

“LOOK AT ME AND TELL ME IF I DON'T HAVE BRAZIL IN EVERY CURVE OF
MY BODY:” WOMEN, PROPAGANDA, AND NATION DURING THE ESTADO

NÔVO, 1937-1945

By

Mary Elizabeth Eiland

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Professor Marshall C. Eakin

Professor Emanuelle Oliveira

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

INSTITUTIONS

MES	<i>Ministerio de Educação e Saude</i>
DNP	<i>Departamento Nacional de Propaganda</i>
DIP	<i>Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda</i>
INCE	<i>Instituto Nacional de Cinema Educativo</i>
CIAA	<i>Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs</i>

ARCHIVES

FGV	<i>Fundação Getulio Vargas</i>
CPDOC	<i>Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil</i>
OA	<i>Oswaldo Aranha</i>
GC	<i>Gustavo Capanema</i>
BNRJ	<i>Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro</i>
BDAE	<i>Biblioteca Digital das Artes do Espetáculo</i>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Copacabana Palace buzzed with activity and national pride on September 7, 1930. In Rio de Janeiro, the first Miss Universe pageant exhibited the beauty of young women from Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Yolanda Pereira, a *gaúcha* from Rio Grande do Sul, received global recognition as the most beautiful and accomplished woman in the universe in one of the earliest international beauty pageants to take place.

É a brasileira, em sua mais lata e justa personificação. É uma rima de canção cabocla encarnada num corpo de mulher. Seu moreninho mate é a cor que deve ter toda a patricia para ser bem brasileira. O Brasil vive-lhe nos olhos irrequietos e fascinadores. Canta-lhe no riso franco e menino. Mora no negrume encaracollado de seus trevósos cabelos. Toda ella é Brasil. O desprendimento, a grandeza d'animo, a galanteria brasilica, tudo vive nella, elevando-a a Symbolo da Raça. Salve Yolanda! Salve, "Miss Brasil"! Cem vezes, salve, "Miss Universo"!¹

Her victory in native territory made her an instant celebrity: as the published album notes, she represented the ideal Brazilian woman, a "symbol of the race," to be emulated by the female public. This honor for aesthetic beauty paralleled the façade of political and social tranquility promoted during the event. Little did the attendees of the small competition know that the nation would follow a similar standard in a mere month as another *gaúcho*, Getúlio Vargas, would rise to power and similarly seek to construct and embody a Brazilian ideal in the national imagination.

¹ From *Álbum do Concurso Internacional de Beleza* (Rio de Janeiro, 1930), BNRJ.

Carmen Miranda sings in a samba, “Look at me and tell me that I don’t have Brazil in every curve of my body.” The lyrics pose an interesting contrast to state-projected feminine imagery of the reserved and dutiful Catholic matriarch who kept to the home and child rearing as opposed to the highly sexualized and independent image of Carmen Miranda, arguably the most famous Brazilian female of the twentieth century. In this thesis I analyze the disparate images of women produced during the period of the Getúlio Vargas’ Estado Nôvo from 1937-1945, discussing their significance in the state-driven process of identity formation during the period. I survey a variety of media sources, newspapers, women’s magazines, films produced in Brazil and the United States, and state-produced propaganda materials falling within these media. I ask whether or not the reality of feminine behavior within Brazilian society coordinated or defied the nationalist image of femininity produced by the state or the images produced by the film industry, at home or abroad. How did women fit into the larger geopolitical scheme between Brazil and the United States, particularly as regards the successful career of Carmen Miranda? My objective is to illustrate the paradoxical and dynamic socio-political space that women occupied in the national imaginary during the Estado Nôvo, the extent to which this space expanded or limited the realm of political and social action within Brazilian patriarchy, and how these contrasting images of Brazilian femininity produced at home and abroad affected the public’s notions of *brasilidade*. I argue that the Brazilian state ultimately did not effectively integrate women into the nationalist project, including them in the national imaginary, and that the state, in fact, denied them full political rights and mobility. Furthermore, the Vargas regime’s definition of *brasilidade*

contradicted the more progressive images and modes of behavior promoted in the public sphere through popular media.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the political apparatus established before and during the Estado Nôvo that controlled and produced images or ideas of *brasilidade* to the public and how Brazilian women fit into or defied these political projections. Considering newsreels, images, and official documents produced by the state, I argue that the Vargas regime projected an image of maternal strength and duty as the epitome of Brazilian femininity, casting women as the educators and nurturers of the future citizens of Brazil. Chapter 2 explores the print culture created and/or consumed by women of the period, along with the rise of popular cinema in Brazil, analyzing the paradoxical ideals conveyed in these media. These images present a striking contrast to those produced by the state, constructing a paradoxical space of feminine representation that challenged nationalist discourse. Chapter 3 examines the film industry and the problematic position occupied by Carmen Miranda within the Brazilian imaginary. As an entertainer and “good-will ambassador” to the United States during the 1940s, Miranda performed and embodied a problematic image of Brazilian identity that invoked aspects of the complex racial and gender dynamic of Brazilian society. Her crafted image of a stylized *baiana* evoked an exotic, carefree, and sexualized image of Brazilian femininity. The document sources used reveal a contentious dialogue taking place within Brazilian society in which official state institutions, popular publications, and the film industry of Brazil and the United States are all involved. These entities all propose and argue for a certain mode and manner of feminine behavior, which inform and shape the nature of a new Brazilian identity.

Constructing *brasilidade*, or ‘brazilianness,’ became a state project throughout the mid and late nineteenth century, requiring a look back into the nation’s past to promote emblematic Brazilian moments or ideals that would align with the state’s ideal projection of Brazilian nationhood domestically and internationally. Founded as a Portuguese colony in the sixteenth century, Brazil became a major producer of agricultural goods as members of the Portuguese merchant class established *fazendas*, producing sugar and coffee for domestic use and export.² Well established as the largest exporter of sugar throughout the seventeenth century, increases in demand and technological developments boosted production, requiring an influx of laborers to keep up with the burgeoning market. The slave trade became an integral part of Brazil’s economic success and fundamentally shaped society. Controlling the trade on both sides of the Atlantic, wealthy plantation owners relied almost entirely on imported African slave labor to operate sugar and coffee production.

Familiar with the threat of European powers vying for economic or political dominance in the region, Brazil suddenly gained political prominence within the sphere of European geopolitics when the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) forced the Portuguese court to flee to Rio de Janeiro in 1807. Along with opening Brazilian ports to other nations and thereby ending the official Portuguese monopoly over the economy, the Portuguese Prince Regent Dom João (later Dom João VI) promoted new cultural ventures that promoted Portuguese culture. Accustomed to considerable autonomy in the colony, the ruling Brazilian elite were forced to yield to orders of the now present court. Pressed by his countrymen to return to Portugal following Napoleon’s defeat, Dom João left his

² For a general overview of Brazilian history, see Thomas E. Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010).

young son Pedro in his stead to rule as prince regent in the king's absence. Threatened by the reestablished court in Portugal to be reduced to colonial status after enjoying considerable autonomy as a co-kingdom, Dom Pedro refused to return to Portugal and declared himself Emperor of Brazil in 1822. Though independent from colonial rule, the ruling elite still maintained socioeconomic control over Brazil. The independence of Brazil is marked by many more continuities than the ruptures that defined the independence movements from Spain in the Americas.

Dissatisfied under the restrictions of monarchical rule, the provincial elites forced Dom Pedro out of Brazil in 1831, leaving his five-year-old son Pedro II as regent and ushering in a formative era of alternation of political power between Conservatives and Liberals in the legislature and regional political competition for dominance. The rise of coffee production boosted the Brazilian economy, but its reliance on slave labor complicated its stability, due to increasing pressure from Britain to abolish the use of slave labor. Following the Paraguayan War (1864-70), abolitionist rhetoric and political debate increased regarding the large population of enslaved Africans and their descendants. The abolition of the slave trade in 1850, followed by the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the fall of the empire in 1889 ushered in a new republican government. These politicians, influenced by positivism and eugenics, sought to consolidate its power as a representative regime while maintaining the hegemony of regional oligarchies, and grappling with the issue of political rights and the increasingly racialized rhetoric that relegated freed Africans to the lower class. In the 1890 census, officials identified 44 percent of the population as "white," whereas in 1940, 63 percent were recognized as

“white.”³ During the period from 1890 to 1930, the Brazilian population more than doubled in size from 14 million to over 33 million.⁴ European immigrants inundated the countryside and fomented the rapid movement of citizens to urban centers. Urbanization and industrialization brought about marked economic changes in Brazil and also changed the social dynamics of traditional patriarchal rule.

Women composed a large portion of these politically disenfranchised groups, although members of the upper class were often afforded more opportunities and enjoyed greater social freedom than the lower classes. The female suffrage movement had its roots in the late 19th century, though it was “not tied to any political party or other social movement.”⁵ Long relegated to the home, women of the upper and middle class exercised little political or economic power, though they were able to run the household and could participate in the running of plantations or shops. Colonial depictions of women commonly valorized virtue and piety; as in the majority of societies of the time, women remained under the auspices of male power over the course of their lifetime.⁶ Whether traditionalists or modernizers, men in positions of power at the state, religious, or basic social level deemed women to be essential in the development of the nation: they had the essential role of educating and rearing the future citizens of Brazil. Women increasingly pursued new avenues to gain more education than traditionally allowed, arguing that advanced education would help them better fulfill their roles as future wives and mothers.

³ Joseph Smith, *A History of Brazil, 1500-2000: Politics, Economy, Society, Diplomacy* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), 123.

⁴ Ibid, 119.

⁵ For an in depth look at female suffrage in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see: June Hahner, *Emancipating the Female Sex: The Struggle for Women's Rights in Brazil, 1850-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Susan K. Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy: The Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996)

⁶ Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy*, 12-13.

At the dawn of the twentieth century and continuing through the decades of the Old Republic (1889-1930), school teaching was one of the only socially approved careers a woman could pursue.⁷ More women began to pursue secondary education in all girls schools as the nineteenth century progressed, and by 1930, women were making large strides in obtaining higher education as Brazil founded its first Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences, and Letters at the University of São Paulo in 1934,⁸ the majority being from the upper class and pursuing careers in education.

In the wake of the republican victory, women also pursued the right to vote, only to be denied by the Constituent Congress in 1891. Although predominantly limited to the realm of the home, women of the upper class were able to exercise mobility within their own social circles, help publish female magazines, or volunteer for philanthropic charities organized through the Catholic Church. Urbanization and modernization led to increased opportunities for women to seek work outside the home as clerical workers in railroad or telegraph offices or in factories in the case of middle and lower class women, but they could not expect to receive equal treatment or compensation from their employers. The Civil Code of 1916 reinforced the social reality of male authority, further limiting women's ability to gain employment and access property. The rapidly growing urban centers were the most progressive locations in the country: women began to organize in favor of female suffrage. Activists such as Bertha Lutz organized a veritable feminist movement through the foundation of the Federação Brasileira pelo Progresso Feminino (FBPF) in 1922, working through social and political channels to more fully

⁷ Ibid, 7-9.

⁸ Ibid, 115.

integrate women into “bourgeois capitalist society.”⁹ The organization drew from diverse ideological backgrounds, including progressive professional women seeking political rights and representation along with charitable organizations and their domestic organizers hoping to celebrate and elevate traditional roles. Susan K. Besse observes that by “accommodating the concerns of very diverse groups, the FBPF avoided confronting the conflicts between women’s public and private roles, as well as the contradictions between definitions of women as innately different from men...and potentially the same.”¹⁰ Though under the auspices of a patriarchal society, women did not sit idly by as many of their husbands and acquaintances began to express frustration with the government after the blow of the 1929 economic depression.

Throughout the early twentieth century, different political factions had been expressing discontent with the republican model of governance. Military unrest and buildup characterized the post-World War I era, threatening the stability of the Brazilian state. Political polarization reflected radicalized politics during the 1920s and 1930s, ranging from the Communist Party of the far left to the pseudo-fascist Ação Integralista Brasileira (AIB). The Revolution of 1930 ended the Old Republic. Beginning the third of October and terminating on the twenty-fourth, the conspirators overthrew the Washington Luís administration along with the President elect Júlio Prestes. Suffering from the global economic crisis of 1929 as well as the increased political hostility between warring factions, Getúlio Vargas and his supporters staged a military coup triggered by the contested election of 1930 in which Vargas ran as the Aliança Liberal candidate. Vargas had served as governor of Rio Grande do Sul and was a wealthy member of the upper

⁹ Ibid, 165.

¹⁰ Ibid, 165.

class oligarchy. His conspirators installed Vargas as the provisional president from 1930-1934, after which he was elected as president indirectly by the Constituent Assembly to serve a four-year term. In a bloodless coup in 1937, Vargas took full control of the government, revoking the Constitution of 1934 that had recognized the political rights of formerly disenfranchised citizens. Elections were suspended, and the women who had fought for suffrage for decades were denied the chance to vote, after only having won the battle in 1934. Vargas strove to achieve a strong centralized government through investing in education and the economy, to demonstrate Brazilian power abroad through stronger international trade, and to improve social welfare through the Estado Nôvo.¹¹

While the consolidation of political and economic power occupied the early years of the Vargas reign, the central government became increasingly involved in the mediation of Brazilian culture. Daryle Williams' study of the cultural production and manipulation during the Vargas years discusses the state apparatus that was instituted to promote, preserve, or silence certain parts of Brazilian historical and artistic patrimony.¹² The creation of a variety of bureaucratic organizations led to direct state intervention in the creation of a Brazilian national identity: the ministries of health; education; labor, industry, and commerce; historic and artistic patrimony; and the departments of propaganda and educational cinema all formed parts of the larger state apparatus of social control. These organizations actively interpreted, fashioned, and projected *brasilidade* to the Brazilian citizenry, attempting to consolidate a national image that would not only foster social cooperation and support within the dictatorial state, but also promote an

¹¹ Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, 116.

¹² Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001)

image within the international community that would encourage the formation and strengthening of political and economic relationships.

