
The Trans/national Cultural Economy of Latin American Film Musicals (1930s-50s)

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Abstract: This essay traces the tensions between national imaginaries and transnational global media flows of tango, samba, and ranchera film musicals, taking into account their cross-media and intercultural configurations as well as interconnections between these three “transgenres.” From a comparative perspective and by means of a “histoire croisée,” or crisscrossing history, it touches upon developments in early Latin American sound film, Hollywood’s Spanish-language films and its Pan-Americanism, Spain’s cinematic Hispanoamericanismo, and Pan-Latin American film productions. The essay makes a case for the multifaceted trans/national cultural economy of the tango, samba, and ranchera film musical productions during their main phase, in the 1930s and 40s.

Keywords: tango, samba, ranchera, transgenre, crisscrossing history, globalization, cinema

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In the 1920s and 30s, tango, samba, and ranchera became national symbols of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico respectively; they are still closely associated with these countries today. The three genres in question were of great importance for the development of Latin American media industries due to their cross-media configurations and transnational circulation. Facilitated by a cultural industry that branched out into various media, tango, samba, and ranchera music turned into “transgenres”—a term coined by Oscar Steimberg (115) for genres that traverse different media while maintaining their key generic traits (which can vary, as in any other genre). Closely connected with particular regional cultures, the three music genres (including dance in the case of tango and samba) each evolved into what Cowen, in the general context of the creative economy, calls a “successful cultural cluster” (122). As a “source of economic and creative value,” they were taken up in other media such as theater, recordings, radio, and cinema. These cross-media connections brought about surplus value for the entertainment industry and created synergies for the artists, evident in the musical trajectories of such singer-actor stars as Carlos Gardel, Tito Guízar, and Carmen Miranda, who all pursued international careers, particularly through cinema, becoming symbols of their respective countries.

Both the musical structures and the cultural contexts of tango, samba, and ranchera are very specific; each of them is marked by its own idiosyncrasies. Nonetheless, significant parallels and resemblances exist among these genres, particularly in two respects. Roughly in the same period, they

consolidated as “transgenres” based on songs with particular lyrics and singing styles that obtained significant transregional dissemination through various forms of mediatization. Moreover, the three genres came to stand for Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico respectively, even though they emerged in very specific regions with particular cultures: tango arose in the Río-de-la-Plata region, principally Buenos Aires, but also in the Uruguayan capital Montevideo; Samba developed in Rio de Janeiro with a strong influence of Afro-Brazilian culture from Bahia; the ranchera is particularly related to the Mexican state of Jalisco.

In addition to national, and even nationalist imaginaries to some extent attributed to tango, samba, and ranchera, these genres also obtained significant transnational dimensions because of their wide circulation beyond the respective countries of origin and also due to the combination and hybridization of their genre patterns. This field of tension between national and transnational dimensions is particularly pronounced in cinema, in which the three “transgenres” became key elements: especially in the Argentinean *cine tanguero*, the Brazilian *chanchada*, and the Mexican *comedia ranchera*, but also in genre constellations of other film musicals, produced mainly in Hollywood and in Spanish cinema between the 1930s and the early 1950s.

This essay traces some of the trans/national dimensions of tango, samba, and ranchera film musicals, taking into account their cross-media and intercultural configurations as well as certain interconnections between these “transgenres.”

From a comparative perspective and by means of a “histoire croisée” (Werner and Zimmermann 21), or crisscrossing history, this essay touches upon certain developments in early Latin American sound film, Hollywood’s Spanish-language films and its Pan-Americanism, Spain’s cinematic Hispanoamericanismo, and Pan-Latin American film productions. The essay makes a case for the multifaceted trans/national cultural economy of the tango, samba, and ranchera film musical productions during their main phase, in the 1930s and 40s.

1. Spanish-Language Sound Films and Hollywood: A Double-Edged Sword

The “multi-centric cultural economy” (Curtin 216) of Latin American popular music gained momentum in the 1930s thanks to technical media, which were able to create effects no live concerts or theater performance could achieve. They ensured a change in the cultural economy of the tango, samba, and ranchera productions. Radio, records, and particularly sound film “industrialised live entertainment by automating it, standardising it and making it tradeable”; this kind of “tradeability integrated national entertainment markets into an international one” (Bakker 404). The internationalization through technical media increased particularly with the emergence of sound film that accelerated the “global cultural flows” (Appadurai 33) of the three “transgenres,” especially the transnational cinematic flows of genre patterns, singer-actors, and other film personnel as well as technology and capital.

Even though tango, samba, and ranchera are strongly based on local cultures from Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico respectively and tend to exalt the respective national identities, they nonetheless contain distinctive transnational dimensions. On a textual level, the cultural economy of the three “transgenres” functions according to the logic of both cultural nationalism and transnational interculturality (though rarely as a manifestation of cosmopolitanism; rather, we can speak of accumulated nationalisms here). These dimensions are manifested in films that combine popular music

and elements of film genres from different countries in order to reach a bigger international audience, thus increasing the profits of the cultural product. This led to “an aural bonding of a Hispanic transnational community” (D’Lugo 163).

A Latin American predecessor of the transnational musical film based on intercultural encounters is the 1935 Argentinean-Brazilian coproduction *Carioca Nights* (*Noches cariocas/Noites cariocas*), released in Portuguese and Spanish (today, unfortunately, considered a lost film). It was written and directed by Enrique Cadícamo, a renowned author and composer mainly known for his tango songs, of which many were recorded by Carlos Gardel, the epitome of tango and argentinidad (Argentinean national identity). The musical comedy about the eponymous “Carioca Nights” combines actors, artists, and musicians from Argentina and Brazil—including Grande Otelo and Oscarito, who a few years later became the main comical actors in the Brazilian *chanchada* genre. Although the combination of Argentinean and Brazilian actors as well as artistic and musical cultures, particularly tango and samba, could have benefitted from successful genre patterns established in both countries, the film actually was a commercial failure (and Cadícamo never directed another film). One problem was the restricted distribution—a general difficulty for the commercialization of local film productions in Latin America given Hollywood’s vertically integrated dominance in the Latin American cinema market (Segrave 98). A main reason for the flop of the film was apparently the lack of actual stars capable of attracting a larger audience. In fact, most of the commercially successful film musicals in Latin America drew on music stars or established singer-actor stars.

