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# Carmen Miranda: an Embodied Marketplace Icon

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## Abstract

Building upon the CCT framework of incorporation of ideologies, taste regimes, and national and regional interests by consumer cultures, this paper proposes that social and political ideologies are also embodied in marketplace icons. This paper aims, then, to bring together the concepts of iconicity and liminality to provide an account of Carmen Miranda as a marketplace icon who not only embodied the national myths of her time but also continues to be employed in the current marketplace for a variety of purposes. As such, icons like Carmen contribute to the production of marketplaces in which historical, political, and ideological issues are naturalized. Carmen's collaboration via cultural industries such as radio and cinema, her omnipresence in advertising campaigns and in the printed media, and her influence on female fashion contributed to the consumer culture of her time. Moreover, the mythical character of her persona and her cultural legacy hold an expressive symbolic power, making her a remarkable contemporary marketplace icon. The key to her iconicity is her liminality; unsettling hierarchies, traversing social planes, and questioning identity. As a marketplace icon, Carmen's legacy is thus constantly reissued, founded upon the ambivalence of her persona and signaling her transgressive potential.

**Keywords:** Carmen Miranda; marketplace icon; embodiment of culture; cultural icon; liminality.

## ***“Quero ficar mais um pouquinho”*: Carmen Miranda as a bond between people**

In 2011, Isabelita dos Patins, a famous Argentinean-Brazilian drag queen, gave a ring to the Brazilian actress Marília Pêra. The ring had once belonged to Carmen Miranda. It was a gift to Pêra

as thanks her for her help during Isabelita's hospitalization. Isabelita, in turn, had received the ring in 1996 as a gift from Erick Barreto on his deathbed. Barreto was famous for his characterization of Carmen. The resemblance was so striking that he had moved Aurora Miranda, Carmen's sister, and they had become friends. Pêra died in 2015 and nobody knows what has happened to that ring since. This story is well known among Carmen's fans, and we like to think that it represents the way Carmen Miranda brought different people together, just like carnival. During this popular festivity, Brazilians usually wear *fantasias* (costumes), a form of masquerade, thus feeling free to subvert socially constructed limits (DaMatta, 1997) and turning the natural order upside down. Similarly, Carmen turned the natural order upside down with her dance, songs, films, and exaggerated and mesmerizing persona.

"Carmen" was a nickname given to her by an opera-loving uncle. Like Bizet's main character, the gypsy Carmen, Miranda had a transgressive *ethos*. She was a working-class woman who achieved international fame, traversing the boundaries of Brazilian society and taste. For those who wanted to question gender norms, Carmen's exaggerated performance on screen served as an inspiration (Pullen, 2014), and, just like the gypsy Carmen, Miranda used her dancing and singing talents (and her sense of humor) to bewitch and seduce us all. Carmen was extraordinary in many ways. She was charismatic, possessing a "quasi-magical power, which makes it possible to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained by (physical or economic) force" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 14). Her life and career were marked by contradictions and ambiguities. Although a Portuguese immigrant, she would get deeply offended if someone implied she was not Brazilian. Despite keeping her Portuguese passport her entire life, Carmen declared her love for Brazil many times. She worked her way to transnational stardom as an actress, a singer, and a performer, yet faced much criticism along the way. Carmen became both a caricature of Brazil and its X-ray (Veloso, 1991), and she remains to this day as a symbol of Brazilianness.

One of Carmen's most striking characteristics, and perhaps the most overlooked in the studies on her, is her *in-betweenness* (Ovalle, 2010) or ambivalence. Carmen existed betwixt and between two different contexts (Brazilian and North-American), representing two different and disputed poles (Blackness and Latinity). As this text will show, the reaction of the Brazilian elite to Carmen's performance at the Cassino da Urca in 1940 (after a season in the United States) is very symptomatic. During the 1930s, Carmen embodied the Vargas government's ideal of racial mixing in Brazil. Thus, she served as a strategic social facade for the incorporation of extant racial and class differences. Upon arriving in the United States, Carmen's image was projected to represent the Latina. During the 1940s and 1950s, the U.S. sought to produce new markets for American products and avoid the advance of fascism in the region. Carmen's image would, therefore, fit the local expansionist policy that had as its main objective to have the countries of Latin America under the influence of the United States. The experience of living and existing "in-between" is also known as liminality, and it is associated with ambiguous transitions and meaningful transformative events that are possible in the realm of the market (Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar, 2020, p. 1). Thus, considering Carmen a liminal marketplace icon translates the idea of an embodied cultural production that overflows and conveys mythologized market ideologies.

Like some contemporary artists (e.g., Jennifer Lopez and Shakira), Carmen embodied the US-centered stereotype of the Latina. Despite their conventional and successful careers, these women have come to embody myths that contribute to the naturalization of history (Barthes, 1972). This

means that marketplace icons such as Carmen and Jennifer are managed to perpetuate ideologies, acting, albeit temporarily, as key players in the development of a national community (“nation-builders”, according to Ovalle, 2010). Carmen was a marketplace icon who acted as a symbol of the Good Neighbor policy and as a representative of a tropical and racialized Latinity. Jennifer Lopez, in turn, mobilized the Latina myth in the 1990s and 2000s by exploring multicultural discourses to incorporate black popular culture into the mainstream North American culture (Ovalle, 2010). Despite their own personas and self-identifications, these Latina icons expose how Latin American countries within the frame of cultural industries are mobilized according to shifting U.S. social, cultural, and political interests (Ovalle). During her time in Hollywood, which covers most of her life and career, Carmen was a barometer of U.S. ideological beliefs toward race, gender, sexuality, and class (Ovalle).

Altogether, those predicates turned Carmen into a marketplace icon that is employed to this day in many contexts; transferring her liminality and mythological spark to everything with which she is associated. This ambivalence does not simply refer to the embodiment of two racial/national identities, but also to the possibility of experiencing something that is otherwise impossible in daily life (Hall-Araújo, 2013a, p. 214). Furthermore, it is connected to change and renewal, which Bakhtin (1984) associates with the carnivalesque. This inserts Carmen into the world of parody, carnival, drag, and camp. To drag aims, “through dress and performance to satisfy recipient or audience expectations associated with a social category [and] very often humor is engaged to comment on [this] category” (Hall-Araújo, 2013a, pp. 214-215). As Hall-Araújo (2013a, p. 150) states, “Carmen’s Hollywood films are filled with carnivalesque moments and scenes that extend beyond the simply comic, typically attending musical comedies”. Through costumes that favored social and spatial movements (which constitute forms of pretense and masquerade), Carmen played with existing hierarchies, moving between different social planes and creating uncertainty and confusion about her belongingness (or identity) (Hall-Araújo, 2013a). *Fantasia* (carnival costume) and fantasy were thus closely connected: dressed as a *baiana*, Carmen put up a show, but the Brazilian audience surely did not mistake her for a real *baiana* or take her dress for a daily Bahian dress. The same could be said about the Latina Carmen embodied on Technicolor Hollywoodian movies. Carmen’s “performative wink” (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016) shows, then, that she could poke fun at the stereotypes she mobilized while performing, thus demystifying them.

