

AMST450

The Careers of Two Ritas:
Latinas, Hollywood, and the Dilemmas of Anglicization
By Jessica Sabin

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Table of Contents

Abstract	Page 2
Self-Ethnography	Page 2
Introduction	Page 2-5
Research Questions	Page 6
Review of Literature	Page 6-10
Primary Research: Methodology	Page 10-12
Results and Analysis	Page 12-25
Conclusion	Page 25-28
Bibliography	Page 29-30

ABSTRACT

This project is focused on the career of two Latina actresses, Rita Hayworth and Rita Moreno, and how their roles and success in film were contingent upon their race and identity. What this work will explore is how Hayworth's transformation from "Latina" to "Anglo" and Moreno's refusal to conform to the whitening of her image tells us about American cinematic expectations during this time period and how they shaped overlapping ideas about race, gender, and sexuality. I used film analyses of *Gilda* (1946) and *West Side Story* (1961), combined with American Studies theories of racial formation, tropicalizations, and Latino labeling in the U.S., to explain how a Latina's success in film was intimately linked to the whiteness of her image in Hollywood. My original contribution is to frame the project in this comparative way and introduce the concept of Anglicization and how it has a positive influence on the success of a Latina actress. In regard to cinema, there is a pronounced lack of diversity in central roles, and it suggests that in order to achieve greater success, one needs to embody a whiter identity.

SELF-ETHNOGRAPHY/SELF REFLECTION/STANDPOINT

As an American Studies researcher, I'm very interested in studying and learning about different cultures, more specifically Latin American cultures. When I was 18 years old, I traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and lived there for 3 months with a family that did not speak any English. At first it was very difficult because I barely spoke any Portuguese, so communication was a challenge. I had so much to learn and there was so much I wanted to learn, so I fully immersed myself into their culture. I learned how to dance Samba, I became fluent in the Portuguese language, and I even learned how to cook traditional Brazilian food. This experience shaped what I wanted to focus and concentrate on in college. Having the opportunity to go overseas and learn a culture different from one's own is eye opening. It enables one to be more welcoming to other cultures and see their own culture in a different light.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the birth of the film industry in the late 19th century, there was only so far you could go as a Latina in Hollywood (Cullen, 1996). Especially since the conversion to sound exposed the accents of many "Latin" performers in the late 1920s, Latinas have been highly marginalized by demeaning stereotypical images. This was mostly because of xenophobia in response to the immigration that was happening from Mexico at the time of the

Great Depression. Since during this period film was becoming more patriotic and conservative, there was a huge downturn for Latinas because Hollywood tended to exaggerate their “foreign” accents and code them as either comic or threatening and always as un-American (Beltrán, 2009). As Charles Ramirez Berg shows, they were often cast as domestic workers, harlots, dark ladies, female clowns, or as an “other,” which reveals an unyielding and constricted idea and vision of Latinidad shaped by Hollywood filmmakers and other cultural producers (Berg, 2002).

Even though these representations are not reflective of either truth or reality, individuals still create the world as they perceive it to be, In this case expecting foreigners to play these particular roles or associating foreignness with Latino/as (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). Americans associate being Latina with these damaging racialized stereotypes because this portrayal is constantly being fed to them through Hollywood productions. During the classic era, or golden age, from the late 1920s to the mid 1960s, the studio system had complete control of the product (Bordwell & Thompson, 1985). This was also around the time of the Production Code, which was a very important element during the time because it was a self-imposed industry set of rules and guidelines that governed the production of U.S. films from 1930 to 1967 and prohibited Latinas from appearing alongside whites in romantic roles (Bordwell & Thompson, 1985). Nonetheless, this was the period where Hollywood film stars Rita Hayworth and Rita Moreno were at the height of their fame (Jewell, 2007). Although they are both considered to be Latina, it was the images they projected and different paths they took as they negotiated their marginal status in film that deciphered how their Latina image would be incorporated into their film work and how successful they could become as an “American” star.

Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*



Rita Hayworth was a Hollywood icon during the '30s and '40s who resisted marginalization and ethnic discrimination in the film industry by altering her appearance and changing her Spanish name from Margarita Cansino. Throughout this process of modification, Rita Hayworth became Anglicized and Americanized. In doing so she was able to become more than just the clown or the harlot; instead, she became a well-respected national icon and a pinup girl for World War II soldiers. Her transformation reflected the changing notion of what is American and its solidification into a more universally white framework. Even though she was still super sexualized by Hollywood productions, especially in Charles Vidor's classic noir post-war film *Gilda* (1946), in which she played a very devious woman involved with two White men, her Latina heritage was kept below the surface and she was able to bring forth a kind of sex appeal that fulfilled the U.S. standards of marketability in White Hollywood film (Ovalle, 2011). This shows that transforming one's appearance and changing one's name to look or sound less "ethnic" can help establish racial mobility as a Latina actress and bring greater success in the Hollywood industry.

Her appearance as *Gilda* sealed Hayworth's iconic status. The film is set at the end of World War II in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was considered a 'Good Neighbor' film since wartime Hollywood wanted to produce films that would strengthen and promote the U.S.'s relationship with Latin America (Stokes, 2010). The sex appeal and seductiveness that Hayworth displays in *Gilda* attracted many middle class White men, especially servicemen, because it encouraged sexual desire towards an enticing object. Her ultimate femme fatale image that she represented was ideal for soldiers because she was a mysterious, provocative sex object that was, for many, a dream come true. I will argue that if it were not for Hayworth's transformation, she would not have been given the opportunity to play such a high-profile role, and neither would she have been considered a Hollywood legend or a top pin-up icon of the war years.

Rita Moreno and *West Side Story*

As a young teen, Rita Moreno performed in several Broadway shows and it was because of her talent at such a young age that really caught the attention of Hollywood agents (Ovalle, 2011). In 1949, she signed a contract with MGM, and later with Twentieth Century Fox. Moreno was often cast in several very racialized and sexualized type roles, like the spitfire or the hot-tempered Latina woman (Ovalle, 2011). Rita Moreno, unlike Hayworth, did not completely conform to Hollywood expectations. She took her own path and decided to stay true to her Latina identity instead of following Hayworth's path and getting swallowed up in a system that held all the power in making decisions as to what was beautiful and valuable, and who got their name written in lights and who did not.

She was born in Puerto Rico and, even though since 1917 Puerto Ricans had been U.S. citizens, there was still a lot



of confusion as to whether they should be defined as Americans or instead as eternal immigrants, which Hollywood productions often seemed to highlight (Beltran, 2009). Even though Moreno was an American citizen she was definitely not treated that way in classic film; she was always being highly racialized and never given roles that depicted Latinas in a positive way. She was widely known for her typecast roles such as the Latin spitfire and the girlfriend of a Latin gang member, as seen in her most notable film, *West Side Story* (1961), a musical tale of gang rivalry in post war New York directed by Robert Wise. Her roles brought her

much attention, and although in her films she did not cultivate a positive portrayal of her Latina heritage, she surely was able to attain the most she could being a Latina and therefore not recognized as being American.

In the 1930s, many immigrants were moving to New York City and in the 1940s and 50s there was a huge rise of film images of teenage miscreants, Latino gangs, and urban crime (Gonzalez, 2000). *West Side Story*, a modernization of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, highlights all of these aspects since it depicts a gang rivalry between the Puerto Rican immigrants and Anglo-Americans. Although Moreno was very talented and won an Oscar for her performance in *West Side Story*, she decided after *West Side Story* that she was tired of playing stereotypical roles and wanted to be cast in only positive Latina roles (Beltran, 2009). Her career was impoverished and restricted for her rejection of stereotypical roles, and due to this she withdrew from Hollywood. Later she came back in *The Ritz* (1976), which satirized those earlier images (Beltran, 2009). Therefore, Hayworth's transformation from "Latina" to "Anglo" and Moreno's refusal to conform to the whitening of her image demonstrates how negotiating the markings of Latina identity could have profound repercussions for actors.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My initial review of the careers of these two actresses revealed the outlines of how racial formations are fueled and shaped by the dominant ideologies of mainstream cinema, which led me to my main research question. What does Hayworth's transformation from "Latina" to "Anglo" and Moreno's refusal to conform to the whitening of her image tell us about American cinematic expectations during this time period and how they shaped overlapping ideas about race, gender, and sexuality?

