

Constructing Self in the Brazuca Narrative: U.S. Brazilian Identity, Memory and Home in *Samba Dreamers*

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Abstract

This article analyzes the constructions of home and identity for the principal characters in Kathleen de Azevedo's 2006 novel *Samba Dreamers* and the role that memory plays in each. Each character represents a different generation of the Brazilian diaspora in the United States and faces a crisis of identity that, in some cases, has tragic consequences. After providing a brief introduction to the Brazilian diaspora in the U.S. and the literature regarding this community, this article will also analyze the role of *Samba Dreamers* within the context of Latino literature, highlighting similarities and differences. While some characters try to assimilate to North American culture, others cannot, and their idea of what it means to be *home* changes as well. Utilizing postcolonial and memory theory from James Clifford, Benedict Anderson and Maurice Halbwachs, along with theory from Silviano Santiago, Maxine Margolis, and Antonio Luciano de Andrade Tosta regarding the Brazilian diaspora specifically, the goal of this article is to demonstrate how *Samba Dreamers* situates itself both "in and out" of the realm of Latino Studies.

Keywords

Brazuca, Latino/a, U.S. Brazilian, identity, diaspora, home, memory.

I. Introduction

In contemporary diasporic cultural production, the themes of identity, home, and the role of memory in constructing each, are common throughout as the characters or subjects involved try to reconcile who they are in relation to a native land that may exist at a great distance. In the Americas, the term diaspora has often accompanied forced migration, exile, and border-crossings, given the tumultuous political and economic history. However, when the subject is considered a minority in the host nation, these issues become amplified and a different kind of struggle presents itself. Within the past five decades, artistic production, especially literary, from the Latin American diaspora in the United States has gained a significant amount of attention in academia. Under the umbrella term of Latino Studies, significant attention has been given to the larger Hispanic-American migrant factions that reside in the United States, such as Cubans in Florida and large cities like New York, and Mexicans in the Southwest, while very little research delves into the cultural production of smaller,

but growing populations of other Latin American national groups in the U.S., such as Colombians, Venezuelans, and Brazilians.¹ Despite different national cultures and histories, there are many similarities to be found within the diasporic cultural production from Hispanic-Americans and Brazilians in the United States that address the aforementioned issues of identity. However, while these populations of *Other Latinos* continue to grow, as José Luis Falconi and José Antonio Mazzotti call them, academia has been hesitant to produce criticism regarding their contributions to Latino cultural production. Still, these persistent issues and questions of belonging and the role of memory in constructing identity and home are common threads that connect all Latinos, including those described as others, within the realm of Latino Studies and lend themselves to an examination of their areas of similarity and difference.

This article aims to examine one contemporary novel, *Samba Dreamers* by Kathleen de Azevedo and published in 2006. Azevedo is a Brazilian author that resides in the U.S. and describes herself as a Latina author (Personal interview 1). The novel fictionalizes the U.S. Brazilian migratory experience and presents three main characters that represent different generations of this particular diasporic community. After analyzing the main characters and their struggles with identity, memory, and home, the article will zoom out to make larger claims about where *Samba Dreamers* fits the requirements of a Latino narrative, but also where it distinguishes itself as exemplary of Brazuca literature.

To include Brazilians in the U.S. within the realm of Latino Studies is not without challenge. As the idea of Latin America has come to signify Hispanic America in and outside of academia, as evidenced by Latin American literature graduate programs that focus solely on Spanish-speaking authors, the term Latino is often interchangeable with Hispanic. The confusion over the labels Hispanic and Latino can be partially to blame on U.S. Census forms, which combine the two terms into a single category as Hispanic/Latino.² What is more, given the competitive and violent history between Spain and Portugal in the Americas, as Antonio Luciano de Andrade Tosta indicates in his essay “The Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian World: Latino, eu? The Paradoxical Interplay of Identity in Brazuca Literature,” any association with Spain is often conflictive (579). A broad definition of what it means to be Latino is provided by Alberto Sandoval and Francés Aparicio in their essay from 2005, “Híbridismos culturales: La literatura y cultura de los Latinos en los Estados Unidos.” They indicate that “Latino” refers to an individual of Latin American heritage who is located in the United States and whose historical experiences have been marked by their condition as a racial minority (665). However, the Latino community is certainly not homogenous, and should not be treated as a

monolith. Those of Mexican descent are vastly different from those of Cuban descent, yet both belong to the Latino community. Sandoval and Aparicio are careful in their definition, taking these factors into account, and noting that the label Latino refers more to the condition of being an ethnic minority in the United States whose origins can be found in what academia has determined as Latin America, and the label should not be used as an indication of a uniform community. Utilizing this definition, one could classify U.S. Brazilian³ cultural production within the realm of Latino Studies. However, despite the growing Brazilian population in the U.S., its cultural production is an area that has been largely ignored by academia, perhaps due to the linguistic confusion of the Latino/Hispanic label and the fact that Latino Studies programs often stem out of Latin American Studies, which, again, generally focus on Hispanic America. The complicated positioning of Brazilians within the context of the U.S. has led them to be called an invisible minority⁴ by one of the leading cultural anthropologists of Brazilians living abroad, Maxine Margolis. This is due to their accidental absence from Census statistics, due to the confused and misleading labels, but also their lack of attention from academia. Still, their condition as an ethnic minority in the U.S. with origins in Latin America would certainly allow U.S. Brazilian cultural production to fall under the umbrella of Latino Studies.