This paper is a tribute to Carmen, adding to her list of achievements another title: marketplace icon. Her iconic status derives especially from the image portrayed by and of her on screen (Sant’Anna & Macedo, 2013), often through one-dimensional archetypes (Denninson & Shaw, 2005). Carmen still influences consumer culture in significant ways. Furthermore, marketplace icons are also cultural icons; “potent and efficient vehicles to diffuse and reproduce ideologies” (Holt, 2016, p. 76.) Carmen’s intense character not only embraced the *Zeitgeist* of her time, but also embodied it through her diction, moves, songs, films, clothes, and costumes. As a creative subject, she “can only be fully understood by analyzing the socio-cultural space (traditions, customs, patterns, and values) to which. . . [she belonged, as a re-inventor] . . . of codes and languages” (Velho, 2006, p. 140).

Building upon the consumer culture theory (CCT) framework of the incorporation of ideologies, taste regimes, and national and regional interests by consumer cultures (Thompson, 2004), this paper argues that social and political ideologies are also embodied in marketplace icons.

As such, icons contribute to the production of markets in which historical, political, and ideological issues are naturalized (Barthes, 1972). Our contributions to consumption studies are threefold. First, we contend that Carmen was “falsely obvious” (Barthes, 1972) since she was an embodied marketplace icon. This means that she embodied and naturalized two national myths through her persona, movies, songs, and clothes, two different ideologies that spilled over into social spheres. Second, we claim that Carmen became a liminal (or ambivalent) icon by naturalizing two different market ideologies; her persona and image were mobilized according to the political goals of different countries. Relatedly, Carmen’s image and persona continue to this day to be employed in the market for many purposes. Third, we argue that Carmen’s liminality is closely connected with parody and debauchery, and that her potential to portray in-betweenness works to demystify the artificiality of what is considered natural still remains (Balieiro, 2014; Trevisan, 2000).

We address these issues by considering Carmen as a marketplace icon and by showing how Carmen embodied the many changes taking place in Brazil and in the U.S. Then, we describe the conditions of possibility (O’Donnell, 2015; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004) that enabled that embodiment. Finally, we discuss Carmen’s transgressive character and critically approach her relationship with Brazilianness in contemporary market narratives.

### **“Cantoras do rádio”: Maria do Carmo before Carmen Miranda**

In 1908, José and Maria Emília decided to emigrate to Brazil due to the political instability in Portugal threatening war and hunger — especially for the inhabitants of Portuguese rural villages. After the birth of their first daughter, Olinda, in 1907, the couple planned to move to Brazil, immigrating in the second half of 1908. However, bureaucracy delayed their plans and Maria Emília, pregnant with her second child, decided not to give birth in a ship crossing the Atlantic, which lacked proper hygiene (Castro, 2005). This bureaucratic delay was the only circumstance responsible for the birth of Maria do Carmo Miranda da Cunha on February 9, 1909, in Portugal. By the time she was 12 months old, the family had emigrated to Brazil, settling in the bohemian neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro. Maria soon learned to dance and sing, performing at parties, auditioning for radio shows, and entering “star search” contests against her father’s will (Hall-Araújo, 2013a). She, then, followed her dream of singing, finding encouragement in the residents and customers of her family’s boarding house, many of them musicians (Pullen, 2014). In 1928, she met Josué de Barros, a Bahian composer, performing with him under the stage name “Carmen Miranda” (Pullen, 2014). Barros helped her sign a deal with RCA Victor and, by the 1930 carnival season, she had become a national sensation (Hall-Araújo, 2013b) with the song *Pra você gostar de mim (Taí)*, a carnival march.

Despite featuring in several Brazilian films, Carmen was best known as a singer in Brazil. Radio was very important for the dissemination of her work, but Carmen’s image was not central to her radio career. Here, the spotlight was reserved instead for her songs, whose lyrics sometimes evoked nationalist themes. Despite belonging to the working class, Carmen forged a sophisticated look based on a Hollywood aesthetic and the latest trends promoted by Brazilian lifestyle magazines (Hall-Araujo, 2013a). Her image as a *baiana* continued to inhabit the symbolic universe of many people; but it was only in 1938 that Carmen adopted and stylized this costume (Hall-Araujo, 2013b). While the *baiana* is a woman born in the Brazilian state of Bahia, it also denotes women of Afro-Brazilian origin and practitioners of the Candomblé religion (Denninson & Shaw,

2005; Sant'Anna & Macedo, 2013). Six days before the release of *Banana da Terra* (1938), the movie featuring the famous costume, Alceu Penna, an illustrator for *O Cruzeiro* magazine, used the image of a *baiana* as a symbol of Brazilianness (Bonadio & Guimarães, 2010, p. 155). This *baiana* look became even more consolidated, stylized, and exaggerated when Carmen moved to the United States (Kerber, 2002; Pullen, 2014).

By 1945, Carmen had become the highest paid woman in the U.S. (Pullen, 2014) and the first South American honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The height of her career as an actress occurred between 1941 and 1945, but her decline was inevitable and mirrored the demise of the great Technicolor musicals at the end of World War II. In contrast, her career as a singer remained solid, with shows in nightclubs and on television, in addition to touring around Europe. In August 1955, Carmen died suddenly of a heart attack in her house in Beverly Hills, "the real Brazilian Embassy in the U.S.", as she used to describe it (O'Donnell, 2015). This was a dramatic finale to a colorful and prolific career that counted with more than a hundred hit singles and twenty movie features. During that time, Carmen had also become synonymous with the stylized *baiana* image that she perfected, an image that served to embody both the project of a Brazilian identity pursued by the Vargas regime of the 1930s and the contemporaneous US-centered stereotype of the Latina. Subsequently, that same image has become an expression of camp sensibility (Balieiro, 2014; Trevisan, 2000).

### **"The lady in the tutti-frutti hat": Carmen Miranda, the marketplace icon**

Carmen was the theme of the 2009 São Paulo Fashion Week. In the corridors of the Ibirapuera Biennial, where the event took place, the drag queens Dindry Buck and Sissi Girl donned productions inspired by Carmen's look, with a profusion of necklaces, bracelets, and even turbans. Harassed by fans, Sissi declared: "This is what success looks like, ok, honey? Look at all these fans!" (Orosco, 2009). Carmen was very popular and loved by her fans. She fostered a very close relationship with them "by maintaining a very active performing agenda and public visibility" and "by sending signed photographs in response to [their] requests" (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 898). And what would be the biggest indicator that Carmen was already a marketplace icon than her popularity? She sold 35,000 copies of her first hit, *Pra você gostar de mim (Táí)*, an extraordinary number in early 1930s (Castro, 2005), and her funeral procession in Rio de Janeiro was accompanied by half a million people, collectively humming some of Carmen's most well-known carnival marches and sambas (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 140), an event poetically described by Castro (2005: 550) as Carmen's last carnival in the people's arms.

