

Embodying latinness in Australia through dance

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Abstract

Dance, as an embodied activity, is shaped by culture, and simultaneously shapes culture. Significantly, over the last few years there has been a worldwide boom in Latin dance, which is often considered an 'exotic' and 'sexy' activity. This paper explores experiences of teaching Latin dance as a service activity (*extensión*, in Spanish) by an academic in Australia, shaped by the theoretical ideas of public and body pedagogies. The reflections are presented under two broad themes: the potential of Latin dance as a service activity, and the processes of integrating and othering Latinness in Australia.

Key words: Embodiment, Latin dance, Australia, public and body pedagogies, service

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Incorporando a latinidade na Austrália através da Dança

Resumo

A dança, como uma atividade corporal, é moldada pela cultura e, simultaneamente, molda a cultura. Significativamente, nos últimos anos tem havido um enorme crescimento mundial de dança latina, que é frequentemente considerada uma atividade “exótica” e “sexy”. Este artigo explora as experiências de uma acadêmica na Austrália, ensinando dança latina como uma atividade de serviço (*extensión* em espanhol), moldadas pelas ideias teóricas de pedagogias públicas e corporais. As reflexões são apresentadas divididas em dois grandes temas: o potencial da dança latina como uma atividade de serviço e os processos de integração e de exclusão da latinidade na Austrália.

Palavras-chave: Corporeidade, dança latina, Austrália, pedagogias públicas e corporais, serviço

Encarnando la latinidad en Australia a través del baile

Resumen

La danza, como una práctica corporal, es influenciada por la cultura, y simultáneamente influencia la cultura. Significativamente, durante los últimos años ha habido un ‘boom’ a nivel mundial acerca de la danza Latina, que es generalmente considerada como una actividad ‘exótica’ y ‘sexy’. Este artículo explora las experiencias de enseñar danza Latina como una actividad de extensión universitaria en Australia, utilizando las ideas teóricas de pedagogías públicas y corporales. Las reflexiones son presentadas en dos temáticas generales: el potencial de la danza Latina como una actividad de extensión, y los procesos de integración y exclusión de la Latinidad en Australia.

Palabras claves: Corporeidad, danza Latina, Australia, pedagogías públicas y corporales, servicio



Introduction

We experience everything in our lives as a consequence of being embodied. Indeed, without a body, we are nothing. People's embodied lives are complex, rich and multi-faceted (Fox, 2012). We live our lives not just immersed in a world of 'things themselves', but also in a wide variety of concepts with specific cultural and social meanings (Hart & McKinnon, 2010). Dance, as an embodied activity, is always shaped by culture, and simultaneously dance shapes culture (Wulff, 2001). Movements and postures in dance acquire meaning from the context where they are performed, as there is no universal meaning for dance. However, dance can also be transferred from one cultural context to another (Wieschialek, 2003). In this sense, dance is a privileged arena for understanding liminality and cultural creativity (Archetti, 2003), and it contributes in diverse and complex ways to the construction of embodied subjectivities.

In Europe, being taught how to dance by a qualified teacher is seen as important, as dances are considered to be fixed sequences of movements that need to be performed in certain 'correct' ways. In this way, these sequences are means to discipline the body and to impose social control (Wieschialek, 2003). Significantly, there is currently a 'global boom' of Latin music worldwide. Regardless of where you are, you can hear some sort of Latin music as background in different places.¹ Processes of globalisation allow the embodied practice of Latin dance to be experienced in Australia, even though it is produced in the 'periphery' and then exported, and in this way contests the cultural hegemony of the 'centre'² (Dyck & Archetti, 2003). As Archetti (1999) claimed in the specific case of Argentina, Argentinian performing bodies – such as those of dancers, musicians, singers and football players – have become highly visible in the leisure arena worldwide. One of the participants in Archetti's (2003) study expounded on this:

We exported, as you know, beef and cereals, and we were known due to these merchandises, but we have been exporting men and women all the time during this century. We exported football players by hundreds and hundreds, to Europe, to South America and to Mexico, but also we have been exporting music, tango, our national music, since 1900, and of course musicians, singers and dancers. We are seen and we think of ourselves, as a country exporting beef, cereals and human performers of all kind. (p. 219)

