

Dancing Mestiçagem, Embodying Whiteness: Eros Volúcia's *Bailado Brasileiro*

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The blood of Brazil's three dominant racial strains—Portuguese, Indian and Negro—flows in the veins of supple young Eros Volúcia. But the dances that have made her Rio de Janeiro's outstanding dance artist come straight from African jungles. As a child, Eros Volúcia lived in exotic Baía, where the inhabitants, predominantly Negro, have retained the sinuous steps, the pulsing rhythms and the primitive witchcraft practiced by their Congo ancestors. ("Brazil's Eros Volúcia Does Negro Witch Dance" 1941)

In September of 1941, Brazilian dancer and choreographer Eros Volúcia was featured on the cover of *Life* magazine and introduced as "Brazil's Top Dancer." In the wake of Carmen Miranda's meteoric rise in Hollywood, photographer Hart Preston was sent to Brazil to photograph Volúcia, who performed on the same elegant casino stages in Rio de Janeiro where Miranda was "discovered" (Bishop-Sanchez 2016, 70; Pereira 2004, 55). The text in the epigraph above—packed with primitivist fantasies about Afro-diasporic religious practices in Brazil—is excerpted from the short article that accompanies the eleven photographs published in *Life*, which featured a scantily clad Volúcia performing her signature solo, *Macumba*, inspired by Afro-Brazilian religions.¹

Contrary to Miranda, the "Brazilian bombshell" who starred in more than ten blockbuster Hollywood musicals between 1940 and 1950 and became one of the highest paid female performers in Hollywood (Ovalle 2011, 54), Volúcia's experience abroad was short-lived and disappointing. In this article I explore the contrasting narratives of race and nation that framed Volúcia's dances in Brazil and in the United States, and analyze her inability (or unwillingness) to achieve "bombshell" status in the United States. I examine Volúcia's racialized stage persona of national *mestiça* in relationship to her European features and light skin, and frame both her choreographic and pedagogic projects as integral to the construction of Brazil as a "racial democracy" in the first half of the twentieth century. I propose that her whiteness, combined with ballet technique, functioned as an important legitimizing element in the performance of the dances of Brazil's racialized "folk." I contrast Volúcia's reception in Brazil—as a staged *mestiça* whose stylized "folk" dances were celebrated as high art—with her reception in the United States, where Volúcia's dances were reduced to Latin *exotica*, and her staged *mestiça* reconfigured through the one-drop rule as a primitive "Negro dancer." Recent scholarship on authorship and copyright in dance has elucidated the ways in

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which whiteness entails and enables both subject position and property rights (Kraut 2011; Picart 2013). I argue that Volúcia's decision to return to Brazil after her first film participation in the United States stems from the "loss of whiteness"—and ensuing losses of status as artist and author—she experienced in Hollywood.

While Volúcia often stressed her intellectual and artistic labor in modifying Brazil's dances for the stage, she also insisted on their authenticity. Her claims to both authorship and authenticity parallel Zora Neale Hurston's paradoxical claims of authoring her stagings of "original Negro folklore" while simultaneously preserving their authenticity (Kraut 2008). However, Volúcia's approach to collecting dances of Brazil and adapting them for the stage shared more similarities with La Meri's (Russell Meriwether Hughes) "ethnologic" dance repertory than with Hurston's folkloric stagings. Like La Meri, Volúcia collected dances in the places she toured, which were then adapted and added to her repertoire. Unlike La Meri, however, who decidedly performed "the other" in her appropriations of dances from around the world (Ruyter 2016), Volúcia was able to claim a kind of "native" ethnographer status through shared citizenship and alleged kinship ties with the national "others" whose dances she appropriated.

Despite her great success in Brazil, both as a performer and as the director of the dance division of the National Theater Service (1939–1969), Volúcia's work as a dancer, choreographer, researcher, and pedagogue has received relatively little scholarly attention. Volúcia is mentioned briefly in Eduardo Sucena's *A dança teatral no Brasil* (1989), and in Ida Vicenzia's *Dança no Brasil* (1997).² Brazilian dance critic Helena Katz, in her book *O Brasil descobre a dança descobre o Brasil* (Brazil Discovers the Dance Discovers Brazil) (1994), omits Volúcia's work entirely and claims that it was not until the 1960s that Brazilian choreographers "discovered" and began exploring Brazilian themes in their dances. In the only article published to date in English about Volúcia, Sandra Meyer analyzes Volúcia's solos in relationship to Brazilian modernism. Her analysis, however, lacks a discussion of the racial complexities of Volúcia's work and seems to take at face value Volúcia's implicit and explicit claims of being a *mestiça* (Meyer 2012, 141–42).³ The only significant research on Volúcia to date was published by Brazilian dance historian and Volúcia's biographer Roberto Pereira, who analyzes her work in the context of the emergence of a national Brazilian ballet in the first half of the twentieth century (Pereira 2003). Pereira argues that Volúcia's dances embodied *mestiçagem*, the racial mixture that defined Brazilian national identity during the first half of the twentieth century, and pays attention to Volúcia's labor of *estilização* (stylization), the term used at the time to refer to a process of balleticized "improvement" of national (i.e., folk) dances.

I extend Pereira's analysis to suggest that Volúcia's stylization through ballet, a dance technique she considered universal, exposes the ideology of *branqueamento* (whitening) that lurks within purportedly harmonious and conciliatory projects of *mestiçagem*. In reframing Volúcia's dances as performances of whiteness cloaked by the rhetoric of *mestiçagem*, I answer Patricia de Santana Pinho's (2009) call to name, study, and visibilize whiteness in an effort to destabilize it. At a historical moment when worn-out nationalist claims of Brazil's color blindness and racial harmony are making a comeback in Brazilian politics and policy—as exemplified by one of President Jair Bolsonaro's campaign slogans, "My color is Brazil" ("A *minha cor é o Brasil*")—exposing the prestige, power, and privilege of whiteness takes on renewed significance.