As national mythologies and ideologies are appropriated through time and by different social actors, "yet constantly renewed to fit contemporary life" (Stern, 1995, p. 183), it is fair to say that, to this day, Carmen is evoked in market and consumption narratives. Her aesthetic heritage works mythically. This means that as a myth (and an icon), Carmen did not deny things; on the contrary, her function was to talk about them (Barthes, 1972, p. 143). She was like wine, a resilient totem, which supported "a varied mythology which does not trouble about contradictions" (Barthes, 1972, p. 58). Carmen was "above all a converting substance, capable of reversing situations and states, and of extracting from objects their opposites" (Barthes, 1972, p. 58). From a critical-historical perspective, she became a mythic and archetypical character that provides plotlines "that structure

consumption texts and the semiotic relationships through which mythic elements form a coherent whole” (Thompson, 2004, p. 162). As a marketplace icon that embodies an aesthetic experience, she triggers assessments of taste and values, and possibilities of understanding the world through her films’ settings, her music, gestures, her body and its movements – just like texts to be read (Sant’Anna & Macedo, 2013). When fans mimic Carmen through consumerism, they recognize that an image bought to wear and to discard at will is as essential for their identity as any other product (Roberts, 1993). Just like applying cosmetics, “fans physically perform the Miranda masquerade, highlighting for themselves the artificiality of the stereotypes that interpellate them in their everyday life” (Roberts, 1993), showing that the market acts as a mediator of social ties and social relations (Arnould & Thompson, 2007).

Her sewing skills and fashion sense have always earned her female fans, which were attracted by the way Carmen put her look together, everywhere she performed. She was a fashionista, or rather, she had “it”, “something that few women have, and that makes them different, charismatic, and that they are not aware of” (Castro, 2005, p. 39). In March 1936, Carmen signed a contract with the Argentinean radio *Belgrano*. Her presence in Buenos Aires caused a furor, evidenced by the headline in *El Hogar*, announcing that Carmen was setting trends around the city (Castro, 2005, p. 142). “The women from Buenos Aires would also wait for her when she left the radio or the theater and would come over to feel her clothes, appreciate the fabric, the cut, the finish, and ask where they could buy or do the same” (Castro, 2005, p. 142). In Hollywood, her looks were also a gold mine at a time when cinema and consumer culture were strongly connected and at the epicenter of “Hollywood’s promotion of both its stars and films and fueled the intense commodification surrounding the stars, both on and off the screen” (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016). The “Miranda-craze” could be translated into numbers: Carmen earned \$311.44 in royalties on jewelry and hats in 1939 (approximately US\$ 602,613.16 in current values), and \$839.90 in 1940 (approximately US\$ 1,602,133.25 in current values) (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 2918). Nonetheless, these numbers only partly represent the “craze”, since her look was also counterfeited. With Carmen’s success shortly after her appearance on “Streets of Paris” (a musical revue that debuted in June 1939 at the Broadhurst Theater), the association of her image with fashion and advertising industries was almost inevitable. Carmen negotiated contracts with clothing manufacturers and her style soon invaded department stores (Balieiro, 2017). Macy’s was the first to sell clothes and accessories inspired by Carmen’s look, “running huge retail ads, with [her] name and photo referring to the Broadhurst Theater. It was what Shubert [Carmen’s manager] wanted: the clothes selling the show, the latter selling the clothes, and both selling Carmen” (Castro, 2005, p. 222). And it was not long before Carmen became aware of the inappropriate use of her image. She had just arrived in the United States and consumer goods associated with her image were already being counterfeited, a sign, among other things, that Carmen’s look was a success in the American consumer market.

Carmen was “one of the first celebrities to endorse commercial products in printed ads” (Hall-Araújo, 2013a, p. 69), thus leveraging her iconicity while embodying the ideologies that permeated multiple market discourses; she appeared in various campaigns for brands such as Ford, Kolynos, General Electric, Rheingold Beer and, ironically, the Barbizon language course (because Carmen would become the symbol of a poorly spoken English). Carmen packaged “the perceived exotic passion of nonwhiteness for white consumption” (Ovalle, 2010, p. 62), helping to sell “South American-inspired North American fashions to South American women”. In 1944, the United Fruit Company even created a brand character called Chiquita Banana inspired by

Carmen's persona (Gatti, 2006; O'Neil, 2005). Nowadays, Carmen is evoked to promote tourism (Macedo & Sant'Anna, 2014; O'Neil, 2005), brands (Carvalho, 2019; Castro, 2005), and to set the mood in fashion editorials (Sant'Anna & Macedo, 2013). This is especially true when the goal is to convey an aura of Brazilianness.

### **“Down South America way!”: Brazilian and American contexts**

National identity and popular culture are concepts manifested within a broader framework: the State (Ortiz, 2005). The concept of *national* evokes the idea of something that is “ours” and of what ought to be done in order to sustain it (Ortiz, 2005). Carmen embodied what Ovalle (2010) calls *in-betweenness*, that is, she existed betwixt the representational poles of blackness and whiteness, serving Brazil and the United States “in radically different ways, unifying one nation through a hybridized sonic sameness and the other through an exoticized visual difference (Ovalle, 2010, p. 49). Nonetheless, both ideologies shared common elements (Roberts, 1993). For example, there was an underlying assumption that “it’s a small world after all”, that “under the skin” we are all *essentially* the same, and that any differences between cultures are only superficial and irrelevant” (Roberts, 1993, p. 6, italics in original). It is further suggested that “cultural and ethnic differences [were] seen as problems that can and should be easily resolved”. By analyzing Carmen’s trajectory, we can pinpoint how culture was used as a medium by the State to gloss over systemic issues and demarcate market and ideological areas of influence in a period of economic and political instabilities.

Conflicting explanatory models of the Brazilian culture have coexisted side by side since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the most prized of which was the one that bore the promise of a “white Brazil” (Schwarcz, 1995). Throughout the 1920s, racial models of analysis came to be harshly criticized, leaving room for social, economic, and cultural arguments (Schwarcz, 1995). It was then that “culture” replaced “race”. During the 1920s, opposing cultures and ideologies were emerging in the Brazilian market context. In Rio de Janeiro (then Brazilian capital), the urban beach culture (centered in the affluent Zona Sul – southern zone) promoting a sunbathed and tanned body, and the Hollywoodian flapper style (in which rich and sexually-liberated white women could party, drink, smoke, and drive cars) were praised. Meanwhile, in São Paulo, parts of the intellectual elite criticized the fanciful image that Brazilians were savage cannibals who lived in an earthly paradise (a place of undeniable natural beauty, with happy and welcoming people, and so forth) produced by Europeans. Both the anthropophagic movement and the 1922 Modern Art Week helped create an ironic cultural imaginary that refuted the European fantasy.

Toward the 1930s, Brazilians were taken by the discussion of what constituted the *brasilidade* (Brazilianness) and the idea of mixed racedness became its most powerful and celebrated signifier. Hall-Araújo (2013a, p.66) highlights the central role of culture in disseminating this emergent ideology. Such a move was based on Freyre’s (1933/1986) work, *The Masters and The Slaves*, inspired by North American culturalism, which produced a new rationality that singularized the mixed race, approaching it from a positive angle (Bonadio & Guimarães, 2010). The main idea of Freyre’s *œuvre* was that every Brazilian has something that came from Africa in the body, or at least in the soul. However, this approach is widely criticized today as a romantic tale of three races or “Brazilian racism” (DaMatta 1987; Hall-Araújo 2013b; Souza, 1994). Under this emerging cultural

paradigm, “the spectacle of a white woman tossing on blackness like an accessory was a model of authenticity. Racial cross-dressing was now as Brazilian as rice and beans” (Dibbell, 1991).