II. Defining “Brazuca”

The term utilized most frequently to classify U.S. Brazilian cultural production is Brazuca. Both Tosta and Margolis utilize this term in their characterization of those Brazilians living in the United States⁵ in their research from the late 1990s-early 2000s, but it is also problematic due to its historical association as a word used to describe Brazilian sex workers. However, after the 2015 FIFA World Cup and the initiation of the “Brazuca” soccer ball, the term is rapidly transforming into a symbol of patriotism. As mentioned before, in the field of comparative literature in particular, little has been published to this date regarding Brazilian writers in the United States. This is certainly not due to a lack of sources; since the late 1980s and before, several novels dealing with Brazilian immigration have been published in both English and Portuguese by Brazilian writers living in the United States, such as *O berro do cordeiro em Nova York* (1995) by Tereza Albués, *Sonho Americano* (1997) by Angela Bretas, *Samba Dreamers* (2006) by Kathleen de Azevedo, *Azul corvo* (2011) by Adriana Lisboa, and many others. In the words of Kathleen de Azevedo in a 2016 interview that I conducted with her, Brazuca literature “does not have the same cache as Latino lit[erature]...[there is] a mixture of races. A detachment from Europe.” It is perhaps these differences that have kept

Brazilian and, by extension, Brazuca literature on the margins of academic research. The diversity within Brazil itself can be overwhelming for any scholarly investigator, and to include the element of diaspora in that mixture is an even more sizeable task.

III. Theorizing diaspora and memory

As James Clifford notes in *Diasporas*, longing, memory, and (dis)identification are traits that are shared by nearly all minority and migrant populations (304). Whether it is a border culture, communities of exiles, or, more broadly, an immigrant group, these attributes are consistent throughout diaspora studies. Literature written by and about immigrants and their progeny provides a fictional, sometimes non-fictional, representation of the reality of an individual in diaspora. Common themes that Latino narratives address are immigration and residency status, language, racial or ethnic discrimination and stereotyping, economic struggle, and, not mutually exclusive to any of these, identity and home. Perhaps the most important and recognizable element at work in diasporic identity construction is memory: memory of life in the homeland, one's journey of migration, and, of course, and the memories that are passed down through family members which bind generations together. In order to negotiate identity in the present, Brazilian diasporic narratives utilize memory as the vehicle for reconstructing Brazil and what it means to be Brazilian. In Maurice Halbwachs's *The Collective Memory*, memory and history are seen as two concurrent forces that shape identity. Halbwach states that memory "retains from the past only what still lives or is capable for living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive" (140). This is to say, then, that diasporic communities pass memory down from generation to generation and, with that, identity is constructed. Tosta remarks on the presence of collective memory in Brazuca literature, which constructs a space that is not only physical, but also "temporal, since these authors create a dialogical relationship between a Brazil seen from a geographical distance and with the authority of memory and a utopian vision of a new Brazil" ("Latino, eu?" 576). As time passes, memories become less and less faithful to reality and begin to create a reality of their own that is overwhelmingly positive. The reality of Brazil does not necessarily align with the Brazil of the diasporic memory; for many, as Tosta states, Brazil becomes a utopian entity that is idealized by those who reconstruct it in their memory. If one has the opportunity to return to the home nation, the confrontation of memory and reality can result in confusion and force the individual to question what and where to situate "home." In addition, as Halbwachs notes, history and memory differ in that there is only one version of history, while "there are several collective memories" (142) that are dependent upon

social class and other socio-cultural factors. Collective memory, in turn, is utilized to construct the idea of nation and nationality, in both diasporic and non-diasporic groups. In Benedict Anderson's iconic *Imagined Communities*, he defines that nation as an "imagined political community" (6) that relies on shared history, culture, and memory to define itself. For the diasporic Brazilian community, these elements, including language, religions, and other traditions, bind individual members together to create the imagined Brazilian nation. On a larger scale, the experiences of migration and marginalization can also unify the Brazilian community, and by extension the Latino community as well.

Citing Silviano Santiago's iconic concept of *entre-lugar* from 1971's *Uma literatura nos trópicos*, Tosta also notes that Brazuca literature helps demonstrate the "in-betweenness" ("Between" 716) of Brazilian immigrants. These intangible states of belonging are indicative of the diasporic experience and have been documented by postcolonial theorists alike, including Homi Bhabha and Edward Said. Tosta's concept of "in-betweenness," then, has many counterparts and precedents, including others from the field of Latino Studies itself. Within this discipline, liminal space has been characterized as the *intersticio*, or interstice, that Chicana author and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa describes in her seminal work, *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*. For Brazilians, this sense of "in-betweenness" is also indicative of their unique historical experience with globalization. As Azevedo states, the Portuguese "history of seafaring makes them global . . . Brazilians are also more diverse than Spanish America" (Personal interview 1). Each of these terms utilized to describe a feeling of not belonging entirely to any one place lead us to similar conclusions about the location of the postmodern, global individual, whose identity and sense of home constantly straddles a line between their national origin and their current location. For U.S. Brazilians, perhaps this feeling is intensified within their cultural production because of Brazil's longstanding history as a diverse and globalized nation.

