Dancing Samba in Sweden
A study on transnational cultural expression

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Abstract

In Sweden, samba - the popular Brazilian dance (and music genre), that has been named the “national rhythm” - is very widely known and practiced. This case study envelops questions about national cultures, cultural embodiment in dance, as well as cross-border relations. It aims to observe in what distinct ways, regarding these multiple facets of the topic, Brazilian culture can be expressed through samba in a foreign country so culturally different and geographically distant from the country of origin. The study focuses on samba no pé, a samba style popularized and mostly danced in Rio de Janeiro.

To reach the objective, the research data has been collected through semi-structured interviews from samba teachers and dancers in Sweden. In addition, an observation has been carried out by watching a samba class in person. The collected data showed that dancing samba gives way to different interconnected processes and elements through which the Brazilian culture is transported, translated, and experienced in Sweden.

As people migrate around the world in transnational spaces, links are created between the migrants’ host countries and their homelands. These connections enable different cultures to be transported, get established in different places and spread in popularity. Corporeality is also key, as culture is embodied in the movements. Samba therefore permits an experience of Brazilian corporeality and plays a central role in the expression of Brazilianness in Sweden.

Keywords
Samba, Dance, Brazil, Transnationalism, Corporeality, Cultural expression, Sweden
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1 Introduction

Samba has been described as the “national rhythm” of Brazil (Vianna, 1999; Chasteen, 2004), and is seen by many, together with soccer, as the Brazilian national symbol. It is therefore not uncommon that when people hear the word samba, they think of Brazil. Nowadays, as the dance is widely renowned all over the world, it is safe to say that a lot of people have heard of samba or have seen it somewhere.

The very first time I saw samba was on television when I was around 10 years old. There was a news reportage about the Carnival in Rio de Janeiro and my parents had called me to watch it. I distinctly remember being instantly captivated by what I saw: the massive crowds in the sambadrome, the carriages with gigantic statues, the sound of the drums echoing throughout the entire city. It all exuded joy, power and this grandeur that is hard to put in words. Next, they showed the samba queens, and the sparkling glitter, the feathers, the smiles on the dancers’ faces and especially the incredibly fast footwork were all mesmerizing. Since then, I have become fascinated with samba.

Every year during carnival (alas, this year it was not possible due to the coronavirus pandemic), the spotlight is on Brazil. The ‘biggest party in the world’ becomes the media’s center of attention, and a little part of the Brazilian culture gets shared with anyone who is interested, no matter where they are located.

“Today we live in a global society in which cultural globalization, or the transnational migration of people, information, and consumer culture, is prevalent” (Shapiro, 2008: 261). As the world becomes more and more globalized, transmission of information and flows people are bigger, and with that, the different cultures can spread faster and easier. As Brazilian migrants brought their culture, including samba, to their countries of settlement, the samba music and dance styles have been popularized abroad. Particularly in Sweden, since the 1980s when the first samba association has been established here, the samba community has been exponentially growing. However, compared to other European countries (e.g., Portugal, Spain, the UK), Sweden is not one of the top destinations for Brazilian emigrants. According to Statistics Sweden (in Swedish: Statistiska centralbyrån (SCB)), in 1980, the number of Brazilians living in Sweden was 1 091 people, meanwhile in 2020 it grew up to 10 725 people. These are nonetheless small figures compared to, for example, the UK, where in 2011 around 180 000 Brazilians had already settled (Margolis, 2013: 5). Therefore, because of this curious
popularity of the dance in Sweden regardless of the small number of migrants, it is interesting
to see how samba dancing looks and how the Brazilian culture is spread here.

Aim of the study

The study focuses on samba dance in Sweden. This creates multiple dimensions to the
study as the topic intersects questions of national cultures, cultural embodiment in dance, as
well as cross-border relations. The aim of this study is therefore to understand in what distinct
ways, regarding these multiple facets of the topic, Brazilian culture can be expressed through
samba in a foreign country so culturally different and geographically distant from the country
of origin. The study’s research question is therefore: how is Brazilian culture and Brazilianness
expressed through samba in Sweden?

The following sub-questions were derived from the research question and will help
guide the study. What are the cross-border processes that create a cultural bridge between these
two countries? This will help understand how samba is transported to Sweden. Which parts of
samba are highlighted, and which are neglected in Sweden? This will allow seeing how samba
is translated in Sweden. In what ways do people come into contact with Brazilian culture
through samba? This question will help observe how samba is experienced by dancers in
Sweden.

What is the relevance of samba study in Sweden? Studying samba dance in Sweden
presents an intriguing case study, since there can be found surprisingly many dance schools and
groups that are involved with samba here. However, no study been done exclusively on the
samba dance in Sweden. Therefore, it is worth observing and analyzing how the difference in
both countries’ cultural backgrounds, as well as the geographical distance affect the way that
Brazilian culture is experienced in Sweden through this culturally significant dance.

Moreover, this case study aims to contribute with a particular perspective on
transnationalism. The academic transnationalist discussions (see Jackson et al., 2004; Joseph
2008; Levitt, 2004; Portes et al., 1999) usually cover the situations where big populations of
immigrants retain ties to their country of origin and spread their culture in the country of
settlement. However, the study of Brazilian samba dancing in Sweden shows how this case
differs from others, and therefore the investigation, by combining different relevant concepts,
helps understanding what happens when in the country of settlement (in this case Sweden) it is
not only the immigrants (i.e., Brazilians) who spread their national culture, but also the locals
(i.e. Swedes). By offering these unique insights, I present my contribution to the general
academic discussion on the transnational processes and flows of culture.
Specific delimitations

Samba is a truly broad genre, enveloping the music genre as well as the dance style. The samba dance is divided into many different styles, from which there are samba no pé, samba de roda, samba axé, samba reggae, to name only a few. This study focuses mainly on the samba style most danced in Sweden, the samba no pé style, which originated from Rio de Janeiro and is associated with the Rio de Janeiro Carnival. Samba and carnival therefore are closely related in this dissertation and looking at both simultaneously is important for this study. Additionally, other styles will nonetheless appear in the picture since they are all interconnected. The definition to the distinct above-mentioned samba styles, as well as all of the foreign terms that will appear further in the text can be found in the Glossary (Appendix A).

Disposition

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first introductory chapter gives a presentation of the study. The second chapter reviews the prior research and discussions that have been made on the topic of Samba and Brazilian culture outside of Brazil. It presents the history of Samba and its cultural significance, as well as the topic of the Brazilian diaspora and the experience of Brazilian culture abroad. Next, the third chapter - theoretical framework - gives an overview of the theories and concepts that guide the research. Chapter four - methodology - presents the methods used in this study. The analysis begins with the fifth chapter, where I discuss how Brazilian culture is transported to Sweden. The sixth chapter examines how Brazilianness is translated, and the seventh chapter looks at how people in Sweden experience Brazilian culture through dance. Finally, the thesis ends with concluding discussions in chapter eight, presenting an overview of the topics discussed in the dissertation.

