of ‘habitus’. It is largely this aspect of Bourdieu’s work that allows his theory to be so useful within an analysis of an embodied practice. The use of these theoretical tools offers another layer of social enquiry that reveals the extent to which the structure of the field deeply influences the way in which we function as individuals and groups within that field. In my research I identify samba as a field where acquiring various types of ‘capital’ contribute to individual meaning-making. Equally, the hybridisation and commercialisation of samba in Australia can be seen as greatly influenced by the way the wider society and culture operates.

**Reading this thesis**

This thesis is an analysis of the Australian samba field by both a scholar in training and a dance practitioner. As I have already intimated, throughout this thesis I share a combination of my personal experiences, quotes from my interviews with participants, pictures and captions from websites and the scholarly work of others, all of which are referenced accordingly. Footnotes are provided where particular ideas, terms, and dance styles require further, or alternative, explanation. I have inserted links to online footage as they are referenced throughout this thesis to supplement my descriptions, all of which can be found individually referenced in the videography at the end of the thesis or
accessible as a playlist via the referenced link: [llillianjeana 2018]. Lastly, this thesis discusses key themes that my various research methods revealed, but not all of them. Those which I address here are ideas that were of most prominence and commonality but also those of which answered most fully my key research question: how are Australians engaged with samba, and why?
Chapter I

Dancing like a Brazilian

Rio Brazilian Steakhouse, Parramatta, September 2014

The worst samba show I ever performed in was also my first. As a 20-year-old, ballet-trained dancer, I was shocked by the reality of working in the commercial entertainment dance world. I had only been training in the Brazilian dance genres, samba, ‘axé’ and ‘lambada’ for a month before I was asked to do my first paid gig. It was a regular venue for the company I worked for, where we were paid (what I thought to be) a measly $70 for a 30 to 45-minute performance, which consisted of the typical mix of Brazilian dance genres and was performed with usually two girls and two guys. Tonight, there were three girls, with one experienced dancer and two novices, but we were missing a third pair of gold knee-high platform boots, meaning only two of us could perform the opening samba routines. The experienced dancer insisted we novices go on “to practise”. We got dressed in a tiny one by four-metre curtained-off section of the restaurant by the fire escape stairwell (our glamorous stage door). It was dark, and there was no mirror to see how we looked in our outrageously revealing, sparkling armour. There was barely any time to get focused and warmed up before the boys had headed out to start the drumming introduction. Stepping around the curtain to the full restaurant was a near paralysing experience. To get to the dance floor, we had to parade through a narrow aisle of patrons eating their dinner, with their faces eye level to our jewelled G-strings. I had never felt so unprepared for a performance, having never rehearsed specifically with this group of performers, having never seen this venue, let alone danced in it, not even knowing which way to face with the audience surrounding the dance floor. Most importantly though, I knew I couldn’t actually samba. By the end of the show, I was feeling pretty rubbish, but the experienced performers didn’t seem bothered by my poor performance. The M.C said, “you gotta fake it till you make

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7 Lambada is a Brazilian music and dance genre that in the late 1980s was heavily marketed, becoming hugely popular, not only in Brazil but internationally with the fame of the hit song ‘Lambada’ by ‘Kaoma’. Despite the songs questionable origins, its associated dance is reminiscent of Brazil’s first national dance, the ‘maxixe’, with the close couple contact and interlacing of thighs (Schreiner 2002, pp. 225-227).
“It Lilly!” This faking went on for a long time, about six months to be exact before I could dance the samba step correctly and feel good about my performances. I now ‘fake it’ on a regular basis with whatever show I am asked to perform in, be it flamenco or belly dancing.

![Image of a woman dancing in a samba outfit]

Figure 1: (Rio Brazilian Restaurant 2014). Dancing samba and wearing the all-important knee-high gold boots at Rio Brazilian Steakhouse in November 2014. Here I perform with La Fiesta Entertainment alongside my fellow samba dancer and the drummer-meet-capoeira performers in the back. Note the empty highchair and restaurant layout – I frequently dodged children and waiters when performing at this venue.

What this recollection and accompanying photo reveals, is the extent to which dancing in this context is a job and satisfying customer expectations is the aim of this employment. The world of samba dance performance in Australia operates mostly within this commercial entertainment environment, where picking up various dance styles for one-off jobs is the norm, as is altering performances at the request of the promoter, venue or client hiring a show. This particular context alters the way in which samba is understood and takes shape as a form of movement and performance practice, creating contradictions for a practitioner’s approach to, and sentiments towards, a dance genre.
with strong ties to a particular nation and culture. Dancers in Australia value ‘authenticity’ in samba, but as we will see in this chapter, are caught up with ideas of the exotic. While dancers are acutely aware of issues of appropriation, they accept that in practising and performing samba in Australia, avoiding such appropriations are impossible. Rather, they ‘make an effort’ towards a kind-of ‘positive’ representation of the culture they display and engage with Brazilian culture outside their practising of samba. The commercial entertainment industry in Australia carries financial and aesthetic expectations, generating production limitations for those involved in the field. Dancers, choreographers and troupes that produce these shows, need to create a flexible product for their clients and audiences.

Although Australia is my context of research, I will briefly summarise the extensive scholarly work produced on Brazilian samba history. This summary will frame what Australians are both appropriating and attempting to honour. The Brazilian promotion of samba sets a tone for the way in which the form is reproduced internationally. I make this connection by looking at the style of samba performance first presented to international audiences and the subsequent reproductions of these performances from Australian groups and companies.

The Brazilian Context

Samba, as we know it today, is said to have been established during the early 20th century in Rio de Janeiro when mass migration of Afro-Brazilian migrants, looking for work, settled in the city post the 1888 abolishment of slavery (Chasteen 1996). The birth of samba music is often dated to 1917, soon after the release of ‘Pelo Telefone’, the first recorded samba song (Schreiner 2002; Souza 2013, p. 94). Afro-Brazilian traditions had influenced a burgeoning local music scene in Rio de Janeiro and had also inspired aspects
of a rising nationalist movement. The sociologist Gilberto Freyre, who wrote ‘Casa Grande & Senzala’ (The Master & the Slaves) spoke highly of ‘mestiço’ culture, which in the context of Brazil was a mix of African and European culture and genealogy (Davis 2009). For the Brazilian cultural elite, this miscegenation represented ‘an uncontaminated expression of the emerging ‘real Brazil’ that had been obscured by Eurocentrism’ (Perrone & Dunn 2001, p. 10). The nationalist dictator President Getúlio Vargas, president between 1930-1945 and 1951-1954, also favoured this mestiço ideology and encouraged influences of Afro-Brazilian culture as a way of re-defining Brazilian identity. Vargas heavily promoted Brazilian music, film and entertainment as a form of nationalist pride (Perrone & Dunn 2001; Davis 2009; Schreiner 2002). Samba soon became, for Perrone and Dunn (2001), ‘intrinsically associated with ‘brasilidade’ (Brazilianess) (p. 11). Not only were musical compositions paid royalties by law, but samba schools or ‘escolas de samba’, community groups often comprising individuals from the lower socio-economic neighbourhoods in Rio, began receiving funding for their year-round preparations for carnival parades (Davis 2009, p. 31). Claus Schreiner (2002) argues that the samba schools consequently have ‘more in common with governmental apparatus than they do with the anarchy of the suburbs. The parades, for example, are nearly as well-organized as those of the military’ (p. 109). The samba schools had to abide by governmental regulations and be representative of government ideals. Today, Rio carnival continues to be the dominant stage for samba music and dance and has developed into a multimillion-dollar industry, attracting tourists from all over the world to experience street parties and parades taken to extravagant levels (Magaldi 2012, p. 246). Darién Davis (2009) describes samba in combination with carnival and the samba schools, of whom most volunteer their time, as a tool for attracting tourists to the city (p. 51). Now samba can be seen as broadening from a music genre into a culture in itself,
with its own costume fashion, food, and associated lifestyle. Consequently, as Gibson (2013b) also notes, ‘carioca’ culture or culture from Rio de Janeiro, has become what foreigners imagine to be the essence of Brazilian culture, dominating the international view despite the reality of Brazilian culture as more diverse. The national promotion and celebration of only particular elements of Brazilian culture, as tourist attractions, contributes to what some scholars would call an ‘imagined racial democracy’. As Corey Souza (2013) critiques: ‘The execution of carnival performance is the crux of a billion-dollar industry whose revenues never manage to circulate back into the marginalized communities that perform the essence of carnival’ (p. 101-102). Natasha Pravaz also questions Brazil’s ‘racially democratic society’.

The political use of regional cultural symbols by Vargas and others did not translate into better living conditions for Afro-Brazilians, nor into financial rewards for their cultural products. In fact, this appropriation contributed to the perpetuation of Brazil’s false self-identity as a racially democratic society, with Afro-Brazilian traditions fused and integrated into dominant white culture (Pravaz 2008 p. 98).

However, as noted by both scholars, the scale of the Rio carnival industry offers opportunities for some individuals, particularly female dancers from poorer communities, to profit from their practice: opportunities that would be less available to those in areas of Brazil where no such industry thrives.

**Samba Abroad**

One example of the opportunities made accessible through the carnival industry includes ‘Tourist-shows’ and ‘*Mulata Shows*’ or ‘*Show de Mulatas*’. These shows run...
separate to carnival events, offering tourists a slice of Brazilian carnival culture all year round. They began as early as the 1970s and contributed to the international exposure and status of Brazil over the decades. These shows highlight various styles of Brazilian music and dance in a cabaret revue-style format, offering, mostly female dancers from underprivileged communities, regular dance work, and for tourists, a recognisable Western entertainment format featuring exotic acts. What’s more, these shows go on tour. One such show was the Italian Franco Fontana’s ‘Oba Oba Show’, produced for the first time in Rome 1984, starring Brazilian performers. This show toured Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand throughout the 1980s and 90s, presenting what they describe as ‘a spectacular stage show that celebrates the culture of Brazil’ (Oba Oba Show 2017, para. 1).

It was these shows, both those that toured internationally and those created for tourists in Brazil, that would have directly informed the samba scene in Australia. These were stage shows heavily inspired by, if not direct copies of the Brazilian cabaret-style shows made for international audiences. Several companies began to enter this Australian entertainment market during the early 90s, accompanied by an increase in the availability of Brazilian dance classes including samba. Throughout the 2000s, Brazilian shows narrowed their focus from a cultural extravaganza to an all-female performance of samba, plugging into the Australian popular performance market with its desire for female spectacle. This kind of female spectacle dates back to the mid-twentieth century, where, as Jonathan Bollen (2010) notes in his study of mid 20th century Australian erotic performance and touring shows, ‘Opportunities for spectators to see female flesh in performance were widespread and well-dispersed across genres of popular entertainment [...] featuring opportunities to see bodies – mostly female, sometimes male – in states of undress’ (p. 127).
Many of the company directors and performers during the 1990s and 2000s were performers from Brazil. However, as local Australian performers became involved in the shows, learning the dance genres, show format and industry workings, they became equipped to form their own companies and troupes. The presence of competing Brazilian dance entertainment groups increased samba's commercial dance existence. A few of the Brazilian participants I interviewed for this research noted, in their critique of Australian samba performance, that they found many Australian companies dance and performance styles to be quite outdated. This is not surprising considering they are based on Brazilian cabaret shows developed in the 1980's. Only recently, in the last several years, have some Australian groups taken on this critique, or paid more attention to the changing trends of samba performance in Brazil. Today Brazilian samba in Australia is a popular form of event, festival and club entertainment and has been significantly hybridised, in keeping with and in response to the bodies dancing the genre and the adjustments that have been made to suit the Australian entertainment market. I return to this hybrid in Chapter II, with a detailed discussion of how it formed and what it looks like. But first, I consider how Australians negotiate ideas of authenticity in the hopes of reproducing both profitable and authentic samba entertainment.

Authentic and Exotic Samba

Valuing ‘Brazilian-ness’

In Australian samba, being authentic is associated with one’s ‘Brazilian-ness’: being Brazilian, associating with Brazilians, looking like a Brazilian, and dancing like a Brazilian. For the most part, samba dancers, choreographers, and company owners in Australia are not Brazilian, we are, in fact, a very multi-ethnic group. My first dance group
had members identifying as, or having family from Asia, Africa, South America, the Middle East, Polynesia and Europe and my research revealed similarly diverse troupes across Australia. Male percussionists dominate the Brazilian musical presence in Australian samba shows, accompanying the dancers by playing the drums, but also often doubling as ‘capoeira’ performers. A few of my research participants mentioned how highly they value these male percussionists in the show, commenting on their energy and skill. As Indira, an experienced performer and dance teacher of a variety of genres expressed.

The incredible thing now is we have got an entire crew of drummers the majority of which are straight from Bahia, and there is a very particular vibe that comes from Bahia and an energy as well that is created.

Or as Palma, a dancer specialising in samba, noticed when that Brazilian energy and skill is missing.

When I was in [my last group] the drummers just did not [...] feel authentic to me at all [...] You kind-of need to have Brazilians [...] because they just naturally have that energy [...] [In my current dance group] all the boys are Brazilian they are all really energetic and get into it and play really well!

The presence of Brazilian women in Australian samba is significantly lower. When I asked my participants about this lack, some of them explained that, in their opinion, Brazilian women in Australia were not equipped with the ability to dance in the particular way desired within the Australian entertainment scene. Those dancers claimed that many Brazilians in Australia could not perform set choreography as well as Australian dancers, even though they know how to samba. For example, despite Indira explaining that Brazilians possessed a unique performance energy: “it’s easy to find Brazilians that can samba like crazy,” she then acknowledged the dominating aesthetic of the Australian appropriation: “but [it is] hard to find those who do choreography too, because, as far

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Capoeira is a Brazilian practice where dance meets martial art meets game, created by Afro-Brazilians in Bahia during slavery in Brazil (Wulfhorst, Rocha & Morgan 2014). Capoeira has its own place as a practice in Australia but often features as a performance number in Brazilian entertainment shows.
as I know, [ours] is a very Western appropriation of [samba].” Rosa, another experienced dancer, teacher and company owner, expressed the difficulty in only hiring Brazilians for samba shows.

I think it’s too much hard work to only hire Brazilians. A lot of Brazilians don’t dance and perform in Australia, girls anyway, and you will find a lot of Brazilian companies, [but] you will rarely find a Brazilian dancer. You may get one or two but that’s about it if you’re lucky.

Even Luna, a Brazilian dance company owner, questioned the necessity of being Brazilian for having an authentic samba show. “It’s hard to say what is authentic, is it being Brazilian or is it doing the dance like in Brazil? You can’t get stuck and have only Brazilians [just] to have authenticity.” Luna offered an alternative reason as to why there were not many Brazilian samba dancers in Australia. She, who initially started to perform in Brazilian dance shows in Europe after much convincing from her friends, said that for her it was “no glory to be a samba dancer”. She worried what her Dad would think of her as in Brazil women who work as samba dancers are often sexualised. Beserra (2014) describes a Chicago Brazilian dancer who had a similar reason for initially rejecting dancing in samba shows. When she was first asked if she would like to dance in a samba show, she exclaimed ‘Me? Dancing naked? No! And not in a bikini either!!’ (p. 42-43, author’s translation). While in Australia dancers receive less stigma for dancing samba professionally, it is still highly exoticised, even though it does not have the history of associations with prostitution that Pravaz states to exist in Brazil (2012, p. 114). 10

Despite Australian dancers feeling it unnecessary, or perhaps too challenging to have Brazilian female samba dancers in their shows, these dancers are still highly valued.

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10 Australian samba groups adjust how revealing their costumes are depending on their event and audience. A common adjustment in Australia is to simply stuff a feathered boa down the costume G-string, allowing for a fluffy tail to cover the buttocks. The Chicago dancer in Beserra’s (2014) research also emphasised the importance of modifying costumes depending on the client in order not to scare more conservative audiences (p. 45). I will describe further details of the samba dancer’s costume in Chapter II.
As the novice hip-hop dancers do in Nazgol Ghandnoosh’s (2010) research, valuing the authenticity of African American hip-hop dancers based on the origins and roots of the dance, so too do dancers in the Australian samba field with those who are Brazilian. For example, Indira was outraged at the injustice of a Brazilian dancer losing to a local dancer in an Australian samba competition: “one incredible girl lost points because she had an issue with her headpiece [...] she was actually Brazilian”. Aline, a Brazilian dancer, teacher and business owner, who initially trained in ballet in Brazil, struggled to find work as a ballet teacher when she came to Australia but was offered work as a samba teacher. She had never danced samba before, but being Brazilian, proved an asset when dancing or teaching samba, but having a Western based dance background, or as previously indicated, having the ability to perform choreography, may have been just as important for Aline’s successful engagement.