The purpose of this article is to highlight and analyze constructions of identity, memory, and home within *Samba Dreamers*, showing its parallels with other diasporic narratives, such as those produced by Latinos, while also showing areas of discord that signal the uniqueness of the Brazilian experience in the United States. Azevedo is certainly familiar with this community, as she is a U.S. Brazilian herself, born in Rio de Janeiro but now living and writing in the San Francisco Bay area. As we will see, her personal story does coincide with some of the characters, which serves for interesting commentary, but my primary analysis will focus on the narrative structure itself. The novel features three principal characters that represent different historical generations of Brazilian

migration to the U.S. The setting is 1970s Los Angeles, which, in the second half of the twentieth century became a popular relocation destination for Brazilian nationals.⁶ Each character, in addition to originating from a different generation or stage of the Brazil to U.S. migration and having opposing views of Brazil as a whole, also belongs to a separate economic class. For this reason, I will analyze each character separately, taking these factors into account and highlighting individual issues, ultimately demonstrating that the narrative locates identity and home in an “in-between” space that is neither Brazil nor the United States. In that sense, then, this narrative will demonstrate that the U.S. Brazilian condition is not unlike that of Latinos; however I will also demarcate areas of discord between these two literary communities to show the uniquely complicated location of the U.S. Brazilian diaspora in the realm of cultural studies.

IV. Analysis of *Samba Dreamers* by character

The first character introduced in *Samba Dreamers* is Joe/José, a newspaper man from Rio de Janeiro, the hometown of the novel’s author, who flees the political oppression that characterized the Brazilian nation in the 1970s. His identity is marked by memories of torture and losing loved ones to the military dictatorship, although he does not speak outwardly of these experiences. During the dictatorship, as it usually is with most military dictatorships around the world, any individual or group that spread liberal ideas was a prime target for torture. As Rebecca Atencio points out in her book *Memory’s Turn: Reckoning With Dictatorship in Brazil*, after the military coup on government, the leaders “moved to consolidate their rule by arresting or purging thousands of people deemed a threat to new order” (9), which undoubtedly included journalists like Joe/José’s character. In terms of the actual timeline of Brazilian immigration to the U.S., Joe/José represents one of the first waves that came as a response to the poor economy and dictatorship that spanned from 1964 to 1985,⁷ which included the most infamous dictator, Emílio Garrastazu Médici. Although Joe/José maintains his silence throughout the novel about the torture that he suffered and does not allude to any specific historical figures, the years indicated in the narration point to this military government in particular. The Médici government was characterized by its penchant for “torturing, killing, and in certain cases ‘disappearing’ its enemies” (Atencio 10). This regime, along with those that followed, gained support from the U.S. due to interests in preventing the spread of Communism in Latin America during the Cold War era. The Cold War and its repercussions saw many Latin Americans flee to the United States, including Nicaraguans and Salvadorans in the 1980s, marking this trauma as a common historical tie within the Latino community. It is most likely that Joe/José’s character

represents the wave of Brazilians who immigrated to the United States during those *anos de chumbo* (Atencio 10) or years of lead, as they were known during the military dictatorship for the excessive force utilized to remove those who threatened the government. Joe/José, then, like so many other Latinos in the U.S., is an exile. In the first chapter from the collection *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*, aptly titled “Exile,” Martin Baumann defines exile as the condition of emigrating due to political oppression, but while still always feeling nostalgia for the home country (23). Joe/José’s condition as an exile and the longing for Brazil, although initially denied, are what help him to negotiate his identity as a diasporic Brazilian throughout the novel. His position of being in political disagreement with the Brazil of the present, while still holding on to memories of its past, also shape his construct and reconstruct his identity while living in Los Angeles.

As can be expected, given the abuse that Joe/José suffers in Brazil, he rejects his Brazilian identity and attempts to construct an American version of himself. He tries desperately to assimilate the culture of Los Angeles, meaning that he leaves his previous culture behind and attempts to completely adopt that of the host nation. His first step at assimilating the culture is with his name, which is longer than the typical Anglo-American name. While still on the airplane to Los Angeles at the beginning of his journey, Joe/José chooses to reduce his full name, José Francisco Verguerio Silva. He feels “his long Brazilian name smashing into pieces and scattering . . . now he was Joe. Joe Silva” (“Samba” 1). The shortening of his name makes it appear more Anglo-American, as typically only the paternal surname is utilized, but also the loss of those names and that part of his identity symbolize the traumatic experience of the dictatorship. After settling on a name, the narrator notes that “it was all the name he had left” (1). In a dictatorship that robbed Joe/José of everything he loved, including his conception of Brazil, his name was the only Brazilian thing that remained in his possession and even that was necessarily “disappeared” after migrating to a new country. In other attempts to assimilate, Joe/José marries an American woman, names his sons after characters from an American television show, and purchases a stereotypical American home. Still, despite his efforts, Joe/José increasingly longs for his formerly Brazilian way of living. His identity, then, becomes an imbalance as he tries to assimilate into a host culture that marginalizes him because of his ethnicity, and wrestles with the internal struggle of trauma and memory from his life in Brazil.