Also during the 1930s, the government expanded its influence on mass media – particularly radio – and encouraged the circulation of hybrid cultural forms (Hall-Araújo, 2013b). Its main purpose was to produce a unified and unique national identity with which all Brazilians could identify, despite local diversity and systemic issues (Bonadio & Guimarães, 2010). In 1939, the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP) was created with the aim of regulating and censoring cultural activities and productions (Bonadio & Guimarães, 2010). Since the 1920s, Brazilian Popular Music had been “the most important vehicle for the affirmation of [. . .] mestizo national identity at home and abroad” (Dunn, 2001, p. 13). Carmen broke onto the scene during this time as a Euro-Brazilian *samba* singer who briefly acted in *chanchadas*, comic films that reached the masses (Macedo, 2011). As a major radio star, she was entrusted with the task of cultivating this idealized Brazilianness (Lima, 2013). Brazilian radio culture was decisive in transforming Carmen into a superstar since Carmen was one of the greatest engines of popularization of radio and other media, such as cinema. Her contract with the *Mayrink Veiga* radio station in the 1930s guaranteed her a 15-minute weekly program (Castro, 2005). César Ladeira, its artistic director and announcer, coined one of Carmen’s monikers: *A Pequena Notável* (“The Remarkable Young Girl”, as Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 262 states). Over the airwaves, Carmen reached an audience of different social classes and was celebrated by the masses (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016). In the pretelevision era, the public in general could not afford to see Carmen’s performance on casino stages, so radio was essential for her career development and success. Moreover, “the radio provided the film industry with the idols they knew the public wanted not only to hear, but also to see” (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 1002).

In 1934, Franklin D. Roosevelt visited South America for the first time to promote the Good Neighborhood Policy, a strategy focused on gaining fiscal and political influence in Latin America (Hall-Araújo, 2013a). After the 1929 crash, it was necessary for the U.S. to secure both sources of raw materials and markets for its industrialized products. Moreover, the U.S. needed to secure its leadership in the West (Brazilian Contemporary History Research and Documentation Center, 2009). In the U.S., movies fulfilled the role of radio played in Brazil: reaching the masses. The American film industry was a privileged means of exporting the American civilizational model to Latin America (Macedo, 2011), a region previously described by John Quincy Adams as the home to people who were “lazy, dirty, disgusting . . . a bunch of pigs” (Macedo, 2011, p. 109). When Carmen arrived in the U.S., the film industry was the country’s eleventh wealthiest industry, producing, on average, 400 movies per year – at the time, the U.S. had more movie theaters than banks (Macedo, 2011). This industry was instrumentalized as “a symbolic, communicational vehicle and propaganda weapon” (Macedo, 2011, p. 109). In 1940, the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) was created. This factory of ideologies (Tota, 2000) maintained a close relationship with major studios (Sant’Anna & Macedo, 2013) to strengthen relations between the U.S. and other countries. Productions with Latin America as backdrops and Latin stars were on the rise, especially between 1940 and 1945 (Sant’Anna & Macedo, 2013). The incursions of OCIAA representatives in Brazil (including Walt Disney) were aimed at ascertaining the country’s ideological climate (Macedo, 2011). One of the results of this enterprise was the 1943 *Saludos, amigos!*, in which the character *Zé Carioca*, a trickster parrot, represents Brazil. Ultimately, Latin America was portrayed as “available for the ‘good’ neighbor’s seduction, receptive and with open arms to meet the unfulfilled



desires of its visitors, exotic in 'just the right amount' not to be taken seriously, only as a hobby or weekend entertainment" (Sant'Anna & Macedo, 2013, p. 197).

Hence, Carmen substituted for Latin America in wartime 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox fantasies. She was portrayed by the U.S. press and fans as the "Ambassador of Good Will from Latin America" (Roberts, 1993). Carmen's *baiana* outfit semiotically served the purposes of the North American message of good neighborliness, depicting "harmonically exploitative relations between the United States and Latin American countries" (Roberts, 1993, p. 5). By personifying an epitome of Latino identity (Denninson & Shaw, 2005), Carmen provided "a nonthreatening difference that could be identified, desired, and commodified for U.S. audiences eager to taste the exotic while disavowing the racial discord in their own backyard" (Ovalle, 2010, p. 60). Shortly after her American career was launched, Carmen performed in English at Casino da Urca, in Rio de Janeiro (1940) for an audience with several members of the Brazilian government, the Brazilian first lady and journalists. She was accused of becoming "Americanized" (Lima, 2013) and resumed her career in the United States.

### **"The Brazilian bombshell": embodying Carmen Miranda**

The opening scene of the 1941 "Weekend in Havana" invited its audience to escape to "a foreign and exciting destination through the lyrics, the music, the performers' costumes, and Miranda's sensual movements – in particular, her trademark 'come hither' gesture and enticing fluttering of the eyes" (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 100). Carmen's singing style always stood out, and not only for her natural musicality and good ear for pitch. Her performance always drew attention: it was "visual, interpretive, full of vocal fans and a game of hands and arms" (Castro, 2005, p. 39). Both on stage and on screen, with *Bando da Lua* behind her, Carmen looked like a goddess, swallowing the audience with her eyes, mouth, arms and her whole body (Castro, 2005, p. 115). It has been said that Carmen "did more than interpret sambas; she performed them" (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 873) with a sensuous smile and dancing eyes, dominating any stage with her radiant, provocative, and seductively impish aura (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016).

Body techniques are social facts, developed within social and media networks (Crossley, 2015). Thus, culture becomes "embodied in the way people walk, sit, stand, eat, wash, breathe, and otherwise comport their bodies as they go through daily life" (Cohen & Leung, 2009, p. 1278). Indeed, particular bodies can come to be representative of ideological projects (Brace-Govan, 2010; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015), taste regimes (Arsel & Bean, 2013), and national and regional interests (Dymond, 2011; Min & Peñaloza, 2019). Through her body, costumes, films, and songs, Carmen Miranda came to embody in-betweenness: a commodified blackness in Brazil and an amalgamated Latin American-ness in the U.S. (Ovalle, 2010, p. 20). Before Carmen ever achieved fame in the U.S., her moves were well known to the Brazilian audience. Hall-Araújo (2013b, p. 235) says that Carmen's performance was "flourished with eye rolls and shoulder shrugs [that] complemented the ironic and often ambiguous lyrics common to carnival marches that she frequently sang", and "was highly theatrical and comic and translated well to moves" (Hall-Araújo). The sexy, flirtatious, energetic Carmen persona is identical whether she sings the 1936 *Querido Adão*, the burlesque *Chico Chico* from "Doll Face" nearly a decade later, or the 1943 "The Lady in the Tutti Frutti Hat" in between (Pullen, 2014, pp. 127-128). The Afro-Brazilian influence on Carmen's performance style and moves is evident, and it seems that she "understood in a general sense that [her moves and

poses] came from an authentic samba tradition” (Pullen, 2014, p. 150). An off-camera Dorival Caymmi (Brazilian singer, songwriter, actor, and painter) “mimicked for Carmen the gestures and movements she was supposed to make while singing” (Pullen, 2014, p. 138) in *Banana da Terra*. However, her American audience was probably “unaware of the cultural significance of the dance patterns and poses she used” (Pullen, 2014, p. 149).