Other Australia dancers expressed this value through their understanding that, as they did not grow up learning to samba, or have this dance as a part of their tradition and culture, they were not, and could not, be wholly authentic in their performance. Fay, a samba dancer and leader of a dance group, expressed this: “We focus on the Rio style because that’s the main style that is performed on the stage, but obviously, we don’t grow up with the music […] Even though we love it, I must say it’s not our life […] we do our best with what we can do.” Fay illustrated the positive associations she harboured between authenticity and Brazilian-ness. “She’s great! She’s an actual Brazilian, and she knows the differences in the music, and she’s from São Paulo, so she loves the style they do over there.” Brittany, another dance company and studio owner, also offered positive

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11 The fact that Aline was not seen as a viable option as a teacher of ballet suggests how this genre of dance is seen as a ‘white’ form. As I address later in this chapter, while Aline may have held a white status in Brazil, the Australian cultural categorisation of white is not limited to skin colour. While I do not have the span to explore this here, it is important to note the discrimination that is potentially illustrated in Aline’s experience.
associations with one’s samba abilities and their authenticity. “[She’s] from Rio and so authentic, so I did a couple of her workshops.” Equally, like Fay, Brittany held the view that authenticity cannot be fully achieved if one is not Brazilian. “It’s clear if you are not Brazilian it’s not 100% authentic. I have been [to Brazil] four times to train, and I don’t say I’m a sambista or passista.”

Here we can see how this question of authenticity extends to the way dancers name themselves as professional samba dancers. In the Australian samba scene, there is tension regarding whether one can call oneself a ‘sambista’ (a musician or dancer that specialises in samba) or ‘passista’ (a professional samba dancer). Such labels allude to one’s samba authenticity. The Brazilian word for professional or specialist samba dancer means so much more than merely stating that one is a professional samba dancer. However, many Australian dancers believe that being Brazilian is a requisite for describing oneself in these Brazilian terms. Although with the recent increase in Australians frequently travelling to Brazil to participate in the Rio carnival parade, some maintain that achieving placement in a passista ‘ala’ (wing) of a parade, one can technically acquire the title, but this is contested territory.\(^{12}\)

(Re)producing the Exotic

Becoming Brazilian – learning to look, dance, and be like a Brazilian, even if one cannot claim the label by location of birth, upbringing, or cultural heritage, other associations or accumulations with Brazilian culture does afford some samba dancers association with the authentic. Clarice, a highly experienced Brazilian dancer who grew up dancing samba in her Brazilian community but also trained in Western dance styles,

\(^{12}\)I will explore the relationship between authenticity and Brazilian travel experiences and participation in Chapter III.
even referred to one Australian non-Brazilian dancer as “really authentic, she looks like a Brazilian.” Whether it was her dancing style and or her long dark hair and olive skin, Clarice had made a positive comparison. Here we are presented with the idea that one could, potentially, look more authentic dancing samba if one appears to have stereotypical Brazilian or more broadly ‘Latin’ features. Palma confirmed that these looks were important in the company she works for, and essential for dancers hoping to frequently secure show bookings. “Yea looks [are] a big thing here [...] like Lani [...] she gets booked so much [...] she’s dark, she’s got a big butt, she’s got really nice curly long hair, and she just looks it [Brazilian].”

When we perform in samba shows around Sydney, it is common for audiences to either assume or ask if we are Brazilian. A Brazilian mother once ran after us, following us into our changing room and calling out in Portuguese to take a photo with her young son. Mistakes like this are easy to make: we are advertised, booked and introduced as Brazilian samba dancers. Most samba shows have a similar introduction from the M.C. “Make some noise for the beautiful ladies straight from Rio de Janeiro!”. “Are you ready to be taken all the way to Brrraaaaziil?” I have performed in many shows with an M.C who enjoyed making up Latin sounding names for the dancers as he introduced us at the end of the show. “Give it up for the beautiful Carrrrmen!” “Make some noise for the sexy Patrrrrcia!” Such superficial, stereotypical representations of Brazilian-ness extend beyond identification and into the layers of our skin. Some dance groups encourage, even require the female dancers to tan up; real or fake. As Palma explained: “there are companies that don't care if you're blonde, if you know what I mean [...] for example we get told we have to get tanned, you can't go out 'white'; they won't pick you.” I heard similar comments from another dancer who revealed that the company she worked for “would never hire blondes”. Physical attributes seem to be important in creating this
‘authentic’ Brazilian look. “I need my cocoa”, I heard one dance company owner exclaim, where a mix of skin colours or presence of at least one dark skinned dancer creates an illusion of Brazilian authenticity. Or as Beserra’s Chicago based dancer and company owner exclaimed: ‘First you must know how to dance! And secondly, I’m looking for people who have some kind of skin pigmentation to blend in easier’ (2014, p. 48, author’s translation). Physical features of the exotic can also be imagined when one is labelled as exotic. In the same way that white Anglo-Australian women may be considered exotic in the context of them dancing in a Brazilian show, white upper-middle-class Brazilians who migrate to Australia are still often considered to have a non-white status (Wulfhorst 2014, p. 480). The Australian associations of Brazil with the exotic prevail regardless of ethnicity, class or genealogy.

These assumptions of how the authentic looks, holds significant connotations of exoticisation, something that has long occurred in Australian popular entertainment. Exotic performances were a common feature of variety and revue-style shows throughout the 20th century. Many of the acts and performers in these productions were from ‘overseas’, making these performances exotic purely because the performers were not Anglo-Australian. Frank Van Straten (2003) describes ‘Margo, the Z-Bomb’ as ‘an exotic, over-energetic under-dressed twenty-four-year-old Puerto Rican dancer and singer’ (p. 212) whose exotic ‘Latin’ performance was slotted into a Western revue-style show with many non-Latina showgirls dancing around her. Through examples of productions and travelling shows during the 1950s and 60s, Jonathan Bollen presents Australia’s obsession with the exotic.

Audiences in Australia were attracted to depictions of national distinction […] These desires for international variety in entertainment reflect a ‘fascination’ with ‘others’ defined by their ‘exotic’ difference from British and Anglo-American sources of Western capitalism that dominated cultural production and social life in Australia (Bollen 2013, p. 74).
Samba dance entertainment in Australia today caters to this ongoing, historical fascination and replication of cultural practices. Those who hire samba performers in Australia are signing up to an ‘exotic fantasy’, and Australian dancers and company owners recognise this. When I asked a range of choreographers, company owners and dancers what they thought appealed to Australian audiences, many of their answers revealed the extent to which samba and or Brazilian performance have high entertainment value.

Maybe some people just want chicks in G-strings [...] You're not paying too much money and you are getting a really good show, like high energy [...] For entertainment you want something fun, but not boring, it's festive and that's also the Latin culture: very festive [...] fiesta, [...] carnival, all that spirit – it's amazing! – Tabani

It's so fun getting dressed up – you can’t beat the visual aspect of samba, [...] can't compare to the samba costumes [...] Australians just wanna be entertained by something spectacular. – Brittany

Tabani and Brittany, quoted above, were quickly able to identify the elements that made samba entertaining, drawing on the visual element of the samba costumes, the ‘high-energy’ of the performance and its positive associations with Latin festival culture.

Kaitlyn had a similar idea about what sells in dance entertainment.

I think it’s the colours, the feathers and the carnival kind of atmosphere [...] So it makes it fun and special, and I think the colours just help bring a sort of vibrancy to their event, which I guess is what you are after, you are after something different [...] and it is a really cultural dance too. Like why would you put girls in beads with drummers? [...] But it works you know, they see Brazil as Rio [...] and they want a bit of that culture at their event.

Mimi and Rosa concurred.

I think it’s because we are in a country where everything is very open and Western, so these performances are not frowned upon, and really exotic, and they haven’t seen [anything like it]. The costumes look really different, the style of dancing is really different and lively and fun, [there is] audience participation. [They are] looking for that kind of performance they can enjoy. – Mimi
It’s the energy, the music [...] the vibe of Australia is very similar to Brazil, but Brazilians are really out there, and they’re really magical people [...] Plus, it [has] got that ‘pizzazz’, that ‘shimmy’, it’s sexy, it’s fun and the music is intoxicating, plus the costumes are pretty damn cool. It’s the energy that comes out when everyone is dancing and having a good time that I think people get really obsessed with. – Rosa

As well as cultural contrasts, Rosa and Mimi offered a sense in which the shock of the exotic is tempered by a commonality between Australia and Brazil: “everything is very open and Western” – an allusion to the Australian acceptance of what Tabani called “chicks in G-strings”. Above all, there was a sense that samba performance is a perfect entertainment product for Australian audiences, offering a taste of an exotic culture through a carefree, high energy, fun and visually spectacular performance.

Packaging a ‘Brazilian Fantasy’

This obfuscation of the exotic and the authentic in Australian samba deepens as we look at the way groups and companies market and package their samba shows. In commercialising samba in the hope of regular remuneration, companies not only have to tap into the market for exotic entertainment but also alter the practice they are presenting to make the show not only profitable but also palatable to audiences.

The Packaged Product

In Australia, most samba shows follow a similar format and are packaged according to the requirements of the venue, the event, the expectations of the client, and most importantly, how much the hirer is willing to pay for the show. Although everyone wants or expects a samba performance, the format of many Australian shows follows a cabaret-style – something that offers a taste of other dance and music genres throughout the performance. This way of performing samba, as outlined at the beginning of this
chapter, reflects the tourist show formats that emerged in Rio de Janeiro for the international market. Although some groups in Australia still follow the original show formats, others have been developed and shaped to suit new trends of an ever-changing entertainment scene. The most commonly requested show is, in my experience, one that includes live drumming, samba dancers and capoeira performers. Many groups also offer other Brazilian dance styles, as well as including some form of audience interaction or participation, whether this is getting audience members up on the dance floor at the end of the show or creating a short dance competition for chosen audience members. These performances vary between 15 to 30 minutes in length, with longer shows extending to 30 or 40 minutes. The longer the show, the more performers and different routines are used, and the more expensive the show becomes for those who are hiring. Dance groups who operate in this commercial environment are continually seeking work, few secure regular venues for performances. Besides the rare contract with a Brazilian restaurant that offers entertainment for their guests on their busiest evenings, Friday and Saturday, most shows are performed at weddings, corporate events, with the occasional special event at clubs or festivals. Consequently, companies and groups are in a perpetual state of promoting and marketing their shows to secure these one-off gigs.

What follows are some examples of the way companies market and package their shows to their potential future clients. Figure 2 displays various Brazilian show packages, each differs according to the number of performers and length of the show. The package names evoke a kind of exotic mystique: 'Energia', 'Soul Brazil' and 'Brazilian Dream'. Their package summary draws on the established tropes of the joyful and festive connotations of Brazilian carnival, as well as emphasising the presence of the exotic 'Brazilian drums' and 'Brazilian Samba girls'. Although in Figure 3 the company does not exclusively offer
Brazilian style performance, they still feature samba dancers in each package. This company's advertisement emphasises that their samba dancers wear 'traditional/full

Figure 2: (Soul Brazil n.d.)

Figure 3: (Latin Dance Australia, n.d.)
Brazilian costume/feathers’, clarifying to the potential client that such a spectacle will be present in every show. The company also names their packages to evoke imagery that comply with a ‘hot Latin’ stereotype – one is called ‘Fuego’ (fire), another ‘Caliente’ (hot), playing on the already assumed exotic nature of Latin dance. These packages reveal the commercial nature of sambas presence in Australia, where shows are organised to attract potential clients, and there is focus on the commercial transaction. They emphasise to ‘Confirm your BOOKING’ and ‘Booking is not confirmed unless a 50% deposit is paid and confirmed by you in writing’ but also notes that ‘additional props/talent can be provided’ and ‘you can customize our packages to your liking’.

The ‘Latin-Mix’ Show

The ‘mixed Latin’ shows, as seen advertised in Figure 3, where companies present a range of dance styles from ‘Latin’ countries, are a popular package across groups that perform samba. Typically, such a show would include various ‘Latin American’ nations music and dance genres, referring to Portuguese or Spanish speaking countries across Central and South America, but it also could include dances from Spain and Portugal. This bundling of cultures is not a new practice in popular Australian performance. Throughout the 20th century, Australian popular entertainment displayed an extensive array of cross-cultural music and dance groups with little acknowledgment of the specificity or particularity of style or history. The earliest music and dance influences from Spanish and Latin American cultures could be found on the popular colonial stage as early as the mid 19th century. John Whiteoak (2008) explores how Spanish, ‘Spanish Gypsy’, and Mexican music and dance influenced popular entertainment trends, paving the way for other Latin American genres throughout the 20th century. Alongside these Latin American music and dance influences was a strong ‘continental’ style of entertainment, that blurred music and
dance genres not only of Latin American origin but also various European genres. The performers of these genres, rarely hailed directly from the country locations the dances claimed. Instead, they arrived via Great Britain, North America and Europe. Whiteoak (2003) describes the ‘tango’ as entering the entertainment scene as a craze at the end of 1913, but there was ‘little understanding of the cultural origins or significance of the tango or, for that matter, later popular Latin-American music or dances’ (p.393). This was reflected in the hybrid shows of the early 20th century, including the ‘Tivoli Tango Teas’ program of 1914 featuring a performance of ‘The Mexican Maxixe’, describing a combination of Brazilian and Mexican dance genres, and ‘The Honolulu Tango’, an Argentinian and Hawaiian dance mix (Van Straten 2003, p. 41).

However, for Latin Americans in Australia, these pan-Latin associations have, in some cases, created positive outcomes. Zevallos (2005) argues that Latin American women in Australia have strategically constructed this pan-ethnicity ‘as a means to celebrate their difference to the majority group and to carve a wider space for themselves in Australian society where they could fit in with others whom they believed to be more like themselves’ (p. 149). A pan-Latin American ethnicity is also useful in the Australian labour market, evident in the performances that showcase the culture and skills of Brazilian performance groups at Australian Latin American events and festivals that attract larger audiences (Wulfhorst 2014, p. 485). Similarly, Brazilians make use of the Latin identity to broaden the possibility of dance styles they can perform; labelling one’s school as ‘Latin’ and hiring other Latin American teacher makes economic sense (Wulfhorst 2014, p. 486). Whiteoak sees the benefits as not only pertaining to those of ‘Latin’ heritage.

The popularity and influence of mediated Hispanic genres – such as the demand for expertise and cross-ethnic collaborations that they generated – played a significant role (alongside, of course, the culturally transformative effects of post
war migration) in preparing mainstream Australia for the post-1960s leap into the multicultural society’ (Whiteoak 2008, p. 20).

The show formats and packages offered by dance companies today are therefore very reminiscent of this history of bundling, not only within ‘Latin American’ styles but also European music and dance styles that hold an ‘exotic’ status in the Anglo-Australian market. However, while it was once a practice conducted by artists who were not from the country of genre origin, today one can find Latin American communities celebrating various Latin American music and dance styles at festivals, community centres and event clubs. Palma, who has a Chilean background spoke about this unity in the Australian Latin community at festival events.

South America [has] so many different countries, but we all kind-of unite [...] There’s a lot of festivals [...] you barely see like ‘Aussies’ walking around or Asians it’s all Latins [...] they come from all over Sydney to come to these events [...] The ones I use to perform at were like Latin mix shows [...] At a Chilean show they wouldn’t just do Chilean dances, they’ll get Bolivian dances, Colombian dances, Brazilian dances.

It was therefore normal for Palma to perform in ‘Latin Mix’ shows when she started dancing professionally.

**Flexibility and Alterations**

Despite this format of the ‘mixed Latin show’ being acceptable by the Latin American communities in Australia, the commercial purpose for such shows has more to do with customisation and flexibility, rather than unity. In offering a range of different dance styles, companies cater to wider audiences and therefore have more opportunity for work. Efforts to remain flexible extend to their choice of the number of dancers,
routines, show length and various extras including photo opportunities and the hiring of specialist performers. The performance packages previously displayed in Figures 2 and 3 emphasise this, revealing the commercial nature of transactions. This ability to be flexible and customise one’s performances to the buyer extends the viability of each organisation, and this contributes to the many fusions and mixes of dance genres that groups perform when clients ask for specific combinations. There are ‘Latin-mix Burlesque’ shows or ‘Bollywood samba’, both of which I have performed in on several occasions. In the world of dance entertainment, waiving traditional aspects of performance and altering pre-rehearsed shows is the norm. Groups remain flexible and open to alternative ways of profiting from their practice, inventing a variety of occasions for clients to experience samba. There are ‘corporate team building’ sessions, where dance companies adjust their skills and practice to a different commercial environment: ‘How about bringing your team a fun activity that they never thought they would do? [...] Ola Brazil can offer team building events with the best drummers in the business’ (Ola Brazil 2016, para. 4). Other popular business possibilities include ‘Hens Night’ entertainment, where companies adjust their practice to be viable for another potential market.

