

**REINVENTING TRADITION:
THE MUSIC AND DANCE OF LATIN AMERICA IN
SOMERVILLE, MA**



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INTRODUCTION

This report was born out of the need to bring to light the cultural contributions of a large population of Somerville and Massachusetts as a whole that has largely been ignored in the past: one out of seven Bay State residents (or 907,000 people) were born in another country, and of those who arrived between 2000-2004, 47.3% were from Latin America and the Caribbean (Changing Face of Mass). In the cities that constitute Greater Boston, one out of every 4 residents is an immigrant (including Boston itself, Brookline, Cambridge, and Malden) and Somerville itself has the 3rd highest percentage of immigrants in the state (Changing Face). In fact, of the 74,554 people that call Somerville home, according to 2000 Census information, 29.3% (22,727 individuals) are foreign-born, and 35.6% (26,831) speak a language other than English at home (City of Somerville). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000, 8.8% of Somerville's total population was of "Hispanic/Latino origin."

Although this data represents the fact that Latino immigrants make up a significant portion of this area's total population, unfortunately, that does not translate to the amount of exposure or attention this large community receives. In fact, the demographic information itself is often grossly inaccurate in regards to minority communities, as Daniel Becker discusses in his 2006 Urban Borderlands' final report. Becker, focusing on the experience of Brazilian immigrants in Somerville and Greater Boston, explains,

"According to Census data from 2000, there should be just over 200,000 Brazilians in the United States with more than 36,000 living in Massachusetts; however a number of studies have challenged this count, estimating a far larger population of Brazilian immigrants. For instance, in 2001, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimated the number of Brazilians in the United States to be somewhere between 800,000 and 1.1 million. In Massachusetts, a report by the Archdiocese of Boston calculated the Brazilian population at approximated 150,000 as of 1990. In a more recent study, the Consulate of Brazil in Boston estimates that there are over 200,000 Brazilians living in Massachusetts," (4).

While many Urban Borderlands classes over the past years, led by Tufts' professor Deborah Pacini-Hernandez, have worked to bring the experiences and contributions of this historically ignored community (including non-Brazilian Latinos) to light, for the first time this year, the focus of the project is illuminating the artistic forms that immigrants produce in Somerville.

My project in particular explores how this community is reproducing so-called “traditional” and “folkloric” music and dance from their native countries here in Somerville and the Greater Boston area, and how these cultural forms affect and influence the experience of immigration. Through this project, I have explored the way in which “traditional” Latin American music and dance plays a multi-faceted role in the Somerville community by serving more than just the Latinos who reproduce these cultural mediums. Furthermore, I seek to learn the role that music and dance plays in immigrants' lives, specifically how the reproduction of these forms can be simultaneously used as a way for immigrants to feel connected to the homes that they left behind and as an economic tool to gain resources from the outside community, therefore creating a legitimate space for themselves in this area.

The use of quotation marks around the words *traditional* and *folkloric* is actually done for a very important reason, one that actually forms the basis of my conclusions in regards to this project. From an anthropological perspective, these terms are just that—terms. Quotation marks are necessary to avoid placing too much meaning on simple words, an action that would therefore result in the transformation of *cultural ideas* into what is accepted *as universal fact*. To explain, it is necessary to take a step back and examine what exactly I mean by “culture” to begin with. Anthropologists not only define tradition as invented *for the people, by the people*, but culture itself as a construct of ideas used to explain the ways in which groups of people assign meaning to the lives they lead. The terms *culture* and *tradition* have even been

historically interchangeable, a notion that springs from the false assumption that one's "culture" is their "traditions", and vice versa. While both are indeed notions regarding the projection of a group's values and ideas projected onto individuals, *tradition* is simply the way in which that *culture* is performed.

Another important factor to keep in mind in anthropological discussions of these terms is the very nature of culture: how it is constructed and how it evolves over time. Culture cannot be equated to history—it is not recorded once, remaining restricted to the words of just a few people. Instead, it is dynamic and fluid, constantly changing and redefining itself. While an exact definition of culture was debated for generations in the field of anthropology, today it is made sense of by the simple fact that culture is created and reproduced by the very people that live in it. After all, if individual people are not static and impermeable to change, then how could the culture that they construct nevertheless be characterized by those adjectives? Mark Rogers, in the introduction to the collection entitled *Performing Andean Identities*, discusses this concept of how anthropological definitions of culture "...call into question the notion of essentialized cultures that are discrete, stable, and historically continuous," (1999:11). He continues,

In this respect, they are a continuation of what is now by a well-established anthropological discourse on the "invention of tradition." In demonstrating the constructedness, fluidity, and context-dependence of cultural identities, such analyses seem to loosen culture from its social, spatial, and historical moorings and evoke a world of flux and play, in which ideas and practices circulate freely, (1999:11).

This is a crucial concept to frame the notions of culture and tradition that I discuss in this report, especially as immigrants' experiences with these further complicates and richens the discussion.

In this report, I examine how the reproduction of cultural forms in a new country helps to provide evidence for this anthropological perspective of the "invention of tradition."

To begin, I will introduce the methodology that I used throughout this project, along with the five narrators who provide the backbone of the report. I will then move on to the analysis of the narrator's experience living and performing in the Somerville area, with respect to the notion of invented tradition and the fluidity of culture. First, I discuss the former through the lens of *samba*, known as the national dance of Brazil, in juxtaposition with the other richly historical dances of the country that have been pushed to the margins. I then turn towards the notion of economic opportunities that performing traditional music holds for many immigrants, and how that problematizes the definition of tradition as pure expression of culture. Finally, I examine the way in which the narrators express the traditional music of their native culture by fusing it with modern and global styles. Regardless of the struggles some of them have encountered, the experience of these individuals highlight the way in which music and dance can help immigrants in the creation of communities and space for themselves in a new country.