Even though *Carioca Nights* was a commercial failure, tango in its transnational, intercultural, and cross-media configuration proved to be a genre capable of successfully reaching an international cinema audience. A key factor for commercial success was the casting of leading roles with music stars in order to profit from their popularity and to create synergies with the music market. This is evident in two early Spanish sound films showcasing the Argentinean trio Irusta-Fugazot-Demare, apparently trying to capitalize on their international success as music stars, particularly with tango songs. In 1933, Francisco Elías directed the film musical *Boliche*, in which Agustín Irusta, Lucio Demare, and Roberto Fugazot feature as a trio, which justifies their musical numbers throughout the film. *Boliche* was advertised as “Una película española interpretada y musicada por el famoso trío IRUSTA-FUGAZOT-DEMARE,” that is, as a “Spanish film” in which the “famous trio” plays the prominent roles as singer-actor stars. With this cross-media reference, the film explicitly ties in with the success the band had already achieved in concerts (especially in Paris and Madrid) as well as with records and on the radio. The combination of Argentinean and Spanish sceneries, music genres, and linguistic idiosyncrasies is motivated by the plot: in order to claim an inheritance, the Argentinean Boliche has to travel to Spain, where most of the film takes place. The motif of the transnational journey has been taken up in other film musicals with transcultural dimensions, including Spanish/Latin American co-productions, especially with Mexico and Argentina, which increasingly emerged from the late 1940s onwards. When *Boliche* was released in cinemas during the Christmas season of 1933, some of the songs the trio plays in the film had already become very popular on the radio (Sánchez Oliveira 95). Thus, *Boliche* became the first truly successful Spanish sound film (Méndez-Leite 345). It is therefore not surprising that in 1934, another film musical was created along similar lines with the Irusta-Fugazot-Demare trio: *Aimless Birds* (*Aves sin rumbo*), directed by Antonio Graciano.

The production of Spanish film musicals starring Argentinean singer-actors corresponded to certain cinematic and cultural developments at the time. With the advent of sound film in the late

1920s, the hope arose in many countries that domestically produced films, with their linguistic particularity, could stop the dominance of Hollywood in their markets. Though Hollywood was at the lead of sound film, this very development confronted the US film industry with a “world fragmented by language” (Jarvinen 156) that seemed to threaten the market dominance gained in many parts of the world. As sound film became established, the Spanish-speaking world, which at that time included more than 100 million people, became an important language-specific film market (whereas Brazil and Portugal, including its colonies, had a much smaller language-specific market and only played a marginal role in the international film industry at the time).

In declared rivalry with Hollywood, Spain promoted a cinematographic alliance with Latin American countries in order to establish a Hispanic film market. To this end, the Congreso Hispanoamericano de Cinematografía was held in Madrid in 1931 (García Ferrer 57-68). Representatives from most Latin American countries, including Portuguese-speaking Brazil, participated in the Congress of Hispano-American Cinema. Promoted by Spain, the congress was dominated by the nationalist and Pan-Hispanic discourse of Hispanoamericanismo, with the claim to defend Spanish language and culture, conceived of monolithically according to the ideology of the “raza hispana”: Spain and the Latin American countries that emerged from the “colonial motherland” were supposedly characterized by one spiritual culture. Thus, the alleged materialism of the USA manifest in Hollywood cinema was to be challenged by Hispanic films. However, the goal of creating a transnational Hispanic cinema with a common market was not achieved. Only after a second congress, in Madrid in 1948, did co-productions between Spain and Latin America begin to flourish, particularly film musicals based on “Pan-Hispanic film folklore” (Schulze, “Pan-Hispanic” 191-208).

Despite the challenges caused by the rise of sound film, Hollywood continued to dominate the market in Latin America, initially with Spanish-language productions and multiple-language version films, and then with dubbed versions. In fact, the first Spanish-language feature film in history, *Havana Shadows* (*Sombras habaneras*, 1929), directed by René Cardona for Tec-Art Studios, was a U.S. production. Shortly afterwards, the musical *Charros, gauchos y manolas* (1930), directed by the Catalan musician Xavier Cugat for Hollywood Spanish Pictures, was released. With the folkloric characters and musical traditions from Jalisco, the pampas and Andalusia (as suggested by the title), this musical evidently aimed at the three main Spanish-speaking film markets: Mexico, Argentina, and Spain. However, many Spanish-speaking Hollywood films failed to achieve commercial success. One reason for this was the potpourri of different accents and varieties of Spanish spoken by actors from different countries; these varieties had nothing to do with the plot and thus caused unintentional distancing effects for the audience. But above all, the Hollywood star system did not work for the films in question, as mostly unknown actors took on leading roles. Film musicals, however, were a significant exception, as the genre was able to use popular music stars as singer-actors and thus achieve cross-media commercial synergies. In the first half of the 1930s, Hollywood musicals were among the most successful Spanish-language films. Musicals produced by Paramount Pictures featuring the Argentinean tango star Carlos Gardel were particularly popular.

2. Carlos Gardel and the Transnational Configurations of the *Cine Tanguero*

With Carlos Gardel, Hollywood’s Paramount Pictures contracted one of the most successful Latin American music stars at the time, a key figure in the development of the tango as a “transgenre” and

its international circulation. Before working for Paramount, Gardel had substantially contributed to the emergence of an Argentinean media industry, which was closely connected to tango in its cross-media configuration (Gil Mariño 33-70). As the most prominent tango star, Gardel sings one of his hits in each of the ten first films with optical sound that were produced and screened in Latin America: short music films directed by Eduardo Morera in 1930. It also was Gardel who in 1917 recorded the first *tango canción*: “My Sad Night” (“Mi noche triste”), the genre matrix of the tango song with its particular singing style and lyrics, characterized by the melodramatic mode of a male lyrical subject abandoned by his beloved. Composed by Samuel Castriota and shortly afterwards complemented with a text by Pascual Contursi, the song was of utmost importance for the development of tango as a “transgenre,” and particularly for its integration in theater and cinema. “My Sad Night” was adapted in *Los dientes del perro*, a *sainete criollo*¹ by José González Castillo and Alberto T. Weisbach, which premiered at the Teatro Buenos Aires in 1918. The play by the Compañía Nacional Muiño-Alippi became an enormous success, especially because of its tango performances, kicking off a theatrical tango cycle lasting for more than a decade (Seibel 554). At the same time, a cycle of tango films was produced, mainly directed by José A. Ferreyra, such as *The Tango of Death (El tango de la muerte; ARG 1917)* and *My Last Tango (Mi último tango; ARG 1925)*, and accompanied by live music (Couselo 49-58). As early as in the 1910s, cultural entrepreneurs in Argentina began to systematically employ cross-media strategies for capitalizing on the tango genre, in particular Max Glücksmann, who had many successful tango composers and musicians under contract and achieved synergies between concerts, records, theater, cinema, and radio.

