

Choreographing National Identity
The Symbolic Journey of Samba and Tango

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Introduction

Argentina and Brazil have each used their self-proclaimed national dances, tango and samba, to cultivate a sense of national unity. These dances' consolidated positions as national iconic figures allowed for this cultivation. However, tango and samba were not born national icons; the final products of a hidden history of appropriation and repression, these dances rose from their scorned societal positions to eventually become national symbols (Garramuño 2006). By what processes did they come to define their respective nations? This paper identifies these processes, separating them into two main stages. The first stage illuminates the parallel historical pathways of the samba and tango, as both dances began their journey towards symbolic significance through the interaction of four seemingly disparate factors; societal repression, foreign influence, political necessity and elite acceptance. The second stage builds on these factors, illustrating the support that the samba and tango received from two populist leaders, Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945) and Argentine President Juan Perón (1946-1955).

Both Vargas and Perón played a crucial role in the consolidation of the samba and tango's national symbolic status, as they proactively propagated and disseminated these dances. However, the motives of Vargas and Perón cannot be considered completely self-less. As this paper will later illustrate, both leaders simultaneously appropriated the growing prestige and national spirit associated with these two dances by manipulating their form and content.

Origins of Repression

This paper will illuminate the parallel historical pathways of the samba and tango from their inception until their adoption by populist leaders in the mid-20th century. I

will begin by exploring the similarities and differences between the historical pathways of the two dances. This exploration will detail the dances' questionable origins and how these origins played a role in each dance's consequent societal repression. Then, I will expand on these themes of repression, offering a description of the three major processes through which the Brazilian samba and Argentine tango rose above their oppressed states: 1) foreign influence, 2) political necessity and 3) elite acceptance.

The Argentine Tango

First appearing in 1880, the Argentine tango adopted the stylistic and musical elements of various African dances (Taylor 1976). While there exists very little consensus on the specific African dances from which tango truly evolved, it is sufficient for the purposes of this paper to acknowledge the fact that tango is rhythmically rooted in the West African tradition (Castro 1991). However, the Argentine tango is not solely African in origin, but is the result of an amalgamation of various cultural traditions. For while “the rhythmic underpinning of the tango is generally attributed to a black population of which few discernable traces remain”, “other elements are assigned to other Argentine ethnic and racial groups” (Azzi and Goertner 1999, 67).

Tango developed as a direct result of Argentina's immigrant influx. During the mid-19th century, Argentina was ruled by a group of elites who “articulated a policy of change for their country that came to have the catchword phrase ‘to govern is to populate’” (Castro 1991, 90). This mantra encouraged European immigration and succeeded in making Argentina, “the second largest recipient of immigration in the Americas between 1821 and 1932” (Azzi 2003, 25). The majority of these Argentine immigrants were “visible foreigners” and thus did not fit nicely within the governing

elites' vision of Argentina as a whiter and consequently more modern nation. Yet, it was precisely this mixing of high society rejects, which gave tango its unique flavor and complexity (Delgado and Muñoz 1997, 142).

Tango arose during a time of increased urban migration both from within the country and abroad. As Taylor describes the situation of many foreign immigrants, "Disillusioned by the state of affairs, many new arrivals tended to accumulate around the port cities. Here they mixed with other elements of the giant labor force congregating on the outskirts, the arrabal or orillas of Buenos Aires" (1976, 274). This giant labor force was increasingly made up of rural Argentines who had also moved to the cities in the hope of increased fortune. As a port city, Buenos Aires was the most popular destination for these urban migrants and a hub of cross-cultural contact (Bliss and French 2007).

The style and mood of tango reflect its origins within these historically marginalized immigrant and working-class communities. While reflective of a certain degree of sexuality, tango was originally conceived as an outward expression of the everyday sentiments of Buenos Aires' socially oppressed. Tango's bitter musical undertones, solitary nature, and lyrical emphasis on "themes of hunger, poverty, and unfair working conditions" echoed the sentiments and emotions of those living in the poor barrios and slums of Buenos Aires (Castro 1991, 229). As Savigliano eloquently states, "Tango lyrics of the period confirm that the idea of 'allowing time for the miracle to work' was not so easy. They portray misery, prostitution, unemployment...tango sang and danced the darker side of development" (1995, 29). Echoed through the "cortes" and "quebradas" of tango, this misery also found its place within tango's dance vocabulary. This dance vocabulary was developed in the brothels of Buenos Aires. One of the few

safe spaces for entertainment and musical experimentation, the brothels “provided protection for a new art form that had emerged in a poor immigrant community” (Denniston 2007, 60). Yet this protection would not last long; for as the brothels became associated with tango, so did the tango come to represent sexuality and promiscuity. This new representation provided fodder for the elites whom already disapproved of Argentina’s “primitive” culture (Garramuño 2006, 128).

Officially repressed because of its blatant sexuality and lasciviousness, tango was relegated by the native oligarchy to the margins of society from whence it had developed (Savigliano 1995). It was considered “the epitome of degradation” (Taylor 1976, 282). It was publicly presented as a sexually promiscuous and dangerous dance, only acceptable to be performed by members of the lower class or the sex industry. The nation’s oligarchy subsequently banned it from Argentina’s upper-class salons and dance halls (Taylor 1976). Yet, the oligarchy’s emphasis on tango’s overt sexuality as unacceptable and unclean, hide to some degree the true motive for this repression; tango was despised for being primitive (Garramuño 2006). In the eyes of these elites, tango’s African roots made it primitive, tango’s association with the immigrants made it primitive and tango’s popularity in the underdeveloped villas miserias made it primitive. Tango arose when the state’s elites were striving for Argentina to be accepted as a modern nation. There was no room for the “primitive” (Garramuño 2006).