Bailado Brasileiro: Dancing Mestiçagem

In her 1947 book on Afro-Brazilian religion in Bahia, *The City of Women*, U.S. anthropologist Ruth Landes famously endorsed Brazil's alleged racial harmony, widely accepted as fact in the fields of sociology and anthropology at the time: "This book about Brazil does not discuss race problems there because there were none" (Landes [1947] 1994, xxxvi). At precisely the same time Landes

conducted fieldwork in Brazil (1938–1939), Eros Volúcia’s career as a dancer, choreographer, and educator was gaining national recognition. In 1939 Gustavo Capanema, Getúlio Vargas’s minister of education and health (and de facto minister of culture) hired Volúcia to direct the dance division of the *Serviço Nacional de Teatro* (National Theater Service) in Rio de Janeiro (Volúcia 1983, 43),⁴ where she taught until her retirement in 1969. Under the auspices of Vargas’s autocratic New State, Volúcia developed her *bailado brasileiro*, or “Brazilian ballet,” a nationalist dance style that allegedly combined movement elements from Brazil’s “three races”—the same racial mixture celebrated by sociologist Gilberto Freyre, whose 1933 *Casa Grande e Senzala* (translated as *The Masters and the Slaves* in 1946) popularized the emerging idea that Brazil’s miscegenation should be valorized rather than regarded as the source of Brazil’s backwardness.⁵

In an article published in *Dance Magazine*, Volúcia explained that “the dance of Brazil proclaims the marriage and fusion of the three major racial groups living within [the country’s] borders” (Volúcia 1948, 18). In the same way that European blood was seen as the ingredient capable of improving Brazil’s indigenous and Afro-diasporic racial stock in this eugenicist racial triad, Volúcia’s *bailado brasileiro* employed ballet—the quintessential European dance form—as a tool to “improve” the dances of Brazilian “others,” dances she had learned through a somewhat haphazard ethnographic research practice that ranged from visiting Afro-Brazilian religious temples to watching indigenous ceremonies staged for her. As other Brazilian artists of her generation, Volúcia used the dances of racialized national “others” as fodder for her own nationalist artistic production.⁶

Volúcia was born Heros Volúcia Machado in 1914 to the poets Rodolpho and Gilka Machado; she grew up around Rio de Janeiro’s intellectual and artistic elite, although the family was far from wealthy and even struggled financially after her father’s death in 1923 (Pereira 2004, 13). Her mother Gilka was a prolific and well-known poet whose sensual poetry pushed the boundaries of early twentieth-century propriety. Machado’s poems are often simultaneously erotic and nationalist, celebrating a feminized *mestiçagem* as the core of Brazilian national identity. Her 1938 poem “Samba” evokes images of a brown female body, a *morena*, overflowing with a sensuality that merges the *morena*’s dancing body with both land and nation: “Brazilian morena /It seems as if the ground/Moves to your samba/It desires you,/it seeks you,/it wants to devour you! ... /Brazilian morena/What a strong attraction your limbs exert/On the land where you thrive” (Machado [1938] 1978).⁷ Here Machado establishes a relationship of kinesthetic interdependence and sexualized desire between an anthropomorphized Brazilian ground/land and the dancing body of the brown *morena*.⁸ Samba, the dance form that would come to symbolize Brazil during the first half of the twentieth century, as danced by the Brazilian *mestiça*, could move the ground that desired, and in fact wanted to devour, this dancing *morena*—an apt metaphor for how *mestiçagem* fed Brazilian nationalism. Volúcia choreographed a solo titled “Cascavelando” (a gerund created from the word “*cascavel*,” or “rattlesnake”) inspired by Machado’s “Samba,” which premiered at Rio de Janeiro’s elegant Teatro Municipal in 1937. Dressed in a shiny skintight dress resembling the skin of a snake, Volúcia’s hip movements alluded to the movements of a snake’s rattle while moving to the rhythms of samba.⁹ The hip undulations of *Cascavelando* were reprised as part of a program that commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the abolition of slavery on May 13, 1938. The fervently patriotic program included various nationalist anthems, speeches by politicians, and a salutation to President Getúlio Vargas. Ironically, this celebration of Brazil’s African heritage did not include Afro-Brazilian bodies on stage (“Cinquentenário da Abolição” 1938; Pereira 2003, 180)¹⁰; Volúcia’s staged brownness seemed to offer sufficient “color” for the occasion.

Volúcia carefully crafted her image on stage as that of the Brazilian *morena*, while her phenotype and social standing allowed her access to elite “high art” spaces such as the Municipal Theater of Rio de Janeiro as well as the municipal ballet school (*escola de bailados*), where she began studying ballet in 1928 at age fourteen. Her uneventful acceptance into the *escola de bailados* corroborates my reading of Volúcia as socially white,¹¹ since it was not until 1948, twenty years later, that the first black dancers were admitted into the *corpo de baile* of the municipal theater (Melgaço da Silva

Júnior 2007, 18–20). In 1932, after only four years of ballet classes, Volúcia decided she had learned enough ballet and left the school to begin creating her Brazilian-themed dances. This abbreviated ballet training, however, gave Volúcia the tools to “cultivate” Brazil’s “folk dances” (a term she always writes in English, signaling the newness and foreignness of the classificatory rubric she used for grouping the dances of her “own” people) (Volúcia 1983, 40). She believed that ballet technique was useful as a foundation, but not as an end in itself; through ballet training, she believed dancers could master what she believed to be universal movement principles, such as the use of breath, balance, elevation, and flexibility (Volúcia 1939, 11). In a published report about the dance program at the National Theater Service, Volúcia explained that “a classical foundation prepares [students] for the good performance of any dance” (Volúcia quoted in Pereira 2003, 186). She believed that ballet training was able to “fine tune the body” and bring about “harmony of movement” (Volúcia 1939, 12).

Not surprisingly, then, *bailado brasileiro* included a ballet barre followed by the practice of folk dances in the center;¹² it employed turn out, demi-pointe, an elongated and erect torso, use of long arm gestures (arms extending upward and outward), various pivot turns such as *soutenus*, leg kicks such as *grand battements*, and leaps such as *grand jetés*. *Bailado brasileiro* did occasionally break with ballet’s vertical alignment in its use of torso, hip, and head movements: in *Macumba*, her signature solo featured in *Life*, Volúcia performed what she called “head fouettés,” head circles that progressively increased in speed and drew enthusiastic applause from her audiences (Volúcia 1983, 42).¹³ Although she became known for her *samba na ponta* (samba on pointe), which she performed on the stages of Rio’s elegant casinos, Volúcia never liked dancing on pointe; she believed that pointe technique was unnatural and stifled individual expression (Volúcia 1983, 40; 1939, 12). Instead, she made ample use of demi-pointe, often in conjunction with flexed knees. She believed that dancing on demi-pointe was more than enough “elevation” in dance: “The Greeks . . . who were often beautiful and cultivated dance more than any other group, only performed on demi-pointe, not needing any more elevation for the spirituality of their wise choreography” (Volúcia 1939, 15). Volúcia found in demi-pointe a compromise between the need to “elevate” Brazil’s folk dances, both literally and symbolically, and her desire to preserve their connection to the ground, the land, and the nation. The vast majority of the photographs included in her autobiography—from photos of a feather-clad, bow-and-arrow toting “Indian” to photos of *candomblé*-inspired dances—show Volúcia balancing on the balls of her feet. Her dancing carried markers of otherness while clearly staying within the realm of ballet, a technique she believed to be the ingredient that allowed her to “bring to large audiences, to a civilized audience[,] the barbarous chants of [Brazil’s] afro-amerindian folk-lore” (Volúcia 1939, 16). Volúcia believed that her training in ballet, combined with her knowledge of Brazilian folk dances, placed her in the ideal position to civilize and elevate Brazil’s “barbarous” folklore. In addition, she claimed that her humble origins and contact with Brazil’s poor allowed her to acquire, to “fix” in her limbs, the “unpredictable choreography of our people” (19).