Already in the 1910s, tango was a highly globalized genre. An international tango boom, particularly related to the then scandalous dance, led to a variety of genre productions in many countries beyond Argentina (cf. Ochoa), including film parodies such as Max Linder’s *Max, Tango Teacher (Max, professeur de tango; FR, 1912)*, and Mack Sennett’s *Tango Tangles (GB, 1914)* starring Charlie Chaplin. Other films featuring tango scenes correspond more closely to the melodramatic mode characteristic of the genre, such as Rex Ingram’s *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (USA, 1921)*. This international box office hit features two emblematic tango sequences by its star, Rudolph Valentino: in one, he appears in a shady bar in La Boca, Buenos Aires, as a gaucho Latin lover performing a hybrid tango dance; in the other, he wears a smoking jacket at a tango ballroom dance in an elegant Parisian night club (for cinematic tango dance; Schulze, “Marcar” 32-45). Valentino’s tango performances evidence that the genre had become “an ‘exotic’ good in the political economy of Passion” (Savigliano 12), ranging between exoticized “primitivism” and upper-class cultural “refinement.”

But back to Morera’s music films starring Carlos Gardel: they clearly reflect a cross-media strategy striving for synergies with Gardel’s internationally successful songs and showcasing his position as the principal star of Argentinean music. In some of the films, his eminence is highlighted by introductory conversations with prominent fellow tango musicians and composers—such as Enrique Santos Discépolo, Celedonio Flores, and Francisco Canaro—addressing the camera, and thus the audience, recreating the effect of a concert stage in film. *Autumn Roses (Rosas de otoño)* begins with a programmatic dialog, in which Gardel answers Canaro’s question “how is it going?” as follows: “As always, brother, defending our language, our customs, and our songs with the help of the Argentinean sound film.”² As it happens, and despite the instrumentalization of cinema for such cultural nationalism, *Autumn Roses* actually is a waltz. What is more, soon after the production of these short music films Gardel signed the aforementioned contract with Paramount Pictures, for which he made

all of his subsequent films. However, they are tango films in Spanish that all contain an apotheosis of *argentinidad*, Argentinean cultural identity. A certain hybridity driven by the media market is manifest in Norman Taurog's Hollywood musical *The Big Broadcast of 1936* (1935), where Gardel sings a tango including English words, as suggested by its Spanglish title *Cheating Muchachita* (called *Amargura* in the Spanish record version). In short, Gardel, like most other Argentinean tango singers and actors, frequently adapted his artistic work to the demands of the entertainment industry, responding both to the national and the international markets, manifesting tensions between local and global cultural patterns, which are characteristic of the "transgenre" tango as such. The *cine tanguero*, be it produced in Argentina, in Hollywood or elsewhere, often deals with social tensions of the time, including those between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, modernity and tradition, urban and rural life, patriarchal gender roles and female emancipation, often symbolically resolved in the happy endings.

Whereas Gardel's short music films had no relevant economic impact due to a lack of broader distribution, his eminently transnational first feature sound film, *The Lights of Buenos Aires* (*Las luces de Buenos Aires*, 1931)—directed by the Chilean Adelqui Millar in Spanish for Paramount Pictures at the Joinville studio in France—became a box office hit in the Hispanic film market. This film and the subsequent productions for Paramount Pictures, such as *The Tango on Broadway* (*El tango en Broadway*; Luis Gasnier, 1934) and *Tango Bar* (John Reinhardt, 1934), illustrate the Hollywood major film studio's strategy of capitalizing on the Spanish-language cinema market. At the same time, Argentinean sound film began to consolidate based on the "transgenre" and its cross-media synergies, with the *cine tanguero*, or tango film, remaining one of the country's main cinema genres until the early 1950s. Symptomatically, the first Argentinean feature-length optical sound film is called *¡Tango!* (Luis Moglia Barth, 1933) and sports a veritable Who's Who of the genre's stars, including the actresses and singers Libertad Lamarque, Azucena Maizani, Mercedes Simone, and Tita Merello, the tango orchestras of Juan de Dios Filiberto, Osvaldo Fresedo, Pedro Maffia, Juan D'Arienzo, and Edgardo Donato as well as the tango dancer El Cachafaz and the composers Roberto Firpo and Homero Manzi. After the sudden death of Carlos Gardel in 1935, the tango singers Libertad Lamarque, Amanda Ledesma, and Hugo del Carril became the leading singer-actor stars in Argentinean cinema. All three did not only build up a cross-media stardom but also had transnational trajectories. Libertad Lamarque even started a new film career in Mexico that lasted for decades—beginning with *Gran Casino* (Luis Buñuel, 1947), in which she played a tango singer, co-starring with the "singing charro" Jorge Negrete. Amanda Ledesma also worked in Mexican cinema in the mid-1940s, having previously starred in the first successful Pan-Latin American film musical, the Argentinean production *The Love Came from Mexico* (*De México llegó el amor*; Richard Harlan, 1940), together with Tito Guízar, the Mexican singer-actor star of the *comedia ranchera*.