The Brazilian Samba

Emerging in Brazil nearly thirty years after the creation of the Argentine tango, the Brazilian samba’s development and initial evolution follows many of the same patterns as the tango; samba has strong African roots, was created by a marginalized

group, in this case the Afro-Brazilian population, and was initially repressed by the nation's ruling oligarchy. "As a coherent rhythm, dance and musical genre, (samba) emerged from popular dance parties in the downtown Rio de Janeiro neighborhood of Cidade Nove during the 1910s" (McCann 2004, 44). While vital to samba's eventual position as a national symbol, this emergence was the result of a long evolutionary process, which began with the merging of certain African and European dance styles (Vianna 1999). Samba's African roots stem from the West African dance tradition (McCann 2004). Yet similar to tango, the rapid abstraction of these African dances as they developed alongside and in conjunction with their European and Brazilian contemporaries makes it difficult to identify their specific names or components. However, a fair amount of information does exist on the European and Brazilian dances from which samba originated: the European polka and the maxixe, itself a blend of "European and African instrumentation and rhythm" (McCann 2004, 44).

African slaves brought their musical traditions, which informed the development of samba, to Brazil. Yet, it was not until the abolition of slavery in 1888 that the samba truly began to take shape (Raphael 1990, 74). After their emancipation, the Afro-Brazilian slaves left the confines of the rural plantations in search of employment and economic security. Similar to the immigrants of Argentina, this large Afro-Brazilian population hoped they would find this economic stability within the nation's urban centers. Instead, they found continued racism and few opportunities (Raphael 1990, 74). Their societal rejection, however, did not stop these Afro-Brazilians from creating their own forms of cultural expression within Brazil's urban areas. The city of Rio de Janeiro acted as a venue for one of these forms of cultural expression- the samba.

Considered the birthplace of samba, Rio de Janeiro acted as a hub of cross-cultural contact comparable to that of Buenos Aires. Yet, despite its general status as samba's official home, much debate still exists on samba's specific native location, with:

some sambistas claiming that samba was music of the cidade, or city, and others contending that it was originally and primarily music of the morro, or hill. Both were collective terms, with cidade standing for the various working and middle-class, white, and mixed-race neighborhoods of downtown Rio, as well as for the city's radio stations and recording studios and morro for the predominately black favelas (McCann 2004, 42).

As samba became a symbol of national identity, the dance became more associated with the image of the pure samba arisen from the morro, unsullied by other cultural influences (McCann 2004, 42). Yet, this eventual belief in the pure samba of the morro, does little to undermine the importance of Rio's status as a space for the unconscious blending of society's rejects, in particular the "blacks, mullatos, Indians, peasants and illiterates" (Clark 2002, 265).

Racism was rampant at the time of samba's emergence. "Only recently freed from slavery, Blacks were still viewed by most Brazilians of Portuguese decent as inferior" (Raphael 1990, 74). This common belief worked to justify society's repression of this group and their specific artistic practices, including samba. Yet while much of society's repression of samba can be associated with the nation's racism, it was also the "primitive" qualities associated with Afro-Brazilians, which informed the ruling oligarchy's dislike of the dance form. Similar to the Argentine tango, samba emerged at a time when Brazil was fighting to be accepted as a modern nation. In the eyes of the elites, samba's African roots made it primitive, samba's association with the nation's Afro-Brazilian population and samba's popularity in the poverty-stricken favelas made it

primitive. In Brazil, as in Argentina, there was no room for the “primitive” (Garramuño 2006).

Foreign Influence

Deemed primitive, relegated to the margins of society and legally repressed, how did the samba and tango rise from their sordid positions on the underbelly of society to become praise-worthy symbols of their respective nations? Triggered by the European appropriation and acceptance of these “exotic” dance forms, the tango and samba were ideologically redefined by their nation’s elites in order to fit the nationalist rhetoric, which would modernize each nation. In this way, samba and tango’s status underwent a strategic transformation as both went from being symbols of national shame to being symbols of national pride. The transformation of the samba and tango into national symbols began with their European acceptance and appropriation. Both these dance forms were appropriated due to their “exotic” appeal, only to have this exoticism altered as they came in contact with new cultures and new societal norms (e.g. Savigliano 1995; Azzi and Goertzen 1999; Garramuño 2006).

Tango began its European tour in the early 1910s. Traveling from London, Berlin, Paris and Rome, it conquered Europe in a wave appropriately entitled “Tangomania” (Azzi 2003, 26). The effects of Tangomania are exemplified by the tango’s arrival and acceptance in Paris, France. During the turn of the century, France craved the “exotic”, especially as it applied to forms of entertainment and artistic expression. Thus, when the Argentine tango arrived in Paris in the early 20th century it was met with extreme interest and quickly became a Parisian phenomenon (Denniston 2007, 84). Tango’s journey from the brothels of Buenos Aires to the fashionable salons

in Paris occurred in great part as a result of the “niños buenos” of Buenos Aires. These rich, young men of society gave tango, what some authors deem, “the greatest aid along its path of success” (Taylor 1976, 283). As Taylor states, “After learning the scandalous dance on their trips to the houses of ill-fame (brothels), and knowing what would make them successful in Europe, they took their new airs (imitated from the compadrito with his dance) to Paris” (1976, 283). After its initial introduction into Parisian society, tango quickly grew in popularity among the upper echelons of society. This acceptance of tango existed in extreme contrast to its repressed and marginalized position in Argentine society.