Volúcia constructed her own dance pedigree by downplaying her ballet training and foregrounding her close connection with the “folk.” She claimed to have taken her first dance steps in a *macumba* temple: “I lived across the street from a well-known *macumba* [temple], the *macumba* of João da Luz. When I was four years old, I would sneak out of the house to dance at the temple of Father João. And it was there that I took my first dance steps. These first impressions will always be engraved in my memory” (Volúcia 1983, 132). Pereira points to the importance of this origin story in establishing the legitimacy of Volúcia’s *bailado brasileiro*, noting that it asserted an “almost biological” link between Volúcia and Afro-Brazilian culture (Pereira 2003, 191).¹⁴ Volúcia’s phenotype was read as white in Brazil; her dark, wavy hair, however, combined with her olive skin, provided her with enough of a foundation on which to build her (auto)exotic image of *mestiça*. The very etymology Volúcia constructed for her first name reinforced her narrative of brownness: Eros derived from her birth name Heros, which she mistook for the English word “heron” and believed meant “*garça morena*” (brown heron) in English (Volúcia 1983, 35).¹⁵ She often mentioned having

a grandmother from Bahia, the Brazilian state known for its thriving Afro-Brazilian culture, thus asserting a biological link to the Afro-Brazilian folklore she stylized for the stage. Explaining her “ancestral” connection to her dancing, she stated: “I do not dance from [received] information [;] in my body of proud mestiça the atavistic manifestations were awoken very early on” (Volúcia 1939, 19). At the same time as she claimed a blood-based, “atavistic” connection to Brazil’s folk dances, which were “awoken” in her body rather than learned, she paradoxically emphasized her labor in reshaping these dances in the same way a jeweler prepares a gem: “I have been teaching in minutes what has taken me years of research and creative work. Nobody reflects, when looking at an ornament made of rare gems, on the work of the artist who cut the gems and assembled the jewel” (Volúcia 1939, 19).

In addition to her allegedly ancestral, blood-based knowledge of dances of Brazil, Volúcia attributed her dance knowledge to the time she spent among “*os miseráveis*”—the abject poor (Volúcia 1939, 19). She legitimized her *bailado brasileiro* through her research “*in loco*” among these poor others;¹⁶ Volúcia, who had no formal training in anthropological research, nonetheless engaged in embodied, participatory research—gesturing toward new trends in ethnographic participant observation without, however, ever engaging in long-term or in-depth field research. Aside from brief descriptions of the dances she observed, published in expanded proceedings from a lecture delivered in 1939 titled *Dansa Brasileira*, Volúcia’s research trips did not yield any kind of significant ethnographic archive—no field notes, no photographs, no audio recordings. Instead, Volúcia’s research was embodied: the act of collecting folklore happened through her body as she learned the dances herself. Her research trips to Salvador and Recife in 1937 and to Salvador again in 1945 had the dual purpose of allowing her to perform her *bailado brasileiro* in the cities she visited and research new local dances, which would be used to renew and broaden her repertoire of folk dances. The photographs that illustrate *Dansa Brasileira*—twenty-four studio portraits of Volúcia in glamorous costumes performing stylized versions of the dances she learned in the field—make clear that the purpose of Volúcia’s research was not to study the dances she researched, nor was it intended to preserve them for posterity (often the rationale for research on “folkloric” practices in the first half of the twentieth century). Instead, her purpose was to *use* the choreography of Brazil’s “folk” as a “contribution for the creation of a classical Brazilian dance” (Volúcia 1939, 42).¹⁷ Using the verb “*aproveitar*,” she refers to the process of selecting choreographic elements that were “useful” while discarding others in the appropriative creative process she understood as “stylization.”

When writing about the dances of possession she observed in *terreiros* of Afro-Brazilian religions,¹⁸ Volúcia rectified the common misconception that these religious dances were merely “convulsions,” and identified the specific “steps, gestures, expressions and attitudes” which would lend themselves “conveniently for a perfect stylization” (Volúcia 1939, 42). Volúcia’s research, albeit well-intentioned in that she aimed at destigmatizing and valorizing Afro-Brazilian culture (Volúcia 1983, 131),¹⁹ had the clear goal of collecting choreographic elements that she would then “stylize” in the process of creating her *bailado brasileiro*—literally lending style to “folk” choreographies. While stylization distanced these dances of possession from their religious context, Volúcia claimed that her dances, on several occasions, actually induced trance: “the dancers were really possessed by the spirits and fell into trance, and the same happened with part of the audience, who would stand up and rush to the lobby of the theater until the trance wore off, which lent the scene an authentic spectacle of great beauty” (Volúcia 1983, 130). Despite taking pride in her artistic labor in stylizing the dances of Brazil, Volúcia repeatedly insisted on their authenticity.

Although Volúcia seems to have spent a significant amount of time in *terreiros* observing ceremonies of Afro-Brazilian religions, her experiences observing indigenous dances were much more limited. She admitted that she had little knowledge of indigenous dances and had acquired this knowledge as a child (Volúcia 1939, 51). In her autobiography, she recounts how she came in contact with Brazilian *índios*:

With a league of indians recently arrived from the margins of the Araguaia [river] brought by catechism teacher Daltro, a close friend of my parents, who housed them on our farm in Tinguá, I also had the opportunity to feel the beauty of the indigenous songs and of their ceremonies: festive, funeral, of war and also fetishistic[.] It was with them that I learned and was able to stylize all the beauty of their dances, completely different from the black rhythms, but possessing, as well, that nostalgia, that mysticism, those impressions that so inebriated me. (Volúcia 1983, 133)

This displaced “league of indians,” housed temporarily at Volúcia’s family farm at the request of a family friend who was a catechist, most likely did not perform full funeral or war ceremonies, and are even less likely to have performed “fetishistic” ceremonies in the presence of a catechist. It is unlikely that Volúcia witnessed more than contrived fragments of indigenous dances at her family’s farm; however, these fragments were enough to cause lasting “impressions” that would later be used in her process of stylization.