Answering my main question raised several related subquestions. For example, how much of Rita Hayworth's hypersexualization and popularity on screen, as seen in *Gilda*, was due to her Latina background and how much was due to her Anglicization? And since Rita Moreno refused to embody a white identity, does that mean that she was accepting the Spitfire image, as seen in *West Side Story*?

Ideas about the construction of race in US culture are also important. Therefore, how can applying Omi and Winant's definition of the cultural construction of race, as it applies to the two Ritas, help us to understand the racialization of Latinas during the 1940s through 1960s in Hollywood productions? With that being said, it is important for me to discuss racial codes, and standards of femininity and beauty. Especially since the lens of racial formation has a capacity to constantly change.

Also, how did contemporary film reviews understand and view the identities of Rita Hayworth and Rita Moreno in their most famous films, *Gilda* and *West Side Story* respectively, and what can that tell us about Latina stardom?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

For this project, I used concepts and ideas central to American Studies. I used critical race studies (e.g. racial formation theory by Omi and Winant) Latino studies, examinations of the cultural construction of Latina identity, and media and visual culture studies, such as Sturken and Cartwright's *Practices of Looking*. I have integrated these historical and cultural works with a close analysis of the films *Gilda* and *West Side Story* to show the differing degrees to which Latina actresses Rita Hayworth and Rita Moreno were racialized and sexualized in mid century Hollywood. Film studies methods were very significant to my topic since I conducted close readings of historical representations of Latina identity and linking them with ideas of race, gender and sex.

Much research has been conducted on these two Latina actresses and their careers in Hollywood; however, none of the existing works speak to the connections between these Latina actresses and how the process of Anglicization is associated with greater commercial and popular success. The published literature talks about the labeling of Latinas in U.S. history, how race has been constructed, and how Latinas have been represented in film.

Since the term “Latina” did not yet exist in the 1940s, back in Hayworth’s time, I needed to examine what the “proper” identification was back then. In doing so, Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s theory on *Racial Formations* was of great use.¹ These authors complicated the theory of race by elaborating that it is not so much based on physical criteria as on how meanings are attached to physical features and the sociocultural and historical context whereby categories of race are constructed. The literature on my topic looked at the different ways race worked, which the authors drew from the law, history and popular culture. Omi and Winant made references throughout in regard to the interaction between representations of race and the distribution of resources. Their work contended that race is multidimensional and is an unstable complex of meanings that are continually being transformed and assigned to different types of human bodies.¹

Racial formation theory did not provide a lot of historical framework around the concept of “Latinidad.” Yet, racialized Latina identities are socially constructed and undergoing constant reconfiguration in the United States. It is important, then, to understand what made someone “Latina” and what that category connoted at a given point in history. Since I focused on mid 20th century actresses Rita Hayworth and Rita Moreno to understand their racial projects and how they may have overlapped with other categories of identity like gender, sexuality, and class, Isabel Molina Guzman’s *Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies in the Media* was essential.² Her work provided both social and political frameworks around the concept of Latinidad. It explored Latinas in a media landscape and how symbolic values were assigned to and associated with Latinas in film. This work was important to my research because it concentrated highly on how U.S. media constructed Latinidad and how media signifiers of Latinidad depended on phenotypic racial markers, which was important when talking about how Rita Hayworth held more symbolic worth than Rita Moreno in respect to their social identities (race, sexuality, gender, and class). In order to further investigate this idea of “symbolic worth,” *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness* by Daniel Bernardi was

¹ Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge.

² Molina-Guzmán, I. (2010). *Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies in the Media*. New York: New York University Press.

very valuable.³ This work drew from several different fields, such as film history, social history, critical race studies, literary studies, and cultural studies. It examined the popularization of American whiteness and how passing as white, during the classical era of the 1920s to the 1950s, always had to do with looking or acting. This was crucial to my research because not only did it explore the concept of whiteness and its production, distribution, and exhibition within the classic Hollywood style, it also explored the idea of an “acceptable” Other, which can be associated with Hayworth. This is because even though Hayworth was a Latina, her “Americanized” appearance is what stood out

Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad by scholars Frances Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman is another work that was crucial to my research.⁴ “Tropicalization” means “to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values,” which has become propagated through history.⁴ Tropicalization is a transnational complex of ideas on how Latino individuals are represented and viewed and how they view themselves. The idea of tropicalization is that it moves from north to south, and from south to north. In other words, it allows the north to look at the south and vice-versa. The term tropicalization also allows for the process of re-tropicalization, which comes from the margins. Re-tropicalization reinscribes hegemonic tropicalizations via parody. It takes the stereotypes and engages them explicitly in order to undo them. This source was beneficial because it helped me analyze the films *Gilda* and *West Side Story* by seeing the ways in which Rita Hayworth and Rita Moreno were stereotyped by U.S. productions and viewed by critics. Since these women were both high-profile Latinas, it gave me a general understanding of how the dominant culture troped Latino identities.

To better understand the notions of “racial mobility” and “inbetween-ness,” I used the work of Priscilla Ovalle, *Dance and the Hollywood Latina: Race, Sex, and Stardom*.⁵ This book worked perfectly in discussing how the female body, race, and sexuality work together in film. Furthermore, it contributed to my understanding on how the United States deals with these categories of identity through dancing Latina bodies such as those of the two Ritas in Hollywood productions. Building on this literature, my project further complicates how Anglicization has been tied to success in mainstream cinema in the 1940s through 1960s. By doing so, I looked at Hayworth’s transition from ethnic to Anglo and Moreno’s exemplification of her “all-round ethnic” look. Ovalle concentrated a lot on

³ Bernardi, D. (2001). *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

⁴ Aparicio, F. R., & Chávez-Silverman, S. (1997). *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad*. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England.

⁵ Ovalle, P. P. (2011). *Dance and the Hollywood Latina: Race, Sex, and Stardom*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press.

dance techniques and history from the silent era to present in her work. The notion of dance in film was that the body exuded great sexual allure, which was seen a plentiful amount in the Ritas' films. The purpose of this piece was to communicate how Latina actresses have used dance in order to make it big in Hollywood and to be able to attract marginalized audiences. However, my research pertains more to the Latina actresses and the images they projected and the different paths they took to allow their Latina images to be incorporated into their film work. Also, I delved into the struggles and inequalities that they faced and how whiteness is privileged, which will be effective when establishing the history of Latinas' in the United States.

Rita Hayworth's biography *If This Was Happiness* by Barbara Leaming examined the struggles that Hayworth went through in order to be the American love goddess.⁶ This work was important because it explored her whole life journey and how her transformation process from Margarita Cansino to Rita Hayworth started. One thing in particular that I found to be vital for my research that I did not find in any other scholarly work was that her father used to regularly engage in sexual relations with her which influenced why she was always so sexually provocative on stage. This information, in particular, was very useful when writing my analysis on her "Put the Blame on Mame" 'striptease' performance. Moreover, *Rita Moreno: A Memoir* by Rita Moreno expressed her struggles that she went through in order to get a shot in the spotlight and also the struggles she went through while being in the spotlight.⁷ As in *If This Was Happiness*, Rita Moreno's memoir was also vital because it demonstrated the inequalities she faced not only as a Latina, but a Latina in film.