METHODOLOGY

Over the course of the 2008 fall semester at Tufts University, or approximately 3 months, I conducted 5 interviews with Latin American immigrants who were either musicians or dancers, or both. To begin my research into possible narrators for this project, I walked around Latino neighborhoods in Somerville, including East Somerville and along Broadway Street. From my informal conversations with people, I learned a bit about the places Latinos in this neighborhood go to experience music and dancing from their native countries. Simply by walking into Latino-owned restaurants, I would occasionally come across a band that frequently performed there, and

fit what I was looking for. The Internet was also extremely helpful in this project, which should come as no surprise, considering its modern cultural relevance. What appeared like a daunting task at the onset—finding Latino immigrants who perform traditional music and/or dances of their native homes—turned out to be fully possible with the slew of information and advertisements online. A wonderful resource that I found was the *AfroBrazil* website, which belongs to an organization that seeks to promote AfroBrazilian music and dancing in this area through a combination of performances and instruction. This organization put me into contact with my first narrator, Rosangela Santiago, who then recommended that I also talk to Daniela Malta, a great example of the ethnographical technique known as the “snowball effect.”

Another great resource turned out to be my fellow classmates of this Urban Borderlands class. Truly representing the spirit of collaboration and genuine interest in each other’s work, my classmates and I pooled together our leads and information in order to find the best fit of projects and narrators. This notion of generosity leads to me to the single greatest resource I needed to make this project the best it could possibly be: the kindness and cooperativeness of my narrators. They took time out of their days to respond to emails from a stranger, to meet with me and of course, to tell me about their personal stories. There was no incentive for them to participate in this project, other than the purely ideological benefit of getting the chance to express their ideas and feelings about an incredibly hard transition they’ve all undergone. I am extremely grateful to these five people who made this project happen.

THE NARRATORS

Rosangela Santiago was born on June 7, 1974, and grew up in the state of Bahia in eastern Brazil. By the age of four, Rosangela was taking dance classes, and a few years later attended jazz school. She has studied *candomble*, *forro* and *capoeira*, and frequently performed in Bahia, especially in festivals such as *Carnaval*. She left Bahia by herself in 2001, originally settling in Somerville, where she lived until 2005. Currently residing in Belmont, MA, Rosangela is pursuing a degree in psychology at Salem State University. In terms of dancing, since moving here in 2001, Rosangela has shifted more towards teaching, mostly due to a knee injury and other physical limitations. Here in Somerville, she has performed with the organization AfroBrazil, which promotes Afro-Brazilian music and dance in this area, including at the Boston Beantown Jazz Festival. Currently, Rosangela is working with AfroBrazil to design a program to teach Brazilian high school students in this area the music and dances of Brazil, along with the history and folklore behind them.



*Rosangela dancing candomblé.
Narrator's own photo*



<http://www.incason.com>

Santos Alva was born in Ascope, Peru, located in the northern region of the country, in 1965. He has been a member of the music group *Inca Son*, which performs traditional Incan songs and dances from the Andean region, for the past 11 years. Santos plays the indigenous Quechuan instrument called the *charango*, which is similar to the ukulele. He moved to the United States in 1998, when *Inca Son* relocated to California. The group later moved to Miami and then to North Carolina before permanently establishing itself in New England. Santos first settled in Central Square in Cambridge for 5 years, then moved to Medford, and has currently been living in Malden for 3 years.

Gina Cachimuel (no photo available) is 19 years old, and she was born in Otavalo, Ecuador. She frequently performs with her family's band, *Yarina*, which performs traditional Ecuadorian music and dances. She learned how to dance just from watching her aunts, and her uncle asked her to perform with them when she was 13. She has only taken one formal class, and that was still taught by her uncle. She moved to the United States in July of 2006 with her mother and 2 aunts, and settled in Somerville. She has a 22-month-old son, and is currently taking classes at Bunker Hill Community College.



Narrator's own photo

Luciana Araripe was born in São Paulo, Brazil in 1976, but her family soon moved to Rio de Janeiro, where she has lived for the majority of her life. She came to the United States in 2005 for a post-doctorate program in Biology at Harvard University, and has lived in Porter Square for this time. She is a member of the band *Choro Democrático*, which plays Brazilian *choro* rhythms and officially formed in January of 2008. Luciana plays the instrument she took up in 2001: the *bandolim*, known as the Brazilian mandolin.

Daniela Malta (no photo available) was born in Recife, Brazil in 1984, and first came to the United States in June, 2004. She originally traveled to the U.S. as part of an exchange program with the Portland Ballet company (based in Maine) that her dance teacher in Brazil recommended her to. After the three months in Maine, Daniela decided that she wanted to pursue her dancing here, and succeeded in securing a scholarship to the Boston Conservatory. She is on the last year of her degree program there and plans to return to Brazil upon its completion. Although she has been focusing on non-Brazilian dances such as ballet and modern here in Boston, she has been dancing *frevo*, an integral part of *Carnaval* in Recife, her entire life.

BACKGROUND

The narrators were all extremely knowledgeable about the history and cultural symbolism of each dance or musical form that they practice and perform. Complemented with my own research, in this section I will provide the background necessary to understanding the cultural relevance and importance of each of my narrator's artistic pursuits. As the majority (three out of five) of the narrators are Brazilian, I will begin highlighting the national dances and musical styles that they discussed with me.

Rosangela, a multi-talented Brazilian dancer, is an expert in *samba*, *farró*, and *candomblé*. She explained to me that samba has a rather mysterious origin, actually calling it a “lost history”, but that it came from a fusion of African drumming rhythms and European melodies, similar to polkas. It's no surprise that Rosangela knows a lot about samba considering it originated in the Northeastern state of Bahia, where she grew up. Scholars link the dance to the Congo-Angola region in Africa, and trace its development to the migrants leaving Bahia for better job opportunities in Rio de Janeiro (Murphy 2006: 7). Once in Rio, these Bahian migrants formed informal music circles where they blended the early samba rhythms with preexisting styles such as *lundu*, *maxixe*, and polkas and percussive religious music (Murphy 2006: 7). Eventually, the style recognized as samba was born, which today has many, many variations and interpretations. As Murphy explains, “It is tempting to pick one style...and call it *the* authentic style and the others adaptations or distortions. But this would itself be a distortion of an important quality of samba: it is as multi-faceted and adaptable as the Brazilian people themselves,” (2006: 7).