2 Prior research

A lot of research has been done on Brazilian culture as well as on samba itself, its origins, and its cultural significance. This prior research section will first observe samba’s history and roots. Furthermore, it will discuss the questions of race and sexuality in regard to the nationalization of samba. Lastly, it will look at the Brazilian diaspora and Brazilian culture abroad.
Samba’s History

During the slavery period in Latin America, Brazil was the country that received the highest number of enslaved people in the region. The enslaved people from Africa brought with them their distinct cultures and customs from their homelands and maintained them in Brazil (McGowan & Pessanha, 2009). The rich African musical traditions evolved throughout the years into many different genres of Brazilian music, and the fusion of Brazil’s African-rooted genres with other, European styles of music eventually led to the emergence of samba (see McGowan & Pessanha 2009; Gilman 2001; Chasteen 2004). Samba, as a distinct genre, appeared in the early 20th century in Rio de Janeiro, as many slaves and former slaves had moved to Rio de Janeiro from Bahia and would gather “together in their leisure time to make music, dance, and worship the orixás (Afro-Brazilian deities) at the homes of old Bahian matriarchs, respectfully called tias (aunts)” (McGowan & Pessanha, 2009: 20). These homes, especially the famous Tia Ciata’s house, were the location for parties and for many talented musicians to meet and write music together, and it was precisely there that samba was shaped into what it is today. Furthermore, the samba dance holds its roots in two Afro-Brazilian dances: lundu and maxixe (the latter being a fusion of lundu and polka) that were developed into the modern samba (Chasteen, 1996).

Earlier on, in the mid-19th century, Rio’s carnival resembled the Venetian parade and was dominated by the elite carnival societies. The transformation of “Rio into a party town” (Chasteen, 2004: 35) occurred when African rhythms and dance were introduced into the carnival (Chasteen, 2004). The first of the escolas de samba, or samba schools, which are community groups dedicated to playing and dancing samba as well as parading, emerged in 1928 (McGowan & Pessanha, 2009: 37). At first, the groups were discouraged from parading because of the government’s repression of any Afro-Brazilian cultural expression. However, during Getúlio Vargas’ administration, the schools were finally recognized, encouraged to parade, and even received official sponsorship (see McGowan & Pessanha, 2009; Chasteen 2004). Since then, not only have the samba schools become an essential cultural institution, but also samba, as Chasteen (2004: 48) puts it, has “acquired a quasi-official status as Brazil’s national rhythm”.
Race and sexuality in Samba

In the early years of samba’s development, the genre was mainly reserved to the ‘popular classes’, performed by Afro-descendants and limited to the favelas. Vianna (1999) argues that it was *mestiçagem* - racial and cultural mixture - that was the reason for the nationalization of samba and its insertion into the notion of Brazilian national identity. Simultaneously, as Pravaz (2012) argues, it was precisely due to this *mestiçagem* trope in samba, that women of color, particularly *mulatas* - “brown-skinned women of mixed racial descent” (Pravaz, 2012: 113) - had become extremely sexualized, especially in the context of dancing samba. Their bodies became objectified in the Brazilians’ and foreigners’ gaze, since these women were seen as erotic figures at display (Pravaz 2012; see also Chasteen 1996).

Chasteen (2004) also adds on the topic of erotization of the dance by describing the carnival samba as containing an “unleashed, uninhibited sexuality - unleashed because of the movements explosive energy and uninhibited because of the dancers near total nudity” (Chasteen, 2004: 9), which is why this dance is often the topic of a lot of controversy.

However, Browning (1995) has observed another side to this sexualization. She notes that in a society where sexism and racism go hand in hand, the female dancers have to assume their sexuality: it thus becomes “auto-erotic”, presenting the capability to empower and being “extraordinarily liberating” (Browning, 1995: 33) to the dancers who use this to their advantage.

Brazilian diaspora and culture abroad

Many Brazilians live abroad with the biggest diasporas being located in the USA, Japan, Portugal, Spain and the UK (Margolis, 2013). In the book *Goodbye Brazil: Émigrés from the Land of Soccer and Samba*, Margolis (2013) describes the lives of Brazilian emigrants and the phenomenon of Brazilian culture abroad. Brazilians, who often emigrate in the search of better living conditions, find themselves immersed in the Brazilian communities there and state that they “become more Brazilian living abroad” (Margolis, 2013: 200). Through the activities of these communities, as well as the cultural imagery brought with them that represent national symbols, such as “the Brazilian flag, samba, capoeira, September 7 Independence Day celebrations” (Margolis, 2013: 190), the immigrants tend to experience Brazilianness a lot more than they did in Brazil. As Margolis (2013: 199) suggests, referring to the work of Tsuda (2003) and Linger (1997): “Brazil itself is never so overtly, intensely Brazilian”.

Furthermore, some immigrants open businesses that focus on Brazilian culture, such as samba or capoeira schools. Beserra (2012) notes that for many, these jobs become their main
source of income: “Samba (music or dance) was the capital that had made it possible for them to escape from the ordinary immigrant job market.” (Beserra, 2012: 108). And that is not by chance, since these Brazilian cultural businesses attract many Brazilian and especially non-Brazilian devotees: Margolis (2013: 100) exemplifies how most of the students in one samba school in California are American. Nonetheless, even in cities with a smaller Brazilian community, such as Chicago, the Brazilian cultural entities and businesses still flourish due to the number of non-Brazilians who are involved in the activities and “addicted” to the culture (Beserra, 2012). Additionally, the attractiveness of Brazilian culture does not stop at cultural institutions. For example, in London, Brazil’s imagery has become a rather popular fashion as numerous shops decorate their displays with tropical Brazilian scenery, nightclubs and capoeira associations organize “Brazilian Nights”, etc. (Margolis 2013: 109; see also Frangella 2010). It is thus clear that Brazilian culture abroad is commodified both by Brazilian immigrants who are sharing their culture, and by non-Brazilians who are profiting from the exotic aspect of the culture as well as the public’s wide interest in it.

3 Theoretical framework

In order to fully understand the case of samba dancing in Sweden, different established theories have to be combined into one unique framework. This theoretical and conceptual framework section is therefore divided into three parts that will help grasp the Brazilian culture’s transportation to Sweden, its translation, and the way that people experience it here. The first part will therefore discuss the concept of transnationalism; the second section will review the concept of corporeality together with that of cultural embodiment; and the final part will observe cultural adaptation and appropriation in the context of globalization.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism is a concept that has been very widely discussed in the social science field. It can be defined as a “process in which international migrants maintain their ties to the home country, despite its geographical distance, while living in the country of settlement.” (Margolis, 2013: 200). In other words, transnationalism describes the process of immigrants establishing social and economic fields in their country of residence which create connections between that country and their homeland (De Jong & Dannecker, 2018). These immigrants, who are localized in one country but remain closely tied to their homelands, play an important role in creating and sustaining identities by indulging in social and cultural practices that link
those two places together. In this manner, they are able to construct multilateral ethnic and national identities and to influence the cultures and people in both countries (Joseph 2008; Levitt 2004; Portes et al. 1999).

This means that transnationalism not only refers to the ties between two places, but also to border-crossing without physical travel to another country. Joseph (2008: 199) explains:

The “export of people and culture, migrants and non-migrants can rely on cognitive, emotional, virtual and corporeal connections to the country ‘to stand for the quintessential experience of border crossing’ (hooks 1996: 2) and therefore maintain international concatenations without ever leaving their (new) homes.”

Transnationalism and the flux of people therefore make culture “detrertorialized”, more openly available than ever before, and this “detrerritorialization” unites the different cultures in a transnational space (Berking 2003). According to Berking (2003: 253), this means that in a globalized world, the significant flow of people, material goods and media give way to “detrerritorialized” imageries, identities, and communities. All these resources allow the immigrants as well as the locals, who do not physically travel, “to recreate ‘place’ through their imaginary contacts” (Joseph, 2008: 201).

The movement across borders without physical travel as well as the symbolic contacts are what can be defined as “imagined journeys” (Joseph, 2008). When people do not have the possibility to travel physically, they have the option of the “imaginary travel”. This can be achieved by taking part in the social and cultural activities brought by the immigrants, as well as by connecting through “symbolic and imaginary geographies” (Jackson et al. 2004: 3): learning the native language; educating themselves about the country and its history; interacting with other people who are involved with that particular culture; consuming imported cultural goods; as well as listening to stories of people who have been to the country of origin (Joseph, 2008).