Despite France and other European nation’s seeming complete acceptance of the tango, the Parisian tango was a far cry from the original tango that had risen from within the immigrant barrios of Buenos Aires less than a few decades ago. The Parisian version was both exoticized and sanitized (Garramuño 2006). The French ensured that tango maintained its exotic image through their recognition and employment of Argentine stereotypes (Azzi 2003). “In Paris, the tango assumed a new folkloric persona, fabricated with elements that had little to do with the original article” (Zolberg and Cherbo 1997, 204). This new image of the tango as an expression of Argentina’s gaucho culture was a gross misconception of its true urban origins of. However, this representation served dual purpose; it maintained the tango’s exotic image, while also protecting French tango musicians from their Argentine colleagues. “Because of regulations designed to protect French performers from foreign competitors in situ, the latter were required to present themselves on stage dressed in their ‘national costume’, not as regular mechanisms but artistes de variétés” (Zolberg and Cherbo 1997, 204). This Parisian created gaucho-tango

was exemplified by Carlos Gardel, who while in Argentine performed in “suave nightclub attire” and yet was forced to dress “as generically Argentine” or in other words in gaucho garb, when performing in France and other European countries (Azzi 2003, 68).

Tango’s sanitization occurred in many of the European nations as the dance, while praised for its exotic characteristics, was simultaneously altered to fit European notions of social dance. First, its complexity decreased. While still reliant on improvisation, the dance was simplified so that it could be taught to a larger audience of willing learners (Savigliano 1995). Second, the tango’s characteristic moves were made less sensual. Instead of the fierce sensuality, which was previously associated with the Argentine tango, the Europeans tended to emphasize the dance’s elegant side (Azzi 2003, 68).

The samba’s path of foreign appropriation and acceptance was similar to that of the tango. Offering another form of exoticism, samba appealed to European nations during the early 20th century. This exoticism opened up the doorway for samba’s international popularity and acceptance. France, in particular, embraced this form of Brazilian popular culture (Vianna 1999, 77). Similar to the Parisian version of tango, the Parisian version of samba differed from that which had emerged from within the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. As Vianna states:

Brazilian popular culture flowed readily back and forth across the Atlantic in the 1910s and 1920s, undergoing surprising appropriations in France, providing typical examples of the process called transculturation, and generating redefinitions of identity on both sides of the Atlantic (1999, 74).

While there exists relatively little information on the stylistic effects of this transculturation of samba, the dance's European acceptance heralded the beginning of a new level of national acceptance and propagation.

Elite Acceptance

The foreign elite's acceptance of tango and samba did not just increase these dances popularity abroad, but also increased their popularity and acceptance within their home nations: Argentina and Brazil. These dances thus made a "double journey": moving beyond their national boundaries to reach international fame, while shifting from their marginalized position to become elite approved forms of expression (Azzi 2003, 68). This secondary journey of elite acceptance is often deemed "validation through visibility" (Azzi 2003, 68). As the modernized European nations accepted these dance forms, the elites of each nation were prompted to reconsider their own traditions and re-evaluate the relationship between these dances and their national image (Azzi 2003, 68). Numerous scholars have acknowledged this increased interest of the elites in their national dance forms and its dependence on these dance's foreign popularity (e.g. Azzi and Goertzen 1999; Azzi 2003; McCann 2004; Denniston 2007). With respect to tango it has been claimed that "endorsement from abroad, especially from Paris, boosted upper-class domestic appreciation of the tango" (Azzi 2003, 68) and in a similar way the samba's elite acceptance has been presented as arising from the time "when (Brazilian) 'nativist' culture became vogue" (Vianna 1999, 70). This shift from repression to acceptance was exemplified by samba and tango's rise from their nation's slums to high-class stages (Azzi 2003, 68). These dances were suddenly the hits of the stylish salons,

with both orquestas típicas and sambistas playing at high society functions and provided with radio time.

The Primitive vs. the Modern

While it has been shown that tango and samba's European popularity initiated their elite acceptance within Argentina and Brazil, the question remains: why did the European recognition of these dances validate their national acceptability? The answer lies at the intersection of the modern, primitive and national. At the turn of the 20th century, both Argentina and Brazil were struggling to present themselves as modern nations (Vianni 1999; Garramuño 2006). Thus, when Europe's supposedly modernized nations embraced the tango and samba, the elites of Argentina and Brazil began to question their previous decision to repress these dances based on their primitive origins. This doubt brought about a shift in Argentina and Brazil, allowing both nations to construct a sense of national pride in the primitive, which ironically would serve as a modernizing force for both Argentina and Brazil. In other words, European approval of the samba and tango allowed Brazil and Argentina to deem these dances acceptable within a modern context. No more were these dances repressed for their African roots and 'exotic' characteristics. Instead, the Brazilian and Argentine elite praised these dances' unique mixing of the primitive with the modern (Vianna 1999, Garramuño 2006). As Garramuño points out, "While in the 1880s the primitive character of tango and samba was the reason to expel them from the national space, after the 1920s it is precisely this characteristic that will be considered one of the reasons to construct tango and samba as national symbols" (2006, 128). Another reason to construct these dances as

national symbols was their already established status as representations of their host nations.

Political Necessity

The historical trajectory of the samba and tango gave these dances the potential to define Argentina and Brazil as unique and independent nations. Both of these dances rose from repression to become products of European and national acceptance, modernization, praised primitiveness, and national symbols. However, within this seemingly benign process of ascension, lay a degree of political coercion. This coercion played an important role in these dance's broad acceptance (Savigliano 1999; Vianna 1999). At the peak of their European popularity, the samba and tango acted as national ambassadors. The international community came to view these dances as representative of their host nations and visa versa (Savigliano 1995). Thus, while many Argentine and Brazilian elites still did not accept these dances, they realized that it was politically advantageous to at least feign acceptance. "To accept the tango as representative of Argentinean national identity potentially affected both their class identity and their power as legitimate representatives of Argentina" (Savigliano 1995; 142). The international community already identified these dances with their respective nations and if the ruling elites wanted to continue in power, they too would have to associate themselves with these foreign-crafted national images.