Salsa dancing, in particular, is globally marketed as 'sexy', 'hot' and 'passionate', and is usually sold as 'different' and 'exotic' in Europe (Boulila, 2018). Even though *salsa* is now a globalised style of dancing, it exhibits a particular Latin American flavour in its music, movements and gender assumptions (Dyck & Archetti, 2003). While *salsa* is often 'sold' as an erotic dance in the Global North, most dancers reject the idea of *salsa* dancing as a means of finding a sexual partner (Ward, 1993). As a commodity in a global market,

¹ The widely played song 'Despacito' (Ender & Fonsi, 2017) is a clear example of this.

² Even though it has been claimed that Australia belongs to the 'Global South' (Connell, 2007), as it is not located in the geographical area of the northern hemisphere, given its European influences and the fact that it is considered a 'developed' country, I do not include it here in the 'periphery'. The latter term is usually employed for Latin American, African and Asian countries, which are considered 'developing/underdeveloped' countries.



salsa capitalises on ‘Latin American passion’ as it invites consumers to embrace racialised performances of Latinness (Borland, 2009; Bosse, 2007; McMains, 2006, 2009, 2015; Renta, 2004; Schneider, 2013).

The work undertaken as an academic in the higher education sector usually involves three main components: teaching, research and service. The last element (i.e. service) is called *extensión* in Spanish and is the focus of this special issue. While *extensión* and service (at least in Australia) may not be exactly the same, what is often called ‘service to the community’ is the most similar approach to *extensión*. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the service to the community that I delivered while holding an academic position in Australia. These service activities involved teaching Latin dance in a rural community in the state of New South Wales (NSW).

Public and body pedagogies

Closely related to the relevance of doing *extensión* (or ‘service to the community’ in Australia) as one of the components of work as an academic, is the concept of public pedagogies (Sandlin, O’Malley, & Burdick, 2011). Public pedagogies recognise that ‘the spaces in which meanings are made, including those about the body, are contested and contingent’ (Rich, 2016, p. 232). Therefore, the concept of public pedagogies challenges the idea that pedagogical phenomena take place only in formal educational settings (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010). From this viewpoint, there is a wide variety of forms, processes and sites of education which take place outside of formal schooling (Sandlin et al., 2011). According to Ellsworth (2005, p. 6), ‘[s]paces are [acting] ... with pedagogical intent’ and places are inevitably lived in, first and foremost, through the body (Wattchow, Burke, & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2008). Public pedagogies prompt us to reflect on ‘what informal and non-institutional sites of education might offer in terms of different forms, articulations, enactments, and traces of pedagogy’ (Burdick & Sandlin, 2013, p. 143) to allow counterhegemonic learning (Rich, 2016). In this sense, public pedagogies magnify the potential for teaching and learning beyond the formal classroom and into everyday and public sites (Rich, 2016).

Importantly, bodies are also pedagogies (Jones & Hughes-Decatur, 2012). Some places are remembered because of their uniqueness, but also because they have affected our bodies and have generated meaningful associations (Bloomer & Moore, 1997, as cited in Vertinsky, 2004). According to Connell (1995, p. 53), ‘[b]odily experiences are often central in memories of our lives, and thus our understanding of who and what we are, and what we are becoming. We also learn through our bodies by doing things with them, and therefore this is an embodied learning that resides in the body itself (Tinning, 2010). Marcel Mauss (1973), a distinguished anthropologist from the early 20th century, defined ‘techniques of the body’ as the ways in which from society to society people know how to use their bodies. Furthermore, he identified the body as socially as well as psychologically and biologically constructed, and education was the essential element of the art of using the body.



The context

The country, city and university

Statistics from June 2015 show Australia's overseas-born resident population to be approximately 28.2% of the total population, with China, India and New Zealand providing the highest numbers of permanent immigrants (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016). Australia, as one of the signatories to the United Nations Refugee Convention in 1954, has recently accepted refugees from Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq and Syria, and between 1 July 2015 and 2 December 2016, a total of 17,436 visas were granted to individuals from Syria and Iraq who had been displaced by conflict. 168,200 individuals migrated to Australia during the financial year 2014–15 (ABS, 2016), and Australian society is currently one of the most diverse in the world (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014).