The Estado Nôvo regime found no better media than film to broadcast national propaganda and visually construct an image of Brazilian citizenship. Historically, the state had little interest in the Brazilian film industry prior to 1930.¹³ Foreign films dominated cinemas during the early years, leaving little room for low-budget Brazilian films to succeed; most moviegoers considered Brazilian films to be amateur compared to the technologically advanced products of Europe and the United States. The exhibition of films began in 1896, but did not consolidate into a true business until a decade later after the exhibition halls proved profitable enough for Brazilians to consider producing their own films. From 1908-1911, considered the *Bela Época* of Brazilian film, European and Brazilian films existed in peaceful coexistence. It was to be short lived, for as the American film industry consolidated and began to dominate the market, the Brazilian film business, and other small markets, found that it could not compete with the advanced technology, the quantity of films produced, or the quality of the productions, thereby losing viewers.¹⁴

The Revolution of 1930 would also signal the renovation of the Brazilian film industry. The state's interest in film's potential to reach the masses and deliver propaganda to the citizenry through both image and sound led to direct involvement in the film industry that would both support and censor production. The Vargas regime was

¹³ The following account of state involvement in the Brazilian film industry is further detailed in Randal Johnson, *The Film Industry in Brazil: Culture and the State* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987)

¹⁴ Johnson, *The Film Industry*, 40. "Although Brazilian feature film production never ceased to exist, it was sporadic rather than continuous, artisan rather than industrial. The film industry, as it existed, was largely sustained by the production of documentaries, often paid for by commercial interests."

principally interested in the potential use of the medium to educate. Through Decree no. 21,240, enacted in April of 1932, the state centralized all censorship responsibilities that had been formerly left to municipalities, levied an education tax on all films exhibited in Brazil, lowered import taxes on raw film stock, and set a precedent that enforced a quota for national films to be shown domestically.¹⁵ These measures demonstrate the state's interest in the educational aspect of the film industry, but not in the protection or expansion of the national film industry. In 1937, prior to the establishment of the Estado Novo in November of that year, Article 40 of law 378 established the *Instituto Nacional de Cinema Educativo* (INCE), the first government office designed specifically to address the state's relationship with and direct involvement in the film industry. National identity could potentially be screened across the nation, teaching the masses the moral code of *brasilidade*. The future creation of the *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda* in 1939 would further promote state production of nationalist imagery and consolidate the desired projection of the ideal Brazilian citizen both nationally and globally.

The film industry had the potential to act as a global ambassador for Brazilian politics: in 1928, prior to Vargas' rise to power, the opinion existed within the Brazilian elite that, "the day we project the smiles of our people and the splendor of our natural beauties across the screens of the world...new horizons will open to our country."¹⁶ But no one could predict that a single woman would take both Brazil and the United States by storm with her captivating smile and a her own constructed image of feminine *brasilidade*. Carmen Miranda proves to be an enigmatic figure when speaking about her

¹⁵ These measures did not help with the inundation of foreign films in the Brazilian market. In fact, the decree lowered customs taxes on film imports, continuing the foreign domination. Johnson, *The Film Industry in Brazil*, 48.

¹⁶ *Diário Nacional*, 28 January 1928; cited in Johnson, *The Film Industry in Brazil*, 51.

film career within the context of the Estado Nôvo. The image she constructed draws on the traditional clothing of the *baiana*, women from the state of Bahia: yet as a white woman of Portuguese descent, her choice of clothing and traditions typical of women of African descent from the northeast creates a problematic image of Brazilian femininity. Her exotic persona within the context of her Hollywood career in the United States also proved to be problematic: studios promoted the image of the carefree Brazilian bombshell as a type of political propaganda to portray Brazil, and the rest of South America by extension, to be allies of the United States. Her film career and persona in many ways mirror the relationship between Brazil and the United States, which I will explore further in Chapter 3. Her sexualized, exotic, and culturally essentialized performances contradict the state's construction of a national image for widespread consumption, and confirm that the projection of ideas through popular media did not guarantee their adoption by the public at large.

CHAPTER II

O ESTADO NÔVO: INSTITUTIONS AND REFORMS

The Revolution of 1930 swept Getúlio Vargas into power, but control of the state, and by extension the control of the Brazilian people, was not easily established. The Vargas camp recast the coup as a “revolution” through state-directed propaganda and evoked nationalist sentiment to garner popular support. The production of propaganda became an integral method through which to sway public opinion and generate an image of *brasilidade* the state wished to promote domestically and internationally. In this chapter, I analyze the discourses that formulated the cultural productions of the Estado Novo regime and the institutions that formulated and produced state policy and imagery regarding women within the state constructed definition of *brasilidade*. Though the Constitutions of 1934 and 1937 permitted women to work and provided legal protections, women were rhetorically relegated to the home within the state-produced discourse of the new Brazil.

The institutions of marriage and the family were key components of social control from the perspective of the state: protecting these fundamental building blocks of social order was synonymous with protecting the political and social well-being of the nation. These notions of proper gender roles were firmly established in the social structure established and perpetuated throughout the colonial period and beyond. The image of the Catholic matriarch pervaded the rhetoric of conduct manuals for women, religious manuals, and editorials and women’s journals which all revolved around notions of

female honor, and by extension the honor of the family. These traditional ideals of femininity began to be challenged with contradictory messages regarding marriage and a woman's place in society.¹⁷ Bourgeois society did not necessarily uphold all aspects of this traditional image: new ideas about the acceptability of self-reliance, efficiency, sexual attractiveness, and reciprocity in relationships contradicted the submissive and morally conservative ideal of the past.

During the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, positivism reemphasized traditional roles within its philosophy of social and political “*ordem e progresso*.” Positivist thought had a great impact on the intellectual elite of Brazil, informing policy and ideology that affected relationships between classes, races, and genders.¹⁸ In Comte's *Influência feminina do positivismo*, women are the “moderators” and the “regulators” of good behavior, planting the seeds of order, progress, and morality in the home.¹⁹ These ideological family values affected the political mobility of women as well: positivist thought supported indissoluble marriages and vocational domesticity. Though Comte believed women should receive the same educational opportunities as men, he claimed that, “a evolução favorece, não a igualdade dos sexos, mas sua diferenciação.”²⁰ Mothers and wives, then, were crucial to the state's project of forming a national identity and consolidating social order.

¹⁷ Susan K. Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy*, 79-80.

¹⁸ For a distinctly Brazilian interpretation of Positivism and eugenics in the context of a modernizing nation, see Marshall Eakin, “Race and Identity: Silvio Romero, Science, and Social Thought in Late 19th Century Brazil.” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 22:2 (Winter 1985): 151-74.

¹⁹ Auguste Comte, *Influência feminina do positivismo*, 14. “As mulheres constituem, pois, no regímen positivo, a parte doméstica do poder moderado, de que os filósofos tornão-se o órgão sistemático, e os proletários a garantia política.” CPDOC, FGV.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 35.

The ruling elites of the Old Republic recognized the political and social implications of women's roles in society and actively sought to control these roles through policy as the economy and social mores began to modernize. Susan K. Besse describes this relationship over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, citing specific instances of state interest and interference in the institution of marriage, the female workforce, women's education and child rearing. State interest in marriage was not limited to the upper and middle classes, expressing equal concern with the working class and recognizing it as laying the foundation for the future generation of Brazilian workers. Marriage would serve as the foundation on which to build a new Brazilian society. However, the state's participation in defining this institution mainly focused on the limits of women's behavior in society. The state offered material incentives for marriage to young couples, drafted "protective" legislation that limited female participation in the workforce, and formed a corps of social workers to safeguard the behavior of impoverished working class families. The Civil Code of 1916 claimed that "the wife was legally described as a 'companion, partner, and assistant in [attending to] familial responsibilities'" and reaffirmed that the husband was the legal head of the household.²¹ A woman fell under the auspices of several patriarchal figures at some point in her life: her father, her husband, and later her son or other male relatives upon the death of her husband. These men retained the right to administer property, relinquish or authorize his "ward's" inheritance, and make a career choice for a woman when appropriate.

²¹ Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy*, 61.

Modernization brought new opportunities for women to participate in the workforce and stimulated debate regarding their political rights. The majority of the women in the workforce were from the lower classes. As the service sector expanded, more opportunities for female employment opened that the middle class deemed “appropriate” for women. Education was critical to the opening of society to more mobility for women, though opportunities were few and limited to the upper class. Professional higher education opened to women in 1879 in Brazil, though few would obtain degrees during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Mothers had long been valued as the most important educators of their children; women dominated the field of primary and secondary education in the wake of the end of the Old Republic and Vargas hoped to capitalize on traditional ideas regarding women’s role in the moral preparation of a future generation of citizens. Though the state offered more opportunities for educational and vocational training, these institutions still privileged marriage and motherhood as the primary goals for women.²²

The Catholic Church was also complicit in this desire for a more conservative social doctrine and provided a religious overtone to feminine ideals. Sueann Caulfield observes,

For a great many contemporary religious authorities as well as political and professional elites, the relationship was simple: sexual honor was the basis of the family, and the family the basis of the nation. Without the moralizing force of women’s sexual honesty, modernization—a catch-all term that meant many things to many people—would bring the dissolution of the family, rampant criminality, and general social chaos. What these elites did not recognize, or at least did not acknowledge, was that sexual honor stood for a set of gender norms that, with

²² Ibid, 121.

their apparent basis in nature, provided the logic for unequal power relations in private and public life.²³

Imbedded in this rhetoric of the ideal family were sexual morality and submission of women to their male counterparts. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Church provided women with the “ordained” patriarchal approval to organize social projects and provide philanthropic services, mostly to the urban poor.²⁴ Organizations such as the *Associação de Senhoras Brasileiras* and the *Liga das Senhoras Católicas* trained women from the upper and middle classes as social workers, working in shelters and orphanages to teach poor women and children how to lead moral lives. These voluntary social projects, while providing opportunities to lead and contribute to society, reinforced traditional ideas of proper women’s work and the class divisions imbedded in Brazilian society. These conservative social mores extended into the legislation of the Vargas era following the fall of the Old Republic, and the Estado Nôvo subsumed this image of the philanthropic Catholic matriarch as an ideal within its constructed national identity.

State Policies Addressing the Family and Women

The period between the Revolution of 1930 and the institution of the Estado Nôvo in 1937 simultaneously promoted and diminished the political and legal rights of women. Although granted suffrage by the national congress in 1932, the decree permitted only literate women over the age of twenty-one to vote: these stipulations marginalized

²³ Sueanne Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor*, 4. The author analyzes legal cases produced during the early twentieth century that addressed sexual morality and/or deviancy, arguing that notions of “honor” defined gender hierarchy and constituted social behavior.

²⁴ Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy*, 59.

working-class women who could not meet the literacy requirement and who were also experiencing hostility from participating in labor activities in the male-dominated work place. The victory was short-lived, for Vargas stripped voting rights away from everyone in 1937. In a 1940 speech, Vargas enumerated the basic principals of the Estado Nôvo, citing how an “electoral fiction” had existed prior to the Revolution of 1930:

Êsses princípios são—reconstrução política, consagrando o centralismo, com o método próprio de impulsão progressista, em vez dos particularismos federalistas, porta aberta a todos os vírus de desagregação, capazes de ameaçar a unidade e a soberania nacional...ordenação social e cultural, para que todos os brasileiros, igualmente amparados pelo Estado, recebam educação e desempenhem, a contento, as suas obrigações para com a Pátria, acima das dissensões de grupos e dos privilégios de classes.²⁵

The political rhetoric of equality and unity within a more centralized state required order, and the state intended to enforce social order through legal means and through the creation of new government agencies with hopes of fashioning and enacting the Estado Nôvo’s new Brazilian national identity.

The Constitution of 1937 directly addressed the importance of the family, stating, “The family, constituted by indissoluble marriage, is under the special protection of the state.” According to the policy makers of the Estado Nôvo, indissoluble marriage represented the fixity and stability of the family. The very essence of the Brazilian family was legally defined within a constrictive, but well-ordered social contract. In theory, shaping the most basic unit of society would produce the ideal Brazilian citizens that would contribute to the success of the political and economic future of the nation. Legal and social projects such as the reform of the Penal Code in 1940 and the 1939 National Commission for the Protection of the Family sought to update women’s legal rights and

²⁵ Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda (DIP). *Unidade Moral e Unidade Econômica da Nacionalidade: Discurso do Presidente G. Vargas às Classes Conservadoras e Proletárias*. CPDOC, FGV.

position within society while still maintaining the traditional values that kept the Brazilian family intact. The Penal Code of 1940 permitted sanctions to be brought against a spouse for the material and moral abandonment of the family, eliminated the distinction between male and female adultery and established equal punishment, and ended the informal legal toleration of crimes of passion that flooded courtrooms with sensationalized stories that in turn inundated newspapers. These reforms reinforced the foundational legal stricture of indissoluble marriage while simultaneously recognizing certain equal rights for women.²⁶

A similarly contradictory legal outcome unfolded within the Ministério de Trabalho e Comercio. The increasing numbers of women working in the industrial and commercial sectors of the economy led to the Decreto N°21.417²⁷, which intended to provide protection in the workplace for women. Decreed in May of 1932, the legislation claimed that equal pay for equal work should be granted to workers regardless of sex, but limited the kind of work women could participate in, excluding them from jobs they had previously occupied. Limits on the amount of weight deemed safe to be lifted by women and the removal of female workers from workplaces deemed unsafe and/or unsuitable (subterranean mines, public construction) constructed a legal apparatus through which female behavior within the workplace could be controlled. Though limiting the types of jobs accessible to women, the legislation (theoretically) provided a thorough protection clause for pregnant workers, ensuring the provision of compensated maternity leave, options for childcare, and job protection. These measures reflected a move towards more

²⁶ Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy*, 70.

²⁷ Ministério do Trabalho e Comercio. Decreto N°21.417. BNRJ.

progressive attitudes towards women in the workforce, but also reemphasized the traditional stereotypes of women's work and her role within society.

Though the regime made legislative strides towards recognizing that women had a place within the modernizing economy and social structure, the language utilized and policies enacted reemphasized the state's desire to relegate women to the home and behave according to traditional patriarchal values. New opportunities to seek employment, education, or social mobility did not reflect a change in the moral rhetoric of those in power, still couched in notions of honor and decency. To further protect the basic foundation of social control and organization, the family, newly founded institutions within the Vargas regime employed traditional discourses of social behavior within their propaganda campaigns to form a discursive portrait of *brasilidade*.

Consolidating the State: New Institutions and Nationalism

The construction of *brasilidade* required the cooperation of multiple state agencies. Perhaps the two most notable and influential agencies during Vargas' reign were the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education; they each took on the project of forming new Brazilian citizens by promoting idealized images of what was deemed essentially "Brazilian" and therefore integral to national identity. Unlike other dictatorial or fascist regimes that existed during the period, Vargas did not form an "ideology" as such,²⁸ but focused on the management of social groups in order to consolidate control. In his study of cultural management during the first Vargas regime, Daryle Williams observes,

²⁸ Robert M. Levine, *The Vargas Regime* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 151.

“Neither modernists, traditionalists, nor academics were willing to let competing camps control the strategic apparatus of cultural management. Rather, each camp wanted to use the state to promote its own political and aesthetic agenda, deeply weaving the state into the politics of culture, just as the state itself was formulating a systematic approach to cultural policy making.”²⁹

Within this struggle of pinpointing the “brazilianness” of different aspects of culture, the ministries of the Estado Nôvo also had to consider the role that women occupied within this discourse.