Another dance that Rosangela is very experience in also originated in her native region of Brazil: upbeat, accordion-driven dance music known as *farró* (Murphy 2006: 95). This dance

style developed from *baião*, which consists of energetic rhythms created by an accordion, *zabumba* (bass drum) and triangle accompanied by Northeastern-themed lyrics. Exemplified in the nation-wide popularity of samba and forró, Brazilians from this region take great pride in the richness of their cultural history, especially in the dances that began there. In fact, these dances and the music associated with them greatly help to form a sense of regional identity:

Music provides what is arguably the strongest and most widely recognized symbol of Northeastern regional identity. The *baião*, a dance rhythm introduced by Luiz Gonzagao, the *forró* that developed from it, and eventually Gonzaga himself became a source of pride for Northeasterners and a source of strength and nostalgia as they migrated to the large cities of the South in search of better living conditions, (Murphy 2006: 95).

Rosangela clearly demonstrates the interconnectedness of music/dance and identity in her region of Brazil, as she constantly emphasized how ingrained these dance have been in her life:

“They’re in my blood.”

Rosangela explained to me that folklore is another extremely important part of Brazilian dances, especially in *candomblé*, which is also the 2nd largest religion in Bahia behind Catholicism. As she described, the dance is a way to pay respect to the goddess Orixá, and works with elements of nature such as water, fire and wind to gain power from this goddess. Live music, costumes, food, etc. all act as offerings to Orixá, and the dance is the culmination of the celebration. The music component usually consists of call-and-response singing accompanied by multiple drums and metal bells (Murph 2006: 10). According to Murphy, *candomblé* faced serious oppression until as recently as the 1950s, when it was finally publicly acknowledged and accepted by the upper-classes of society (2006: 11).

Daniela is also an expert in Brazilian dances, with her specialty being *frevo*. She explained to me that dancing is a part of life in Brazil, specifically *frevo* in her city of Recife. Meaning “to boil”, *frevo* is an incredibly high-energy and complex dance that came from its

roots in *capoiera*. Daniela told me of its history, how it developed from the two opposing groups, or *blocos*, of *capoiera*, that engage in mock-fights and acrobatic moves to the music of a *pandeiro* (similar to a tambourine), scraper, drum, and solo songs and choral responses. Blurring the boundaries between dance, music, and sport, *capoiera* “can be described as a game or martial art with music, as a form of dance with vocal and instrumental accompaniment, as a drama, and as a philosophy and worldview that emphasizes liberation and embodies reciprocity,” (Murphy 2006: 55). Frevo, Daniela’s specialty, branched off and became its own dance revolving around small umbrellas that the dancers used to defend themselves against the other *blocos*. Daniela told me that frevo songs usually focus on love and pride in the city of Recife, known as especially musically and culturally rich. Although the dance technically has 120 steps, Daniela explained to me that not everyone has to know all of these steps to know frevo. Instead, as she said, “Once the music comes on, everyone just starts moving. Everyone knows the music, and everyone know show to move their bodies. You don’t need to know all of the steps, they are so complicated. Everyone just moves to it.” She echoed the same sentiment that Rosangela feels towards her regional dances: “It’s in our blood.”



Daniela’s frevo umbrella—Author’s photo

Luciana, on the other hand, is not a dancer, but is extremely knowledgeable about the musical style of *choro* (or *chorinho*), which her band *Choro Democrático* performs. Choro is a traditional Brazilian style of instrumental music that originated in the 1800s. She described to me how choro first began on the margins of society, only played and listened to by the lower classes in Brazil. At the beginning, the first original choro rhythms were very similar to polka or *maxixe*, but quickly transformed into an entirely new form of music.



Choro Democrático—Narrator's photo

Interestingly, Luciana told me that know one really knows where the name *choro* actually came from, as the verb *chorar* means to cry, yet this type of music is generally very upbeat and happy. Murphy believes this name comes from the melancholy way in which Brazilian musicians composed the polka melodies that would eventually inspire choro (2006: 31). While it became very popular quickly amongst the majority of the population, the seven-piece musical ensemble was not truly accepted by the upper classes until the 1930s, when the Vargas administration (dictator from 1930-1954) began a social movement emphasizing the promotion of genuinely Brazilian cultural forms, including music (Murphy 2006: 30). Luciana impressed upon me that despite this rather turbulent history (it also had a significant decline in popularity during the 70s and 80s), choro is one of the most traditionally beloved forms of music in Brazil. One of the

most important aspects of this history is that choro originated decades before samba and *bossa nova*—musical styles that are considered “traditionally Brazilian”—became popular, which signifies its important place in Brazilian culture.

My other two narrators, Santos and Gina, are not from Brazil, and therefore have an entirely different perspective on their native “traditional” forms of music and dance. Both perform in self-described “folkloric” and “traditional” bands, but their music is not as easily defined as the aforementioned Brazilian styles. This is because rather than being defined as distinct and specific types of music and dance that have unique histories, *Inca Son* and *Yarina* (their respective bands) play a fusion of indigenous music that has been passed down over generations. The members of *Inca Son*, which originated in Santos’s home country of Perú, play indigenous instruments from the entire Andean region in South American, including other countries such as Bolivia. The instruments are all “traditional” and “native” (narrator’s words) including *sampoñes*, which are pan flutes, drums, and Mr. Alva’s instrument—the *charango*, which is similar to the ukulele. The band’s website, www.incason.com, describes their mission as follows: “to preserve and instill appreciation for their cultural legacy through the international language of music and dance ... They are one of the few bearers of the Inca musical legacy.” While performing, the band members are dressed in the style of their Incan ancestors, with feathers and gold earrings, or in the wool ponchos still worn in the Andean region today



www.incason.com

Yarina, the band that was founded in 1984 by four of Gina’s uncles, performs songs and dances of what she calls “traditional and folkloric” Ecuadorian style, particularly from “her culture” of the “Otavalos”, referring to the city she was raised in.



<http://www.yarinamusic.com>

The men in the group primarily perform the musical element of the performances, playing indigenous instruments such as the *charangos*, small guitars; *bandolina*, larger guitar; *sampoñas*, bongos; along with *maracas*, flutes, the violin, and *saxo*, or saxophone. As their website (www.yarinamusic.com) describes,

Yarina (which means "remembrance" in the native Quichua language of the Incas) has since 1984, been dedicated not only to musical excellence, but also to the preservation and sharing of the beauty, courage and survival of the ancestral

traditions and culture of the indigenous peoples of the Andes. Their wholehearted and passionate dedication to musicianship, excellence and cultural expression has earned them the honor of being named "Ambassadors for Indigenous Ecuadorian Performers" by the Department of Culture, Quito, Ecuador.