The experiences narrated in this paper took place in a small regional city of Australia called Armidale, and they are linked to a regionally based university named University of New England (UNE) where I worked as a (senior) lecturer (teaching and research), from 2014 to 2018. Armidale is a city in the Northern Tablelands, NSW, and had a population of 24,504 as at June 2017 (ABS, 2019). The population in Armidale of people born overseas and from non-English-speaking backgrounds has increased over the past ten years. Between 2006 and 2011, there was a population increase of 23.8% for those born overseas, and an increase of 41.4% of the population from a non-English-speaking background (UNE, 2016b).

UNE was Australia's first regional university. The original and main campus is located in the city of Armidale and there are 11 regional study centres located throughout northern NSW and a metropolitan hub, UNE Sydney, in Parramatta (UNE, 2016c). The university offers more than 200 courses at undergraduate, postgraduate coursework and higher degree research levels, and has more than 20,000 current students and 1,200 staff. Ten per cent of the total students are international students, and the domestic students are mainly from the New England and North West region of NSW. Most of the students are 'mature' students, aged more than 25 years. UNE has a long history with distance education even before the existence of the Internet, with courses done partly by correspondence.

The position that I held at UNE was a permanent teaching and research position (starting at level B – lecturer – in 2014, and then being promoted to level C – senior lecturer – in 2017). The position was undertaken at the School of Education, in the team of Health, Physical Education and Sport Studies (HPSS). In Australia, academic positions that combine teaching and research are the most common ones, particularly in the HPSS field. These positions include a combination of teaching, research and service. Service is usually undertaken in two levels: at the university level and at the community level. This last level of service is most similar to what is called *extensión* in Argentinian universities. My position at UNE encompassed 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% service. Particularly at UNE, these percentages made reference to: 'Experience and achievement in teaching, curriculum development and research supervision, including



leadership in teaching’ (teaching component), ‘Research, scholarship, creative achievement and professional activity’ (research component), and ‘Service and administration to the University and Community’ (service component) (UNE, 2016a). According to this form, the service activities need to be related to the work undertaken and one’s role as a UNE academic. The service contributions need to be contextualised and leadership roles also need to be highlighted. Furthermore, the dimensions, duties and achievements of these roles need to be stressed, as well as the impact that they had (UNE, 2016a). Service to the community can include collaborations with local, regional, national and international bodies; however, there is not much explanation about this particular academic role.

According to UNE position classification standards for academic staff, a lecturer (level B) is supposed to have ‘[i]nvolvement in professional activity’ (FairWork Commission, 2014, p. 75). Among all the position standards for level B, that is the only mention of the service component. In relation to cultural/ethnic background awareness, there are a series of documents at UNE, such as the ‘Cultural Diversity’ policy (UNE, 2007), currently expired, the ‘Equity and Diversity’ rule (UNE, 2019a) and the ‘Prevention of harassment, bullying and discrimination’ policy (UNE, 2019b).

UNE claims to be a diverse university represented by staff from 51 countries and students from 66 countries in 2016, when international students represented 4.9% of the population. Students from China and Nepal represent the greatest proportion of international students studying at UNE at 19.2% and 15.7% respectively (UNE, 2016b). According to the Multicultural Action Plan (UNE, 2016b),

To meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population UNE aims to:

- Provide education programs that support social and economic participation.
- Provide a high quality student experience that embeds cultural and international awareness.
- Strengthen engagement with regional and international communities to build educational pathways for diverse student groups. (p. 2)

Furthermore, the Multicultural Action Plan (UNE, 2016b) expands on the aims for multiculturalism, stating that:

As the Armidale community and the University attract and expand their population of culturally and linguistically diverse people it is important that the University is able to:

- Provide an environment free from harassment and discrimination.
- Meet our obligations as a provider of education to international students.
- Support the needs of students and staff from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Prepare our students to work effectively in cross cultural contexts.
- Develop and nurture strong and enduring relationships between the University and the local regional community for the benefit of students and staff.
- Embrace culturally diverse perspectives in our teaching and research.



