

# *Latin Dance and Culture in Somerville*

*Examining Dance Through the Lens of Space, Community, & Social Relations*

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Jennifer Earls

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# **INTRODUCTION:**

Somerville, Massachusetts is an extremely unique community. Upon entering the neighborhood, it becomes apparent that there is a rich local dance performance and social scene. Many qualities of Somerville allow for dance interactions to take place and although not obvious to the outsider immediately, my research in the 2008 Tufts University, Urban Borderlands Class allowed me to uncover and document a variety of Latin dance activities in Somerville. Urban Borderlands, taught by Professor Deborah Pacini-Hernandez, is an oral history anthropology class designed to give students education in conducting anthropological fieldwork and to document the happenings of the city of Somerville where half of the Tufts University campus is located. The Urban Borderlands Class focuses on a variety of aspects of the Latino, Brazilian, and Immigrant communities in the area and the eleven students during the fall 2008 semester decided to focus on the arts in Somerville. Students in this class project focused on a variety of forms of production all the way from poets and singers to painters and photographers. Our research was compiled through a variety of ventures into the city of Somerville and personal interviews with artist contacts that we had made in the community.

My own dance background is what led me to investigate the modes of dance production in Somerville. I am currently a junior at Tufts University and have been a competitive Latin and ballroom dancer for years. As a high school student, I was also a member of a salsa dance company and an Afro-Cuban Performance group. Since the seventh grade, I have been involved with dance, which has transformed me physically, emotionally and mentally. Throughout these experiences, I have learned many life

lessons about dance as a mode of communication and about culture. Learning from Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Russian, and Czech teachers propelled me into the fields of anthropology and dance. At Tufts University, as an anthropology major and dance minor with an interest in health and the body, I have continued my dance education as well. At Tufts, I have been on the board of La Salsa and Performance group choreographer since my freshman year. I also continue to compete in Latin dance, help coach the Tufts Ballroom Team, and am a member of the on campus hip-hop performing group. My own dance experience and anthropology interest is what propelled me to sign up for Urban Borderlands 2008.

In this class, we also teamed up with a group of local Somerville high school students who worked at The Welcome Project. The Welcome Project is a program that started in the Mystic Public Housing Development in Somerville in 1987. It was created in order to join a variety of immigrant newcomers from Central and South America, the Caribbean, East Asia and other parts of the world. The Welcome Project came together as a community based initiative designed to unify and assist the immigrants as well as combat discrimination and misperceptions about these people (Welcome Project). Our Professor suggested that we use the students as a resource to help us with our interviewing and gathering of information. Many of us found that their own rich immigrant and artistic backgrounds provided us with invaluable research that we could use in our projects.

As I went about my research, I was able to learn a lot about the dance communities in Somerville. Initially, I found it hard to breach the language and culture

barriers in Somerville. Once I was able to gain insight into the local customs and dance practices, I was excited to find a variety of forms of dance activity in Somerville. I saw a variety of structured dance, including professional education, which took place in studios and clubs, and unstructured cultural social dancing, which took place at family gatherings and community festivals. There were a variety of types of Latin dance styles, both performative and social, and many forms of dance such as samba, salsa, forro, and merengue, that were common to Somerville. In my investigations, I also decided to look at the role of Tufts University and the place of Latin dancing on campus. La Salsa, a student run salsa organization dedicated to bringing students off campus to clubs, is the main group I looked at. Members who I spoke with gave me insight in to campus interest and connection with Somerville. I personally saw many types of people dancing and the diversity of the narrators that I spoke with gave me insight into cultural uniqueness of Somerville as a dance and cultural hub. As I interviewed dancers and investigated Somerville, I found that there were certain aspects of this community that make dance common and others that prevent it from being accessible to the entire population. For example, there are a number of venues available for samba dancing, but lack of T access prevents people from getting to many locations. I also found that there are a variety of forms of dance production, but landscape, language, and community make them somewhat disjointed from each other. However, people who dance in Somerville do so for a variety of reasons including building community, culturally bonding, having fun, and improving their health. A common line of questioning that I pursued with the various artists that I interviewed was the reasons why people danced in Somerville. I discovered several themes that were common to the locals as well as to the greater Boston and dance

communities as a whole. This part of my research connected well to my anthropological background and I found that a variety of anthropologists and dance ethnographers discussed many themes that I saw in Somerville. The first common theme that I encountered through my fieldwork was that dance contributes to community building. People come together and connect because of their shared interest. In Somerville, this is both apparent in structured and unstructured dance, as Latin dance affords the opportunity for the city to become stronger. In her book, Dancing Communities, Hamera argues that:

Dance techniques are ideas of order, performative templates for generating artifice in/and community. They offer vocabularies for writing, reading, speaking and reproducing bodies. In doing this, they do much more: organize communities around common idioms, rewrite space and time in their own images, provide alibis, escape clauses, sometimes traps, sometimes provisional utopias (208).

This list is by no means inclusive, but it was an exciting aspect of this project as my narrators demonstrated how dance contributed to many aspects of their lives. In speaking with the narrators, it was also interesting to discover how their movement forms were culturally depicting social differences including ethnicity, race, gender, religion, and local struggles and triumphs of the Somerville dancers.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

In going about the research for Urban Borderlands, I had specific goals in mind. I initially considered focusing on a specific type of dance or looking at solely professional dancers or just social dancers. As soon as I started going through Somerville and getting in contact with dancers and people who knew dancers, it became clear that there was a large variety of venues and ways to develop this project. Since there has been little research done on Somerville, and even less done on arts and dance related activities, I made it my objective to do a survey of a variety of dance forms in the local immigrant community. The questions that I asked were targeted in order to reveal the reasons why people in Somerville dance and uncover the social, geographic, and personal motivations that promoted or hindered Latin dance activities.

A variety of geographic markers and landscape aspects of the city are unique to the area, including long streets that connect city squares together. In looking at the community, I questioned how these factors positively and negatively affected the dance flow. In this project, I examine what aspects of Somerville are specific to the community and how the borders of the city are affected by the flow of its people

I also wanted to look at the variety of dance scenes and see what it is about Somerville that connects them and separates them. I quickly found that there were several contrasting scenes and wish that I had more time to explore them all further. There were people of many nationalities who both socially and professionally danced. Professional dancers and companies in Somerville with whom I spoke, afforded me insight into their



backgrounds, their success, their clientele, and were very telling of the local settings. I also was able to speak some with local immigrants who participated in a completely different form of unstructured dance. I found that their social dance experiences were very telling of their histories and their desires to connect with fellow countrymen and women. In examining Tufts University as a Latin dance hub, I hoped to see its connections to and place in the greater Somerville community. I also wanted to examine dance in Somerville as a form of non-verbal communication.

Throughout the process of my research, I was surprised by my narrators' sentiments and discovered some new thoughts, which helped me explore further research questions and allowed me to better develop this project. I became curious about how local production and reproduction of dance was creating and recreating culture. The people I interviewed gave me significant insight into cultural connections among those who danced, and bonding between people of different races and ethnic backgrounds. I wanted to further examine how race, class, gender, and religion were organized by, and contributed to the dance forms of people I spoke with. I found this line of questioning to be most telling as it encompassed the true heart of the affects of cultural dance on people in Somerville.