National Ideological Shift

The blending of the primitive and the modern exemplified by samba and tango was supported by the theories of exceptionalism gaining credence in Brazil and Argentina at the turn of the century. Particularly evident in the case of the Brazilian samba, these

new theories praised the nation's historical diversity, presenting its heterogeneous origins as the factor, which defined their nation (Vianna 1999; McCann 2004). In the case of Brazil, this theory was presented as a new national ideology, which rested on the latest constructed association of authenticity with racial mixing (Vianna 1999, 36).

Previously, as was evident from the repression of samba, Brazilian society had pointed to the nation's racial mixing, mestiço and Afro-Brazilian populations as the cause of their nation's backwardness and underdevelopment. However, this new ideology reversed this previously propagated theory.

This rupture can be conceptualized as an inversion of values, reversing the negative position that the mestiço and racial mixing formerly occupied in Brazilian culture. Instead of a degenerative influence, the cause of great national woes, race mixing could now be interpreted as a positive cultural process around which Brazilians could invent a new identity (Vianna 1999, 53).

As presented by intellectual Gilberto Freyre, Brazil's racial mixing guaranteed the nation's distinctiveness. In other words, Brazil's racial mixing and the cultural products, which emerged from this mixing, such as samba, had the potential to define Brazil as a unique nation on an international scale.

The tango possessed a similar ability to highlight Argentina's exceptionalism as a result of the nation's increased pride in their immigrant history. While not as frequently and formally articulated, the tango's elite acceptance in essence symbolized "the acceptance of diversity and the inclusion of marginality within the system" (Azzi 2003, 25). Thus, Argentina's exceptionalism, while not defined by popular theory or national ideology, was expressed by the elites' actions and recognition of the nation's diverse immigrant heritage.

The parallel historical trajectories of the samba and tango from their inception up through their societal acceptance are marked by the complex interaction of societal repression, foreign influence, political necessity and elite acceptance. Together, these factors defined samba and tango, allowing both dances to consolidate a position of international and national prestige and acceptability. However, the ruling elites official acceptance and re-appropriation of the samba and tango in the early 1920s did not mark the end of these dances' symbolic journey. Logistical and ideological problems still prevented the samba and tango from consolidating themselves as a defining aspect of Brazil and Argentina's national identity; for while both dances were viewed as representative of their respective nations by the international community, they had yet to be viewed as such by their actual inhabitants. These internationally national and nationally regionalized dances needed to be proactively propagated and disseminated as part of Argentina and Brazil's national identity in order to eventually reach this status. These nations' populist leaders rapidly adopted this project of propagation and dissemination.

Political Support- The Entrance of Vargas and Perón

<i>Yo también soy Juan Tango cuando sueño,</i>	<i>Slavery has ended</i>
<i>cuando digo mi amor, cuando trabajo,</i>	<i>Long live the 1930 Revolution</i>
<i>¡porque yo, con Juan Tango, soy el Pueblo!</i>	<i>Which was our salvation</i>
<i>[I too am 'Juan Tango' when I dream</i>	
<i>When I say my love, when I work,</i>	<i>Workers toiled twelve hours a day</i>
<i>Because I am, with Juan Tango, the People]</i>	<i>Bosses were never satisfied</i>
	<i>Now with the change</i>

The workers will win
Poor bourgeoisie
On whose bones we will gnaw
(Levine 1998, 15).

This set of lyrics, one taken from an Argentine tango and the other from a Brazilian samba, extol the populist discourse of Argentine President Juan Perón (1946-1955, 1973-1974) and Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945, 1951-1954). Consciously fostered and broadcast by these South American leaders, the tango and samba were used to support each leader's consolidation of a popular personal and cultural image, as well as propagate a new national ideology. How did this process occur? How could Perón and Vargas successfully use their respective national dances, characterized by the themes of melancholy, desperation, poverty, and *malandragem* to boost their national popularity and propagate their government policies? This section offers an answer to this question through a thorough investigation of Perón and Vargas' concrete uses of these dances as symbols of national identity. Both leaders altered these dances content, forcing the tango and samba to propagate their particular national goals and ideology. In the case of the tango, this alteration also affected the dance's form, as the tango became more detached from its lyrical content. In contrast, Vargas successfully maintained the popularity of samba as both a dance and a lyrically driven musical form by relying more heavily on state-driven repression and co-optation.

In order to illustrate these leaders concrete use of these national dance forms, this section outlines each dance's path of appropriation: beginning with each leader's initial rise to power (Vargas: 1930, Perón: 1945). This section begins with the tango, offering a brief description of tango's position during Argentina's military rule of 1943. This

description is then complemented by a discussion of the samba's status and cultural management before Vargas came to power. Next, it will highlight the new vision that Vargas and Perón had for their respective nations and what role they forced the samba and tango to play within those visions. Furthermore, this section illuminates Vargas and Perón's qualified acceptance of these dances through an exploration of their concrete use of these dances as tools of political propaganda and as symbols for a new nation.

In order to appreciate the revolutionary manner in which Vargas and Perón chose to use samba and tango, one must first understand the position these dances held prior to their political propagation. While this paper has previously detailed the historical trajectory of samba and tango on their journey towards becoming national symbols, Vargas and Perón's decision to promote these popular dances was most directly related to the treatment of these dances by each nation's prior regime.

Perón's Rise and Tango's Fall

Juan Perón's political interaction with tango began with the military takeover of 1943. Led by a group of military officers, this takeover seized governmental power from the hands of acting president Ramón Castillo and placed Argentina under the control of a nationalist military junta. Claiming to oppose Castillo's commitment to foreign interests and the conservative land-rich oligarchy, the military junta promised the creation of a New Argentina (La Argentina Nueva). This New Argentina would reject foreign influence and most exterior-oriented policies, opting instead to develop the nation's interior and protect the "national values, cultures and ethics," which the previous rulers had "trampled in a mad dash to make Argentina subservient to foreign interests" (Castro

1991, 206). Not considered a national form of cultural expression by the junta, tango was excluded from the protections promised in the initial development of this New Argentina.