The University is committed to building a respectful and inclusive environment for domestic and international students and staff and values the contribution of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. (pp. 2–3)

This is also consistent with one strategy and aspiration included in the UNE Strategic Plan 2016–2020 (UNE, 2016c), under the section ‘Deliver a high quality student experience’, which states that one of the aims is to ‘[e]mbed cultural and international awareness in current programs’ (p. 6).

My background and Latin dance

I was born and raised in a rural city in Argentina. Argentina is a country in which immigration levels are low, particularly in rural areas. In 2010, 1,805,957 of the Argentine resident population were born outside Argentina, representing 4.5% of the total Argentine resident population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo, 2010). People who have fair skin are considered ‘white’ in Argentina. The label ‘white’ is determined only by skin colour and not necessarily by ancestry or place of birth (author, 2019). Therefore, I have always self-identified as ‘white’ in my home country. In 2010, I arrived for the first time in Australia to pursue a PhD in HPESS. There, I learned that ‘whites’ are considered to be people with a European background, and it is not only linked to ‘skin colour’, as in Argentina. Therefore, from that moment, I self-identified as non-white and/or ‘Latina’ in Australia (whenever I needed to ‘label myself’). In so doing, I changed from being part of a ‘majority’ (i.e. within the dominant group in Argentina) to being a ‘minority’ (i.e. non-white in Australia).

I first started going to social Latin dance within my first three months after arriving in Brisbane.³ One Friday evening, when I was walking in the city centre, I heard Latin music and I followed the music to see where it was coming from. While I have always enjoyed Latin music, I never used to dance *salsa* or *bachata* back in Argentina – just a little bit of *cuarteto*⁴ in social dances. After I reached the place where the music was coming from, I saw a large group of people dancing outdoors. I stayed for the whole night and that was my first connection back to Latin memories after I arrived in Australia, which I truly enjoyed. In this sense, Latin dance put my body at ease, creating a feeling of ‘comfort’ and ‘home’ (Boulila, 2018). From that day, I joined the social Latin dance each Friday for the whole year, which also included a short introductory and free class in Latin dance before the social dance. I made several friends by going each week, some of them Latinos, others from all over the world, and they showed me different moves and steps for *salsa* and *bachata*. In this way, I ‘learned’ to dance mainly by going to these social dance encounters.

Four years after that first encounter with Latin dance in Australia, I moved to the regional city of Armidale, and there was no Latin dance (or music) in the city. After living there for a few months and getting to know some people (most of them born and bred

³ A metropolitan city of Australia. It is the third biggest city in the country with a population of approximately 2.5 million people.

⁴ *Cuarteto* is very similar to *merengue*, and it is a very popular and traditional music genre in the state of Córdoba, where I was born and raised. There, it is common to dance *cuarteto* at weddings, parties and discos.



Australians with European backgrounds), and telling people that I used to enjoy Latin dance, I was asked to run *salsa* dance lessons. I explained that I could dance some *salsa*, but I had never taught it before. Nevertheless, I decided to go ahead and prepare myself to teach Latin dance – after all, I am a Physical Education (PE) teacher. I prepared classes for *salsa*, *bachata* and *merengue*, which were held weekly in the city hall for a term of 12 weeks. Many people responded enthusiastically and most of the attendees were white Australians, with the exception of a Cuban and a German participant. Most of them held senior positions in their professions, and some were also academics who worked at UNE. I also organised a couple of social dance events, one of them with a performance demonstration.

After the success of the first term, I decided to organise a second term, with two levels available: one for beginners and the other for continuers/intermediate. While I was enjoying the opportunity to teach Latin dance and do some social dance, I was also putting lots of effort into running the classes. I needed to learn the ‘proper’ names of the steps in English, break them down so the participants could learn them easily, and organise the venue, public liability insurance, advertising and so on. I was mainly doing all this just to have the opportunity to dance myself, as there were no other Latin dance options in the city. As Skinner (2007) suggested, *salsa* (and other Latin dances, I could add) is particularly danced in ‘cosmopolitan’ cities where there is a market for ‘world culture’, and Armidale was probably not big enough for this activity (even though UNE was praising the multicultural nature of the city).