3. Tito Guízar and the Genre Matrix of the *Comedia Ranchera*

Tito Guízar had a fundamental role in establishing ranchera music as a "transgenre" and fostering its international circulation in cross-media productions (Schulze, "Songs Beyond" n.p.). Guízar prominently stars as the *ranchera*-singing *charro* in the film *Out on the Big Ranch* (*Allá en el Rancho Grande*; Fernando de Fuentes, 1936), which helped establish the genre matrix of the *comedia ranchera*, the "Mexican cinema par excellence" (Ayala Blanco 69). This was a markedly Mexican film genre revolving around melodramatic conflicts of heterosexual love and male friendship in the folkloric

realm of an idyllic hacienda, featuring abundant musical interludes sung by *charros* and occasional comical scenes. The enormous international success of *Out on the Big Ranch* triggered the production of similar films, resulting in the emergence of a new genre and the consolidation of the incipient Mexican film industry.

Musical numbers are essential elements of the *comedia ranchera*, a genre that draws on well-established singers, musicians, and composers of Mexican popular music, especially the *canción ranchera*. Ranchera music had emerged in the late 1910s³ and consolidated as a genre a decade later with songs performed by popular ensembles such as Los Trovadores Tamaulipecos, who played for radio stations, made records, and performed in early sound film—for instance, in *Mano a Mano* (Arcady Boytler, 1932), a precursor to the *comedia ranchera*. In *Out on the Big Ranch*, a cross-media strategy is evident. Fuentes clearly aimed to capitalize on the success of popular Mexican music, and particularly *música ranchera*. At the time, the film's eponymous folkloric song was already very popular, turning up in many performances, for example, in the 1927 *revista* called *Cruz*, as well as in various radio versions and recordings, including interpretations by Tito Guízar. By the time Guízar starred in *Out on the Big Ranch*, he was not only an established singer in Mexican *teatro de revista*, broadcast and recordings but had also conducted his own radio show in Los Angeles, *Tito Guízar and His Guitar* (*Tito Guízar y su guitarra*), and appeared as a singer in a few Hollywood films. In resonance with his international career, Guízar is presented in the film's credits as “famoso cantante mexicano,” the “famous Mexican singer.”

Besides the singer-actor star Tito Guízar, the composer Lorenzo Barcelata was also crucial for the musical configuration of the film and is prominently mentioned in the credits for the musical adaptation and supervision. Like Guízar, Barcelata was already a very successful cross-media musician and composer when Fuentes made *Out on the Big Ranch*. His band Cuarteto Tamaulipeco, renamed Los Trovadores Tamaulipecos in 1929, was one of the leading groups of popular Mexican music at the time and also successfully toured Cuba and the USA. In the 1930s, Barcelata signed a contract with the radio station XEW, published songs for the U.S. record company Peermusic, and began to work as a composer for Mexican film productions. Notably, most compositions in *Out on the Big Ranch*—five out of seven songs—were written by Barcelata in collaboration with a member of Los Trovadores Tamaulipecos, Ernesto Cortázar. In Fuentes's film, Barcelata also appeared as an actor, playing Martín, the rival of José Francisco (Tito Guízar). He appeared prominently in the musical number “Amanecer ranchero,” a serenade he sang alternately with Tito Guízar at the request of Don Felipe, the *hacendado* of Rancho Grande, at the window of the rancher's fiancée Margarita. Rather typically for the *comedia ranchera*'s incorporation of popular Mexican music (mainly *música ranchera* but also other genres), the song was taken up in another film—indeed, the film was named after it: *Ranch Dawn* (*Amanecer ranchero*; Raúl de Anda, 1942).

Not only *Out on the Big Ranch* but most *comedia ranchera* productions profited from cross-media synergies with the *canción ranchera*. For instance, the international box office hit *Jalisco, Don't Backslide* (*¡Ay, Jalisco, no te rajes*; Joselito Rodríguez, 1941) starring Jorge Negrete and featuring the eponymous hit song (composed by Manuel Esperón with lyrics by Ernesto Cortázar) was screened in the same year the song was released, thus mutually reinforcing their success. In Rodríguez's film, the prominence of the song was highlighted by its performance by two of the foremost stars of the *música ranchera*: first, it was sung by Lucha Reyes and then again by Jorge Negrete. Lucha Reyes's most striking appearance in the film was an outstanding solo performance of the song in a *charreada* (rodeo) arena where she sang the *canción ranchera* in the *estilo bravío* (brave style) with a raw, deep voice

and confident gestures. Negrete, by contrast, performed the song in a cramped cantina, showcasing his refined baritone in a collective musical spectacle featuring the Trio los Río and including *gritos mexicanos*: high-pitched interjections with ululation trills. Both Reyes and Negrete also sang “¡Ay, Jalisco, no te rajes!” for the radio and recorded the song (followed by many other musicians who interpreted it subsequently). The song quickly became a quasi-anthem of Jalisco, which metonymically stands for Mexico. As such, the immensely popular *canción ranchera* was included in the 1944 Walt Disney animation *The Three Caballeros*, a cinematic manifestation of the Good Neighbor policy. “¡Ay, Jalisco, no te rajes!” is one of numerous compositions by the composer and lyricist team Manuel Esperón and Ernesto Cortázar who, along with Lorenzo Barcelata, were of utmost importance for the musical configuration of the *canción ranchera* in different media, and particularly in cinema.

4. Carmen Miranda, or the Globalization of Samba: Between Early Chanchadas and Pan-American Musicals

Walt Disney’s *The Three Caballeros* prominently features not only Mexico and ranchera music, but also Brazil and samba, just as the enormously successful prequel of the film did: *Saludos amigos* (1942), which ends with documentary images of Rio de Janeiro’s carnival followed by an animation titled “Brazil.” In this sequence, which serves to manifest Pan-American friendship, Zé Carioca shows Brazil, called “the land of the samba,” to Donald Duck. The animation is accompanied by two sambas. First, there is Ary Barroso’s *samba-exaltação* “Aquarela do Brasil,” which is known in English simply as “Brazil”—and which is indeed an unofficial anthem of the country, in tune with Getúlio Vargas’s “ideological guidelines of the Estado Novo” (Siqueira 232) that instrumentalized samba as “national music.” The second song is the *samba-choro* “Tico-tico no fubá” by Zequinha de Abreu, which like “Aquarela do Brasil” also became one of the most famous Brazilian songs through its circulation in the U.S. media industry. *Saludos amigos* ends with a postcard-like image of Rio de Janeiro, highlighting both the Sugarloaf and the then famous music venue Urca casino. This take is preceded by the silhouette of Donald Duck dancing samba with a woman resembling Carmen Miranda in her typical appearance as a stylized *baiana*, an Afro-Brazilian folk figure she appropriated and famously integrated into her star persona—symptomatic for the *branqueamento*, or “whitening” of samba, i.e., an exclusion of Afro-Brazilian musicians in the commodification of the genre (166-172).