Shortly after the coup of 1930, Vargas established the Ministry of Education and Public Health (MESP), which would be renamed in 1938 as simply the *Ministério de Educação e Saude* (MES), whose intent was to manage and shape different aspects of Brazilian “culture” within the regime. Gustavo Capanema, a *mineiro* lawyer, took over the MES in 1934 and defined the policies during the Estado Nôvo era, promoting new education policies along with health regimens and safety measures in hopes of transforming the Brazilian youth into ideal citizens with strong nationalist sentiments and respect for state-instituted social order. Not willing to limit the ministry’s scope to a narrowly defined definition of “education” or “health,” Capanema petitioned Vargas to create a council of national culture, and was granted his request in 1938. The ministry (Capanema, really) understood culture as, “(a) philosophical, scientific, and literary production; (b) art appreciation; (c) preservation of cultural patrimony; (d) intellectual exchange; (e) the mass media (books, radio, theater, cinema); (f) patriotic and humanitarian causes; (g) civic education; (h) physical education; and (i) recreation,”³⁰

²⁹ Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil*, 60.

³⁰ Ibid, 68. The *Conselho Nacional de Cultura* (National Culture Council) was to “coordinate all activities dealing with cultural development undertaken directly or indirectly by the Ministry of Education and Health.”

and took on the duty of forming a multi-faceted, selective idea of Brazilian culture under the auspices of Estado Nôvo control.

The education system itself received special attention from the very beginning of the Estado Nôvo era: in 1937, the *Plano Nacional Educativa*, the outcome of a detailed questionnaire composed by Capanema, was submitted to Vargas for approval. This lengthy reform bill proposed general education reform for public schools in the form of curriculum requirements, physical health components, and increased technical school training.³¹ Within the more than one hundred pages of curricular reforms, the *Plano* also directly addressed the education of women. Although education became more pervasively available to women during the early twentieth century, “the goal of the educational system was not to foster female intellectual, economic, or social emancipation but to effectively mobilize women to promote physical health, national economic prosperity, and social and political prosperity.”³² Women gradually began to dominate the teaching profession, particularly women from the middle and upper classes who had opportunities to receive an education. Recipients of degrees from institutions of higher learning were few and far between.

Capanema stated in a speech given in 1937 that while education should be available to all, men and women should not necessarily receive the same type of education:

A educação a ser dada aos dois há, porém, de diferir na medida em que diferem os destinos que a Providência lhes deu. Assim, se o homem deve ser preparado com t mpera de teor militar para os neg cios e as lutas, a educa o feminina ter  outra finalidade que   o preparo para a vida do lar...Ora,   a mulher que funda e

³¹ Simon Schwartzman, ed., *Tempos de Capanema* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Paz e Terra S/A, 1984), 182-188.

³² Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor*, 128.

conserva a família, como é também por suas mãos que a família se destrói. Ao Estado, pois, compete, na educação que lhe ministra prepará-la conscientemente para esta grave missão.³³

The reforms of the education plan actually provided instruction for young girls in preparation for a “life of the home” and received a “certificado de dona-da-casa.”³⁴

Notwithstanding the clear agenda to instruct future homemakers, the young girls did receive the general education requirements as their male counterparts. Again, the purpose of education revolved around the notion of forming the future citizens of Brazil: thus their mothers should be equipped with a basic education so as to be better arbiters of order and cultural identity for their families.



Figure 1: “Atividade em sala de aula” (CPDOC)³⁵

The coup closed Congress in 1937 without it passing the *Plano Nacional Educativa*: its scope was considered too broad and unrealistic to be put into action.

Although some of its suggestions were put in place during the Estado Nôvo, such as the

³³ Schwartzman, *Tempos de Capanema*, 107. Gustavo Capanema. Conferência proferida por ocasião do centenário do Colégio Pedro II, 2 de dezembro de 1937. GC/Capanema, Gustavo, 02.12.37, série pi.)

³⁴ Ibid, 186.

³⁵ All figures that appear in this chapter were taken between 1938 and 1945 under the coordination of Gustavo Capanema for future use in *Obra Getuliana*, discussed later in the chapter.

implementation of industrial training, reform of secondary education in 1942, and the “universidade-padrão” project, the Plan’s ambitious goals extended beyond the powers that many politicians considered appropriate for a bureaucratic institution like the Ministry of Education. This detailed plan intended to solve (however idealistically) political, economic, and social problems by defining professions and social activities through education when in reality they depended on the labor market and pre-established practices of professionals within the market.³⁶ The sheer scope and magnitude of reform proposed by Capanema’s ministry demonstrates the extent to which the institution, and by extension the State, concerned itself with the definition of culture, and therefore *brasilidade*. Women clearly take precedence within this discussion of forming new Brazilian citizens, but within the traditional roles of matriarch as the ultimate educator in terms of morality and values.

The ministry also took on issues of health, whether through the promotion of basic hygiene, preventative health measures, or athleticism. While physical activity for women had been classified as a marker of the lower classes, or racialized in the context of slavery, the twentieth century opened this realm of activity and athletic practice to women. Silvana Vilodre Goellner’s study of the *Revista Educação Física* during the first half of the twentieth century observes the interplay of eugenics, gender, and nationalism in the promotion of athletic and healthy bodies.³⁷ The training and

³⁶ Ibid, 188. Other factors could not be solved merely through reforms of education and changes in schools, which the author chooses to leave unmentioned, considering instead the listed factors of the labor market and professional practices to be the defining forces of social, political, and economic practices the *Plano Nacional Educativa* sought to correct.

³⁷ Silvana Vilodre Goellner, “‘As mulheres fortes são aquelas que fazem uma raça forte:’ Esporte, eugenia e nacionalismo no Brasil no início do século XX,” *Recorde* 1:1 (Jun 2008) 1-28. “...a constituição homogênea do povo brasileiro passou a ser o pilar fundamental de um projeto de humanidade centrado na valorização do corpo ágil, viril, saudável, potente e branco” (11).

strengthening of the human body would likewise form disciplined citizens and breed nationalist sentiments.

The production of images became a major priority for the Vargas regime. Under the direction of Gustavo Capanema, the state employed three German photographers, along with Brazilian professionals, to traverse the countryside and document signs of progress and development. The photographers shot thousands of photos, which Capanema intended to publish in a master tome, *A Obra Getuliana*.³⁸ This paean to modernization centered on Vargas as the great leader of economic, political, and social initiatives that would bring Brazil to the forefront of modernity on an international scale.

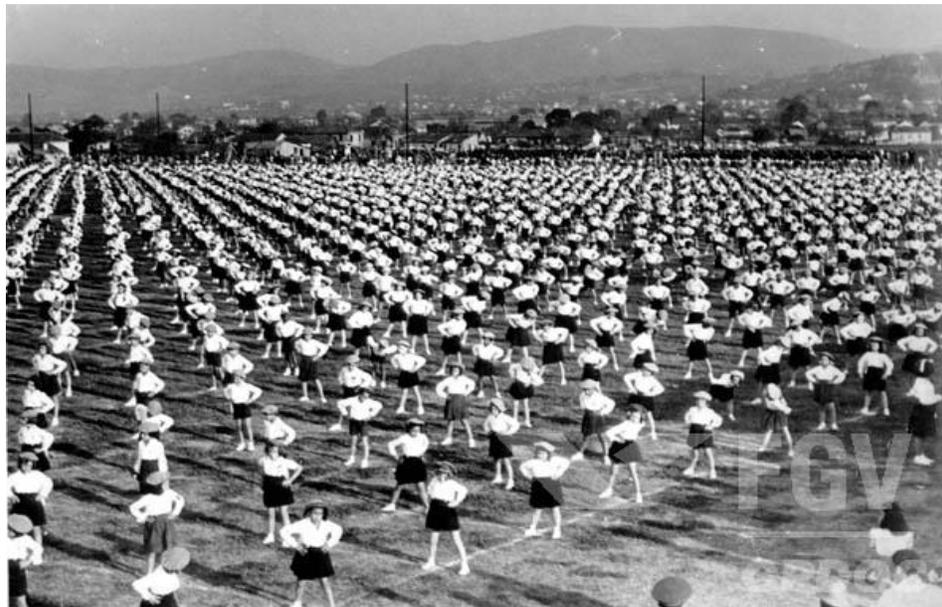


Figure 2: “Aspectos de eventos em homenagem ao Estado Nôvo,” Rio Grande do Sul. (CPDOC)

In celebration of the second anniversary of the Estado Nôvo in Rio Grande do Sul, a group of young girls dressed in uniform, presumably from the same school, aligned on a field to process as part of the celebrations of the day. Organized marches of children and young people as part of national holidays or commemorative events were commonplace

³⁸ CPDOC, General Information, FGV.

during the Estado Nôvo, adding a youthful face to the more regimented marches of branches of the military. Through these images, it is clear that the propagandists wished to promote a healthy, youthful, and white image of femininity as the nationalist ideal of the regime. These public exercises, reminiscent of formal military processions that traditionally involved only men, integrated women into a performance of order, progress, and patriotism. Whether marching alongside men, or processing together as a group, women were clearly visible in the Vargas regime's national production of identity.

The production of images that promoted state organizations and illustrated the progress made by these new institutions was a source of contention within the regime following the coup in 1937. Though the majority of the administrators within the regime believed that culture should be arbitrated by the state, different individuals espoused a range of policies and methods of cultural formation and did not reach a consensus on the purpose or extent to which the state should intervene in the construction of an ideal cultural patrimony. For instance, the ministries of Education and Justice competed on an ideological and practical level for control of the mediation of state-produced notions of culture, demonstrating that "In an authoritarian state that presented a public image of unity and harmony, the state was divided against itself, pitting advocates of cultural management as a form of educational reform against those who saw cultural management as a tool for social control."³⁹ Though infighting never ceased between ministries and the personalities who administered them, the formation of the *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda* (DIP) in 1939 marked a definite shift in administrative organization and state production of propaganda that defined *brasilidade* through print, images, radio

³⁹ Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil*, 78.

broadcasts, and film.

The Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda and the Film Industry

The reorganization of the *Departamento Nacional de Propaganda* (DNP) led to the foundation of a restructured and more focused entity, the *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda* (DIP). Under direct supervision of Vargas, the DIP sought to centralize and coordinate the communication of the state with the polity.⁴⁰ Like the propaganda ministries of many totalitarian states in Europe, the department censored the various media available to Brazilians (print, media, film), controlled the finances of state-produced propaganda, and composed and approved the content of all state communication. It also concerned itself in the regime's project to create a "national cultural patrimony" that valued and celebrated certain historical events, people, and traditions deemed representative of Brazilian culture.⁴¹ Though the Brazilian government did not openly express admiration for the level of censorship within the dictatorships of Europe, admiration did circulate within the early Vargas regime for the German propaganda model. In a letter addressed to Vargas in September of 1934, Oswaldo Aranha, states:

O que me impressionou em Berlim, foi a propaganda sistemática, methodizada do governo e do sistema de governo nacional socialista. Não ha em toda a Alemanha uma só pessoa que não sinta diariamente o contato do 'nazismo' ou de Hitler, seja pela fotografia, pelo radio, pelo cinema, atravez toda a imprensa alemã, pelos leaders nazis, pelas organizações do partido ou, seja, no minimo, pelo encontro, por toda a parte, dos uniformes dos S.A.⁴²

⁴⁰ Silvana Goulart, *Sob a verdade oficial: ideologia, propaganda, e censura no Estado Nôvo* (São Paulo: Editora Marco Zero, 1990), 17.

⁴¹ Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil*, 83. "The disappearance of the DIP's permanent archives will forever complicate a full understanding of the internal politics of culture during the Vargas regime."

⁴² CPDOC, FGV, 22/9/34, OA.34.09.22. Oswaldo Aranha served as the ambassador to the United States from 1934-1937 and as the Minister of External Relations from 1938-1944.

Though Vargas would ultimately side with the Allies during World War II and mobilize troops during the conflict, the authoritarian regime he instituted clearly considered the German propaganda system worth emulating as far as generating nationalistic fervor was concerned. As both promoter of culture and censor of original cultural productions unassociated with the state, the DIP acted as a cultural mediator between the state and the Brazilian people.

Newspapers and print media were the major sources through which the DIP hoped to reach the masses; print media could be dispersed to urban centers and the rural stretches of the nation where radio had yet to reach. But even with the information dispersed, it could not be ensured that everyone would receive the message: in 1940, 56.4% of the population over eighteen years of age remained illiterate.⁴³ The DIP capitalized on the potential of radio and film for wide dissemination of propaganda throughout the urban centers of Brazil, but could not hope to reach the vast stretches of the rural interior where these technologies had yet to be established. Within this conundrum of distribution versus consumption by the populace, the coordination of national projects, particularly between the MES and the DIP, was crucial. A population educated under the reformed system would be more easily indoctrinated (in theory!) into the nationalist vision of the state. In the media produced by the DIP, education became an important mechanism in the process of modernizing the nation.

Vargas recognized the potential power film could have in delivering nationalistic material to the masses. Film was a means through which to promote state-constructed nationalist sentiment by embodying an active image of an idealized Brazilian image on

⁴³ Goulart, *Sob a verdade oficial*, 28.

the screen. Vargas explained, “Associando ao cinema o radio e o culto racional dos desportos, completará o Governo um sistema articulando de educação mental, moral e higênica, dotando o Brasil dos instrumentos imprescindíveis à preparação de uma raça empreendedora, resistente e varonil. E a raça que assim se formar será digna do patrimônio invejável que recebeu [sic].”⁴⁴ Within the vision of the state, film had the capability to reach the masses through the means of a seemingly harmless form of entertainment, demonstrating the idealized vision of “o povo brasileiro” to the people themselves in hopes of inspiring nationalist fervor and unity within the Estado Nôvo. The *Instituto de Cinema Educativo* (INCE), founded in 1937 before the coup, produced educational film clips that coordinated with the projected education initiatives of the MES. The INCE, while able to produce silent films, was never an overly productive source of propaganda for the state due to the lack of funding and technology, although it did produce documentary films for instruction in the classroom.⁴⁵

The DNP took immediate action in promoting the established authoritarian regime in 1937 through the *Cine Jornal Brasileiro*, short film composites that included national news and promoted state programs, institutions, and changes in an idealized manner.⁴⁶

Produced and distributed by the film company Cinédia, the state enlisted the expertise of the film industry to produce its own materials for mass consumption.⁴⁷ From 1938-1946,

⁴⁴ Anita Simis, *Estado e cinema no Brasil* (São Paulo, Brazil: CNPq; FAPESP, 1996), 31. This quote can be found in: Getúlio Vargas, “O cinema nacional elemento de aproximação dos habitantes do país.” *A nova política do Brasil*, v. III (Rio de Janeiro, José Olympio, s/d.) p. 183-9.

⁴⁵ Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil*, 72. “The mere fact that early releases were silent and used 16-millimeter film unsuitable for commercial film houses effectively blocked any hopes of transforming the INCE into an agency of mass persuasion.”