The potential of Latin dance as a service activity in Australia

Australians usually need formal instruction to learn Latin dances, and this was the case for the participants who attended my Latin dance classes. Many of them were constantly staring at their feet and counting the steps while moving. The methodological and disciplined ways in which Australians prepare themselves to dance, which is comparable to what Wieschiolek (2003) found amongst Germans, function also as a way to distance themselves from Latinos, who skip the classes and just join the social dance. In Brisbane, where there are more opportunities for Latin dance, Latinos tend to go directly to the social dance events, rather than attending lessons in advance (even though some of them do not know how to perform *salsa*, *bachata* or *merengue* steps). On the other hand, my Australian participants asked me for the ‘proper outfit’ and shoes they needed to wear even before the first class.

The creole (in Spanish, *criollo*), because of the Latin influence, is exactly the opposite of the Australian: restless, undisciplined, agile and skilful (Archetti, 1996). The ‘Latin element’ is characterised by lack of energy, strength and discipline, but excels on speed (author, 2016). The oppositions between British and *criollo* physical virtues have been embedded in perceptions of football – and I would say, also in dance. The British physical virtues are related to strength and physical power, while the virtues of the *criollos* are more associated with agility and virtuoso movement (Archetti, 2003). However, regardless of the level of participation, the formal disciplining of bodies that occurs in dance includes not only the transmission of knowledge about techniques of the body, but also

preferences and meanings (Dyck & Archetti, 2003). People acquire embodied understandings of what to do with their bodies within a specific context. Participants also learn movements that they are not used to performing. For example, one of the participants in Wieschiolek's (2003) study stated: 'I learned to move in a way I never saw before and to move muscles I didn't even know I had. This gives me the feeling of being able to master my body' (p. 129). Many others also talked about other positive effects associated with dancing *salsa*, such as 'escapism' (i.e. the ability to relax and forget their daily routine) and dancing as a means to improve their self-esteem. Some participants even mentioned that their colleagues, friends and relatives were impressed by their 'exotic' hobby.

Latin dance is generally performed by couples and requires physical contact (at least *salsa*, *bachata* and *merengue*, which were the focus of my dance classes). Australia, like most countries of the Global North, currently operates with preconceived ideas of 'no touching', and people living in these countries are not used to having physical contact with others that they do not know (well). Anglo-Euro-American culture is usually classified as the archetypal individualistic, non-contact culture (Altman & Chemers, 1980). On the other hand, Latin culture is considered an example of a high-contact proxemic culture (Hall, 1966), with individuals who prefer more proximate social interaction (Evans, Lepore, & Mata Allen, 2000) manifesting a variety of collectivist over individualist tendencies (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Latin Americans prefer closer social interaction distances than individuals from North America or Northern Europe (Aiello, 1987; Aiello & Thompson, 1980; Altman & Vinsel, 1977; Sussman & Rosenfeld, 1982), as studied elsewhere (author, 2018) during PE classes.

Therefore, the fact that these types of dances required physical contact with another person already posed a challenge for some participants. One of them, who was a belly dancer, commented that as a belly dancer she was not used to touching and dancing with another person, and that was already challenging for her. A participant in Wieschiolek's (2003) study also stated: 'for me, *salsa* is first of all a harmless and inoffensive way of meeting people ... you have the chance, with a person that you don't know at all, to smell and to touch this person or whatever' (p. 131). Furthermore, dancing is usually associated with heavy drinking in a pub or disco in Australia. The culture of dancing just for the joy of dancing without alcohol (or not in a pub) is uncommon in many places.

Given the social dimension of dance, particularly within this service activity, the processes of embodiment often involve the presence of fellow participants. This social element goes beyond the mere exchange of some casual chit-chat before the lessons, but is also the main point of how they learn to use and enjoy their bodies. Dancing can be particularly pleasurable when it involves recognised forms of movement performed in relaxed and playful ways (Dyck & Archetti, 2003). This enjoyment was clearly visible in participants' smiles, their informal comments between classes and the social dance venues being fully packed with people dancing (which was not common in those pubs). When their bodies are required to perform choreographed steps and coordinated movements, this demands awareness of the disposition of others and some shared anticipation and imagination. Latin dance takes place outside the everyday routine, and the dancers can experience a temporary escape from the realities of life and new visions and possibilities which influence their embodied subjectivities and social lives (Dyck & Archetti, 2003).