Saludos amigos, like many other Hollywood musicals of the time, reflects the U.S. Good Neighbor Policy and the role samba played in the Pan-Americanist “machine of representation” (Salvatore 15). In fact, Walt Disney made the film under the auspices of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, created in 1940 with the aim to affirm the political alliance between the USA and Latin America and to secure Latin American markets (Usabel 161). Carmen Miranda was a key figure in Pan-American cinema—including corresponding cross-media synergies in appearances on Broadway, in cabarets, recordings, radio, and television. Though she received the nickname “Brazilian Bombshell,” resonating with her sexualized exoticization and extravagant “tropicality,” the singer-actor star actually performs a hybrid Latin Americanness based on different national stereotypes. This is particularly evident in her first three musicals for 20th Century Fox, in which she portrays characters from the countries mentioned in the programmatic titles, to which the U.S. protagonists travel: *Down Argentine Way* (1940), *That Night in Rio* (1941), both directed by Irving Cummings, and *Week-End in Havana* (Walter Lang, 1941). These “false” representations actually caused indignation in

Argentina and Cuba. At the same time, “Brazilianness” depicted in Hollywood was equally fantasized. For instance, in the Pan-American musical *Brazil*, also known as *Stars and Guitars* (Joseph Santley, 1944), set in Rio de Janeiro, the Mexican star Tito Guizar features as a Brazilian composer with a love interest in an American author played by Virginia Bruce, who claims to detest Latin American men. In Hollywood’s Pan-American films, there usually is a schism between American protagonists and (mostly female) Latin American figures: the former play a central role in the plot, exhibiting psychological development and ample verbal articulation; the latter have few narrative functions and appear mostly in musical numbers, related to the “cinema of attractions,” the extra-narrative and spectacular element of the genre (Gunning 57).

Part of Hollywood’s Pan-American films of the 1930s and 1940s were “South-of-the-Border musicals,” identifying the “southern neighbors with rhythm, life, and a certain looseness of morals” (Altman, *American Film* 186). One of the early films of this cycle included RKO’s box office hit *Flying Down to Rio* (Thornton Freeland, 1933), which prominently featured the supposedly Brazilian song and exotic dance called “The Carioca,” a genre hybrid including elements of samba and foxtrot. The song, recorded by Max Steiner and the RKO Orchestra, was marketed together with the film and became a huge hit. Not by accident, Rio de Janeiro and its popular music were highlighted and commercially exploited: Pan American Airways, the sponsor of the film, had recently made Rio de Janeiro a tourist destination for the USA. Moreover, US media companies were already capitalizing on Brazil’s vibrant popular music by producing it on records and promoting it via cross-media strategies.

Our Things (*Coisas nossas*; Byington e Cia., 1931) became the first film to systematically explore the synergies between the incipient music and cinema industries in Brazil: it was directed by Wallace Downey and produced by Alberto Byington Jr., the former being the artistic supervisor and the latter a representative of the U.S. company Columbia Records in Brazil. *Our Things* follows the pattern of the *revista de teatro*, or revue, very popular in Brazil at the time, and the Hollywood film revue, such as the international box office hit *The Broadway Melody* (Harry Beaumont, 1929). With his first and very successful film, Downey inaugurated the *filme de revista* in Brazil, which intersperses musical numbers with comic sketches performed by popular actors and musicians who already had success in theater, radio, and the phonographic market (Vieira 48). In the framework of this cross-media strategy, all musicians in *Our Things* had contracts with Columbia or were hired by the record company in the context of the film production. The film included a performance of “Tico-tico no fubá” by Gaó and the Colbaz Orchestra, who also recorded the song for the first time in the year the film was made. Symptomatically, it was the *samba-choro* version of “Tico-tico no fubá” in *Saludos amigos* that made the song a huge international success, followed by numerous recordings and adaptations in Hollywood films of the 1940s (Schulze, “O tico-tico” n.p.).

Both Byington Jr. and especially Downey played an important role in the early development of the Brazilian media industry. Instead of marketing American music in Brazil, they very successfully promoted Brazilian artists and genres, particularly music that had the “potential to be recognized as typical for Brazil” (Miranda 40). Aiming at cross-media synergies including records, radio, theater, and cinema, Downey explored samba and other domestic genres like the *marchinha*. In 1935, he co-directed the very successful *filme de revista* called *Hello, hello Brazil!* (*Allô, Allô, Brasil!*) featuring many Brazilian music stars, including Carmen Miranda, who at the time was already a household name in Brazil and had performed musical numbers in films such as *The Voice of Carnival* (*A Voz do Carnaval*, 1933), directed by Adhemar Gonzaga—the founder of Cinédia, which produced numerous film musicals