Transnationalism can be linked to corporeality and the embodiment of culture, since precisely the corporeal practices are the ones that permit border crossing without physical travel. The following section reviews the concepts of corporeality and embodiment of culture.
Corporeality and cultural embodiment

Many scholars have theorized about the embodiment of culture, how the body experiences, interprets and expresses cultural practices and constructions. As Allen Ness (2004: 124) suggests, citing the work of Novack (1990):

“Culture is embodied. . . Movement constitutes an ever-present reality in which we constantly participate. We perform movement, invent it, interpret it, and reinterpert it, on conscious and unconscious levels. In these actions we participate in and reinforce culture, and we also create it. (1990: 8)”

Allen Ness (2004) also specifies that in dance, the cultural ‘value’ of the movement is extremely broad and can envelop the embodiment of history, societal structures, identities, and symbolisms. In other words, as Grau (2007: 193) puts it, “cultures and histories are embodied in all our activities, in the sense that they are constructed through human beings’ involvement in society and through their engagement in systems of belief that operate through and beyond discursive principles.”

On top of that, different cultures have their specific culturally significant practices that involve corporeality. Joseph (2008: 203), referring to the works of Mauss (1973) and Welsh Asante (1996), points out that “a body gesture, physical activity, dance, fight or game may be inscribed with national, ethnic, and/or racial characteristics and sentiments.” This means that the body automatically carries out the embodiment of culture. The body thus occupies a central place in the creation and expression of culture. Mauss (1973) notes the centrality that the body occupies in cultural and social identities, as certain movements and corporeal characteristics can be indicators of different national and racial cultures.

Through corporeal participation in another culture, the body becomes a “vehicle for transcending our limited social identities” (Shapiro, 2008: 261); it also creates connections to a particular group; and the performativity of movements that have a cultural significance, allows people to ‘travel’ to the movement’s homeland. Levitt (2004: 21) explains that these people, living within transnational spaces and practicing their native culture’s corporeality, have the ability to “keep one foot in each of the two worlds”. Meanwhile, Joseph (2008: 205) adds that for the people who are moving according to a culture that is not their own, doing so gives them the ability to obtain a “‘kinesthetic citizenship’ that permits their ‘travel’” to the country that the culture originated from. In relation to dance, corporeality and transnationalism are therefore
interconnected since the culture is embodied in the movement and, through the body, people experience the culture and cross the borders while staying in one country.

The embodiment of culture can therefore be observed through transnational processes. It is important to note, that transnationalism mostly focuses on the cultural transportation and propagation made by immigrants coming from that particular culture. Nonetheless, when it is people who are not from that culture who use it and commodify it, the topic of cultural appropriation should be discussed. The following section reviews this concept.

**Cultural appropriation**

Cultural appropriation, as defined by Young (2008: 5), can be seen as a process when “members of one culture (I will call them outsiders) take for their own, or for their own use, items produced by a member or members of another culture (call them insiders)” and, as Rogers (2006) claims, this is unavoidable when different cultures meet. The concept however implies some negative connotations, since cultural appropriation also includes assimilation and exploitation of marginalized communities’ culture, and the power relations between the dominant and subordinated communities are pivotal in these processes (Rogers, 2006).

Cultural appropriation also indicates adaptation, which implies the creation of something new. Emig (2012: 20) explains that adaptation is a generation of a “constructed monumentality of an original and the cultural power it gains from this construction”, and as Nicklas & Lindner (2012: 6) see it, can therefore be characterized as “the creation of new cultural capital.”

Roger (2006: 477) identifies four categories of cultural appropriation: “cultural exchange”; “cultural dominance”; “cultural exploitation”; and “transculturation”. For this case study, the category of cultural exploitation is the most interesting. Cultural exploitation sees a culture being “treated as a resource to be ‘mined’ and ‘shipped home’ for consumption” (Rogers, 2006: 486). To put it differently, this means that the culture is extracted from its origin and subjugated to commodification. And this creates issues, since “commodification, by abstracting the value of a cultural element, necessarily removes that element from its native context, changing its meaning and function and raising concerns about cultural degradation” (Rogers, 2006: 488).
4 Methodology

Case study and delimitations

This research presents a case study on samba dance in Sweden. The research design is descriptive, as the study focuses on obtaining a detailed context of the situation which will be used for the analysis.

The temporary delimitations of this study are the more recent years, approximately from the 2010s until the present day. It is important to mention that during the last one and a half years, the samba community (like more or less every other performing arts branch) has been greatly affected by the coronavirus pandemic, since big events have been canceled, there are very few performances, and the schools who are still holding classes have them seldom and with a limited number of people. Most of the data therefore centers around the time period of 2010 - 2019.

The data collection methods that have been chosen for this study are mainly semi-structured interviews as well as an observation that was carried out by watching a samba class in person. The following sections will provide more information and details on how these methods were implemented and how the data will be further analyzed.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the main data-collection method for this study, firstly, because of the qualitative nature of this investigation. This study aims to observe how Brazilian culture is expressed in Sweden through dance by analyzing and understanding people’s experiences and opinions. Therefore, semi-structured interviews are the most convenient method for gathering this kind of data. Additionally, particularly this kind of interviewing method allowed a more conversational interaction, since the questions that were asked were in a “general form of an interview schedule” (Bryman, 2012: 212), but the sequence of questions could vary. On top of that, when the interviewees responded with significant or interesting information, follow-up questions were asked, which, consequently, helped getting a better picture and a deeper understanding of the entirety of the context, as well as obtaining an in-depth view on certain issues.

Twelve people were interviewed for this study. They come from three different Swedish cities with the biggest concentration of samba dancers: Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö. The participants varied in age as well as nationality: Brazilians and non-Brazilians were interviewed. The interviewees were divided into two different groups, which were the samba
teachers (four people) and the dancers (eight people). That was done in order to have the different perspectives of the people involved in samba, as well as to tailor the set of questions for each group, to get greater insights on how these people experience samba. The questions thus focused on how samba is taught, how it is danced, and the connections that are established between Sweden and Brazil.

Personal experiences and views were important since they exemplified how something commonly experienced, such as culture, was perceived by each informant. The questions for both groups of study’s participants can be found in the Appendix B - Interview Questions.

Most of the interviewees were contacted by reaching out to the dance schools and dance groups all over Sweden. Some participants however were found by asking my Brazilian and non-Brazilian acquaintances for contacts of people who dance samba in Sweden.

The interviews were conducted in English, except for one, which was conducted in both English and Swedish. Most of them took place digitally, however a few of them were conducted in person.

The study as well as the interviewing process have been presented thoroughly to all the participants, and they were able to ask questions if something was unclear. The interviews were recorded. All the interviewees gave consent to participating in the study and to being recorded. Anonymity has been guaranteed to all participants, therefore all of them have been given pseudonyms according to which participant group they belong: Dancer $X$ and Teacher $X$, $X$ representing a randomly chosen letter of the alphabet. These pseudonyms are how they will be referred to in the analysis. In addition, to ensure full anonymity, the gender of the participants was neutralized. The pronouns “they/them” will be used in the text to refer to each participant in order to be gender-neutral. Further discussion on ethical matters can be found in a section below.