Integrating or othering Latinness in Australia?

While participants in this service activity responded enthusiastically in their efforts to learn Latin dance, they still considered it an ‘exotic’ activity. Even though UNE attempted to welcome people from overseas, their traditions (e.g. dances) are considered strange, and by extension they become ‘strangers’ to the country. According to Ahmed (2000), the incorporation of difference into a country occurs through welcoming ‘strangers.’ For Ahmed, the stranger is a discursive figure that is excluded from belonging to a particular space. The stranger thus embodies difference (Boulila, 2018). However, stranger figures are not just established as other through expulsion from spaces but also by processes of incorporation and ‘welcoming.’ The act of welcoming ‘the stranger’ as the origin of difference produces the very figure of ‘the stranger’ as the one who can be taken in. In so doing, multiculturalism requires the presence of the stranger as the origin of difference that can be taken in (Ahmed, 2000).

Considering spaces as being discursive (Ahmed, 2006; Valentine, 1993), processes of expulsion and integration are key places for the differentiation of borders, populations and those who do not belong (Boulila, 2018). While difference assists a nation to reimagine the collective ‘we’ as ‘diverse’, strangeness is only attractive when it fulfils the role of a provider of difference that can be safely consumed (e.g. as Australians learn Latin dance). This was clearly expressed in Boulila (2018) when Latino participants commented on their embodiment:

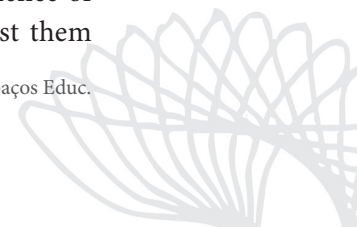
How did I feel about, you know, Latinos being sold as loving, sexy, that kind of thing. It’s been engraved into people’s minds – Latin America is exotic. I think it’s comes from the publicity, word of mouth. People are thinking ‘Have you ever slept with a Latino?’ ‘Have you ever slept with a Latina?’ And you know you’ve had English girlfriends and suddenly you slept with a Latino and you think ‘Oh my God, I’ve never felt anything like this in my life’ It’s engraved in people’s minds, that’s what they expect before even experiencing anything. They’re already thinking it’s exotic. It’s been going on for years ... I think that people think you’re exotic – you’re a commodity and they do feel that ‘I’m above you because I’m European’ Not all the time but a lot of the time. We often feel like we are being used. Because we are ‘exotic’ – yeah again ... a commodity ... Just because you have an accent you can’t be that bright. (Daniela, in Boulila, 2018, pp. 249–250)

Daniela’s critique highlights that the provision of ‘exotic’ goods on the market requires racialising discourses and racist hierarchies. The provision of desirable goods such as ‘salsa’ or ‘good coffee’ or ‘good bananas’ is part of the same racialising narrative that associates Latinness with stereotypes of low skilled or criminal labour (Boulila, 2018). Accordingly, Ahmed (2000) claims that the commodification of difference into lifestyle goods allows ‘difference’ to be associated with something that just boosts the ordinary. In so doing, the exotic component is believed to be transferred through consumer goods that can be integrated and assimilated. This is also complemented with the idea that the consumer can become different by consuming ‘ethnic’ products and by engaging in exotic practices but without experiencing racialisation or living with racialised others (Boulila, 2018).

Latinos and non-Latinos in Australia differed also in their favourite places and ways of dancing Latin music. Latinos did not often attend classes and went directly to the social dances. Australians (and people living in Australia who were born in other places except for Latin America) tended to attend formal lessons before starting to dance socially. This was also the case in Brisbane when short introductory lessons were offered before the social dance, and this is similar to the results found by Wieschiolek (2003) among Germans who dance *salsa* in Hamburg. In this study, Latin Americans used to claim that they have ‘the rhythm in their blood’, and they even mocked the Germans for their excessive willingness to learn *salsa*.