The way Carmen used her body in Hollywood productions has been extensively analyzed by several authors (e.g., Ovalle, 2010; Pullen, 2014; Sant’Anna & Macedo, 2013) who highlight the importance of her gestures, expressions, movements, and even her way of dancing and speaking in embodying the image of *Latina*. As a performer from “down South” (Pullen, 2014), Carmen is always already “a Bakhtinian ‘low other’, a designation supported by her body in performance” (Pullen, 2014, p. 129). Her ever-moving hips and revealing costumes present “a grotesque (if also spectacular and compelling) body” (Pullen, 2014). Her body and its seductive movements are sexually charged (Roberts, 1993), positioned as a spectacle to arouse male desire (Ovalle, 2010). In her American movies, Carmen uses her body to underscore both comedy and musical numbers. The performances are always excessive, spectacular, and carnivalesque. Most of her songs are performed in Portuguese, and her foreign accent is emphasized “by comic malapropisms and mispronunciations of English, suggesting that foreigners are incapable of good English and, by extension, promoting a ‘primitive’, ignorant stereotype” (Roberts, 1993, p. 11). Therefore, the audience should read the universal language of her body. Carmen’s “costumed body, heavily accented English, and performative hips became a generic Latin American Other against which white Americanness could be measured – and from which she could never escape” (Ovalle, 2010, p. 20).

The exaggeration associated with Carmen leads authors to believe that she had full control over her image. On one hand, Roberts (1993) believes that she manipulated her image as a form of masquerade, but that this fails to negate the problems regarding the stereotypes linked to her. On the other hand, O’Neil (2005p. 206) associates “the sheer outrageousness of Miranda’s image” to the delegitimization of “the racist and sexist stereotypes underlying her Hollywood roles”. Nonetheless, it seems that Carmen was “clearly aware of being trapped in typecast roles” (O’Neil, 2005, p. 206). Her performance style and body were described as “barbarous” and “savage”, and “she was regularly compared with exotic animals in the popular press” (Ovalle, 2010, p. 52). Regardless, Carmen was able to access Hollywood in ways that black performers in the United States could not since a Latin female body like hers was needed to mediate blackness for white consumption (Ovalle, 2010). Later in her career, Aloysio de Oliveira and Ray Gilbert composed the “I make my money with bananas” specially for Carmen. In the lyrics, Carmen sings that she would love to “play a scene with Clark Gable/With candle lights and wine upon the table/But my producer tells me I’m not able/‘Cause I make my money with bananas”, ironically acknowledging her stereotyped role, and how her “business” became a mere commodity with which she made money for herself and Hollywood studios.

### **“O que que a baiana tem?”: clothes and costumes**

In early 1930s’ Rio de Janeiro, the *baiana* was a famous character in revue theater, typically performed by an actress of white European descent, and usually depicted as a strong, malicious, naughty, and seductive exhibitionist, in richly ornamented costumes, an exaggerated number of

necklaces and bracelets, and turbans (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016). When Miranda performed the song *O que que a baiana tem?* dressed as a *baiana* in *Banana da Terra* (1938), she gave the character an irresistible embodiment through her “unusual arm, hand, and hip movements that distinguished her from contemporary stage *baianas*” (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 716), setting her apart from all the other artists who dressed up as *baianas* before her. During the 1920s, Carmen was a fervent follower of Hollywood styles, mainly inspired by the actress Clara Bow and her spit curls, painted lips, and self-aware coquettish poses (Hall-Araújo, 2013b). Her behavior also reflected the many social changes occurring at the time. Her early persona was inspired by the 1920s’ modern, elitist, white sensibilities amid the Afro-Brazilian culture in Lapa, where she lived with her family. During the 1930s, she incorporated into her performance the idea of cultural hybridity that was valued in Brazil. Her iconic look was inspired by the *baiana*. *O que que a baiana tem?* describes the *baiana* as a charming, sensual woman, who wears a silk turban, golden earrings, a starched skirt, adorned sandals, golden bracelets, a twist in her hair, and a silver buckle (*balangandã*) (O’Dell, 2008). Carmen’s *baiana* was a mixture of traditional elements, Hollywood exoticism, and her own sensibility/style (Hall-Araújo, 2013b). Dorival Caymmi, the young Afro-Brazilian composer of the song, took Carmen to a dressmaker to develop her *baiana* look, or so the story goes (Gatti, 2006).

Dressing as a *baiana* was not Carmen’s idea. The *baiana*-inspired look was a ubiquitous street carnival costume in 1930s’ Brazil (Garcia, 2004). Nevertheless, it was prohibited in upper-class carnival dances because it was considered excessively vulgar (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016). To be acceptable as a stage costume in revue theater, the *baiana* needed to be “dressed up” in velvet, silk, and gold, taking the original elements (bracelets and beaded necklaces, for example) to new levels. Aracy Cortes, a Brazilian revue theater performer of African and Spanish descent, dressed as a *baiana* before 1938, as part of a ubiquitous *baiana*-vogue tradition common on the stages of Rio de Janeiro (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016). Also, in the film “Flying down to Rio”, the African American singer Etta Moten appears dressed as a *baiana* while instructing the audience on “how to be a *Carioca*” (Ovalle, 2010). However, the broad cultural resonance with the *baiana* only happened with Carmen’s version of the costume (Hall-Araújo, 2013b). Although it had initially been rejected at the gala carnival dances of Rio de Janeiro (Balieiro, 2017) due to its relation to an African image, Carmen’s characterization helped destabilize existing racial boundaries. Stimulated by advertising, Carmen’s Hollywood productions, and the market for carnival costumes, women began to incorporate Carmen’s *baiana* as a representation of Brazilian femininity (Balieiro, 2017) and a kind of domestic exoticism (Hall-Araújo, 2013b).

The costumes Carmen wore in her U.S. films were more stylized, luxurious versions of the 1938 *baiana*. It is believed that the “over-the-top” aesthetics reinforced the dichotomy between North (USA) and Central-South (Americas) (Roberts, 1993; Sant’Anna & Macedo, 2013). On screen, Carmen always wore beaded necklaces and bracelets on both arms, large earrings, richly decorated turbans, flirty skirts that showed her curves, and revealing tops that left her midriff exposed. Her costumes were supposed to reflect the sensuality, romance, and pleasures the Latin world could offer (Sant’Anna & Macedo, 2013). As her outfits were revealing for the time, they suggested an excessive female sexuality (Roberts, 1993) aligned with simplistic archetypes such as that of the fiery, hot-blooded Latina (Denninson & Shaw, 2005). Carmen’s looks connected with the exoticism that has always been part of Hollywood culture, according to which some glamorous stereotyped exotic ethnicities were considered marketable (Hall-Araújo, 2013b). “By popularizing a so-called Latin style in film, music, and fashion during the 1940s, Carmen facilitated the U.S. importation of

an exotic nonwhiteness as though it were a raw material like coffee or sugar” (Ovalle, 2010, p. 50). Through Carmen’s films, consumers learned they could transform themselves into glamorous exotic types (Hall-Araújo, 2013b), turning exoticism into a form of masquerade (Hall-Araújo). And let us not forget that exoticism is racism’s twin brother (Souza, 1994).

Carmen’s look also influenced fashion in the U.S. Due to her success in “Streets of Paris” (1939) and the wide dissemination of her image in magazines like *Life*, *Vogue* and *Esquire*, the fashion industry bowed at her feet, offering a percentage of the sales of products in exchange for the rights to exploit her name and image (Castro, 2005, p. 222). Platform sandals and turbans have always been two of Carmen’s trademarks, guaranteeing her a few extra inches. Combined with Carmen’s coquettish aura, they gave her a “touch of absurdity, joy and extravagance that came to characterize her” (Castro, 2005, p. 110). Carmen was just 152 cm tall (approximately 5 feet), but she came to embody on screen the image of a powerful, tall, and “larger than life” woman. At first, her famous platform sandals were considered too exotic for the North American female consumer (Shaw, 2013). However, that changed after Carmen’s success, and the high-heeled sandals were successfully marketed by Bergdorf Goodman (Shaw, 2013).