## **METHODOLOGY:**

In going about my research, I started by trying to get to know the landscape of Somerville. I explored the city by driving, walking, and talking about Somerville as much as I could. Although I had previously been in Somerville, worked there, and lived there, as Tufts University is half located in the community, I had never explored the community. I felt as though I did not have a good sense of what was out there and did not see why our class specifically focused on this city. How could there be anything so unique to this community, I wondered, that our class would be able to all collect data from the same location?

I quickly realized that there was much to discover in Somerville and it was truly a one of a kind city full of many types of people and artistic productions. One of my first ‘exploration’ trips to Union Square in Somerville was probably my most eye opening moment of the fieldwork, as the Brazilian influence was tremendous. Initially I went into stores that specifically had Brazilian writing and flags in the windows, but soon realized that I could go to places like the grocery store and Laundromat in order to ask for information about Latin dance. I was able to find a few studios, dance clubs, and locations where dancers had been to. I continued on with my research and returned to the same locations and others.

My methods for research seem simple, but really were more challenging. My goal was to walk through Somerville, happen into a dance studio, meet a Latino or Brazilian,

and interview them later. This was not at all possible and happened in an entirely different way. My walks through Somerville revealed many exciting activities, but all dance venues and people seemed to be dead ends. Unfortunately, due to a number of circumstances, including my class schedule and extracurricular schedules at Tufts, the times in which I ventured into Somerville also coincided with closed dance spaces.

Entering my next phase of research, I contacted t as many people as I could who knew something about the local area. I found this mode of research to be much more successful. Soon I was contacting everyone I could think of and asking people who might have small connections to the Somerville dance scene. It was certainly true that I was not able to gather information from everyone, but I found that dance friends, teachers, and personal contacts were invaluable to the progress of my research. In the following weeks, while I was continuing my survey of Somerville, I received numerous tips on possible leads for people who I knew or personally through friends. Eventually this turned into a list of contacts and narrators for my paper.

Conducting interviews was a unique process in itself and was a first for me. I have conducted many informal interviews before and have had educational discussions with foreigners; however I have never been required to tape an interview or get permission slips from the narrators. Interviewing did present several challenges and it took me a little while to get in the routine of asking questions in a certain way. Not all of my interviews were conducted with the same ability level and I found that as I went through the process, my questions and responses became better and more helpful to the development of my research.

Interviewing was never a simple process and I found that, at times, I had too many options of people and at others, was nervously pondering who else I could speak with. I am extremely thankful to my narrators, who were willing to give me the time and benefit of their knowledge, Meeting with people and touring the city were unique and each experience was at the same time different and helpful to the movement of my research.

## **LIST OF NARRATORS:**

### **Michelle Rubiera**



Michelle Rubiera was born and raised with four sisters in the Dominican Republic. She grew up dancing at small gatherings and at home with her parents. At age ten, she and her family moved to Puerto Rico, where they continued to dance as a form of cultural production. She never took classes, but danced at family gatherings. Rubiera then moved to Boston where she took numerous jazz and ballet classes and loved it. Her dance instructor was the director of dance at the Colleges of the Fenway Performing Arts in Boston which is an arts consortium between several schools. Rubiera then attended the Boston Conservatory, where she studied jazz, ballet, and tap. Rubiera then got a scholarship for Harvard University's dance program. She worked as a break dancer in the group Floor Lords and as a hip-hop, jazz, and Latin dancer in the dance group Funk Phenomena. With both groups she was working a lot and performing for many groups including dancing as back up dancer for famous singers including Marc Anthony, Missy

Elliott, and Busta Rhymes. Rubiera then became a nurse and performed and traveled as a backup dancer for the singer Illiana Vasquez at the same time. She works for and helped implement dance fitness programs for several health organizations including Win Win, Step Up, and Cambridge Health Alliance. At the Cambridge Health Alliance, she is a teacher of the program Baila Cardio: Latin Dance for Fitness, which is designed as a fun way to target obesity in the Latino community. She also worked for the Tufts University School of Nutrition helping them understand cultural focus behind health programs. Michelle Rubiera has continued to teach all over Massachusetts and perform as well as maintain several jobs. She predominantly teaches at her family-owned studio, Creative Talents Studio. She is known in the community for creating choreography for many famous musicians.

### **Andres Giraldo**



Andres is from Columbia and he and his family moved to Boston before he was ten years old. He learned dancing both at home and from taking classes. As a teenager, both he and his brother Johnny took part in a Colombian dance group, where they performed cumbia and other traditional Colombian dances. It was not until he was

seventeen that Andres became really interested in salsa. Salsa dancing was developed by a combination of Cuban and Puerto Rican musical rhythms as people interacted in the United States. It has a lot of Colombian influence and is also extremely common in Giraldo's home country (Waxer). Andres was inspired by his brother and followed in his brother's footsteps to become a professional dance teacher. Together, the brothers own a dance company called Salsa Y Control. Both teach a variety of salsa and other Latin dance lessons and classes including bachata, cumbia, and merengue at different studios and salsa venues including Havana Club and Dance Republic. Giraldo worked at Johnny D's, a bar in Somerville, and taught there for seven years. Giraldo also is the DJ for the new Somerville City Salsa Club which is a night club dedicated to these kinds of dance styles. Giraldo went to the Massachusetts College of Art and besides being a dance teacher and performer, sells paintings of Latin Dancing. He works out of an art studio in Cambridge and continues to teach dance.

### **Itamar Sangiorgio**



Itamar Sangiorgio is from Minas Gerais near to Governador Valadares like many other local Brazilians. In his Urban Borderlands Paper, Danny Becker discusses the reasons why many Brazilians have come from this region. He writes, “Regardless, of all the theories used to trace migration from Governador Valadares to its source, the most popular revolves around that region’s vast mineral deposits” (22). After this initial move, many Brazilians who moved to America wanted to do so, because they had contacts in the Somerville area. As a child, Sangiorgio learned to dance samba as well as other kinds of Brazilian dance. He moved to the city of Resplendor when he was about fourteen years old, in order to attend high school in a bigger city. He continued to dance in parties, *carnaval* celebrations, and school activities. As a seventeen year old he began work as an assistant teacher and continued to teach math, physics, and chemistry, until he became the headmaster of the school seven years later. As a headmaster, he worked to bring cultural days to the school where dance was a key component. Three years after that, in 2001, Sangiorgio went to the United States to visit a friend and fell in love with the country. He



currently works as a cleaner for a local private school and plans to attend university once his English improves. Locally, Sangiorgio continues social dancing and frequents many clubs. He is well known in the Brazilian community as he participates in many community gatherings and samba parties. He and his wife Cheilhe welcomed their first son Christopher on November 28, 2008.