Racialised others are still under-represented in Armidale, even though the Multicultural Action Plan (UNE, 2016b) at UNE states that ‘the Armidale community and the University attract and expand their population of culturally and linguistically diverse people’ (p. 2). One of the strategies and aspirations of the university’s Strategic Plan is to ‘provide a high quality student experience that embeds cultural and international awareness’ (UNE, 2016c, p. 6). However, it would be difficult to achieve this if the community still considers the ‘other’ as ‘exotic’ and hierarchically inferior. Dominant discourses and practices of ‘white-as-norm’ (Flintoff, Dowling, & Fitzgerald, 2015, p. 560) prevail in Armidale and in Australia in general. White supremacy is characterised as the implicit, pervasive operations that construct and maintain racial inequities to protect whiteness through the regular functioning of society (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). Those identified as non-white are denied the privilege of normativity and are marked as inferior, marginal and ‘other’ (Gillborn, 2005). In so doing, whiteness operates in the notions of privilege and power, constructing race as ‘other’, and products and service from the ‘others’ as ‘exotic’. Whiteness normalises and naturalises ‘difference’, locating ‘other’ people as inferior and therefore maintaining social inequalities (Azzarito, Macdonald, Dagkas, & Fisette, 2017; Bowleg, 2012). In this sense, othering means treating difference between individuals hierarchically (Azzarito et al., 2017) and, in so doing, maintaining the interlocking systems of race, class and gender to reproduce a social moral order in which some are positioned at the centre and others at the margins (Dagkas, 2014).

In my particular case, it was only after I went to Australia that Latin dance became a relevant aspect of my generalised ethnic subjectivity as Latin American, even though I always used to enjoy dancing in general. Stories from my Latino friends, most of whom worked in low-skilled labour, confirmed that ‘others’ are often associated with ‘the body’ and whites with ‘the mind’. Ethnic minority groups do not always have the possibility of agency and opportunities to ‘speak for themselves’ and negotiate power relationships (Azzarito, 2016), and the minority group usually faces the dilemma of speaking out or being silent (Freire, 1996). In this sense, it is necessary to think strategically and thoughtfully about issues of representation of the ‘other’ in today’s global era. When the ‘other’ is represented, the representation itself is filtered, mediated and distorted by the dominant culture. In an attempt to disrupt this colonial construction of otherness, Southern theory (Connell, 2007) and postcolonial scholarship repositions the Global South (in which Latin America is included) as an epistemic other, a source of unique knowledge in that it has emerged directly out of the experience of various forms of oppression, including colonialism, and the struggles against them



(Takayama, Heimans, Amazan, & Maniam, 2016). To be able to truly listen to the 'other', both unlearning one's privilege and destabilising the centred position are crucial strategies for constructing an infrastructure where the voice of the 'other' can be seriously considered.

Concluding remarks

The purpose of this paper was to explore the teaching of Latin dance as a service activity in Australia. In doing so, I explored these practices using the theoretical approaches of body and public pedagogies. This approach has unveiled two main perspectives. First, the potential that Latin dance has as an embodied service activity in Australia, and second, how Latin dance can serve to both integrate and other Latinness in Australia. Regarding the first point, Latin dance classes worked as body and public pedagogies for the participants in the classes, as they learned some Latin dance steps, to move their bodies in different ways, and just to enjoy dancing and moving their bodies. In relation to the second point, through the delivery of Latin dance classes it became evident that Latinness could be both integrated and othered in Australia.

While UNE, the Armidale community and Australia in general claim to be increasingly multicultural, minority groups are still under-represented and are usually associated with the provision of commodified goods and services demanded by the majority group. Racialised discourses and practices still exist and Latin dance is often considered an 'exotic' and 'sexy' activity. Even though the university aims to increase international contacts and connections with the local community through service activities, the provision of Latin dance classes proved to be a very complex process.

In my particular case, I learned that I am able to teach Latin dance and that my otherness was a subtle form of racialisation because of my ethnic background. My liquid subjectivity of ethnicity has been a continuum rather than a fixed entity (author, 2019), which changed from 'white and dominant' (in Argentina) to 'non-white and minority' (in Australia). Latin dance was also an aspect of my subjectivity of ethnicity as a Latin American living outside of my country of birth.

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