### **“They said I came back Americanized”: the songs**

In November 1929, Josué de Barros sought out the office of RCA Victor, and got Carmen an audition. The label offered her a two-year contract. Her way of interpreting the songs distinguished her from other singers of the time. In addition to her crystal clear and rapid diction and the potential to sing in a variety of rhythms and styles, Carmen sang in tune and with a smile on her face (Castro, 2005). This helped her seduce audiences in public performances. She also added “a unique playfulness and interjected spontaneous Brazilian slang and humorous asides” to her performances (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016: 252), which reinforced her coquettish and ironic aura. Before the 1930 carnival, Carmen had a fortuitous encounter with the composer Joubert de Carvalho, who wrote *Pra você gostar de mim (Taí)*, Carmen’s first hit. The song was recorded on January 27, 1930, and the sales success required successive presses (Castro, 2005, p. 53). She soon became the *Rainha do Disco* (Queen of the LP), and newspapers already called her the greatest expression of popular music (Castro, 2005, p. 63). After the release of *Taí*, Carmen recorded other 14 albums between January and September of that year (Castro, 2005).

Carmen was a *carioca* “it girl”, “presenting herself in a way that privileged whiteness in terms of *corpo praiano* [related to the urban beach culture which emerged in the 1920s as part of the modern sensibilities] and Hollywood style” (Hall-Araújo, 2013a, p. 65), while being surrounded by Afro-Brazilian music like *maxixe* and *samba* that were gaining increasing traction. Initially, *samba* was associated with the Brazilian black community, and restricted to spaces associated with this ethnic group. With the rise and development of the entertainment industry, especially radio and recording labels, *samba* went through a democratization process alongside a “whitening” elitization process, the latter, a demand from certain elites that conditioned its acceptance to a “sanitary” version of the rhythm (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016; Cunha, 2004). It was later appropriated by the Estado Novo (the Third Brazilian Republic, inaugurated by Getúlio Vargas, lasting from November 10, 1937, to January 31, 1946), becoming “the” reference for Brazilian music. Carmen’s *sambas* expressed the desires and aspirations of her public. Radio was the fundamental medium for the popularization of

her work during the 1930s (Kreber, 2002). Across the airwaves, the nation magically came together, and the voices of President Vargas and Carmen represented a united nation through a unique identity, reaching all Brazilians (Kerber, 2005). Among the themes *sambas* were elements that legitimized the nationalist proposal of the government. These were formatted as neutrally as possible to appeal to diverse groups (Kerber, 2002). One example was exalting Brazilian fauna and flora since elements associated with modernity, like economy and technology, were not considered typically Brazilian features (Kerber, 2002).

Carmen was supposed to be the “Ambadress of Samba” (Balieiro, 2017), supporting a “cultural policy that emphasized [Brazilian] national unity” (Balieiro, 2017, p. 275). Nonetheless, her U.S. songs were a mixture of Latin genres that were fit for American tastes (Macedo, 2011). Carmen’s songs often involve a “getting to know you” theme “in which the main characters representing Latin America and the United States demonstrate the ease with which one [. . .] can acquire another country’s culture” (Roberts, 1993, p. 6). There were no subtitles during the Portuguese songs, full of tongue twisters that emphasized the sound of the words rather than their meanings. Sant’Anna and Macedo (2013) connect this to the lack of importance of the lyrics for the narrative within the plot, thus having a decorative function that contrasted with the ones performed in English. Roberts (1993) further adds that Carmen’s native language (Portuguese) was not important at all, and that although her audiences could not understand her, they loved her “extreme Otherness.”

### **“Don’t forget that I earn money with bananas”: the films**

When Carmen arrived in New York, she was asked which English words she knew. She answered with “a mix of savvy sensualism and effusive naiveté” (Dibbell, 1991): “I say money, money, money, and I say hot dog. I say yes, and I say no, and I say money, money, money. And I say turkey sandwich, and I say grape juice.” (Castro, 2005, p. 201). At that moment, and perhaps without realizing it, Carmen assumed “a role that had never been hers in Brazil, but that she would play for the rest of her life in the United States: that of a pure comedian” (Castro, 2005, p. 201). Before Hollywood, Carmen’s stage persona and style transferred seamlessly to the silver screen in five Brazilian films between 1935 and 1939 (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016). These films were productions without structured plots and with musical numbers that guaranteed their cohesion, but they consolidated the association of Carmen with carnival (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 1037). The 1935 *Alô, alô, Brasil!* brought together on screen “most of the biggest singers and composers of the time [. . .] cementing the partnership of radio and national cinema and guaranteed a public for this budding industry from that point forward” (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 964). Carmen’s rendition of *Querido Adão* in that movie showed her upbeat performance style which engaged with the audience, “walking and swaying her hips [. . .] from side to side, while always facing forward, communicating through the sparkle and movement of her eyes, exaggerated facial expressions, twirling hands, and open arm movements” (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, pp. 1027-1028).

In Hollywood productions, Carmen appeared “either as herself, or as some stereotypically Latin persona” (Roberts, 1993, p. 8) or as a generic Latin American female stereotype associated with exoticism (Shaw, 2013). As a part of Hollywood and its star system, she was extensively marketed and mythicized as a competitive differential and “a popular icon whose fixed meaning and visual appeal invited its reproduction, imitation, and instant recognition (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016,

p. 163). Carmen's already established star status in Brazil on radio, records, and in films was undermined by Hollywood homogenization (Roberts, 1993). Her Technicolor films emphasized her vivid, brightly colored outfits (Roberts, 1993), and were classified as musicals whose stories involved a tone of mild comedy and romance (Sant'Anna & Macedo, 2013). Carmen's hyperbolic performance style contrasted with those of her white co-stars, making their performances seem more realistic and allowing the audience to identify with the narratives and ideologies of each film (Pullen, 2014, p. 131). The production of Latinness, by opposition, also signaled that Latin America was ripe for exploitation, even for oppression (Gabriel, 2008). Carmen and her accompanying band *Bando da Lua* were considered non-white characters by the American audience, while "for Brazilian spectators the African absence might not be evident, as long as they would see Miranda and the *Bando* members as white (according to the Brazilian racial spectrum)" (Gatti, 2006, p. 103).

Upon the release of the 1940 *Down Argentine Way!* (Carmen's first North American film), Alceu Penna (fashion illustrator for *Cruzeiro* magazine) published a review in which he expressed his disappointment with the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox studio. According to Penna, despite using a Brazilian star, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox had created a plot set in Argentina (Bonadio & Guimarães, 2010). Penna's criticism reflects the Brazilian nationalism of the early 1940s, represented by patriotic *sambas* (Bonadio & Guimarães, 2010, p. 161) about a "poor but happy Brazil, a tropical paradise". The film *Down Argentine Way!* arouse many diplomatic frictions due to numerous misconceptions in its plot. For example, Carmen sang a *rumba* in Portuguese and another actress played castanets, facts unrelated to Argentina (Macedo, 2011). The film was banned in Argentina and it was frowned upon in Brazil. While the U.S. was depicted as the perfect model of what a civilized nation should aspire to be, Latin American countries were represented as fantasy lands or tropical paradises, as places for permanent vacation "with harems of pleasure, excitement, warmth and romance, unrelated and isolated from the tensions and hardships caused by the war" (Sant'Anna & Macedo, 2013, p. 189). The underdeveloped Latin American countries were, thus, viewed as ripe for exploitation and intervention, despite their political independence (Mauad, 2005).