Since I analyzed two films for this project, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, by Maria Sturken and Lisa Cartwright was a very important source because it used cultural theory and semiotics.⁸ These authors provided their readers a wide range of important terms and definitions that helped me to realize how we see and understand representations in visual media. Representation creates meaning and ideas because of the way in which we interact with visual texts. Sturken and Cartwright challenge that the idea of representation is constitutive rather than reflective of society and ideology because it is not "reflective" of the truth or reality, but instead "constitutive" since it is all about perception. Therefore, what things are called is more important than what they actually are. When Hollywood productions represent Latina actresses in film they are, in fact, constituting their meaning, which gives popular culture its power. This related to my topic because when I started doing my film

⁶ Leaming, B. (1989). *If this was happiness: A biography of Rita Hayworth*. New York: Viking.

⁷ Moreno, R. (2013). *Rita Moreno: A memoir*.

⁸ Sturken, M., & Cartwright, L. (2001). *Practices of looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

analysis I needed to decode the meaning of several scenes and, based on what was being represented, I looked for meanings and considered how those meanings became ideologies, which became naturalized through repetition. Since the literature was based on how we perceived the world in an active way, I focused on how, through the films, the Ritas' roles, which were produced and affirmed through social structures, reflected their filmic identities. This related to Silverman and Aparicio's work on *Tropicalizations* because based on what was represented in the films helped me understand why Americans perceived "others" in such exoticized or even criminalized ways. What my project uncovers is this underlying factor that has not yet been discussed, which is how whiteness is privileged in Hollywood's segregated system and how the whiter one looks or is, the more fame one might acquire throughout their career.

PRIMARY RESEARCH: METHODOLOGY

It was vital for my research question to find a wide range of primary sources that pertained to Rita Hayworth and Rita Moreno and how the politics of labeling, in regard to their racial identities, were associated with how they were represented in the realm of Hollywood. With that being said, I developed a model by which I analyzed films *Gilda* and *West Side Story* on the basis of gender stereotypes, sexuality, labeling, and racial formations. I also analyzed these Latina actresses as racial projects and examined how they were labeled in the press of the time.

The most important primary sources that I used were the films *Gilda* and *West Side Story*. I picked these two films because they are the most prominent and famous roles that Rita Hayworth and Rita Moreno played respectively. Since the films contained valuable intuitive insight regarding the political attitudes of the time period, it was important to see how Hollywood productions created popular imagination through such films. I used these films to help convey the cultural and historical material for my research, and to better understand how the ideas of American society were represented throughout as well as popular culture and its vessels for communicating. Additionally, seeing how Hollywood had manipulated and highly fabricated their identities was very keen when analyzing the films because it allowed me to understand if they were used to exemplify the politics behind undesirable Latina depictions. In addition to reading and decoding these films, I examined if the actresses' roles and prosperity were congruent with their racial identity.

I am using *Gilda* as a popular culture context to observe whether or not Rita Hayworth's transformation from Latina to all-American love goddess made her into a silver screen sex symbol and fantasy for many white middle class men. In comparison, I am using *West Side Story* to take a look at whether or not Rita Moreno was limited to racially stereotyped roles because of her refusal to transform her all-Latina look and name to fit a more Anglo façade. Although I only looked at two particular Latinas and two of their films, they are great models for my research, examining if Latina success in the mid 20th century was tied to Anglicization.

I also used newspaper film reviews, from the late 1940s to more recent, that were available online. I used *The New York Times*, *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, and *The Victoria Advocate* to examine what critics had said about the films and what meanings they had created by decoding the encoded text. Using these sources gave me deeper, more profound insight on the particular events that occurred, including the heavy involvement of ideas about race, gender, and sexuality in these historically and culturally significant films. Being sensitive to my own ideological predispositions, these sources helped me understand exactly what was being said about Hayworth and Moreno at the time the films were released. Using film reviews in newspapers, some from around the time the movies were produced, was greatly beneficial because they helped in the credibility of my analyses. I aimed to connect what I found in the newspapers with my own personal analysis of the films to better understand how one's race prominently played in securing screen role opportunities and in the development of professional reputations. In regard to the newspapers, I needed to be aware of the following: the year they were published, the sex of the reviewer and their opinions on the Ritas and their films. Also, did they bring up a point that I did not think of? And how did they describe any representative scenes that were any way different from how I interpreted them?

Rita Moreno's memoir was a very informative historical source providing personal insight into her thoughts and life. However, because memoirs inevitably tell only the stories the author is willing to share, I had to critically assess the source to more fairly understand her agency in controlling her own career path and image.

There were several key components of film analysis that I needed to apply in order to examine the material in depth. My approach drew on semiotics, as the practice of reading signs, outlined by Sturken and Cartwright, combining the historical background context from the films with my own textual interpretation. What specific "Latina" images were shown and how were they being portrayed to the public? What were they wearing? Did their costume exude a type of exoticism or did it in fact make fun of a stereotype? I also looked at how sexualized they were and how that was influenced by their Latino background. All of these questions enabled me to understand how

Hollywood was not only establishing the history of Latinas in the U.S., but also how Hollywood manipulated Latinas identities based on their race and standards of feminine ideologies. By only looking at *Gilda* and *West Side Story*, I might miss some of the more nuanced aspects of these Latinas' early and/or later careers. I am looking at a moment compared to moments that maybe longer span would reveal more historical change and persistency, which could be more useful. However, these are arguably the two most iconic roles each actor played, and that is particularly why I chose them.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

My analysis applies and adopts Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation to understanding the construction of Latina stardom in the classic Hollywood period. Racial formation theory argues that race is not a product of biological essence but rather the construction of social and cultural institutions, such as the film industry (Omi & Winant, 1994). Thus, as the film industry depicts Rita Hayworth and Rita Moreno, it is also creating the idea of the "Latina" in the American popular imaginary. However, Omi and Winant do not say much about Latinas specifically and therefore, the most pertinent theory in developing this idea and applying it to Latinas, is the work of Frances Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman on "hegemonic tropicalization". They argue that "hegemonic tropicalization" is the way in which dominant, European and American, cultures construct Latin American and U.S, Latinas/as cultures and identities (Aparicio & Chavez-Silverman, 1997). My two case studies illustrate the work of racial formation and "tropicalization" in constructing, defining, and delimiting the Latina in American history. In the case of film, Maria Sturken's and Lisa Cartwright's notions of semiotics are also pivotal. Films create signs and ideological connotations, and one of the ways in which we can look for and understand tropicalizations and racial formations at work is to explore their specific articulation through the theoretical notion of semiotics.

Rita Hayworth & *Gilda*

The transformation of Margarita Cansino, the Spanish nightclub dancer, into Rita Hayworth, "The Love Goddess", the "ethereal all-American girl," and "the favorite G.I. pinup girl during the 1940s," allowed for racial mobility in Hollywood, which is an important example of racial formation at work in the visual realm (Rodriguez, 1997). Yet, "the half Spanish Margarita Carmen Cansino was always present in Rita Hayworth as a star text" (McLean, 2004). Cansino used to dance professionally with her father in a Tijuana night spot, called the Caliente Club, which is where Winfield Sheehan, vice-president of the Fox Film Corporation, first saw her performing

(Leaming, 1989). Since Hollywood discovered her in Mexico, she was dressed like a Spanish girl, she was dancing to Latin music, her last name was Cansino, and her hair was a glossy midnight black, her perceived “Latinaness” trumped her European heritage. They therefore, typed her as a Latina, which meant, as McLean argues, “being confined to playing all purpose ethnic, often foreign, film roles” (McLean, 2004). This demonstrates a racial formation because even though Cansino’s Spanish heritage is technically European and not at all Latin American, it was the fact that she was discovered, by Hollywood, in Mexico that reiterates how Spanishness and Latinaness were consolidated (Ovalle, 2011).