in the 1930s and 40s. Downey and Gonzaga went on to create successful films starring Carmen Miranda as a singer-actor, such as *Students (Estudantes, 1935)* and *Hello, Hello Carnival (Alô, alô, carnaval, 1936)*. Downey also produced Carmen Miranda's last Brazilian film, *Cooking Banana (Banana da Terra; 1939, Ruy Costa)*, which featured her famous performance of Dorival Caymmi's samba "What does the woman from Bahia have?" ("O que é que a baiana tem?"). In this musical number she appeared in a *baiana* outfit that was to become the trademark of her star persona, particularly in the Pan-American films she made in the 1940s. While Carmen Miranda starred in Hollywood musicals, Brazilian cinema flourished, producing films based on Brazilian music. A formula used since the beginning of sound film was responsible for many of the most successful film productions in Brazil until the early 1960s: take some popular songs performed by stars and add a good dose of comedy. Initially, this combination appeared in film revues and then in the genre of the *chanchada*, carnivalesque musical comedies. The *chanchada* was based on comic plots, interspersed with love stories and elements from other genres, such as the gangster film. It was also abundant with musical numbers—frequently samba, but also other, mostly domestic, genres—performed by Brazilian popular music stars in synergy with the radio and phonographic industry (Vieira 45-62). Symptomatically, the *chanchada* frequently included carnivalesque parodies of Hollywood aesthetics and particular films (Shaw 70-83). But even Carmen Miranda in her Pan-American musicals seemed to, at least partially, resisted Hollywood's neocolonialist representation of Latin America. Countering an attempt to use her as an exoticized, sexualized and primitivized persona, she decentered and arguably even deconstructed the naturalized stereotypical "Latin Americanness" by her camp performances, marked by corporal excess, exaggerated affectation, and artificiality (Sontag 275-292). She thus highlighted the performativity—in the sense of Judith Butler (189)—of her star persona, the "Brazilian Bombshell." Her camp appearance was particularly pronounced in Busby Berkeley's *The Gang's All Here* (1943). The film even ironized the Good Neighbor Policy between the USA and Brazil as well as Miranda's own career. This became clear in the film's very first sequence: Carmen Miranda performed the song "Aquarela do Brasil" wearing an enormous tutti frutti hat connected to a fruit charge from a ship called Brazil, which brought coffee to New York along with Miranda herself, who then received "the key to Broadway." However, Miranda also appropriated the *baiana* character and was part of the "whitening" of samba, thus balancing on the "tightrope of 'coloniality' and its subversion" (Balieiro 68).

5. Mexican Boy Meets Argentinean Girl: Pan-Hispanic Musicals

Hollywood's Pan-American musicals singer-actor stars such as Carmen Miranda and Tito Guízar embodied singing Latin American characters in plots often centered on journeys from the U.S. to countries south of the Rio Grande. At the same time, film companies from Hispanic countries also produced star-driven Pan-Latin American, or rather Pan-Hispanic musicals. The films capitalized on singer-actor stars from different cultural and musical backgrounds, mostly from Argentina, Mexico, and also Spain, i.e., the countries with the leading film industries of the Spanish-speaking world. They brought together singer-actor stars from different countries and from distinctive national genres in which they frequently starred. Such Pan-Hispanic musicals contained "generic clusters" (Mittel 11) stemming from different popular film genres, particularly the *comedia ranchera*, the *cine tanguero*, and the *españolada*—a kind of musical from Spain based on Andalusian folklore, primarily flamenco music and dance. The combination of different genre clusters resulted in "multiple generic identities"

(Moine 129) with a greater potential to reach different segments of the international film audience. Most Pan-Hispanic musical films share a narrative structure: two protagonists of the opposite sex embodied by singer-actor stars from different countries meet, clash in some way, and finally become a romantic couple.

The Love Came from Mexico, directed by Richard Harlan in 1940, established a film cycle of Pan-Latin American or Pan-Hispanic musicals (after films like *Bolicho* and *Carioca Nights*). Starring two of the most prominent singer-actors from Mexico and Argentina of the time, Tito Guízar and Amanda Ledesma, the film indicated an intercultural encounter in its very title: a wealthy Mexican portrayed by Guízar came to Argentina where he prevented the selling of a rancher's estate as the main creditor; he and the rancher's daughter (played by Ledesma) fell in love. Corresponding to the typecasts both stars had firmly established by 1940, Guízar and Ledesma performed ranchera and tango music numbers, respectively. Harlan also made extensive use of cultural and linguistic idiosyncrasies from Mexico and Argentina, particularly those related to the generic clusters of the *comedia ranchera* and the *cine tanguero* based on Mexican folklore from Jalisco (resonating with the film's setting in rural Argentina) as well as urban culture related to Argentinean tango.

Not only are plot, cast, and genre structures distinctively marked by transnational dimensions, but also parts of the film's location, personnel, and production are non-Argentinean. Richard Harlan, the director of *The Love Came from Mexico*, was a Peruvian who grew up in Cuba and directed Spanish-language productions in Hollywood, including *The Radio Troubadour* (*El trovador de la radio*, 1938), *Single Dad* (*Papa Soltero*, 1939), and *The Pine Forest Ranch* (*El rancho del pinar*, 1939), all starring the singer-actor Tito Guízar. In *The Love Came from Mexico*, Brazil is also part of the Pan-Latin-American scenario: Ledesma is introduced as an Argentinean tourist in the luxurious surroundings of Rio de Janeiro, accompanied by postcard-like views of Copacabana intended to augment the production values and to highlight the tragedy of the rancher's bankruptcy. Putting an end to the sumptuous life of his daughter, it forces her to return to a rural Argentina akin to the typical setting of the *comedia ranchera* (but also to the Argentinean gaucho film, established as a genre in 1915 by Humberto Cairo's *Gaucha Nobility* [*Nobleza Gaucha*] and partially taken up in the *cine tanguero*). Transnational dimensions are also present in the film production. As specified in the credits, the sound recording system used is the "Sistema sonoro RCA Victor." Significantly, the vertically integrated U.S. company RCA Victor also produced records by Tito Guízar and Amanda Ledesma (as well as by Jorge Negrete and other stars of ranchera and tango music). The U.S. company's sound system was used in many Latin American film productions of the time, including *Marina* (Jaime Salvador, 1945), a Mexican musical starring both Guízar and Ledesma, loosely based on the eponymous Spanish zarzuela by Francisco Camprodón and Emilio Arrieta.

The intercultural encounter in *The Love Came from Mexico* drives the protagonists into each other's arms, which resonates with the film's title song performed by Tito Guízar in a folkloric rural setting. Full of pathos, Guízar sings in praise of the Mexican-Argentinean friendship: "this Mexican embracing / this embracing of brothers / symbolizes the harmony / of your homeland and mine. / From my Mexico [...] / offering songs from my heart / with my charros / to your pampas and your gauchos / [...]"⁴ Although the film features very culture-specific songs, such as tangos sung by Ledesma, "De México llegó el amor" is a "Canción Fox" (according to the record by Guízar), a genre not notably identified with either Argentina or Mexico. As such, the song creates musical common ground for the Mexican-Argentinean fraternization extolled in the lyrics. To boot, the piece was authored by Rodolfo Sciammarella, an

Argentinean tango lyricist and composer, and sung by the Mexican singer Guízar, primarily identified with the *canción ranchera* (even though he had numerous other music genres in his repertoire).

