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**Garotas e samba: gender and consumerism in the Vargas Era**

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**Garotas e Samba: género y consumo en la Era Vargas**

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**Roberta Gregoli**

Doutora pela Universidade de Oxford (2013), com bolsa Clarendon (Oxford University Press), Santander e The Queen's College. Mestra (2009) pelo programa Erasmus Mundus Crossways in Humanities, nas universidades de Sheffield (Inglaterra), Perpignan Via Domitia (França) e Nova de Lisboa (Portugal). É bacharel e licenciada em Letras pela Universidade Estadual de Campinas-Unicamp (2006). [roberta.gregoli@gmail.com](mailto:roberta.gregoli@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

This article investigates the representation of gender and sexuality in the *chanchadas* through an in-depth cinematic analysis of *Garotas e Samba* (Carlos Manga, 1957). The film is here regarded as a means of elaborating new paradigms for both genders, with love and marriage as symbolic battleground for the power struggles between men and women. The analysis demonstrates that the rapid rise of a consumer culture has had repercussions on the construction of masculinity – with infantilised men as the result of the increasing demands on masculine models – and femininity, whose representation indicates an attempt to cope with the women’s emancipatory movement at the time as well as its debunkment of romantic love in favour of a money-driven, consumerist approach to love.

**Keywords:** Gender; Sexuality; Consumerism; Brazilian Cinema; *Chanchadas*.

## RESUMO

Este artigo investiga a representação de gênero e sexualidade nas *chanchadas* através da análise cinematográfica do filme *Garotas e Samba* (Carlos Manga, 1957). O filme é aqui tratado como um meio de elaboração de paradigmas para ambos os gêneros, com conceitos como amor e casamento vistos como campo de disputa simbólica de poder entre homens e mulheres. A análise demonstra que a expansão rápida da cultura de consumo teve repercussões na construção da masculinidade – com homens infantilizados como resultado de demandas crescentes nos modelos de masculinidade – e feminilidade, cuja representação indica uma tentativa de lidar com o movimento emancipatório das mulheres à época. A análise também constata a desmistificação do amor romântico em favor de uma abordagem pragmática e consumista do amor.

**Palavras-chave:** Gênero; Sexualidade; Consumo; Cinema brasileiro; *Chanchadas*.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo investiga la representación de género y la sexualidad en las *chanchadas* brasileñas por medio del análisis de la película *Garotas e Samba* (Carlos Manga, 1957). La película es tratada aquí como medio de paradigmas de desarrollo para ambos sexos, con conceptos como el amor y el matrimonio vistos como campo de disputa simbólica de poder entre hombres y mujeres. El análisis muestra que la rápida expansión de la cultura del consumo repercutió en la construcción de la masculinidad – con los hombres infantilizados como resultado de la creciente demanda en modelos de masculinidad – y de la feminidad, cuya representación indica un intento de tratar con el movimiento emancipador de las mujeres en el momento. El análisis también toma nota de la desmitificación del amor romántico a favor de un enfoque pragmático y consumista al amor.

**Palabras clave:** Género; Sexualidad; Consumo; Cine brasileño; *Chanchadas*.

## Introduction

Cinema as a modern phenomenon plays a pivotal role in the dynamics of consumerism. As Maggie Günsberg has stated, “[t]here is a longstanding link between the screen and the shop window, enhanced by press-books and posters, with the construction of the spectating self mirroring the appearance and lifestyle of the stars in materialist terms of buying clothes, cosmetics, cars and furnishings” (Günsberg, 2005, p. 61). This broader connection between cinema and consumerism is underscored by Brazilian films of the 1950s, the so-called *chanchadas*, with a rather self-conscious promotion of consumer culture, reflecting the rapid industrialisation process set in motion during the Vargas Era. According to Dennison; Shaw, “[c]onspicuous and vulgar consumption [was] applauded on screen, in a satirical response to the aspirational living of the 1950s and the consumerism promoted in Hollywood movies of this era” (Dennison; Shaw, 2004, p. 84). More than a “satirical response,” Brazilian popular films of the time found in humour a means of coping with these rapid changes and elaborating new paradigms for both genders, with love and marriage as symbolic battleground for the power struggles between men and women.