However, Hollywood producers thought she had the capacity to become highly popular and profitable (McLean, 2004). That is because, as Ovalle suggests, “Hayworth’s Spanish lineage was ultimately more malleable... due to her U.S. birth, American accent, and willingness to follow the trajectory of whiteness” (Ovalle, 2011). Daniel Bernardi, author of *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, makes the important point that whiteness is often about passing, and that “there are no white people per se, only those who pass as white. And passing as white in the United States, has almost always had something to do with “acting” or “looking”—making—white,” as seen through Margarita Cansino’s journey in becoming Rita Hayworth (Bernardi, 2001).

After she signed with Fox, press releases had abbreviated Margarita’s name to Rita, which was still a very ethnic name. Later, in 1937, she signed with Columbia Pictures and with the advice from studio head Harry Cohn, her very Spanish-sounding last name, Cansino, was changed, as well, by the adoption of her mother’s Anglo maiden name (Leaming, 1989). Additionally, Hayworth went through other processes of fabrication, such as “diet and body reshaping through exercise, strengthening and homogenizing her voice with diction and singing lessons, changing her hair from black or dark brown to red, and raising her low forehead through two years of painful electrolysis on her hairline” (McLean, 2004). The auburn hue her hair had been dyed to became her trademark and was what ultimately transformed her into, what Leaming calls, “one of the greatest screen beauties Hollywood has ever known” (Leaming, 1989). After this long “American” transformation process, Hayworth successfully transcended her ethnic limitations and Hollywood stopped considering her as a Spanish dancer; she was physically Anglicized and her last name had a “good old American ring” (McLean, 2004).

However, although her transformation rendered invisible, the markers of her Latina ethnicity did not remove what they stereotypically connoted (McLean, 2004). She was able to stray away from ethnic roles and be cast in all-American parts. However, her Latina identity remained under the surface, drawing “on the potency, the

emotional aura, of stereotypical assumptions about Latin sexuality” (Stokes, 1997). Therefore, since she was all-American on the outside, but Latina on the inside, “it permitted her ‘to integrate wholesomeness with eroticism in her films’, incorporating ‘disparate (to Hollywood) and even “paradoxical” elements, most strikingly eroticism and decency”” (McLean, 2004). Rita Hayworth, a classic sex-symbol image, was “the girl of men’s dreams and fantasies... This fantasy sexuality would emerge in a variety of incarnations in the key film roles such as *Gilda*...as she seems to [constantly] give her body to the camera, [while keeping] herself in mysterious reserve” (Leaming, 1989).

Gilda is a noir classic with ambiguous erotic meaning that depicts a “rivalrous love triangle” between Gilda (Rita Hayworth) and two men, Johnny (Glenn Ford), and Ballin (George Macready), before and after World War II. Ana Black, author of “Glamour Girls Had Their Day” in the 1975 *Milwaukee Sentinel*, wrote “*Gilda* is arguably the glamour movie of all time (Black, 1975). Hayworth was a glamour girl and beauty of Hollywood, and it was her appearance in *Gilda* that made the film thrive: Black writes “during the depression years, fans flocked to theatres for escapism with a kind of desperation born from the need for urgent compensation against real terrors... Glamour thrives on difficult years... And the Second World War gave it added impetus” (Black, 1975). Furthermore, critic John Hallowell adds, “there is only one name for the forties: the girl with the long dark red hair whose pin-up was the most reproduced picture of a star in the history of *Life* magazine” and was dubbed as “The Atomic Bomb” (Hallowell, 1970). Although Hayworth did not gain an Oscar nomination for *Gilda*, the film “earned back \$7.5 million dollars at the box office at the time of its first release.” *Gilda* has also created lasting legacy in 2001, “Saks Fifth Avenue in NY offered a shortened version of the famous dress Hayworth wore during her semi-striptease and the ‘Gilda look’ using cosmetics became fashionable in London” (Stokes, 1997).

In the film, Hayworth portrays a very devious woman who uses her sexuality in order to enjoy a luxurious lifestyle. She is, as Stokes says, “playing a man’s game in a man’s world of crime and carnal innuendo, where her long hair [is] the equivalent of a gun, where sex [is] the equivalent of evil. And where her power to destroy [is] a projection of man’s feeling of impotence” (Stokes, 2010). She is first briefly presented to us in a tantalizing fashion, with her naked back toward the camera while swiftly walking away. Johnny, her former lover, played by Glenn Ford, is instantly drawn to her without even seeing her face. Even in such a brief appearance, she immediately connotes sexiness and darkness. Her beautiful auburn hair is pulled up in an elegant style. She is wearing a black strapless dress that reveals much of her back as well as a lot of bulky, extravagant jewelry, specifically bracelets

going all the way up her forearm. She quickly disappears out of the frame and is not fully presented to us until she is introduced to Johnny by her husband Ballin, who has no idea that the two have a history. There is a teasing quality to this introduction, a “showing and taking away,” suggesting sexual titillation.

Gilda is loudly humming and singing a little bit of “Put the Blame on Mame.” Right away Johnny knows who the woman is that he is about to “meet.” Ballin enters the bedroom with Johnny and asks Gilda if she is “decent.” Gilda replies, “me?” with a huge sarcastic smile on her face, as if she is never decent and he should know that, but once she sees Johnny she lifts up one of her sleeves and says, “Sure. I’m decent.” The camera shows Gilda in a medium close-up. Her wavy hair is glistening due to the light that is projected from above her. Her hairline, altered under the direction of studio bosses, is noticeably further back than when she was Margarita Cansino. Her upper chest and one shoulder are once again bare. She is wearing lipstick and rouge, and her arched eyebrows are drawn on. She represents luxury and glamour for she is always in dresses made of rich materials, like silk satin. White women in film, during this time, would be much more likely to be shown wearing these kinds of materials. However, Hayworth’s rich-material outfits are very provocative and revealing, perhaps too provocative and revealing for a white woman to be able to wear on screen. Therefore, it can be interpreted that it is Hayworth’s “Americanness” that allows her to wear these rich materials, but it is her “Latinaness,” lying under the surface, that allows her clothes to be super sexy and revealing.

Gilda is a woman of loose morals. Even though she is a married woman, she spends time with many different men throughout the film. Gilda is not the typical housewife. She does not participate in domestic roles that were common for women at the time; instead she does pretty much whatever she wants because she is in charge. She shows a complete disregard for society’s values and standards, which is why many men find her tempting and addicting. According to drama editor Ed Blank, of *The Pittsburg Press*, “Rita Hayworth was queen of sex goddesses,” and “the siren of the decade” (Blank, 1987). In one scene, she is dancing with a stranger very intimately. Her hands are around his neck and his are around her waist. As soon as Johnny goes over and tries pulling her away, reminding her that she is a married woman, she looks at Johnny and says, “I always say there is something about Latin men. For one thing, they can dance. For another....” She quickly looks at the man she just danced with and asks for his phone number in English so Johnny can understand and then says the rest in Spanish. When she walks away with Johnny, he asks her what she said, and Gilda replies, “I just told him that if a man answers to hang up. Was not that alright?”

A few things can be inferred. She makes a reference to Latino men being exceptional in bed. This can be inferred because she never finishes her sentence on what the other thing was that Latino men are good at. As soon as she starts to say it, she looks down to the floor and smirks, and turns to the man and seems to ask for his telephone number. The implication is mostly that because Latino men know how to have a good time on the dance floor that they also know how to have a good time in the bedroom. During this time period, there was no interracial dating permitted in Hollywood films. Even though the Production Code did not explicitly prohibit Latino- white relationships, it became an unwritten rule; a rule understood as something one would not do. According to Beltran, the Production Code, “forbid the portrayal of ‘miscegenation,’ or sexual relations between people of different (typically interpreted as white and black) racial designations” (Beltrán, 2009). However, the black-white rule got applied to all races (Beltrán, 2009). Latino/as tended to be lumped in as racial “Other” and while it is not specifically in the code, the code sets this atmosphere in which interracial dating between Latinos and whites just did not happen, and, if anything, it was considered to be taboo (Beltrán, 2009).