Learn how to reproduce the look of a Samba Queen and be taught how to booty-shake and dance like you’re in Carnivale! In no time at all, you and your guests will transform into glamorous Brazilian Carnivale dancers, learning and performing a high-energy, dazzling samba routine (Red Velvet Cabaret 2017, para. 1).

Companies are stretching the possibilities of samba to accommodate many occasions and markets, increasing the possibility for their business to thrive. However, an inherent issue in allowing such flexibility is that elements that were once essential to the Brazilian practice, are lost, compromised and or deemed unnecessary. A Brazilian musician expressed his frustration with this slippage. Discussing the music used in
Australian samba, he confirmed that the rhythm favoured in Australia known as ‘Olodum’, is the name of a ‘bloco-afro’ or community music group from Salvador, Bahia. The music they play is a style distinctive to the Bahian state, called ‘samba-reggae’, which despite being a genre of samba, is none-the-less unique in its rhythms and therefore different to what is considered samba in carioca culture. More importantly, Brazilians move differently to this music and do not dance the samba step I described in the introduction. What we have in Australia, in this instance, are dancers forcing a carioca samba dance to Bahian samba-reggae music. This musician thought it was fine if we play the music, but if we are going to dance to it, we should not be dancing samba. He then got up to show me the way people dance to samba-reggae, moving side-to-side – in a swaying groove like motion. Indira also mentioned this discrepancy. “Brazilians don’t dance samba to Olodum […], but here everybody starts ‘samberying’ […] you are doing a samba step to different music which is fine but don’t call it samba.” Despite some performers knowing the incompatibility of the music to the dance, this rhythm is still widely used, even by those groups who regard authenticity to be of the highest importance in their samba performances. In part, this is due to the way in which companies and groups need to package their performances for their clients.14 It is difficult to achieve the distinctive sound of samba with so few instruments, but many shows in the Australian samba field utilise only a small group of percussionists, typically three drummers. Adding another musician raises the show’s price by $100-$200 Australian dollars. In offering smaller, less expensive shows, troupes can be booked multiple times in one evening, with the performers spread out across venues and often jumping from one show to the next in the same night.

14 I say, ‘in part’, as many of the drummers used in Australian shows originate from Bahia rather than Rio de Janeiro and they are more familiar with ‘samba-reggae’ rhythms than the carioca rhythms of samba. These musicians may also simply be more comfortable playing this music.
Appropriation and 'Making an Effort'

The ease with which the Brazilian practice adjusted here in Australia lies in the fact that no one who pays for this entertainment really knows the difference. Audiences hire samba performers for a touch of the exotic, for something different – the differentiating of samba genres engaged in by the musician informant and dancer is not a concern for those booking samba shows. Most audiences would fail to notice these elements of in-authenticity, as long as they see the signifiers – women wearing feathered headdresses, dancing with frenetic hip movement, men beating drums – they accept the group’s performance for what it says it is. Kaitlyn, a dance company owner, admitted how audience naivety in Australia shapes the construction and choreography of her shows – incorporating ‘showgirl’ styling and choreography in their samba routines (a genre I address in the subsequent chapter).

Because they don’t actually know [if] what you’re doing is authentic or not, and it’s hard to dance samba [...] for so long [...] we usually do a bit more parading and, you know, showy type moves, so yea, depending on the theme, [we] definitely [...] insert non-traditional moves because they don’t know, and it’s still spectacular to them anyway.

Palma revealed that she did not worry so much about getting the steps right as ensuring the audience is experiencing a high-energy show.

People aren’t watching your choreography. Most people [...] have never seen samba before and they’re just in shock. [They don’t know] what’s going on, so they’re not gonna [say], ‘oh you missed that kick, or you missed that step’ [...] Half the time when I’m really tired [...] I just go off clapping into the crowd, and it doesn’t really matter – people don’t know what you’re doing.

Olivia, an experienced dancer of a variety of genres expressed how often she did not feel authentic in her Brazilian performances but concluded that most audiences are “from all over, we are so multicultural here, so they just get excited anyway.” Luna expressed her
disappointment in this aspect of Australia samba. It was frustrating for her that the audiences do not know about her culture and are happy despite the misappropriations.

I think is wrong to just put yourself [out] there and do whatever, [it’s] disrespectful, which sometimes I see around, not only in Australia but around the world [...] People just put feathers on and do [...] whatever, with [...] whatever drums, and just [make] some noise. Because people, the public, don’t know [how] to distinguish authentic from non-authentic. They can’t ask, what is this? [...] they just do it, and this, I think, is disrespectful.

However, during the same interview, Luna also mentioned how she appreciated the effort Australians make in trying to dance samba well.

It’s so honouring for Brazil, to want to do it the best way that they can do. [They] try to respect the culture and do as best as they can [...] it doesn’t matter the nationality you are if you are doing it with your heart, so Australians are doing samba so good, and it’s such an honour.

This contra opinion on the state of samba in Australia made me wary of my position as a samba dancer and a researcher; the former potentially caused the dancers I spoke with to hold back their criticism or soften the blow of some of their less collegial views regarding the state of Australian samba. Clarice, for example, described the physical differences in Australian samba that she did not see as reflective of the Brazilian practice. Rather than insinuating that Australians were pretending or just doing whatever because audiences did not notice.

The samba here is quite straight without much of the hips. I don’t know what is missing? – A kind-of groove. [Australians do] a lot of arms, big arms [...] I could see a lot of the girls didn’t samba in the beat [...] But I was happy that there was samba here already, happy to have my culture explored.

Aline also commented on the “lots of arms” and “no hips” of Australian samba but she added, “it’s really nice to see my culture [in Australia], and it makes me proud.” However, Tiago, a highly experienced teacher of Brazilian and Latin dance genres as well as a company owner, felt no need to sweeten his critique of the local samba. He claimed that company directors in Australia “are looking for people who they can teach some steps
[just] because they can move [...] they look like they are doing samba and the clients don’t notice anyway. [They] keep making money out of a culture.” He continued when I pressed him further on this issue.

I think they probably believe it’s authentic. The groups tend to have […] Brazilians playing percussion, maybe one Brazilian girl [in the troupe] and they are reproducing what they see in some tourist clubs in Brazil. I think they just don’t know.

Non-Brazilian dancers in Australia were also aware of these issues, but there is an ambivalence at the heart of the Australian performer’s relationship with samba. There is a commercial imperative, but authenticity, or at least an image of the authentic is still valuable. Participants expressed this through their emphasis on the importance of at least ‘making an effort’. A lack of authenticity is excused as long as practitioners made that effort and Brazilian practitioners seemed to think that such efforts are necessary for performing samba more authentically. Some of my Brazilian informants believed the Brazilian proximity alleviated the worst of appropriation. Aline and Clarice suggested that Australia’s choreographers and group leaders should go to Brazil, not only to take samba lessons there but to also keep up with the trends in dance styles and fashion at the source. ‘Making an effort’ means that Australians can be considered more authentic, or at least less disrespectful, as both Fay and Brittany explained earlier in this chapter. Danielle also agreed: she could never perform samba like a Brazilian because Australians come with a different intention, she explained, and cannot relate to samba in the way Brazilians might. She too was conscious of the criticism non-Brazilian samba dancers received.

There’s a lot of public outcry lately from Brazilians around the world that foreigners dancing and performing samba are not being true to the roots. That they are just putting on feathers and bikinis and jumping around and don’t even understand the music […] the lyrics, [they] don’t speak any Portuguese, have never been to Brazil, have never performed in carnival. So they don’t really understand what they’re teaching and dancing, and to a certain extent I do agree that there are some groups out there doing that, but then there are also groups who have put in
the time and effort. To study, to go to Brazil, to train to respect the roots and the origins of samba.

Despite the inherent inability to be genuinely authentic as a non-Brazilian samba dancer, Danielle notes that through particular efforts one can get closer to the authentic.

I’m Australian, and I’m representing an element of Brazilian culture, but obviously I’m not going to be able to represent it 100% authentically Brazilian because I’m not Brazilian and I didn’t grow up there. So, I am adding my own flavour, bringing in my own dance experience but trying to keep it as authentic as possible to Brazilian samba.

These ideas were shared by many Australian samba dancers I interviewed. Kaitlyn saw her choreographic choices, which reflected the Brazilian practice, as making the show more authentic. “I mean our choreography is quite ‘sambery’, say we freestyle for a Brazilian themed show, that would obviously be quite Brazilian [...] I think we try to keep it pretty traditional.” Indira explained the efforts her group leader made re-invigorated her enjoyment for dancing samba. “I think [she] has really made the effort, she’s gone to Brazil [...] she is up with the fashions in Brazil.” Tabani too felt that there “really needs to be some sort of standard” in the samba community regarding dance ability and authenticity and pressed on me that her group leader “goes to Brazil a lot and makes an effort.” Authenticity cannot be gained merely through practising samba, evidence of engagement with, or efforts to obtain a sense of authenticity is essential to be considered an authentic samba dancer. I will devote a more detailed analysis of how precisely this works in Chapter III of this thesis.

**Samba as a Product**

In commercialising samba, as we have already seen, it becomes a product that can and needs to be altered, to accommodate the demands of a market. The form is manipulated to realise the desires of the clientele by companies and individual dancers that strive to produce profitable dance performance. Authentic samba is defined in
Australia through Brazilian signifiers – the proximity to or evidence of Brazilian-ness often relayed to naïve audiences through tanned skin, women in revealing costumes and men playing the drums. Furthermore, authenticity is seen to be achieved through efforts made to connect with samba and Brazilian culture, which signifies, mostly to other samba practitioners, one has made an effort to engage with Brazilian samba culture. However, ultimately, this form is located in the field of Australian commercial entertainment, which is, at times unapologetically improper and acquisitive, driven by profit and demand. Practitioners adjust samba accordingly to what sells in this particular market. In the following chapter, ‘The Samba Showgirl’, I introduce another key value in the Australian samba scene, ‘professionalism’, which as we will see, is defined by association with and a history of influence by Western dance techniques and performance practices. This value influences the hybridity of the dance in Australia, which I describe in more detail, particularly in comparison to how samba is performed, presented and valued in Brazil.
Chapter II

The Samba Showgirl

Dinner Cruise Audition, Sydney Showboats, January 2017

Part of me is attending this audition in the hope that the casting directors will look past my unfortunately average height of 5’8” and offer me a regular gig. Another part of me is just as willing to be embarrassed ‘for the research’. In keeping with the latter, perhaps I didn’t make enough effort with my presentation, but I was very much alone in that quarter. Walking onto the boat, docked at Darling Harbour, I am greeted by a collection of long limbs clad in fishnet stockings, stretched out all over the floor. High-waist, butt-cheek revealing underwear accentuates the length of the dancers’ legs, which are paired with bust-hugging crop tops and a full face of stage makeup. Chairs and tables are set up throughout the boat for the nightly dinner cruise performance which we all hope to secure employment in.

Feeling a little out of place with my messy bun and two-inch heels (everyone else has three-inch) I give up on my first goal (a job) before I even start dancing and embrace my second – I begin to watch the other girls. After learning the audition routine, I go to the back of the boat and frantically practise by myself. One auditionee, Nadia, approaches and asks to join me as I practise. We run through the dance and joke about the particularities of the choreography and I soon learn, to my great delight, that she too is a samba dancer. Now I am presented with the perfect scenario; I can watch a professional samba dancer perform next to jazz and ballet trained showgirls. The differences are spectacular. While most girls look straight ahead, turning their head to take their eyes off their spot for only a split second, Nadia looks out and around, at the other dancers and the casting team. She also looks at herself, her own hands and body and when dancing, she wears, what looks to me like, a natural, genuine smile; the others hold that clenched grin of the showgirl performer. Nadia’s replication of the set choreography is not perfect, and she has more of a ‘weight’ to her movement: she sinks deeper into her plies and pushes her hip out as she transfers her weight for each new move, showing off her curves. Although Nadia is using what she knows from

15 A dancer’s ‘spot’ is a focal point for concentration and balance. A dancer will often choose a point to focus on to maintain a steady eye line when performing or to simply make for easier turning.
her years of performing samba, due to the similarity of lines and positions between the two styles, she fits in perfectly with the other wannabe showgirls. Only a few girls make the first cut; they are neither the stronger dancers nor performers but the tallest and the thinnest. Nadia didn’t make it. It was a shame; oh...and neither did I.

What was particularly revealing about this encounter was the similarities and the differences between Nadia’s performance style to that of the other women. Nadia certainly looked the part, with perfect showgirl proportions, being very tall and very slim, beautifully made up, and she created the desired lines of the Showboat choreography with ease. She possessed former training in Western dance genres which had equipped her for this cross-over. In saying this, the choreography would have been something that she had already encountered in her samba training, as Australian samba dancers shape and style their routines in much the same way. Despite her ability to fit into the audition expectation seamlessly, aspects of Nadia’s samba training peeked through her performance. As described in my extended field note, her gaze, weight distribution, the release of the hip in weight transfers, revealed to me evidence of samba training, or rather ‘samba showgirl’ training. Here I make a differentiation between samba dancer, showgirl and samba showgirl to describe a dancer who has some form of Western-based dance training and or understanding of the essentials of that training. However, this dancer has also learnt how to dance samba, and therefore brings not only a different kind of physicality to her samba performance, when compared to a passista in Brazil, but also has a different understanding of what a performance is, can or should be in Sydney’s commercial entertainment circuit. She is the same, but different from the other showgirl auditionees, just as samba is the same but different to showgirl performance.

A showgirl is a female dancer or performer that has particular attention placed on her physical attributes, emphasised through costume and dance style. The showgirl was
born out of the popular stage entertainment form of revue shows in Europe (predominantly Paris) dating as far back as the early 20th century and was made particularly iconic in the United States during the mid 20th century (Jarrett 1997; Hirsh 1985). Today showgirl performance is defined by a particular technique, a practice by where dancers hold and move their bodies in particular ways.

In this chapter, I describe aspects of this technique, its physical and choreographic elements, as well as the cultural, social and historical branches that define showgirl and samba as individual practices but also as a hybrid, evidenced in what I am calling the ‘samba showgirl’. I argue that the samba showgirl dominates the samba performance scene in Australia, with showgirl performance aesthetics directing the way samba is performed here. However, while some companies advertise their performances or simply hashtag their social media posts with ‘samba showgirls’, the majority of those I interviewed see themselves as performing an authentic samba with adjustments made to suit the local commercial market. In the second half of this chapter, I describe the ‘samba soldier’ style that I see as a further hybridised version of the samba showgirl. The samba soldier places great emphasis on physical precision and synchronisation and has the greatest impact in group performances. This approach, I argue, ultimately brings Australian samba closer to the tradition of the showgirl. To begin this chapter, I describe what makes up the embodied shell of the samba showgirl, with reference to the female passista performance of samba in Brazil, where evidence suggests that there have been adjustments over the 20th century to this particular style of samba performance. Such adjustments have created a merger of form, making the samba showgirl not only an Australian phenomenon but a globalising hybridisation.
Posture, Parading and Posing

Since the early 20th century in Brazil, there has been a mixing of samba culture and its iconic performer, the *mulata*, with the revue-stage-spectacle and its iconic performer the showgirl. Accordingly, features of the dance style have changed to accommodate the latter with new performance modes, genres and venues. Naturally, this has changed what it means to be a professional samba dancer in Brazil. There has been an integration of Western showgirl aesthetic. The dancer’s posture, presentation and their mode of parading have shifted to accommodate this Western style of performance – how they move, what they wear and how each dancer interacts with one another and their audience, significantly impact the dancing produced.