While performing, their costumes consist of all white clothing—button-down shirts, long pants, and shoes. The women in the group dance, and they wear “traditional” colorfully embroidered white blouses and black, brown, and blue skirts with a full white petticoat underneath.

Interestingly, both the men and women wear their hair long and braided, which Gina told me was the traditional hairstyle of the Otavalos. They perform in both Quechua, the indigenous language of her region in Ecuador, and in Spanish, and she told me that their songs and dances have been handed down from generation to generation in Ecuador.

INVENTING TRADITION

The notion of “invented traditions” is clearly represented in role that samba has played in Brazil’s national history and identity. Just the simple fact that Rosangela, who has been dancing samba her entire life and is very knowledgeable about the origins of many Brazilian dances, believes that samba has a “lost history” is extremely illuminating. Samba actually has an incredibly complex and interesting history, yet one that has been entangled with politics and nationalism...most likely the reason that even dancers like Rosangela aren’t aware of the full story.

Although other styles such as choro and maracatu originated well before samba, the latter is today known as the original Brazilian music and dance. This occurred due to the Vargas administration’s desire to nationally promote cultural forms that were distinctly “Brazilian”, and

original to his country. Because Brazil is a deeply diverse nation that is divided along regional lines, this proved to a very difficult task, as most of the musical styles and dances originated from specific regional cultures. Samba, however, with its fusion of African and European rhythms and melodies, was seen as an embodiment of Brazil's multicultural spirit. Vargas therefore essentially "chose" samba as the national dance of Brazil, a status that has seeped into the national consciousness over the following generations.

Calling samba the authentic and original music and dance style of Brazil greatly overshadows the importance of the myriad others, especially when considering the diversity of the regions. The Brazilians dancers that I spoke with demonstrate the diversity of Brazil's cultural landscape—one that is certainly not dominated by samba. Rosangela, for example, is much more experienced and connected with forró and candomblé than samba, and Daniela barely even spoke with me about the latter. Instead, her real passion lies in frevo, which originated in her home city. In fact, she told me, "Everyone in Recife has rhythm, the rhythm of frevo, inside. We have it in our blood, and once the music comes on, you just start moving your body." She went on to say, "Frevo is inside of me. I don't need to practice or be around it all the time to know that. It will always be a part of me." She did mention, however, that "all Brazilians" also know samba—that when the rhythm come on, everyone knows how to move to it. While the prevalence and popularity of samba in Brazil cannot be questioned, it is problematic to label it *the* national dance. As Murphy notes, "Brazilian musicians have always cultivated a sense of national identity, modified it with the accents of regional traditions, and blended it with musics from outside Brazil," (158).

In a discussion regarding the cultural domination of samba, it is important to discuss how it has eclipsed choro in popularity and in success for much of its time. This doesn't make much

sense in the context of Brazil's musical history, as Murphy explains, "Choro symbolizes Brazilianness because it is among the first distinctively Brazilian ways of composing and playing instrumental music. Choro compositions such as "Tico-Tico no Fubá" and "Brasileirinho" are among the most widely recognized pieces of Brazilian music," (29). Luciana herself grew up listening to choro, especially as it originated in her hometown of Rio de Janeiro. I really enjoyed listening to Luciana describe one particular neighborhood in the city that clearly meant a lot to her. She described how this community, Lapa, was an extremely popular center for music when she was young—particularly *choro*. This once musically and culturally rich neighborhood underwent a serious decline when she was older, with nearly all of the music clubs and bars shutting down or struggling to survive. Recently, however, Lapa has begun to make a comeback, as she noticed on a trip home last winter. Luciana told me how walking down the street in the evening, she once again heard choro rhythms and sounds coming from all over. She sees this revitalization of the neighborhood as a parallel to the choro community in Brazil—just now fully regaining its popular strength and vitality after decades of decline.

The invention of samba as the national dance of Brazil can even be seen thousands of miles away: here in Somerville. I gained great perspective on the Brazilian music scene in Somerville from my conversation with Luciana in regards to her band, *Choro Democrático*. The band has rented out a performance space in the Third Life Studio in Union Square a few times, and Luciana told me that the shows there have been very successful, drawing crowds that outnumber the 50-person maximum capacity. There are typically very few Brazilians in the audience, however, which really surprised me. Luciana, on the other hand, seemed to think that this was pretty natural, because Brazilians here are mostly into more "pop" forms of music, like samba. *Choro* usually doesn't involve singers/lyrics, and its corresponding dance, *gafieira*, is

extremely complex and difficult with a lot of steps. She talked to me about how popular the Samba Bar is, because the Brazilian community can go there to let loose and dance. The few Brazilians that *choro* usually draws tend to be instrumental musicians as well, who therefore tend to have a greater appreciation for this type of music. The band has attempted to reach out more to the Brazilian community by postering and recruiting family members and friends, but they haven't had much success so far in making a solid connection. As Luciana told me in the interview,

Choro is not... it is very popular but very concentrated too, I mean everyone knows what *choro* is, but people who go see *choro* and who really enjoy are not like the big Brazil. So most of the Brazilians like *samba*. So there's other styles that people listen more and enjoy more. And I think the Brazilian community here may not like *choro* much, that's why, I mean I'm not saying everyone, but there's so many Brazilians and we don't see that many in our concerts. There's a lot of Americans interested in world music, and there is a lot of people who know *choro* already from, I don't know, some experience with them. Brazilians who are into music come, but Brazilians, usually Brazilians, I mean when I say "who are into music", I say like who play some instrument. But I think the big Brazilian community may not even know about it, or just know about it but doesn't like *choro* that much, because it's mostly instrumental, you know. They prefer something sang, that they can sing together. I know that there are places that you can find *forró* in Somerville, do you know about Samba Bar?... Yeah, it's like crowded. You go there Thursdays and Sundays and it's like very crowded. So this like music, popular music, people can dance and sing together. So I think that the community goes more to this.