The military coup of 1943 rejected tango as a national symbol and refused it protection due to its existence as an amalgamation of foreign influences. The tango's African roots in combination with its immigrant association helped establish its image as a largely foreign creation. Yet, the two main reasons for the junta's rejection of tango went beyond its foreign origins, focusing instead on (1) the dance's European success and (2) the Castillo administration's previous acceptance of the dance as a symbol of Argentina.

Castillo's time in power represented for many the "Golden Age" of tango. This was the era of Carlos Gardel, arguably the most famous tango singer of all time, the era of the tango song and the era of tango's greatest popular successes. As Pablo Vila states in his article "Tango to Folk: Hegemony Construction and Popular Identities in Argentina", during the 1930's "the dance spread everywhere: in the neighborhoods, the carnival, the dance halls organized by the radio stations. An amazing number of orchestras, dozens of radio programs and magazines dedicated to tango were only the visible part of a popular phenomena difficult to recognize nowadays" (1991). Never again would tango be so widely listened to and supported.

As a result of tango's popularity under the Castillo administration, as well as its foreign ties, the military regime of 1943 fiercely repressed this dance form. A key move in this campaign of repression was the government's creation of "la ley seca", roughly translated as the dry law. The end goal of this law, largely supported by right-wing

nationalists and the Church, was the purification of Argentine Spanish. Its effects on tango included weeding out the majority of the Argentine slang (lunfardo) from tango songs in an attempt to prevent the proliferation of these words in society. For example the famous tango “Yira...Yira” (“Aimless Wandering”) was changed to “Dad vueltas...dad vueltas” (“Aimless Wandering”) due to the connotations of the lunfardo word yirar. These changes greatly affected the integrity of the genre, its popularity and ability to portray the Argentine experience (Castro 1991).

Representative of the military government’s rejection of tango, “la ley seca” also played an important role in introducing Perón to the national and political dialogue on tango. As the Secretary of Labor and Social Welfare, Juan Perón dealt in a minor way with the legal rights of artists; it is in this capacity that Perón was first confronted with “la ley seca” and its artistic implications. In this role, he was able to talk with musicians and learn about their concerns for the future of the tango, all the while using his political position and prowess to contradictorily present himself as a supporter of the tango and a supporter of the current administration’s cultural policies (Castro 1991). In fact, it was not until 1949, after three years in office, that Perón officially lifted the strict ban on lunfardo created by “la ley seca” (Azzi 2002)

Brazil’s Rejection of Samba: The First Republic

Similar to Perón, Vargas’s acknowledgement of the political power of popular culture, in particular the samba, developed in direct response to the previous government’s denial of this power. Prior to Vargas’s abrupt rise to the presidency, Brazil had been run for over thirty years by a decentralized oligarchy, which held as their ultimate goal the construction of a modern and civilized Brazil. In order to do this, they

attempted to “construct and impose a national cultural identity on their society” that was “self-consciously European in origin” (Needell 1999, 1). However, these elites did not just seek modernization by adopting European cultural principles, but they also rejected those aspects of culture, which were deemed “primitive” and of the masses. This rejection was directed at Brazilian popular culture, in particular that of Afro-Brazilian origin (Garamuño 2006; Vianna 1999). As Needell states, “This was not only a positive act of state imposed culture and identification with a selective notion of European civilization- it was also a negation. The state, in other words, not only imposed a culture and an identity tied to imperial Europe, it negated a congeries of native cultures in that same process of imposition” (1999, 8).

The samba, as a decidedly Afro-Brazilian art form, received the brunt of much of this negative rejection, which resulted from the state’s still present racism and the aforementioned primitivism associated with the dance. “Only recently freed from slavery, Blacks were still viewed by most Brazilians of Portuguese decent as inferior” (Raphael 1990, 74). This common belief, while not exclusive to the Afro-Brazilian population, worked to justify the elite’s repression of this group and their specific artistic practices, in particular the samba. This repression was further justified by the elites classification of samba as “primitive”. The samba was thus considered illegitimate. “It was the stuff of lowlife rascals, the carol of vagabonds. And the police, in their chief function of watching over the maintenance of public order, persecuted [samba] without rest” (Vianna 1999, 11). For example, samba was prohibited from the nation’s respectable dance halls and salons (Vianna 1999). Also, a variety of laws were enacted with the intent of decreasing its consolidation as a popular dance form. Yet, despite this extended period of “legal

persecution and harassment”, samba continued to experience true artistic development and increased popularity (Sheriff 1999, 13). This degree of artistic resilience allowed for the samba’s subsequent appropriation by Vargas.

Vargas’s Estado Novo: The Samba and Brazilian Exceptionalism

Before entering into a discussion on the ways that Vargas manipulated samba to serve his national ideology and goals, one must define this national ideology. After successfully ousting the previous government’s newly elected president, Getúlio Vargas declared himself the provisional President of Brazil in 1930. As a result of this newly gained political power, Vargas was able to formulate and enforce his own vision of Brazil, a vision, which drastically differed from the previous republic’s ideals. Two of the major differences between these republics were their definition of modernization and their positions on popular culture.