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 84.

⁴⁷ Goulart, *Sob a Verdade Oficial*, 25. Cinédia was founded in 1930 by Adhemar Gonzaga, a friend of Getúlio Vargas.

the DIP produced close to one thousand reels of cinema journals and documentaries,⁴⁸ covering an enormous range of subjects, places, and events that strove to promote a unified national identity on screen and inspire a sense of national unity and belonging in the audience. Similar to the American film tradition of the time, viewing the *cinejornais* was “compulsory”—they preceded a regular film screening, ensuring “that movie-goers were exposed to an imagined Brazil that contained no conflict, no misery, no setbacks, and no culture wars, even if this was a fiction of a repressive regime.”⁴⁹ Transformations of industry, urban centers, rural farms, and schools all demonstrated the state’s activity and success in modernizing various sectors of society and the economy.

Along with producing its own films, the DIP also took an active interest in the Brazilian film industry, hitherto operating more or less independently of the state. Under the direction of Lourival Fontes, the DIP instituted a screen quota for Brazilian films to be shown in every cinema (even though it was only one per year in 1939), supporting the Brazilian film industry in theory, but doing little to help improve domestic production, allowing American films to inundate the market. But the domestic production of film as *art* or *entertainment* (or even as a source of income) did not interest the regime: it viewed film as a medium through which to educate, a moral force, a purely “pedagogical instrument.”⁵⁰

Perhaps the most emblematic film segments of the state’s priorities coalesce in the recurring documentations of organized demonstrations celebrating important national events. Inspired by the tradition of military processions, school groups of young children

⁴⁸ *Cine Jornal Brasileiro: Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda, 1938-1946*, (São Paulo: Fundação Cinemateca Brasileira, 1982), 1.

⁴⁹ Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil*, 85.

⁵⁰ Johnson, *The Film Industry in Brazil*, 54-55.

and adolescents organized and paraded in front of national dignitaries, or Vargas himself, to commemorate national holidays and/or events highlighted by the state. In one particular episode, screened in 1940, female students of the Colégio Normal and male students of the Colégio Militar in Rio de Janeiro file down the streets to the DIP headquarters to be received by members of the administration and addressed by Gustavo Capanema at the first conference held by the DIP for the Organização da Juventude Brasileira. Divided by sex, the adolescent girls receive their address first, followed by a spirited speech by their own colleague Maria da Costa Guedes, addressing the importance of their education and their potential contributions to the greater good of Brazil: “O Brasil caminha elevando-se moral e materialmente...Compreendemos a nossos deveres e selamos na solidariedade que nos une.”⁵¹ The organized parade of youths displayed to the public demonstrates the regime’s dedication to the education of the people, granting the youth of Brazil a voice within the nationally prescribed rhetoric. Referring to the “renovation of the national soul,” Maria da Costa Guedes’ speech aligns the Organization of Brazilian Youth with the “grande movimento educativo” proposed by Vargas to not only provide school education to the populace, but to reform Brazilians into modern citizens loyal to the dictatorial regime. Society deemed a career in education an acceptable pursuit for female students, particularly for young women of the upper and middle classes. Though representing the “future of Brazil” through these images of order, this film perhaps best demonstrates the social stratification of the education system, indicative of the social disparities within society at large. All of the students are white, reflecting the selectivity of both the Colégio Militar and the Colégio Normal. Though the

⁵¹ Author’s transcription. *Cinejornal* v.1 n.120 (1940). Arquivo Nacional. www.zappiens.br

regime clearly chose to downplay racial difference and promote a unified national identity based on “*mestiçagem*,” very few individuals of African descent make an appearance in the *cinejornais*. Whether due to subject matter, choice of location within rural and urban settings, or a concentrated effort to exclude Afro-Brazilians, the face of *brasilidade* was most certainly white.

Women appeared in *cinejornais* in both traditional and more modern roles, all prescribed by the DIP’s notion of proper female behavior in the political, industrial, and general social spheres. Reinforcing the strong support of the military shown for Vargas, the *cinejornais* often depicted military units drilling on bases or parading through the streets; the military took up the bulk of screen time as the United States, and later Brazil, entered into the armed conflict in Europe against fascist Germany and Italy. Women are depicted on the sidelines of military parades, looking on from the stands. However, in the sweeping overviews depicting Brazilian progress in industry, the DIP chose to include images of women working in factory jobs.



Figure 3: “Trabalhadoras embalam produtos farmacêuticos” (CPDOC)

The *cinejornais* also exhibited Brazilian women as political actors within the nation. In the *cinejornal* “Como votar nas eleições do dia 2 de dezembro,” the film follows the steps each voter takes to cast a ballot at the polls, a right denied to Brazilians since 1932, and a right never before exercised by women.⁵² Though the first scene demonstrates a line of voters entering the polls, the informational montage follows a young, well-dressed, white woman through the process. As a voiceover narrates, she dutifully submits her identification, registers her name, privately consults the names of the candidates, then casts her ballot, ending with the reassuring mantra “O voto é o direito de cada um. O voto é o dever de todos.” The scenario serves as a tool of instruction for a large sector of the population who had never participated in an election. But using a woman as the representative of the general Brazilian voter also acceded to the legitimacy of the female voter.



Figure 4: “Comemoração cívica”(CPDOC)

⁵² *Cine Jornal Brasileiro*, 158. This particular clip is unnumbered and undated in the archive.

Creating Nationalism v. Controlling Popular Culture

The Estado Nôvo included women within its constructed definition of *brasilidade*, recognizing them as a valid component of the political and economic future of the nation. Inclusion in the national imaginary did not mean that the state broke with traditional definitions of feminine behavior within the family, the workplace, and society at large. While the government could construct and disperse an idealized national image to the nation in hopes of inspiring the kind of patriotic support it desired to maintain power, it could not completely censor or control forces of popular culture, consumed through various sources of media and emulated by society at large. These influences included popular newspapers, women's magazines, and international films that inundated the Brazilian industry throughout the Vargas regime, mostly produced in the United States; all of these media broke from the traditional image of the Brazilian Catholic matriarch.

CHAPTER III

POPULAR MEDIA AND THE STATE

In November 1935, Getúlio Vargas' daughter Alzira visited the Brazilian ambassador to the United States, Oswaldo Aranha, in Washington D.C. on holiday to acquaint herself with Brazil's great northern ally. The young Alzira experienced the sites of the capital, the nightlife of New York City, and the industrial centers of Detroit and Chicago on her American tour, taking in the urban epicenters of commercial and industrial progress that Brazil sought to emulate. In an amicable letter to Vargas, demonstrating the close relationship Aranha had with the President, he narrates Alzira's itinerary and experiences in the United States, but lingers on the differences he sees between Alzira, the Brazilian woman of the future, and the productive, uninhibited modern women who seemingly participate in all aspects of American society. The letter, while reporting on the activities of Alzira Vargas in America, reads more as a persuasive essay comparing the state of equality between the sexes in the United States with the situation in Brazil:

Aliás, Getúlio, o convívio com esta civilização mostra uma evidência para a qual temos fechado os olhos e as portas: a eficiência da colaboração da mulher. Ela [Alzira] vai ver e sentir isso e voltará, provavelmente, mais consciente de seus atributos e mais útil, se possível...[a mulher] foi e é parte essencial de progresso e da grandeza Americana, em cuja formação teve e tem papel igual ao do homem, quer nas atividades privadas, quer nas públicas, que na dos negócios em geral.¹

Aranha's stance on gender equality did not go unrecognized by Vargas, nor did Vargas deny the positive aspects of having women participate more in the political and economic

¹ CPDOC. OA 35.11.11, 1-2.

spheres. However, in official rhetoric and imagery, the state relied on traditional roles of women as mothers and homemakers to portray nationalist Brazilian identity for women.

Though the Brazilian state and various bureaucratic organizations attempted to promote and popularize a certain image of national identity during the Estado Nôvo, the successful distribution of imagery through print, film, and radio did not ensure the adoption of these characteristics or “ideologies” by the public. Administrators within the Instituto Nacional de Cinema Educativo recognized the persuasive potential of film: “Com um prestígio assim tão vivo e dilatado, pode o cinema, sem duvida, influir beneficentemente sobre as massas populares, instruindo e orientando, instigando os bellos entusiasmos e ensinando as grandes attitudes e as nobres acções [*sic*].”²

In this chapter, I analyze the popular media produced during the Estado Nôvo period that did not align with the state’s projection of *brasilidade*, observing how print media and film ultimately constructed a dichotomy between the state’s national imagining of women as political and social actors and actual social reality. The politics of constructing culture and a national definition as imagined in popular cinematic productions of the 1930s and 1940s extended to include international relations, particularly the relationship between Brazil and the United States before and during World War II. I analyze the tensions latent in popular women’s magazines that invoke notions of Brazilian femininity; the Brazilian film industry, fighting for autonomy (and sometimes survival) in an era of Hollywood hegemony; and the representation of *brasilidade* and the Brazilian nation, both domestically and internationally. This reading of popular cultural media involves a discussion of the United States’ conscious and

² CPDOC, FGV. GC 34.09.27, INCE.

unconscious role in shaping political and popular culture in Brazil. These multiple facets of social influence ultimately illustrate a social sphere in which paradoxical ideals of a “modern” Brazilian woman circulated.

The Feminine Press: Replicating Rhetoric and Pushing Boundaries

Women were marginally involved in the press during the early twentieth century, but hardly excluded from the subject matter of periodicals, magazines, or pamphlets. Though journalism as a profession was rare, and in these cases looked down upon due to the required familiarity with and involvement in politics, women did collaborate to produce publications for a female readership. These publications exhibit a strong class and racial bias due to the demographic of the writers and editors: the upper- and middle-class white women who contributed to these issues had the luxury of time and social mobility, unburdened by the need to work for an income. While articles and advertisements tended to support the traditional ideals of womanhood (successfully fulfilling the roles of wife and mother), women’s magazines did not limit the realm of feminine existence to the home.

Early women’s magazines such as *Revista Feminina* promoted mobility and emancipation through Catholic culture, reminding women of traditional values in the wake of industrialization and changing codes of behavior.³ Women were not necessarily excluded from political rhetoric, but government propaganda clearly delineated gendered political roles to promote a unified national identity. Women organized and appealed for female suffrage, considered fairly radical for the time period, and also joined forces with

³ Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy*, 25. *Revista Feminina* was published from 1914-1927.

more conservative groups to preserve traditional social roles, such as the integralist political organization Ação Integralista Brasileira (AIB). Formed in 1932 and active until the establishment of the Estado Nôvo, the AIB pressed for tighter state control and nationalist sentiments independent of official state rhetoric. Mirroring fascist movements in both Italy and Germany, the “green shirts” organized around both political and moral imperatives to keep the Brazilian family strong in times of change. Vargas quietly garnered the AIB’s support throughout the 1930s, hoping to be rewarded with political legitimacy once elections took place in 1938. However, with the outlawing of all political parties and organizations in 1937 and without the state’s official support, Vargas forced the AIB to disband, rendering them unable to mobilize a movement in protest due to the lack of support from members of the military.⁴

In an article titled “A mulher e a educação” in the weekly AIB newspaper *A Offensiva*, Dora de Barros Pastorino relates the importance of women in relation to raising future Brazilians:

Nossa tarefa será árdua, nossa responsabilidade grande, tanto maior quanto os integralistas de amanhã, seremos nós que os faremos. Serão os nossos filhos, sobrinhos, e netos, os continuadores da luta em que nos empenhamos, e para que assim seja será preciso que nos mulheres saibamos orientar-os, dirigir-os, educar-os...E é justamente em manter este sentido recto, equilibrado, justo, bello e perfeito, que está o papel da mulher...Por isso é que a ella, mais do que a ninguem, cabe a tarefa da educadora [*sic*].⁵

As a woman supporting the AIB, Dora de Barros Pastorino actively advocated for traditional roles within the political realm. Women, then, were not all advocating for

⁴ See Stanley E. Hilton’s article “Ação Integralista Brasileira: Fascism in Brazil, 1932-1938,” *Luso Brazilian Review*, 9:2 (Winter, 1972), 3-29, for an overview of the AIB’s political history during Vargas’ regime.

⁵ Dora de Barros Pastorino, “A Mulher e a Educação” *A Offensiva* (6 de setembro, 1934), BNRJ.

equal rights or greater mobility, but also identified with more conservative political movements. The Vargas government expressed similar sentiments, focusing on the importance of women within the reformed education system. Once again, female political mobilization became officially constructed through the rhetoric and imagery of the devoted mother, a construction that continued in official state propaganda, as well as popular print.

Policy shifts within the Vargas regime after the establishment of the Estado Novo led to stricter censorship of the media. The majority of popular magazines read by women during the time period were of a lighter persuasion, simultaneously reaching out to mothers and “modern” Brazilian women. In issues of *Walkyrias*, columns covered fashion trends, homemaking tips and recipes, and parenting or relationship advice, blocked between ads for household or beauty supplies. Written for a strictly female audience, women’s magazines tended to be apolitical and had few to no allusions to current events. Dulcília Helena Schroeder Buitoni observes that the absence of “journalistic” content in women’s magazines created a mythic space in which the idea of the Brazilian woman could be formed and from which she could not escape.⁶ As superficial as the content of these publications may seem, we can see that below the surface, “a imprensa feminina é mais ‘ideologizada’ que a imprensa dedicada ao público em geral.”⁷ Yet within this idealized and ideologized space existed contradictions: a clear shift in content occurs with the passage of time from 1900 to 1940 as the film industry, both at home and abroad, continued to develop and gain popularity. Buitoni observes two

⁶ Dulcília Helena Schroeder Buitoni, *Mulher de papel: A representação da mulher na imprensa feminina brasileira* (Edições Loyola: São Paulo, 1981), 5-6.

⁷ Buitoni, *Mulher de papel*, 1.

thematic trends in the feminine press beginning in the late nineteenth century: the traditional realm of existence confined to the home, and that of a more progressive support for women's rights and the promotion of education.⁸ The film industry and the growth in popularity of attending films profoundly shaped the feminine press of the late 1930s and 1940s, effectively during the Estado Novo. Brazilian women navigated separate, but not always distinct, dialogues of femininity: a modernizing populist state's conservative imagining of female loyalty within the realm of the home and the field of education, rearing future Brazilian citizens, and a modernizing film industry at home and abroad portraying progressive women with the ability to independently choose a traditional role or a modern one. Newspapers and women's magazines provide a unique space in which both dialogues occupy the same physical space or are actively debated, producing interpretations for an assumed female audience that may or may not coincide with official rhetoric or a national agenda.