### **The Welcome Project Kids**



After speaking to kids at The Welcome Project, I found that many of them had dance backgrounds and asked if I could Interview some of them. I felt that the best setting to do this in was in a group interview so that I could get a variety of student and social dance perspectives. Therefore, I met the group at The Welcome Project on a Wednesday afternoon and talked with them. Due to the fact that this was a group interview and that the majority of students at the Welcome Project were under eighteen, I am not able to use their full names, but was able to obtain basic information about who they are. The group of students consisted of immigrants whose backgrounds were Brazilian, Haitian, El Salvadorian, Mexican, as well as others. Juana is from El Salvador and loves cumbia, which is a traditional Latin dance from her country. She was in a

performance group with girls at home, but since her move to the United States in 2004 has not really been dancing. Kathleen's parents are from El Salvador and she plays violin as a member of the high school student orchestra. Sonia moved to Worcester from Mexico seven years ago. She dances at home and at festivals for fun to South American music including Bachata and Merengue. (The kids tended to call Latin music that was in Spanish, Spanish music, which helped distinguish it from Brazilian music). Gina and her sister Katherine moved from Ecuador to the U.S two years ago. They are members of a familial, folkloric, Ecuadorian dance and music group. Katherine is also a member of the school dance club. Clivia is from Portugal and goes out to dance at local clubs. She usually dances with her Brazilian boyfriend and likes Spanish and Brazilian music. Also, Clivia likes to listen to Portuguese popular music as well as folkloric dance from her country. Luana dances sometimes, but just for fun in her room or with her friends. Rose likes hip-hop and reggae, and dances with her friends at parties. Fedelyne likes the same kind of music and dance as Rose. Jessica enjoys hip-hop dance and also dances traditional Haitian dances such as compa. She is the choreographer of praise dance for her church. Jessica also dances step. Rose and Fedelyne stated that they also liked Haitian dance. (Esther was not here at this point although later it became apparent that she liked similar music to them). Tailane is Brazilian and will move to anything with a beat and also dances choreography at church. Anny is from Brazil and is a competitive forro dancer. Forro is a very common partner dance from Brazil. She takes weekly classes and competes. Now she is in the process of a competition and is the second place finalist. This takes place at different venues around Somerville including Samba Bar. She also likes other Brazilian and Spanish rhythms including samba.

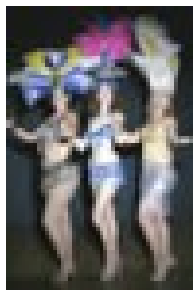
### **Namibia Lebron-Torres**



Namibia moved back and forth between Holyoke and Springfield Massachusetts where she has also gone to school for most of her life. Her mother is from Puerto Rico and dad was from Chicago. He was half Greek and half Puerto Rican. Lebron-Torres loves listening to music and seeing dance at family gatherings and holiday parrandas. A parranda is a traditional Puerto Rican Christmas Holiday festival in which the party moves from house to house the entire night and is filled music, dance, food, and friends. Lebron-Torres has gone to private schools throughout her life and there were only few kids at her school who were Latino. She felt that this prevented her from getting the cultural exposure that students at the local public schools got. It was not until she made a few Latino friends at high school that she started salsa dancing. She told me of how a new Venezuelan student joined her boarding school and she immediately went to him and asked him for lessons. After a three day crash course, they formed the Latino Cultural

Organization (LCO) at their school, where they taught dancing and made a performance group. As a student at Tufts University, Lebron-Torres studies anthropology and biochemistry. She is currently the Vice President of Tufts student group La Salsa, where she teaches, choreographs, performs, and organizes outings to local salsa clubs. Lebron-Torres is also an RA and often encourages and teaches salsa events on campus.

### **Rachel Werkman**



Rachel Werkman (featured in the center) is from Boulder, Colorado. She studied theater at New York University and lived in New York City for three years. Since her graduation from NYU, Werkman has lived in Cambridge and teaches at Harvard University. Her interest in samba dancing was sparked by her first trip to Brazil in 2000. Immediately upon returning to the United States, she enrolled in a samba class for adults at the Boston Center for Adult Education. She has performed and been very involved with the Brazilian Cultural Center of New England for about five years. The BCCNE Company, Samba Tremeterra, performs at a variety of events, clubs, and venues both in Somerville and the rest of Massachusetts. She has also traveled to do shows throughout the Northeast.

### **Jennifer Earls**



Jennifer Earls grew up in Wilmington, MA where she attended public school. She then studied at Tufts University where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with minors in Communications & Media Studies, and Entrepreneurial Leadership. Earls graduated from Tufts in May 2008, and now works in as a Marketing Specialist at a workforce management software company called Kronos. Earls started dancing at age 4, learning tap, ballet, and jazz at local studios. In college, Earls ventured to hip hop, ballroom, and salsa. At Tufts University, Earls was the president of student group La Salsa and performance group choreographer. Currently, Jen is a member of a Boston area salsa dancing group called Metamovements. With Metamovements Earls organizes events, takes lessons, teaches, and is a member of the performance group. She assists teaching at Metamovements' Sunday salsa classes at the Cambridge YWCA and at the Wednesday salsa classes at a Boston bar, An Tua Nua's.

## **Part 1: The Somerville Community**

When describing Somerville, it is important to first examine the scenery and physical space in order to see how they contribute to positive and negative aspects of dance connections. Walking around Somerville gave me good insight into how the landscape affects the dancing and social activities of the inhabitants. The spaces and venues I saw including housing, stores, and dance clubs allowed me to better understand how they were used by the people. When I explored the city, I was surprised to find such a large number of Brazilian owned businesses. Union Square, which I explored quite a bit, is a location where about five different streets intersect and walking down the streets reveals many things about the usage of the space. The streets are filled with small businesses, insurance agencies, car dealerships, hair salons, restaurants, alteration stores. Closer to the hub of Union Square there are more businesses and stores that would be used for everyday life needs, demonstrating that locals participate in activities in a variety of places in the area. The stores are all relatively small and the windows tend to advertise subtly and in small writing. In every few windows there is a Brazilian flag posted or bright yellows and greens in the signage. Upon further examination it becomes apparent that though the words in the windows are in both English and Portuguese, the majority are in Portuguese. There are signs informing the outside that Portuguese is spoken inside. Amongst the Brazilian owned locations, there are also smatterings of Italian, Chinese, Mexican, and Peruvian restaurants and businesses. Although there are other types of people and immigrants living and working in Somerville, most are Brazilian.

As one walks away from central locations such as Union Square, the space and atmosphere change. Long streets lead away from the center of the town. One day, I walked straight away from Union Square in order to find a well known dancing club called Samba Bar. It was about a fifteen minute walk from the square and as I walked, stores became sparse. During this walk, I did not see many people and the small buildings that lined the way gave me an initial sense that the area was peaceful, but slightly unkempt and unexplored.