*Tem uma postura* (To have posture, attitude, a stance)

One’s attitude, posture or stance, in samba, as in showgirl performance and many other dance styles for that matter, is an important aspect of a dancer’s physical presence. Posture is one of the significant elements that differentiates the way *passistas*, or aspiring *passistas*, hold themselves when compared to those who perform a more ‘street’ version of samba, or the way people dance samba socially. This posture includes an extension of the neck, a lowering of the shoulders that coincides with an upward and outward extension of the chest, and finally a contraction of the diaphragm that emphasises the waist. Although this posture is not enforced quite as stringently in samba as it is in other genres of dance like ballet, my years of ballet training prepared me for the desired posture, as do years of ballet training provide the same for showgirls. This posture, however, is only from the waist up in samba, from the waist down, the posture is entirely different, and as I can attest, it is somewhat tricky for a ballet-trained dancer to master.
My initial challenge was to ‘split’ my body in two: the upper needing to be lifted in the diaphragm and expanded and elongated across the chest and shoulders, the lower weight placement and flexibility working in a downwards motion, with the feet pushing into the ground to enable flexible hip movement, supported with bent knees. When I asked Clarice if and how her Western dance training in Brazil affected the way she danced samba, she discussed the effect on her posture in similar ways.

Definitively, yes, you know because it builds up your posture [...] even the way you walk [...] it definitely impacts the way I do my samba today, and I can see it in girls doing the samba without any ballet or dance as a background, it’s a different style.

For Clarice, training in jazz, ballet and contemporary dance gave her access to a particular posture that she automatically incorporated into her samba style. Aline, the Brazilian ballerina who learnt samba in Australia, had similar sentiments.

If I really think about the only thing that I don’t have to worry about [it is] posture, but everything else is completely different [...] also the style I teach is the style from Rio, which is really elegant and really proud, but I would say [it is] the posture [that] I don’t have to think about.

This dancer felt that her ballet training meant that when she was learning samba, the necessary upper body posture was already there, and she did not have to work on it as she did with everything else about the style. Aline’s Rio style is, as she mentioned, distinctive in its elegance and proud demeanour. Natasha Pravaz (2012) explains how important posture is for samba dancers in Brazil, but specifically for mulatas, the elegance counteracting the association of sexual availability within their performance. As explained to Pravaz by the director of the passista section of a prominent Brazilian samba school.

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16 ‘Rio-style’ refers to the way in which samba is danced in Rio de Janeiro. Another samba troupe leader and teacher in Australia refers to this same style as ‘passista style’, suggesting it is the way professional Brazilian samba dancers perform. This style is the favoured form amongst most dance groups and teachers in Australia; however, it is usually simply referred to as samba here in Australia. In São Paulo, Brazil when I was dancing in a samba dub, I was told I had this ‘Rio-style’ – some evidence to suggest where Australians replicate the form.
When the mulata is dancing the samba with posture, gracefully, she opens a space for herself. She doesn't need to go there and try to invade the space of other mulatas, try and break the other, outdo the other in front of the cameras. When she forgets that she is in the parade and tries to get the attention of the photographers and the cameras, she sticks her bum out and begins to do this [imitates a dancer bending over sideways and shaking her buttocks in an exaggerated manner]. So, this is wrong, we have to organize ourselves and do a serious job (Pravaz 2012, p. 125).

In this situation posture is a way of distinguishing between dancers, but also elevating the form and the people who practice it. Pravaz (2012) also reveals how ‘entertainment establishments in Rio, and increasingly the passista sections of samba schools, have developed posture and etiquette courses to teach ‘proper manners’ to the mostly poor and uneducated women who perform as mulatas (p. 125). In Brazil, this posture training is something that improves the status of the dance and the dancer, elevating the form from a street style to professional practice by attempting to distance the performance from connotations of sexual availability, something that is deemed distasteful to the directors and coordinators of these public performances. I mentioned this idea when interviewing Tiago. “In Brazil, they have a tendency to copy everything that comes from Europe and America [...] this thing of posture [...] it’s to look more elite, [...] but it separates [samba] from the source of the thing.” Tiago then made comparisons to the way other Latin dance styles have changed through the introduction of Western dance aesthetics. With an international market having such an influence in Brazil, it is no surprise that presenters, dancers and choreographers have, over time, adopted and come to prefer this posture in their samba. In footage from a carnival parade in Rio de Janeiro, 1970, featuring the winners of the samba queen competition we see the extent to which this posture has changed.

The footage shows what appears to be a carnival parade where a wide inner-city street has been closed off for participants and floats to pass through. The float has two
tiers. On the top tier is someone whom we can assume to be the ‘rainha’ or queen, a young woman in a mini dress, sporting a sash, with a small crown on her head, wearing, what appear to be, two-inch heels. On the second tier are the ‘princessas’ or the princesses (the runners-up). Each dancer has an individual samba style. Some have an upright posture and prominent side to side hip movements. Another is twisting her whole lower body side to side in a gliding motion with her knees close together. While the rainha at the top of the float, exhibits the fastest samba of all – she is bent over from the waist, buttocks out and shaking at double speed to the other dancers. Her head is held up, and her arms are bent from the elbows, close to her body. She is moving as though she is jogging on the spot, with circular motions, elbows only pushing slightly back and away from the body. This footage can be found via the following link: [DiFilm 2014].

For a samba queen to exhibit such a posture with her upper body weight placed so far forward from her hips, is quite unimaginable today. The close proximity of her arms to her body is also rarely seen on today’s professional samba dancers – the samba torso has ‘risen’ to meet a new status, etiquette and aspirations of the social position of the mulata.

Posing: presenting and pleasing

The ‘bevel’ is a traditional pose and transitionary position used in, and highly associated with showgirl performance. In the bevel, the dancers supporting foot is slightly turned out, with the other perched on its toe next to or directly in front of the supporting foot. The knee of the perched foot is pulled across the centre of the body, making an hour-glass-like shape, where the lower legs and feet create a thin line, exaggerating the curve of the thighs and hips. In the bevel, no gap is seen between the dancer’s legs; it is a closed position commonly used for photos but also in pauses and
transitions during sequences. For a description and demonstration of the bevel see: [The Rockettes 2016]. The upper body in the bevel adopts the upright posture described above with the arms placed away from the body. They may be held out, presenting to the audience, held on the hips, as seen in Figure 5 or they may be held above the head, as seen in Figure 4.

This hour-glass shape is created and exaggerated through the bevel and presents a dancer with a ‘sexy’ yet ‘tidy’ image. Despite the heightened sexuality of the dancer's posture in the bevel, the legs are closed, avoiding any sight of the inner thigh in an open-legged stance that is associated with a lack of decorum. “Hide the pussies!” was how a showgirl friend of mine described the instructions they were given when practising the bevel for cruise ship show rehearsals. ‘Hiding the pussy’, combined with an upright posture presents a non-confrontational look. Poses like this illustrate the remnants of the showgirl’s past, representing, as Robert Allen (1991) suggests, a more ‘wholesome, doll-like and decorative sexuality’ (p. 282). The bevel and other crossed-leg pose variations are now also frequently utilised by passistas, with pauses for such presentation peppered throughout their samba performances. The passistas samba step has evolved to use the bevel as a transitional pose, where the dancer’s legs and feet are swapping from a left to right bevel by passing one foot behind the other and sliding the next to the front to take the perched foot position. This placement of the legs and feet is an evolution of samba exclusive to the female passista. In Bahian versions of the samba step, as seen in a samba de roda and in samba axé, the step is performed with the knees facing outwards in a wider leg stance or close together with flat feet resembling more of a shuffle with hip movement. The passista adoption of, or perhaps progression into this showgirl pose, produces a formalised, globalised image of beauty, feeding on the long history of stereotyping mulatas as beautiful icons of samba and carnival. As Jennifer Manthei (2007) explains,
Figure 4: (The Radio City Rockettes 2017)
The Rockettes strike a pose in the bevel during a performance on a US television show (The TODAY Show). The bevel position provides the dancers with the balance of revealing their figures, giving their buttocks and hips a curved shape, while hiding the crotch with their legs held tightly together.

Figure 5: (SRzd 2018).
Passistas from Mocidade samba school in Rio de Janeiro take a break from rehearsal at their school headquarters in the lead up to the grand carnival parade to pose for a photo. Note how they cross their front leg in the bevel like the Rockettes.
the *mulata* ‘has salience as a symbol of national identity, but primarily as a product for entertainment, a media image, commodified for carnival and tourism’ (p. 206). This association is important, as the *mulata* is valued not only for her beauty and ability to samba well but for her balance of ‘sexy’ and ‘good natured’ qualities (Manthei 2007, p. 193). The *mulata/passista* like the showgirl, is there to be enjoyed and not to confront or challenge. She dances with her body on display, but as she poses, she closes her legs in the bevel and presents her arms out welcomingly with a friendly, charming smile.17

**Parading: stepping with style**

Walking, for both the *passista* and showgirl are almost as important as their dancing. While the showgirl, who has throughout her 20th century stage history largely spent the majority of her time walking on, off and down grand staircases, and in and out of formations, the *passistas’* biggest show of the year involves (in the case of Rio and the Sambadrome) walking down a mile-long stadium for an hour.18 The *passistas* very name also alludes to walking or stepping with the word stemming from the Portuguese verb ‘*passear*’ (to walk) making ‘the one who makes steps’ the literal meaning of *passista* (Pravaz 2012, p. 119). The skill for the *passista* and the showgirl is in their ability to merge this walk as part of their performance, creating a parade that is as mesmerising as their

17 While *mulata* and *passista* mean two different things, there is a significant cross-over of meaning for these two identities. The lines that differentiate the two are very often blurred. *Mulata is now often used to describe a female samba dancer, whether ethnically mixed race or not. As Pravaz (2012) suggests, ‘today, the word ‘mulata’ tends to mean a woman who dances the samba on stage in nightclubs and carnival parades’ (p. 115). For Browning (1995) ‘while samba is even popularly regarded as essentially African, the women who dance it professionally – in the carnival or in tourist shows – are all called *mulatas*, regardless of their color’ (p. 19). Although the term *mulata* refers to a woman of mixed African and European descent, the ambiguity of Brazilian racial terminology and social categorisations means that one can perform, what Souza (2013) calls ‘*mulatice*, a way of performing like a *mulata*, with very dark skin through to very white skin, suggesting that you do not have to be of mixed race to be named as such. ‘Obtaining professional *mulata* and *passista* status is not based on the color of a woman’s skin, but instead is based on her proficiency’ (p. 91).

18 The Sambadrome or ‘*sambódromo*’ is a mile-long street stadium built at the end of the Brazilian military regime in 1984 in Rio de Janeiro. Today it continues to host the huge and elaborate carnival parade with television media covering the event from every angle (Chasteen 1996, p. 45; Magaldi 2012, p. 246).
dancing, displaying their beauty and costume to create the greatest impact. It is the particularities of this parade that the *passista* and showgirl share: with an elevated upright posture the dancers move forward, leading with their chest and their legs following close behind, crossing over in front one another and landing on the balls of their feet. The dancer’s hips push forward and roll back as the opposite leg steps forward, creating a ‘swinging’ movement. The shoulders typically create a forward up and back rolling motion on alternating shoulders and opposing the hips, while the arms stay extended away from the body, allowing for the shape of the dancer’s body to be, once again unobstructed from view. This stylised parade is a late development for samba and today one would still only see some *passistas* perform this walk, often determined by whether the dancer is featured as a soloist in a carnival parade due to their celebrity status or because of their samba dance training. Furthermore, in carnival videos throughout the 20th century and even into the 21st, it is common to see individuals moving in what I call a ‘samba jog’. During a break in-between one’s performance of the samba step, a dancer may jog to the music in a bounded shuffle that moves them forward, leaving an impression of taking a break from the performance and displaying movements more typical of those dancing samba in a relaxed social environment.

For the showgirl, her mode of parading is one of the performance elements that initially differentiated her from other dancers she shared the stage with. It was a specialty way of walking with style and was considered an art in itself due to the difficulty of moving elegantly down the lavish revue stairs. Showgirls would wear enormous headdresses and high heels, which they had to negotiate while maintaining this upright posture (Jarrett 1997 pp. 108-109; Hirsch 1985, p. 120). The showgirl walk was made famous by Florenz Ziegfeld, director of the Ziegfeld Follies who brought the European
revue-style show to the United States. John Emile Hirsch explains how Ziegfeld iconised this walk.

It was not, however, simply a walk – it was the “Ziegfeld Walk” – the narrow silhouette, the large headdress, the high risers on the mandatory Joseph Urban-designed staircase, and the stance (attributed in part to Irene Castle), accentuating the pelvis, each contributed to the effect (Hirsch 1985, p. 120).

This description would typically be associated with a model rather than a dancer, but in a sense, much of what the showgirl and the passista share is the modelling of their costumes and bodies through dance and parade. It is perhaps no coincidence that the famous Victoria Secret lingerie brand has an annual fashion show where the models parade in high heels and elaborate back pieces that reference the styles worn by showgirls and samba dancers.

**Bikinis and Feathered Crowns: a word on costume**

Beyond the physical specificities that reveal showgirl influence on Brazilian samba, an obvious place of influence is the costume, particularly predominant in carnival and tourist shows post the 1970s. However Parisian showgirls, have been known for their elaborate, gleaming and form-hugging costumes since the early 20th century. This costume could now be considered a uniform. It consists of: tiny sequined high sitting G-string bikinis, high heel shoes, decorative armbands and necklaces, often bare chests with pasties or jewelled underwire bras, large and often feathered head-pieces, back-pieces and sometimes a peacock-like ‘tail’ with more feathers and rhinestones. Very similar (if not identical) costumes are worn by samba dancers. Souza (2013) also notes this strong resemblance between showgirl and samba costume styles (p. 97), where one could perform a showgirl performance in a samba costume just as a passista or a rainha de samba could perform samba in a showgirl costume.
Figure 6 (top left): A showgirl from the Moulin Rouge (The Guardian 2015). Figure 7 (top right): Samba dancers of La Fiesta Entertainment performing at River Canyon Restaurant in Sydney Australia (River Canyon Restaurant 2018).
Figure 8 (lower): Dancers of ‘Vai Vai’ samba school in São Paulo carnival (UOL 2016).
Similarities can be seen here between showgirl and passista/samba dancers. The costumes share similar back-piece, bikini, headpiece and accessory designs.

The showgirl costumes of Paris and Las Vegas were quickly utilised in popular Brazilian revue shows called ‘teatro de revistas’ during the early part of the 20th century. These shows drew on the theatre traditions of France and Portugal and eventually developed into a Brazilian and particularly carioca culture and lifestyle through their productions (Shaw 2015, p. 88). Female dancers in teatro de revistas resembled ‘the glamorous female performers’ or showgirls of popular American and European revue
shows, enhancing the female performers’ physique with showgirl attributes: tall, athletic bodies in revealing costumes (Shaw 2015, p. 77). However, it was not until the second half of the 20th century that Brazilian samba dancers became known for donning these same costumes. Oswaldo Sargentelli, known as the ‘father of mulatas’, was famous for iconising the mulata in his ‘show de mulata’ throughout the 1970s, giving rise to an industry of cabaret and dinner show entertainment featuring mulatas samba dancing in little bikinis and platform heels. An early version of Sargentelli’s show de mulata can be seen featured in the 1976 film ‘As Granfinas e o Camelô’ and can be seen via the following link: [Sandrinha Sargentelli 2012]. Pravaz (2012) describes these shows and the more elaborate ones that followed, like the tourist shows, as inspired by Broadway musicals (p. 118).

It should also be mentioned that there is no doubt that samba costume accessories to a glittery bikini and platform heels often include designs and feather formations that are reminiscent of those worn by indigenous groups across the Americas. For example, similar costumes to those in Rio carnival can be seen at the ‘Boi Bumba’ festival in Parintins, Brazil. This festival incorporates legends, rituals, music and dance of local indigenous people, celebrating the lifestyle of the ‘caboclo’, people with mixed indigenous and European ancestry (Boi Bumba 2012, para. 1). The costumes worn are evolved and theatricalised versions of traditional clothing and costume worn by indigenous people like the Parintintín (one of the first peoples inhabiting Parintins) (Boi Bumba 2012, para. 4). Carnival costumes worn by samba dancers in other regions of the country, particularly in the case of Rio de Janeiro, are indeed reminiscent of those worn at indigenous festivals
like *Boi Bumba*; however, they are rarely worn by people with indigenous heritage nor in the context of indigenous music or dance practices (Schreiner 2002, p. 11).

Regardless of the costumes’ various potential origins and influences, in the context of this thesis consideration of the effect of costuming on the dancing is crucial, as what one wear alters how one dances. The samba queen of the 1970s as described earlier, not to mention the other styles of samba practised outside of Rio, could not accommodate the contemporary samba dancer’s costume with her rhinestone covered bikini, large headpiece and platform heels. Samba dancers today must negotiate their elaborate costumes when performing. They hold their head level and still to maintain their balance and control the great weight of these headpieces. Arms are away from their bodies, not only to reveal the costume but also to avoid knocking the rhinestones attached to their costume. Legs are extended in high heeled shoes as they precisely and confidently perform their samba, and their hip and buttocks movements are on full display with only a G-stringed behind. When a dancer wears heels as high as these women do, they are permanently balanced on their toes, making it difficult to have one’s weight forward even if their headdress would allow. In adopting the dress of a showgirl, the samba dancer confirmed and responded to the influence of the former.