The patriotic apotheosis of two Hispanic countries, epitomized in the title song of *The Love Came from Mexico*, was taken up in subsequent Pan-Hispanic musicals, particularly in Juan Bustillo Oro's *When a Mexican Loves* (*Cuando quiere un mexicano*; Mexico 1944), which depicts an encounter between an Argentinean woman, Mercedes (Amanda Ledesma), and a Mexican man, Guillermo (Jorge Negrete). Apart from the participation of the Argentinean singer-actor star Ledesma and the generic clusters of *cine tanguero*, the film also contains a transnational dimension at the production level. It was shot in the Estudios CLASA, boosted by U.S. capital: the real estate and land owner Harry Wright as well as Howard Randall from the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) were economically involved (Pérez Turrent 164). Moreover, as in many other Mexican films, Randall was the sound director of *When a Mexican Loves*.

The intercultural encounter of *When a Mexican Loves* is motivated by the plot: accompanied by her servant, the emancipated Mercedes pilots an airplane from Buenos Aires to New York, crash-landing in the Mexican countryside, where she is forced to take shelter at the hacienda owned by the cynical macho Guillermo, who commands his servant to pretend to be the master. Urban Buenos Aires and rural Mexico are the respective typical settings of the popular genres *cine tanguero* and the *comedia ranchera*. Even though most of the film takes place in the Mexican countryside, generic clusters of the *cine tanguero* are inserted into the *comedia ranchera*, such as tango musical numbers performed by Amanda Ledesma. The Argentinean singer-actor is given a level of exposure befitting her star persona, apparently in order to capitalize on her international success with tango songs and films. In line with the transnational focus of the film, the tango songs result from an unusual collaboration between two artists working in different genres: the distinguished Argentinean tango composer Hector Stamponi and the main lyricist of the *comedia ranchera*, Ernesto Cortázar. Stamponi had accompanied Ledesma on a tour of Central America before he was contracted to compose the two tangos she sings in *When a Mexican Loves*, "Somos dos" and "Cruz." Although authored by a Mexican, the lyrics correspond with the genre conventions of the *tango canción* and fit in perfectly with the film's narrative. The tango "Cruz" reveals the tender side of lovestruck Mercedes. Alone in her room, crying at the window, she melodramatically sings lyrics involving "this love of my love" and "pain of my suffering."⁵

Remarkably, the conflict between the protagonists is epitomized in a *duelo de coplas*, a singing duel characteristic of the *comedia ranchera*, featured in the matrix of the genre, *Out on the Big Ranch*. With a bottle of tequila in his hand, the *charro* played by Negrete, "the greatest emblem of musical machismo" (Díaz López, "La comedia ranchera como género musical" 33), arrives at his hacienda with a group of mariachis; they rather offensively address Mercedes in their song. She interrupts the mariachis, takes a guitar, and counters with a song directed at Negrete, mocking a man who insults a woman. What follows are verses sung alternately by the protagonists in which Mercedes, with her strong "porteño" (Buenos Aires) accent, affirms her superiority. Finally, Negrete commands her to leave, upon which she slaps him in the face. Even though Mercedes has the upper hand in the verbal and musical exchange, at the end of the film she submits to Negrete: he, too, gets to slap her, and this scene is followed by her embracing him in tears and a kiss.

When a Mexican Loves is an example of a what can be called a "masculinist national imaginary" (Gledhill 350) manifest in several Pan-Hispanic musicals, especially films involving the *comedia ranchera*. The Spanish-Mexican coproduction *Jalisco canta en Sevilla* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1949),

also starring Jorge Negrete in an overtly misogynistic role, exhibits similar features (cf. Díaz López, “La comedia ranchera y sus coplas de retache” n. p.). Genre structures such as the “dual focus narrative” (Altman, *American Film* 16-27) and the idealization of both Hispanic countries represented by the couple played by singer-actors tend to harmonize patriarchal gender constellations, thus naturalizing the power relations represented in the films. Machismo is especially pronounced in the *comedia ranchera*, devoid as it is of a female equivalent to the iconic singer-actor stars Tito Guízar, Jorge Negrete, and Pedro Infante. Here the female leads usually do not sing but rather listen to the men’s musical performances. Tellingly, even a very successful singer such as Lucha Reyes, a key figure of the *música ranchera* with an “important career in revue and radio” (Gómez 121), never became a singer-actor film star, although she appeared in many movies. In the *cine tanguero*, on the other hand, the “gendering of genres” (Gledhill 350) is much more ambivalent. This is due not only to the strong presence of female singer-actor stars but above all to a more ambiguous position of male tango stars: their melodramatic suffering corresponds more to the female rather than the male cliché in patriarchal gender orders (Schulze, “Constelaciones” n.p.). Nonetheless, even in *cine tanguero*, female characters who show signs of emancipation are usually disciplined by or subjected to the male leads.

6. A Fading Film Genre, or Latin American Music Performance as Pastiche and Camp

The star persona of Carlos Gardel, an epitome of tango, was taken up in the Spanish musical *My Last Tango* (*Mi último tango*, 1960), directed by Argentinean filmmaker Luis César Amadori. In contrast to previous musicals, it was not an Argentinean man who played the Gardel character but a Spanish woman—Sara Montiel, a great film diva with a distinct transnational trajectory. Since 1950, Montiel had been a lead actor in Mexican genre films, taking on several roles in Hollywood movies before starring in *The Last Torch Song* (*El último cuplé*; Juan de Orduña, 1957), one of the biggest box offices successes in the history of Spanish cinema. The following year, Montiel appeared in a film that put a new spin on the plot of *El último cuplé*—the Argentinean *From Cuplé to Tango* (*Del cuplé al tango*; Julio Saraceni, 1958), in which she played the daughter of a famous Madrid couplet singer who made her breakthrough in tango music. In *My Last Tango*, Montiel was the maid of a famous Spanish female singer, whose identity she assumed at a performance in Buenos Aires. Dressed as a man, she imitates Carlos Gardel’s characteristic appearance with a grey suit and a slightly slanted hat, smoking and singing the tango “Yira, yira” to great applause. However, a fire breaks out in the theater and the melodramatic plot unfolds, one peripeteia after another. In *My Last Tango*, identity is presented as role play. Montiel’s character keeps transforming her appearance, using a wide variety of costumes that reflect different social, cultural, and gender identities. The film is characterized by a camp aesthetic later echoed in some of Pedro Almodóvar’s melodramas.