Soon I saw the signs for Samba Bar which was unfortunately closed and when open, only for people who were over twenty one. However, I did make a discovery as I tried to read the numerous Brazilian signs. Both samba and forro (pronounced foe-hoe), were key dances of the club. This was my first clue that forro dancing was a major form of dance in the Somerville community. Several of my narrators discussed the fact that forro was extremely common in Brazil and with many Somerville Brazilians. When I spoke with people on the street and my narrators, Itamar Sangiorgio, Rachel Werkman, and the kids from The Welcome Project, it became apparent that this was a key location for their dance interactions. Samba Bar is a dance club located at 608 Somerville Avenue and is open every night of the week and serves drinks and supports a variety of dance performances. This is one of the main clubs that my narrators frequented and talked about. Dance clubs like this one are settings in which people socially dance with one another to music chosen by DJ's and to live music (Samba Bar). Samba Bar serves the Brazilian community and this becomes even more apparent, when looking at the Portuguese-only website. On the way back from this club, I stopped into a grocery store to try to find contacts and I was amazed by the food products. The variety of Brazilian

and South American food options and patrons indicated that the grocery store was a cultural hub for locals.

Walking about ten minutes in the opposite direction from Union Square in Somerville one will see a similar site. McGrath Highway runs above Washington Street where there is a lot more car traffic, but there is also a variety of stores. Café Belo, located at 120 Washington Street, is another restaurant and dance venue that locals told me to go to. When I arrived at Café Belo, I was somewhat confused by the setting as I realized that it was a restaurant rather than a night club like the Samba Bar. At this location, Brazilians come to eat and socially interact with one another. Music and dance also take place, but at later times of the day.

What my experience in Somerville tells me about dance is also important to the specific place and locations. Everyone who I contacted and asked for directions knew to direct me towards Samba Bar and Café Belo. Although many people did not speak English, the fact that they were able to relay the specific locations of these in the city says a lot about their presence and influence on the people. The community functions well in the space in which it is located, with people engaged in walking shopping and dancing in their environment.

In speaking with Itamar Sangiorgio and students at The Welcome Project, it became apparent that space and geography of Somerville are crucial to their dancing experiences. Both cited clubs and restaurants such as Samba Bar, Café Belo, Club Lido, and the Holiday Inn as key locations where they dance. At the same time however, their housing is also crucial to their dance experience. When I went into Itamar's home, which is located right outside of Somerville, he told me how he has many dance celebrations at his



home where friends and family come to join in. The girls at The Welcome Project also told me how they danced in their homes and that people who lived in nearby to each other, particularly those who lived in the Mystic Public Housing Development, had very good access to gatherings.

Somerville appears to be a thriving community full of a variety of activities. At the same time however, Somerville is situated around a series of long roads and highways and getting to locations requires access to some form of transportation. Walking is an option for people who live close to dance studios and clubs, however not everyone does, and cold snowy weather makes it a less desirable option. Transportation by the subway is limited as there are only a few stops in Somerville. People can use the public bus system but buses present the same challenge in Somerville that they do in almost every city: they do not stop everywhere and waiting for them can often take a while. In Somerville, where temperatures fall below freezing, waiting for a bus is an undesirable situation.

In further examining the physical setting of Somerville and what makes it more or less accessible to dancers, it is important to situate it in the rest of Massachusetts. Somerville is surrounded by the other cities of Everett, Medford, Arlington, Cambridge, and Boston. When speaking with all of my contacts and when trying to get information about Somerville, everyone discussed the lack of clear boundaries of the city. People, particularly dance teachers Michelle Rubiera and Andres Giraldo, had loose connections to the city of Somerville and considered it to be one place of many where they worked. Rubiera teaches salsa at the Cambridge Health Alliance's Baila Cardio: Latin Dance for Fitness on Cross St. where she uses her nursing and professional dancing background to help improve the physical fitness of Latinos in the area. I too am a dance teacher for this

program and although we teach on different nights, what she says about Somerville rings true to my experience as well. She does not feel as though there is specifically anything unique to this location that separates it from other venues in Massachusetts. Rubiera does believe that the students are a combination of Latino, Caucasians, and Brazilians, but does not see this demographic as particularly unique to Somerville. She did cite the Brazilian influence as a key difference in Somerville and the social dance experience. Both she and Itamar mentioned how the permits that the city of Somerville gives prohibit night clubs to be open past 1:30 am. Itamar said that this is a cultural problem as Brazilians are accustomed to partying all night long and the strict regulations prevented a significant amount of dancing.

Andres Giraldo, who taught dancing at local bar and restaurant, Johnny D's in Somerville for seven years until the new owner recently cancelled the weekly Latin night, believes that its location in Davis Square makes it more accessible to salsa dancers who can use the subway, and to Tufts University students who are over twenty one. Giraldo said that the salsa community, which includes a variety of teachers, students, and social dancers, is not really present in Somerville. Salsa in Boston is popular at night clubs and lessons are available from a variety of dance groups and companies. Giraldo believes that there probably is a combination of locals and Boston salsa dancers who just follow the clubs Johnny D's and The Somerville City Club Salsa. His opinion is that the borders of Somerville are not very significant to his role as a salsa instructor as his students follow him no matter where he is located and he does not see many Brazilians at the salsa events anyway. In speaking with several narrators, I found that language and cultural barriers between Brazilians and other South Americans prevented them from socializing with

each other. Although all of the people who I spoke to dance Latin styles, the differences in their backgrounds were immense.

I found the unclear borders to be a common theme throughout my interviews and fieldwork as every time I asked for Somerville dancers, studios, clubs, teachers, and performers, I was pushed towards Cambridge and Boston. In Cambridge, for example, I came in contact with the Dance Complex, which is a fantastic studio that has a great variety of dance styles including, samba, capoeira, flamenco, and Haitian dance. A dance studio is different from a dance club in that it is designed to teach styles to patrons and usually involves a one hour class. A club, like Samba Bar, is designed for social interaction and courtship and often involves food and alcohol. In speaking with people there, it was clear that although the venue is technically located in Cambridge, many from Somerville and other cities frequented the complex which was targeted to a variety of different dancers. Clubs like Samba Bar, Club Lido, and Café Belo were mentioned to me and used by the Brazilians I interviewed, but were not frequented by non-Brazilian narrators. The Dance Complex was targeted to a larger variety of people as their classes involved styles from many countries and was located near Harvard University where there is good access for students, professors, and others living in the area. Rachel Werkman, who I initially met at the Dance Complex, after she had just assisted with a Samba dance class, also mentioned the porous borders of Somerville. She performed in Somerville just as she did in Cambridge, and did not feel that the city boundaries were boundaries to the dance communities.

## **Part 2: Dance Landscape**

After touring through Somerville, I found a many types of dance venues in the area and in nearby locations. I believe that there are two main categories for types of movement and that there are both ‘structured’ and ‘unstructured’ venues of dance. When I tried contacting people, I was constantly given information regarding structured forms of dance including names of professionals, studios, and clubs. These types of activities often involve paid teaching events or paying to get access to these events. Venues include Samba Bar, Café Belo, Dance Complex, Somerville City Club Salsa, Johnny D’s, and Baila Cardio: Latin Dance for Fitness. Structured dance circles are very important in Somerville, although they are not unique to the city. In these forms of dance venues there is often a variety of different crowds and types of people. For example, according to Andres Giraldo, Caucasians are more likely to partake in structured venues rather than unstructured ones. He believed that they were more willing to try something new and did not mind being beginners. Latinos who grow up dancing and with music do not tend to pay for lessons, because they were expected to already know how to dance. Also, Itamar Sangiorgio and The Welcome Project kids mentioned that Brazilians were more common at clubs that played their kinds of music, and Namibia Lebron- Torres discussed how she did not see them at salsa venues. The dance professionals who I interviewed felt that Professional dance teachers are also more likely to be found teaching and involving

themselves in activities related to these types of structured programs Dance professionals, like Rachel Werkmen, often teach, perform and learn the technique of their styles.