In a contemporary twist, today it is increasingly common to see *passistas* donning more comfortable clothing options like the ‘mini-dress’, or fringed leotards and bikini skirt combinations, all highly decorated of course. They keep the extremely high platform heels but ditch the headpieces and wear their hair out. In this more comfortable

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19 In the Rio carnival parade of 2017, the samba school *Imperatriz Leopoldinense* paid tribute to the Brazilian indigenous people of the Amazon’s ‘Xingu’ River, with many of the tribes’ leaders participating in the parade. They protested the destruction of the Amazon and the corruption inherent in many projects using the natural resources of the Amazon (Amazon Watch 2017). This samba schools parade is one of the few to have such inclusion of specifically indigenous culture, despite still using samba music and dance traditions they included indigenous people in the parade. Other schools fantasise Brazilian indigenous culture using it for theming purposes only.
alternative a whole new set of dance moves, in combination with the already well-implemented showgirl style posture and arm extensions, has begun to emerge. Dancers can bend at the waste and whip their hair side to side or flick it from the front to the back. Such costumes and choreography are reminiscent of those trending with famous pop artists like Kylie Minogue, Beyoncé, Arianne Grande and Jennifer Lopez, who don glittery leotards and high heels on stage, also flicking and whipping their hair freely. However, for the Brazilian samba scene, the passista dress and bikini costume represent more than just costume options; they are symbols of passista status. Samba choreographer Carlinhos Salgueiro, on his workshop tour of Australia, emphasised to Australian students that the ‘traditional’ bikini showgirl costume described is a privilege for Brazilian samba dancers to wear. The mini-dresses and leotards are what samba dancers wear before earning their right to wear the samba showgirl style, a status which is achieved through practice and dedication to their art. He criticised Australians for merely taking a few samba classes before wearing the bikini costume and performing in samba shows; revealing of the extent to which the traditional showgirl costume of the Parisian and Las Vegas revues has been hybridised for new ownership, under new socio-cultural principles in a new field.

**A Brazilian Samba Showgirl?**

The international marketing of the Brazilian samba showgirl dancer, turning her into a Brazilian icon, has increased the demand to shape the Afro-Brazilian practice into a hybridised form. The similarities shared by the passista and showgirl are no accident, but it is not the task of this thesis to trace, confirm and critique the influence of showgirl aesthetic on samba performance in Brazil. What is of interest here, is the manner in which such a link makes the passistas performance recognisable in the context of Australia. A double appropriation is in play: a Western aesthetic is almost unknowingly being
appropriated in a Western context by those engaged in the replication of an exotic Brazilian practice.

Samba Soldiers

‘Feathered and Fierce’, Amy Mills Samba Pro-Team, Sydney Fringe Festival 2017

As the dancers move into each symmetrical formation, they perform the samba ‘basic’, whipping their arms into their chest as though saluting to the rhythm of the drums. It is an impressive spectacle of precision arms, frenetic feathers and flashing rhinestones as they quickly move through choreographed formations. This is the final number of an hour-long show of various Latin dance styles combined with Western jazz, ballet and hip-hop technique. This final samba routine is a stand out performance number, the genre these dancers clearly excel in. Their movements are precise, with their legs and arms moving quickly to the exact positions needed to create the desired angles and lines of the choreography – they are exercising extreme control of their movements. There is one stand out dancer whose hip flexibility surpasses the others; she also allows her gaze to flicker through the audience giving a sense of connection and warmth that the static showgirl heads behind her avoid as they maintain a strong eye line out over the audience. Occasionally this dancer does something a little different to the others when at the front centre of the group: an extra turn or clap to hype the audience, to make some noise; she is undoubtedly the leader, the ‘sergeant’ if you will.20

This way of performing samba, which I describe here as ‘samba soldiers’, is predicated on synchronised choreography with symmetrical line formations and a precise, controlled physicality. Australian dancers, choreographers and troupe directors bring this style to their samba – it is almost universal. This aesthetic has been made popular throughout Australia by the leader of this group, Amy Mills, whose distinctive

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20 Footage of this performance can be found via the following link: [Sydney Latin Festival 2016]. Note this performance includes another group’s choreography first, which I would equally describe as having this samba soldier style. The group that follows is the ‘pro team’ that performs the same choreography I saw live at the Sydney Fringe Festival and here sometime earlier at the Sydney Latin Festival.
samba style and technique has dominated both group and individual performances in the national and international samba competition circuit for the last ten years. In keeping with the relationship established above between showgirl performance explored above, samba troupes in the Australian scene favour similarly symmetrical formations, synchronisations and replicated actions. As such, Australia’s appropriated samba is much closer to the traditions of the mid to late 20th century showgirls – altering key elements that currently differentiate samba in Brazil, creating a style of samba performance which I have called the samba showgirl. It is this tradition of dance aesthetic that continues to dominate in popular performance across many genres. Despite desires to be authentic to Brazilian dance practice, Australians are unable to detach themselves from performing samba with the inflection of these traditions; traditions which are both controlled by cultural taste in what looks like, to these dancers, a ‘professional’ performance, and how their Western dance training has shaped their bodies to favour a particular style of movement.

**Teams versus Queens**

To become a ‘rainha de samba/bateria’ (samba queen/queen of the drums) or a ‘musa’ (muse) is the ultimate achievement for a Brazilian samba dancer. Being crowned either of these titles confirms one’s excellence in samba no pé and or recognises the dancer’s beauty and stage presence. Individuals can be crowned queens in competition and nominated to be a representative queen or muse in their samba schools, a position acquired by standing out amongst other dancers and passistas. The prestige of such positions is not only symbolic, but it also creates economic and social opportunities for the dancers, opportunities that they would not have access to otherwise. Clarice expressed how winning her first samba competition in her home city in Brazil “opened a
lot of doors”, giving her the opportunity to travel and dance all over the world. All these positions share the common privilege of performing as a soloist at samba events. The dancer wears a unique costume and receives individual recognition in the samba community. Aspiring queens work towards this goal of recognition by focusing on their individuality in physical appearance and performance style. Dancers must practise and perfect their step combinations and style so to be ready to whip out a unique sequence in samba carnival rehearsals and shows.

In Australia, while no doubt many individuals would also aspire to be crowned a queen of samba, it is more common for dancers to work towards being a part of a successful dance team. ‘Samba teams’, like the Pro-Team described above, grew out of the Latin Dance Competition circuit in Australia, where samba teams collect around various dance studios across the country and enter their teams in competitions, many of which are also associated with professional samba entertainment companies. This sense of being a ‘team’ is also present in the commercial entertainment scene, replicated on social media and in promotional material. Groups promote themselves as collectives, with catchy titles like: ‘The Chicas Bomba’, ‘The Aluminus Angels’, ‘The Tropicalistas’ and ‘The Glamourosas’. Equally, groups refer to themselves as a ‘family’ or a ‘troupe’. This collective dance group identity is reminiscent of traditional showgirl culture, where visual and corporeal characteristics are shared by each dancer, which creates a marketing dream for commercialising a dance show. Some of the oldest, most famous and popular female showgirl and chorus girl troupes have been commercially successful due to their group identities for which dancers are both specifically chosen to match and trained to adopt a group style. The Blue Bells at The Lido, the Crazy Girls of the Crazy Horse, Doriss Girls of the Moulin Rouge, and The Rockettes of Radio City Music Hall have group names and associated venues that take precedence over the name of any individual dancer. It is
the style and aesthetic of the group that is famous and reproduced rather than the performances of the women in the groups, all of whom are interchangeable.

It is this same unified group creation that has been carried by companies and troupes of samba dancers in Australia. It is rare for a samba dancer to perform a solo routine for a commercial samba show. The placement in a highly-regarded dance company, troupe or team (all of which are interchangeable membership in this small dance scene in Australia) with a branded group identity provides individual dancers with all that is associated with the group, “everyone wants to be the better group” said Mimi when discussing the competition in the Australian samba scene. Being an individually skilled dancer is of no use if one is not a member of an equally skilled group. What’s more, picking up the style, choreography and technique of the group gives one a place on stage, a matching costume, a sense of belonging and most importantly a means of earning an income.

Of course, there is an element of this in Brazil. Brazilian passistas feel a commitment to and or connection with their corresponding samba schools, and many dancers tend to reflect the samba school’s distinctive identity even wearing matching outfits in school colours. However, it is their approach to dancing samba in Brazil that embraces an individual style rather than establishing a way of dancing that conforms to the necessities of being in a unified team. Australian samba dancers are more inclined within their group identity to physically match each other’s performance or at least their lead dancer/choreographer (who is often also the company owner) rather than establish and experiment with their style. Standing out is not their goal. Each of the Brazilian participants I spoke to about this difference, emphasised the importance of individuality in samba. Luna and Aline spoke about how they try to encourage individuality rather than getting their students to copy the way they dance.
I think you have to learn the base and then the steps [...] Put your own soul on it
Listen to the music and then allow the music to go into your heart and into your
body, and then put the step on it [...] So, I think it’s definitely important for the
teacher to tell [the student:] “look this is the technical part but you can put your
heart on it, and then do a rebolar [a hip roll movement] or basic step and put your
flavor on it.” But it’s hard for them to let it go. – Luna

Everyone in Australia dances the same way, there’s no such thing as, you know, as
individuality and personality [...] There is 12 people dancing the same thing [...]
dancing together, same steps and they all look the same [...] you will never see that
in Brazil. It doesn't exist. [...] It's all about personality. That's what I teach in my
class, I say: “look I don’t want you to dance like me, I don’t want you to dance like
the best dancer in Australia or whatever, you have to develop your own style”. –
Aline

For the Brazilian dancers, this lack of individuality is the main difference between each
nations’ style. Rosa noted this difference between Australia and Brazil as well. “It’s
because they are all individuals there, they are all queens, everyone has a different style”.
Rosa went on to note that this ‘queen culture’ was not present in Australia but that some
were trying to make it more prevalent here with soloist samba competitions. One
particularly influential Australian samba dancer, teacher and business owner, Mishel
Finlayson, made Rio carnival history becoming the first Australian musa, parading with
samba school 'Estacio de Sa’ in 2017. Such an endeavour no doubt will have inspired other
Australians to strive for similar individual recognition that goes beyond establishing a
successful team of dancers.

**Synchronisation and Freestyle: Choreographing Samba**

One of the most notable dance trends to develop during the early 20th century in
Europe was precision dancing. This style has saturated popular dance entertainment ever
since. The idea of precision dance focuses on moving in time with one another – complete
synchronisation, forming a spectacle of bodies rather than highlighting individual
creativity or beauty. A famous creator of such female spectacle is Busby Berkeley, who
choreographed and directed films during the 1930s and 40s. Picking up on the trend of precision performance, Berkeley utilised showgirls to architect elaborate scenes on screen, literally constructing unfolding geometric displays with the bodies of many female dancers (Fischer 2010). Another creator of such spectacle is John Tiller. Tiller is known as ‘the Father of Precision Dance’, creating the first, and highly popular precision dance group during the late 19th century in England, with highly synchronised choreography. ‘The Tiller Girls’ maintained their popularity throughout the 20th century, influencing other precision groups including the American ‘Rockettes’ and the German ‘Hiller Girls’ (The Rockettes 2018, para. 2; Gordon 2002; p. 40). The popularisation of this particular aesthetic prevails today, even in backup dance choreography for famous pop stars and group dance competition choreography.

Synchronised dance dominates the commercial scene in Australia, and this influences the Australian samba team culture. The performances are designed and practised, step-by-step, ahead of time to chosen music. By contrast, in Brazil, the choreography reflects the aspirations and expectations of the queen culture, dancers improvise steps, learning how to perform a freestyle samba. Although ‘freestyling’ is a type of improvisation, its spontaneity takes immense practice. Dancers in Brazil learn to improvise by perfecting their moves so that when they come to perform, they can call on their actions as if they are spontaneous. It would be rare to see Brazilian samba dancers all performing the same steps at the same time. Despite an increase in efforts to make synchronised, choreographed routines, when one watches Brazilian dancers performing ‘together’, they are often all performing different arms or adding movements that are different to those around them; they avoid looking the same. In Australia dancers that are not performing a set choreography or who are purposely performing actions differently to those around them, would mean they are freestyling –
a performance convention that although included in most Australian samba shows, does not comprise the majority of the performance, as it does in Brazil. Brittany had also noticed this contrast.

I think it’s really choreography based here. I think we have a really high level of samba dancers here, especially in competitions. In Brazil, it’s a lot more freestyle, even at the shows they do freestyle. They dance it because it’s what they do [...] an expression of joy. [Here] we focus on hitting the choreography hard [...] We will always be more confident with choreography than freestyle.

Indira made the distinction between what is favoured in Australia and what is ‘authentic’, and therefore Brazilian.

It’s kind of like samba is couched within this cabaret showgirl style here. [T]here’s the samba step, but then [if] you know samba in Brazil, [it] is meant to be very fluid and very personal and very expressive. So, it’s like the freestyle element is probably the biggest and most important thing that keeps it authentic.

A perfect example of this distinction occurs in a video of a group samba performance that made the news during the 2016 Olympic Games in Brazil. During a press conference with Jamaican sprinter, Usain Bolt, a collection of passistas entered the stage and encouraged both Bolt and other athletes to join them as they danced. At first glance, the dancers look like they are performing the same dance moves, but after closer observation, one can see the dancers are not always on the same foot at the same time, nor are they trying to be. These dancers are only following a basic structure of when to come on and off, inviting people up to dance with them and perform a step repeatedly. This video can be seen at: (Beanyman Sports 2016) and for an extended playlist of examples of samba performed in show contexts in Brazil see: (llillianjean 2018b). These examples are dramatic contrasts to my description of the Australian competition team at the beginning of this section, but also with another video of a Sydney based group performing for the Australian Olympic Games Committee in 2016. In the latter, the performers create an organised spectacle. We see the set placement of the dancers whom
all follow drilled, inflexibly choreographed routines. Their synchronisation extends to parading on stage on the same foot and placing their arms at identical angles. This can be seen at: [Rhythm Brazil 2016] and for further examples of Australian samba performances with this particularly ‘samba soldier’ style see: [lillianjeanc 2018].

Some Australian dancers I interviewed saw the correlation between synchronised choreography and professionalism in Australia, insinuating that choreography was essential for a professional show and as Danielle states, it is expected.

Here in Australia for the corporate market they expect a choreographed show, in Brazil it’s freestyle, they have grown up dancing that way, its dancing from the heart [and it’s] common not to do choreography [...] Aussie dancers don’t have that experience [...] and with a Western perspective of booking companies for shows [promotors and venues] expect a choreographed show.

Both Mimi and Kaitlyn seemed to think that samba in Brazil could be performed in social contexts, whereas here in Australia it was reserved for the stage.

I also notice [that in Brazil], sometimes it’s really casual [...] small, and just on the street, sort of street samba. Whereas here we make it really showy and big and you know really, not professional but [Brazilians] use [samba] for all times, whereas we just use it for big shows, we don't just do it casually on the street. – Kaitlyn

Here it's more performance based, so it needs to look a certain way and [Australians are] obviously trying to also make the style that would suit the audience [...] – what they think they would like. But then in Brazil, from what I have seen, they're dancing on the street, there is live drumming, it’s more natural, it’s very different in that way [...] The only way they could bring it here would be if [we] had those kinds of parades and carnival [...] You need something that’s a bit more routine [here] and everyone has to follow the steps in a certain way, and make it look a bit more, I guess you would call [it], professional. – Mimi

These dancers emphasise the ‘street’ and freestyle elements of Brazilian samba when compared to what they see and perform in Australia. What is fascinating here is the relationship that these dancers/choreographers made between their Australian style of troupe precision and professionalism. Here we see a relationship begin to emerge between structure and synchronisation, created through rehearsal specificities of timing,
angles, with this notion of what denotes professional performance. Mimi and Kaitlyn also described the difference between samba dancing in Brazil and Australia through the words ‘messy’ and ‘clean’: Australians perform ‘clean’ samba and Brazilians were ‘messy’. Dancing ‘messy’ or ‘clean’ was, for these dancers, associated with evidence of perfection, or the lack thereof. Physical precision requires control and dancing ‘messily’ holds negative connotations.