I think that this is incredibly interesting and poses some very interesting questions regarding the popularity of traditional forms of music within its native community. *Choro* is considered one of the most traditionally and authentically Brazilian cultural forms, yet for immigrants living outside the country, it remains largely abandoned and ignored. This phenomenon contradicts what Sebastián Chaskel found in his research: a "traditional" and folkloric dance was being more authentically reproduced here in Somerville than back in El Salvador. While I'm not arguing that what *Choro Democrático* performs is not authentic, as I can't be a judge of that, but it is clear that *choro* has not gained a foothold in the Brazilian

immigrant community like the cultural dance did in the Salvadoran community in Somerville. I think the binary that choro is one of the oldest and most “traditional” of Brazilian musical styles, yet the large Brazilian community in Somerville virtually ignores it, is a very important notion to grapple with. I believe that this is due to the historical promotion of samba as “Brazilianness” and “authentic tradition” back in Brazil, which was brought over to the United States by those immigrating here. After all, if Brazilian grew up with this notion back in their home country, why would it disappear upon moving to another country? As it has become internationally recognized as the symbol of Brazil, samba is the musical and dance style that is easiest for its people to find outside of the nation’s borders. For the Brazilian immigrant community living in Somerville, places like the Samba Bar provide them with a space to enjoy the feeling of being back in Brazil. With this need already satisfied, other musical styles such as choro tend to be eclipsed.

THE ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF TRADITION

Just as traditions are continuously invented and *reinvented*, they are also used and performed by different people in many different ways. While for some, traditions may be performed for the more generally acknowledged reason (i.e. a way to connect with one’s past and ancestors), for others, they belong more to the realm of practicality than nostalgia. In fact, sometimes one culture’s “traditions” and “folklore” directly translate into economic opportunities when reproduced in a different locale. I was first exposed to this idea through my conversations with Santos and Gina: both are Latin American immigrants who came to the

United States in order to make more money performing the traditional songs and dances of their native countries (Perú and Ecuador, respectively.)

Santo's band, *Inca Son* performs traditional Andean songs, which as he told me me, "come directly from my ancestors, the Incas." Mr. Alva explained to me that every song and dance that they perform has a meaning and folkloric story behind it that has been passed down to them from these ancient ancestors. For example, *valecha* is a traditional dance from Cuzco, Peru, which Mr. Alva explained, came from men working hard in the fields of their farms, and "...their women would dance around them, trying to entertain and distract them from their work." He also explained the origins of their song *Marinaz*, which was influenced from the Spanish conquistadors. He said that the female dancers wear elegant dresses and twirl around to show off the full skirts while the song's lyrics explain the importance of love and respect for humankind.



<http://www.incason.com>

Mr. Alva come to this country in the pursuit of better economic opportunities, but did so per the request of his boss, Mr. Villalobos, in Peru. This man, who Santos refers to as his brother, decided in 1998 that *Inca Son* would be much more successful in the United States, and he asked Mr. Alva to come with him. Mr. Alva agreed, and brought along his new wife. They first tried to establish the group in California, then Miami and North Carolina before ending up in New

England, which Mr. Villalobos decided would be the best choice because of the number of tourists around Boston. The main reason for this move was because they had encountered the difficulties of making a living as musicians in Peru today, especially specializing in Incan music. He said that wherever you go and try to perform, “hundreds of other musicians just like you are already there...Here, I am more unique. It is easier to find jobs and make money.” For Mr. Alva, music is how he makes a living, and he performs mostly for tourists. While he goes back to Peru to visit his family members, he never wants to go back there to live permanently. Here, he is a unique musician who does very well with his group, and back home, he’s just another face in the crowd. Plus, “they don’t have TVs like this one back in Peru!”

Gina also expressed that there really isn’t much of a popular demand for indigenous forms of music and dance back in Ecuador. She even said that her family moved to the United States in order to find better opportunities to perform, just like Santos and *Inca Son*. A few of her uncles, including the founder of *Yarina*, and her father left Ecuador much earlier than Gina and the rest of the family in order to establish a base for the band. As soon as business was lucrative enough to support more family members in the U.S., the others joined them. Thus far, the group has been quite successful here in the U.S., frequently touring across the country. Recently, the group has performed in Texas, New York and Chicago, and Florida. Gina, unfortunately, can’t go with them as often as she’d like due to the classes she’s taking at a local community college. They perform in schools (including numerous times at Somerville High), functions and festivals, and in more conventional concerts. From what Mr. Alva told me, *Yarina* sounds very similar to *Inca Son*, in that they basically perform wherever they get the opportunity to.

Just like *Inca Son*, another popular Boston-based group, the founders of *Yarina* came to United States to make more money. I think this notion is very important, because it demonstrates

that indigenous cultural reproduction is often more financially successful in the United States than in the actual country that it originates from. This idea of culture as a form of tourism aimed at a Western audience is extremely interesting, and says a lot about what the terms “culture” and “tradition” really mean in non-academic and non-Western settings. The experiences of Santos and Gina and their motivation for coming to the United States really demonstrates the idea that traditions are just cultural inventions, used by individuals in whatever manner suits their lives best.



<http://www.yarinamusic.com>

REDEFINING AUTHENTICITY

While each of my narrators’ experience in immigrating to the United States was unique and depended on personal context, they did share some commonalities in adjusting to their new homes. Above all, the music and/or dance of their homelands helped to create a new community here in the Greater Boston area, whether amongst other immigrants of the same nationality or simply those who shared similar a passion. Because they were able to find those people, whether

in the audience or playing right next to them, clearly there already existed a demand or interest in traditional or folkloric music and dance in this area, before my narrators got here. This demonstrates that these “native traditions” are in reality not so native, or in other words, or not strictly isolated to the country of origin. In fact, in each of my narrators’ experience, at some point the “traditions” of their native countries became interconnected and woven with threads of modern and new cultural forms, even coming from other places in the world. This phenomenon is incredibly interesting in that this union of new and old seems to create quite the paradox: how can a *tradition* also be *new*? The answer to this question directly correlates with the overarching theme of this report that traditions are not just old, perfectly preserved customs of the past. Instead, they are constantly being reinvented and recharged by whoever is currently putting them to use.