Andres Giraldo and Michelle Rubiera professional dance teachers were the first two people who I interviewed. Rubiera made an impact on Somerville through her work at the Cambridge Health Alliance through the Somerville City initiative, Shape Up Somerville. At this program, which I helped start and continue to teach at, Rubiera teaches a cardio-salsa class in order to help combat obesity. Last semester all of the students were Latinos: El Salvadorians, Ecuadorians, and Brazilians. Rubiera specifically selected Latin dance music and targeted it towards the Latino backgrounds of the majority of the students. As a nurse and dancer, Rubiera has worked for several programs that use cultural backgrounds in order to implement effective programs. Rubiera feels that in order to truly hit a target population, it is necessary to get an insiders perspective of the community and try to use their unique backgrounds to implement programs. At the program this semester, the majority of students were Caucasian. This was an interesting change from last semester as the people who came were different then before. We assumed this change was due to marketing in more Caucasians newspapers rather than through local contacts as was the case last semester. One of the key people who was initially involved in the program got many of his Brazilian and Latino patients interested in the class, but was unfortunately unable to help during the second session of the program. Therefore there was less word of mouth spread in those communities. Students who took this semester long course were required to pay for the series of lessons at an extremely discounted price of ten dollars. This discount was implemented so that low-

income Latinos would be easily encouraged to participate, however low cost enticed others as well.

Andres Giraldo is one of the best examples of a professional teacher who works in Somerville and Boston. He is perhaps the most involved salsa teacher in Somerville. People who went to Johnny D's where he worked until recently, frequented the restaurant and bar as they learned to dance. The location and price made it affordable and convenient to both outsiders and locals. However he could not distinguish between the two. An interesting aspect of the Latin Night at this restaurant was the decision by the new organizers to stop both the live band and salsa lessons from Giraldo. Giraldo stated that the owners did not see it as a successful event as the number of people who came often fluctuated. He did not seem too happy about this decision as he believed that it was a successful venue and the problem had more to do with marketing than a dislike of salsa dancing.

The new Somerville City Club Salsa, which started in September 2008, is a club space that is rented by Salsa Boston three Thursdays of the month. Giraldo has been DJing there since the start of the salsa night. I decided to go there as part of my project research, because it was an all ages salsa, merengue, and bachata dance club, I could enter. On opening night this structured dance venue, which had a lot of social dancing, was extremely successful. I spoke with Giraldo about specifically why the club had decided to open in Somerville and how successful he thought it was. His response was that the organizers chose the location because of the large amount of space necessary for dancing and low rent. He also stated that it was successful, but that it was a common trend for an opening to be good and for attendance to trail down later. Giraldo said that it

would be a while before he and his coworkers were sure about the true success of the venue and how salsa frequenters and locals found it.

I was directed to both Rubiera and Giraldo through my own work and through my friend and salsa performer Jennifer Earls. In speaking with these dancers about their work, it became clear to me that salsa was a lot more common to Boston. These narrators did not feel as though there was a significant amount of Latin dance related activities in Somerville and they believed that Boston was the key location for those forms of movement. Boston is a central area and the major city in Massachusetts. This allows a lot of people access to a variety of activities and dance and night-life opportunities. Although a lot of people live in Boston, it is not strictly residential and there is a lot going on during the evenings.

The different narrators that I spoke with had different ways of categorizing Latin dance. Rubiera and Giraldo discussed salsa, bachata, meringue, and cumbia as some of the forms of Latin dance styles that they partook in. Others, such as my Brazilian narrators, discussed samba and forro. Although all tend to be lumped under the term Latin dance, they are very unique and very different for people from different countries.

It became apparent that organized dance venues and studios were not as common in Somerville as they were in Cambridge and Boston. In my search I only found one dance studio in Somerville, called The Tango Society of Boston. I was not able to get in contact with this studio as it was closed and I was unable to reach it on the phone. I would have liked to speak with the studio about business in Somerville, as I did not hear of any other studios. As a dancer myself, I have found that people who frequent dance

studios tend to be middle aged affluent people who can afford the luxury of dance lessons. Private lessons can cost anywhere from fifty to eighty dollars and group classes tend to cost about fifteen dollars. Perhaps the lack of studios in Somerville is telling of the socio-economic status of the residents and lack of business that a potential studio would have. Rent costs could be too expensive. In order to answer this question, further research should be done. Contact with the Tango studio should shed some light on the studio situation in Somerville. In hypothesizing the reasons why the number of Somerville's dance venues is small in comparison to places like Boston, I would first mention that Boston's size and location as an urban city makes it a key place for musical and dance activity. Therefore, the likelihood of finding significant urban dance venues outside of the city center, where many businesses and schools are located, seems pretty small. The fact that there are a variety of dance activities in Somerville shows how integral it is to the community. However, as a poorer community, Somerville's populace cannot partake in the structured costly dance scene so prominent in Cambridge.

As an immigrant city, Somerville has a lot of people who are attempting to get by for the first time in a foreign city. According to the Somerville Community Profile 2008, "Low-income people in Somerville are more likely than most to be recent immigrants, and immigrants are more likely to live in poverty" (CAAS 1). Although Somerville has a prominent, but more hidden dance scene, economics are likely to affect dancing activities. These people are less likely to have the time or the resources to participate in dance studios or social clubs where they have to pay money. However, this does not stop people from dancing as it is part of many of their cultures. According to the Somerville people who I interviewed, many dance, however they do so more through unstructured



forms of dance such as through family, parties, church, and community celebrations. After interviewing Rubiera and Giraldo, I realized that the information that they had given me did not incorporate the entire Somerville community and that I needed to find local social dancers to see what was happening in these circuits.

The moment I spoke with social samba dancer, Itamar Sangiorgio, on the phone, I found that he was an extremely delightful and enthusiastic personality. From him, I learned tremendous amounts about the social scene in Somerville as well as Brazil. (SEE APPENDIX FOR MORE ABOUT ITAMAR). Sangiorgio enlightened me to the situation that social dancing was common to Brazilians in Somerville and that this played an important role in maintaining relations between community members. Unstructured dance takes place in Somerville at peoples homes. For example, when Sangiorgio celebrates his birthday or a Brazilian holiday friends and family all gather at his house to dance samba. It also became clear from my discussion with him that the church played a key role in creating places and events for Brazilians to dance. He discussed a religious festival, fiestas juninas, which occurs between June and July and is a large Brazilian party. Sangiorgio has been to many of the local Brazilian clubs, however, he does not believe that they truly mirror the clubs in Brazil, because he is accustomed to partying from six pm to six am and Somerville does not allow for this type of gathering. I also spoke to one of my Brazilian dance students from the Cambridge Health Alliance who discussed with me how local churches organize large dance parties for all Brazilian holidays and for various celebrations. Itamar revealed that there are local celebrations in which Brazilians took part as well as more celebrated events such as Brazilian Day and

September seventh, in which most Brazilians make their way up to New York to dance samba and celebrate their independence. Itamar gave me great insight into local social dance costumes which was further confirmed by the interview that I had with the students at The Welcome Project who stated that they participated in many similar events.