I think we try to keep it pretty traditional, but [where] I do notice the big difference is, like in Brazil it's really like raw and kind of messy, but that is awesome! It's meant to be that way, obviously. Whereas here, we kind of stylise it a bit and make sure we are all in time together and we are all looking the same, whereas over there, they're just like whatever goes just goes. – Kaitlyn

I guess yea the style is a bit more...like it's not very clean, it's very... not that it's messy [...] it feels more wild, you can do whatever you want. – Mimi

Naturally, these dancers hesitated to say that the way samba is performed in Brazil is wrong. They qualify ‘messy’ in a Brazilian context with the fact that Brazilians, by expectation and reputation (if not always by experience) are freer, less controlled – ‘wild’ ‘whatever goes just goes’ and ‘you can do whatever you want’. Indira describes the reaction some Australian dancers had towards the performance of a famous male Brazilian samba choreographer from Rio de Janeiro, who came to tour Australia in 2016. Her sentiment reveals how control and precision in Australian samba performance are considered an essential part of making a professional show.

It was a hot mess by our standards, but [...] we bust our asses trying to replicate their energy which they just exude naturally, so that’s definitely a different thing, you know. Just the sheer fact that we do choreography and it’s all about arm here, make sure you do that [...] [your] angles, [your] hands, but for a show and to monetise it and make it a viable thing to sell, of course it has to be clean.

Although the dancers readily suggest they appreciate, even admire that ‘messy’, ‘wild’, ‘free’ look of the samba dancer in or from Brazil, groups that perform in this manner in Australia are not appreciated. I have often heard dancers express their
disapproval of Australian samba groups who look ‘messy’ in their performances – they lack synchronisation, and this lowers the group’s status as professionals in this field. In dance sport, the appropriated ballroom style of salsa shares a similar aesthetic to Australia samba, as Juliet McMains describes.

[T]he ballroom Latin dancer might be characterized as appearing clean, controlled, and balanced (or from a different perspective stiff, sterile, and predictable) in contrast to the salsa dancer’s rhythmical, playful, spontaneous, and free (or wild, messy, violent, and off balance) style (McMains 2001, p. 57).

Here, ballroom salsa has been creatively appropriated to suit a particular group with a different set of aesthetic values and or skill set of bodily movement and training. Similarly, Gibson (2013a) describes how in the New Orleans groups, Casa Samba, time would be spent ‘[taking] the ‘ghetto” out of the dance styles of the African American women joining the group; women who had grown up listening to mainly hip-hop, bounce music and brass bands. What these women bring to their style of samba, contradicted the changes that had already occurred in passista culture in Brazil, where, as we have seen, a more showgirl aesthetic and style prevails.

Women are encouraged to display their skill, energy, sensuality, and even seductiveness, but they are criticized if these movements should ever show a loss of control. Director Curtis Pierre understands losing control as “dancing in a way that looks more street than what the imagined idea of dancing ‘Brazilian’ should be (Gibson 2013a, p. 110).

The ‘tidying-up’ of the passista style of samba in Brazil has meant that when a dancer with experience in hip-hop, an African American dance with an aesthetic of grounded movement, is subject to the ‘messy’ label when beginning to practice samba, a style deeply rooted in Afro-Brazilian movement. While the ballet-trained dancer, who can maintain a controlled posture and elegant arms, but who may struggle to learn the grounded weight placement needed to create the samba hip movements and footwork, is less subject to the label.
The Hybridisation

The changes in Brazilian samba performance, particularly for passistas, signifies the historical incorporation of showgirl performance practice and sensibility into samba, with ideas of what one might wear and how one might posture, pose and parade, that are common to both forms. It is these similarities of showgirl and passista samba performance that allow Australian dancers, with dance backgrounds that reflect a common embodied practice to the showgirl, to better access the form. Samba, for Australians, has features that make sense to their embodied and cultural histories. However, what significantly sets the showgirl and passista apart are the constructs that constitute good form and professionalism. Synchronisation, commonality and uniformity have, for over 100 years in popular Western dance, been associated with professional entertainment, and there is no exception made when incorporating another style – samba takes on synchronisation and uniformity when performed here. Australians commend freestyle and creativity but also label such practices as ‘wild’, ‘messy’ or ‘unprofessional’. Conversely, the antecedents of Brazilian cultural preference consider this intensive synchronisation and precision as clinical or lacking emotion and a sense of embodied expression. In the next chapter, “Professional’ and ‘Authentic’ Capital, I address this value of ‘professionalism’, along with its often-conflicting value of ‘authenticity’, as identified in Chapter I. Next, we see how Australian samba practitioners are shaped through their cultural, social and bodily histories to favour uniformity over individuality, but also how they attempt to negotiate and balance ideas of professionalism and authenticity as a means of being valued themselves as samba dancers.
Chapter III

‘Professional’ and ‘Authentic’ Samba

Thus far, this thesis has identified two distinct and competing concerns that are prevalent within the Australian samba dance community: ‘authenticity’ – which, in practice, is understood as the capacity to approximate ‘Brazilian-ness’ – and – ‘professionalism’ which signifies what passes as ‘good’ dance in this field. This chapter analyses how Australian samba dancers balance these two contrasting elements to maintain their saleability, popularity and stylistic dominance. Although I have explored the source of a claim to authenticity and professionalism in the proceeding chapters, this chapter contains a more detailed consideration of how groups and individuals in the Australia samba field interact with these two principal values. The way they construct their public engagements with the dance community and how their dance history – their training and the value system that pervades commercial dance in Australia – supports their inclination to be more focused on one value at the expense of the other. In what follows, I outline the theoretical approach to this analysis, before separating dancers I have worked with, watched and interviewed into two categories: the ‘professional appropriators’ and ‘authenticity accumulators’. In doing so, I identify the relationship between their dance backgrounds and their subsequent approach to performing and
commercialising samba in Australia. Finally, I look at the way in which dancers are challenged to compete in the industry using the two categories.

**Bourdieu and Samba**

To gain a deeper understanding of why and how Australians practice samba, I have used the theoretical tools of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. His approach offers the research a structural and functional analysis of the ethnographic and biographic findings presented thus far. Bourdieu’s tools acknowledge the embodied, social, economic and cultural elements that go together to make up a comprehensive examination of a social world or field of practice.

Most individuals practising samba in Australia today began engaging in the practice as adults, it was not included in their culture growing up. Australian samba dancers have therefore made what Bourdieu calls a ‘yield of investment’. They have chosen samba as an activity worth investing in as it will add meaning to their life or, they simply believe the benefits of the field to be desirable. Equally, engaging with a dance form may present the possibility of making individuals distinctive in the other fields of their lives – dance or non-dance. ‘Illusio’ is Bourdieu’s term to describe the tendency for participants to engage in a particular activity or industry and believe in the benefits of its field. There is no question of the engagement being meaningful, in and of itself, rather participant engagement and its continued investment confirms its meaningful existence in their lives (Heidegren & Lundberg, 2010). Bourdieu expresses this engagement in the world as being ‘occupied by the world’.

What is comprehended in the world is a body for which there is a world, which is included in the world but in a mode of inclusion irreducible to simple material and spatial inclusion. Illusio is that way of being in the world, of being occupied by the world (Bourdieu, 2000 p. 135).
‘Habitus’ is another important term for this analysis, which Bourdieu (1977) describes as ‘a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a disposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination’ (p. 214). All of which are shaped by the way in which we internalise and externalise the world. One’s habitus is an accumulation of taken-for-granted manifestations of our social habits, values, ways of being, thinking and moving. They are created, encouraged and reinforced through social engagement, with groups of people who maintain and generate social meanings and values within a common field (Urquía 2005). This concept of the body’s engagement with the world is of immense significance to this thesis. As we have seen, Australian dancers perform and present samba differently from those in Brazil. It is the habitus of Australian dancers that dictates their shaped internalised samba: the emergence of what I have called the ‘samba showgirl’. Those Australian dancers, depending on their histories, prefer and perform different elements of what shapes Australian samba. Their habitus determines the amount that each dancer in this scene values the ‘professional’ or ‘authentic’, creating perceptions of what it means to dance samba and what it means to samba dance well.

Because habitus is, as its name suggests, a product of a history, the instruments of construction of the social that it invests in practical knowledge of the world and in action are socially constructed, in other words structured by the world that they structure (Bourdieu 2000, p. 148).

Habitus is not only an accumulation of physical efficiency but also the accumulation of a way of thinking and behaving. In Chapter I, we saw how samba is something perceived as inherently entertaining and exotic, this is due to our internalisation of Brazilian culture as exotic. Consequently, when we produce samba performance, in the hope of being authentic, it is the exoticism that becomes a principal feature of the performance. Authentic samba in the habitus of a Brazilian is therefore different from that of an Australian, as our ideas of what constitutes ‘professional’ or ‘authentic’ performance
differ. As explored in Chapter II, Brazilians and Australians share differing tastes, while Brazilians tend to value individual performance and freestyle dancing, Australians are more inclined to see synchronised group choreographies and precise angles and movements as markers of professionality and quality in dance practice.

The key ‘field’ in this thesis has been the Australian samba dance field, the community of dancers, choreographers, musicians, teachers and pupils that engage with samba performance and pedagogy in Australia. However, while I have throughout this thesis referred to the samba dance field as such, when Bourdieu talks about a ‘field’ he refers not only to a social arena but also the ‘current state of play in that social arena’ (Maton 2012, p. 50). It is the collective beliefs and ways of practising those beliefs that make up a field. In the Australian samba scene, the values of ‘professionalism’ and ‘authenticity’ are collective values that define the field of Australian samba performance. However, as we will see, some value one quality more than the other, and this is mostly dependent on what they bring to the field and how they engage with what they find there. So rather than a field being merely a social space where practitioners engage with samba, it is also where individuals understand, replicate, and value authenticity and professionalism.

Gaining recognition within a particular field is done by collecting what Bourdieu calls ‘capital’. This is a combination of already accumulated and ‘to be’ accumulated, values and valuing that largely shapes the two groups I have distinguished; ‘authenticity accumulators’ and ‘professional appropriators’. The ‘authenticity accumulators’ have and seek authentic capital, while the ‘professional appropriators’ have and focus on further accumulating ‘professional’ capital. The two groups I have distinguished are primarily shaped by the type of capital they already have and what capital they wish to accumulate.
However, as I explain in the second half of this chapter, those who hope to be successful in this field inevitably must gain both authentic and professional capital.

In applying Bourdieu’s sociological tools to analyse the workings of the field of Australian samba, I will begin by describing the habitus of the two different groups of individuals I have identified and the kind of capital they seek to accumulate and their particular placement in the field. Here we will see the extent to which each dancer, choreographer and teacher’s background in dance contributes to their habitus, revealing not only the rationale for their particular leaning towards ‘authenticity’ or ‘professionalism’ but also their approach and attraction to samba more broadly. These forms of capital can be accessed through the particular efforts of the practitioners as they acquire the various signifiers of capital that make sense in this field.

‘Professional Appropriators’

*Copacabana International, Melbourne, from field notes February 2017.*

Two blonde, tanned and muscular dancers glide across the stage with ease and synchronisation. Their samba basic has a little ‘bounce’ to it, where their chest seems to propel forward to meet each arm as it is placed neatly and precisely just in front of their feather exploding bra. Their knees and feet control their steps by the centimetre, barely making an impact on the floor. Not long after parading off stage, the dancers return in cropped fitness outfits, tumbling onto the stage like cheerleaders at a sports game before jumping into a ‘reggae-ton’ dance routine. A male dancer soon enters, following with another impressive gymnastic combination and a double pirouette ‘en l’air’ [a double turn in the air] which he gracefully lands on one knee with his arms stretched out towards the audience, before jumping up and joining the reggae-ton choreography with the girls. The dancers exit the stage. One male and one female dancer soon return to perform a partnered salsa routine, packed with complicated lifts and tricks performed in ballroom dance styling.
Copacabana International is a Brazilian Barbeque restaurant in Melbourne that offers ‘Latin style’ entertainment on weekends. Here I watched a group of dancers rotate with ease through the various dance genres from a variety of cultures, taking us on a ‘tour around Latin America’ all performed with a kind of calm perfectionism and professionalism. In the diverse skills and dance styles the performers revealed evidence of their equally diverse training – gymnastics, ballet, jazz, and ballroom dance – and yet they also managed to imitate the necessary performance qualities of the various Latin dance genres that were on display throughout the show. These dancers were commercial to the core, the kind who could adapt to any style and impress audiences with ease.

The Commercial Dancer

These commercial dancers I have described are what Susan Leigh Foster (1997) calls ‘hired bodies’. As Foster explains, these dancers learn new skills and dance styles with ease, building on their training as replicators. Later, Foster describes them as ‘the industry body’.

The industry body has acquired with its expanding popularity, a more extensive training program, one that adapts quickly to new styles in fashion, movement, and activities in popular culture. Schooled in a mishmash of traditions, including hip-hop, Broadway jazz, and occasionally, ballet, gymnastics, tap and martial arts, the industry body is most concerned with its appearance from a front defined by the camera’s position (Foster, 2010 p. 26).

This ‘industry’ or ‘hired’ body is what we in the dance world would call a commercial dancer. Commercial dancers engaged with samba are what I call in this thesis ‘professional appropriators’. Due to their flexibility and adaptability, they can jump from one genre to the next, guaranteeing maximum employment for each dancer in this field. These dancers are not only employed in the field of commercial dance, but they also stay up to pace with the commercial scene, being able to perform in ways that are popular and
develop their skills to be saleable in their genre of choice. Typically, as Foster notes, these dancers have a Western dance background. Much of their training would have been restricted to genres like ballet, jazz, contemporary and more recently, hip-hop. In dance studio contexts, where many of these dancers would have trained throughout their youth, these genres are taught with attention to repetition, where particular movements are drilled, replicated and copied with intensive detail. Such training creates a habitus that values the mimetic. These dancers ‘pick up’ movement quickly and have an eye for variation in weight distribution, extension, speed, balance and energy. This ‘body for hire’ quality means the commercial dancer continually develops and adds to a particular set of skills that not all dancers are required to engage with, as Amanda Card explains.

These performers are able to ‘be’, and ‘become’, in various and different ways with apparent ease. This is a precious gift. It may be acquired or achieved through accidents of visual, auditory and sensual particularity. It is not average, but I would also contend that it is not rare. By virtue of their adaptability these dancers are unique, as unique as those for whom one way of being/moving in the world is primary (Card 2006, p. 49).

The commercial dancer may be no master of any particular dance style, but they are masters of replication. Choreographers in Janet Roseman’s (2001) interviews with ‘legends of dance’ allude to this idea and call it ‘kinaesthetic absorption’ (pp. 15-16, 45). However, in this case, it is a highly efficient form of kinaesthetic absorption that takes place, often without the dancer having to acknowledge their own body. A dance friend who has over 15 years of experience working in the commercial dance world exclaimed in a rehearsal: “I use the mirror to copy her exactly. I’m not looking at myself; I’m looking at her”. This continual engagement with dance and movement in such a way further

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21 It is debatable whether hip-hop (and jazz for that matter) can be identified as ‘Western’ (Ghandnoosh 2010; Guarino & Oliver 2014). However, in the form that many of these dancers acquire this genre, it has little resemblance to its African American origins. Many studios are teaching a fused commercial style of dance that is prevalent in popular music videos with some calling this style simply ‘commercial’ or in other cases, the style is named a fusion, as with ‘JFH’ which stands for ‘jazz, funk, hip-hop’.
supports commercial dancers’ acquisition of athletic skill and the ability to replicate with precise and controlled movements. These are qualities they learn to maintain and favour throughout their careers. For Foster (1997), this aesthetic preference ‘homogenizes all styles and vocabularies beneath a sleek, impenetrable surface’ (p. 255). This means that even though the dancers in this study perform different dance genres and significantly adapt to the aesthetic of each style, they do so with what Australian dancers in Chapter II described as a ‘clean’ quality. Movements are altered to be more controlled and uniform, creating what Foster (2010) later describes as the ‘glossy mainstream commodities’ that dominate popular entertainment stages around the world (p. 29). This aesthetic must be deeply embodied as dancers seek employment at venues that value variety, but with the ‘gloss’ of professionalism whether it be a cabaret-style show, a cheerleading group or a performance in a mainstream musical.

Naturally, when this commercial dancer seeks to diversify and learn a specialised dance style, like samba, they alter their body in replication of the new movements, but they also bring aspects of their ‘commercial’ ‘body for hire’ to the form. Equally, Brazilian dancers working in this field benefit from having this professional commercial style. Not only does this help them to adapt their Brazilian style of dancing samba to suit the Australian showgirl aesthetic, but most of those I interviewed had already trained in similar environments to the commercial dancers in the Australian field. Such training and experience have given them the professional capital that enabled them to quickly enter this field where their authentic capital as native Brazilians was equally valued.