As in other parts of the globe, consumption beyond mere subsistence developed as “the beginnings of a consumer culture in the 1930s and 1940s and blossomed [in the 1950s] into the cult of consumerism” (Günsberg, 2005, p. 60). Indeed, a nascent consumer culture can be observed in the *chanchadas* in the form of an endless parade of cars, white goods, fur coats, hats, shoes and dresses. As Stephanie Dennison and Lisa Shaw have argued, “[t]he crisis of identity provoked by industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation continued to be reflected in the *chanchadas* of the 1950s via the adoption of a new persona by characters on the bottom rung of the social ladder, like their audiences” (Dennison; Shaw, 2004, p. 92). This crisis of identity is also a crisis in gender identity, and the films of the period offer a way of elaborating on the impacts of these changes in relation to gender roles.

In this article, the *chanchada* *Garotas e Samba* (Carlos Manga, 1957) was chosen to serve as case study to analyse different facets of gender dynamics in relation to an emerging consumerist culture in Brazil, as it is a paradigmatic film in relation to this change in culture and one which has been little studied (Shaw, 2001, p. 17).

## The *chanchada* and *Garotas e Samba*

The *chanchada* was a genre of popular comedies produced from the 1940s until the mid-1960s (Dennison; Shaw, 2004, p. 66 and 131), a time of intense economic expansion and mass migration from rural to urban centres, whose population rose from 30% to 70% (SHAW, 2001, p. 19). In the 1950s, the decade in which the most prominent *chanchadas* were made, Brazil was for the first time a country with the majority of its population living in urban areas. In the political arena, Getúlio Vargas was elected President by direct vote in 1951 for the second time after a fifteen-year dictatorship (1930-1945). Under Vargas’s previous regime, Brazil saw the birth of industrialisation, a process which continued under his democratic government. Marked by an intense process of modernisation accompanied by strikes and demonstrations, the political and social turmoil resulted in Vargas’s suicide in 1954.



Dercy Gonçalves as a poor migrant passing as rich in *Entre de Gaiato* (J. B. Tanko, 1959). The close up of her feet promotes a status-conferring product (shoes) while showing her discomfort in wearing it. Spectators could identify with her desire to have these products as well as her ineptitude in handling them.

Source: Garotas e Samba footage

The *chanchadas* reflect the “sweeping economic, social and cultural change” (Dennison; Shaw, 2004, p. 31) of the period under various guises. Mirroring the massive movement of people from rural to urban areas in the country, the protagonists, usually migrants themselves,<sup>1</sup> often seem confused by urban life:

Both newcomers to the city and uninitiated locals experience an identity crises when confronted by the rampant modernity of the big city. In *Esse milhão é meu*, for example, Oscarito’s character, a humble civil servant, is nearly knocked down by a bus. This physical joke would have struck a chord with faceless migrants in the audience. [...] As the hick Bonifácio anxiously points out on his arrival in Rio in *Treze cadeiras*: ‘Eu não conheço ninguém aqui’ (Dennison; Shaw, 2004, p. 91).

The concern with better living and working conditions (‘making it’ in the city) drives the narrative of various films: the saga of the protagonist of *Treze Cadeiras* (Franz Eichhorn, 1957) consists in finding one chair from a set of thirteen that contains a distant relative’s inheritance, and the protagonist of *Entre de Gaiato* (J. B. Tanko, 1959) passes as a rich woman to try to seduce a rich man, to name but two examples. As Lisa Shaw has argued, “this popular genre articulated and perhaps helped to remedy the Brazilian masses’ unstable sense of belonging to a society that was experiencing dramatic shifts at its very core” (Shaw, 2001, p. 17).