Despite efforts to assimilate, Joe/José quickly realizes that blending into hegemonic American culture in that time period is impossible and that he represents an ethnic minority. First, he is constantly plagued by his memories of Brazil, which cause a longing for cultural markers like *samba*, *biscoitos*, *forró* music (3), and the sound of Portuguese. When his American wife leaves home,

Joe/José plays “his Brazilian records, his sweet bossa nova, his dear Antonio Carlos Jobim” (109) and dances with their sons. His longing for anything Brazilian becomes so strong that, at one point, while at a carnival in Los Angeles, as his sons wander off, Joe/José pushes “his empty stroller over to a group speaking the language of his heart” (195). These memories are of the utopian variety, which Tosta indicates as typical in the Brazuca narrative, only remembering the positive aspects of Brazil. This is exceptional in the case of Joe/José, who has such a tense relationship with his home country. By referencing Brazilian food, music, and language, Joe/José demonstrates the notions of collective memory and an imagined community at work that both Halbwachs and Anderson describe. These cultural markers, *samba*, *biscoito*, even more-so in the Portuguese language, form part of the national imaginary that exists in the minds and memories of all Brazilians, both in the home nation and in diaspora. These common cultural markers are frequently utilized in Latino narratives to distinguish from Anglo culture and reconstruct the homeland. It is this shared memory of what it means to be Brazilian that unites Joe/José with the other characters in the novel, but also with Brazilians in general, as one imagined community. Despite his negative political relationship with Brazil, his memories and identity are still uniquely Brazilian, and for that reason, his idea and construction of home will always reside somewhere between the Brazil of his memory, the real Brazil, and the host culture of the United States.

Having been in the U.S. longer than Joe/José and from the previous generation, Carmen Socorro is described as a famous Brazilian actress known for her dancing, singing, and tutti-frutti hat. She was considered a great actress of her time, as indicated by Tony, the Hollywood Tours van driver and Mexican-American friend of Joe/José, who stops in front of her house on the tour and describes her as an actress “who wore enormous hats loaded with bananas and grapes and real animals and even small villages” (8). Her fictional life parallels that of Carmen Miranda, the real-life Brazilian bombshell who personified Latin America and the Good Neighbor⁸ in American cinema in the 1940s. Her immigration to the U.S. was motivated by politics, as the U.S. attempted to foster positive connections with the rest of the Americas during World War II by enacting the Good Neighbor Policy. Lisa Shaw and Maite Conde describe this policy in their essay from the 2005 collection *Latin American Cinema*, as beginning in 1933 as a means to bridge the Americas through popular culture. It sought to create an overarching image of *latinidad*, or Latin-ness, that would not distinguish between nations and confuse North American audiences, but also not be offensive to Latin American audiences (184). The image would be overwhelmingly positive and inspire a strong relationship within the Americas during the adversity of wartime. The career of the real-life Carmen

Miranda parallels that of Carmen Socorro in certain moments in *Samba Dreamers*, but ultimately their paths diverge to allow Carmen Socorro to stand alone as a character and not appear as a carbon copy of Miranda. In addition to the not-explicitly mentioned political motivations in the film industry in the novel, the narrator mentions that Carmen Socorro came to the United States for better opportunities as an entertainer. Still, despite her prosperity and success in the film industry, Socorro struggles to reconcile a super-charged Latina identity that has been created for her on screen, and that of reality which splits her between Brazil and the United States.

Carmen's identity, like that of Joe/José, is caught between three different realms: being Brazilian, being a Brazilian in diaspora, and portraying an archetypal Latina on the film screen. Unlike Joe/José, because of her public persona, Carmen is unable to assimilate. However, it is revealed that her on-screen character is not representative of her true identity and that, in fact, she resents the role that she has been forced to play. In one scene that is a flashback from her daughter, she "mourned for her own hair, which she had to keep bunched in a turban, bound and gagged under tons of fruit and fru-fru" ("Samba" 46). She is forced to maintain the Brazilian bombshell identity at all times, which causes her both physical and psychological pain. Her requirements to fulfill the bombshell persona extend not only to her physical image, but also to her personal life, including the birth of her daughter, Rosea. When she is born, Carmen is forced to hide her in order to maintain the virginal, Latina goddess identity that she portrays on-screen. Both her on-screen identity and that of reality are constructed by memories of Brazil, however false or utopian they might be. Upon returning to her homeland for a vacation that she needed in order to revive her health, Carmen realizes that she is not entirely Brazilian now, either, having lived in the U.S. for so many years. She is also seen as the Other in Brazil, having been Americanized. When she travels to the Amazon in order to reconnect with her roots, she is chastised for wanting to swim up the river and observe Amazonian women, who she considers her ancestors and source of strength. One observer shouts, "why would anyone go up there except a stupid American . . . take your things and go home! We don't want you here! You are not one of us" (135). It is in this moment that she recognizes the error in her memories of Brazil and her ancestors who were, most likely, not the indigenous Amazonian women. This voyage also, perhaps unintentionally, highlights the element of fantasy in her identity construction. In order to bolster her Brazilian-ness, she returns to one of the mythical hearts of Brazil, as described by José de Alencar and the *indianista* literary movement, which utilized indigenous characters and their land as symbols of nationality and patriotism. Carmen realizes that her idea of Brazilian-ness is partially memory, partially fantasy, and although she does

not feel American in the U.S., she knows that her identity has been affected by both places. Due to the confusion of balancing memories of three places, and the identity that accompanies each, that of being Brazilian, being American, and being what Hollywood felt was Brazilian, Carmen enters into a period of heavy drug use to sedate herself. One could argue, then, that this represents a fourth facet of her identity, that of the drug-induced realm where she is able to find some happiness or, at least, a release from the pressure of the other three identities. Her last name, then, is telling of her existence: *Socorro*, which translates to “help” or “help me” in Portuguese, indicates a struggle by a character whose inability to understand or accept her identity ultimately results in her drug-related death at a young age.