Despite having done practically no research on indigenous dances, Volúcia spoke with authority about them:

These people who dance to commemorate all social events of their tribes; who owe a contemplative indolence to their adoration of nature; who sing imitating the voice of the birds and the beasts, of the waters and the wind; who praise in their songs the beauty of the environment that surrounds them; these people who have war dances and liturgical dances, festive [dances], [dances] of love and hate, of immolation and sacrifice, necessarily possess in their depths a vast choreographic array, [and] have to reflect, without a doubt, the marvelous spectacles of Brazil’s nature in their dances. (1983, 133)

Volúcia’s “indians” did not purposefully create dance and song, but instead, merely reflected and imitated the sounds and movements that exist in nature—a nature they worshipped in “contemplative indolence.” Their dances were innate rather than a conscious, creative process—something they already “possess[ed] in their depths” (133). In stating that they “dance to commemorate all social events of their tribes,” Volúcia echoes the theories about “primitive” dances disseminated through the writings of German musicologist Curt Sachs. In his 1937 book, *A World History of the Dance*, Sachs affirmed that “on no occasion in the life of primitive peoples could the dance be dispensed with. Birth, circumcision, and the consecration of maidens, marriage and death, planting and harvest, the celebration of chieftains, hunting, war, and feasts . . . —for all of these the dance is needed” (1937, 4–5). Like Sach’s fantasies about the dances of all peoples he considered primitive, Volúcia’s ideas about indigenous dances were no more than “impressions that so inebriated” her, combined with preconceived primitivist notions about indigenous dance and culture.

The highly balletic movement vocabulary she used in her “indian” dances, such as grand jeté leaps and jumps with both legs in plié, allegedly derived from “jumps, attitudes and spins” she learned from the *índios* she met at the family farm (Volúcia 1939, 51). For Volúcia, indigenous dances were characterized by straight lines and “sober” movement—her embodiment of the stereotype of the “noble savage.” She believed that these straight lines and sobriety of movement were able to soften the “simiesque expressions, exaggerated hip-shaking, and violent foot-stomping” of African dances (51). Although Volúcia’s goal was to visibilize and valorize Brazil’s folk dances, and even though she presented herself as a racially mixed, working-class woman who belonged to these communities of Brazilian others, her writings often reflect the racist thinking prevalent at the time, in which *índios* laze about in nature and blacks are “docile, malleable” (1939, 28) and dance with “simiesque expressions.”

Volúcia's *bailado brasileiro* embodied the mestiçagem celebrated by Brazilian nationalism and its thinly veiled whitening ideals; through a European dance aesthetic, Brazilian ballet "improved" and "elevated" the dances of Brazil's "primitives." This process of appropriation was smoothed over by a rhetoric of national unity and harmonious miscegenation that Volúcia explained as the "loving intertwining of three dissimilar races" (Volúcia 1939, 23). Volúcia paradoxically claimed authenticity through her alleged "atavistic" knowledge of Brazilian dances while simultaneously claiming authorship by foregrounding her labor in transforming these dances in the same way a jeweler lapidates a rock into a gem—gems that she now claimed as her own intellectual property.

Stylizing the Folk: Volúcia's Mestiçagem as High Art

Volúcia's self-fashioning as the national mestiça was so successful that critics unanimously read her body on stage as the authentic representation of a new Brazilian corporeality; Volúcia's performances were praised as "spontaneous," "naïve," and she was seen as possessing "natural grace" (Pereira 2003, 181). However, critics did recognize the craft involved in Volúcia's approach to choreographing mestiçagem and praised her labor in translating, transposing, and stylizing Brazil's "folk dances" into high art.

When Volúcia was invited to perform as a guest soloist with the resident ballet company of the Municipal Theater of Rio de Janeiro in 1943, she was cast in roles that highlighted her mestiça persona. In this season, Volúcia performed in two ballets: *Leilão* (Portuguese for "auction," in this case "slave auction") and *Uirapuru* (a bird found in the Brazilian Amazon), both choreographed by resident choreographer Vaslav Veltchek.²⁰ In *Leilão*, Volúcia danced two roles: *a escrava* (the female slave) and *o moleque* (the black boy)²¹; in *Uirapuru*, Volúcia danced the role of *a índia caçadora* (the indigenous huntress) ("Temporada Oficial" 1943).

The libretto for *Leilão* recounts the hegemonic narrative of abolition as a benevolent gesture of the Brazilian monarchy, one that erases the labor and the struggle of many Brazilian abolitionists. The first act depicts a slave merchant's house where slaves are seen playing, fighting, and dancing; a farmer enters and buys a female slave, leaving her male companion distraught. In the second act, Brazil's Princess Regent Isabel, after dancing a polka at a royal ball, dramatically tears the "slavery law" and signs the decree of abolition. The ballet ends in a celebratory note with a *carnaval* parade, although within this celebration there is room for a dash of social critique: the formerly enslaved male companion reappears looking for his lover, whom he will never find ("Temporada Oficial" 1943).

Volúcia accepted the invitation to perform in Veltchek's *Leilão* on the condition that she would be allowed to choreograph her own dances (Pereira 2004, 73). By 1943, Volúcia's mestiça persona had been firmly established; her fame preceded her as the creator of *bailado brasileiro*, and critics consistently praised her performances even in mixed reviews of the program as a whole. At a historical moment of heightened nationalism, her dances were lauded as a transformation of Brazil's "folk dances" into national high art. Writing about Volúcia's performance in *Leilão*, one critic stated: "A rare and strong instinct and a lively intelligence allowed her to create, for the international ballet, an intrinsically Brazilian performance. Her agile grace, her varied and impassionate knowledge of our choreographic folklore, render her an authentic master of the art of dance specifically ours" (A. M. 1943).²² Volúcia combined "instinct" with "intelligence" in her embodiment of mestiçagem, a mixture that resulted in an "intrinsically Brazilian" dance style suitable for the international stage. Significantly, Volúcia's performance was seen as authentic and based on "impassionate" knowledge of Brazilian folklore.

Authenticity, however, proved to be a double-edged sword. Volúcia should be authentic but not too authentic. Another critic writing about *Leilão* considered the ballet a failure in terms of nationalist representation:

In terms of the extremely difficult performance of the choreography, due to its rudimentary and naïve nature, [and] to the barbarian and fetishistic element of the African, we will highlight the performance of Eros Volúcia, full of talent and devilish fantasy, in these exotic creations, which are not really nationalist, because certainly we are not Africans (despite the desires of those ignorant in geography). (J. I. C. 1943)²³

The “intelligent” *mestiçagem* praised in the previous review was lacking in the opinion of this critic, and Volúcia’s “talent and devilish fantasy” were the only redeeming aspects of this representation of Brazilianness, deemed “barbarian” and “fetishistic.” In another review, this same critic concluded disparagingly that *Leilão* was “pure Africanism” and “not Brazilian at all” (J. I. C. 1943).²⁴ Brazilians, after all, were certainly not Africans!