In the discussion with the students, I learned that all but one of the students danced and enjoyed dancing. The majority of them socially danced in their homes, with friends, and at parties. The students were a mix of Brazilian, Haitian, El Salvadorian, Mexican, Ecuadorian, and Portuguese students and every single one of them was either an immigrant or first generation American (CAAS 5). These students all went to Somerville High School. They spoke with me about how they danced constantly in situations including weddings, church, family gatherings, school activities, clubs, professional groups, and competitions. The one student who was a competitive forro dancer informed me of an entirely new aspect of this project and discussed how the competition took place at such venues as Samba Bar. This group was certainly a unique and eclectic mix of young women. Additional research could be done with students in the future as I was unable to speak with all of the students to the extent that I would have wanted. It demonstrated to me was just how common dancing is in their lives and social settings. I also inquired of them if their experiences were common to Somerville or the same as in other locations in Massachusetts and what aspects of their community made it easier for them to dance so often. The students responded that the number of immigrants, particularly Brazilian, Haitian, and El Salvadorian, in the community make it possible for dance to occur at numerous events. The large numbers of country men and women provide social groups for the various dance styles to take place. What is also unique to

Somerville and the dance situation of these students is that some are dancing traditional dances from their countries such as samba and forro from Brazil, compa and reggae from Haiti, and bachata and merengue from the Dominican Republic along with traditional hip-hop and American teenager styles of dance. This mix was really interesting to me as it showed how the people who lived in Somerville were creating their own dance activities by producing the styles of their country and at the same time fusing it with each other's styles.

Another aspect of the dance scene in Somerville that I found crucially important to this project is the role that Tufts University plays in the dance scene. My own experience as Latin dancer at Somerville gives me a lot of insight into the dance scene at Tufts and the connection between students and locals. The main activity of Latin dance at Tufts University is the salsa class and performance group called La Salsa. Jennifer Earls, Namibia Lebron-Torres, and I have all been on the board of the club, performance choreographers, and teachers. There are many other dance groups on campus and several of them have Latin dancing elements. Most notable of these groups is the Spirit of Color, a hip-hop performance group and the Ballroom and Latin dance competition group, both of which I participate in. Spirit of Color often has Latin movements. The Tufts Ballroom team teaches a variety of Latin dances including cha-cha, samba, and tango and emphasizes a structured technical style. Ballroom Latin dances have South American and European backgrounds. La Salsa distinguishes itself from the other two because of its desire to bring club members to salsa venues in the community. I felt that interviewing both Namibia and Jen would give me better insight into the connection between Somerville and Tufts Latin dance community.

Namibia spoke with me about how La Salsa was a way for students of different backgrounds and interests to bond on a similar level. As an RA who assists new students acclimate to Tufts, she tries to get them involved in a variety of salsa outings as well, because of the social aspects of it. Namibia also discussed how Tufts La Salsa members generally went to Boston and Cambridge to frequent dance clubs and did not feel a strong connection with Somerville. She discussed the Somerville City Club Salsa, which is the only salsa club she has been to in Somerville, and how it was very fun, but hard to get to. The lack of transportation was the main problem with this venue as she required a car to get there which she saw as a challenge with a lot of Somerville and Tufts relations. Namibia stated that she wished the Tufts Latin dance students and Somerville Latin dancers communicated more, however she also saw language barriers and age limits in Brazilian clubs as challenges that separated the college campus from the city.

### **Part 3: Reasons Why Somerville Dances**

Dancing is not only a common form of community building between people who are dissimilar, but is also a key mode of ethnic connection for Brazilians and other Latino immigrants in Somerville. People in Somerville come together over their shared histories, traditions, and transnational experiences. They build and maintain community through the various social venues, church activities, and festivals that are offered by Brazilians and various other Latinos and Haitians. In speaking with students at The Welcome Project, I went around the group and asked them what the main reason they danced was. They said a great variety of things including that it is “from my country”, it is “a language between you and your culture”, and “when you see it and see people from your country you get emotional”. Nostalgia and cultural connection are common themes in what the students said and was telling of the fact that Somerville citizens of all age dance in order to connect with each other. They also dance to retain a connection to their homeland and to build bonds with people in their communities. I believe that a key reason for the numerous dance activities in Somerville is the Somerville Brazilians and their desire to maintain a relationship with their homeland. When I spoke with Itamar, he discussed the various differences between Brazil and Somerville and cited culture, people, and opportunities as things that were different. When I asked Itamar about dancing in Somerville and in Brazil, he brought up many similarities and differences and seemed to express nostalgia for the constant samba atmosphere of his homeland.

In Brazil, samba and forro are extremely popular and are constantly part of daily life. Itamar discussed the *carnaval* culture and how key events in Brazilian life revolve around dance. In the United States he tries to maintain those activities, but believes that dance is much more common and exciting in Brazil. In Somerville, Brazilians dance samba at all of their community events and during the traditional times of the Brazilian calendar. However, the communities, early closing venues, and lack of nation wide carnivals and celebrations make it extremely different. There are a lot of differences and one of the main ones is the *carnaval* celebration that takes place in Somerville. In Somerville people celebrate this in clubs, houses, and other venues and taking joy in this party is extremely important for them. However, this celebration is completely different in Brazil, where *carnaval* involves street parades, partying of the entire country, and national samba dance competitions. This is something that Itamar is certainly nostalgic for as he expressed his love for samba. Although he loves the United States he wishes that samba were danced all of the time in Somerville.

Another main reason why the narrators loved Latin dance was simply because it is fun. Sangiorgio could not express more how much fun samba was and how much he and everyone who danced it enjoyed it and could do it. Others including Earls and Lebron-Torres talked about how it was entertaining and a fantastic way to socialize. The freedom that salsa dancing allows gives them both the opportunity to let loose and enjoy life. It is also a common way of courtship and a lot of flirtation that takes place in the Latin dances is fun. Earls says, "I couldn't imagine my life with out dance". As shown by Earls, Latin dance is part of who she is and what makes her unique as an individual. Giraldo also

expressed that many of his students danced because of their desire to try something new and have fun.