Therefore, this raises the question: how does Gilda know that Latinos are good in bed? Could it be her subjugated “Latinaness” talking? Perhaps, because no American woman would know, other than an “American” like Hayworth. Moreover, she really tells the man, “It was a pleasure to have danced with you,” which she naughtily mistranslates for Johnny. Gilda’s ability to speak Spanish is emphasized in this scene, which also plays on her “Latinaness.” This created a racial formation in which Hayworth was able to be at once Latina and white and thus valuable, iconic, but also extremely sexual.

Many scenes touch on Hayworth’s “Latinaness,” but they are not explicit; one would have to know her past to make these associations. While she is dancing with the Latin man he tells her she should dance professionally. Gilda tells him, “I used to.” Someone who knows her past can conclude that she is perhaps referring to when she was Margarita Cansino and danced professionally with her father in Mexico. Furthermore, when she is sitting at the table cramped in the frame between Johnny and her husband, and Johnny looks at her and tells her, “It is one thing and then right before your eyes it is another thing.” This could be a statement aimed directly towards her transformation process that has abled her to become this Gilda character, a woman who can be sexy and flirty and at the same time restrained. Many Rita Hayworth fans, as Priscilla Ovalle shows, were well aware of her background and so these kinds of references might have resonated with them, as well (Ovalle, 2011).

Another significant scene is when Gilda is speaking with her maid, Maria (a very stereotypical name for a maid) who is, of course, Latina. The scene starts with the camera entering a room in which Gilda is lying down on the couch with one leg up in the air as she rolls on her black stockings. Maria enters the room and provides a complete contrast to the sexuality and attractiveness that Gilda exudes. Gilda confides in Maria (and tells her multiple times not to tell anyone) that she is really “superstitious”. The fact that Gilda trusts her maid and talks to her like a friend could be a representation of her “Latinaness” coming to light. Another representation of her “Latinaness” could be when she is sitting down and is to the front left of the screen with a dark shadow covering her face as she talks to Maria. Maria, standing behind her, is to the right of the screen and completely in focus with the light shining on her. It can be decoded that, in this instance, Gilda is for once exposing her inner “Otherness,” signifying a “hegemonic tropicalization.” Additionally, since Gilda is shadowed over and Maria is not, one might decipher that Hayworth’s “Latinaness” is being shown through the presence of the maid who stands behind her.

Later on in the film, Gilda runs away to Montevideo, Uruguay where she is next seen onstage at a nightclub singing “Amado Mio.” According to Ana Black, “Her singing voice was always dubbed. Some of her onscreen dancing was the footwork of somebody else. Close-ups of her hands were usually those of a fill in” (Black, 1975). That being said, it was not her “talent” per se that made her a silver screen star, it was her beauty as a movie goddess that Hollywood created.

In this scene, subtle recognition of Hayworth’s ethnic identity as a Cansino once again shines through. Even though Hayworth plays this all-American character, she still projects a Latin sexuality, enabling her to amalgamate wholesomeness and charm with eroticism and seduction. While singing “Amado Mio,” Spanish for “Lover of Mine,” she wears a white two-piece sequined outfit that shows off her midriff, and at times her long toned legs. Her dancing starts as being very composed and subtle. Her arms are stretched out and her hips move gracefully, but not erotically. As the song comes to an end, the tempo of the music picks up into a very quick, jazzy beat. Her dancing becomes more sexually thrilling: spinning around, throwing her arms widely in the air, flipping her permed hair, pulling up her skirt to show her legs, and shaking her hips vigorously, signifying “a facet of her Otherness as a Hollywood Latina” (Ovalle, 2011).

This is not the only dance performance where we see this type of erotic behavior from Gilda and signs of Hayworth’s, as Bernardi calls it, “acceptable otherness” emerging from below the cosmetic surface. In her very famous seductive striptease, “Put the Blame on Mame,” Gilda draws all eyes to her. Black writes that, “to movie

audiences, Rita was the most erotic, exotic, unreal creation since the manufacturing of Marlene Dietrich,” who was a German-American actress (Black, 1975). When Hayworth makes her appearance, she comes flinging her scarf across the stage. She is shown wearing a long black strapless tight-fitting dress that accentuates her womanly figure and exposes her bare shoulders, upper chest, and legs.

Throughout “Put the Blame on Mame,” Gilda makes several references to cataclysmic events in American history, such as the San Francisco Earthquake, The Great Chicago Fire, and the Great Midwest Blizzard. Gilda says, “one night she started to shim and shake and that brought on the Frisco quake,” which symbolizes the potential for female sexuality to be a disruptive force. Gilda looks directly into the camera looking sassy and playful. This implies that there is much more going on. She is not just simply singing a song; she is decoying the men in the audience with her erotic charm and mocking their tendency to blame everything on women. *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther wrote, “Miss Hayworth...gives little evidence of a talent that should be commended or encouraged. She wears many gowns of shimmering luster and tosses her tawny hair in glamorous style, but her manner of playing a worldly woman is distinctly five-and-dime” (Crowther, 1946). This “five-and-dime” reference that Crowther makes is interesting because it implies that although Gilda attempts to look high-class, there is this low-class element, which could be referring to her “Latinaness.”

Having total control over her sexuality, she starts removing her black glove slowly, building temptation for the men in the audience. She frequently flips her auburn curly hair back and forth and repeatedly shakes her hips seductively, conveying, what Diane Negra calls, “excessive physicality,” which in this situation is referring to her exaggerated sexuality and appetite for men (Negra, 2001). During the period when Hayworth was dancing with her father in Mexico, he not only “groomed her to be sexually provocative on stage,” he also frequently sexually abused her (Leaming, 1989). The incestuous relationship taught her “to use sex to get and hold attention” and “the sexually provocative role that her father encouraged her to play onstage would have done the same” (Leaming, 1989). This is explicitly seen in “Put the Blame on Mame.” Hayworth takes off her remaining black glove and tosses it directly to a man sitting in the audience. After he catches it he screams out, “more, more, more,” while other men are cheering, clapping, and whistling in admiration. She then takes off her necklace and tosses that into the crowd. With nothing left to remove but her long black sexy silky dress, she looks to the audience and mischievously says, “I am not very good at zippers, but maybe if I had some help.”

The zipper, in modern pictures, is used as a symbol and tool of seduction, allure, and promiscuity. Furthermore, “with its ease of opening and its relatively public accessibility, it offers opportunities for attracting sexual advances, but at the same time its mechanical nature makes the zipper a masculine intrusion—even weapon—in the intimate environment of a woman’s clothing” (Friedel, 1994). This is not the first time that Gilda comments on her inability to work a zipper. She never has a problem with the zipper when she needs to put on her clothes, and this can be suggested because she is never seen getting in them and also because the zipper is associated with sex, which means taking off clothes, not putting them on (Friedel, 1994).

Even though there are many things that are used to open and close garments, such as buttons, lace, and snaps, none of them carry the same sexual and seductive significance that the zipper does (Friedel, 1994). One of the main reasons for that is because of its speed; “nothing suggests so strongly a quick and effortless opening and disrobing as the zipper” (Friedel, 1994). Men are hungry for Gilda and she knows that. She encourages their interest by manipulating them with the use of her sexuality and eroticism. She makes one little comment about her zipper, and immediately men throw themselves at her. Hayworth exudes a type of sexiness and eroticism that very few women, especially white women, during the Production Code era conveyed, and it could be because Hayworth represented this new breed of American female sexuality (in between whiteness and Latinness).