In terms of her belonging and sense of home, Carmen is trapped between the three spaces that also haunt her identity. She insists that Brazil is her home, and that she is Brazilian, but this becomes confused with the idea of Brazilian that she represents on the film screen. As in the case of Joe/José, her memories of Brazil are idyllic, only remembering the positive and the aspects that reinforce her Brazilian persona, such as the ties to the Amazon when she is, most likely, from a city. In both Brazil and the U.S., Carmen is the Other and does not feel at home. The difficulty that she faces upon returning to Brazil could be described as the regression syndrome that Margolis describes⁹ or the realization that her memories do not align with reality. Tosta indicates that longing and separation assists characters to “choose good, special memories about their homeland” (“Between” 722) in order to construct their identity and sense of home. However, it is Carmen’s fantastical return to the Amazon that ignites a passion for the Brazil of her memory, which she attempts to reconstruct in her Los Angeles home. Recreating her version of Brazil, Carmen plants “magnificent young trees and vines and bushes and flowers in her garden, and from mustached sea merchants ordered tropical birds and monkeys to add them to the backyard as well so that it would be the Brazil that would love her in spite of her foolishness” (“Samba” 136). This reconstruction mimics the Amazon, and the myth of Brazilian heritage, which she prefers to the difficult reality of existing between two nations. After the real Brazil proved to not be as she remembered and did not correspond to her the *saudade*¹⁰ that she felt, defiantly, Carmen constructs the Brazil of her memory at her Los Angeles home. This garden also represents a micro-structure of Carmen herself who, just as the tropical plants and animals do, is a transplanted Brazilian in the U.S. who is forced to represent the idea of Brazil to observers. Just as the characters that she portrays, Carmen lives in a utopian, mythical version of Brazil instead of the reality of the U.S. or Brazil itself.

Also living in the realm of an imagined Brazil is Carmen's daughter, Rosea Katz. Born in Los Angeles, Rosea represents a second-generation U.S. Brazilian figure. She admits that she has never been to Brazil, and that she does not "know much of the language" (78), but that she feels very connected to her cultural inheritance, often comparing herself to the infamous Amazonian women that her mother described. Azevedo herself is also half-Jewish on her father's side, and in our interview, she has described this inability to be culturally "pigeon-holed" as a source of inspiration for her literary work. What is more, knowing that Rosea's mother fantasized about her own ancestors, one sees that Rosea, perhaps involuntarily, has also constructed a fantasy identity that accepts her diverse background and creates a sense of community for her. Despite living in Los Angeles for her entire life, Rosea does not feel as though she belongs there. In fact, she appears to feel more of a connection with the Mexican-American community in Los Angeles than other Brazilians, as evidenced by her close friendships and dealings with Mexicans. However, what is unique to Rosea is the ability to move fluidly between both a learned "American" identity and an imagined Brazilian identity, which at times is more Latina than Brazilian.

Rosea understands when it is advantageous to act "Brazilian," as people expect of the daughter of Carmen Socorro, and when it is in her best interest to act "American." This ability to move between multiple national identities and cultures is not uncommon for second-generation immigrants in the United States. In *Goodbye, Brazil*, Margolis indicates that "it is easier for young people of the second generation, who possess a better understanding of the local ethnic system, to declare their Latin-ness in contexts where it is advantageous to do so" (197). However, the use of the word "act" is not casual: she is, in fact, performing an imagined identity, especially when she chooses to favor her Brazilian identity. Her knowledge of what it means to be Brazilian comes from the memories of her mother and also from popular culture, which do not portray the reality of Brazil. For instance, when describing herself, she often refers to herself as an Amazonian woman, describing her "black hair and made-up eyes and hips as thick as a mound of earth" (48), also remarking that "men loved her long legs and powerful calves stretched long by cha-cha shoes" (48). Her knowledge of how an Amazonian woman should appear comes from her mother, who is also adored for her curvy body and dark hair. In addition, the shoes that she wears do not correspond with an Amazonian figure, but rather with Hollywood and the films that her mother made. Therefore, culturally, Rosea finds herself caught somewhere between an imagined Brazil, taken both from Carmen's memories and Hollywood, and her personal reality in Los Angeles, neither of which she feels accept her entirely.

Both Rosea and Carmen also differ from Joe/José in their experience as diasporic women. The issue of gender is certainly a factor in identity construction for both of these characters. Rosea is sexualized in her workplace, exploiting her sensual figure to obtain the job that she wanted, and also with Joe/José, who has a romantic affair with her not because he finds her attractive, but because she is a Brazilian object within his reach. Carmen, after becoming pregnant, is encouraged to hide her child in order to maintain a “sexy virginal allure” (129) in cinema. The experiences of Rosea and Carmen are indicative of Gloria Anzaldúa’s virgin/whore dichotomy (53), which states that Chicana women are expected to be innocent and docile like the virgin in public, but also sensual like the whore in private. This dichotomy extends itself throughout all of Latin America, sometimes utilizing different terminology, but clearly affects Brazilian women like Rosea and Carmen in diaspora as well.