Some of the most popular forms of entertainment in print culture were the reviews of films and profiles of movie stars. Even the AIB newspaper inserted a section of film reviews, often focusing on the immoral plot devices of Hollywood films and the need to support the floundering Brazilian industry, reflecting the nationalistic political leaning of the organization.⁹ But not all publications emphasized the moral laxity or invasive characteristics of Hollywood: publications such as *A Scena Muda* and *Cinearte*, published in Rio de Janeiro, celebrated and profiled the stars of American films, imitating

⁸ Ibid, 28. Buitoni periodizes the development of the feminine press by decade, synthesizing the general themes and content of various publications within each. For example, the 1920's evoke "a sacerdotista de beleza" and the '30s "Iracema de lábios grossos."

⁹ Oswaldo Gouvea, the house film critic, commented, "É preciso que façamos, dentro do Brasil, uma campanha intensa e tenaz contra a influência perniciosa do cinema judaico norteamericano." *A Offensiva*, 18 de outubro, 1934 (Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro).

the popular cinema magazines initially popularized in the United States.¹⁰ Journalism surrounding the film industry in the United States grew along with the burgeoning production of films; just as Hollywood films were exported for consumption in foreign countries, film agencies sent news material abroad to be translated or adapted for foreign audiences.¹¹

Though not explicitly self-promoted as “women’s magazines,” articles, advertisements and formats appealed to a female readership. Articles followed a young Hollywood starlet for a day, narrated the challenges of directing, or simply summarized the dramas played out on screen in written form, echoing the tradition of short stories and romances printed in women’s magazines throughout their existence. Cinema dominated the content of the feminine press during the 1940s,¹² exposing women to an increasingly dynamic form of popular entertainment that provided a wealth of examples of independent women, as fictional characters and working actresses. While *Cinearte* defined itself as an intermediary between Brazil and the North American film producer, it simultaneously called for protection and support of national cinema projects, while maintaining the popular demand for information about American films and movie stars. These publications provide an insight into popular interests in film and illustrate representations of women that tend toward the “modern” end of the spectrum in comparison with the socially conservative archetype promoted by the state.

¹⁰ *A Scena Muda* was published from 1921 to 1955, while *Cinearte* was published from 1927 to 1942 (BNRJ and BDAE). Over the course of its publication, *A Scena Muda* changed from *Cena* to *Scena*, reflecting linguistic changes. I refer to the magazine as *A Scena Muda* throughout to avoid confusion.

¹¹ Buitoni, *Mulher de papel*, 73.

¹² Within Buitoni’s categorization, cinema dominates the content of the feminine press of the 1940s.

Political Considerations of Production and the Formation of Popular Cinema

Early filmmakers and critics recognized the need for some sort of state involvement in the budding film industry in order to keep up with the prodigious output of Hollywood. From 1900 to 1912, often referred to as the *Bela Época* of Brazilian film, nationally produced films dominated the internal market.¹³ Film production in France and the United States exceeded production in Brazil from an early stage, and while imported films shared screen time with Brazilian films on a more or less equal basis in the early years of film attendance, foreign markets exceeded Brazil in both quantity and quality of productions. Filmmakers adapted to new technology (e.g. the advent of “talkies” and new sound equipment), but the lower quality of production compared to the foreign films widely distributed throughout the country led to drops in attendance. Brazilian cinema could not achieve success on an industrial scale due to the inability to foster and consolidate a market (nationally and/or internationally) for the few films produced.¹⁴ During the early years of Vargas’ rule, film production remained more or less stable, but quickly began to taper in 1934. In 1937, film production fell to an all time low as it had in 1935, and not until 1940 did production return to an equivalent level of the decade before.

Table 1: Brazilian Film Production, 1931-1940

1931	17	1936	7
1932	14	1937	6
1933	10	1938	8
1934	7	1939	7
1935	6	1940	13

Source: Randal Johnson, *The Film Industry in Brazil*, 45.

¹³ John King, *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America* (New York: Verso, 1990), 20.

¹⁴ Johnson, *The Film Industry in Brazil*, 29.

In 1930, the year of Vargas' ascendancy to power and subsequent affirmation of the regime's desire to involve the state in the film industry, Adhemar Gonzaga established Cinédia Studios in Rio de Janeiro, to be followed by Brasil Vita Filmes in 1933 and Sonofilmes in 1936.¹⁵ Though output was low and resources were limited, these early studios helped to focus the industry and formalize production, looking to foreign industries as models and competitors. *Brasilidade* could be formulated and interpreted through this new media. In an address given to the Association of Brazilian Film Producers in 1934, Getúlio Vargas concluded:

Combining cinema with radio and the rational cultivation of sports, the government will complete an articulated system of mental, moral, and hygienic education, endowing Brazil with the indispensable tools for the development of an enterprising, hardy, and virile people. And the people that come into being in this way will be worthy of the enviable heritage it receives.¹⁶

The writers at *Cinearte*, among them Adhemar Gonzaga, recognized the potential utility of the film industry to a regime seeking to construct a national image: “O cinema é o mais poderoso processo de propaganda com uma grande copia de vantagens sobre a propaganda falada ou escrita.”¹⁷ This early enthusiasm for the potential collaboration with the state was most likely fuelled by financial survival and hope for the state to enact certain protection measures for the national industry. An issue published later in August of 1930 touched on the issue of censorship of films: “Continuamos a manter firmamente a nossa opinião de que é absolutamente necessário reformar a nossa censura, dando-lhe organização compatível com as nossas necessidades e de acorda com a nossa cultura e

¹⁵ Ibid, 44.

¹⁶ Quoted in Stephanie Dennison and Lisa Shaw, *Popular Cinema in Brazil, 1930-2001* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 32.

¹⁷ *Cinearte* (7 de maio, 1930), BNRJ.

adeantamento.”¹⁸ Different critics expressed trepidation over the immoral content of many Hollywood films screened in Brazil, and by extension, the seeming absence of morality in the lives of the stars of these films reported on in the popular press. The ability to censor the news and works of art in every variety of media—print, radio, and film—gave the state unprecedented influence in the realm of popular consumption, enabling those in power to shape what constituted Brazilian culture.

Though not directly under the auspices of the state, the passage of Decree 21,240 in 1932 centralized the powers of censorship and mandated that all media be subject to the oversight of the DNP (which would later become the DIP in 1938). Relying mostly on private capital to produce films, filmmakers soon realized that the relationship with the state would not necessarily be a mutually beneficial or reciprocal one. The DIP was involved throughout the filmmaking process: “production, promoting, rewarding, and punishing, censoring, registering, licensing and, finally, supervising the exhibition of the end product.”¹⁹ With a market flooded by foreign films of high quality and entertainment value, Brazilian filmmakers sought to tackle the challenge of creating films that embodied Brazil, that would draw the Brazilian masses to theaters and support the national industry.

The United States’ film industry directly influenced filmmakers in Brazil in terms of technology, production quality, and aesthetics. This relationship between national cinemas is inseparable from the political relationship fostered by the United States during World War II. The United States launched a publicity campaign to promote the “Good Neighbor Policy” of Franklin D. Roosevelt both domestically and abroad, paying

¹⁸ *Cinearte* (6 de agosto, 1930), BNRJ.

¹⁹ Anita Simis, quoted in Dennison and Shaw, *Popular Cinema in Brazil*, 34.

particular attention to Brazil: in an issue of *Cinearte* from 1942, in the midst of World War II, the introduction states, “As Américas estão ligadas, não sómente pela continuidade territorial, como também por um destino comum. Caminhámos para o mesmo objetivo, e a cada passo que damos para frente, sentimo-nos mais fortemente ligados por múltiplos laços.”²⁰ Adopted as a strategic effort to counter Nazi propaganda in Latin America, the Good Neighbor Policy involved both propaganda campaigns and economic incentives to promote good will throughout the Americas. Analysts within the public and private sector viewed Latin America as particularly vulnerable to the powers of European fascism for political and economic reasons: “Europe has been the market for the bulk of Latin-American products. An average value of \$1,200,000,000 worth of these goods went to European consumers every year, or twice the amount usually shipped to North America.”²¹ Nelson Rockefeller took special interest²² in the portrayal of Latin America, particularly in film. Not only was he the owner of RKO Radio Pictures, he also had financial investments he hoped to promote: telegraph services available through RCA Communications (the RKO owner), along with a direct flight from New York to Rio on the recently inaugurated Pan American airline.²²

From the vantage point of the United States, constructing an attractive and sympathetic image of Latin America for the American public involved the portrayal of “*latinos*” as friendly, fun loving (if not always intelligent), and above all exotic. Playful films such as *Flying Down to Rio* (1933) with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers also established Rio de Janeiro as a travellers’ paradise, an exotic playground that was now

²⁰ *Cinearte* (15 de maio, 1941) n. 546, p.5. BDAE.

²¹ Douglas Miller, *You Can't Do Business with Hitler* (Little Brown and Company: Boston, 1941), 152.

²² Bianca Freire-Medeiros, “Hollywood Musicals and the Invention of Rio de Janeiro, 1933-1953” *Cinema Journal* 41:4, (Summer 2002), 55.

within reach thanks to positive foreign relations and accessibility via commercial flights. This film in particular is an example of the lengths to which Nelson Rockefeller's Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) went to in order to portray *latinidad* or individual identities of different Latin American nations with accuracy, without simply reducing characters to hackneyed stereotypes. RKO tripled the budget for the film at the request of Rockefeller in order to eliminate offensive portrayals of South American characters.²³ Americans had a vested interest in Brazil's nascent film industry throughout the 1930s, prior to and independent of official United States foreign policy and the establishment of the CIAA. Wallace Downey, a Hollywood producer who resided in Rio de Janeiro, helped produce films at Cinédia Studios, of which one of them was arguably the most famous film of the era, *Alô, Alô, Carnaval*.²⁴

Exposing Americans to a truthful portrait of Latin American culture was a key goal of the CIAA. Walt Disney produced two animated films, *Saludos Amigos* (1942) and *The Three Caballeros* (1944), with the help of federal funding and the collaboration of several Latin American composers. One of the more emblematic moments of interaction between Hollywood and the Brazilian film industry occurred in 1942 when Orson Welles, the famous director of the classic *Citizen Kane*, travelled to Brazil in order to film a documentary. *It's All True* documents two separate story lines, unified by the thematic focus on Afro-Brazilian culture and the reality of racial difference within Brazil. Paramount Pictures never released the footage, shelving the project in the early editing stage due to the racial content and criticism of inequality that Welles portrayed, and it

²³ Ibid, 55.

²⁴ Dennison and Shaw, *Popular Cinema in Brazil*, 50.

was only in 1985 that Charles Higham rediscovered the footage.²⁵ No other film came closer to revealing a full scope of Brazilian reality, illustrating the paradoxical nature of absorbing and lauding Afro-Brazilian cultural practices as emblematic of the nation, while excluding individuals politically based on race. It never reached audiences within the United States because the exposure of exclusionary practices hit a bit too close to home.

The quantity of films produced in the 1930s (see Table 1) reflects a lack of popular interest in lower quality films produced nationally in comparison with the wealth of foreign films available. Film studios in Rio de Janeiro recognized the widespread popularity of musical review comedies produced in Hollywood and capitalized on its plot form and visual techniques to produce a Brazilian version. As Robert Stam discusses in his overview of race in Brazilian cinema, the music of carnival became extremely popular due to the radio exposure of recordings of sambas during the 1930s. “Ethnic” cultural elements (samba, carnival, capoeira) gained in popularity across race and social hierarchies, only later to be co-opted by the state as “national symbols.”²⁶ Vargas and elite thinkers disregarded the ethnic heritage of popular culture in order to integrate them into a broader, whitened conceptualization of *brasilidade* under the Estado Nôvo known as *mestiçagem*. In his analysis of Brazilian culture and national identity, Renato Ortiz situates Gilberto Freyre’s *Casa Grande e Senzala* as a foundational piece in the construction of Brazilian identity in the twentieth century:

²⁵ Robert Stam devotes an entire chapter to the documentary in *Tropical Multiculturalism*. The film focuses on carnival, samba, and capoeira, documenting the cultural practices of Afro-Brazilians in urban areas; then, it documents the journey of a group of *jangadeiros* (fisherman) who travel by boat from the Northeast to formally petition Vargas. The recovered footage was made into a eponymous documentary in 1993.

²⁶ Robert Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism: A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema & Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 80.

Gilberto Freyre transforma a negatividade do mestiço em positividade, o que permite completar definitivamente os contornos de uma identidade que há muito vinha sendo desenhada. Só que as condições sociais eram agora diferentes, a sociedade brasileira já não mais se encontrava num período de transição, os rumos do desenvolvimento eram claros e até um novo Estado procurava orientar essas mudanças. O mito das três raças torna-se então plausível e pode-se atualizar como ritual. A ideologia da mestiçagem, que estava aprisionada nas ambiguidades das teorias racistas, ao ser reelaborada pode difundir-se socialmente e se tornar senso comum, ritualmente celebrado nas relações do cotidiano, ou nos grandes eventos como o carnaval e o futebol. O que era mestiço torna-se nacional.²⁷

Freyre's analysis of the dynamics between races in Brazil lent well to the Vargas regime's unifying dialectic of *mestiçagem* under the Estado Nôvo. As demonstrated in the propaganda published by the DIP, the state consciously portrayed a white, united Brazilian citizenry. Though exceptions do occur, the film industry followed similar trends when casting principal roles as well as extras.

Within this period of cinematic competition and political and cultural manipulation by the state, the popular genre known as the *chanchada* emerged. Once the genre attracted the viewership necessary to finance more films, production increased and the *chanchada* came to define Brazilian cinema of the 1940s.

Chanchadas: Musicals for the Masses

Hollywood's famed movie musicals employed elaborate sets, flashy costumes, and choreography, filled principal rolls with famous singers and actors, and developed light-hearted comic plots to form a "popular" genre that captivated the American imagination. The combination of sound technology with the elaborate production techniques developed by directors like Cecil B. DeMille and others made musicals both visually spectacular and cutting-edge, demanding more and pushing the boundaries of

²⁷ Renato Ortiz, *Cultura brasileira e identidade nacional* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 2006), 41.

sound technology. The Hollywood musical proved popular with Brazilian audiences, and would later serve as a model for Brazilian musicals. Wallace Downey's early interest and involvement in the Brazilian film industry coincided with the advent of sound: he modeled an early precursor to the *chanchada*, *Coisas Nossas* (1930), on the "all-singing" studio musicals popular in Hollywood.²⁸ Far from merely replicating a formula, Brazilian films capitalized on the increased popularity of *carnaval* and samba on a national scale. Filming and screening these popular forms of entertainment aligned with the state's own interest in cultural formation, promoting them as national emblems and downplaying their Afro-Brazilian roots.²⁹ Two films stand out as emblematic of the establishment of a particularly "Brazilian" form of cinema: *Alô, Alô, Brasil!* (1935) and *Alô, Alô, Carnaval!* (1936), both produced and directed by Adhemar Gonzaga at Cinédia Studios.