As implied by the title of *Garotas e Samba*, the focus of the film is on the female characters, the *garotas*. By focusing on three migrant women in search of better opportunities in the city, the film addresses the modern issues of its time with particular interest in their

impact on the lives of women. As most *chanchadas* were made by men, the focus on women reveals femininity and female sexuality as signs to cope with anxieties related to masculinity. As Maggie Günsberg argues in relation to Italian films of around the same time:

In this context of intensified commodification of social relations, the subversive possibilities inherent in the comic genre [...] rub against the status quo of patriarchal ideology, which continues to construct femininity as an arena for relations between men, with the commodification of female sexuality as the basis of these relations (Günsberg, 2005, p. 62).

Touching on two crucial issues during the historical moment the film was shot – namely migration (to the then capital Rio de Janeiro) and the resignification of gender roles –, the story of three female migrants seems to have caught the public's attention. Although official box office figures are not available for the period, *Garotas e Samba* was recorded by the press as having had a record-breaking audience, making more than seven million *cruzeiros* at its opening.<sup>2</sup>

The film tells the story of three migrant women arriving in Rio de Janeiro in search of better life opportunities. Zizi (Sônia Mamede), Didi (Adelaide Chiozzo) and Naná (Renata Fronzi) meet in a boarding house run by Dona Inocência (Zezé Macedo), where they share their stories. Zizi, who ran away from an arranged marriage to try to become a radio star, blackmails radio producer Charlô (Ivon Curi) while avoiding his jealous girlfriend Ninon Ervilha (Berta Loran). Didi is a country girl who, due to family pressure, comes to the city to work on the radio as a singer and accordion player. In the course of the film, Didi is tricked by Belmiro Cheiroso (Jece Valadão) and saved by the *mocinho* Sérgio Carlos (Francisco Carlos). The third protagonist is Naná, a gold digger of unknown origin. Naná becomes involved with millionaire Memé (Zé Trindade), who is married to the frightful Jocelina (Suzy Kirby) and the father of Sérgio Carlos. The film ends with the three couples formed during the film: Zizi and Charlô, Didi and Sérgio Carlos and Naná and Zizi's abandoned husband (played by actor Pituca), after he inherits a large family endowment.

*Garotas e samba* is loosely based on Jean Negulesco's *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), also about three women — mastermind Schatze Page (Lauren Bacall), intrepid Loco Dempsey (Betty Grable) and scatterbrained Pola Debevoise (Marilyn Monroe) — with the common mission of finding a wealthy husband. Led by Schatze, they rent a penthouse in New York City and make a living by selling the flat's furniture. After several frustrated attempts at getting engaged to oil barons and bankers, Loco and Pola end the film with far from affluent men: mountain ranger Eben (Rory Calhoun) and IRS-indebted Freddie Denmark (David Wayne), respectively. Schatze pursues their original plan further, but abandons multi-millionaire J.D. Hanley (William Powell) at the altar, as she too has fallen in love. The recipient of her affections is Tom Brookman (Cameron Mitchell), whom Schatze believes to be penniless throughout the film. The film ends with the three couples in a diner eating hamburgers, when Brookman finally reveals to his new wife that he is in fact a multi-millionaire. The three women faint and the men celebrate the victory of love over money.

There are several similarities between the two films, starting with the fact that they are both set against the backdrop of major urban centres and present a tribute to the big cities where they take place. *How to Marry a Millionaire's* opening sequence consists of long

shots of New York City underscored by Ken Darby's lyrics: "Glorious, glamorous wonderland, New York." While *Garotas e Samba* does not make explicit reference to Rio de Janeiro,<sup>3</sup> it nonetheless taps into the mystique of the city as the country's picturesque *Belacap*,<sup>4</sup> well illustrated in the scene where Naná goes to a country club (filmed at the glamorous Hotel Glória) with Memé.