Observation

A small participant observation was carried out by assisting one samba class. There were some limitations to this data collection method, since due to the current coronavirus situation in Sweden, very few places still hold classes or gatherings, and the number of participants in those classes is very limited. Since it is also not easy to travel, there was no opportunity to go to the two other cities and visit other samba schools. Therefore, the observation was carried out in only one class of one dance studio. This observation, however, helped get a first-hand look at how the classes are held, and some of the observations made during the class led to further questions that were later asked to the study’s participants.
Ethical matters

This study aims to be as ethically correct as possible. Bryman (2012: 135) has presented the ethic dilemmas that every research faces as they have been sectioned by Diener and Crandall (1978) into four categories: “whether there is harm to participants”; “whether there is lack of informed consent”; “whether there is an invasion of privacy”; and “whether deception is involved”. The recommendations to prevent these ethical issues from occurring are that the researcher should preserve the confidentiality of the participants and the information, to “try to minimize disturbance both to subjects themselves and to the subjects’ relationships with their environment” as indicated in the SRA’s Ethical Guidelines (Bryman, 2012: 136). Additionally, disclosing as much information and being as explicit as possible about the study is key. Thus, informed consent forms should be given out to the participants to sign, which also allows the informants to know their rights: that the participation in the research is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw at any moment.

Therefore, to avoid these ethical issues in this study, all recommendations were respected and implemented. The participation in the research was anonymized by default; the interviewees were fully informed about the study and their rights; consent was given by every participant. Most of them gave it via the suggested consent form by Bryman (2012: 141) that was adapted for this study and can be found in Appendix C - Interview consent form, meanwhile other participants gave verbal consent.

Data analysis

The data collected during the interviews as well as the observation will be analyzed by applying a deductive approach. The theories discussed in the theoretical framework chapter help understanding this unique case. The study also applies an interpretative research approach since the researcher aims to make meaning of the data through interpretation and personal perspectives. Furthermore, to help illustrate the analytical discussions, transcriptions of relevant parts of the interviews were made.

Having introduced the methods of the research, the dissertation continues with the analysis of the gathered data, which is divided into three chapters. As previously mentioned, chapter five discusses the transportation of culture, chapter six examines the translation of culture, and chapter seven analyzes the experience of culture.
5 Transportation of culture

Samba has been brought to Sweden by Brazilians who wanted to share their culture and their passion for the rhythm and dance with others. The style soon got popularized and rapidly spread out, and many dancers and teachers who were not Brazilian started holding classes and opened dance schools. The samba culture in Sweden can therefore be seen as developed from what has been brought here by Brazilians. What are thus the cross-border processes that create a cultural bridge between these two countries? How has samba spread here? And how has this widespread of culture and samba provoked discussions on cultural appropriation in the community? Hereunder, this chapter analyzes the processes through which samba transports Brazilian culture to Sweden.

Before continuing with the analysis, a general profile of the study’s participants is presented. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the informants have been divided into two groups: the dancers and the teachers. The interviews, however, showed that both groups shared the same view on how samba is danced and how the culture is expressed in Sweden. The informants were from Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, and the slight differences observed between the cities are discussed in chapter 6. The participants’ age ranged from around 20 to 60 years of age. As the sample was quite little, no significant difference in opinions according to age was seen. Most of the informants were non-Brazilian, except for one Brazilian informant. Hearing that informant’s experiences led to a first-hand observation on how they view their culture’s expression here. Most of the participants were also women, except for one male participant. In this analysis, where it was possible, the gender of the participants was neutralized to provide as much anonymity as possible.

Physical travels back and forth

As the culture moves across borders, it becomes part of the transnational space where flows and exchanges between cultures occur (Jackson et al., 2004). In a globalized world, the flux of people and goods has been made so much easier, and as these physical travels occur, the culture is being simultaneously transported as well.

First, the physical migrations related to samba that happen between Sweden and Brazil can be observed in the travel of material things. Different groups and schools here have mentioned that they import shoes for the dancers and instruments for the baterias\(^1\) from Brazil.

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1 Definition to all foreign terms can be found in the Glossary (Appendix A)
As these authentic Brazilian objects are brought to Sweden, they create ties between these two countries and keep the groups here connected to the processes in Brazil (Joseph, 2008). It could be interesting to note, that most samba groups in Sweden do not order costumes from Brazil; they make them by hand while trying to keep the Brazilian style and pattern of the clothes, and mostly order materials from other countries (like China), since it is more cost-effective.

Secondly, the action of people traveling across borders is as, if not more, important in this discussion. Teacher M, a non-Brazilian samba teacher who has been exposed to Brazilian culture at a young age, explained that samba has become part of their identity, and that although they had not been born into it, they dance at a very high and “a very conscious level” (Teacher M). This level of consciousness is reflected by the fact that Teacher M understands samba’s cultural significance and the deep history that surrounds it, and sees it the teacher’s obligation to respect that. As Teacher M reflected: “It’s not just ‘OK, I teach a movement, I teach a dance’; no, I teach a culture. And there’s a very big responsibility in that.” Therefore, Teacher M, like many other samba teachers in Sweden, aims to travel to Brazil as much as possible to train, to immerse themselves into the culture, and to “go back to the source” (Teacher M).

Additionally, the dancers who learn samba in Sweden are greatly encouraged by their teachers to travel to Brazil. Teacher M, who strongly encourages these travels, explains: “I can teach you how to dance, I can teach you how to move, how to get in contact with your body […] but you need to go back to Brazil at some point and you need to understand how all these pieces are connected.” The dancers therefore must go back to the origins and place themselves in the context of the dance, to fully understand its background and the dance itself. The pure technicality of the dance is only a small fragment of the culture and the dancers therefore deem important to travel to Brazil, as that helps them to appreciate the context in which the dance was created and developed.

Nonetheless, the physical travel across the transnational space does not only go one way. Dancers and teachers from Brazil get often invited to come to host workshops and masterclasses, and as Dancer N, a non-Brazilian dancer, has noted, the samba community tries to “organize for some of samba carnival queens to come to Sweden.”

It would be interesting to mention, however, that in many workshops in Sweden as well as in the workshops in Brazil hosted for foreigners, there have been many cases where the Brazilian teachers did not put much effort into the classes. Teacher C, a Brazilian teacher who

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2 Usage of the pronoun “they” in this sentence refers to Teacher M.
3 The informant (Teacher C) during the interview gave their answers in English and Swedish. Their spouse was also present, assisting with some of the translations.
lives and teaches in Sweden, has noted that a lot of the teachers only hold these kinds of classes for money and for the opportunity to travel. “They like having Europeans to come and pay for the workshops”; “The problem is the money” (Teacher C). Many of the teachers are from lower- or middle-classes and they view this as a mere business opportunity. They also put little effort into the classes as they have been noted to carry rude attitudes towards the dancers or to arrive extremely late to the events.

These migrations across borders therefore perfectly exemplify how physical travels play a quintessential role in the transportation of culture in the transnational space. The culture is therefore transported through experiences and transmissions of Brazilian culture brought from the source, i.e., Brazil, to Sweden via real journeys, which is what connects the two countries.

Cultural appropriation

As the culture moves across borders through these back-and-forth travels and more people who are not Brazilian get involved with Brazilianness, discussions about cultural appropriation and who has the right to dance samba have appeared.

The informants expressed that many of those who are not Brazilians have been called “gringo/a”\(^4\)- a term with a derogatory connotation used to describe foreigners - by Brazilians. Teacher M illustrates this by saying how their acquaintance, who is also a samba teacher and has Caucasian features, gets negative reactions from Brazilians: “When she comes, people are like ‘oh, gringa […] but do you know how to dance?’ And when she starts to dance, she’s like a hurricane”. Another non-Brazilian teacher, Teacher A, recalls their negative experiences of being called by this demeaning term:

“But then it’s always like ‘oh the gringo/a is coming’. I don’t like the word gringo/a, for me it’s very negative; like they’re [looking] down on me. And the Brazilian people\(^5\) here use this and act like they’re ‘superior’ pressing down the gringo/a.”