Similar to Joe/José and Carmen, Rosea also struggles to negotiate a sense of belonging and home. Although she has never been to Brazil, Rosea expresses that it is her true home, simultaneously denying Los Angeles as a possible homeland. However, just like her inherited Brazilian identity, the Brazil that exists in her memory is deceptive because it is a construction of memories from her mother and popular culture. An example of this problematic relationship in the Latino community is described by Gustavo Pérez-Firmat in his 1994 book, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban American Way*, as the “Desi chain.” He notes that the most prominent “visible Hispanic presence in the United States over the last forty years” (1). This image, that of Desi Arnaz as Ricky Ricardo on the *I Love Lucy* television program has shaped generations of Cubans in the U.S. on how to speak, behave, and dress like a real Cuban. In much the same way, the image of Carmen Miranda influenced the identities of generations of Latinos, and U.S. Brazilians in particular, on how to behave or perform a Latino identity. Undoubtedly, Rosea’s perception of what it means to be Brazilian is influenced by her mother’s memories and films, which portray a certain version of Latinness, and not necessarily Brazilian-ness. This seems to be true for many second-generation immigrants, that information about the country of origin and its culture, both fact and fantasy, are seen as essential to identity construction. Perhaps even more interesting, or confusing for Rosea, is that her own mother’s idea of Brazilian-ness is based on one of the mythical hearts of the country, that of the Amazonian culture, and not her own life in Rio de Janeiro. In this sense, then, Rosea’s inherited memory of what it means to be Brazilian is based on her own mother’s fantasy, which is so far from the reality of Brazil that one must essentially question Rosea’s construction of her own identity. Of course, as a marginalized person in the U.S., whatever version of Brazil Rosea can access from the collective memory of her community is important in order to give her strength and a sense

of belonging. No matter what, throughout the entire novel, Rosea expresses that she feels more Brazilian than anything else. As an act of defiance and a demonstration of her Brazilian identity, at the end of *Samba Dreamers*, Rosea dives into the Pacific Ocean from the California coast, telling others that she is “swimming home” (“Samba” 286). Given that her direction would not take her to Brazil, but rather even further away, her gesture mirrors that of her own mother “returning” to the Amazon River. They both fall short of truly going home, instead going to mythical spaces of their memory that exist independently of physical geography. It is an impossible voyage to an even more impossible place.

V. Is *Samba Dreamers* a Latino narrative?

After analyzing how each character negotiates his or her identity and sense of home in *Samba Dreamers*, the original question posited by this article remains: is this a Latino narrative? As Suzanne Oboler points out in *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States*, the adoption of the term “Latino” represents “an attempt to embrace all Latin American nationalities, including those which neither have ties to Spain nor are necessarily Spanish-dominant groups” (4). However, Latino/a literary and cultural criticism has focused almost entirely on the Hispanic-American diaspora in the United States, leaving Brazilians, Haitians, and other technically Latin American diasporic groups in the margins. There are certainly many similarities to be found between all of these diasporic groups and their cultural production, such as the physical price of immigration, the emotional struggle of not belonging to any one, physical space, and the realization that one’s memory of home is not necessarily faithful to its reality. To reiterate the definition of “Latino” from Sandoval and Aparicio, being Latino is not necessarily an ethnic marker given the diversity within Latin America, but rather a term that indicates the condition of living as an ethnic minority in the United States whose cultural origins can be traced back to Latin America. In *Samba Dreamers*, as well as in other Latino narratives, what it means to be Latino also depends on the gaze of the host culture since it is a term that refers to the condition of being of Latin American descent in diaspora.

Perhaps the most overwhelming similarity between *Samba Dreamers* and other Latino narratives is the feeling of “in-betweenness” that Tosta describes. For Joe/José, Carmen, and even Rosea, their identity and home are culturally located between the memory of Brazil and the reality of the United States. This certainly makes one recall the interstice that Gloria Anzaldúa describes, characterizing her existence between two vastly different cultures. For Carmen and Rosea, this

interstice becomes even more complex, adding the element of fantasy from popular culture that characterizes Brazil as a tropical paradise. What is more, Rosea has the ability to go between both cultures, that of the U.S. and that of Brazil, depending upon her circumstances. This capability is typical of second-generation immigrants and those who migrated at a young age, as Pérez-Firmat discusses with regard to Cubans. Using the term “one-and-a-half” generation (Pérez-Firmat 4-5). to describe them, a phrase originally coined by sociologist Ruben Rumbaut, he asserts that they are able to choose which culture to express at any given moment. Rosea does exactly this, emphasizing her Brazilian-ness when advantageous. For example, in order to gain the affection of Joe/José, despite not speaking Portuguese fluently, Rosea pronounces his name in a Brazilian-Portuguese accent. Also, to obtain her job with the Hollywood tour company, she dresses and carries herself in a sultry way that is reminiscent of her mother’s films. Her chameleon-like abilities is reminiscent of Pérez-Firmat’s idea of “biculturation” (6), which describes the harmonious balance between two cultures. This parallel between Rosea’s behavior and what Pérez-Firmat describes for the Cuban-American narrative demonstrates the ability of *Samba Dreamers* to be categorized as a Latino/a text.