Memé and Naná in Rio

Source: *Garotas e Samba* footage

As the footage shows, not only is Rio de Janeiro present as background scenario, but it is also referenced in Naná's swimsuit, which resembles Burle Marx's pattern of the Copacabana promenade. The connection between women and the city echoes the metaphors of women as the nation (see Donapetry, 2006) and suggests that both are sites of desire, open for exploration.

### **Masculinity in Crisis: *Malandragem* and Infantilisation**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a transition in the household paradigm, from self-sufficient rural families to urban "units of consumption" (Besse, 1996, p. 18). By the 1920s, the middle classes had "succumbed to the pressures of conspicuous consumption" (Besse, 1996, p. 19). As part of the redefinition of gender roles in the 1950s, such consumerist culture created increasing demands on masculinity.

It is interesting to note the contrasts in *Garotas e Samba* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*, as, for example, the stance of the male characters. In the North American film, they seem to be construed in rather Manichean terms with sympathetic morally righteous characters (J.D. Hanley, Tom Brookman and Eben) and unsympathetic morally devious characters (the Fred Clarke character, a millionaire who wants Loco to be his mistress, and the fake millionaire

who courts Pola). In the Brazilian film, on the other hand, traits of *malandragem* are incorporated into the male characters, and thus they do not rely on a straightforward distinction between good and bad – the humour of the plot relies heavily upon Memé’s attempts to deceive his wife Jocelina, in spite of the fact that he is not portrayed as an unsympathetic character. With the exception of Belmiro, who is portrayed as a straightforward villain, the other male characters in the Brazilian film also blur the distinction between virtue and licentiousness.

At its best, this stance blurs the positivist (and often exclusionary) distinction between right and wrong; at its worst, it naturalises oppressive practices at the expense of women, as violence against women is deemed acceptable through naturalisation (see the sequence below for an example). In relation to masculinity, *malandragem* plays an important part. Examples are Sérgio Carlos’s roguish attitudes as well as Memé’s portrayal as an infantilised man, signalled both by actor Zé Trindade’s stature and the name of his character.



Sérgio Carlos roguishly takes advantage of his privileged hiding spot  
Source: Garotas e Samba footage

The *malandro* is an inherently playful figure,<sup>5</sup> and his work-evading playfulness is directly linked with capitalism. As David Treece has argued, “[a]t the heart of both jive and *malandragem* is the ludic instinct, as a strategy for survival as well as an existential alternative to the alienated world of capitalist labour” (Treece, 2013, p. 41). The *malandragem* as well as the infantilisation of male characters in *Garotas e Samba* support the argument that the gender model established by the Brazilian films offers an evasion from the demands of a new consumerist culture on masculinity.



Infantilised Memé

Source: *Garotas e Samba* footage

As Dennison; Shaw have argued, “[f]aced with the mounting demands of modern life, the male anti-heroes of these popular films tend to shy away from their patriarchal responsibilities in favour of handing over the reins of domestic power to the ambitious, go-getting females of the 1950s” (Dennison; Shaw, 2004, p. 98-99). The association of masculinity with childhood and *malandragem* in these comedies — in itself a form of infantilisation —, “especially in its propensity for play rather than work, and in its toying with consumerism” (Günsberg, 2005, p. 71) can be seen as an index of the difficulty of adjusting to a rapidly expanding consumer culture. These films show men who ultimately fail to catch up with the new demands and the increasing pressures on masculinity.

This subtle, embryonic male powerlessness resurfaces in the next popular upsurge of Brazilian cinema, the *pornochanchada*, in much more obvious ways, as men are literally portrayed as impotent. As the environment becomes more authoritarian and women become increasingly liberated, the trends observed in this article escalate, and men come across as increasingly out of control while women continue to be cast in objectified, secondary roles.

In contrast with the infantilised men, *Garotas e Samba* portrays a considerable number of active, strong-willed female characters.