Vargas ushered in a new era of nationalism. Echoing scholar Gilberto Freyre’s concept on Brazilian exceptionalism, Vargas argued that Brazil’s racial mixing guaranteed the nation’s distinctiveness. In other words, Vargas praised the nation’s historical diversity, presenting a “new ideology of national identity...that embraced blacks and mulattos as distinctive facets of Brazilian society and culture” (Clark 2002, 254). More prevalent during the formation of the Estado Novo (1937-1945), this emphasis on diversity and “ethnic integration- an official euphemism for racial mixing” became the policy of Vargas’s authoritarian state (Vianna 1999, 51). Going far beyond mere acceptance, Vargas used the heterogeneity of Brazil to support his claims of Brazilian modernity and to begin to propagate the “myth of racial democracy” (Vianna 1999) In this way, Vargas’s new ideology allowed for and even benefited from society’s

acceptance of samba. Strongly separating Vargas from his predecessors, samba was propagated to show that that which had previously been rejected, could now be lauded as a national symbol of modernity and unity.

Vargas's acceptance of samba showcases not only his new vision for racial diversity and "equality", but also his appreciation for the persuasive power of popular culture. This acknowledgement was necessary to some extent due to Vargas's populist policies and the demographics of his support base. As Needell states, "Under Vargas, much that had been despised about the popular culture of Brazil's majority received state consecration because of its nationalist potential and populist appeal" (1999, 11).

Claiming to be the "people's delegate", Vargas defined himself as populist due to his focus on improving the social and economic status of Brazil's urban working class and his claim that the government should follow the people. While frequently subject to cooptation, clientism and corruption, the masses acted as Vargas's popular base of support and thus their cultural tastes greatly influenced his policies (Williams 2001).

Vargas was well aware of these cultural tastes, one of which was the samba, and the political advantages that could be gained from visibly accepting them. By associating himself with samba and incorporating it into his national ideology, Vargas aided his ability to present himself as truly representative of the people, garner more popular support and legitimize his claims to power. This aid occurred through a process of identification. If the people identified with the samba and Vargas identified with the samba, then to some degree the people identified with Vargas. Thus, Vargas's support of samba was frequently equated with his support for the masses. In addition, the samba represented the racial mixing, which formed the cornerstone of Vargas's new

nationalism. Samba thus stood at the intersection of Vargas's new vision of Brazil as both modern and of the people. As Williams states, Vargas recognized that "managing culture could be a powerful weapon in managing Brazilianess" (2001, 52). He thus could not afford to ignore the influence of the samba and as a result included the samba, in its symbolic format, as part of his Estado Novo.

Perón's New Argentina: The Tango and el "Pueblo"

Perón echoed many of Vargas' populist goals and cultural management strategies, altering Argentine popular culture in order to suit his own national ideology and vision of a new Argentina. After suffering a tumultuous rise to power, Perón became the official President of Argentina in 1946. As a result of this newly granted political power, Perón was able to formulate and enforce his own vision of Argentina, a vision, which simultaneously overlapped and differed from the previous military government's ideals. One of the major similarities of the two administration's ideologies was their shared emphasis on developing the interior of Argentina and re-defining the country's national identity in accordance with the values and traditions of the interior. As Castro states in his book on the social origins of tango, "The Peronist perspective on culture...continued the earlier theme of seeking Argentina's greatness from within" (1995, 217). Thus, the Perón administration encouraged the development and proliferation of the gaucho or folk tradition, which was believed to truly represent Argentina's exceptionalism. This encouragement of the folk tradition was carried out through Perón's overall acceptance of rural society, as well as his praise and propagation of folk music. Exemplified in many of Perón's official pronouncements, the gaucho culture was presented as the official Argentine culture, a heroic culture of the "tierra adentro" (Castro 1991, 229; Vila 1991).

How did tango fit into this rural narrative? As a dance that originated in the urban slums of Buenos Aires, the tango could be considered the antithesis of the propagated image of the pure, simple gaucho from the pampas. However, Perón's intricate national ideology could simultaneously support both of these urban and rural images due to its qualified acceptance of that which is cosmopolitan (Vila 1991). Labeling Perón as a cultural nationalist, Thomas Turino states in his article, "Nationalism in Latin America", that Perón was able to "express that a new national culture will be forged from the best of local 'traditional' culture combined with the best of foreign and 'modern', that is, cosmopolitan, culture" (2003, 193). Thus, in contrast to the previous regime's rejection of the "foreign", Perón accepted certain cosmopolitan foreign influences in conjunction with the nation's more local traditions.

The second manner in which Perón's national goals differed from his governmental predecessors was his embrace of the masses and use of "*el pueblo*" to gain political support. Continuing the populist tradition, Perón focused on improving the quality of life for Argentina's urban working class through social programs and labor incorporation. The masses were Perón's popular base of support and thus their cultural tastes greatly influenced his policies (Vacs 2006). As Castro states, "This urban area served as the power base for any government that would try to be mass oriented...Therefore, a clear cultural awareness of Buenos Aires was essential for any politician" (1991, 224).

Perón possessed this cultural awareness of Buenos Aires, something, which was imperative due to his aforementioned base of support. Thus, while the Peronist national ideology focused on the propagation of native values and Argentine exceptionalism

through folk music, perhaps even more important to Perón's personal political career was his support and acceptance of the art of the urban masses- the tango. Born in Buenos Aires, the tango maintained its strongest roots in the city, especially among the urban poor and immigrant workers. As Castro clearly summarizes, "The political base for Perón was the cultural base for the tango, then it follows that Perón would not long miss the significance of Carlos Gardel (a true representative of tango) as a useful symbol" (1991, 235). Perón could not afford to ignore the influence of the tango and as a result included the tango, in its symbolic format, as part of his new Argentina.