Teacher A also comments that they have been called “a Brazilian wannabe” and that some Brazilians have asked: “who [do they] think [they are] trying to teach about Brazilian culture”. On top of that, a few dancers have noted that they have been discouraged to dance samba since it has African roots, and as that is not their culture or history, it could be seen as cultural appropriation. “I actually danced samba once with a friend of mine who was from the rich part of Brazil and they told me to stop because that was the black people’s dance”, says Dancer V,

\(^4\) The spelling “gringo/a” is used here to make the term gender-neutral.
\(^5\) Mostly in the dance community
a non-Brazilian dancer who has danced samba for many years. However, many informants who have received criticism have noted a duality: some people tend to criticize them and claim it is cultural appropriation, while others appreciate their culture being spread. Reflecting on my position as a researcher in the discussion, it would be incorrect for me to state what is right and what is wrong in this situation, because Brazilian culture is not my culture either. However, through the discussions that have been made in academia as well as in the dance community as a whole, an analysis of the situation can be carried out.

As defined in the theoretical framework section, cultural appropriation refers to one culture taking for themselves and using parts of another culture that is not theirs. As Rogers (2006) claims, this might be inevitable when cultures come in contact. However, according to an article in Dance Magazine, it becomes problematic when there is a “disconnect from the origins of the culture and the people who created it” (Schaefer, 2019). In addition to that, Rogers (2006: 487) explains that exploitative appropriation can be seen in terms of commodification. This could be viewed as problematic in the case of this study since many teachers in Sweden are not Brazilian and hold paid classes. The culture that is not their own therefore enters the capitalist market through these classes and the paid shows that the groups do, which can be viewed as exploitation.

However, through the above discussed real travels, the teachers, including Teacher A and Teacher M, aim to stay as authentic as possible and to spread Brazilian and samba culture with great consciousness and respect. As Teacher M notes:

“Of course, it’s important that if you promote another culture that is not yours, you need to do it in a respectful way. And that is for example why we, the instructors, we always go back to Brazil, we go back to the roots and we study, we participate in the carnival. We know how it works, how the samba school works, and the history of the samba, the history of the schools, the importance of it. So, it’s not just a dance, it’s a very conscious cultural expression.”

Their respect and effort are noticeable. Teacher K, a non-Brazilian samba teacher who has traveled to Brazil many times, recalled their Brazilian dance teacher acknowledging their school’s effort: “You don’t just adopt the feathers, the glitter and all these surface things about samba; you really try to endorse the culture.”

Moreover, both the dancers and the teachers have noted the importance of acquiring a historical background of the dance. All the groups have samba’s history classes, especially aimed to newcomers and beginners. In addition, a few comments or references to culture and
history may come up here and there during the dance practices. Teacher K has also mentioned how their group would have documentary screenings and share information about samba in their social media groups. Thus, it is clear that the culture and history are omnipresent in the Swedish dance groups, which can be seen as an act of respect and appreciation of the culture, rather than appropriation. In fact, as Finnegan (2020) discusses, a respectful entering into another culture through dance is achieved by building relationships with it and, most importantly, by learning about the origins and the people who created it: “Even a small amount of knowledge about the origins of a dance can be the difference between feeling entitled to a story that is not your own, and feeling honored to be allowed to step into someone else’s shoes and share a part of their story through dance.” (Finnegan, 2020).

Therefore, as samba and with it the Brazilian culture are brought to Sweden and danced by non-Brazilians, Brazilianness and other nationalities meet, generating “new cultural capital” (Nicklas & Lindner, 2012: 6), that can be seen as a creation of “something in between” (Joseph, 2008: 197). This leads to questions on how culture is consequently translated abroad, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

6 Translation of Culture

As the dance gets transported and established in a foreign country it may go through a process of translation. The translation of a culture can be described as the processes by which the culture is accommodated in another context. In the case of this study, as the Brazilian culture gets immersed into the Swedish culture, questions like what aspects of Brazilian culture are highlighted or hidden here may arise. This chapter aims to analyze these processes by first looking at the similarities of samba traditions in Brazil and in Sweden. Secondly, the social aspect of samba is discussed, followed by the exotification of the culture. Finally, the last two sections of the chapter discuss how cultural differences affect the way that samba is danced in Sweden.

The samba traditions

In Sweden there not many schools that resemble the actual samba schools of Brazil. In Stockholm and Malmö there are no schools that could be considered real samba schools, meanwhile in Gothenburg there are two big dance associations that greatly resemble the samba schools in Rio de Janeiro. These particular schools have adopted some traditions that are present in the original samba schools in Brazil. A Swedish dancer from Gothenburg, Dancer B,
described how their school is a community organization and is non-profit, as all the money from members’ contributions and shows goes into the maintenance of the school. This, according to Dancer B, is similar to how the samba schools are organized in Brazil. The samba schools in Sweden also look up to the schools in Brazil to understand the structure of the associations, the different roles in the schools as well as how carnival is organized. A teacher from the other big school in Gothenburg explained that their school, in addition to participating in the city carnivals, does also organize their own carnival. The teacher also said that their parades are divided in the same way as they are in Brazil: they have the different *alas* - the sections of the samba school - in the carnival, which are the *mestre-sala*, the *porta-bandeira*, the female and male *passistas*, *musas*, *destaques*, as well as the *bateria*. That school also organizes special ‘show auditions’, as well as important elections of the *porta-bandeira* and the *mestre-sala* for the carnival.

The social aspect of samba

In Brazil, as many research participants have mentioned, the samba community is quite competitive and big rivalries occur between the samba schools. In comparison to the situation in Sweden, in 2013 and 2014, a rather competitive environment in the community had been created by establishing the *Swedish National Samba Competition*. However, because rivalries started growing between the groups and the community was not fond of it, the championship was short-lived. Instead, in 2016, the first *Swedish Samba Encontro* was organized, which is a gathering where samba devotees get together to play and dance samba, and where teachers exchange work by holding workshops for each other’s groups. The event has been really successful and has been organized every year since its introduction (except during the coronavirus pandemic). The *Encontro* holds a feel of togetherness and collaboration, and creates a strong united community of dancers in Sweden. The community feeling is important to acknowledge here, because at its core, samba has an essential social aspect to it. As Teacher K points out: “In Brazil it’s also this very social thing to dance samba, in a more social context [...] people would hang around and not do the ‘performance samba’. And here of course this is what we strive for, to have a community where we dance with each other”. The creation of the *Encontro*, therefore, allowed the samba dancers and musicians in Sweden to experience the social part of samba by accommodating it in a way that suits them, thus translating the culture into their own context.

This social aspect is nonetheless limited, since as many dancers and teachers have noted, samba in Sweden focuses a lot more on performance, staging and choreography, rather than
improvisation and mingling. On one hand, this could be due to the European concentration on choreographed dance. Teacher K explains this by saying:

“In Europe, you are so caught up with the notion of choreography. […] Samba doesn’t have strict rules like ballet or jazz. It has the basic step and then it just keeps evolving. […] Here [in Sweden] we are used to the more technical, more choreographed dance. The ‘is this right or wrong?’, ‘is this what you’re supposed to do?’, because we don’t have the natural setting for the improvisational thing to happen.”