Sara Montiel did not only star in films that appropriated tango music and the *cine tanguero*. In the Spanish-Brazilian co-production *Samba* (Rafael Gil, 1964), Montiel played a woman from a favela who sings samba songs, re-staging the folkloric figure of the *baiana* with resemblances to Carmen Miranda. The reference to the camp icon Miranda makes Montiel’s musical performance seem aware of belonging to a camp tradition. *Samba* illustrates the end of the boom of trans/national film musicals based on tango, samba, and ranchera music. Unlike the previous co-productions, *Samba* no longer features singer-actor stars from both countries involved in the leading roles. The film’s protagonists neither perform musical numbers associated with their home countries nor do they stand

for two different culturally specific film musical genres that are combined in a heterosexual love story involving the protagonists. While in *Samba*, the famous Brazilian music and dance genre is of central importance for the film, flamenco or other elements of the *españolada* are not included. Sara Montiel plays two Brazilian women, including a singer from the favela, and performs the Samba songs herself. The supporting actors at her side are Franco-Swiss (Marc Michel) and Italian (Fosco Giachetti) rather than Brazilian. The discourses of Hispanoamericanismo, or Iberomericanism including Brazil (which was indeed represented at the Congreso Hispanoamericano de Cinematografía in Madrid in 1931), is no longer present. Even though some Pan-Hispanic film musicals still were produced, such as Gilberto Martínez Solares's *The Gypsy and the Charro* (*La gitana y el charro*; Spain/Mexico/Guatemala, 1964) starring Lola Flores as a gypsy and Antonio Aguilar as a *charro*, the genre had exhausted itself. The emergence of a short cycle of Latin American rock film musicals in the late 1960s and the following decade was just the coda of a fading genre—crucial in the era of early sound film until the 1950s, today it is only occasionally taken up in Latin America.

7. A Coda and a Prelude: Tango, Samba, and Ranchera as “Transgenres”

If genres in general are “permanently contested sites” and as such “ever in process, constantly in subject to reconfiguration, recombination and reformulation” (Altman, *Film/Genre* 195), then this holds true particularly for the “transgenres” tango, samba, and ranchera with their complex and changing cross-media, transnational, and intercultural entanglements. Inserted into a cultural economy based on tensions between globalizing processes and regional (partly invented) traditions, the three “transgenres” played an important role in the construction and commodification of national imaginaries of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. A further level of complexity resulted from the fact that generic regimes of tango, samba, and ranchera were not only adapted in the *cine tanguero*, the *chanchada*, and the *comedia ranchera* but also appeared as interconnected clusters in many Latin American film musical productions. What is more, they merged with generic regimes stemming from other contexts, particularly Hollywood film and Spanish cinema, in which they were subjected to discourses such as Pan-Americanism and Hispanoamericanismo respectively. As such, film musicals containing elements of samba, tango, and ranchera often abound with ambivalent representational regimes that foreground exoticized regional folklore and a “postcolonial exotic”: that is, they are subject to a “global commodification of cultural difference” (Huggan vii). These representations of cultural difference often imply a nation-building discourse for domestic audiences and at the same time serve as a factor of product differentiation and marketability in Latin American media markets, which are strongly dominated by US-American productions. At the same time, Hollywood also capitalized on representations of Latin America by drawing on clusters of the tango, samba, and ranchera genres. As a result, the three “transgenres” are subjected to multifaceted transnational media flows that create a certain *latinoamericanidad*, or Latinamericanness, as a unifying “global geocultural identity” (Quijano 200) in the Americas; at the same time, they bear witness to conflicting national imaginaries and ambivalent forms of othering.

The dynamics and complex representational regimes of the “transgenres” tango, samba, and ranchera kept changing in the course of history. In the 1950s, the *cine tanguero*, the *chanchada*, and the *comedia ranchera* gradually lost their popularity, declining even more steeply in the following decade. What can be called the “social nexus confirmed by a genre” (Steimberg 129) failed to attract

the audience of the 1950s the way it had attracted those of the 1930s and 1940s. As a result, since the 1960s, the three film genres in question have been produced only sporadically. Nonetheless, the versatile tango, samba, and ranchera “transgenres,” in their specific textual configuration in each production, continue to “participate” (Derrida 230) in other generic constellations. Tango, samba, and ranchera “genre clusters” (Mittel 11) still circulate in different forms and media, be it in the tango dance film, in Samba music videos, or in audiovisual *narcotráfico* narratives, to name but a few manifestations. Thus, the three “transgenres,” in their ever-changing variations, keep playing a role in the trans/national cultural economy.

Notes

1. The *sainete criollo* is the Argentinean—i.e. mainly involving Argentinean popular culture—variant of the Spanish theater genre *sainete*: one-act plays with music and dancing interludes, usually presenting comic snapshots of life in Madrid (for the *sainete criollo*, cf. Blas Raúl Gallo, *Historia del sainete nacional*. Buenos Aires Leyendo, 1970).
2. “¿Qué tal?”—“Como siempre, hermano, defendiendo nuestro idioma, nuestras costumbres y nuestras canciones con la ayuda del film sonoro argentino.”
3. The first compositions to exhibit the characteristic traits of the *canción ranchera* date back to the late 1910s. Despite its title, the song “Canción mixteca,” a composition by José López Alavés from 1917 which won the contest Canción Mexicana in 1918, can be considered the first song that exhibits various parameters of the genre (Brenner 186).
4. “este abrazo mexicano / este abrazo de hermano / simboliza la armonía / de tu patria y la mía. / De mi México [...] / ofrendo a tu pampa y tus gauchos / con mis charros [...] / canciones de mi corazón.” The English translation does not follow these verses line by line but is adapted according to grammar, in order to facilitate the reading.
5. “este amor de mi amor,” “dolor de mi sufrimiento.”

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