Inca Son and *Yarina* perfectly embody this redefinition of tradition: both are simultaneously self-described as “traditional” and “modern”. For example, here is an excerpt from *Inca Son*’s website:

Inca Son means “Sound of the Incas.” This world acclaimed band, founded 15 years ago in Boston by the multitalented César Villalobos, plays the centuries-old music of the Andes of Peru, home of their Inca ancestors. In addition, Inca Son performs music from throughout Latin America, and through original, vibrant arrangements, lends an Andean flavor to well-known modern pop tunes. (www.incason.com)

Note how the band plays a combination of very old Incan songs and modern pop tunes—not exactly what you would expect from a “traditional” music group. *Yarina* takes a very similar approach to performing “traditional” songs and dances:

Originally founded in Ecuador by four brothers, *Yarina*'s extensive travel throughout Europe and the Americas has resulted in a unique creativity and versatility of styles that is at once spellbinding and highly original. The pure and hauntingly beautiful sensual music of the Andes captivates all ages and audiences, while their imaginative repertoire incorporating jazz, blues, Latin and western classical masterpieces serves to surprise and delight the most jaded of listeners. (www.incason.com)

Once again, this band, despite its emphasis on the “traditional” emphasis, represents a fusion of new and old, and is not limited to solely the ancient Quechuas of Latin America. Furthermore, according to this excerpt, a group that performs “traditional” songs and dances can also be *original*—a notion that directly contradicts the standard assumptions regarding tradition. These two bands greatly represent the fluid and ever-changing notion of tradition in their own multidimensional and international approach to performing the music of their ancestors. Although they see themselves as representing the culture of their forefathers, they are also inspired by the world in which they live today.

Choro Democrático is another band that fuses a traditional form of music with new flavors and characters. In fact, out of the seven members, only two are actually Brazilian, even though choro is considered the most original musical style from that country. The other five are all talented American musicians who simply share a love for Brazil. I think that this is a very interesting dynamic, especially considering that the band is performing what Luciana calls “very authentic” Brazilian music. In fact, when I asked her if she felt that having a majority of non-Brazilian members in the band put them at a disadvantage in terms of reproducing *choro* authentically, she responded wholeheartedly in the negative. She reiterated many times to me that what *Choro Democrático* is doing is very authentic and very similar to the music that you would hear performed right now in Rio de Janeiro. She also emphasized that all the members of the band have been to Brazil and began playing Brazilian music because of their passion and interest in it. She did concede, however, that she and Fernando have an advantage because they have grown up with this style of music, that “it’s in our blood.” The rhythms and timing of *choro* simply come more naturally to them. As she told me,

But for me, I think it helps because, like if I try, I want to learn bluegrass,
American. But it’s just like something, I just can’t get the feel for it. It’s just

something I didn't grow up with. I need to listen to it a lot. So I want to learn other styles just to improve my instrument, and I like bluegrass, too. But there is just something about being used to it that makes a difference. I think because I listened to *choro* when I was little, and *samba*, I can, I kind of think it makes it easier for me, with being a beginner in the instrument. And I know that some people who played mandolin and want to start in Brazilian music, or who played other melody instruments, they have some trouble at the beginning. Because the people in the band, they have been playing this for some time, so nowadays we don't see much. But I'm sure, like at the beginning, they had some trouble with the syncopation and where you find the beat...one...two...three...measures. So these things for me are very natural, and I think if I had not been listening to it, it would be harder. Not that I would not learn, but it would just be harder, like bluegrass is hard for me.

Clearly growing up with a certain type of music greatly aids the learning process later in life, as Luciana discovered in her first attempt to play a non-Brazilian style like bluegrass. Nonetheless, from Luciana's viewpoint, if you can play it well, there's no reason why your music shouldn't be considered authentic, regardless of your nationality. Her band is interesting in this way because it is very different from the other "traditional" bands, *Inca Son* and *Yarina*, that I discuss in this report. Those bands are comprised entirely of immigrants from their respective countries, while *Choro Democrático* is a mixture of Americans and Brazilians. Once again, this simply goes to show that you cannot define "tradition" as a narrow and fixed idea—it can be whatever you want it to.



Luciana Araripe photo

CREATING COMMUNITIES

While generally you cannot draw overarching conclusions about a sector of society based on the experiences of one small group, there was one theme that all of my narrators had in common: their artistic productions, whether music or dance, helped them to create a community and feel at home here in the United States. For Rosangela, that community was AfroBrazil, where she helps to teach workshops and design programs for schools with the director, Marcus Santos. Daniela found her place at the Boston Conservatory, which has essentially become her home away from home. Although she takes all non-Brazilian dance classes, the passion that she gained dancing frevo in Brazil is what has led her to this new community. Santos even refers to his fellow band members as his “brothers” and “sisters”, and told me that *Inca Son* is like his family here in the States. Gina, on the other hand, left Ecuador with her family strictly because of their band, and she knows it will stay in the family for generations to come—one day she’ll be performing alongside her son.

Even Luciana, who came to this area for a reason totally unrelated to music (to pursue her studies in biology), has found her comfort zone thanks to choro. Through her music, she met her current boyfriend and circle of friends, and truly found her happiness here. She told me that when she first arrived, she began doubting her decision to leave Brazil. Her biggest obstacle was making friends and speaking English, the combination of which led her to feel quite depressed and homesick. That all changed, however, when she met her boyfriend and bandmate, Adam, who had learned to play choro during a visit to Brazil a few years prior to their meeting. When I asked Luciana how she feels about living here, she responded,

Some time ago I was considering going back, cause I was, like, “Oh, okay, enough. I’ll go back.” But this year, it was just...I had an offer back in Brazil, it was not a job but for post-doc, but I had an offer, in the middle of the year, and I was like, “No, I’m having fun here.” And this has to do with the music, for sure. I mean, the hobby, it doesn’t matter if it was a band playing around or just a hobby that is regular, but it’s just something that I like to do. And it doesn’t matter if we are playing concerts or not for me, I mean, it matters if we get together and play. And if people are around, even at like parties, people around enjoy, this is fun. And I decided that this is important now, for me here. And it helps to stay here, and it helps to meet people. Yeah, just helps improving the instrument playing. It doesn’t help much the work, though...Now I really like here. Everyone complains, mostly coming from Brazil, because it’s a warm place, complain about the weather and all this. Actually, I don’t like the length of the winter, but I like so many other things that it kind of compensates for it. It was hard at the beginning, the beginning was a little hard, culturally, to kind of adapt to people’s way of making friends, for example. But after some time, some months, one can really enjoy the safety, convenience, it’s a very international place. All this I really like...