### **"Chica boom chic": the camp icon**

Gay men have been an organized presence in the carnival of Rio since the early 1930s. For instance, Antonio Setta formed a gay carnival group that paraded through the streets in luxurious sequined gowns, adding a camp element that set them apart from heterosexual cross-dressers who exhibited a parody of womanhood (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 493). After Carmen's 1938 performance as a *baiana* on film, the "gay presence at carnival took a more definite form [. . .] as revelers cross-dressed as the *baiana*, taking carnivalesque transgressions to a whole new level through their subversive gender-play" (p. 493). Camp is often associated "with homosexual subculture and the idea of potential sexual subversiveness, gender play, and marginality" (p. 3348), but its meaning has been extended to a more mainstream and general usage, associated with "exaggeration, stylization, transformation, ambivalence, incongruity, and playful deception" (p. 3358), creating "an aesthetic that upturns received norms and realities, changing the natural and the normal into style and phoniness". As an analytical tool, camp helps us understand how Carmen "was part of a masquerade in a way that led her to engage with her star image as an artificial, exaggerated version of the *baiana*, yet without demeaning herself, her gender, or her culture" (p. 3358).

Icons are intertextual, and Carmen's myth continues to be updated through the way the public uses it as a starting point, choosing what works for them (Dyer, 2004). Carmen's excessive performance might be seen as unnatural for its spectacular and carnivalesque features, signaling transgression while stabilizing a status quo (Pullen, 2014). Duality and ambivalence accompanied her (Pullen, 2014), presented in the discourse as both subject and object of self-parody (Roberts, 1993). Fans nowadays seem to apprehend Carmen as a parodic text, "a grotesque and excessive carnival fool that stabilizes the white, heteronormative, upper-middle-class primary narrative of her films by representing the inversion of those norms" (Pullen, 2014, p. 148). Stabilized meanings are dissolved and placed under tension when ambivalence is emphasized (Balieiro, 2014). In Hollywood, it seems that "the more fixed Carmen Miranda's image became, the more her iconicity became a space for gender and sexual play" (Ovalle, 2010, p. 68).

As a stereotype of hegemonic and conservative discourses marked by coloniality, Carmen was reappropriated by subordinate subjects in a heteronormative logic (Balieiro, 2014). She is considered a classic gay camp icon (LaBruce, 2015), political, subversive, and revolutionary in nature. In its origins, 'camp' is defined as a sensibility whose essence is a love for the unnatural, for artifice and exaggeration, and a "private code or a secretly shared identity badge" (Sontag, 1964). The triumph of style over content, aesthetics over morality, and irony over tragedy would point to an absence of meaning, politics or history. Nonetheless, Carmen has crossed paths with all of those during her existence and even in her afterlife (Dibbell, 1991). A modern approach sees camp as a way of being paradoxical, mixing debauchery, artifice, and aesthetic mannerisms aimed at demystifying the artificiality of what is considered natural (Balieiro, 2014; Trevisan, 2000). Therefore, Carmen's persona is appropriate as a device for exposing the naturalized arbitrariness of culture (Balieiro, 2017). For those who seek self-reinvention in bold and spectacular ways (O'Neil, 2005), Carmen is a font of inspiration. An Air Force sergeant who played Carmen in military theatres and camps during World War II, Sasha Brastoff, is also worthy of mention (Balieiro, 2017, p. 284). His performance became known in the 1946 film "Winged Victory". His interpretation stood out for adopting Carmen's look with some stylizations, such as a turban full of silverware, and a dress made from a U.S. army uniform. Carmen met him in 1942 at a military base in New York and, so the story goes, she would have said that he looked more like Carmen Miranda than herself (Balieiro, 2017), showing the ironic humour that has always been part of her career.

While visiting Rio de Janeiro in 1996, the drag queen Ru Paul declared: "I am the daughter of Carmen Miranda" (Trevisan, 2000, p. 390). Carmen herself could be considered a drag queen. As Dibbell (1991) rightly puts: "Carmen Miranda - who had come to Rio with her Portuguese parents at the age of one, and still traveled under a Portuguese passport - came to the United States with a mandate to impersonate Brazilian culture itself. It would be the drag performance of her life." She "was often perceived as a drag queen, given her hyperperfeminization and the over-the-top artifice of her outfits" (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 3403), which helped her develop a "performative wink", or, in other words, her ability to simultaneously perform and distance herself from it, thus opening a space for poking fun at the stereotypes associated with her roles, which at the same time that marginalized her, placed her in the center of the stage, two essentially camp characteristics" (Bishop-Sanchez, p. 3415).

### **“... e o mundo não se acabou”: further considerations**

Erick Barreto (1962-1996) performed under the name Diana Finsk. As a drag queen, he “brought transformism to a new level of artistic performance in Brazil, to rid it of its social stigma” (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 5173). He personified several personalities on stage with precision, talent, class, and distinction, and was set apart from comic, camp imitations (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016). Carmen was his most highly perfected act, and his excellence and reverence was recognized by Aurora Miranda, who became his friend and appointed him to Helena Solberg, a Brazilian filmmaker who directed the documentary *Carmen Miranda: Bananas is my Business* (1995), in which he played Carmen and “fascinated the public with his gracious gestures, the batting of his eyes, and the fluidity of his movements, creating the most beautiful rendition of Miranda down to the minutest detail” (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016). In May 1996, Barreto died prematurely and was buried in Rio de Janeiro, near Carmen’s resting place.

As this paper has evidenced, Carmen Miranda was extraordinary in many ways. By utilizing discussions of ideology from within CCT, we have demonstrated how Carmen embodied the transculturalism, hybridism, and ambiguities in the market between 1930 and 1945 as a marketplace icon. This embodiment process was multifaceted, including her films and costumes, her music and movements, her diction and her gestures, even the way she kept her hair hidden under a turban (Ovalle, 2010). Moreover, she was so profitable to the audiovisual market and loved by her Brazilian popular audience that at her 1940 performance at the Urca Casino, when she was coldly welcomed by an elite audience (attended by several members of the Vargas regime and the president’s family), the Brazilian government offered no major public criticisms (Lima, 2013). Yet, Carmen lives on as an icon. Her legacy is mythical, spanning decades and being constantly reissued to serve a range of market purposes that build specifically on her liminality, transgressive potential, and expressive symbolic power.

Among the adjectives used by the Brazilian press at the time to describe her, *brejeira* was the most common and the one that best captured Carmen’s aura (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 850). In English, the adjective translates as impish, mischievous, coquettish, wickedly funny or provocative (Bishop-Sanchez). Her embodiment of the *baiana* could be interpreted as an ironic maneuver. Such an evidently white woman dressing as a *baiana* and popularizing (nationally and internationally) an image so specifically black could be taken in itself as the greatest irony of all (Dibbell, 1991). Carmen had a special capacity to be part of the performance but also to distinguish herself from it in order to react, laugh, and look. This suggests the possible way with which Carmen looked at her persona, maybe as a kind of subversive performance or parody. The parody of the *baiana* might have been a way of showing what Carmen thought was the authentic, popular Brazilian culture to her elite audience (Bishop-Sanchez, 2016, p. 1467), to depict through a masquerade those who were left in real life in the background and/or denied by both Brazilian and American elites.