### Femininity: Vive l'Argent

The changes taking place in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also had an impact on the way femininity was represented on film. The women's movement was very active in Brazil in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but its gains were limited. Although claims to female suffrage date back at least as far as 1919, when Bertha Lutz became director of the *Federação Brasileira para o Progresso Feminino* (FBPF),<sup>6</sup> the right to vote was in fact secured for women as late as 1932.<sup>7</sup> However, as most Brazilian women had not gained access to educational and professional opportunities, the right to vote, which still had literacy as a requirement, did not cause a significant change in the lives of the vast majority of Brazilian women (Besse, 1996, p. 165). Furthermore, with the dissolution of the legislature in 1937 by Getúlio Vargas and the establishment of the Estado Novo, a populist dictatorship, no one could vote for another eight years. Due to the bourgeois nature of the FBPF, it was alien for the majority of women, lacking the grassroots support necessary for radical cultural change (Besse, 1996, p. 165). Confronted with the strong anti-feminist social stance and the installation of the Estado Novo, the still fledgling feminist movement was demobilised (Besse, 1996, p. 165).

The 1950s was a rather uneventful decade for the history of the feminist movement in Brazil, as the turmoil of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had settled maintaining the fundamental gender asymmetries. Nonetheless, as the films of the period demonstrate, the memory of the women's emancipatory movement was still present, despite the fact that its threat to the status quo had been largely neutralised — to reemerge in the 1970s (Pinto, 2003, p. 49). In a moment of resolution following a period of social and cultural crisis, the relative lull of the 1950s enabled films to portray the otherwise unsettling figure of the strong-willed, unruly woman in a relatively unsettling manner.

*Garotas e Samba* is similar to *How to Marry a Millionaire* in terms of female agency — the women take their destinies into their own hands in order to achieve their goals. The differences in the ethos of the female characters across the two films arise as the dream the women pursue in Negulesco's film is strictly related to matrimony. As Schatze phrases it, getting married is “the biggest thing you can do in life.” In *Garotas e Samba*, marriage is, for Naná, a means to achieve social status and financial security. Furthermore, the other women have different aspirations, i.e. Zizi wants to be a radio star and Didi wants to be a professional singer and accordionist. The film therefore reflects women's presence — and their demands to be present — in the public arena, as well as in the employment market:

As chanchadas souberam captar muito bem esses dois aspectos da mulher carioca da década de 1950. Uma mulher que precisava trabalhar fora como doméstica, manicure, artista, mas que continuava carregada dos valores domésticos, privados, onde a busca do par é supervalorizada (Dias, 1993, p. 89).

The *chanchadas* in general illustrate this ambiguity regarding the public and private spheres, as they portray numerous working women<sup>8</sup> (albeit in a limited range of professions seen as acceptable) while maintaining the role of housewife as a woman's preferred choice in life, as Renata Fronzi's<sup>9</sup> character implies in the particularly conservative *Treze Cadeiras* (Francisco Eichhorn, 1957):

Yvonne: ...e agora volto para a cidade, para o meu trabalho.  
 Bonifácio: Sim, mas uma moça tão bonita precisa trabalhar?  
 Yvonne: É que eu ainda não encontrei o meu príncipe encantado.

A univocal perspective in relation to love can be observed in *How to Marry a Millionaire*, where the three female protagonists end up with the men with whom they fell in love during the film. Essentially, *How to Marry a Millionaire* is about the vindication of love over wealth, even for extremely ambitious women like Schatze. Initially troubling, Schatze's determination and Loco's audacity ultimately function to reinforce the overwhelming power of love, even over apparently indomitable women. The fact that Schatze ends the film with someone who at last reveals himself to be a millionaire serves two points: that "[t]he couple's cross-class union thus affirms the U.S. ideology that class doesn't matter" (Rowe, 1995, p. 118), and the implicit 'message' of the film – that love is more important than money.