Critic Mario Nunes, who had been influential in the creation of the *escola de bailados* in 1927, agreed that the choreography of *Leilão* fell short of transforming “raw” Africanity into high art, despite “the well intentioned efforts of Eros Volúcia.” Nunes believed that Afro-Brazilian *art* could only be attained through “the transposition onto the spiritual plane of the impulses of a purely sexual sensuality, such as that which overflows from the tunes and dances of African origin” (Nunes 1943).²⁵ For this critic, Volúcia’s choreographic *mestiçagem* had not gone far enough in taming the “purely sexual sensuality” that allegedly overflowed from African dances.

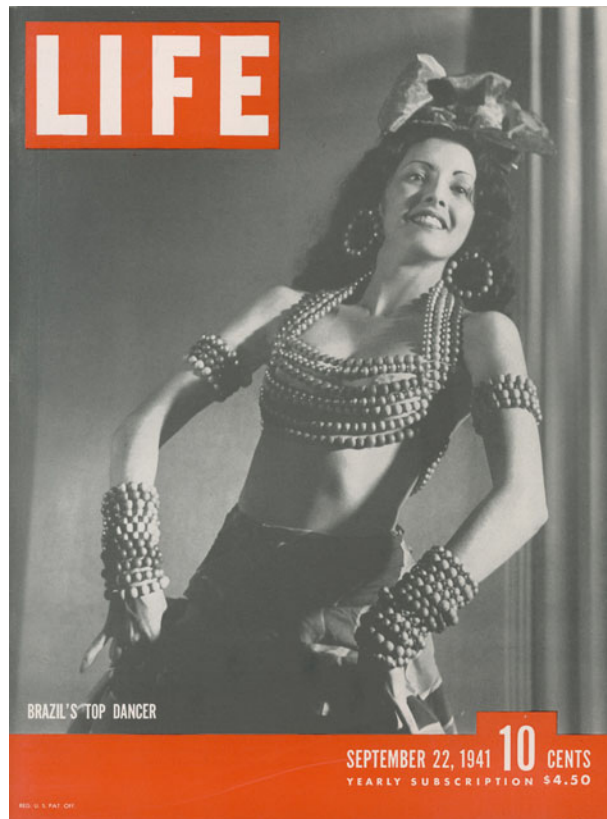
Dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster analyzes the strategies of desexualization employed by Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn in the process of creating a chaste and thus legitimate form of art dancing in the early twentieth-century United States. These chaste dances, as Foster notes, were often supported by a racist narrative that distanced them from the purportedly “lascivious” dances of Africans and “Negroes” (2001, 151–169). In order to establish her *bailado brasileiro* as high art, Volúcia faced the difficult task of distancing herself from a racialized sexualization while at the same time performing an alluring and desirable *mestiça*.

As the indigenous huntress in the ballet *Uirapuru*, also choreographed by Veltchek, Volúcia was perhaps more successful in attaining the “spiritual sensuality” desired by Nunes. Critic Ruben Navarra recognizes a “lyrical” sensuality in Volúcia’s performance: “In her ‘role’ of an *índia* in love, her movements are convincing because of their lyrical sensuality and in them we feel not only the dancer, but the woman, the *fêmea*” (Navarra 1943). Dancing as the *índia*, Volúcia conveyed a “lyrical” rather than sexual sensuality; this critic could “feel” Volúcia as not only a dancer, but a *fêmea*. By using the word “*fêmea*,” a word typically used to refer to the sex of animals, Navarra both sexualizes and dehumanizes the indigenous woman that Volúcia represents. While Volúcia may have achieved a certain “lyricism” in her performance, she maintained enough sexual allure for this critic to be able to “feel” her animalistic femininity.

In the same review, Navarra praised her acting skills but noted her deficiencies in ballet technique: “Her dancing itself, despite a few fortunate details—like the way she jumps with both feet in ‘plié’ in a very indigenous way, and falls with the feet crossed—lacks however a certain academic sophistication” (Navarra 1943).²⁶ Despite, or perhaps because of her perceived lack of sophistication, critics understood Volúcia’s work as authentic and assumed that anything that deviated from an “academic” ballet vocabulary must necessarily be drawn from Volúcia’s research of Brazilian folklore (such as the jumps with both legs in plié, which this critic interprets as “very indigenous”). In fact, this critic noted a lack of technical rigor throughout the ballet, in which the dancers were allowed to be “‘at ease,’ as if those *índios* were in nature and not on stage”; the choreography, he continued, was so simple that it could, with a little bit of technique and goodwill, even be danced by real *índios* (Navarra 1943). Critics expected choreography on nationalist themes to convey a sense of authenticity without being “too authentic”; prominent use of ballet technique was necessary for national themes to be sufficiently whitened and “improved” to be recognized as high art.

The critical reception to the Teatro Municipal's 1943 ballet season reflects the same stereotypes held by Volúcia herself—of primitive Africans and lazy nature-loving “indians,” as well as the belief that ballet, a European dance form, was the necessary ingredient to render their dances “national.” Critics read Volúcia precisely as she had constructed herself: a mestiça white enough to be accepted on high art stages, simultaneously instinctual and intelligent in her stylization of Brazil's dances, and, most importantly, an embodiment of Brazil's harmonious and democratic blend of the “three races.”

Photo 1. “Brazil's top dancer,” Eros Volúcia on the cover of *Life* magazine, September 22, 1941. Photo by Hart Preston/The LIFE Premium Collection via Getty Images.



From White Mestiça to Negro Dancer: Volúcia in Hollywood

In 1941, two years before Volúcia danced the lead roles in *Leilão* and *Uirapuru* at the Teatro Municipal, *Life* magazine photographer Hart Preston invited Volúcia for a photo shoot on the stage of the Cassino Atlântico (Pereira 2004, 50); Preston's photographs put her on the cover of *Life*, which led to an invitation to take part in a Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) film. On the cover photo, Volúcia is shown from the hips up: she wears a full skirt, which she pulls up delicately with both hands, a gesture that draws attention to the bead bracelets that decorate her wrists and upper arms and cover her bustier. Like Miranda and several performers before her, Volúcia embodies the *baiana*, the sexualized working-class brown woman from Bahia that became a stock character in Rio de Janeiro's *teatro de revista*, casino stages, and *carnaval* parades (Shaw 2011). Instead of the *baiana*'s signature fruit basket, however, Volúcia adds her unique touch to the costume by wearing a large bow atop her cascading brown curls.²⁷

Inside the magazine, the two-page photo story titled “Brazil’s Eros Volusia Does Negro Witch Dance” echoes Volúcia’s self-presentation as a mestiça, but in fact emphasizes the “Negro” aspect of her dancing. The brief text of this piece is worth quoting in its entirety:

The blood of Brazil’s three dominant racial strains—Portuguese, Indian and Negro—flows in the veins of supple young Eros Volusia. But the dances that have made her Rio de Janeiro’s outstanding dance artist come straight from African jungles. As a child, Eros Volusia lived in exotic Baía, where the inhabitants, predominantly Negro, have retained the sinuous steps, the pulsing rhythms and the primitive witchcraft practiced by their Congo ancestors. Nightly from her back yard young Eros could hear the hypnotic tom-tom and see the frenzied invocation of jungle gods. It was natural, therefore, that Eros, though schooled in classical ballet, should in maturity revert to the dances of her people. On this page she dances the *macumba* with which Brazilian slaves once used to invoke fierce African deities to avenge their wrongs. Originally beaten out by dusky feet on giant drums, it begins with a slow hypnotic sway, quickens into violent tremors and undulations as the spirit invades the body and ends with a vaulting leap as the spirit departs. Sometimes a performer in Rio’s casinos, Eros is more interested in her work with the Brazilian Ministry of Education, which commissioned her to create a native ballet. Heretofore unreceptive to U.S. offers, she now contemplates a good-neighbor tour north. (“Brazil’s Eros Volúcia Does Negro Witch Dance” 1941, 57)

What is striking about this text is how quickly the author moves from Volúcia as mestiça to Volúcia as the embodiment of the “primitive witchcraft” of dances that “come straight from the African jungles,” allegedly practiced by her Congo ancestors. In this short article, the author conflates Africa and Brazil and undoes Brazil’s carefully crafted whitening-as-mestiçagem, in which the European element “civilizes” and “improves” Brazil’s racialized others. In fact, the dance critic that deemed *Leilão* far too African, and hence not Brazilian enough, may have been referring directly to this article in the closing statement of the review, in which he protested that “certainly we are not Africans (despite the desires of those ignorant in geography)” (J. I. C. 1943).

On the first page, the story features *Macumba*, one of Volúcia’s signature pieces. Nine photos of Volúcia in action give the reader a glimpse into a dance of possession—the “Negro witch dance” promised in the headline. Volúcia’s costume, reminiscent of the orientalist garb of early twentieth-century US modernist choreographers, is far more revealing than the one worn for the cover photo. Her bejeweled bustier is connected to her neck and otherwise bare belly by delicate ornamented chains; snake-shaped arm bands wrap around just above her biceps, and metal bangles adorn her wrists. Over a bikini bottom she wears a belt-like garment with zigzag print that sits low on her waist; on her left side, a slightly longer piece of fabric, attached asymmetrically and adorned by pendants and tassels, suggests a short skirt while leaving her legs fully exposed. Her bare feet, almost always in demi-pointe, are adorned by similarly ornate anklets. Although the photo shoot also included photos of Volúcia and her students in *baiana* costumes, most of these photos never made it to print; while Volúcia’s stylized *baiana* costume, the same from the cover photo, did reveal her midriff and even a peak at her breasts under her bustier of beads, the costumes of her students were perhaps “too authentic” in their modesty.²⁸

The photos of Volúcia dancing *Macumba* in her diminutive costume are published in chronological sequence, giving the reader a sense of the progression of the dance. Volúcia begins with her arms raised, gaze down, legs together, standing high on the balls of her feet. In the next photo, her knees bent, she teases the viewer by shifting her weight to the right while rolling her left shoulder forward. The next shot catches Volúcia in midturn, and in the next she tosses her head back, lowering her arms delicately by her sides. One more turn is followed by another ecstatic moment, head thrown back. In a move that seems to belong to another dance, the next photo shows Volúcia looking

straight at the camera, smiling coquettishly, in mid grand battement à la seconde, her arms to her sides, with soft elbows and broken wrists. Next, Volúcia seems to quote Isadora Duncan's signature upward reaching gesture—arms forward, palms facing up—but, with a few more degrees of bend in her back, this gesture goes from supplicant to ecstatic. Volúcia's choreographed possession is unequivocally sexualized. The last photo matches the reporter's description of the dance's finale, when Volúcia "ends with a vaulting leap as the spirit departs."

The same "African" sexual excess that was shunned by Brazilian critics was prominently featured in this article for a US readership. This reporter fails to recognize Volúcia's labor of choreographic mestiçagem, and instead frames her dancing as a retention of the "jungle dances" of her alleged Congo ancestors. The barefoot modernity of Volúcia's dances and the "academic" European ballet aesthetic through which she stylized her dances were lost in her introduction to US audiences. The one-drop rule meant that Volúcia would be read as a Negro in the United States, albeit an exotic Latin American one; without the "civilizing" power of her whiteness, Volúcia was no better than the "barbarous" and "indolent" others whose fetishistic and inebriating dances had inspired her balletic creations. Through a binary, North American racial gaze, Volúcia was no longer a socially white choreographer respected in Brazil's intellectual and artistic circles; instead, she was conflated with her stage persona and assigned a full-fledged primitivist Afro-Latin alterity.

Carmen Miranda, under contract with Twentieth Century Fox, had set the other studios on a quest to find their own Brazilian bombshells. In the same year Volúcia appeared on the cover of *Life*, she signed a contract with MGM and traveled to the United States with her mother to take part in the film *Rio Rita*, starring the comedic duo Abbot and Costello.²⁹ Despite the initial excitement about the invitation to choreograph for a Hollywood film, upon her return Volúcia reported a disappointing experience in the United States, marked by misunderstandings and diverging expectations (Pereira 2004, 67).³⁰

Volúcia worked with a group of "girls" assigned to her, teaching them several of her Brazilian dances over a period of six weeks; when only two of the dances were chosen for the final recording, she remembers "almost fainting" from the disappointing news. After teaching all the "secrets of her art" to these dancers, she was appalled that they would only want to film two dances (Pereira 2004, 62). She resented teaching her Brazilian dance technique for a month and a half—in effect sharing her intellectual property—and seeing only a small fraction of that work on screen. Volúcia was very proud of her *bailado brasileiro*, which she declared to be Brazil's "classical dance" (Pereira 2004, 53). However, while artistic authorship was of great concern to Volúcia, her dances were largely seen as authorless "folklore" and unmediated Afro-Latin exotica by the film's dance director, David Robel. Her dance number in *Rio Rita*, in fact, is introduced as "an authentic native dance" from Brazil.³¹

After Volúcia's insistence on dancing only to Brazilian music, a compromise with the director of *Rio Rita* was reached, and she performed to a musical potpourri arranged by a US conductor, Nilo Barnett, who rendered the Brazilian songs barely recognizable. The potpourri begins with a few notes from Ary Barroso's *Na baixa do sapateiro*, also known as *Bahia*, and moves quickly to Zequinha de Abreu's hit *Tico-tico no fubá*, the song that inspired Volúcia's famous *samba na ponta* (samba on pointe), which she had performed on the stages of Rio's casinos.³² The second dance of the potpourri is a version of *Macumba*, the same dance featured in *Life*. Instead of the primitivist bare feet, bare legs, and midriff decorated with beads and tassels, in the film Volúcia wears heels and copious "pan-latin" ruffles on both her shoulders and skirt—a skirt that features a low-cut waist that reveals the upper sides of her buttocks, teetering just on the edge of propriety. *Macumba* danced in heels and ruffles adds a coquettish lightness to the dance's "raw" primitivism, rendering it incongruous—neither a "serious" dance of possession nor a fun Latin divertissement.