Tango: The Dance/ Samba: The Censored

Perón and Vargas' acceptance and employment of tango and samba did not come without restrictions or alterations; for although neither could afford to ignore these dances, they also could not afford to suffer these dances' inherent social criticisms and indirect opposition to each leader's national goals and ideals. For example, the tango almost always focused on the individual and not on the group. "The tango with rare exceptions did not call the listener to join any great causes.... therefore the tango was outdated because the 'new' Argentina now had a mission of greatness to fulfill as expounded in the Peronist doctrine" (Castro 1991, 229). The tango's solitary nature, coupled with its lyrical emphasis on the "themes of hunger, poverty, unfair working conditions", and lack of female integrity, challenged the goals of Peronism (Castro 1991, 229; Savigliano 1995). Similarly, the samba frequently glorified the *malandro* (rogue) and the theme of *malandragem* (Williams 2001). Malandrangam emerged as a theme in Brazilian popular culture as a result of the lack of industrial work, which had kept the nation's masses under the domination of the oligarchy for decades. As Oliven describes

this term within his article “The Production and Consumption of Culture in Brazil”, “*Malandragem*, by proclaiming a ‘horror of work’ and by refusing salaried work, developed as an alternative strategy of survival in a society that marginalized the laborer and did not assure him the conditions of a decent livelihood from the fruit of his labor” (1984, 107). This theme was supported by another series of themes that constantly appear alongside that of *malandragem*, including “*chronic prontidão* (lack of money), *categoria* (class), *jogo de cintura* (artfulness)...and so on” (Oliven 1984, 107). Together these popular samba themes challenged the goals of the Vargas administration.

In response to the conflict, which existed between the themes of the Perón and Vargas administration and the lyrical themes of tango and samba, both leaders altered the integrity of these national dances. Perón chose to modify the tango’s form and content by effectively separating it from its lyrical form and promoting its development as a dance form, while Vargas instead created the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP) and the Ministry of Education. Both of these organizations were tasked with modifying the samba’s content so that it could be effectively appropriated as a political tool (Levine 1998; Williams 2001).

Tango: The Dance

Eloquently described by author Daniel Castro, Perón ushered in a vital shift in the form and significance of the tango:

the tango as such was now more of a vehicle of the feet and the body than for the ear and the mind. The evolution from dance to song had now reversed itself. Therefore the “offensive” lyric of the old tango in terms of language and then with content was of no matter. The tango was now more for dance. This was the tango of the Perón Era (1991, 235).

This Perón Era tango with its strong emphasis on dance and lack of social content was able to arise due to the popular Peronist bent of many tango composers. Whether composing tango songs that specifically praised Peronism and its leaders, such as “Los muchachos peronistas”, or actively supporting Peronism outside of the realm of the tango, these composers had power. They had a definite say in what type of tango songs would be written, recorded and publicized. Thus, their support of Peronism encouraged their composition of more dance-worthy tangos that could be detached from the art forms traditional critique of social practices (Blaya and Pinsón). Castro considers this time period the end of the social history of tango, stating, “It was not until the time of Perón did the tango lose its currency as a source of social comment. The close ties of the tango poets to Perón and their apparent sense of loyalty to the regime created a ‘new’ tango focused on nostalgia and dance form....Thus ended the tango as a useful source for Argentine social history” (1991, 251).

Tango as Peronist Propaganda

Once transformed into its more socially benign format, Perón was easily able to use the tango for his own political purpose. Directly employed as a form of propaganda, Perón encouraged and commissioned the composition of songs that glorified his presence. This trend was specifically prevalent at the beginning of Perón’s time in office. As Pinsón writes, “when the figure of then Colonel Perón was surfacing as the people’s candidate to the nation, songs with words or titles that paid homage to his persona were appearing”. Some of these songs were *Oda a Perón*, *Juan Perón*, *Los muchachos peronistas*, *Marcha Peronista*, *Descamisado* and *Caballero Juan Perón*. Supporting the Peronist usurpation of tango as a tool of political propaganda was the aforementioned

power and support, which Perón received from many of the nation's tango composers (Pinsón). For example, Discépolo, a tango composer and radio personality, frequently used his radio character, "el Mandatorio", to spread the Peronist doctrine and convince the nation of Perón's personal integrity (Castro 1991, 240).

While the use of songs as propaganda and the employment of tango composers as political patrons *directly* placed Peronism within the culture of tango, tango was also *indirectly* utilized by Perón to shape his own personal identity. In other words, Perón attempted to outwardly identify with tango by bringing its culture into the political realm. The Perón administration accomplished this goal by promoting tango dance festivals, using tango orchestras at their state events and either imposing or repealing laws in the hope of maintaining the national nature of the Argentine tango (Azzi 2002; Rocchi and Sotelo 2004). For example, Perón re-initiated the Argentine tradition of having "bailes populares" or popular dances. These dances, organized by the state, broadcast Argentine national music, such as the tango, into the streets, creating massive dance parties in the process. The Peronist agenda for these "bailes populares" was to promote the tango, while simultaneously celebrating Perón and the power he had granted to the working classes. As author María Susana Azzi describes this experience, "the image of workers dancing in the streets traditionally monopolized by the upper classes served as a symbolic recreation of the 'take over' of the city and its symbols of power" (2002, 33).

Samba: The Censored Version

In contrast to Perón's more subtle appropriation of tango and its newly created message, Vargas challenged the samba's integrity in a more direct and forceful manner. One way he did this was through the DIP or the Department of Press and Propaganda.