In 1941, Moacyr Fenelon established a new studio in Rio following the destruction of Sonofilmes in a fire that would give the industry a new "dynamism."³⁰ Pulling from the *carioca* elite and various sources of private capital, Atlântida Studios entered into the film industry as filmmakers and producers began to collectively recognize popular preferences of the film-going public and master new technologies that produced better quality films. The three most powerful studios, Cinédia, Atlântica, and Vera Cruz, all began producing *chanchadas*, recognizing the cost benefits of filming

²⁸ Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism*, 83.

²⁹ Though the state attempted to promote a national image through the *Hora do Brasil* radio program, the *cinéjornais*, and the educational films produced by the INCE, it is debatable to what extent these efforts actually shaped Brazilians' notions of *brasilidade*. See Daryle Williams' *Culture Wars in Brazil*, and Silvana Goulart's *Sob a verdade oficial: Ideologia, propaganda e censura no Estado Novo*.

³⁰ Ricardo Wahrendorff Caldas e Tânia Montoro, *A evolução do cinema brasileiro no século XX* (Brasília: Casa das Musas, 2006), 67.

cheap, formulaic films that attracted a large public domestically. Rio de Janeiro was the center of film production, and figured prominently in the films as a dynamic city full of life. It was here that cultural practices such as samba and *carnaval* became ritualized, and portrayed on screen as the ultimate location to experience Brazilian culture.

The musical genre did not draw the same admiration from film critics as it did popular audiences: “A genre usually identified with escapism, sentimentalism, and mass consumption, as well as associated symbolically with a ‘feminine’ and therefore a supposedly acritical public, musicals are typically accused of not providing the discursive complexity of films made by true ‘authors.’”³¹ Although the author refers to the American film industry in this understanding of the musicals within the public, it is more difficult to draw this kind of gendered distinction when speaking of the *chanchadas* and the Brazilian public. Other historians have instead noted a clear delineation of class in analyses of musical comedies: traditionally, *chanchadas* drew in mostly working-class audiences.³² After all, only urban Brazilians of a certain income could afford to attend a musical review starring a famous singer in the theater. With the proliferation of radio, a greater number of the public could tune in and listen to the musical artists on the radio, and film brought this formerly unavailable visual component of entertainment to the masses. Ticket prices were affordable and cinemas proliferated throughout the country; illiterate Brazilians were more likely to choose a Brazilian film in Portuguese over an imported Hollywood film with subtitles, thereby further supporting domestic profits, and also becoming accustomed to seeing familiar customs and their own language portrayed

³¹ Freire-Medeiros, “Hollywood Musicals and the Invention of Rio de Janeiro,” 52.

³² Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism*, 83.

on screen.³³ Though film would not achieve the same status or consideration as “art” like the theater, it nonetheless became a means of communication and entertainment that was available to a wider, more diverse audience.

Drawing once again on the popular film magazines of the era, *Cinearte* and *A Scena Muda* discuss the *chanchadas* in their pages, reporting on their popularity and mass appeal. “Uma das grandes provas do progresso e do sucesso do cinema brasileiro é a popularidade das nossas estrelas. Popularidade porque são figuras que chamam a atenção, são queridas, admiradas. São nomes que representam até sucesso de bilheteria e por conseguinte, garantia de atividade e progresso.”³⁴ Support of the domestic industry could be fostered through the popularization of celebrities, a key strategy employed by magazines. Producers sought out famous entertainers that began their careers in film and radio to star in *chanchadas*, relying on their pre-established fame to draw in audiences. Actors like Grande Otelo and Oscarito helped establish the comedic formula of the *chanchada* genre, playing similar roles together as a dynamic duo in each film. This genre also poked fun at the Brazilian stereotypes created by Hollywood in a variety of films during the Good Neighbor period, along with the domestic limitations of film production. Perhaps the greatest foil and frustration for domestic critics was the representation of the Brazilian film industry as floundering and inadequate, and of its people as hackneyed Latin stereotypes.

Women negotiated this paradoxical space of representation in the media and made personal choices as to what kind of image best suited them individually. The imagery and models of femininity produced by the DIP and state officials stood in stark contrast to the

³³ Dennison and Shaw, *Popular Cinema in Brazil*, 64.

³⁴ *Cinearte*, 7 de maio, 1930 (Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro), 5-6.

images of women and feminine experience portrayed on the silver screen, and discussed in print culture. Both sources appealed to women, whether as readers, consumers, mothers, or “citizens” of Brazil, hoping to inspire national fervor or popular support. Representations were not merely projections of an ideal, but also necessarily reflected social realities: a representation had to have a semblance of self-recognition in order to peak the interest of or persuade the intended female audience of these various media. No other figure quite embodies the paradox of Brazilian representation, from within and without, than Carmen Miranda. Her career as an entertainer poses an interesting study of *brasilidade* as imagined within the context of the Vargas regime, the nascent domestic film industry, and the political, economic, and artistic ties to the United States and Hollywood during the late 1930s and 1940s.

CHAPTER IV

CARMEN MIRANDA, “A BRASILEIRA MAIS FAMOSA DO SECULO XX”

“Pois é, tirando as más intenções, toda gente reconhece que La Miranda é um sonho colorido, um amor. E adoro-a, porque é nossa.”¹
—Deborah Medina, reader of *A Scena Muda*

When Carmen Miranda said, “Look at me and tell me if I don’t have Brazil in every curve of my body,” her intent was innocent enough. But the trajectory of her career and the historical context of her success invite further analysis of her statement. Her performance of Brazilian identity challenged notions of gender, race and nation: as a woman embodying Brazil, Miranda did not align with state-produced imagery and propaganda that promoted conservative, maternal values; as a white woman interpreting Afro-Brazilian music and donning a *baiana* costume, she whitened a racialized aspect of Brazilian culture and projected it internationally; and as a representative of Brazilian culture within the United States, she shaped international perception of Brazil apart from the foreign diplomacy of the Brazilian state. Carmen Miranda complicates the dialogues circulating within Brazilian society during the Estado Nôvo pertaining to the feminine embodiment of *brasilidade*.

Tunico Amancio observes, “Falar sobre Carmen Miranda é enfrentar diretamente o confronto com os clichês que uma circunstância histórica consolidou e esbarrar nas

¹ Deborah Medina, “Carmen na opinião de seus ‘fans’ brasileiros,” *A Scena Muda* (25 de maio, 1943, n. 21), 6.

diversas leituras que sua controversa figura gerou.”² Her stage and screen performances evoked kitsch and hackneyed stereotypes, yet they also provided a parody of the same notions of *latinidad* exploited by American filmmakers for the benefit the Good Neighbor Policy. Though American films solidified her fame abroad, the roots of her image lie in Brazil and draw on Afro-Brazilian roots in the musical, stylistic, and performative aspects of her persona. Considered “white” due to her Portuguese origin, Miranda’s persona poses an interesting parallel within the context of Getúlio Vargas’ own nationalistic project promoting cultural *mestiçagem* during the Estado Nôvo. These images of *brasilidade* presented a unified Brazilian nation of mostly white citizens to the world, absorbing Afro-Brazilian traditions like samba, carnaval, and capoeira into the broadly defined Brazilian *mestiçagem*.

In this chapter, I consider the contradictory dialogues and images of *brasilidade* as interpreted and performed by Carmen Miranda on screen and the subsequent reactions of the Brazilian public to these representations to the films produced in Brazil and Hollywood during the Estado Nôvo, with particular attention paid to the opinions and reactions to her work by critics and readers of film magazines in Brazil. Her performance of Brazilian culture at home and abroad sparked a polemic within intellectual and popular spheres, bringing questions of race, gender, and foreign influence to the surface through popular media. Her personal career and indelible impression on the Brazilian imaginary (as viewed from the perspectives of both insiders and outsiders) also represent the paradoxical and complex social constructions of gender within Brazilian society: Miranda represents a foil to the dialogical construction of femininity by state propaganda, yet fits

² Amancio, Tunico. *O Brasil dos gringos: imagens no cinema* (Niterói: Intertexto, 2000), 94.

into a the state's efforts to promote Brazil's political and economic legitimacy internationally.

Roots of Interpretation

"A pequena notável" first attracted notoriety as a radio star in the early 1930s, crooning sambas through live broadcasts and later recording songs in Rio de Janeiro. Born in Marco de Canavezes, Portugal, her parents immigrated to Brazil in 1910 as part of the wave of European immigrants resettling in Brazil during the time period. Raised in the bohemian, working-class neighborhood of Lapa in Rio, Miranda grew up in a culturally diverse environment in which men and women moved about in the marketplace and the working class social sphere with considerable mobility.³ She worked in a hat shop as a young woman, earning money for her family and beginning to circulate within society.

The many ardent fans she attracted through radio and stage performances did not associate her with a "personality" as such, but as the embodiment of popular samba and the epitome of a modern woman. She achieved the apogee of stardom in her native Brazil: an early issue of *Cinearte* reports on her music career, "Ella, que é a maior figura da musica popular do Brasil, continua a ocupar a posição destacada que ha tanto tempo attingiu [*sic*]."⁴ Her early lifestyle and appearance evoked the progressive images of American film stars, separating her from the more traditional mores of nationally approved feminine roles. Beginning with traditional interpretations of popular music, she

³ Ruy Castro's *Carmen* provides a detailed account of her career and recognizes her importance within Brazilian culture. See also Martha Gil-Montero, *Brazilian Bombshell: The Biography of Carmen Miranda* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1989).

⁴ "Televisã," *Cinearte* (1 de março, 1937, n. 458), 5. BDAE.

became the most famous interpreter of Brazilian samba, a musical form invented by the poor, working-class inhabitants of the *morros*. Carmen, as a phenotypically white woman, helped popularize this genre across the strict racial and social barriers that had kept samba isolated to an Afro-Brazilian audience.



Figure 5: Carmen Miranda

Miranda's signature look, the colorfully embellished dress, headpiece, and jewelry, drew on the traditional dress of Afro-Brazilian women from the state of Bahia. The term *baiana* denoted a region, but more specifically referred to a social and racial category: the *baianas* were Afro-Brazilian, working-class women who worked in the market or served food on the streets as vendors. Her first appearance as a *baiana* did not occur until 1938, when she appeared in *Banana da terra* interpreting Dorival Caymmi's samba *O que é que a baiana tem*. Miranda herself dreamed up the idea for the dress and

adornments to reflect the lyrics of the song.⁵ Having previously appeared in *Alô Alô Carnaval!* (1936), *Banana da terra* further solidified her status and popularity as a singer, and provided the medium through which to establish her popular image that she would use throughout the rest of her career. Tânia de Costa Garcia observes that Carmen fulfilled an intermediary role as an interpreter of popular sambas and as a female artist: “Antes de ser baiana, a pequena notável vasculhou e procurou uma identidade própria. Era portuguesa, mas identificava-se com a canção popular urbana e seu ambiente malandro. Cantava samba, mas se penteava e se vestia seguindo a moda ditada por Hollywood. Carmen, como o malandro, ocupava a fronteira entre o morro e a cidade.”⁶ Vacillating between marginal and elite cultural elements, and later between two nations, Miranda formed a distinctly “Brazilian” image to project to her audiences, simultaneously shaping and being shaped by Hollywood.

A Very Good Neighbor

A rather contentious history of Hollywood’s portrayal of Latin Americans in film is traceable from 1915 through the end Carmen Miranda’s career. Hollywood relied on hackneyed stereotypes of Latin Americans, portraying women as seductive and daft and men as crooked and lazy.⁷ In the case of Brazil, though characters were often ‘stock’ caricatures, exotic locations such as Rio de Janeiro received a favorable treatment: Rio

⁵ Julian Dibbell has interpreted the *baiana* costume as “racial cross-dressing.” Her analysis derives from modern evocations of Carmen Miranda in gay camp performance, particularly through cross-dressing. “Notes on Carmen,” *The Village Voice* (October 29, 1991).

⁶ Tânia de Costa Garcia, *O ‘It verde e amarelo’ de Carmen Miranda, 1930-1946* (São Paulo: Annablume; Fapesp, 2004), 61.

⁷ Lisa Shaw and Maite Conde, “Brazil Through Hollywood’s Gaze: From the Silent Screen to the Good Neighbor Policy Era,” *Latin American Cinema: Essays on Modernity, Gender, and National Identity* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2005), 185.

became a traveler's paradise, an accessible playground thanks to the inauguration of air service between the two nations.⁸ In an early attempt to entice American audiences, the famous Mexican actress Dolores del Rio portrayed a Brazilian woman in RKO's *Flying Down to Rio* from 1933. The film promoted the proximity of Latin America as a tourist destination, particularly Rio, and marked the beginning of Hollywood's political interest in Latin America in conjunction with the United States' foreign policy.

Miranda's international career conveniently coincided, and in many ways depended, on Rockefeller's Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA), and by extension the Good Neighbor Policy's efforts to promote Pan-American cooperation during World War II. The CIAA actively worked with Hollywood to produce films that portrayed the United States' "friends to the south" in a positive light. At the World's Fair held in New York in 1939, Brazil capitalized on the tropical and exotic image portrayed in Hollywood in order to promote Brazil's export economy and attractiveness as a tourist destination, serving *feijoada* and *vatapá* as Carmen performed (in costume) in the Brazilian pavilion.⁹ Other Brazilian artists and intellectuals, such as the anthropologist Gilberto Freyre, the opera singer Bidú Sayão, the pianist Guiomar Novais and the painter Candido Portinari all performed or toured in the United States during the late 1930s and 1940s, enjoying personal success and demonstrating the cultural sophistication and uniqueness of Brazil.¹⁰ As Carmen Miranda joined their ranks as a promoter of Brazilian culture, Getúlio Vargas acknowledged Carmen's popularity and her potential to serve as a good-will ambassador to the United States.

⁸ Ibid, 183-4.

⁹ Shaw and Conde, "Brazil Through Hollywood's Gaze," 190-1.

¹⁰ "Já Merece o Nome de Estrela?" *A Scena Muda* (22 de Julho, 1941, n. 1061), 17-18. BDAE.

“Discovered” by Lee Shubert in 1939, Carmen received rave reviews following her debut on Broadway, attracting the attention of Hollywood. Robert Stam pinpoints Miranda’s position within popular imagination(s) as ambiguous: “For North Americans, Miranda is the ‘Brazilian bombshell,’ a zany emblem of pan-*latinidad*” whose performances nonetheless enabled her to “undercut and parody stereotypical roles, but did little to gain her substantive power.”¹¹ For Brazilians, Miranda’s style, persona, and performance evoked rich Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions through music, dance performance, and clothing, embodying a cultural eclecticism of Brazil that initially garnered praise from the Brazilian public. But as her film career blossomed in the United States, popular opinion at home took on an increasingly critical tone.