Volúcia does not seem at ease in front of the camera—she often seems unsure about where to direct her gaze, and her facial expressions range from an awkward smile to a dramatic or concentrated

frown. During a couple of moments when Volúcia joins the group of dancers, Volúcia appears to give verbal directions to her dancers during the performance—her zeal for the correct execution of her *bailado brasileiro* clashing with the demands of Hollywood for a straightforward festive, exotic, and sexualized Latinness.

Her participation in the film received positive reviews in the United States, many noting the festive, sensuous, and even “volcanic” qualities of her dancing (“Rio Rita at Rialto” 1942; “It’s Easy but for Slang” 1942). Critics found Volúcia picturesque and glamorous, and advance publicity credited her with the creation of samba “and other native dances” (“Rio Rita Has Abbott-Costello Team” 1942). Journalists racialized Volúcia as being “the color of a chocolate malted” (Smith 1941) and “young and beautiful as an Indian princess” (Scheuer 1941).

A short note about Volúcia, published in the *San Jose News* shortly before the release of *Rio Rita*, exemplifies Volúcia’s reduction to “generic Latina” and sexual object in the United States. The writer ridicules Volúcia’s accent by phonetically transcribing her accented speech—much the same way that Miranda’s English was often mocked in print (Roberts 1993)—and comments on the revealing costume she had worn for the photo shoot during which the interview took place (probably the same costume featured in *Life* a year earlier). Trying for humor, he notes that Volúcia “kicked off her sandals, thereby removing half of her clothes” (Harrison 1942). However, this writer reports on several instances when Volúcia pushed back against her own objectification and “Latinization.” When someone tried to play a Cuban rumba during the photo shoot, she protested: “Ess not the moosica of my contree. Since I have come here I try to explain Brazilian dance ees not like Cuba, not like Argentina, not like anytheeng” (Harrison 1942). Unlike Miranda, Volúcia was not willing to embrace the role of generic Latina.³³ He also notes, somewhat surprised, that Volúcia “wore an attitude of academic detachment, like a lecturing ethnologist. As a matter of fact she is one, having been commissioned by the Brazilian government to evolve a truly national ballet.” Several published excerpts of interviews with Volúcia reflect her insistence on educating journalists about her position in Brazil as a state-sponsored pedagogue and artist. In her efforts to reject the label of generic Latina, Volúcia also denied the very African heritage she had claimed in Brazil: the US press reports that Volúcia had Portuguese and Indian blood, surely reproducing information provided by Volúcia herself, who attempts to counter her earlier classification as a “Negro” dancer by *Life* magazine.

Brazilian reviews of *Rio Rita* differed dramatically from US reviews in that they acknowledged Volúcia as an established artist: one critic expressed patriotic pride in her participation, however brief, in a Hollywood film, and referred to her as the “quintessential tropical morena, daughter of two great poets, [who] in fact dances with the temperament of a poetess, whose soul is located in her [dancing] feet” (quoted in Pereira 2004, 132). In Brazil, despite *representing* the “tropical morena,” Volúcia was first and foremost an established dance artist and daughter of renowned poets, who herself was able to create poetry through her dancing. In Hollywood, Volúcia loses her social status, white privilege, and position as author and artist; her painstaking stylization is rendered invisible, and her dances are treated as authorless folklore and festive Latin entertainment.

Contrary to her reception in the United States as just another exotic Latin performer, theatergoers in Brazil were able to distinguish the performer from her role, despite the critical praise Volúcia received for the authenticity of her dances. Her whiteness was clearly visible underneath her staged brownness, and her labor in “lapidating” the dances of Brazil’s folk was recognized. Always on demi-pointe, Volúcia “elevated” Brazil’s dances through the white universality of ballet. To critical acclaim and with government support, Volúcia successfully embodied Brazil’s desired whiteness and carefully crafted myth of racial democracy. While in Brazil Volúcia’s *bailado brasileiro* embodied the country’s allegedly democratic and harmonious racial mixture, in the United States Volúcia was equated with the very natives whose dances she sought to improve and render suitable for “civilized” audiences.

Notes

1. This article is an expanded version of a paper I presented at the symposium “Africans and Afro-Brazilians: the African Diaspora in Brazil” at Johns Hopkins University in 2016. I want to thank my colleagues José Luis Reynoso, Angeline Shaka, and Lorenzo Perillo for their invaluable comments on previous iterations of this article. I am grateful for the excellent research assistance of Allison Beaty, and for support from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro’s Office of Research and Engagement.

2. Sucena devotes two and a half pages (1989, 353–355) and Vicenzia a long paragraph (1997, 17–18) to Volúcia.

3. Meyer writes: “[T]he solo dances of Eros Volúcia . . . affirmed a combination of nationalism and modernism imbued with reflections on *her own* Afro-Brazilian culture” (italics added). Throughout the article it is implied that Volúcia was in fact Afro-Brazilian.

4. The dance program was called *curso de coreografia* (choreography course), even though its focus was not to teach students to be choreographers. The word “choreography” here seems to be used to distinguish this program from the *escola de bailados* of the municipal theater (where students learned classical ballet) while still avoiding the more common word for dance, “*dança*.” At the same time as the word “choreography” is returning to current usage in the context of the establishment of modern dance in the United States, it is employed here by Volúcia to simultaneously lend legitimacy to *bailado brasileiro* and distinguish it from ballet. For a genealogy and analysis of the word “choreography,” see Susan Leigh Foster (2010).

5. The valorization of *mestiçagem* disseminated by Freyre’s 1933 book, *The Masters and the Slaves*, begins much earlier, dating back to a 1843 essay by Karl Friedrich Philipp von Martius titled “How the History of Brazil Should be Written.” Both authors shared the perspective that the “indian” and the “Negro” offered valuable *contributions* to Brazilian identity—a model that, despite the authors’ best intentions, reaffirmed Euro-Brazilian superiority through paternalistic valorization.

6. Volúcia’s work shared an interest in Brazilian themes with modernists such as Heitor Villa-Lobos, Tarsila do Amaral, Anita Malfatti, and Mario de Andrade. While I concur with Sandra Meyer that Volúcia’s work should be considered modernist, I believe that her choreography is not exactly “anthropophagic” in the way that Brazilian modernists employed the term (Meyer 2012, 142).