Another similarity between *Samba Dreamers* and other Latino narratives is the reliance on national collective memory to reconstruct the nation in diaspora. When Carmen builds her garden, she relies partially on her own memories and partially on stereotypes to create a version of Brazil in her Los Angeles backyard. For Joe/José and Rosea, they form a romantic bond over their Brazilian-ness, despite the fact that Rosea has never been outside of Los Angeles. Perpetually being seen as the outsider, Joe/José feels attracted to Rosea because of her apparent *brasilidade*, although he does not find her physically attractive. When she pronounces his real name, José, “Jzo-se” (111) in Brazilian Portuguese, this sends him into a passionate tailspin. Throughout the course of their romantic tryst, Joe/José and Rosea reconstruct Brazil by sharing their memories about music, food, and the nation’s history. The concept of nation is constructed from outside the country itself by a political exile and a second-generation Brazilian in the U.S. who selectively identifies with the culture that is most convenient to her at the time. Diasporic nation-building is characteristic of Latin American and Latino texts that span as far back as the nineteenth-century when we consider the work of Cuban exiles like José Martí and, more contemporary authors, Reinaldo Arenas and Cristina García, who also utilize collective cultural memory to answer the question of what it means to be Cuban in the United States.

Still, the label “Latino” is, ultimately, one that is created by the host nation in order to categorize people who differ from the hegemony. In the case of Joe/José, he is constantly measured

by his lack of culturally belonging to the United States. At home, his American wife demands that he not act “Latin” around their sons, scolding him for “that Latin shit” (108) when he speaks Portuguese or listens to *samba*. His inability to assimilate to the host culture causes conflict and, ultimately, ends his marriage. In the eyes of his wife, any behavior that does not correspond to normalized, Anglo-American behavior must be attributed to his being Latino. Still, as Margolis and Tosta have pointed out, the general confusion in the U.S. about Brazil and how it differentiates from the rest of Latin America can be partly to blame. For Carmen and Rosea, their memories of Brazil are overpowered by the Hollywood interpretation of Latin America as one homogenous region filled with only positive elements. In film, Carmen’s Brazilian-ness is washed out by an over-arching Latin-ness, in which the cultural lines between different countries in Latin America are blurred.¹¹ It could be said, then, that Latino is a label of convenience or inconvenience, depending on perspective, from a host culture that does not or cannot easily distinguish between separate nations, and as history shows, it is the remainder of a political project that benefitted North America during troubled times. *Samba Dreamers* comments on this, perhaps inadvertently, by also mentioning an American professor who specializes in Brazilian anthropology, and a blonde, “gringa fool” (264) actress who portrays Carmen Socorro in a film about her life. This certainly gives agency to the host culture in deciding what should and should not be considered Brazilian. However, in articles from Sandoval and Aparicio, Suzanne Oboler, and many others, the label “Latino” is overwhelmingly being reclaimed by those who fall into this category as an indicator for activism and validation of the Latin American diasporic experience.

Still, while there are many similarities, *Samba Dreamers* also highlights discrepancies between Latino and Brazuca literature. One example that spans the existence of all of the characters in the text is the desire to return to Brazil and the perceived notion of a temporary stay in the United States. Even Joe who feels betrayed by the dictatorship longs to return to Brazil and eventually does. The feeling of being a sojourner, always planning to return to the homeland, is something that Tosta and Margolis both describe as characteristic of Brazuca texts. Language itself also points to this characteristic, in such that the expression in Portuguese for a relative living in the U.S. is “*está fazendo América*” (*Goodbye* 16) which means he or she is “doing” America, hinting at the temporariness of their time outside of Brazil. What is unclear, though, as in the tragic cases of Carmen and Rosea, is whether or not a return to the Brazil of memory and fantasy qualifies one as being a sojourner as well. Perhaps this is where the lines of literary and creative production and fact-heavy

anthropological studies rupture, in that all diasporic Brazilians have the possibility to be metaphorical sojourners.

In addition, the Brazilian construct of home varies greatly from other Latin American countries, given their long history of slavery and political oppression. This is echoed throughout *Samba Dreamers*, as various characters mention the irony of Los Angeles: it is a city in the middle of the desert with water pumped in from other areas to allow exotic, non-native plants to grow. One character mentions the palm trees, “brought in as children of the tropics and [who] grew to be Angelenos” (23). The experience of these palm trees is analogous to that of the Brazilian immigrant: both are forced to adapt to a new environment and, with the passing of time, some can successfully grow there. On a larger scale, the reference to palm trees recalls the establishment of *Quilombo dos Palmares* in the state of Alagoas, a community and safe-haven for escaped slaves in the Northeast of Brazil. Forced into slavery, they managed to create a long-standing community based on a mixture of African cultural traditions and language. The establishment of *quilombos* has impacted the significance of home in the Brazilian cultural imaginary, along with ideas about nationality and ethnicity. While other Latin American countries also had fugitive slaves, such as the *cimarrones* in Cuba, *quilombos* are unique to Brazil in that they were long-lasting and functioned independently of the government. This unique notion of home that exists in the Brazilian cultural imaginary represents another possible area of difference between Brazilians and other Latinos.