**Samba as ‘professional’ capital**

Professional capital is an example of what Sherril Dodds (2011) calls an ‘embodied value’ (p. 5), where the extensive repertoire of the commercial dancer gives them not only
more access to work, but it also places them higher in the scene of commercial dance where they seek to be valued as a competent and professional dancer. With each new style learnt or job experienced, the commercial dancer gains more capital in their field, and as such, acquires skills and experiences of diversity and capability for any new job or experience that awaits. Professional capital goes beyond the Western signifiers of what makes a dance performance good, even pervading what is considered possible, probable and preferred in all styles of dance. This idea is on display in popular television shows like ‘So You Think You Can Dance’, where competitors perform different dance genres each week to a panel of judges, as well as a local and television audience. They pick a dance style out of a hat and attempt to master a routine in their chosen style in one week. The challenge of the task is emphasised as the show plays clips from their week of gruelling rehearsals, but audiences are left in awe after each dancer and couple successfully produce an impressive live performance in a different style week after week. Versatility is impressive. As we have seen already, for the dancers, each style becomes an asset. Samba for the professional appropriator, is another style to accumulate in their accumulation of capital towards becoming a more professional dancer in this field. Some of my participants explained how learning samba was for them a pragmatic decision in their dance careers, rather than any great passion for the form. Here, Rosa describes how she initially became involved in samba.

Samba came about when I was working in a restaurant [...] We did afro, conga, salsa, mambo, cha-cha-cha, so it was like a variety of shows. Then my boss at the time there said I need you to dance the samba [...] I liked [samba] I was amazed at how they could shake their booty, but because I could already dance dance-hall and afro I just thought, “oh whatever that's just a G-String,” so I lacked the respect of it [...] I never really wanted to learn but I was thrown into it. I said I don't know how to dance it, and he said it's easy and just gave me a quick demo.
Kaitlyn also had a pragmatic reason for learning samba, one that was shaped by a desire to be more in control in her performances rather than any particular attraction to the genre.

For me, when I was doing Latin [dance] it was all couples dancing, and I felt with some of the performances you had to rely on your partner to do it right [...] So the pull for me was that it was still within that scene, but it was a solo dance and I could control myself and not have to rely on someone else for support.

These are dancers drawn to samba as one dance style among many, ultimately in learning to samba, they extended the possibility of their employment and became better professional dancers in their field. For these professional appropriators, learning and performing samba is the way they gain professional capital.

Within the Australian samba field, professional appropriators are valued. We can see this through the audition notices companies display when seeking new dancers for their live performances. This first audition call, Figure 9, despite expressing their desire for ‘Advanced or Intermediate level samba dancers with performance experience’, also emphasises that with ‘a passion for Samba and Brazilian culture’, commercial dancers are ‘welcome to apply’. This group prides itself on the number of Brazilian performers in their company and their ‘authentic’ approach to the genre, but equally, they know commercial dancers to be far more numerous than exclusively samba trained performers. Samba companies recognise that a strong commercial dancer can not only help fill a stage for a larger show but can also sufficiently ‘fake it’ before learning the style. This second audition notice, Figure 10, is a prime example of a multi-genre dance group that performs samba along with many other genres. The commercial dancer is their ideal auditionee. They ask for ‘versatile, adaptable’ dancers that are ‘open to learning new dance styles’. They ask for ‘knowledge of some Street Latin dance styles’, but also a ‘strong foundation in jazz, contemporary, Hip Hop’. There is also mention of ‘acrobatic’, ‘instrument’ and
AUDITION NOTICE

Sunday 19 March 2017
Ministry of Dance, Level 1, 64 Sutton Street
North Melbourne 3051 – Studio 1

DCP is looking to cast strong female and male dancers and singers for a variety of upcoming projects. You must be versatile, adaptable, take pride in your presentation both on and off the stage, be energetic, have a fun attitude, be passionate about what you’re doing and open to learning new dance styles.

We are also looking for a strong female latin vocalist who can move well and be able to sing in Spanish is a bonus!

**Must have:**
- Knowledge of some Street Latin dance styles is essential
- Strong foundation in jazz, contemporary, Hip Hop styles
- Dancers who can sing well
- Performance experience
- Committed, reliable and professional with a positive attitude
- Performance experience
- Bring your A game to every rehearsal and live performances
- Be a team player and work harmoniously in a team environment

**Desirable:**
- Acrobatic skills
- Dancers/singers who can play an instrument
- Adagio/partnering skills

**REGISTRATION OPEN TIMES:**
Males @ 12.00pm
Females @ 1pm
Singers & Musicians @ 3pm

1st round – DANCE
Male dancers @ 12.30pm
Female dancers @ 1.30pm

2nd round – DANCE CALL BACKS
Dancers @ 2.30pm

3rd round – SINGERS/MUSICIANS
Singers @ 3.30pm

**DANCERS - What to bring/wear:**
- Short CV and head shot
- Latin heels for the ladies
- Comfortable dance attire with no loose fitting clothing
- Neat and tidy appearance

**SINGERS/MUSICIANS:**
- Email your CV, head shot and audio links to victoria@dancecity.com.au
- Bring along your backing track/s on USB
- Bring along instrument for your audition piece

Figure 9: (Rhythm Brazil 2017).

Figure 10: (Dance City 2017).
‘partnering’ skills as a bonus that dancers may be able to add to a themed show – presenting the group with numerous possibilities for dance entertainment work. Many dance group/company leaders and choreographers favour commercial dancers as they see their flexible potential and their utility within the variety of shows and styles they may have to perform. Rosa told me she did not hire dancers only trained in samba as “you can’t do anything with them”.

In both using commercial dancers for specialist genres like samba, as well as the commercial dancers’ ever-expanding appropriative abilities, there is a strengthening of crossovers between dance fields within the companies performing in Australia. This is not new of course as Card suggests.

Throughout its history dance on the popular stage has been a great hybrid. It has constantly borrowed from what ever happened to be available. Other dance genres have been its bread and butter; nothing has been off limits. Movement has been borrowed from the classical, the ethnic, the erotic, the exotic, the social and the nostalgic. Popular dance is also a story of remarkable resurrections and persistent reinventions. Confronted with changing times, popular stage dance has accommodated new technologies and new social circumstances with a display of the adaptability and versatility that are intrinsic to the form (Card 2003, p. 218).

Today the Australian samba scene is a part of a field where dancers move between, hybridise, borrow and connect various dance genres as standard practice. The professional appropriator’s habitus reflects and creates the capital in this field. The state of play in this field includes the valorisation of a particular dance aesthetic. Fusions or hybridisations are valued as are quick-fired appropriation. The dancer who has diversified their dance capabilities and developed the ability to simulate something new efficiently, will no doubt work well and easily find employment in such a field.
‘Authenticity Accumulators’

When I first began to learn samba at the dance school connected to the company I was very soon to be performing regularly with, I was presented with an opportunity to go to Brazil and participate in the grand carnival parade in Rio de Janeiro. It was proposed as the experience of a lifetime, but the hefty price tag (around $3000 not including flights) was far too steep for a fulltime student living out of home. The following year, two dancers in my dance company went on such a tour, and I lived their adventures, vicariously, through their social media updates. When these dancers returned, their samba seemed better even though there was not that much samba training involved; their social media posts predominantly consisting of beach and poolside selfies. In retrospect, I realised that I had never really paid much attention to their samba dancing. It was as though the knowledge that they had been to Brazil and experienced samba at its source, on the streets and in the carnival parade, had increased my awareness of the way they danced. When they returned with new dance shoes, workout gear and even two Brazilian capoeira performers in tow to join our group, they had acquired authenticity through proximity. Through the association with Brazil, we all felt they made our dance group more authentic. We were now performing alongside ‘real’ Brazilians as well as dancers who had performed in Rio, the biggest stage for samba in the world. In the years that followed, as my interest in the samba scene had been influenced by the expectations and complications of academic study, I watched as more Australian samba dancers flocked to Brazil – most of them on tours organised by prominent samba group directors in Australia. These providers had moved to package those ‘experiences of a lifetime’ for both amateur and professional samba dancers to experience samba culture at its source. The stakes were higher now, as more groups competed in offering the most authentic tours.
Tours included participation in a samba school parade during carnival, attendance at samba school rehearsals, dance classes from prominent samba teachers and even organising tourist experiences like visiting Christ the Redeemer and Ipanema Beach. Through these tours, Australian dancers received a comfortable experience of samba culture, despite the majority of samba practitioners being based in some of the poorest, and most violent areas of Rio de Janeiro. Everything was arranged: transport, accommodation and translation, with the tours’ dance directors acting as guides for their Australian samba enthusiasts.

**Authentic Capital**

As the developing attraction of these samba tours highlights, proximity to Brazil offers a samba dancer access to ‘authentic capital’. Unlike the professional appropriators explored above, these ‘authenticity accumulators’, invest significant time and money into experiences. They also tend to be individuals who are more focused on their samba dancing to the exclusion of all other dance styles. They are often, although not solely, dancers who have less training in Western dance styles and have picked up samba as a leisure activity later in life. Or they may also be dancers who have rejected their Western styles turning to a genre of dance they consider to be more meaningful. Indira describes how she was drawn to samba later in her dance career, and how joining a dance group that performed various non-Western dance styles opened her up to practising dance in different (read non-Western) ways. There was “a very different approach to dance,” she said: “it wasn’t about necessarily being perfect, it was about connecting with culture and expressing a feeling and a vibe which I found that resonated a lot more with me as I started getting a bit older.” Other individuals who had little previous dance training spoke of how samba was something they ‘discovered’ after learning about Latin culture in their
post-high-school education. For these dancers, it is more about the dance and its associated culture. As we also saw in Chapter I, the appeal of samba is connected to its exoticism, with many of those I interviewed highlighting aspects of the colourful, exotic costumes, as well as the high energy, joy and ‘wildness’ associated with difference. Brittany commented that she found women wanted to take samba lessons as they “really love the movement and culture and celebration of the female body”, but she also admitted that they liked the prospect of getting dressed up as well. Danielle explained that students loved the idea that samba was a ‘real culture’. It is different from anything associated with home, where Australian Anglo culture is the norm and therefore not considered ‘cultural’ in the same way. Joanne Bosse (2004) found in her research on individuals learning salsa in the United States that many were doing so in the hope of acquiring, ‘some of the sexuality, exoticism, or other qualities’ that this street style offered (p. 41). Bosse (2008) also notes that this desire was not solely an attempt to perform or pretend to be a part of a different ethnic group, it was instead a way of ‘refashioning identity’ by people who had become ‘frustrated with their inability to step outside of their own cultural predispositions about movement, dance, and their own bodies’ (p. 48). As well as hoping to acquire exotic traits through the particular way they move their body, the ability for non-Latinos to dance salsa is also considered socially valuable in certain circles, communicated as valuing cosmopolitanism. Urquía (2005) states that ‘studies of cultural consumption imply that salsa might be just as valuable to non-Latin groups because it communicates their worldliness’ (p. 388). Bosse (2004) concurs; salsa offered her research participants a way of signifying their ‘fluency in foreign lands’ (p. 22) gaining what Bethany Bryson (1996) calls ‘Multicultural Capital’ (Urquía 2005, p. 387).

For some people investing in samba it is about gaining this kind of capital that confirms one’s connections to or legitimacy in the practice. A few Australian based samba
companies make significant efforts to acquire authentic capital. They craft their experiences, their contacts and understanding of Brazil, often accumulated in Brazil, and they promote their authenticity within their Australian samba communities. These efforts increase the companies’ authentic capital, extending their business opportunities.

One such business opportunity can be seen through the tours organised for Australians to experience Brazilian samba culture in Brazil. In the two Instagram advertisements below, we can see how each advertises the tours and workshops through discourse that highlights the authentic cultural experience customers will receive. Figure 11 questions the reader, ‘have you ever dreamt of [...] parading in the spectacular Rio carnival and learning to samba like a Brazilian [...] [and] experiencing a vibrant new culture?’ Figure 11 also emphasises the glamour and exoticism of the Rio carnival experience while marketing what this company offers as an enjoyable holiday. We see a samba dancer in an elaborate samba diamanté costume and feathered headpiece with happy tour goers enjoying the tourist sites in Rio. While Figure 11 states their tour as the ‘most authentic Rio Carnival experience’, Figure 12 takes a different approach, using an image of the less glamorous side of Rio to insinuate connection to what is described as a ‘grass roots Samba culture experience’. Here we are taken to the ‘favelas’ (Brazilian shanty towns) where many of the samba schools and communities are located in Rio de Janeiro. This advertisement emphasises the ‘street’ element, accentuating the authentic nature of the experience offered. It also offers a degree of mysticism and adventure in offering no visual reference to dancers but instead emphasises insider knowledge. The names of professional samba teachers and performers are listed, both allowing for a dancer’s affirmation of authenticity if they recognise the names or creating a sense of exclusivity if they do not; potentially generating a desire to be an insider who does.
Figure 11: (Sambaliscious 2017).

Figure 12: (Samba Internacional 2017).
These companies, ‘Sambaliscious’ and ‘Samba Internacional’, have also posted videos of their directors interviewing Brazilian samba practitioners in and from Rio, gaining authenticity through literal proximity. These videos also offer opportunities for the directors to advertise not only the wonderful experience of travelling to Brazil, but they also highlight their access to, and the importance of the culture of samba, its history and the people who practice it, as well as display their Portuguese language skills. An example of these interviews can be seen in the following links: (Samba Internacional 2016), (Sambaliscious 2017). The use of Portuguese in obtaining authentic capital within this field can also be seen in the social media posts of many dancers and dance groups. Here practitioners post in Portuguese despite communicating to largely English-speaking audiences. Their social media posts or page headers are captioned with expressions in Portuguese. ‘Nossas lindas Sambistas se divertindo muito’ (Our beautiful Sambistas having lots of fun), ‘BEM AO BRASIL’ (GOOD TO BRAZIL), ‘Momentos inesquecíveis’ (unforgettable moments), ‘So Alegria’ (So joyful), ‘energia boa’ (good energies). In using the national language of Brazil, these companies connect to the country and culture of samba. Posting pictures with the Brazilian samba practitioners in admiration of their practice is also a common way in which dancers and dance group leaders display a sense of proximity to Brazil. These various forms of association with Brazilians both in Brazil and in Australia provides an impression of authenticity that is converted into authentic capital. Gibson (2013b) also notes this in her study, where the samba group leader acknowledged that allying with Brazilian performers gave their group legitimacy (p. 21).

‘Making an Effort’

As identified in Chapter I, ‘making an effort’ to understand or connect with Brazilian samba culture was considered, both by Brazilian and Australian samba
practitioners, not only the appropriate course of action but also an essential part of
dancing samba in a foreign land. ‘Making an effort’ to learn about or engage with Brazilian
culture can be seen through both extensive efforts of engagement with the culture, like
travelling to Brazil, but also through smaller attempts of displaying a sense of cultural
understanding more locally, like learning Portuguese samba terminology.

However, the efforts that many dancers make in obtaining a greater sense of
authenticity in their involvement and performance of samba does not necessarily
correlate with the Australian samba dancer’s actual performance style. Their dancing
abilities and the particular quality of their movement are less important than, for
example, speaking Portuguese, or having a claim to have danced in Rio carnival or access
to engage with Brazilian people. It is essential to be culturally engaged, or at least display
a sense of cultural engagement, even if one’s dance quality or performance is not
reflective of this engagement. Although many dancers and group leaders express the
importance of trying to represent authentic Brazilian samba in Australia, this desire is
always offset by attempting to fit such a practice into the commercial entertainment
scene where there is competition for business in a place that is not Brazil. Going to Brazil,
training with Brazilians, learning a little Portuguese and advertising these as assets,
indicates to competitors and potential clients that this dancer or this dance group is ‘the
real deal’. Their display of ‘making an effort’ under difficult circumstances can excuse
their appropriation and commercialisation of the dance practice.

Having studied groups and individuals more closely over the last few years, I have
ascertained that many of those who have done workshops and classes with Brazilian
samba teachers in Brazil show little difference in their dancing. The ‘samba soldier’ and
‘samba showgirl’ qualities noted in the previous chapter remain. In most cases, as they
return to the Australian samba field, dancers will feel the pull back to the local shared
values that differ to those in Brazil. As we have seen, Brazilian dancers living and dancing in Brazil hold a different quality to their samba performance. The best amongst them may even be considered less useful for Australian samba groups, where choreography and synchronised precise movements as well as the ability to perform in any dance genre, prevails.