7. “Samba,” first published in *Sublimação* in 1938 and reprinted in *Poesias Completas* in 1978. Author’s translation.

8. Machado likely chose the word “*chão*” (ground) rather than “*terra*” (land) because “*chão*” is a masculine noun while “*terra*” is a feminine noun. In establishing a relationship of sexual desire between Brazil and the female *mestiça*, Machado gendered Brazil masculine so as to keep this erotic relationship heteronormative.

9. Sandra Meyer (2012) compares *Cascavelando* to Loie Fuller’s *Serpentine Dance*, a comparison that does not take into account that Volúcia’s snake is a rattlesnake, which signals that the dance emphasized fast movements of the hip (analogous to the rattle and prominent in samba dancing), a part of the body not featured in Fuller’s *Serpentine Dance*. See Soraia Maria Silva (2007, 211–227) for further analysis of the connections between the dance *Cascavelando* and Machado’s poem.

10. No dancers other than Volúcia are listed in the 1938 program. (“Cinquentenário da Abolição” 1938). Roberto Pereira has noted that, despite this lack of information, the description of the dances in the program points to the participation of other dancers, most likely Volúcia’s students. Although I have not been able to obtain photographic evidence of her students at this time, photographs of her ensemble taken by photographer Hart Preston in 1941 attest to an absence of Afro-Brazilian dancers, which was likely true of the 1938 ensemble as well.

11. Fernando Marques Camargo Ferraz, in his 2012 master’s thesis, also analyzes Volúcia as white (Ferraz 2012).

12. Roberto Pereira (2003, 39, 186 n2) cites an interview with a former student of Volúcia who remembered that classes consisted of a ballet barre followed by the practice of folkloric dances in the center. In her autobiography, Volúcia (1983, 50) complains that, at times, she had to teach in spaces that lacked basic resources such as barres, mirrors, and even bathrooms, thus confirming the fact that *bailado brasileiro* included exercises at the barre. Volúcia never published a teaching method, and her *bailado brasileiro* is no longer taught in Brazil, so details about her technique must be inferred from archival evidence.

13. In her autobiography, Volúcia writes: “Perhaps [*Macumba*] was my most successful dance, since, to this day, that movement of circling the head of difficult execution has been often copied... [B]eginning the turns slowly, they would increase in speed, reaching a really impressive speed, to the point that my face would disappear around my thick head of hair, which would make the audience go wild and give a standing ovation to that difficult acrobatic move, veritable head fouettés...” (1983, 42).

14. Pereira reads Volúcia as a white woman, one who felt “spiritually” *mestiça*.

15. While her brownness was reinforced through her birth name, her sensuality was touted through her stage name, Eros, the Greek god of sensual love and desire.

16. Volúcia’s focus on poor “others” as legitimizing research subjects is echoed in the choreographic research methodology taught at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP) in Brazil, the “dancer-researcher-performer” method, known by its acronym BPI. See Höfling (2016) for an analysis of the BPI method as a way of constructing a white middle-class self through the dances of Brazil’s “others.”

17. Volúcia uses the verb “*aproveitar*” (to enjoy), which here could be translated as “salvage” or “make use of” (1939, 42).

18. Volúcia reports observing ceremonies of macumba, candomblé, and *umbanda*.

19. Volúcia clarifies that she had the permission to perform dances of possession from the leaders of the *terreiros*, “who knew of my interest in disseminating and elevating the beauty of these rites” (1983, 131).

20. Vaslav (also spelled Vaclav) Veltchek was a Czech dancer and choreographer who toured with Anna Pavlova’s ballet company and studied with Mary Wigman in Dresden before settling in Paris, where he choreographed both for the Ópera-Comique and the Théâtre du Châtelet. Veltchek was invited to go to Rio de Janeiro in 1939, with four other European choreographers, to choreograph for the first performance season of the resident company of the city’s municipal theater. He subsequently went to São Paulo to found the ballet school of its municipal theater and returned to Rio in 1943 to choreograph once again for the resident company of Rio’s municipal theater (Pereira 2003, 170 n132).

21. The word “*moleque*” also means “street urchin,” but it has a history as a racialized term. See Acerbi (2017). In her role as *moleque*, Volúcia performed in black face, following the convention used in the first act, during which all dancers playing the role of slaves performed in black face. In the role of *escrava*, however, Volúcia’s staged brownness was enough, and she did not perform in black face and body makeup. See Pereira (2003, 226).

22. A critic who signed his name as A. M., *Jornal do Comércio*, May 15, 1943.

23. A critic who signed his name as J. I. C., *Correio da Manhã*, May 16, 1943.

24. J. I. C., *Correio da Manhã*, May 14, 1943, 27.

25. Mario Nunes, *Jornal do Brasil*, May 16, 1943, 3.

26. Ruben Navarra, *A Manhã*, May 23, 1943, 5.

27. A similar bow is used in *Rio Rita*. In an excerpt from an interview published in her biography, Volúcia reports that the film’s producers originally wanted her to wear horns instead of a bow (Pereira 2004, 62).

28. On the second page of this article we see two photos, flanked by ads on both sides, showing both Volúcia and her students fully dressed in more “traditional” costumes. The captions identify the first as *lundú*, “a dance from which sprang both the maxixe and the popular samba,” and the second, where Volúcia appears in the same costume as the cover photo, seated between two of her dancers, as a “slave festival dance” (“Brazil’s Eros Volúcia Does Negro Witch Dance” 1941, 58).

29. A short article in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, published shortly before the 1942 release of the film, proclaimed that this version of *Rio Rita* “bears little resemblance to the original, but it’s still a tip-top musical farce with a heavy accent on slapstick comedy” (Radcliffe 1942). The first film version of *Rio Rita* (based on the 1927 stage musical) was released in 1929 by RKO Pictures.

30. Volúcia returned to Brazil shortly after shooting the dance numbers for *Rio Rita*, well before the end of her two-year contract with MGM, sparking rumors of her failure abroad.

31. In the film, the bandleader introduces Volúcia: “From Brazil we present an authentic native dance—introducing Miss Eros Volusia!” (Simon 1942).

32. In addition to embodying the *baiana* character, Volúcia and Miranda shared elements of each other’s repertory: Volúcia choreographed to *Tico-tico no fubá*, a song Miranda performed in the 1947 film *Capacabana*; Miranda, according to Volúcia, developed her signature arm gestures by emulating Volúcia’s arm movements after watching one of her casino performances (Pereira 2004, 55).

33. Shari Roberts (1993) and Kathryn Bishop-Sanchez (2016), among others, have noted that Miranda was sharply aware of her own exoticization as the over-the-top “lady in the tutti-frutti hat,” and consciously played the part of the sexy and verbally incompetent generic Latina.

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