Throughout her performance, she resembles a drunk, sexy, yet dangerous woman who attempts to get naked in front of all the men and their wives. This performance makes Johnny very mad. He throws her against the wall and she yells, “Now they all know what I am.” Before she can go so far to say what she is, Johnny slaps her. It can be implied that she is a fallen woman who has used sex for her own personal gain and a woman of dubious moral character. It can also be understood that she is talking about her “Latinness” because that is what is allowing her to be this sexy, provocative, shameless flirt. The audience in the film, as well as those watching at home, seeing this highly sexualized striptease may even say or think that she is a stripper, a tart, or even a cheater. This scene represents the idea of her contingent American whiteness interlocking with Latinness to produce an “acceptable other,” which allowed Hayworth to be a stripper and a prize catch in the same film.

At the end of the film, Gilda ends up with Johnny, the man who slapped her in the face. In some ways, the way that Gilda behaves justifies this physical disciplining of her potentially dangerous sexuality. This shows the symbolic expressions of masculinity, such as male dominance, and how Rita Hayworth’s feminine sexuality is disciplined by it and contained. It also shows a possible slave and master relationship between them, due to the fact

that he can just slap her whenever she is acting overly sexily and promiscuously, and yet she still stays with him. Although Rita Hayworth has become an Americanized persona and has strayed away from the typical Latina harlot role, she is still super sexualized. Ed Blank claims, “Rita—no one else with her name was nearly so famous—was the love goddess, the sex goddess, with a look that in her sultriest years suggested she was thinking, ‘Who, me?’, which could be this idea of conveying sex appeal and innocence at the same time (Blank, 1987). The sex appeal and seductiveness that she exudes in *Gilda* attracted many middle-class white men because it encouraged sexual desire towards an enticing object, which is what helped gain much of her popularity and success at the time, as an “American” star.

After the release of *Gilda*, “Hayworth’s stock rose so high that by December 1946 her marquee value was only just outside the range of Hollywood’s top ten stars of both sexes” (Strokes, 1997). “[The] public loved her. She was the apex, the ultimate, the epitome, the last and best example of Hollywood’s glamour girls. She was the essential movie goddess, a sparking silver screen image with an exquisite face, glamorous hair and the air of a conquering tigress” (Black, 1975).

Rita Moreno & *West Side Story*

In *Gilda*, Rita Hayworth’s whiteness allows her to be sexually transgressive without being entirely excluded and condemned, unlike if she had maintained her Latina identity as Rita Moreno did. Rita Moreno’s refusal or inability to transcend her somatic markers of Latina identity established for her a different, less glamorous trajectory. One writer even mimicked Moreno’s strong accent when arguing that, “[her] career has had more oops and downs than a jo-jo,” (Champlin, 1976). For many years, Rita Moreno “had to be a “smoldering, sexy spitfire,” an ethnic maiden.” [She] was forced to play by Hollywood’s rules. [She] may appear as bold and golden as all [her] statuettes—Oscar, Tony, Emmy, Grammy—but inside, the struggle continued” (Moreno, 2013). According to Champlin, Moreno faced “10 fairly demoralizing years” before winning the Oscar, which even then failed to bring her respectable roles in film. She was still only called to play demeaning ethnics and because of that she quit Hollywood, as Champlin implies, “in a mixture of despair and disgust” (Champlin, 1976). However in 1969, she came back to Hollywood and continued playing stereotypical roles, such as a junkie and a Puerto Rican girlfriend, similar to her earlier role in *West Side Story* (Champlin, 1976).

In her early years, Rita Moreno had changed her name from Rosita Alverio since nobody could pronounce Alverio correctly; if no one knew how to say it they definitely would not be able to remember it. Moreno took the

last name of her stepfather, whom she despised. To Moreno, it was a nice last name and it was convenient; it was easy to pronounce and remember (Moreno, 2013). Bill Grady, a Hollywood producer, gave her the name Rita after Rita Hayworth since she was a “Latin” star that was able to succeed in film (Moreno, 2013). Moreno started taking dance classes with a “Spanish from Spain” teacher, Rita Hayworth’s uncle.

“Spanish from Spain” meant he would speak the cultivated dialect very different from Puerto Rican Spanish—“Spanish from Spain” was also something of a racial distinction: Puerto Ricans came in a myriad of races and skin colors—fair, golden, tan, dark brown, black; Spaniards from Spain were white. “Spanish from Spain” was definitely regarded as an haute category” (Moreno, 2013). Bernardi states, “according to narrowly defined characteristics such as skin color and facial characteristics, light-skinned Hispanics moved in and out of ethnic roles more easily. The label “Spanish” removed these actors somewhat from the negative connotation “Mexican.” Others, especially mestizos or mulattos, were stuck with stereotypical “greaser, bandido, and ‘Native’” roles,” illustrating Hayworth’s on screen abilities in comparison to Moreno’s (Bernardi, 2001). Moreno’s last name, working-class background, black curly hair, and tan complexion, “prevented an inflated cultural cachet or symbolic whitening through an affiliation with Spain” and so her ability to play the conventional, nonethnic type roles, that Hayworth was able to play, was restricted (Ovalle, 2011). This suggests why it was possible for Hayworth to transform herself and become more than the stereotypical harlot and spitfire, but instead a pinup girl and American love goddess for World War II soldiers.

Rita Moreno’s ethnicity in film, if anything, was always exaggerated; “[she was five-foot-tall, skin-one-shade-too-dark Hispanic girl whose feet still felt like leather soles from running barefoot on the rough roads of Juncos” (Moreno, 2013). The Hollywood studio system signed Moreno because she resembled a Spanish Elizabeth Taylor; it was ever since then that she has played demeaning roles, like Mexicans, Polynesians, Arabians, and sexy spitfires (Moreno, 2013). She even played up these hypersexual and emotionally irrepressible kinds of images onscreen because it was the only way she could succeed (Beltran, 2009). She herself cultivated this lively and exaggerated performance persona because it helped her get work in Hollywood (Beltran, 2009). In a 1969 *Herald-Journal* newspaper article, writer Peer Oppenheimer conveys, “[she] was inevitably the exotic wench or the Mexican heroine... no one could visualize her as anything but the Latin spitfire” (Oppenheimer, 1969). According to Moreno, “To work, I had to jump into deep schlock, and this was the era of the worst of my Lolita/Conchita Hispanic spitfires. I would do whatever it took—take whatever job—if it kept me among “the stars” (Moreno,

2013). However, Moreno went too far along the Latino path to ever extract herself, whereas Hayworth arrived as a film star as Rita Hayworth; she was not Margarita Cansino onscreen and then suddenly tried to get out and become Gilda. The Latina image has a prolonged negative history in American film, and this spitfire type image that Moreno tried hard to escape from can be traced to this history, as shown in *West Side Story* (Beltran, 2009).

West Side Story, a theatrical production based on *Romeo and Juliet* set in the late 1950s in the Upper West Side of New York City, explores the conflict between two street gangs, the Jets (American) and the Sharks (Puerto Rican). In the film, Rita Moreno plays Anita, a sharp-tongued Puerto Rican who dates one of the Sharks, Bernardo. She is first introduced in the film working in a bridal shop as a seamstress. Not only is Moreno a girlfriend of a gang member, she is also an employee at a clothing factory and speaks very broken English, which was “intended to enhance the vulgarity of her costumed appearance” (Ovalle, 2011). Rita Moreno was always known to “play “cute” ethnics and employ [a] newly invented “universal ethnic accent,” which is a coy pidgin English of no discernible authentic origin” (Moreno, 2013). Not only does she have a very thick and exaggerated Spanish accent in the film, she also has tan skin, and dark brown hair and eyes, a “Latin look that is everyone recognizes...[and] are to a considerable extent determined by political, economic, and historical contexts, and the images are often at variance with the current and past Latino realities” (Rodriguez, 1997). Her hair is also thick and cut short, and she has a very voluminous layered hairstyle with short bangs. Furthermore, she is shown wearing some lipstick and eyeliner, and gold hoop earrings.