Figure 6: Carmen Miranda on the cover of *A Cena Muda*

¹¹ Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism*, 84.

The popular magazines *A Scena Muda* and *Cinearte* provide insight into the career of Carmen Miranda from both an American and Brazilian point of view.¹² Because much of the material and news came from Hollywood agencies, the film synopses and photo spreads of her films receive a glamorous, positive treatment when considered as an artistic whole. However, the editors of the magazines and the editorials written by readers convey a more problematic portrait of the Brazilian public's reception of her success in America. Both male and female readers wrote film reviews and submitted them to these publications, expressing admiration for Carmen's roles and performances on screen at times, and consternation at others. As a "representative" of Brazil, readers and critics expressed contradictory opinions regarding her portrayal of Brazilian culture, her role as representative of Brazilian interests in the United States, and the image of femininity she presented on screen. Carmen also took her role very seriously: performing in the United States was an enormous career opportunity, and she recognized it as such, but she also considered her presence in the United States as a symbolic extension of good will from her homeland.

Gilberto Souto, the Hollywood correspondent for *Cinearte*, wrote of Carmen's instant success in 1939:

"Não ha dia que se passe sem que eu leia algo sobre ella, pelas noticias telegraphicas ou em artigos dos varios syndicatos jornalisticos. Não ha jornal ou revista de popularidade que não haja ainda publicado um retrato de Carmen com os maiores elogios e referencias tambem ao Brasil...O Brasil e os 'fans' de Carmen estão de parabens e Hollywood também" [sic].¹³

¹² *A Scena Muda* was also spelled *A Cena Muda* during most of the 1930s and 1940s. For continuity, I refer to the magazine as *A Scena Muda* throughout.

¹³ Gilberto Souto, "Carmen virá para Hollywood!" *Cinearte* (1 de Novembre, 1939, n. 522), 4.

In her Broadway debut, Carmen glamorized an earlier version of her *baiana* costume, donning sky high heels and adding fruit to her headdress, enchanting audiences with popular sambas played by Orchestra Lua. Hollywood soon took notice: 20th Century Fox contracted her to appear in a new film, *Down Argentine Way* (*Serenata Tropical* in Brazil), extending her stay in the United States. Her many “fans” requested an address to send fan mail,¹⁴ and critics in the press celebrated her accomplishments, recognizing her success as good propaganda for the Brazilian nation as a whole. However, her appearance on the silver screen also ushered in a wave of criticism from Brazil.

Between 1939 and 1943, *A Scena Muda* and *Cinearte* printed numerous columns and received opinionated letters from readers regarding Carmen Miranda’s meteoric rise within the American film industry. In *Down Argentine Way* (1940), Miranda sang several musical numbers, cast as an eponymous *latina* showgirl with no explicit allusion to Brazil or specific aspects of Brazilian culture. Though not billed as a principal actor in the film, she is the first image the viewer looks upon before the opening credits: a medium shot focuses on her elaborate turban and costume as she sings “South American Way” in a mixture of Portuguese and English, looking into the camera and returning the audience’s gaze. As the viewer’s first impression, Miranda evokes a sensual and carefree tone that characterizes the entire film. Later in the film as the principal actors enter a lavish nightclub; a waiter hushes their discussion, “Shhh! It’s Carmen Miranda!” drawing the viewer’s attention to the spectacle of her performance of popular samba. Her performance undoubtedly made an impression on the American public: the film did well at the box office and dresses styled á la Carmen cropped up in department stores. For her

¹⁴ “Correio dos Fans,” *A Scena Muda* (14 de Novembro, 1939, n. 973). BDAE. “Claro, Shelia, pode escrever a Carmen Miranda, aos cuidados da 20th Century Fox, 444 West 56th Street, New York City, U.S.A.”

first American film appearance, Brazilians, in general, were not bothered by her limited screen time, nor her role as a nightclub singer; but the generalization of *latinidad* did strike a critical chord with the public.¹⁵ Though Miranda sang traditional Brazilian sambas, they were relegated to a more general notion of *latino* culture rather than identified as particularly Brazilian. The film was actually the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs' (CIAA) first project as an overseer, spending an enormous sum of money to reshoot scenes in order to portray Latin America and its people in a more accurate way.¹⁶

Renato de Alencar, a member of the editorial staff of *A Scena Muda*, maintained a consistently critical perspective of Miranda's screen persona over the course of her career in Hollywood. Her limited screen time in *Down Argentine Way*, coupled with what Alencar considered an over-exaggerated performance, inspired him to write in 1940, "Até que enfim puderam os proprios fans acreditar em nossas explicações, por que não consideravamos a cantora de samba Carmen Miranda uma authentica 'estrella' de tela [*sic*]."¹⁷ Alencar compares her portrayal of samba in the film to her successful singing career in Brazil, expressing nostalgia for what he considers a more sophisticated Carmen that does not merely rely on sensuality or extravagant designs to successfully perform. In between film projects in 1940, Carmen returned to Brazil for a temporary visit. Her return garnered national attention, and different organizations and individuals, including the national government, staged an extravagant receiving party upon her arrival in Rio de

¹⁵ The Brazilian reaction was mild compared to the reaction of the Argentine public: the film was actually banned in Argentina, throwing the movie-going public into an uproar over the portrayal of Argentines, despite diligence of the CIAA to accurately portray the nation and its people.

¹⁶ Shaw and Conde, "Brazil Through Hollywood's Gaze," 184.

¹⁷ Renato de Alencar, "Chronica: A fita de Carmen Miranda," *A Scena Muda* (6 de Fevereiro, 1940, n. 985), 3. BDAE. Emphasis is original to article.

Janeiro. Again, Alencar questioned the nature of the praise she received upon her return: “O publico compareceu, e ella, um tanto perturbada pelo que via, teve esta espressão curiosa: ‘Estou emocionada com todas homenagens (**todas as**, queria dizer). Ellas calam fundo no meu coração, e mais porque (gravem este fim, por favor) e mais porque **tenho consciencia de que tudo o que fiz pelo Brasil foi o meu dever!** [sic]’”¹⁸ From his perspective, Miranda had not portrayed Brazil or its culture in a positive way; she had merely taken advantage of a career opportunity without consciously thinking about the implications her performance had on the international community’s conception of Brazil and *brasilidade*. Samba blended in with the rest of the *latino* allusions in *Down Argentine Way* instead of being recognized as a particularly Brazilian art form. His emphasis on her word choice and grammatical errors attempt to undermine her Brazilianess on a linguistic level, and her claim that her career in Hollywood and the roles she portrays are her “duty” as a Brazilian citizen are treated with disdain.

During this interlude in Brazil, the First Lady Darci Vargas organized a concert in Rio de Janeiro with Carmen billed as the star, inviting the political and social elites of the city for a night of entertainment by Brazil’s most famous representative abroad. The concert was a traumatic experience for the singer: the audience did not applaud following her songs, whispering in disdain at her interpretation “americanizada.” During the show, she performed a newly composed song in response to criticisms of her time spent in the United States, “Disseram que Voltei Americanizada.” The lyrics reject the criticisms that she has been corrupted by wealth, losing her Brazilian roots. This song did little to win over the audience: the icy reception by the Brazilian elite was a major setback for

¹⁸ Ibid, 5.

Carmen, and her hasty return to the United States to fulfill a contract with 20th Century Fox left many wondering if she would ever return.

More letters from readers with Carmen Miranda as their subject began to appear in both magazines beginning in 1941, following the release of her second American film, *That Night in Rio* (1941). José Lima from Caçapava, São Paulo related, “Carmen Miranda, a nossa querida ‘embaixatriz do samba’ supera o seu curto trabalho de ‘Seranata Tropical,’ alias, papel este muito aquém das suas qualidades artísticas [*sic*].”¹⁹ Her growing popularity abroad was cause for excitement, according to many of her fans and readers of film magazines, hoping that with more prominent film roles, Carmen would serve as an ambassador of Brazilian culture in the United States, particularly as the United States actively courted Brazil to join the Allied Forces. Again, critics attacked Carmen’s performance in her second feature film, citing similar frustrations with the stylistic elements and the stereotypical *latina* traits of the role:

“Uma Carmen vestida com elegancia, uma Carmen social e distinta, interpretando papeis mais serios e decentes, eis o que muitos de seus fãs desejam ver na tela. O turbante, os balangandãs, as estouvadas grosserias cenicas, as explosões de ataques de estupidez, as ciumadas grotescas, com arremeços de sapatos na cara dos coiós e dentadas na mão dos namorados, tudo isso é irritante ... A Fox precisa dar-lhe outros papeis, fugindo um pouco dessa repetição enfadonha que se encaminha para o intolerável [*sic*].”²⁰

This less than generous review insinuates a certain amount of unfair manipulation on the part of the American studio system: though Miranda’s popularity was soaring in the United States, Brazilian at home resented her culturally essentialized roles and the potential effect her image could have on the American public’s understanding of Brazil.

¹⁹ “Mande Tambem Sua Crítica”—“Uma Noite no Rio” *A Scena Muda* (21 de outubro, 1941, n. 1074), 10. BDAE.

²⁰ Renato de Alencar, “Carmen sem balangandãs,” *A Scena Muda* (14 de outubro, 1941, n. 1073), 3. BDAE.

Femininity boils down to sensuality, fits of jealousy, and flightiness, all contributing to an “indecent” portrait in the author’s opinion. Along with her role, her appearance is a main point of contention for the author:

...baiana imaginada pelos exagerados figurinistas carnavalescos de Hollywood, cheia de toucados extravagantes e risíveis, sufocada em voltas, voltinhas, balangandãs e baduleques africanos, sem nenhum traço positivamente nacional da verdadeira baiana de Cidade do Salvador. Ao que propolam, demonstrou que tem capacidade para interpretar cenas de comédia; mas tudo isso ainda não lhe dá o título de estrela do cinema [*sic*].²¹

The *baiana* costume does not evoke sophistication or elegance, but rather obscures Miranda’s true charms and talents behind an exotic construction of a *latina*. Alencar points out the falseness and inaccuracy of Hollywood’s version of Carmen’s *baiana* costume: while her original version reflected real aspects of culture in Salvador de Bahia, the hand of Hollywood costume designers corrupted Carmen’s original style and persona. No longer starring as a featured performer, *That Night in Rio* showcased her acting abilities, although still cast as the showgirl. Unfortunately, her acting did little to assuage the worries of critics at home; effective as a comedienne, her role still essentialized belabored characteristics that reinforced *latino* stereotypes.

Many readers recognized that she did not have much control over the roles she received once she signed a contract with 20th Century Fox, sympathizing with her limitations rather than placing all the blame on her personally for her recurrent appearance as the *baiana* entertainer. Professional critics on staff at the magazine cautioned the public to reconsider her meteoric rise in popularity (and payroll) and not to grant the title of “star” so freely in her case. As a representative of Brazil for the American public, critics were deeply unsatisfied, complaining, “...parece que os norte-

²¹ Ibid, 28.

americanos continuam a ter do Brasil idéias erradíssimas...[sic].”²² In their eyes, Miranda seemed to encourage the stereotype rather than rectify it when the momentum of her popularity gave her the opportunity to do so publicly. The premiere of her third Hollywood motion picture, *Weekend in Havana* (1942)—*Aconteceu em Havana* in Brazil—sparked more reactions than ever, and a marked increase in letters to magazines voicing critical and laudatory opinions on Carmen Miranda’s representation of Brazil abroad.

Dulce Damasceno de Brito, a young film journalist from São Paulo, took up Carmen’s defense as a personal project in the pages of *A Cena Muda*, countering the consistently critical editorials produced by the staff writers.²³ When requested to select the three most talented, beautiful actresses in Hollywood, she compared Carole Lombard, Vivien Leigh, and Carmen Miranda, describing the latter as “a maior produção brasileira.”²⁴ As one of few women in the field of journalism at the time, Damasceno de Brito occupied a unique position within the small world of Brazilian film journalism, and her early professional work stands in contrast to the writings of her male contemporaries, particularly articles about Carmen Miranda. The journalist presents a hyper-sympathetic and defensive counter-argument to her many critics, both professional and recreational, invoking a personal tone in her opinion piece formatted in the style of a letter to Carmen:

Minha querida: Mais uma vez você é vítima da maledicência alheia. E eu, na qualidade de ‘advogada e defensora perpétua de seus direitos no Brasil,’ ocupo novamente as páginas d’ ‘A Cena Muda’ para uma mensagem cordial e sincera a você...Carmen, você que sempre primou pela sua fineza, pela maneira aprazível,

²² “Já Merece o Nome de Estrela?” *A Cena Muda* (22 de Julho, 1941, n. 1061), 18. BDAE.

²³ Dulce Damasceno de Brito had a successful career as a Hollywood journalist, moving to the United States in 1952. She published *O ABC de Carmen Miranda* in 1986, and maintained a close friendship with her until Miranda’s death.

²⁴ Dulce Damasceno de Brito, “Três—Três Mulheres-Artistas,” *A Cena Muda* (7 de Julho, 1942, n. 1111), 12. BDAE.

nobre e elegante de tratar a todos aqueles que se lhe acercam, sejam jornalistas ou fãs, merece, por isso mesmo, o maior apreço dos brasileiros [*sic*].²⁵

Though her choice of language and address assures the audience of her personal affiliation with the actress and suggests a close relationship that supports the author's claims of personally "knowing" Carmen's fundamentally good and generous character, her well-intentioned defense takes on an unprofessional, fawning tone that bears little resemblance to the more objective film criticisms written by her male colleagues. Her subjectivity in many ways genders her journalism, appealing to Carmen personally on an emotional level, and simultaneously arousing sympathy in her readers:

Você, que tudo faz em benefício de nosso país, que é também o seu pelo lado do coração, recebe em troca, 'apenas,' palavras cruéis, masúaveis, dizendo trabalhar 'a cantora portuguesa Carmen Miranda,' a bem do dinheiro e não do Brasil, do samba da propaganda valiosa que necessitamos...sinto-me envergonhada em possuir contrêrâneos tão vilmente baixos, que ofendem-na com o fito de ganhar popularidade, conquanto seja deshonrosa [*sic*].²⁶

To spite Miranda, many critics alluded to her Portuguese heritage, denying her "brazilianess" and therefore her role as a representative of Brazilian culture abroad. Damasceno de Brito recognizes Carmen's international visibility as well as her assumed role as a representative of Brazilian culture in the United States. Regardless of actual Brazilian policies and the state's interest in using Miranda as a cultural ambassador, journalists, readers, and the public at large perceived Carmen as a legitimate cultural intermediary. Damasceno de Brito's role as Carmen's "advogada" in the pages of the magazine inserts a woman's defense of character in a predominantly male field of

²⁵ Dulce Damasceno de Brito, "Mensagem á Carmen Miranda," *A Scena Muda* (27 de Janeiro, 1942, n. 1088), 6. BDAE.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 6.

professionals. Her solidarity with Carmen reinforces the powerful impression she imbued on the Brazilian public, inspiring sympathy and controversy.