On the other hand, this emphasis on choreographed samba in Sweden could be explained by the nature of doing shows: as Dancer V puts it: “If you pay for a show, you know, you want to see people who have prepared something. People think it looks cool when we do the same thing”.

Finally, the reason that the sociality of samba does not come naturally in Sweden could be that people here, contrarily to Brazil, have not been exposed to samba from a young age. “The way you are inserted here into the samba dance is more unnatural. You have to learn it totally from scratch. It’s like you’re blank” (Teacher K). Therefore, it is due to these differences in customs and cultures that the sociality of samba is only partially expressed here in Sweden.

Choosing the costumes

In Sweden, in terms of samba and carnival, the focus seems to be mainly on the passistas, that are the dancers who have mastered the samba steps. Dancer N illustrates that here “the perception of samba is the passista girl that has feathers”. In addition, the sensual, skin-showing costumes play an important role: the “extra” part of the costumes together with the glitter and the feathers is highlighted in Sweden, since “that’s the part that is fun to watch”, as says Dancer L, a non-Brazilian dancer. The costumes are therefore selected in accordance with ‘what sells’ in Sweden, which again relates back to the questions of commodification of a culture other than one’s own.

On top of that, some teachers have noticed that many beginners get involved with samba only because of the costumes. Teacher A tells how at the start of the semester their school receives a flow of “new dancers, and they have been seeing us during the carnival and they say, ‘oh I want to dance with that group because they have such beautiful costumes’, […] but it’s so much more than that”. Therefore, in order to avoid a shallow perception of samba and the focus solely on “the extremely expensive costumes, the beautiful bodies, and just being sensual”
(Teacher A), Dancer B points out how their group does not let inexperienced dancers perform with the revealing costumes, so that the outfit would not be distracting.

**Being the center of attention**

Culturally, Brazil and Sweden are noticeably different, and these differences play an important role in the way that samba is danced in Sweden. In addition to cultural differences emerging from distinctions in histories and geographical locations, cultural stereotypes are also important in this discussion. These stereotypes form our perception of a culture, and therefore are usually widely known and, as Schaad (2008: 201) explains, are spread “in a variety of old and new media: stock characters or incidental portrayals in books and film, newspaper and magazine articles, television shows, fashion, all forms of advertising, and travel accounts by foreign visitors”. Through these means, Swedes may often be represented as more timid and serious, meanwhile Brazilians may be seen as outgoing and always joyful.

Although the stereotypes of a culture are usually the representation of how foreigners see that culture, this study’s participants’ experiences show that sometimes these cultural perceptions may be the way that the natives see their own culture as well. Many Swedish dancers have described samba as extravagant, something that requires one to take up space and be the center of attention. As Dancer N explains: “Samba is about everything that is over the top: it’s never just an ‘I’m just dancing a little bit here on the side, nobody’s looking at you’. They will never let you just dance on the side”. Teacher C, who is Brazilian, agrees with this and claims that Brazilian people have an ease in taking up the space and expressing the happiness of the dance through smiling; it comes naturally to them. However, in Sweden, the dancers have noticed that they struggle, as Dancer L says, to “be bold, [to] take up space”. The dancers explain that it is uncommon in the Swedish culture to present oneself in that manner, and therefore this demonstrative attitude is not a given. Dancer N shares how they have been told to force themselves to smile. They recall what one teacher has told them when they were on a break in between performances:

“‘Look, if you are not going to smile and take up all of the space that is there for you, and have absolutely everyone's eyes on you, it's better you don't dance samba at all.’ And I was so shocked. […] She’s like ‘all you need to do is just to start smiling, force yourself smiling, just have it on your face and then everything comes along.’ And I was like ‘well I have to do it, I’m already here, I’m all dressed up, I just have to put on that smile, you know.”
Therefore, these cultural differences and stereotyped perceptions of cultures are the reason that the extravagant aspect of samba and being the center of attention have difficulties being highlighted in Sweden.

The thrill of playing someone else

The difference in the cultures and the contrast in the ability to be extravagant and take up space, translates into the observation that, meanwhile Brazilian dancers in Brazil experience samba in the sense that they live it, in Sweden, more often than not, people tend to perform it. Teacher C explains:

“In Brazil, when you dance samba, you dance with joy, with your heart, you are yourself. [...] When you dance samba, you open your whole heart so that you can dance. But many Europeans when they dance, they put on something, they put on a character; they are someone else. In Brazil you can be someone else, but you continue to be yourself, [...] you don’t have to think ‘I have to be someone else’. You are who you are.”

Therefore, in Sweden, and other European countries, a lot of people lack the feeling of naturality when they dance samba and “try to play like theater” (Teacher C).

This performativity in the dance has been described by the dancers as a challenge, an effortful but rewarding exercise of thinking outside a culturally constructed box about how one should be. As Dancer L says:

“To me, Swedish culture is very timid, and you can’t really take up much space, or you shouldn’t feel pride in what you do. And then when I started taking samba lessons, it’s the complete opposite! And it really was a challenge.”

Therefore, getting in touch with another culture’s corporeality not only creates ties between the individual and that culture, but also becomes a powerful tool for expanding their limited culturally defined concept of identity (Shapiro, 2008).

Additionally, it is interesting to note that to attain the above-mentioned outgoing and extravagant attitude, dancers have been told to use the example of RuPaul’s Drag Race - an American reality television series about a drag queen competition. This can be seen as a tool of translation in regards to the cultural differences, because as the dancers explain, using RuPaul’s

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6 This quote is my translation from Swedish.
Drag Race as an inspiration encourages them to “explore [the extravagant] part of ourselves, instead of being our ‘boring’, normal selves” (Dancer L). By feeling like they are another persona, or like they are exploring a different personality, the dancers might get an easier access to finding that flamboyant part of themselves. Dancer V points out: “Everything in samba is so extravagant, so exaggerated, and that can be kind of hard to find. I think it’s easier to step into a character if it’s a little bit further from yourself, from your normal self. And RuPaul’s Drag Race is a great inspiration for that”.

Performing as a different persona therefore becomes a thrilling experience for many dancers and strengthens their passion for samba. As culture is embodied (Allen Ness, 2004; Grau, 2007; Shapiro, 2008), adopting another culture’s corporeality not only allows the dancers to experience that culture through the body (Joseph, 2008), but also gives them the ability to discover parts of themselves that they have never been able to experience before. This leads to the next chapter of the analysis, which discusses the way that Brazilian culture is experienced through samba.

7 Experiencing culture

Dance is a corporeal practice. The embodiment of culture allows the experience of that particular culture through movement, and therefore through dance. In what ways can people thus come into contact with Brazilian culture through samba? This chapter aims to observe how the dancers in Sweden experience Brazilianness. It will first discuss the power that samba has to liberate people. Second, it will analyze the processes of adopting another culture’s corporeality. Finally, it will observe the characterization of samba as a lifestyle and what that means to the dancers.

A liberating experience

Before starting the discussion, it is important to mention that in Sweden, 99% of the dancers are women. The steps and the focus on the body movement in samba are mostly gendered, meaning that they are different depending on whether it is a female or a male dancer. Nonetheless, gender boundaries in samba can be blurry, and thus the individual can choose to dance any part they prefer. A great example of this is the Brazilian male dancer and teacher Carlinhos Salgueiro, who is famous for teaching the female samba steps. Some of this study’s participants have mentioned that, in Sweden, there are sometimes people who also prefer dancing not accordingly to their gender. This topic is nevertheless too large to go in depth in
this dissertation, but for this section it is important to keep in mind that, in Sweden, the majority of the women dance the female steps.