At the same time that Latin dancing is fun to Somerville dancers, it also is a way for them to express their emotions and relieve stress. Dance allows for mental freedom and relieves the body. Students at The Welcome Project said to me about dance, “it helps express and improve your mood” and to “get my mind off of stuff”. These students expressed a common theme that many feel. Latin dance allows for emotional healing and mental stability. Hanna writes, “The physical, affective, and cognitive properties of dance... suggest its potential in promoting health and healing” (207). Dancing affects a number of the Somerville community members who I spoke with in the same way in that they allow for a variety of health treatments. While people are dancing salsa, samba, merengue, bachata, and other forms of dance, the music styles and movement quality allow for release of tension and the excitement the experience puts people in an elated emotional state. Namibia Lebron-Torres also discussed how dance allowed for her emotional expression and allowed her to “express her sensuality”.

Rachel Werkman, discussed how part of her reason for learning samba dancing was to overcome her insecurities. She writes:

I feel that our samba community is very accepting. That’s one of the strongest reasons that I was able to overcome my self-consciousness in dance. The BCCNE, when it was open, was a very supportive environment that I felt was free of judgment. This is very integral to samba (I feel) because the core of the music

and dance is jubilation and exuberance and self expression. I personally feel very welcomed in the community.

Here, Werkman was able to cope with her insecurities and challenge herself to overcome hindrances. The Somerville and Cambridge communities were welcoming to her, which allowed her to thrive as a dancer and grow as a person.

Somerville artists that I spoke with all expressed the uncanny ability of Latin dance to improve their mental well being and emotional health. Another key aspect of Latin dancing is its ability to promote physical health. People dance for exercise and as a fun way to burn some calories. People's desire to dance because of physical health is why artists like Michelle Rubiera have a niche in the local Somerville community. In a survey conducted the Baila Cardio: Latin Dance for Fitness program, students cited their desire to get into better shape, try something, new and have fun as main reasons for their interest in salsa and merengue dance (CHA). The program that I helped start was designed to target Somerville community members who wanted to get in better shape, but did not want to exercise in a gym. Latin dance is a fun way to move and forget about traditional gym activities that are dreaded by many desiring to lose weight.

Hamera discusses how all modes of dance offer foundations to dancers and modes of communication between them. In structured dance forms, dancers come together and bond through their shared passion for dance. The events they plan, teach, and attend together allow them to bond. Even the ritualized actions of applying make-up together for a show or celebrating a job well done can bring a group of non similar people together. Both Lebron-Torres and Earls discussed how this was the case with dancing at Tufts



University. Lebron-Torres sees La Salsa was a compilation of people from different backgrounds whose shared interests in salsa allowed them to become friends. She also met her boyfriend through dancing at Tufts La Salsa. Their shared passion for dance gave them a common ground and mode of communication. These examples demonstrate that there are a number of reasons why Somerville residents and immigrants partake in dancing activities.

## **Final Remarks**

The results of this project were extremely valuable to me as a Latin dancer and anthropologist. My desire to learn more about my passions was certainly quelled by the research and has also left me wanting to learn more about dance and Somerville. I see many areas of interest which I would like to examine further. Perhaps, the next person who looks into Latin dance in Somerville will be able to use my work as a foundation for their own. I would like to have spoken with more people of varying races, because I interviewed Caucasians and Latinos who were Brazilian, Dominican, Columbian, and Puerto Rican. It was certainly a diverse group and adding in The Welcome Project kids, who were from an even larger variety of backgrounds, made for a nice mix. Further research on the local clubs and studios would also be a valuable place to examine in order to better understand the local dance scene. It is also important to note that although my narrators discussed dance as an outlet for their expression, it is also a profession. Research on the financial aspect of Latin dance in Somerville would be a valuable next step.

My main criticism of the Latin dancers and Somerville as a whole is that the connection between all types of Latin dance lovers is small. For example, the samba dancing Brazilians and the salsa dancing professionals knew nothing about the other and did not participate in the other style or with the other group. It is true that these styles and types of people are different and that connecting them through a similarity might be a

little too thin, however it is unfortunate that people who share such amazing and similar interests do not connect in a deeper way. From my discussion about this project with friends and classmates, I realized that the majority of Tufts students unfortunately have little clue about the people living in Somerville and immense artistic productions taking place only a few minutes away from them. As Lebron-Torres said, lack of connection between Tufts and Somerville is mostly a challenge of space and location as the majority of university students do not have access to a car and their lives are limited to campus and locations that they can get to on the Subway. This lack of connection between Somerville residents and lack of subway access are two notable challenges to the dance scene in the city. People of different backgrounds who partake in various forms of Latin dance are not all connected together as they have unique and different backgrounds. Social Brazilian dancers and Professional salsa instructors who I spoke with were largely unaware of the other groups' activities. This speaks to their differences and to connections between people in Somerville as a whole. I have already begun to tell people about the rich culture outside, in Somerville, and hope that this project will be a good resource for both outsiders and Tufts University students to learn about the people and productions taking place.

Cultural and language barriers, which I only really experienced while I was walking around and speaking with Brazilians, were also perhaps the most rewarding part of the project. It was frustrating at times, but I really enjoyed the feeling of being somewhere entirely different. I liked the challenge of having to negotiate language and cultural understandings and was excited to discover how little I knew about where I lived. The most rewarding conclusion of my research was to see that although there were space,

economic, and language barriers in Somerville, immigrants and locals dance. Although I only had a few narrators and what they said is not inclusive of the entire Somerville experience, my most exciting discoveries about Somerville was that dance was a key part of the majority of people's lives. Latin dances brought people from many diverse backgrounds and histories together to share in a similar passion and community. The students at The Welcome Project were the most unified example of people I interviewed, as all discussed that they enjoyed watching each other's styles. If this camaraderie translated to more of the community I think it would benefit Somerville as a whole. It would also be nice to see more connections between Tufts University and the outside Somerville dancers. My hope is that with this project, students and outsiders will be able to get a better understanding of the amazing Latin dancing opportunities that Somerville has to offer.

The reasons that they danced were immense as many Brazilians like Sangiorgio socially partake in samba, forro, and others in order to stay connected to their homeland and to relate to other Somerville Brazilians. Others like Lebron-Torres used dances such as salsa, merengue, and bachata to express their emotions and connect with fellow students and Latinos. Dance is a central part of the social and cultural lives of many Somerville residents and although it does not unite all people, it brings fulfillment to each individual who partakes in it.

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## **Appendix:**

### **Artist Profile: Itamar Sangiorgio**

Itamar Sangiorgio was born July 15, 1973 and is from Minas Gerais near to Governador Valadares like many other local Brazilians. As a child he loved to dance samba and learned in school and in the streets with other kids. Itamar always listened to music and watched videocassettes to learn. He said that his family did not dance, but that a lot of friends danced samba, forro, and pagode. Sangiorgio explained that Catholicism dominated the country. While he was growing up and still today, there is a conflict between the church and samba, as the sexuality that dance portrays is not welcome in the church. Itamar believes that 30-40 percent of Brazilians are very Catholic and that they do not approve of dancing samba or things like night clubs, alcohol and cigarettes. Sangiorgio's parents were Christian and they did not dance. However, Itamar expressed extreme gratitude for their open-minds and allowing him to dance.