In *Garotas e Samba*, on the other hand, the importance of romantic (heterosexual) love is significantly diminished. Naná accomplishes what the protagonists in *How to Marry a Millionaire* set out to do but fail to achieve (with the exception of Schatze, who does so unintentionally), thus asserting money over love. Although Naná is the character who illustrates this point most clearly – the adulteration of the expression “vive l'amour” into “vive l'argent” is performed by her –, bourgeois sentimentality is debunked in the film as a whole.

Zizi and Naná are the most vibrant female characters in *Garotas e Samba*. They take control over men not through coercion (like matrons Ninon and Jocelina), but rather via assertiveness and sexual attractiveness, thus introducing the problematic idea of sexuality as empowerment. Problematic to the extent that this type of so-called empowerment still relies on their female bodies. As contemporary popular culture critics have pointed out, “Even when women are sold the story that their beauty is power over men, it is a deceptive and temporary truth. It's baseless power. It is the kind of power that only exists in relation to a man's desire” (Foscolos, 2013, p. n.p).

The power they exert over men is suggested in several scenes, such as when Zizi arrives in the boarding house claiming to have “um pistolão deste tamanho.” Whereas the reference is to Charlô (*pistolão* meaning an inside contact), the gesture insinuates her own phallic power. Her marked Northeastern accent also resonates with the figure of the (also phallic) ‘mulher-macho.’ As epitomised by Luiz Gonzaga and Humberto Teixeira's 1952 song *Paraíba* (“Paraíba masculina, mulher-macho, sim senhor”). The song was the consolidation of the representation of Northeastern women as masculinised in popular culture. The rationale behind this conventional image, which has become one of the signs of *nordestinidade*, is that

em um lugar como o sertão nordestino, onde os homens eram escassos e existiam muitas mães solteiras e viúvas, as mulheres precisavam ir para o roçado plantar o que comer e pegar em armas para defender a família. Na ausência do marido, elas tinham que conduzir e alimentar os filhos e essa imagem acabou sendo consagrada (Paiva, 2013, p. 265-266).



Zizi shows the size of her *pistolão* to the discomfort of Dona Inocência

Source: Garotas e Samba footage

Similarly to Zizi, Naná is presented repeatedly throughout the film as an ambitious, driven woman, determined to achieve her goal of marrying a millionaire. As Rowe argues, “[l]ove is one of the few areas where Hollywood [i.e. popular cinema] allows women to take charge” (Rowe, 1995, p. 27). Her strength of character is reinforced by her physical appearance, and indeed Renata Fronzi’s stature, particularly in contrast with the diminutive actors Zé Trindade and Pituca, is outstandingly imposing.

Like Mae West in Kathleen Rowe’s analysis, Naná exemplifies the motifs associated with the unruly woman, such as

a carnivalesque openness toward sexuality; the presentation of her self, especially her gendered self, as visual construct or image, created through a performance of femininity that exaggerates its attributes and thus denaturalizes it; and a comic gender inversion that reduces men to interchangeable sexual objects while acknowledging [...] that men make the rules of the game [...] (Rowe, 1995, p. 119).

Like the shrew characters (Ninon and Jocelina), Naná’s power signifies the subjugation of the male characters. However, as Rowe argues, “[l]ike film noir, romantic comedy often subjects a weak male to a predatory woman, but within a comedic frame that mutes the threat of male chastisement” (Rowe, 1995, p. 118). Indeed, Naná’s cigarette holder is at once a symbol of power and a harmless gag.



Naná's phallic cigarette holder

Source: *Garotas e Samba* footage

However limited by comedy their power might be, Zizi and Naná contradict the ideology of the 'well-adjusted' woman as

silent, static, invisible — 'composed' and 'divinely' apart from the hurly-burly of life, process, and social power. [The unruly woman,] [t]hrough her body, her speech, and her laughter, especially in the public sphere [...] creates a disruptive spectacle of herself. [...] Ultimately, the unruly woman can be seen as prototype of woman as subject — transgressive above all when she lays claim to her own desire (Rowe, 1995, p. 31).