Balancing and Competing

As I have illustrated here, ideas of ‘authenticity’ and ‘professionalism’ have both been, and continue to be, of importance in performing and commercialising samba in Australia. It is important to note that it is difficult to place dancers in the Australian samba community in either basket as ‘authenticity accumulators’ or ‘professional appropriators’. In reality, dancers attempt to balance these values to profit from what each offer to the most important form of capital in this field – economic. The final section of this chapter focuses on how these two values are manipulated by individuals to create a balance or to make one more dominant than the other in their field. When discussing other samba groups, many of my research participants revealed how using both the notion of authenticity and professionalism were, and are, the means by which they all compete for economic, social, cultural and symbolic dominance in the field.

Balancing Capital

Samba dancers and their group leaders are continually balancing two contradicting ways of moving and presenting themselves. Indira summarised this challenge effectively.

That’s the beauty of samba, it’s unique and you gotta kind of do it enough to find what works for you and looks the most natural for you, whilst still hitting the beat
at the right time doing the steps the right way and being aware of styling that is still modern and fresh.

As Indira explained, she must try to embody the ‘natural’, ‘freestyle’ look of Brazilian dancers but also be able to conform to the Australian/Western way of dancing in synchronisation and with precision. This balance is the crux of what makes popular samba performance in Australian dance entertainment what it is. Australian audiences for samba entertainment want, or at least the dancers and companies working in this area believe (through experience) that they desire both the familiar and the new. Something that follows Western notions of what signifies a ‘good’ performance, but simultaneously an exotic inflection in their samba show.

Derek Thompson argues that such a balance is what nurtures popular cultural products, including songs, movies and books.

Most consumers are simultaneously neophilic – curious to discover new things – and deeply neophobic afraid of anything that’s too new. The best hit makers are gifted at creating moments of meaning by marrying new and old, anxiety and understanding. They are architects of familiar surprises (Thompson 2017, p. 7).

Applied to the Australian samba scene, what I have called ‘professional’ here, is the neophobic represented in the familiar aesthetic of dance practice and performance within Western societies such as Australia. The ‘authentic’ is the neophilic – a touch of the exotic, the unfamiliar, the new. This mix is true for students, professionals, promoters and audiences of samba. When attending a samba class in Australia, one is learning something out of the ordinary (if you are non-Brazilian), a dance style from another culture but in a familiar ‘dance class’ environment. One is taught by someone speaking English, which is in the Australian context, a familiar language and in the recognisable environment of an indoor dance studio space. The teacher will use a range of samba music genres in the class but will also mix in popular ‘Top 40’ hits. These songs are chosen because they have the appropriate time signature and a beat that can be readily adapted
to give the students some familiarity as they attempt to move in a manner that may be foreign.

Practitioners in Australia seem to understand the necessity for this balance and in fact aim to maintain a certain level of both the ‘authentic’ and ‘professional’ in their approach to practising samba. Many groups shape their business and performance decisions accordingly. An example of a way in which Australian dance groups attempt to achieve such a balance is through their approach to performing different genres within the same commercial field. Some groups perform Brazilian dance entertainment shows, but also burlesque/cabaret shows, individually marketing each group to increase their access to work. In doing so, they can emphasise their Brazilian-ness despite also practising other Western styles. Figures 13 and 14 reveal the extent to which this individual marketing and branding of each genre, through the group names, logos and photos, making for significantly different styles despite consisting of the same management and performers.

Figure 13: (Samba Brazil Entertainment 2015).
Ultimately, most Australian samba groups achieve this balance through the samba showgirl hybrid they perform, tapping into a mixed aesthetic both physically and visually that offers Australian audiences a tempered taste of a foreign dance culture through an identifiably glamorous cabaret show – the neophobic with a neophilic twist.

**Economic Capital**

In balancing their authentic and professional capital, dancers and groups are not only externalising their dance habitus: they are shaping it to a commercial field where money drives and impacts their practice of samba. The majority of dancers I spoke to expressed, in one way or another, the financial challenges in Australian samba performance. This was an issue that prevented them from practising and performing samba the way they desired and encouraged the need to compete for economic capital with other samba dance groups. Dancers, teachers and company owners were bothered by competing groups not committing to gaining and presenting either sufficient authentic
or professional capital in their samba performance: insinuating that there are some who acquire work in the commercial entertainment scene illegitimately or unfairly.

I have to actually teach clients why it costs so much. [Otherwise] they are going to call another company who have no training. [The companies] put a beautiful costume on, they can't samba but they do it much much cheaper [...] [I tell them] if you want a cheaper group I can give you a number. I can't guarantee that you're going to get the same quality. – Aline

For Aline having to justify the cost of her show, which she values as having both a high level of professionalism and authenticity, is frustrating. She links this frustration to other groups both charging and offering less in their samba performances. Indira had similar sentiments.

I don't think samba dancers get paid anywhere near the amount of money they should for the amount of time, energy, effort, fitness, everything that we have to put in [...] You know people only really seem to get between $80 and the upper limit seems to be $150 a show [...] The problem here is that a lot of people are willing to undercut each other just for money [...] There is a flood of groups and there's such a difference in the level of quality and authenticity, and yet I feel there's maybe not even that level of respect from the people hiring the groups; they'll make a lot of the decisions based on money.

Groups with less authentic capital are gaining economic capital, and for Indira and Aline, this is unfair to those groups that have invested more time and money in acquiring authenticity. Rosa also mentioned this 'undercutting'.

What I find particularly challenging for me is money [...] I kind of get really agitated and anxious about companies undercutting other companies and not necessarily being the right person for the job [...] They're basically putting not the best quality out on the stage [...] I see a lot of other companies, for example, that get students to dance as professional dancers to cut costs [...] This is the greatest challenge we face, the ones who are running this as a business, who live this life every day and who don't have other jobs.

This economic competition reveals a heightened judgment for authentic and professional capital that perhaps audiences and clients cannot see or is less of a concern for them outside the field. This competition for economic capital comes back to the particular industry in which these samba dance companies are located. The commercial dance
world primarily operates around money, rather than having a social and cultural impact or maintaining a traditional practice – as happens in other fields. This commercial dance scene is instead one that sees trends come and go and those who desire to work within it must also keep up with it, as Danielle explained.

When there is hype around something people will come. For example, the whole Zumba craze, and then it drops off [...] I do fitness classes, I offer yoga for dancers [...] team building sessions [...] I’ve found I’ve had to diversify to keep afloat [...] I do find that the dance industry can be very competitive and bitchy, so the challenge is trying not to listen to what other people are saying about you and how they’re judging you and just really coming back to your intention.

Here Danielle notes the financial difficulties but relates them mainly to attempting to 'keep up' with an industry that sees dance and training practices come and go. In keeping her company flexible, her business stays afloat, but as she concludes, there is a competitive backlash from other groups who are also competing for scarce resources. This disrupts collegiality of the field but also drives its principles and aesthetic.

**Competing for Dominance**

What emerges is a picture of a competitive environment in which aesthetic dominance is maintained through a collection of illusios and habitus. This environment forms a particular balance of capital that enables those best-equipped in that particular balance to dominate in a field of scarcity. To explore the idea of domination in the Australian samba field I will use Bourdieu’s concept of 'doxa'.

The relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice between a *habitus* and the field to which it is attuned, the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense. Enacted belief, instilled by the childhood learning that treats the body as a living memory pad, an automaton that 'leads the mind unconsciously along with it', and as a repository for the most precious values, is the form *par excellence* of the ‘blind or symbolic thought’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 68).
Doxa is the apparent natural and the sensible presuppositions which we in the field deem as given (Bourdieu, 1990). Investment in a particular form of capital leads Australian dancers to believe that one particular way of performing or approaching the practice of samba is inherently the ‘best’ or the most ‘professional’ or ‘authentic’ way to do so. What’s more, those who are competing for domination in the Australian samba scene, are either aiming for or engaging with the field’s doxa. It is unquestionable to engage with samba in a way other than that which reflects what is deemed in the field to be appropriate. Competition develops through attempts by individuals to shape what capital is most desired in the field. This Bourdieu calls a ‘classification-struggle’.

Principles of division, inextricably logical and sociological, function within and for the purposes of the struggle between social groups; in producing concepts, they produce groups, the very groups which produce the principles and the groups against which they are produced. What is at stake in the struggles about the meaning of the social world is power over the classificatory schemes and systems which are the basis of the representations of the groups (Bourdieu 1984, p. 479).

The divisions between those with more authentic or more professional capital are struggling or competing for power over classifying what is most valued in the field of Australian samba. Those with more or less of either capital have a motivation to shape what is valued in the field to suit the capital they have easier or more access to. Samba practitioners, as we saw above, who have less access to professional capital, have a motivation to promote the importance of authenticity in their engagement with samba, as it validates them. Alternatively, those who have more access to professional capital will see less value in promoting an authentic practice of samba and instead will utilise their professional capital through their engagement with other dance practices and or displaying their athletic capabilities as a means of displaying their professionalism. Bourdieu (1984) states that it is through this struggle that doxa and the constitution of doxa as orthodoxy occurs (p. 480). This normalisation or unquestionability of value in
either authenticity or professionalism would make its corresponding capital more valuable, therefore making the individual or group with such capital more dominant and more profitable. For example, if gaining authentic capital became essential, dancers may find themselves needing to go to Brazil to train with Brazilian practitioners before being considered suitable to be paid to dance the form in Australia. Such a shift would greatly benefit those who facilitate and commercialise such a process. Conversely, if gaining or having professional capital was essential, dancers who held no training in the forms that produce the ‘professional’ aesthetic could be deemed unsuitable to be dancing professionally, regardless of style.

This idea of competing for aesthetic values in dance can be seen in research by Urquía (2005). He saw groups in the London salsa community shape the definition of what could be considered authentic salsa according to their particular skills and style. Here the groups were making distinctions between those who are considered legitimate consumers of the genre and those who are inauthentic appropriators. However, Urquía also notes that such aesthetic qualities which signify authenticity can be altered to favour the group’s strengths.

Dancers who compete in this social field use strategies to undermine their rivals which are based on distinctions between legitimate consumers and inauthentic appropriators [...] Salsa is presented as a site of aggressive appropriation and resistance to appropriation, in which authenticity is a key weapon used by both sides to define and redefine correct and legitimate forms of Salsa dancing (Urquía 2005, p. 396).

What Urquía (2005) observed in London is also taking place in samba performance in Australia, where both professional and authentic capital is used by Australian practitioners to legitimise their engagement with samba. In doing so, dancers are competing to define what is deemed the most valued way of practising samba. While some individuals and groups will publicly promote their professionalism by emphasising
their intensive training regime and physical prowess, others will promote their authenticity by highlighting aspects of their proximity to Brazilian-ness, through expressions of adoration for Brazilian culture or through attendance of Brazilian events, workshops and festivals. Equally, Brazilian dancers in this scene must compete; they must highlight their Brazilian-ness and utilise the assumptions the field has around authenticity and quality or skill in samba. As Beserra (2014) notes in her study of the Chicago scene, Brazilian-ness is as equally an asset to Brazilians as it is for non-Brazilians.

The Samba Scene Deconstructed

In using Bourdieu's toolkit, I have explored how the actions of individuals and their negotiations with what is of value in their field, are shaped by their habitus. We can see how this not only moulds the hybridisation of the dance but also how it profoundly impacts the way practitioners perceive their appropriation of samba. By looking closer at the habitus of what I have designated as ‘professional appropriators’ and ‘authenticity accumulators’, we come closer to comprehending the distinct dispositions that exist between the participants and their various approaches to samba – all of which influence their manner and choice of accumulating multiple forms of capital. Samba performance in Australia operates within the commercial entertainment dance scene and therefore produces a tendency within all samba groups to maintain a certain degree of balance between the two forms of capital that dominate the field. However, there is a continued oscillation between these alternatives, and despite their inherited and inherent allegiances, practitioners are aware of the source of their particular capital. To increase their viability and their popularity, they promote and acquire a way of understanding the field that plays to their strengths as dancers, teachers and business owners.
Conclusion

I began this research expecting to reveal a rather straightforward case of cultural appropriation. Although there are questionable practices in Australia – overly simplified representations of Brazilian culture, stereotypical ‘Latin-ness’ flavouring highly inauthentic performances which rely on audience naivety for legitimation – a closer look at the workings of these groups and individuals through direct engagement revealed a complex field that required a more nuanced analysis. This research has identified a practice and process that is cross-cultural and cross-genre with expertise and attitudes that have been produced in this particular field. After talking to dancers, company choreographers and teachers, looking closely at their discourse and their embodied engagement with samba, my analysis focused on dialogues between cultural values and expectations which have been shaped by traditions and altered within the bodies of practitioners. As I have illustrated, individuals bring their own, culturally and socially designed, embodied dispositions and tastes to their understanding of what it means to practice samba in this Australian context. Like Ian Maxwell (2003) who studied Hip-Hop in the western Suburbs of Sydney during the early 1990s, I was ‘not interested in adjudicating the relative ‘authenticity’ of an Australian ‘take’ on’, in his case, ‘Hip Hop’ and in my case samba (p. 47). Like Maxwell, I have chosen to neither excuse nor justify the Australian samba scene’s practices, nor condemn those who practice for their lack of authenticity; rather I have offered a critical analysis that focuses on the how and why of some Australians engagement with this Brazilian performance form. I was interested in their own assessment of their engagement, as much as my analytic unpacking of the
cultural and embodied histories that made and continue to make sense to this group of people.

As I have shown, Australian samba is not simply samba. As the student in São Paulo, Brazil told me: ‘it’s really cool and impressive, but it’s not samba’. Samba, in this study, is shown to have been conditioned by its placement in a field, far removed from its origins of practice in Brazil. This field straddles dance as performance, popular entertainment and pedagogy, with each impacting how the samba dancers that we have encountered in this thesis adopt, carry and confirm existing tastes and modes of practice within their field. Some value their and others proximity to authenticity or Brazilian-ness. Social and cultural capital is gained through the presentation of the experiences one has had and the people one knows both at home and the home of samba. The efforts made by individuals to show others in the field how close they are to Brazilian culture and, by association, how authentically they dance, choreograph or teach samba, mean that they acquire ‘authentic capital’. Practitioners in this field display and wield this kind of capital to both sell their performances and to show how they are qualified and worthy of representing Brazilian samba in Australia.

Values in this field do not solely revolve around the acquisition of or recognition for authenticity – there is also ‘professional capital’. Not all samba dancers seek to be regarded as authentic, but rather aim to be valued more broadly, in the wider field of dance and commercial entertainment as ‘good’ dancers. They pride themselves on having acquired abilities in many dance styles, and this is the embodied source of their capital as professionals. Professional capital is associated with a particularly Western tradition of dance practice and mode of dance training. Dance practices like ballet, jazz, contemporary, and hip-hop as we saw in Chapter III are set up to develop in practitioners, from a young age, a facility for precision, learning synchronisation and mimetic skills.
These dance techniques and skills allow the Australian dancer to replicate the nuances of many dance styles – samba included – and we see a hybridised style take shape in the Australian commercial entertainment scene. Furthermore, the similarities between the posture, posing and parading of the showgirl and passista reveal the extent to which a hybridisation of style had already occurred in the genre. These shared dance qualities, as we saw in Chapter II, give Australians easier access to the form. This ‘samba showgirl’ hybrid has adopted some of the qualities of today’s Brazilian samba style, while still adhering to deeply ingrained performance qualities derived from previous histories and training in popular Western entertainment practices. Australian samba dancers shape what signifies professional performance in the field. This is due to the dominance of Western dance aesthetics in the broader Australian dance community, where they have learnt, practised and performed their craft. The dance forms that are valued in this field make the Brazilian style, as it is performed in Brazil, appear less ‘professional’. As this research has illustrated, there are conflicting values in the Australian field of samba, where Western social, cultural and embodied signifiers of professional dance mix with signifiers that denote authentic Brazilian-ness. Both are sought after, and this makes for a complex field where practitioners seek to enhance their social, cultural and economic capital according to both values while operating in the Australian commercial entertainment field.

In summary, Australians are dancing samba in a hybridised way that is moulded by the context of the Australian commercial dance and popular entertainment field. These practitioners negotiate with what is socially and symbolically valued and economically profitable. When performing samba, they alter their own embodied histories in a complex movement across multiple locations with different understandings of professionalism and authenticity. What has consequently emerged is the samba showgirl, a dance hybrid
that has, and will continue to be, an influential dance style in the Australian dance entertainment scene and for those dancing within it.
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