VI. Conclusions

While *Samba Dreamers* certainly echoes many other Latino narratives, the fact still remains that Brazuca literature positions itself both “in and out” of the Latino movement (“Latino” 578). This is due, primarily, to linguistic differences, but also to the Brazilian constructs of nation and identity. Tosta notes that Brazilians also see themselves as having a unique nationality and ethnic composition that resists inclusion into other groups (“Latino” 580). Still, this and other intra-Latino subjectivities are an increasing area of interest among Latino Studies scholars. In *Samba Dreamers*, we are exposed to an intra-Latino relationship between Joe/José and Tony, a Mexican-American at his workplace who is characterized as friendly and as speaking a “Spanish slooped off the tongue and mixed in with English and heh-hehs” (“Samba” 4) rather than formal Spanish that Joe/José is accustomed to hearing. In addition, when Rosea enters into legal troubles, she describes her adventures as “Mexican trouble” (14) in East L.A., characterizing all violence as coming from the Mexican-American population. It becomes clear that, despite their similarities, the Brazilian

characters of *Samba Dreamers* see themselves as very different, possibly better, than their other Latino counterparts. Even still, this feeling of singularity, although perhaps more strongly felt among the U.S. Brazilian population, is not unique to them. For instance, as Frances Aparicio points out in her 2009 article, “Cultural Twins and National Others: Allegories of IntraLatino Subjectivities in U.S. Latino/a Literature,” many negative stereotypes exist between Cuban-Americans and mainland Puerto Ricans, who see themselves as vastly different in terms of politics and culture.

However, while Brazuca literature presents many challenges to scholars of Latino/a literature in terms of inclusion and exclusion, the fact remains that, despite cultural differences, the diasporic experience for Latin Americans in the U.S. and their descendants is marked by similar struggles and emotions. That which binds the Latino population together can be observed when Tony drives a fellow Mexican-American friend and Joe/José past the Hollywood home of the late Carmen Socorro. After explaining her elaborate garden, Tony remarks to them, “she was homesick, of course, homesick in the worst way . . . we all know what that is like” (9). In that moment, both Joe/José and the other passenger experience a wave of emotion that shows how alike they are, despite their national origin.

Samba Dreamers and other Latino narratives successfully demonstrate that, for any immigrant, home is no longer a question of geographical origin or location, but rather an amalgam of cultures and people that may or may not be situated in the same place. Just as the identity of an immigrant becomes transnational, so does the construct of home. Home and identity are not questions of here or there, but rather, here *and* there, and learning to differentiate between the utopia of memory and the confusion of reality.

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Notes

¹ In *The Other Latinos*, edited by Falconi and Mazzotti, they note that the 2000 U.S. Census statistics show that “Other Latinos’ are becoming a more significant portion of the total Latino population. More than 1 in 4 Hispanics—28 percent of Latinos counted by the Census in 2000—did not classify themselves as one of the three major national origin groups” (22). On this particular census, the three largest national origin groups were listed as Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban (figure, 22).

² Margolis indicates that in 2000, for the first time on the United States census, “the Latino category specifically excluded Brazilians, and Brazilians who checked Hispanic/Latino and wrote in ‘Brazilian’ were marked ‘not Hispanic/Latino’ and their nationality went unnoted. And while Brazilians are ‘Latin Americans,’ this is a geographical designation, not an ethnic one” (*An Invisible Minority* 8).

³ To distinguish between Brazilians in Brazil and those in the U.S., I utilized U.S. Brazilian. Brazilian-American could be seen as problematic, as Brazil views all North and South America as one continent, America, and many Brazilians in Brazil consider themselves American, too.

⁴ Margolis labels the Brazilian migration as “invisible” because of the “significant but unknown percentage of Brazilians living in the United States [that] are undocumented immigrants” (*An Invisible Minority* 7). In *Goodbye, Brazil*, she also states that “accurate figures are clearly difficult to come by, particularly in countries like the United States, where many Brazilians – an estimated 63 percent in 2007—are undocumented” (5).

⁵ Tosta states that Brazuca is the name that “Brazilian immigrants in the United States call themselves” (“Latino, eu?” 576). Maxine Margolis also defines this neologism as “a slang term for Brazilian, but it has come to have the more specific meaning of Brazilians living abroad” (*Goodbye, Brazil* 76).

⁶ Margolis notes that Los Angeles, as of the late twentieth century, contains of “between 60 and 70 thousand Brazilians [who] are served by the Brazilian Consulate” (*Goodbye* 99),

⁷ In *An Invisible Minority*, Margolis notes that many Brazilians began to emigrate during the late 1970s and early 1980s to escape a “chaotic economic situation” (9).

⁸ In *Brazilian Bombshell*, Martha Gil-Montero asserts that the Good Neighbor Policy was established to form “official relations with Latin America on every conceivable front, including the press, the radio, the film industry, and cultural exchanges” (112).

⁹ Margolis asserts that this difficulty upon returning home for many Brazilian emigrants is known as *regression syndrome*, which describes “the feeling of many that it is more difficult to return home than to leave” (*Goodbye* 219).

¹⁰ *Saudade* is the word used to describe the melancholic longing of home that Brazilians feel upon migrating to a new place (Marcus 489).

¹¹ In *Becoming Brazuca*, Allen Woll notes that Miranda portrayed “Latin-ness” to the extreme, “as she added singing number in Spanish, Spanglish, Portaño, or Portuguese mixed with English . . . [she and others] adapted to a U.S. gaze that might have understood what Latin-ness meant in broad terms but certainly did not take the time to distinguish between national cultures” (38).