When Sangiorgio was about fourteen years old, he moved to a larger city, Resplendor, to attend high school. At school Itamar also danced in group events that

promoted different ethnic groups in the country. For example, the schools would do traditional Portuguese and Italian dances along with samba and forró. Itamar's grandparents are from Italy and he believes that they came over along with many other Europeans during the Second World War and that is why the schools act out their dance forms. Dance was also taught during 'educación física' class at school. As a child, Itamar, like many of his Brazilian friends, played football and loves the game, but not as much as samba.

At school Sangiorgio excelled in math, chemistry, biology and physics. In 1991, at the age of seventeen, Itamar became a teacher. He taught for about 7-8 years before becoming the headmaster of the school. Itamar Sangiorgio worked as a headmaster from 1997-2000. As a teacher and headmaster, he helped organize folkloric days in which different ethnic groups were represented with different food, costumes, and dance. In 1995, Itamar married his first wife, a former student. Throughout his life, samba has always played a key role in his development as a fun person and in his social activities. Sangiorgio described Brazilian parties that he grew up taking part in and how they included dance, food, decoration and music. He and his friends went to many night clubs and parties and it was a key part of his community.

Itamar also has been very involved with the most famous aspect of Latin dancing in Brazil, the *carnaval*. He discussed how *carnaval* was a country wide festival and street parade and that he had participated in the celebrations every year. We talked a little bit about the history of samba and reasons why people dance it. Itamar then talked about how samba originally came from African people because they left their country to work hard and that they needed jobs. Here he struggled with the words, but once I mentioned



slavery, he said that it was from them because they had to “sacrifice for their life”. Africans did not come to Brazil voluntarily to get good jobs, but were captured and made to live as slaves. Sangiorgio’s discussion of slavery is a little hard to understand and I am uncertain whether or not he knew the full slave history of the black Brazilians. The main reason he believed that people danced samba was because Brazilians were trying to have fun or as he put it “to get funny”. Sangiorgio said that Brazilians like fun things and that they like “too much noise” (in a good way). *Carnaval* involves loud instruments and elaborate costumes. He said that samba does not really mean anything to the people and that its just fun and that most do not know that it is from slave people. He said, “Samba is a party and anyone can do”. Literature cited in my paper show how Itamar’s sentiments are not uncommon and that not acknowledging the racial history of the dance is superficially homogenizing.

In discussing dance in Brazil further, Itamar talked about forro. Forro is another common dance that many people like and it involves the accordion. It is from Bahia region and in the Northeast of the country. Sangiorgio said that there are also many types of forro and the most recent one is *carnaval* influenced and is faster. He said that many people enjoy forro, as it is less energetic and easier for less active people to do. He clarified pagode, which is another type of dance that he had mentioned earlier. He said that it was his favorite style and the most popular kind of samba. Further questioning led to the discovery that there are ten types of samba and that they varied by instrument, sound, speed and topic. Itamar mentioned that the songs and movements reflect a story about things like poor people, politics, or other happenings. He said that Brazilians can

not really tell them apart although they know that there are differences. The most well known are forms of samba are *enredo* and *pegode*.

Itamar Sangiorgio continued his discussion of samba and mentioned samba schools in Brazil. People in these schools pay to be a member and join because they love to dance. The students work hard for fun and to improve their skills. Each year during *carnaval*, the samba schools compete to see who the best is. This is very common in Rio and Sao Paulo, but there were no samba schools where Itamar grew up. The schools compete with each other on the streets and 5-10 judges rank them on a set of criteria and give out points. It is very important to be the winner and Sangiorgio has watched these competitions many times in person, on TV, and on the internet.

At the age of twenty one, Sangiorgio came to visit a friend in the United States for about 40 days during a school break. He loved the country so much he extended his visa in order to stay longer. He was in the country for a year and then his now ex-wife joined him. The two separated and he married his second wife Cheilhe, who was also his ex-student and had been a classmate of his first wife. Cheilhe had also moved to Somerville and that is where the two of them re-met. Their first child, Christopher, was born on Friday November 28, 2008. Itamar came to the US, because he believes that there are more financial and social opportunities and rights are more respected here. He did say that it was hard because of language and different habits and that he had to exchange some of his customs. For example, he said that people in the US are more respectful to everyone, and that people are not as polite and do not respect adults in Brazil. He moved to Cambridge specifically, because his friend lived in the area and because he knew of

many Brazilians came to Somerville, Everett, Cambridge, Arlington and Framingham. He believes that the community is good and strong, because there are so many people who speak the same language and are used to the same customs. The community has made the transition more comfortable for him.

Sangiorgio works as a cleaner for a private school and has done so since he arrived to the United States in 2001. He enjoys his job, but his plans are to go to school for two years of college to compliment what he learned from his schooling at home. He is waiting until his English improves and is saving money. Sangiorgio's dream is to complete school and continue to work and live in America. Sangiorgio discussed the dancing communities in Somerville and Cambridge and he said that they are very similar. According to Sangiorgio, Brazilians dance mostly forro in Somerville and Cambridge. Forro is the most common Brazilian dance and samba is danced more of the time of *carnival* and party times. Local Brazilians, including Sangiorgio, dance forro in night clubs and Brazilian bars like the Holiday Inn, Samba Bar, and Club Lido. He likes forro and samba, but prefers dance in Brazil, because there are not as many time limitations. He said that everyone at home would dance straight from 6pm to 6am and in Somerville night clubs close at 1:30. Sangiorgio said that there are some classes that teach Brazilian dance in Somerville, but most just dance for fun and because it is good for your mind to relax, have fun, and relieve stress. Sangiorgio also mentioned that there was no difference in the reasons people dance here and in Brazil.

Sangiorgio also said that there is a strong community because of local churches. There is a well known local festival called fiestas juninas which is put on by the churches

in June and July about St. Antonio, St. George and St. Peter. This is a very big public party with a lot of “dance, music and ornamentation”. Itamar also talked about other yearly parties including a cowboy/girl party in August and September, and Brazilian Day which takes place in New York during Brazil’s independence holiday in the first week of September. *Carnaval* is celebrated in a different way and is mostly celebrated in dance clubs in February/March. Itamar participates in all of these events and also dances samba at home during birthday parties, Christmas, and when his friends are over. Itamar says that there are samba classes here, but there are no samba schools that compete in a large celebration.

Itamar also mentioned capoeira, a martial art and dance style, and how it is also common in the local area. Fellow classmate, Namibia Lebron-Torres did her research on capoeira in Brazil and found it to be an important aspect of the Brazilian community in Somerville. Capoeira also comes from Africans and although he enjoys watching it, he does not like to dance it because it is not as fun as samba and is more choreographed. He said that many Brazilians feel the same way as him and that they really enjoy samba, because it is a party dance. Sangiorgio finished by saying how great samba is and that he would love to help people to dance and that it is “not easy to learn but everyone can do and try”. Samba is truly a passion for him and his experience in Somerville and in Brazil as a dancer is telling of both of their communities. Itamar is an extremely enthusiastic individual whose knowledge and passion for samba greatly enhanced this project. This summary of his life as an artist stems from the interview that I had with him and I am very thankful for the insight that his openness afforded me.