Created in 1939, one of the main objectives of the DIP was the alteration of the samba's content. The DIP performed this task by censoring the messages and lyrics of the sambas broadcast on the radio. Similar to "la ley seca" instituted in Argentina during the military regime of 1943, the DIP attempted to project an image of a new Brazil through the dissemination and regulation of samba lyrics. While the severity of these regulations remains debatable, it is clear that they did affect the composition of samba and its ability to represent society. As Martins Castelos, the DIP's "semiregular radio critic" said about this censorship, the goal was "to prohibit the release of compositions which employ slang corrosive to the national language and present insipid elegies to malandragem" (in Williams 2001, 84). For example, the enormously popular samba *O Bonde de São Januário* was forced to replace the word *otário* (vagabond) with *operário* (worker) in order to fit the ideals of the Estado Novo. As opposed to Perón's eventual elimination of this type of censorship, Vargas encouraged these lyrical alterations, claiming that they were beneficial to samba and society. This favoring of censorship highlights the way in which Vargas viewed the samba. Rather than truly accepting it as a form of cultural expression, he viewed the samba as a crucial instrument in the management of Brazil. For Vargas, the samba was a tool for an end.

Samba as Propaganda

The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the DIP insured that Vargas could properly use this tool. The initial censorship of the samba worked to transform it, "often maligned for its glorification of the *malandro* (rogue) and use of pulsating sensual rhythms, into musical compositions which extolled the virtues of hard work, moral rectitude, and patriotism", three themes that were much more complementary to Vargas's

vision of Brazil (Williams 2001, 85). Vargas was now easily able to use the samba for his own political purposes. Directly employed as a form of propaganda, the Ministry of Education and the DIP commissioned the composition of songs that proudly declared Brazil's modernity, Vargas's competency and the people's nationalism. As Williams clearly lays out this process:

The DIP, hoping to 'educate' samba, called upon well-known musicians and lyricists to compose samba lyrics that praised the Estado Novo or Vargas for the bounty of gifts that they had bestowed upon the nation. When these compositions hit the airwaves, they helped popularize and commercialize hyperpatriotic lyrics that complemented the Vargas regime's goal of civic renewal and social uplift (2001, 86).

Some of these hyperpatriotic songs included, *Glórias do Brasil* (Glories of Brazil), *Salve 19 de Abril* (Long live April 19th - Vargas birthday), and *É Negócio Cesar* (It's time to get married) (Levine 1984, 16; Williams 2001, 86).

The distribution of these songs, as well as their influence was increased by the commanding presence of the DIP and the Vargas administration's access to the radio. As opposed to the Peronist bent of many tango composers, the majority of the popular samba composers disagreed with Vargas's decision to censor the samba and alter its content. Nevertheless, these composers bowed to the will of the DIP. As Levine states, "Most writers and musicians voluntarily bent their production to DIP guidelines rather than to risk costly penalties. Few editors or program directors could afford to risk angering the censors, since one bad mark would guarantee 'special' attention in the future" (1984, 15). By using the DIP in this way, Vargas was able to compensate for the lack of power and support, which he received from Brazil's samba composers.

Introduced to Brazil in 1922, the radio greatly increased Vargas's ability to use the samba as a tool of political propaganda, for it allowed him to "capitalize on the growing popularity of the samba" (Sheriff 199, 13). The radio provided the Vargas administration with a new means of broadcasting their political and personal messages. Some say it even, "served as the regime's major weapon in the campaign to uplift civic attitudes" (Levine 1999, 16). For example, the show *Hora do Brasil*, which presented a large quantity of state-commissioned samba music, acted as an advertisement for Vargas. As Levine describes this show:

The *Hora do Brasil*, a compendium of speeches, propaganda, and music which by law was carried on all stations from 7:00 to 8:00 each evening, and which therefore reached as many as two-thirds of all Brazilian house-hold with radios on any given night, was laced with performances by the country's most popular singers and musicians, including Francisco Alves and Carmen Miranda, under government contract (1999, 16).

While the use of songs as propaganda, the broadcast capabilities of the radio and the manipulation of samba composers directly situated Vargas's ideology within the culture of samba, samba was also indirectly utilized by Vargas to shape his own personal identity. Similar to Perón, Vargas attempted to outwardly identify with samba by bringing its culture into the political realm. Vargas accomplished this goal by making state-oriented sambas a central part of Brazil's Carnival. Considered by many the most Brazilian of all elements of popular culture, Carnival is an annual parade that is most generally associated with Rio de Janeiro, the birthplace of the samba (Oliven 1984). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a thorough description of the evolution of Carnival, it is interesting to note that Carnival's development trajectory opposed that of the samba, as the popular classes appropriated the Carnival from the dominant classes

(Oliven 1984, 103). Yet despite these opposing trajectories, Carnival and the samba complement each other. Providing a venue for the development of sambistas and prompting the creation of the *escolas de samba* (samba schools), samba and Carnival work in conjunction. Vargas recognized this complementary relationship. As a result, Carnival was lauded as an outlet to both promote the samba and his own vision of the nation. As Oliven details:

As soon as it perceived the political importance of the carnival groups, the state assumed a fundamental role in this process. After 1935, the *escolas de samba* were recognized, legalized and obliged to register as official entities under the title of Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba. Thereafter their parades were organized and financed by the state. All *escolas* were ‘asked to collaborate with the official extremely vainglorious political propaganda, the tradition was started of parades that tell a story capable of stimulating popular affection for patriotic symbols and the glories of the nation’ (quoted in Oliven: Tinhorão, 1975: 173).

Conclusion

Through the use of samba and tango in participatory performances, the manipulation of each dance’s lyrics and the patronage, if sometimes forced, of composers, Vargas and Perón attempted to appropriate the popularity of the samba and tango as their own. In this way, both leaders propagated their respective dances, strengthening these dance’s claim to national status, while strengthening their personal status as populist leaders and supporters of the nation’s cultural diversity. Vargas and Perón, thus, played essential roles in the symbolic journey of the samba and tango. Completing the process of national acceptance began decades ago, Vargas and Perón successful propagation and dissemination of the samba and tango allowed both of these dances to become national symbols not just in the eyes of the international community, but in the hearts of their nation’s actual inhabitants.

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