Although she had begun looking for post-doctorate programs back in Brazil, the formation of *Choro Democrático* made her want to stay. When I asked her at the end of our interview if she wanted to return to Brazil one day to live permanently, she couldn’t give a definite answer.

Along with helping to create new communities here in the U.S., music and dance also helped my narrators stay connected to the communities they left behind. Each one told me that the music of their homeland, whether playing or dancing to it, made them feel like they were home again. Daniela described to me how she almost always tears up when she listens to Brazilian music, especially frevo, because, “When I hear it, I feel like I’m back in Recife. It makes me sad, but also happy to remember and to have memories of Carnival and home.”

Luciana described a similar feeling when she’s playing with *Choro Democrático*:

It is very similar, it’s very authentic. So, I think everyone who plays in the band has something, has the right feel and all this. Sometimes in La Luna [a café, in Central Square where the band frequently performs], when I get like little intervals or something, and I’m watching, I really feel like I’m in Rio. It’s just the environment, it’s that. Mostly because it’s relaxed, there’s no audience. Everyone is together there, watching and playing and dancing. So I really think we are doing similar to what this neighborhood, this renovated neighborhood in Rio is doing now.

Comments such as these appeared frequently throughout the interviews, which clearly demonstrates the ability of music and dance to connect people in a variety of ways. In the experiences of these narrators, “traditional” music and dance both reminded them of their old homes and helped create a new home here in the Greater Boston area. Once again, these “traditional” songs and dances did not perform the roles they are “traditionally” assigned.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Overall, the conversations that I had with these five dancers and musicians strip the academic wordplay from anthropological notions of culture and tradition and demonstrate exactly what experts in the field have grappled with for years: although an anthropological approach to interviewing individuals attempts to draw larger conclusions about groups of people or even society as a whole, an individual is still an individual. As the famed anthropologist Sidney Mintz once wrote, “The choice ought not to be between a disembodied individual who floats outside and above the culture and society, on the one hand, and a culture and society which imprison and make irrelevant the individuality of the informant, on the other,” (1979: 302).

Furthermore, Valerie Raleigh Yow, in her comprehensive guide to recording oral histories, writes that the ethnographer must not only recognize his or her narrators as individuals who must be treated as such, but also him or herself as an individual that comes with assumptions and preconceived notions about the world (2005: 34). This was crucial for me to remember as I went through this process, as at the beginning, I definitely had my own (however vague) idea about what it meant to be an immigrant performing traditional cultural forms. My narrators’ perspectives quickly helped remind me just how fluid the process of immigration and even simply making music or dancing is for every individual—no matter what I may have thought

beforehand. Now I have a much better idea of the *different ways* in which Latino immigrants reproduce their culture in the United States—for some it is a reminder of a home they miss dearly, and for others, it is an economic opportunity far more lucrative than any artistic venture would be at home.

Somerville, in particular, clearly lives up to its name of “Immigrant City”, as the large population of immigrants has spawned such a diverse group of talented musicians and dancers. This city can be seen as a microcosm for Latin American immigration in the country as a whole, and not only because of its history and current large percentage of immigrants living here. Rather, it represents the various processes that these newcomers are both swept up in and create for themselves as they strive to make a space for themselves in this city. Music and dance, what this report focuses on, is just one tiny portion of the myriad of cultural forms this population produces to connect to their new community and reconnect to their old. The Urban Borderlands class at Tufts University pays testimony to this transition, and through its very existence, demonstrates the uniqueness of Somerville as an immigrant city.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to its limited duration and number of narrators, this report can only go so far as to express this idea in regards to the experience of immigration to the United States, and the role that music and dance play in that transition. While no study, no matter how comprehensive, can define a single experience, this one is particularly limited in the fact that I only spoke with five individuals over the course of three months. Future researchers with much greater resources could take this study much further in depth and breadth. I would suggest gathering testimony

from more than just the immigrants who perform these traditional cultural forms—it would be very interesting and enlightening to hear from those who choose to attend the performances. For example, why is it that not many Brazilians attend *Choro Democrático* concerts? Who are the people that do go? I wish I could have been able to include this perspective in this report, as I believe that the consumers of cultural products such as music and dance are just as illuminating as the producers themselves.

Overall, I think it is crucial to analyze the cultural (re)production of immigrants outside of the Greater Boston area. Expanding this project to the United States as a whole, while incredibly daunting, would much better capture the current realities of immigration to this country. As Latinos are poised to become the largest minority and Spanish is increasingly becoming part of the landscape of this country, their cultural contributions can no longer go ignored. Furthermore, it would be very interesting to take a look at what is going on with these traditional music and dances directly at the source. I found one of the most interesting aspects of this project to be the stories of musicians such as Santos and Gina's uncles who had to leave their native countries in order to make any money with their music. This trend really lies at the heart of the tension between "tradition" and "modernity" that the field of anthropology, in particular, has become very interested in over the years. However, I truly believe that this subject is not only extremely enlightening to anthropologists alone, but instead is crucial to understanding the ever-changing face of the United States.

APPENDIX A

Artist Profile: Santos Alva



http://www.incason.com/Wb_Sch.htm

Mr. Alva was born in Ascope, Peru, located in the northern region of the country, in 1965. He moved to the United States in January of 1991, first settling in Central Square in Cambridge for 5 years, then moving to Medford, and now has been living in Malden for 3 years. He has been a professional musician for most of his life, both in Peru and here in the Greater Boston area, as a member of the group, *Inca Son*, which was first formed in Peru. Officially established in the Boston area 15 years ago, *Inca Son* performs traditional Incan songs and dances from the Andean region. As Mr. Alva explained to me, the name *Inca Son* means “Incan culture...with a double meaning of *hijo* (son) and *sol* (the Sun).”