She probably sought to deal with stereotypes throughout her career through performative humor, irony, and exaggeration, some of the features that also characterize carnival as a festivity depicted by the inversion and subversion of social constructs (DaMatta, 1997). And, although humor (and irony) might be powerful tools, they might also be inadvertently co-opted (e.g., Holt, 2002; Klein, 1999) or have a limited reach. For instance, Carmen returned to the Casino stage a couple of



months later with the song “They say I came back Americanized”. On the one hand, some consider the song as a *mea culpa* (Tota, 2000). On the other, it seems that Carmen used the song on that occasion to highlight the hypocrisy of the Brazilian elite (Lima, 2013) who accused her of being Americanized while having no interest whatsoever in truly integrating manifold values and traditions into the Brazilian market. This song seems to reinforce Carmen’s commitment to the Brazilian culture and music, while pointing the finger at the Brazilian elite of the time, which never truly got involved with nor accepted samba in its original manifestations. As previously highlighted, samba was associated with the Brazilian black community and reached the radio and recording labels through interpreters like Carmen, a white woman. Also, Vargas’ government had fascist inclinations and the 1934 Constitution, drafted by a constituent assembly convened by Vargas’ provisional government, represented the national elite. The cynical (and perverse) character of the elite is reflected in article 138 of the constitutional text, which pointed out the duty of the union, states, and municipalities to encourage eugenic education (Pereira, 2014). Carmen was a sanitized icon, the ideal one to represent the Brazilian identity, disguising racism under the myth of the three races. One can imagine how the Brazilian elite was shocked when Carmen showed up on the stage, representing, in front of their eyes, the way North Americans saw all Latinos, including Brazilians. It is impossible to assert what Carmen herself thought about that, but it is well known that, after this episode, she went back to the United States to continue her career.

Her transgressive persona was (and still is) appropriated as a masquerade to comment on gender (and other social) categories (e.g., Balieiro, 2017; Hall-Araujo, 2013a; Ovalle, 2010), reinforcing the idea that gender, as the body, is socially constructed, not “natural”. Carmen’s iconicity still serves as inspiration for an overwhelming number of drag queens and “Carmen Drags” (Hall-Araujo). Her contribution to women as a symbol of female strength during the war has been overshadowed (Ovalle, 2010). During that time, white women entered the labor force, and Carmen’s image helped them to spice up their work uniforms and negotiate their own sense of sexuality and sensuality (Ovalle, 2010). Her image, as part of a market mass culture, has contributed to ongoing changes in gender and sexual codes in Brazil since 1920. Through photos in magazines, advertisement campaigns, and films, she presented her fans with new possibilities of experiencing femininity (Balieiro, 2017). Although her *baiana* costume was initially rejected by Brazilian elites, Hollywood success saw it achieve a remarkable presence as a symbol of a new form of national femininity. This lays in stark contrast to Carmen’s influence on everyday American fashion (Balieiro, 2017).

Ironically, the Brazilianness Carmen embodies today is associated with her Hollywood image of a stylized and exaggerated *baiana*, and it might relate to what Souza (1994) calls the “fantasy of Brazil”. In a nutshell, Brazil went through a process of “otherization” (Gabriel, 2008) even before it became a colony. Due to the late end of the Brazilian Empire in 1889, nationhood became a central theme during the 1920s. The modernist movement and its idea of cultural hybridity (anthropophagy) took place in São Paulo and could be characterized as a reaction to the aforementioned “otherization” that positioned Brazilians as savages and cannibals who inhabited an earthly tropical paradise (Hall-Araújo, 2013a). At the same time, other ideologies took the market in Rio by storm, such as conflicting ideas about race. However, it seems that, during the 1930s, the prevailing ideology was linked to Freyre’s work, which propagated the mixed-race argument, permeating the whole social spectrum. Carmen Miranda was the embodiment of this ideology. On one hand, Carmen’s popularity made her image circulate and turned her into a Brazilian star during the 1930s. On the other hand, her iconicity reinforced “the pairing of her Euro-Brazilian looks with

an Afro-Brazilian musical style, [creating] a shared popular repository for what constituted thirties *Brasidade*" (Hall-Araújo, 2013a, p. 69). The same occurred with her image and iconicity in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s, when Carmen became known as a Latin icon. Nonetheless, the Latin stereotype was linked to the idea that South Americans were unable to follow the North American ideal of progress, modernity, and culture, thus representing backwardness and precarity (some sort of modern savagery).

In the film "The Gang's All Here" (1943), the "The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat" number is described by Dibbell (1991) as "an orgy of giant phallic bananas and vulval strawberries through which Miranda moves with a contained chaos", capturing "accurately the North Atlantic fantasy of the South as a site of innocent erotic anarchy". Accordingly, the country was made ripe for exploitation and other forms of violence (Gabriel, 2008). The "fantasy" of a mixed-race country embodied by Carmen's *baiana* during the 1930s in Brazil should have worked as an invisible, tough, productive (in the sense that it structures reality to the point that it is impossible to distinguish them, as Žižek, 1989 argues) protection against this violence and its consequences (the national systemic hardships Schwarcz, 2019 describes). It also allowed Brazilians to be (symbolically) racist (even today, according to Souza, 1994; Žižek, 2014). For instance, there were political sanctions against certain Afro-Brazilian practices, such as capoeira (a Brazilian martial art) and candomblé rituals (Hall-Araújo, 2013a, p. 67). When this fantasy was amplified by the North American cultural industry and came to represent Latin women and South American countries, the Brazilian elite was displeased. Nonetheless, the tropical fantasy has been reorganized over time, assuming many forms. For instance, Santa'Anna and Macedo (2013) and Carvalho (2019) were keen to analyze how Carmen's Hollywood look and her films' ideology are embodied by fashion editorials and advertising campaigns, as a synonym of Brazilianness linked to the idea of a tropical paradise and an exotic holiday destination, respectively. In 2005, the Brazilian government launched *Marca Brasil*, a marketing strategy that aimed to position Brazil both in the domestic and foreign markets as a synonym of diversity and a manufacturer of industrialized goods, not just a holiday destination and an exporter of commodities.

Resuming the search for a homogeneous identity narrative that would establish the country as unique before others, Carmen's image was chosen to legitimize this discourse and give territoriality to national products (Macedo & Sant'Anna, 2014). The fashion industry was the one that most embraced the diversity discourse (Michetti, 2012) and Havaianas, a brand internationally recognized as typically Brazilian, launched a campaign in 2009 centered on Carmen's image (Macedo & Sant'Anna, 2014). At the 2016 Olympics closing ceremony, the Brazilian singer Roberta Sá dressed herself as Carmen, clearly to represent the country in an international event. All these manifestations of Carmen position her as a liminal marketplace icon, capable of embodying a multitude of meanings, thus evoking the ambivalence that accompanied the performer throughout her career. A liminal aura hangs in the air every time Carmen's iconicity is brought up, enabling many analytical veins and criticisms. Despite this, Carmen's joyful, seductive, and ironic persona remains unshakable.

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