Similar to the unruly woman described by Rowe, Naná's carnivalesque stance is repeated throughout the film, from explicit references (Zizi calls her "rainha moma")<sup>10</sup> to symbolic ones, such as references to the bodily lower stratum:

Naná: Já tive uma [pele] dessas. Os pêlos caem.  
Salesperson: Mas isto é legítima raposa da Sibéria. Os pêlos não caem.  
Naná: Ah, então deve ser sífilis porque os pêlos caem.

Also carnivalesque is Naná's symbolic marriage to Memé. With no apparent narrative motivation, the wedding march is played as Naná and Memé enter a night club, in a communal act that makes reference to the "perpetual crowning and uncrowning" (Shohat; Stam, 1994, p. 306) of carnival whilst also mocking the institution of marriage.



The carnivalesque wedding of Naná and Memé

Source: *Garotas e Samba* footage

Naná's transgressive stance in relation to marriage is accepted because, like Mae West two decades before her, she is "a larger than life cartoon, and her gold-digging is so over the top that it becomes a kind of parody of itself" (Briggs, 2005, p. 58). In other words, Naná is a parody of herself or, in Rowe's words, a 'female-female impersonator' (Rowe, 1995, p. 30). Through the self-conscious use of her image, Naná demonstrates that "femininity is a masquerade, a costume like any other, which she can relish [...] but discard in an instant. Feminine passivity and weakness are artificial ploys, tools to utilize toward her own ends" (Rowe, 1995, p. 30). The artificiality of Naná's masquerade is constructed by the use of glamorous clothing and a French accent, affected mannerisms, high-pitched exclamations, which are all used with the aim of seducing and manipulating her male suitors to her own financial benefit.

The focus given to Naná's clothing and shopping sprees is significant as it is indicative of a particular moment in the development of consumerist culture, as mentioned previously. The 1950s was a decade of consolidation of consumer values in the US, with ramifications for the West more broadly.<sup>11</sup> The character of Naná, in particular, overtly promotes consumerism and enacts the triumph of money over wealth, in stark contrast to *How to Marry a Millionaire's* ending. Although Naná's main quest is to find a partner, the interchangeability of her male suitors subtly undermines the importance of romantic love in the film, and significantly it is not Memé (with whom she has shared most of her comic scenes) who appears in the final scene as her romantic partner.

## Conclusion

This article has proposed to probe the influence of the historical and social context of *Garotas e Samba* and the wider role of cinema in social transformation. As the analysis of the film has demonstrated, the representation of gender and sexuality in Brazilian popular comedies constitute an insightful barometer for social and cultural transformations. It is not by chance that popular comedy, particularly that which stemmed from the *comédia de costumes* and its inherent focus on gender play, emerges as an immensely popular genre in Brazil at times of rapid social transformation.

In the 1950s, the *chanchadas* reflected the massive rural-urban migrations, and rapid industrialisation promoted a modern lifestyle with increased demands for men and new freedoms for women. As the vast majority of popular films have been produced by men and are about male desire, their context of production reveals that it is not a coincidence that recurring themes include issues surrounding women's emancipation and the reinscription of models of masculinity.

As this case study has shown, the *chanchadas* developed a close link between women and consumption — and consumerism more specifically. Indeed, the association of women with consumerism made rather explicit in these films sets up a trend that continues up to the present day in Brazilian popular comedies, as seen in the *Globochanchadas*.<sup>12</sup>

The Brazilian film leaves certain loose ends (such as the interchangeability of Naná's millionaires and the accomplishment of her goal) that can potentially deny closure and "escape the oppressive totalizing of dialectal reasoning" (Rowe, 1995, p. 46). This is a vital difference in relation to *How to Marry a Millionaire*, where closure is provided by all three characters serving to reinstate the same (fundamentally oppressive) dichotomy of money vs. love. The Brazilian film complicates this dichotomy by inserting female professional ambition (embodied by the character of Didi) and, with Naná, it inverts the hierarchy of the dichotomy by privileging the materiality of money over romantic love.