The majority of reader submissions conveyed their personal reactions to recently viewed films, or composed short elegies or criticisms of specific stars. The vast majority referred to Hollywood films and actors, due to the inundation of the Brazilian market by American-made films and the general public's preference for films of higher production quality. Both male and female readers wrote to magazines, their opinions occupying the same physical space. Though not always appearing with the same frequency, the presence of opinion pieces from women denotes an active readership and desire to insert their voices into the dialogue appearing in the press. In addition, the publication of material written by women alongside pieces written by men suggests an opening within the press that reflected a larger trend of expanded mobility for women in Brazilian society. While women certainly expressed their impressions, they also expressed a certain amount of self-consciousness regarding the "validity" of their opinions within a literary space traditionally occupied by men. One such submission from Maurinha in 1942 states:

Eis porque você, garota bonita ou você mesmo, leitor amigo, encontra nesta página, esta crônica. Não é um artigo maravilhoso, pois não sou nenhuma...preciosidade! Muito menos uma crítica ao pé da letra!...Resumindo: são algumas linhas para matar saudades da 'nossa' Carmen e ao mesmo tempo dizer a vocês como vi e apreciei o seu desempenho na película ora em cartaz. Quem acompanha a carreira de Carmen desde os áureos tempos mayrinkianos deve sentir-se orgulhoso e triste. Sim, amigo-fan! Torno a repetir: orgulhoso e triste. Um paradoxo que exprime toda a verdade [*sic*].²⁷

By addressing the "garota bonita" separately from "leitor amigo," Maurinha distinguishes between the sexes of her assumed readership. The "pretty girl" is not designated as a "leitora" and the "reader friend" in this case refers to a gendered male reader when placed

²⁷ Maurinha, "Fala o Amigo Fan," *A Cena Muda* (29 de dezembro, 1942, n. 1136), 10. BDAE.

as a binary in the same phrase. She goes on to deprecate her station in life, as well as her knowledge of film criticism and her ability to compose an article worthy of publication. She reaches out to an implied community of Carmen Miranda fans, to which the magazine supplies an open forum. Unlike the straightforward, “for” or “against” conclusions of many of her male contemporaries, Maurinha captures the “paradox” of Miranda’s image and popularity that aroused such controversy throughout the public: though proud of her accomplishments in the United States, her extravagantly constructed film persona generated an exotic imaginary of Brazil that excluded the qualities individuals within the Vargas regime and without wanted to project onto the international community, particularly the United States. She laments the repetition of the same role for Carmen for the third time, but Maurinha expresses frustration with the studio system more so than the actress herself:

Na verdade ela ainda é a mesma Carmen, com a sua brejeirice toda especial e as suas baianas p’ra lá de formidáveis, no entanto, o produtor da película e o studio responsável pela mesma, exigiram de Carmen, muito, e resultado: *Aconteceu em Havana* nos apresenta uma Carmen diferente, forçada, gesticulando muito, trabalhando mais com as mãos que com o corpo, e com uma pronuncia afetadíssima. E é pena, amigo-fan! É mesmo lamentável! [*sic*]

The demands of Hollywood shape a “forced” performance by Carmen, unnatural and already tiresome to the Brazilian public. Though her Brazilian audience valued her distinctive *baiana* act, they longed for her to mature as an actress and portray legitimate Hollywood roles.

From March to August of 1943, *A Scena Muda* began devoting two full pages to opinion columns submitted by readers titled “Carmen Miranda na opinião dos ‘fans’ brasileiros,” categorizing the opinions as “Pro,” “Contra,” or “Neutro.”

Table 2: Reader Participation, March-August 1943, *A Scena Muda*: “Carmen na opinião dos ‘fans’ brasileiros”²⁸

	Men	Women	Unknown	Opinion%
Pro	41	33	2	44.2%
Contra	58	29	5	53.5%
Neutro	1	3	0	2.3%
Total	100	65	7	
Gender Participation%	58.1%	37.8%	4.1%	

The magazine had provided a space for open debate regarding Carmen Miranda in the past, but the announcement of her fourth forthcoming film, *Springtime in the Rockies* (referred to as *Minha Secretaria Brasileira*), inspired strong opinions in the Brazilian public and merited the devotion of an entire section in the magazine. Published in Rio de Janeiro, *A Scena Muda* was a metropolitan publication that attracted urban, film-going readers who had access to at least one, if not more, cinemas. The submissions came from across Brazil, but by and large, the majority reflected the opinions of Brazilians from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the cities with the largest number of cinemas. While men wrote more than half of the letters published, women actively contributed to the debate and openly engaged Carmen Miranda as a positive and problematic representative of Brazil abroad. This section covered a general spectrum of Brazilian public opinion, culled from a sector of the mostly urban population that attended films regularly and had some memory or association with Carmen Miranda’s career in Brazil and the United States.

²⁸ The data table was compiled from a total of 19 issues of *A Scena Muda*, a total of 172 opinion columns, published between March 16 and August 3, 1943. Two issues (April 6 and 13) were unavailable and are therefore not included in the calculations. BDAE.

The specificity of this forum was unprecedented for the publication, for no other topic or individual had merited the devotion of an entire section of the magazine for six consecutive months. Women contributed a significant amount of editorial space and opinions to the Carmen Miranda debate, and their opinions were fairly equally divided on whether or not they approved or disapproved of her career trajectory. This particular series of reader responses demonstrates that women were more apt to side in favor of Carmen than men, yet the margin between the female “pros” and “contras” was much smaller. When speaking of the fundamental contentions most readers had with Carmen Miranda, very few claimed that they outright disliked her or thought she had no talent.

The majority of “contra” contributors expressed nostalgia for the Carmen Miranda of the days of her radio stardom, their most famous interpreter of samba. Osvaldo Jannuzzi of Rio observed, “Carmen não nasceu para ser artista de cinema, apenas artista de rádio ela pode ser. Deve-se contentar em ser o que é e voltar ao rádio. Nossa terra e o samba lhe déram fama e fortuna. Carmen não soube ser grata.”²⁹ Others hoped to see her move beyond the typecast *latina* showgirl roles to star as a true heroine in a Hollywood film. Few readers criticized her performances in terms of sex appeal or vulgarity; the majority of the commentary referenced the over-exaggeration of her costume or movements, not the overall persona in terms of propriety or morality. Though she would become the highest paid actor in Hollywood during World War II, as well as the most famous Brazilian abroad, many Brazilians expressed discontent with the trajectory of her artistic career, despite her professional success.

²⁹ Osvaldo Jannuzzi, “Carmen Miranda na opinião de seus ‘fans,’” *A Cena Muda* (27 de Julho, 1943, n. 30), 12. BDAE.

Though these issues of *A Scena Muda* are rife with criticism of Carmen's performances, and occasionally describe her costume and dancing as indecent or exaggerated, a close analysis of the "fan" letters reveals very few allusions to proper feminine behavior or traditional maternal roles. Alicinha Barbosa submitted a positive portrait of Carmen in the May 18 issue of 1943:

"Pessoa que veio dos EE.UU., contou-me como vive a Carmen em Hollywood: Uma vida de boa dona de casa, morigerada, séria, bem comportada, costurando e tendo a seu lado toda a família, todos os entes que lhe são caros...Não anda fazendo maluquices, como podem pensar daqui. É economica, é respeitada, o tipo da mulher que trabalha e precisa repouso [*sic*]."³⁰

Here, the "fan" references Carmen's normal reality as a good and proper woman who keeps house and is well respected and economical, not lascivious or irresponsible. This is one of the few references to her personal life that appear in the magazine that also frames her within a more traditional female role as a "lady of the house." Miranda's personal life never aligned with patriarchal social mores, remaining unmarried until she was thirty-eight and pursuing her career domestically and internationally of her own volition. Though plenty of gossip circulated throughout Brazil regarding her life in Hollywood, these rumors do not appear in the magazine, nor does a certain patriarchal, judgmental debate ever surface from the editorial staff or the letters of readers. Within the sphere of these specific, metropolitan film magazines with large readerships of both genders, contributors do not invoke the propagandistic language of the Vargas regime that imagined Brazilian femininity within the context of the home. *A Scena Muda* in particular does not serve as a forum in which the morality or appropriateness of Miranda's personal life or film persona are debated, so much as a space in which readers debated the

³⁰ Alicinha Barbosa, "Carmen Miranda na opinião de seus 'fans'" *A Cena Muda* (18 de maio, 1943, n. 20), 7. BDAE.

implications of her performances on the United States' impressions of the nation as a whole.

Within the editorial debate of 1943, along with the many letters of praise and criticism written to *A Scena Muda* and *Cinearte* beginning in 1939, Carmen Miranda certain anxieties of international perception that existed in the popular imagination of Brazilians of the time. Readers approved of her performance and interpretation of Brazilian cultural elements such as samba and carnival, but many readers found her expositions contentious if they were over-generalized as merely *latino*, or if they viewed them as overly sexualized, and therefore an inaccurate representation of *brasilidade*. Dulce Damasceno de Brito referred to her as “o ‘produto nacional’” in July of 1943, figuratively transforming her into a consumer product for export to an international market. Serendipitously rising to fame in the midst of the era of the Good Neighbor Policy, Carmen Miranda became an icon of this period as a representative of Latin America within the United States. It is debatable the extent to which Miranda promoted herself or the Hollywood studio system co-opted her image and exploited it as a propaganda tool; however, her persona undoubtedly made an impression on American and Brazilian audiences.

Critical Perspectives

Carmen Miranda's career began to steadily decline following the release of the three films discussed and debated in *A Scena Muda*. Her later films continued to gross money and attract audiences, but her now famous persona would eventually lose its

exotic novelty. Her tragic death from a heart attack in 1955 followed shortly after the suicide of Getúlio Vargas in 1954, ending his term as a re-elected president.

Only within the last twenty years or so has Carmen Miranda reentered discussions of Brazilian culture and identity, particularly within the academy. Martha Gil-Montero's biography rekindled interest in her personal life and career, followed by Helena Solberg's interpretive documentary *Bananas is My Business* (1995). Ruy Castro's detailed biography *Carmen* was well received by the Brazilian public, dedicating a significant portion to her early music career and the role she played in the popularization of samba.

Within film studies and criticism, Miranda has also resurfaced as an enigmatic icon of the *Latina* stereotype, while also problematizing certain feminist film theories. As Lisa Shaw and Maite Conde observe, Miranda subverts the masculine gaze and her own "to-be-looked-at-ness," as theorized by Laura Mulvey, by returning the gaze and actively addressing the viewer on screen:

"Whilst her inclusion as a performer freezes the narrative, openly displaying her as an object of a voyeuristic gaze, Miranda herself undermines the passivity inherent in this role by aggressively returning the gaze of the camera and the spectator. As a result, she is seen to acknowledge and openly participate in her representation as tropical 'other'... There is in Miranda's own performance a sense of self-conscious representation and mimicry of the stereotype of the exotic Latina."³¹

Authors such as these have re-read Miranda's performance and apply new theories to interpret her films, as well as her negotiation of cultures and politics.

The current resurgence of Carmen Miranda's popularity has also proffered a new analysis of her position vis-à-vis the Brazilian state. While her performances can be interpreted as political acts, I have chose to interpret them within the historical context of

³¹ Shaw and Conde, "Brazil Through Hollywood's Gaze," 192.

her career and the Brazilian state in relation to the reality of the lives of Brazilian women during the time period. While never a conscious political actor or representative of the Estado Novo proper, Miranda made a lasting impression as a cultural ambassador to the United States that, for better or worse, introduced Brazilian culture to the masses. Regardless of official status or the political reality of her position, Brazilians considered her to be an important representative (in whatever capacity) of Brazil abroad. Gil Vicente Barbosa of the state of São Paulo invoked her fame within the greater socio-political context of her time: “Não quero desmerecer o trabalho de embaixadores, diplomatas, etc. Mas o certo é que, com justiça, Carmen será lembrada pelos historiadores do futuro quando excreverem a nosso respeito. Apesar de não ser Nostradamus, creio firmemente nisso [*sic*].”³²

Barbosa was right: Carmen Miranda continues to spark scholarly debate with her singular and complex performance of Brazilian culture. Carmen’s portrayal of Brazilian identity poses a contradictory foil to that produced by the Vargas regime, problematizing projections of the realm of female political and social action, as well as women’s contributions to the formation of a cultural identity.

³² Gil Vicente Barbosa, “Carmen Miranda na opinião de seus ‘fans’” *A Scena Muda* (8 de junho, 1943, n. 23), 7. BDAE.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Throughout this project, I have demonstrated the paradoxical images and ideals of Brazilian femininity produced by the Estado Nôvo and popular media. Defining *brasilidade* and illustrating the ideals of this identity proved to be a complicated process of cultural manipulation that did not always inspire support. This era of authoritarian control and economic expansion created a dynamic and complicated sphere of influence for Brazilian women. The paradoxical construction of a feminine ideal demonstrates a lack of continuity within the authoritarian regime itself, along with a dynamic public sphere that absorbed influences and put varying degrees of officially constructed nationhood into action. The Vargas regime projected an interpretation of *brasilidade* onto the Brazilian public, and varying aspects of this ideal resonated with the public while others were rejected. Popular media is an indicator of the extent to which it took hold within the popular imaginary.

The state included women in its complex construction of the cultural imagination, defining feminine *brasilidade* in terms of traditional maternal roles, but stressing the fundamental importance of women as progenitors of Brazilian culture and future success. The Estado Nôvo attempted to shape cultural ideology through technologies of mass communication: radio, photography, and film all projected a maternal model for women to imitate. Extreme examples such as Carmen Miranda demonstrate another aspect of popular representation that contrasted with the ordered conservatism of public displays of

Brazilian femininity. Ultimately, the state's projection of *brasilidade* ignored women's push for expanded political rights, their established influence as social actors, and manifestations of progressive gender roles within popular culture. Miranda poses a unique and engaging foil to the Estado Novo's idealized *mãe/filha brasileira*, interjecting an alternative female persona onto the international stage that generated both admiration and disdain at home in Brazil.

Further exploration of this topic would involve a larger survey of women's magazines and publications, Brazilian films produced during the era, and women's political mobilization. Additional facets of social life, such as economic involvement, participation in the modern art movement, and participation in religious organizations would all further illuminate the range of involvement of women in the public sphere. A closer study of Afro-Brazilian and minority groups would add to the current scholarship, which mainly focuses on elite, groups of women during the time period. Drawing on theory from anthropological and literary studies, an analysis of the construction of gender roles through "performance" would be a useful category of analysis for the time period, especially as regards the construction of idealized masculine and feminine gender identities by the state within *brasilidade*.

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