Unlike Hayworth, Moreno’s clothes in *West Side Story* are not revealing and provocative; she is fully covered and her breasts are not accentuated in any way. Moreno is not at all super sexualized and does not play a harpy; she is however, highly marginalized and racialized, “under the category ‘general ethnic’” (Moreno, 2013). Isabel Molina-Guzman makes an important statement that, “media signifiers of Latinidad rely on the production of familiar ethnic characteristics that communicate national origin through the use of language, dress, or music, such as the use of Spanish or salsa music to signal Latinidad” (Molina-Guzman, 2010). This is represented to us when Anita is at the dance with Bernardo and the rest of the Sharks.

Anita enters the dance wearing a simple purple dress that has cap sleeves and goes about knee length with a ruffled skirt, making those sharp dancing spins a lot more flattering. During this scene, there is a dance battle between the Sharks and the Jets. The Sharks, including Anita, go out to the middle of the dance floor. The beat starts to sound more upbeat, and Spanish instruments, such as the conga, can be heard. The Puerto Rican women,

especially Anita, start to scream, “mambo”, which is a Cuban dance. Anita is shown grabbing the bottom of her dress lifting it up and sexily twirling around the bottom of her dress. She repeatedly shakes her hips, swings and bends her legs, and shimmies her upper torso, signifying a sexual connotation of the dance as well as the idea of, as Molina-Guzman suggests, placing “Latina bodies in the media landscape as both culturally desirable and socially contested” (Molina-Guzman, 2010). This Latin spitfire imagery emphasizes on “tropicalism” because it illustrates this idea that Latinas are highly sensual, passionate, and erotic. Unlike Hayworth, Moreno is not dubbed. She can actually dance and sing, making her a very versatile star. However, she is not Anglicized and does not represent the “American” beauty that Hayworth has and therefore she continues to be given roles within sexualized and racialized traditions (Ovalle, 2011).

In a 1960 article in the *Oscala Star-Banner*, Bob Thomas quotes Moreno, “‘Why oh why, ‘do Latin girls on the screen always have to be tempestuous sexpots?’... ‘It’s a stereotype’... ‘It’s also stupid’... ‘They are just the same as other women’... ‘Yet how do scriptwriters portray Latin girls? They have us flaring nostrils, gnashing our teeth, wiggling our ears as well as our derrieres’” (Thomas, 1960). In Latin dances, it is the movement of the hips that is the most pronounced and that is clearly seen when Moreno is on the dance floor “swirling and spinning and affecting quite a bit of the mating dance in ritualized Hispanic manner” (Moreno, 2013). For publicity motives, “[she] was stereotyped as a hot Latina with smoldering eyes and hips that would not quit” (Moreno, 2013).

Moreover, in the film, after the dance Bernardo is upset because he sees his sister, Maria, dancing with a Jet. Anita tells him to relax and that, “Girls here are free to have fun, she is in America.” America being this “free land”, where people can do whatever they want, but has Anita forgotten that she is not just anybody in America; she is a Puerto Rican in America? And whites do not want her kind there? It is interesting to see that even though Puerto Rico is a place filled with people of all different skin colors, all the Sharks in the film are of a homogenous brown. This demonstrates Moreno’s lack of “in-betweenness” and how it was molded by regional and cultural origins as a Puerto Rican living in New York, which “placed her at a crux for nonwhiteness” (Ovalle, 2011). Furthermore, Ovalle explains that, “As a brown complexioned Puerto Rican woman emerging in the 1950s, Moreno often explicitly signified sexuality and blackness on the Hollywood screen, and her career trajectory embodies the social, cultural, and political climate of racial formation and Latino/a identity in New York and on the U.S. East Coast” (Ovalle, 2011). With all the Puerto Ricans on the rooftop, hot-blooded spitfire Anita sings about her love for her new homeland, America. According to Priscillia Ovalle, Moreno’s “variegated career was distinctly marked by a

political professional agency—a trajectory that correlates with larger U.S. social and cultural struggles of Latinos/as in terms of racial and gender equality” (Ovalle, 2011).

Anita experiences such racial inequality in *West Side Story* during the scene when she walks into candy shop to speak with the Jets. She walks in the shop with a scarf wrapped around her head and fright in her eyes. She is standing on one side and the Jets are on the other with the American flag hanging on the wall. The Jets immediately start making fun of her along sexual and racial lines by whistling “la cucaracha.” The Jets get physically aggressive with Anita. They tell her to “stick to [her] own kind,” connoting the idea of cultural separatism and racial prejudice. Furthermore, the Jets ask her to beg by telling her to say things like “please” and “por favor,” mimicking her native tongue. They tell her she is “too dark to pass” and they start blocking her every move. Such a racial statement, “confirms that the struggle for territorial supremacy is truly based on racial discrimination, of a sort which often is not euphemistic” (Rodriguez, 1997).

In the scene, Anita is outnumbered. She becomes victimized: they start circling around her, calling her “pig” and a “lying spic,” shoving her, lifting up her skirt, throwing her around, and they even pinning her down to the floor, attempting rape, depicting the Latina’s “temporary status and inability to cross the racial line” (Ovalle, 2011). The scarf around her head carries religious significance, mourning the death of Bernardo, and the Jets attacking her suggests a form of devaluing her in a spiritual way. The media’s production of Latinidad, in this instance, is racialized through racial hierarchies and binaries due to the fact Anita is being overpowered by white men who are mocking and threatening her “foreign” presence (Molina-Guzman, 2010). For Anita, the nation is not full of the promises that she believed it to be. She loses her lover, and after this scene almost her sanctity. She completely “changes her attitude towards the Anglo-American system” and although she was paradoxically “the most assimilated, [she] ends up the most ethnic by affirming her cultural difference” (Rodriguez, 1997). This scene brought Moreno to tears; “It was that incredible, amazing, magical thing that happen sometimes when you’re acting and you have the opportunity to play a part so close to your heart: You pass through the membrane separating your stage self from your real self. For a time, at least, you are one person” (Moreno, 2013).

This is an important moment because *West Side Story* becomes edgy and radical. The music playing in the background is “America,” only more intense, which calls into question Anita’s presumptions about the country to start with. Can the material goods compensate for the discrimination? Anita lives in a male-dominated society that disregards women, especially “foreign” women. She is sidelined and degraded, representing that Latina women are

powerless, especially Anita without Bernardo. Rita Moreno “longed to be cast as a genuine person, without racist or sexist overtones” (Moreno, 2013). However, as Oppenheimer suggests, “West Side story only proved that Rita was the perfect Latin vixen” (Oppenheimer, 1969).

CONCLUSION

For this research project, I worked with my research strengths and constructed something primarily based on Latinas, but tied it in with US film culture. I decided it would be very interesting and important to focus on if and how the success of Latina actresses in mid 20th century mainstream cinema was tied to the Anglicization of their image. I decided to look at the careers of two prominent Latina actresses, Rita Hayworth and Rita Moreno, and demonstrated how negotiating the markings of their Latina identity had ideological repercussions for their status in Hollywood productions. This topic is important to me because there is a lot of racial stereotyping when it comes to the roles of Latinas in film. They are either Anglicized, hiding their true identity, or they are proud to be Latina, which comes with the negative consequences of racial discrimination within the narrative of many films.

In terms of predispositions, I have affection for my subject matter and I had to be aware of that affection and not let it color my analysis too much. I could have been keen to see it in the perspective of the Latina and could find that I’m already inherently biased towards Rita Moreno and the decisions she made because they were so ethical and political whereas Rita Hayworth became more of a tool of the studio system. Therefore, I needed to understand both sides equally and be self-critical while I was reading my sources and watching the films, to make sure that I was keeping my biases under control. Reading Moreno’s memoir and Hayworth’s biography was very helpful in this regard since they gave really close insights into their personal lives and lives on screen, which I could not get anywhere else. This helped me to better understand their career path decisions and gave me a different perspective on Hayworth’s desire to transform her Latina look to one more Anglo.