Mr. Alva and I discussed *Inca Son* in detail—he is very knowledgeable about its origins as he has been a member for half of its 22 years of being. He has also known its founder, César Villalobos, from his days of growing up in Peru, and they clearly have a close relationship—Mr.

Alva refers to him as “brother”. *Inca Son* started in Peru from what Mr. Alva called a “corporation of musicians”, a group that gathered to play simple instruments from the Andean region in South America, particularly Peru, but including other countries such as Bolivia. In the late 1980s, Mr. Villalobos decided that *Inca Son* would be much more successful in the United States, and he asked Mr. Alva and a few others to come with him. Mr. Alva agreed, and brought along his new wife. They first attempted to establish the group in California, Miami, and North Carolina before ending up in New England 15 years ago. They decided that Boston would be the best choice because of the number of tourists and schools around the city.

The group consists of 12 members, with 5 musicians and 7 dancers who Mr. Alva also refers to as his “brothers” and “sisters”, clearly demonstrating how close-knit the group is. When I asked him if he felt that *Inca Son* helped him to feel at home in this country, he nodded enthusiastically, and reiterated how the group is like his family. Although Mr. Alva still has relatives back in Peru that he visits twice a year, it seems like this musical group has become a surrogate family here in the U.S. The instruments that these musicians play are all traditional of the Andean region, including Mr. Alva’s instrument, the *charango*, which is a 10- stringed instrument made from the body of an armadillo, and is similar to the ukele (http://www.incason.com/Wb_mus.htm). The band also plays *sampoñes*, which are double-row pan flutes that were invented more than 2000 years ago and are called sikus in the native Quechua language, along with simple percussion instruments.

(http://www.incason.com/Wb_mus.htm).



Sampoñes and a drum typically played by Inca Son

As mentioned above, *Inca Son* performs traditional Andean songs, which as Mr. Alva explains, come directly from the Incan culture of the Andes. He iterated to me that every song and dance that they perform has a meaning and folkloric story behind it that has been passed down to them from their Incan ancestors. For example, *valecha* is a traditional dance from Cuzco, Peru that came from men working hard in the fields of their farms, and "...their women would dance around them, trying to entertain and distract them from their work." He also explained the origins of their song "Marinaz", which was influenced by the Spanish conquistadors. He said that the female dancers wear elegant dresses and twirl around to show off the full skirts while the song's lyrics explain the importance of love and respect for humankind.

They perform in many different public arenas, including at concerts and schools across the globe. He explained that they "are always trying to find jobs," which means that will perform basically wherever asked, and that where they perform also depends on the season—performing outside in the winter is not too fun! Mr. Alva is apparently quite modest, however, because from their history of performances it doesn't seem like the group has too much trouble finding gigs. This long list includes multiple Olympic Games, World Cup soccer matches, and United Nations events, along with collaborations with the likes of the Boston Pops and the Chicago Grant Park Orchestra (http://www.incason.com/Wb_inc.htm). Furthermore, the group has won various awards including the 2007 Independent Music Award for "Best World Traditional Song" and the 1999 Boston Music Award for "Outstanding World Music Act."

Personally, Mr. Alva prefers more formal concerts over street and school performances, because he feels it is more true to his identity as a musician, where he can play interrupted and become fully immersed in the songs. However, educational performances in schools are also an

important part of their work, which they see as a way to share the Incan culture and traditions with young Americans. As Mr. Alva explained, “It is our branch, connection between each other to share our culture and your culture.” The group does much more than just sing and dance for school groups, however, because they see themselves as representatives for the Incan culture as a whole. To this end, they bring items such as real gold objects, clothing, food, and other cultural artifacts. In fact, when I asked the narrator whether he would prefer to perform for a Latin American audience or Americans, he answered the latter, because he would rather educate a group of people about his culture rather than simply perform. This sentiment is apparently shared by the rest of the group, as their website declares,

Inca Son, since its earliest beginnings in the streets of Harvard Square (Cambridge, Massachusetts), has been a band with a mission: to preserve and instill appreciation for their cultural legacy through the international language of music and dance...in the words of Boston Pops conductor Keith Lockhart, ‘the indispensable cultural ambassadors of this nearly lost South American folk tradition. Their music is of the highest caliber.’ They are one of the few bearers of the Inca musical legacy, (http://www.incason.com/Wb_Inc.htm)

Despite their international fame, Mr. Alva and *Inca Son* are very well connected to Somerville, especially considering that the former lives only a few miles away in Malden. The group has performed in the city many times, including at Somerville High School and Tufts University. *Inca Son* also used to perform regularly at the restaurant Machupicchu in Union Square, which proclaims itself as a “Restaurante Turístico.” I thought that this title was very interesting when I visited, as this is the type of “tourist-y” restaurant that you would find in Peru, near Machupicchu, but which doesn’t really make sense in the context of Somerville, MA. When I asked Mr. Alva about this, he answered that Machupicchu is a “symbol of Peru, so people go there expecting Peruvian culture...it is Peruvian identity.” I actually first discovered *Inca Son* at this very restaurant, when I wandered in after hearing that it often hosts live Peruvian music.

For Mr. Alva, this notion of a “Tourist Restaurant” is not too strange, considering makes a living from cultural tourism, i.e. performing for Americans interested in experiencing another culture. He apparently loves this lifestyle and is very appreciative of his success here, because although he goes back to Peru frequently to visit his family members, he never wants live there permanently again. Here, he is a unique musician who does very well with his group, and back home, he’s just another face in the crowd. It’s not surprising that he wants to live in this country for the rest of his life, as his immigration to the U.S. is very inspiring. This change of location resulted Mr. Alva and *Inca Son* achieving immense musical success. In addition to the prestigious performance and collaborations discussed above, the group has put out 15 CDs, both instrument and vocal, the latter of which are sung in Spanish and occasionally in Quechua. With this astounding commercial success, it appears that Mr. Alva is more than achieving the dreams he had when he first agreed to leave his home of Peru to come to the United States, all for the sake of developing *Inca Son* to its greatest potential.

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