Due to the characteristics of samba, especially the movement of the hips, many female dancers in Sweden find that samba helps them get more in touch with their femininity. Here, “women don’t like to underline their femininity”, says Dancer N, and according to them, samba allows women to be “more feminine and carry it with pride”. A similar idea has been shared by Dancer V: “It’s a liberating feeling for me to dance in this sensual and feminine way, because I don’t feel like that is the way that I normally am in my professional life for example, not really in my personal life either.” They also added that this feminine expression has given them “quite a lot of strength and self-confidence that [they] didn’t have before” (Dancer V). Besides, by getting in touch with their femininity and sensuality, the women gain more body positivity, since samba, as described by Dancer O, a Swedish samba dancer, becomes a “way to feel more comfortable about your body.” The gained confidence and self-acceptance also allows many dancers to feel more secure in the revealing costumes, and some even choose to wear them, even though they could receive negative comments: “Women say ‘I decide, it’s my call, if my husband doesn’t like it, so, it’s his problem’” (Dancer N).

In addition, the dancers have noted that samba helps them discover or express the more outgoing part of their personality. Dancing in an extravagant and outgoing way has helped many to come out of their shells. Dancer L shares: “I don’t know who I would have been if I hadn’t danced samba”. Later Dancer L adds:

“[Samba] has really affected me, the definition of me […] by challenging myself, and what I am. So, I definitely think it has changed who I am, and how I behave. […] I’m more [confident] now.”

Also, Dancer O, whose experience in samba is similar, expresses: “Since I started to dance, for sure I felt more open and free”.

Feeling more feminine and getting the opportunity to come out of one’s shell through samba has been a liberating experience for these dancers. By the same token, Browning (1995) in her book *Samba: resistance in motion* reflects on how the dance has been empowering even to women in Brazil:
“The female sambista must assume her sexuality - not as the coffeepot, receptacle of some wan, milky fluid, but as Iansã’s self-sufficient whirlwind of the hips. She takes a man if she wants one! It would be highly idealistic - and wrong - to suggest that this is the reality of a Brazilian underclass woman. But it is an ideal expressed by her in the samba” (Browning, 1995: 34).

Therefore, according to Browning (1995), through the idealized persona in samba, women in Brazil can become who they thought they could never be, or who they always wanted to be, which is similar to how women feel in Sweden. This is in no way to assimilate the situation and the struggles of women in Brazil to that of women in Sweden. It comes to show, however, how samba overall has the ability to empower and liberate and allow one to be whoever they want to be. As Dancer L’s experience illustrates: when dancing samba “I feel powerful and confident. And like I can be whoever I want”.

Therefore, the dancers in Sweden, by adopting a different culture’s corporeality, have found ways to empower and liberate themselves. In addition, it is worth noting, that in dance anthropology, dance in its essence can be described as “bounded rhythmical movements executed in an altered state of consciousness, often described as an elevation, or a trancelike state” (Wulff, 2018: 2). This trancelike state could also be seen as liberating.

The observation that was carried out in the samba class helps illustrate this idea. The dancers were doing the extremely fast footwork for several minutes on end, and only when they stopped dancing, one could see the signs of exhaustion. Thus, the rhythms and the movement had put the dancers into an almost hypnotic state, a full absorption into the dance, which was “transcending fatigue” (Chasteen, 2004: 8) in that moment.

“Unlocking the hips”: adaptation of another culture’s corporeality

As discussed in the previous chapter, many Swedes have not grown up with samba and when they finally start practicing the dance, they must start from scratch. That means that the beginners must understand the samba rhythm and the movement, in particular the hip rotations and the footwork. As Teacher C points out: “It’s not easy in the beginning. It’s very very difficult for Swedish people\(^8\) to understand [the music, the step, the rhythms].” Teacher C continues by saying that their students, after seeing the impressively rapid footwork for the first

\(^7\) Iansã is an orixá that represents the climatic phenomena (wind, storms, lighting, etc.). Iansã is a symbol of an independent warrior woman.

\(^8\) Referring to Swedes who are beginners in samba
time, said that it looked like Teacher C had “[a thousand feet]⁹”! This shows that the students were so awe-struck by the speed footwork and could not understand how it was done, as it looked like the teacher had more than two feet.

According to many interviewed dancers, the hip rotations are as, if not more difficult, to acquire. The dancers refer to that process as “unlocking the hips”, and they share that it is the lengthiest and the most work-demanding practice. Dancer O exemplifies that “that feeling [of “unlocking the hips”] came after 4 years. It took a while”. Meanwhile, Dancer V shares: “And I [still] don’t feel like I’m there with the hip movement […] it’s the main focus [of] every single dance class.”

The embodiment of culture (Allen Ness, 2004; Grau, 2007; Shapiro, 2008) can be understood through these cases. There are particular movements, or particular ways that the body is used to move in different cultures. When a person who is not Brazilian tries to move in a Brazilian way, that motion may not come naturally to them. Acquiring another culture’s corporeality could therefore be compared to learning a new language. Understanding the different sonorities that are not in one’s mother tongue and grasping how those new sounds are phonetically produced takes time. It may take years to learn how to speak with an accent that resembles the native one, meanwhile some people never lose the foreign-sounding accents. The same could be said about corporeality and especially in this case, about “unlocking the hips”. Understanding how the body must move often takes many years for the Swedish dancers, and as Dancer V had said: “it’s the main focus [of] every single dance class”, meaning that it often remains a working process to have their movement similar to the Brazilian one.

**Samba becoming a lifestyle**

As the dancers learn the culture and immerse themselves in it through corporeality, samba becomes for many of them a part of their lifestyle. These dancers use the term “getting hooked” for describing this process, as samba has infiltrated their lives. Dancer O describes here what the samba lifestyle means to them:

“The late nights, standing in these small areas, completely covered in sweat, and just, you know, ‘go for it, shake it!’ for maybe 6 hours a week. And on the weekends, go out and try to find situations where there is music. And also perform during shows and carnivals. That is kind of the peak, the main thing, because then you can be completely free and dance for many many hours with no choreography. Just feel the music and dance.”

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⁹ Translated from “tusen fotter” in Swedish
For these dancers who get “hooked”, experiencing samba as a lifestyle does not stop at only dancing. Those dancers often physically travel to Brazil and to different samba events all over the world. They also practice what Joseph (2008) calls “imaginary travels”: they learn Portuguese, practice other Afro-Brazilian dances, meet like-minded people and actively participate in the samba community. This samba community, as discussed in chapter six, has been described as containing a strong sense of togetherness, diversity, and welcome, and allows the dancers to experience a little part of samba’s social aspect. Dancer N notes this by saying: “A lot of people, for example people who don’t have families, some ex-pats come as well, those who don’t have any kind of special context in the country, they seem to find a sort of a family in samba”. The samba community thus gives the dancers the possibility to build networks and meet people who share the same passion for samba.

These real and imaginary travels thus strengthen the dancers’ experience of the Brazilian culture and allow them to simultaneously “keep one foot in each of the two worlds” (Levitt, 2004: 21). This means that people who dance samba in Sweden have the opportunity to come in contact with Brazilian culture by learning and practicing Brazilian corporeality and by building their connection with Brazil through imaginary travels. Accordingly, the Swedish samba dancers (when they are not physically traveling across borders) can greatly experience Brazilian culture without having to leave their country.

8 Conclusions

Samba’s popularity in Sweden has created a multifaceted case that allows understanding how Brazilian culture is spread and presented abroad. This study has raised the question of how is Brazilian culture and Brazilianness expressed through samba in Sweden? To help answer this broad question, the process of cultural expression has been divided into three sub-processes, which are the transportation, the translation and the experience of culture.