My main research question for this topic was, what do Hayworth’s transformation from “Latina” to “Anglo” and, in contrast, Moreno’s refusal to conform to the whitening of her image tell us about American cinematic expectations during this time period and how they shaped overlapping ideas about race, gender, and sexuality? My additional questions were, how much of Rita Hayworth’s hypersexualization and popularity on screen, as seen in *Gilda*, was due to her Latina background and how much was due to her Anglicization? And, since Rita Moreno refused to embody a white identity, does that mean that she was accepting the Spitfire image, as seen in

West Side Story? How can applying Omi and Winant's definition of the cultural construction of race, as it applies to the two Ritas, help us to understand the racialization of Latinas during the 1940s through 1960s in Hollywood productions? And lastly, how did contemporary film reviewers understand and view the identities of Rita Hayworth and Rita Moreno in their most famous films, *Gilda* and *West Side Story* respectively, and what can that tell us about Latina stardom?

In *Gilda* and elsewhere in her career, Rita Hayworth's transformation reflected the changing notion of what is American and its solidification into a more universally white framework. The fact that Hayworth changed her appearance and name implied that American cinematic expectations (and studio chiefs looking to meet those expectations) wanted her to fit a more "Anglo" classification, one of cultural power and control that allowed her to establish racial mobility and achieve greater success as a Latina actress in the Hollywood industry. Since Hayworth was able to Anglicize herself, she was placed in a number of major films and throughout her career was able to remain a big star and an icon of American beauty.

Moreno, on the other hand, who actually won an Oscar along with many other awards, continued to struggle. She remained limited and confined to stereotypical spitfire-type roles because she played them up so much and could not see any other way to obtain both work and attention. As Rita Moreno saw it, the option was not to change. She did not want to be a whitened version of herself and disavow her Puerto Rican heritage. Instead, she resisted any such manipulations, a decision that proved detrimental to her career since it severely restricted her opportunities in Hollywood. What this suggests is that the white body, as one can see through the career of Rita Hayworth and not in the career of Rita Moreno, held more symbolic worth and facilitated greater commercial and popular success in film during the classic era of Hollywood.

Moreno's limitations and inability (or refusal) to break out of the stereotypical Latina frame provided the difference. In many of Hayworth's films she did not play a Latina, which gave her the chance to play important roles. However, even though her roles were important, her character was for the most part always highly sexualized, reflecting her ability to encompass whiteness and Latina identities at once. The "Anglo-ness" that Hollywood producers had attached to Hayworth allowed her to ride that "wave" of being super sexy but also not so sexy that she cannot be saved within a story.

Film reviews from the time and more current, tended to touch on similar facets. For example, the majority of the film reviews on Hayworth addressed how famous she was in *Gilda* and as a World War II pin up girl.

Significantly, none of them openly drew on her “Latinaness.” The authors either hinted at it or did not mention it at all. Most of the reviews, if not all, were about how “American” and glamorous she was. However, film reviews on Moreno, for the most part, concentrated on her spitfire- type roles and how she could not really break free from those. These reviews would even sometimes make fun of the accent she exaggerated so much in *West Side Story*. Furthermore, the reviews confirmed that Rita Hayworth walked a line between the glamour of whiteness and the sex appeal of Latina identity, while Rita Moreno was restricted to the limits of Latinas’ roles.

Even though the research confirmed my assumptions and answered my questions, it also raised new questions about Latinas in Hollywood today. The marginalization of Latinas in film is an ongoing issue and the fact that racial stigmas still exist in Hollywood is crucial to understanding the ongoing work of race and racism in American culture. Latina actresses have been limited to non-protagonist roles and, due to the strong correlation between whiteness and success in the movie industry, being a Latina in a way remains a disadvantage. Even though this is a historical limitation that has not changed much in contemporary times, there do seem to be more complex representations of Latinas emerging, which is why there needs to be more extensive research, even comparative work similar to my project, between then and now to see how much Hollywood’s politics of race and gender have or have not developed.

The biggest paid Latina celebrity at present is Sofia Vergara, who is stereotyped as a hypersexual hot-bodied woman who spends a lot of time strutting around wearing low-cut tops, revealing a great amount of cleavage, and emphasizing her curves in the hit TV show *Modern Family* (Arreola, 2014). She represents a Latina who, in some ways similar to Moreno, exaggerates her performance persona; she has a very thick accent, and she is, over the top, loud (a common Latina stereotype).

At the same time, though, it should be acknowledged that Latinas, such as Michelle Rodriguez and America Ferrera, who frequently challenge the stereotypical depiction of Latinas, are also making careers for themselves in film. Their characters are not all hot-bodied and super sexy, but have more to do with intelligence, personality, and morality. Rodriguez, who plays in films such as *Girlfight* (2000) and *The Fast & The Furious* (2001), embodies a more dominant and empowered Latina persona, called by one scholar “The Macho Latina” (Tolchin, 2007). The emphasis on this masculine persona highlights a different type of woman’s beauty, and that is one of empowerment and strength. Ferrera, on the other hand, who starred in the TV show *Ugly Betty* and the film *Real Women Have Curves* (2002), breaks the mold in different ways. In both of these roles she plays a character that

defies the societal standard of beauty. In *Ugly Betty*, she plays a supposedly very unattractive young woman, *Real Women*, she portrays a woman who is very curvy with a lot of meat on her bones. This brings a “real woman” image to the surface, showing that women come in all shapes and sizes, which can be very empowering to many Latinas.

Even though these two Latina actresses are successful, in the sense they play in several films and subvert Hollywood’s usual depictions of Latina’s by bringing a new Latina image to the surface, they do not make nearly as much money as Sofia Vergara, who is repeating and playing up these stereotypical images. Vergara is making roughly \$37 million dollars a year and \$325,000 per episode of *Modern Family*, and it could have a lot to do with the fact that she is one of the Latinas who over-exaggerate their Latinaness to such an extent (Arreola, 2014).

Jennifer Lopez is another interesting case because in her film *Selena* (1997), she is highly racialized and sexualized. There is a lot of attention to her backside and low-cut tops. At the same time, however, she has appeared in socially conscious films like Mexican American director Gregory Nava’s *Bordertown* (2006), which is not at all about her body, but about the murder of young women in a Mexican bordertown. This shows how Lopez, in a way, almost gets to do it all. She represents this “crossover star,” as Myra Mendible suggests, because she was able to; “[naturalize] her transition from “Latina” actress to all-purpose pop diva and movie star.” This perhaps explains why some of her roles in film are highly sexualized and some are serious and respectable (Mendible, 2007). Even though, the box office takings for *Bordertown* (\$8,329,799) are nowhere near the box office takings for a film, such as *Selena* (\$35,281,794) or *Maid in Manhattan* (2002) (\$94,011,225) (Box Office Mojo, 2014).

Furthermore, successful “mixed Latina” actress Cameron Diaz, who is Cuban and German American, never plays Latina type roles and that can be because she really does not want to be associated with being “Latina” on screen (Beltran, 2009). Cameron Diaz could be, in some ways, comparable to Rita Hayworth. Even though Diaz’s heritage is part Cuban, her European phenotypes (fair skin, blue eyes, and light colored hair) has, also, allowed her to, in a hypothetical sense, disguise her Latina identity from the public, and be this all-American star persona that gets lead roles. This, in a way, represents the idea that today not being at all Latina or being very Latina, in a stereotypical sense, is acceptable. The way in which these racialized identities led career wise looked at the way these Latina women played their “race cards” successfully or unsuccessfully. We are in a period where Latina actresses embody all sorts of different roles and therefore, more research is needed to track these trends.

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