The privilege of money over love makes sense against the film's historical backdrop, which combines the promotion of consumerism and the relatively insubstantial threat real women posed to a largely male-dominated labour market. Although Dennison; Shaw rightfully argue that "[m]ale authority and control were threatened by industrial society and the new freedoms enjoyed by women" (Dennison; Shaw, 2004, p. 100), the unruliness of the characters like Naná and Zizi is permissible precisely because it is set against a relatively unthreatening backdrop.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples include Oscarito in *Homem do Sputnik* (Carlos Manga, 1959), Dercy Gonçalves in *Entre de Gaiato* (J. B. Tanko, 1959), Renata Fronzi in *Treze Cadeiras* (Franz Eichhorn, 1957), not to mention Jeca Tatu, a redneck stock character embodied by Mazzaropi in over 30 films.

<sup>2</sup> According to Andréa Zenaide's *Cinelândia* article cited in Dias, 1993, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> As seen in several Atlântida *chanchadas*, such as *Os Dois Ladrões* (Carlos Manga, 1960) in which Oscarito revels in the beauty of the city or *Esse Milhão é Meu* (Carlos Manga, 1959), which presents a long drive with Rio as background, to name a few.

<sup>4</sup> Short for 'Bela Capital,' as Rio de Janeiro was the capital of Brazil from the proclamation of independence in 1822 until the construction of Brasília in 1960.

<sup>5</sup> In David Treece's words, "the *malandro* has been a heroic (or anti-heroic) icon of popular and cultural life, particularly of the 1930s and '40s, expressing dissent from the official values of family, work and deference to authority, and representing a countercultural ethos of playfulness, the circumvention of social rules, a defiance of discipline, matched by verbal wit and dexterity" (Treece, 2013, p. 36).

<sup>6</sup> Women had individually claimed the right to vote before that, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Pinto, 2003, p. 15). Pinto dubs Lutz's feminism as "bem-comportado," in opposition to other more radical forms that existed concomitant to it (Pinto, 2003, p. 10).

<sup>7</sup> With the FBPF the struggle for female suffrage became organised, but individual demands for the right to vote can be found as far back as 1891, in carnival *marchas*: "As mulheres votam: propaganda prática e animada por espirituosos tribunos, no intuito de dar à mulher o que só tem sido dos homens / Discutiu-se ardentemente e é crença de muita gente que dê lá por onde der o que ao homem se garante não se negue doravante à mulher / Mas que o voto lhe assegure aparte o exército e o júri tanto quanto se puder / Já num discurso inspirado disse isso o Costa Machado da mulher / Que o voto se lhe permita, mas (exceção esquisita de quem tal reforma quer) que não seja recrutada nem para o júri sorteada a mulher / Porém o exemplo palpável vivo, claro, incontestável diga o Zama o que disser. Em resumo disse eu noto que há assim de ser o voto da mulher" (Ferreira, 1995, p. 156-157).

<sup>8</sup> To cite a couple of examples, Dalila (Eliana Macedo) is a manicurist in *Nem Sansão Nem Dalila* (Carlos Manga, 1955), not to mention a number of singers and performers, such as Mara (Sônia Mamede) in *De Vento em Popa* (Carlos Manga, 1957) and the characters mentioned in *Garotas e Samba*.

<sup>9</sup> The same actress who plays Naná in *Garotas e Samba*.

<sup>10</sup> In the carnival tradition, *Rei Momo* is considered to be the king of carnival.

<sup>11</sup> As Maggie Günsberg (2005, p. 68) argues in relation to Italy, "[p]laying on the centrality of women to Catholic family ideology, market competition for consumers in 1950s and 1960s Italy targeted the woman in the household (wife or mother) as the 'angel in the household' able to divert the man's spending power to goods for the home (refrigerators, washing machines, furniture)."

<sup>12</sup> *De Pernas para o Ar* (Roberto Santucci, 2010) is a good example.

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