As samba has been brought from Brazil to Sweden, transnational ties have been created between those two countries. Real travels and physical migrations across borders allow the Brazilian culture to be transported from its origin to Sweden and facilitate its expression in Sweden. Furthermore, as the culture moves across transnational spaces, it becomes more accessible to foreigners who may start practicing it.

Questions of cultural appropriation arise when the culture becomes spread and commodified by non-natives. Nonetheless, the problematization of the discussion can be resolved if the culture is used and spread while keeping close contact to the roots of the dance.
That is exactly what the non-Brazilians samba teachers and dancers in Sweden strive at doing, as they travel to Brazil and put samba’s history and background as the fundamental part of their dance experience.

As the culture goes through the processes of transportation, upon its arrival to the foreign country, the culture becomes accommodated in a new context. A creation of “something in between” (Joseph, 2008) occurs as some parts of the culture are put to the front and some may be neglected. This process of translation of Brazilian culture in Sweden can be observed in how some parts, such as the exoticism of the costumes are highlighted, while other parts, such as the sociality of samba or being the center of attention, are harder to carry out. As it has been discussed, the neglect of certain aspects of samba is mainly due to the cultural differences between the two countries. The Swedish dancers are not accustomed to seeing samba as a social, community phenomenon from a young age, and therefore are mainly only able to perceive it as a performance dance. In addition, the Swedish cultural timidity creates a struggle for the dancers to move in a bold, extravagant way, which is seen as natural to the Brazilians, but many have found the solution to this issue in focusing on performing as someone else, someone other than their ordinary selves.

The difference in cultures can also be highlighted through the concept of the embodiment of culture. The body moves differently in different nations, and the culture is thus inscribed into those particular movements. As the Swedes, through the Brazilian dance, acquire another culture’s corporeality, they get to experience being liberated from a limited, culturally constructed perception of themselves. The dancers may feel more feminine, discover more outgoing parts of their personality, and by “unlocking their hips” in samba, they ‘unlock’ the experience of Brazilianness. The dancer’s increased sense of femininity through samba has been discussed, however, as it was mentioned, the gender boundaries in samba and carnival are blurry. This question has not been analyzed in this thesis, and it would therefore be interesting to further observe how people, who do not dance according to their gender, experience samba and Brazilian culture in Sweden.

In addition to experiencing Brazilianness through corporeality, the experience of the culture is also strengthened by the so-called “imaginary travels” (Joseph, 2008) that the dancers practice when samba becomes a lifestyle to them. The dancers learn Portuguese, start practicing other Afro-Brazilian dances, and actively participate in the samba community and events. By taking part in these activities, they build real and imaginary connections to Brazil and therefore get to experience the culture. Therefore, although Swedes may be seen as performing samba,
while Brazilians *live* it, the becoming of samba as a lifestyle for Swedes and their all-around experience of Brazilian culture allows them to also *live* samba.

The expression of Brazilian culture through the dance in Sweden can therefore be seen as a multilateral, ongoing, never-ceasing process. The continuous flows of people and information in a globalized world build constant connections between countries and permit a versatile expression of a particular culture no matter where in the world it appears.
References


Appendix A. Glossary

*Ala*  
Meaning “wings”. These are the sections of samba schools that perform in the carnival parade and wear the same costumes.

*Baiana*  
Carnival performers wearing Bahian-style broad flowy dresses and turbans. The *baianas* are exclusively women performers and their movements mostly consists of spinning.

*Bateria*  
The percussionist group playing the samba rhythm.

*Destaque*  
The parade performers with the biggest, most intricate costumes.

*Encontro*  
Literally “meeting” in English. A gathering organized by the samba community in Sweden, where people get together to practice samba and build connections.

*Escolas de samba*  
Meaning “samba school”. An organization that plans parades and participates in carnivals.

*Gringo*  
Term with a slightly derogatory connotation used to describe foreigners by Latin Americans.

*Lundu*  
Music and dance style with Angolan roots brought to Brazil by enslaved Bantu people (McGowan & Pessanha, 2009).

*Maxixe*  
First original Brazilian urban dance, created by fusing *lundu* with polka and other styles (McGowan & Pessanha, 2009).

*Mestiçagem*  
Racial and cultural mixture (Vianna, 1999).

*Mestre-sala*  
Master of the ceremony who leads the *porta-bandeira* in a samba school parade (McGowan & Pessanha, 2009).

*Mulata*  
Woman, partly of African ancestry (Chasteen, 2004).

*Musa*  
Literally “muse” in English. A carnival performer who inspires all elements of the parade.

*Orixá*  
Deities of several major religions of the African diaspora. In Brazil, *Orixás* are part of the Candomblé religion.

*Passista*  
The samba school dancer who has mastered the samba steps (McGowan & Pessanha, 2009).

*Porta-bandeira*  
The flag bearer in a samba school parade. *Porta-bandeiras* are exclusively women (McGowan & Pessanha, 2009).

*Samba axé*  
Dance style originated from Bahia, that consists of choreographed routines that go together with lyrics of the songs.
**Samba de roda**  
Samba circle-dance that originated in Bahia and consists in one or two dancers dancing in the middle of the circle until other dancers substitute them.

**Samba no pé**  
Samba dance style that originated and was popularized in Río de Janeiro and is most commonly associated with the Río de Janeiro carnival.

**Samba reggae**  
Style created in Bahia by mixing samba and reggae.

**Sambadrome**  
A purpose-built exhibition place for Brazilian carnivals, where samba schools parade.

**Tia**  
Meaning “aunt”. A respectful term used to call the matriarchs of African ancestry (Chasteen, 2004).
Appendix B. Interview questions

Questions to the dancers

1. Why did you start taking samba classes in Sweden? What attracted you to samba?
2. How do people react when you tell them you dance Brazilian samba?
3. How do you describe samba? What does it mean to you?
4. How do you feel when you dance samba?
5. Do you feel like you become a different person, someone new when you dance?
6. What do you mostly focus on during classes? (Certain movements, expressions, attitudes, feelings?)
7. How would you describe Brazilian culture? What attributes do you ascribe to it?
8. Have you ever danced/seen samba in Brazil? How does it compare to the dancing here in Sweden?
9. Which parts of samba are highlighted here in Sweden? Which are neglected?
10. What is your most memorable experience from dancing samba?

Questions to the teachers

1. How come you had this idea of starting teaching samba classes here in Sweden?
2. Have you danced in Brazil? How does it compare to the dancing in Sweden?
3. What does samba mean to you?
4. How do you describe samba to your students?
5. Where do you get the costumes and the instruments that you use?
6. Do the dancers want to wear the costumes? Do any discussions arise?
7. Do you talk about the roots of the dance in class?
8. What do you mostly focus on during classes? (Certain movements, expressions, attitudes, feelings?)
9. Which parts of samba are highlighted here in Sweden? Which are neglected?
10. Do you feel like you become a different person, someone new when you dance?
11. What is your most memorable experience from dancing and teaching samba?
Appendix C. Interview Consent Form

NB: This consent form is suggested by Bryman (2012: 141) and was adapted for this study.

- I, the undersigned, have read and understood the Study Information Sheet provided.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the Study.
- I understand that taking part in the Study will include being interviewed and recorded.
- I have been given adequate time to consider my decision and I agree to take part in the Study.
- I understand that my personal details such as name and employer address will not be revealed to people outside the project.
- I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs but my name will not be used.
- I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any material related to this project to Evelina Gaizauskaite.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and I will not be asked any questions about why I no longer want to take part.

Name of Participant: ___________________________ Date:
Researcher Signature: __________________________ Date: