The Modern Synthesis of Josephine Baker and Carmen Amaya

Justice Moriah Miles

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of
Josephine Baker and Carmen Amaya

By

Justice Miles

Dissertation

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The Modern Synthesis of Josephine Baker and Carmen Amaya

by

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Abstract

The Modern Synthesis of Josephine Baker and Carmen Amaya explores how flamenco dancer Carmen Amaya and African American performer Josephine Baker utilized modern synthesis in their careers. I define modern synthesis as a synthesis of various ideas and identities that supports a modern fluid identity that points to the idea of an alternative space that is beyond definition and human categorization. Expanding upon the ideas of Brenda Dixon Gottschild and William Washabaugh, I propose that there exists a thread of a tragic/comic dichotomy in African American performance and simultaneous opposition in flamenco and that Baker and Amaya came out of these traditions and used modern synthesis to formulate new modern hybrid identities. Coming out of a tradition of a tragic/comic context for African American performers, I argue that Baker synthesized savagery/royalty and demonstrated hybrid-gendered embodiment with her phallic banana skirt performance. In contrast, Carmen Amaya came out of a tradition of simultaneous opposition in flamenco and used modern synthesis by complicating four binaries of regional Andalusian/non-Andalusian, Hyper-gitana/hyper-American performance, the perception of gitana/classical elements in the U.S. and male/female aesthetics. Furthermore, the work finds that African American
performance and flamenco were launched into modernity through artists such as Amaya and Baker, even though African Americans and the Spanish struggled with being viewed as modern historically (Woods 2012:108). The last section of the work examines my MFA choreographic work *Ink on Cotton* and how it continues a legacy of modern synthesis through complicating identity categories in the present day.
Preface

One may ask why I chose to write about African American performer Josephine Baker and gitana (Roma) flamenco artist Carmen Amaya. I chose both of these women because of my interest in gitano flamenco and African American performance historically. I noticed there were connections between gitanos in flamenco and African Americans in jazz. I remembered in Denver when gitano guitarist René Heredia would talk in his performances about how African American Jazz and gitano flamenco have similarities as both have been influenced by oppressed peoples. As an African American/biracial girl interested in flamenco with a jazz musician father, I found this information very interesting. In 2018, I attended Meira Goldberg’s conference in New York that was dedicated to research on blackness in flamenco. Fascinated by African American and gitano culture, I chose Baker and Amaya for my study.

In my family’s bright little red brick house on Olive Street in Denver, Colorado, where the sun streams in and music constantly flows out, I grew up surrounded by a variety of music. Playing with Barbies with my dad quietly in the back of concerts and playing tag with him at record stores are some of my most cherished childhood memories. When I was little, my dad would send me faxes of hand-drawn comics when he missed me when he was on tour playing jazz. The house was always full of music and musicians. There were always my mother’s piano and flute students coming to the house or there were rehearsals going on in the Music Room, an added part of the house that was a room completely dedicated to music. I was not fully aware of growing up that incredible musicians walked through the house to rehearse jazz in the Music Room, artists such as Bill Frisell, Ginger Baker, Brian
Blade, and more. There was great beauty in growing up in an environment full of amazing
music and incredibly kind and talented musicians.

One day in our little red brick house, I walked into the living room when my dad was
watching a jazz documentary and Josephine Baker came on. I found her fascinating. Her
banana dance and subversive play within the fantasies the French had about black people was
intriguing to me.

As a teenager in Denver, I remember first seeing old photographs of Carmen Amaya
in René Heredia’s house and being enraptured by videos of her on Youtube. Heredia was full
of stories and memories of Carmen Amaya, Sabicas, Paco de Lucia and various artists in his
life. Heredia had studied with Sabicas and became Amaya’s guitarist at seventeen years old
when Sabicas left Amaya’s company to have a solo career. A joy within this project was an
interview with Heredia for information on Amaya’s life which gave a living, breathing
essence to Carmen Amaya with vivid details such as his memories of her watching cartoons,
drinking black coffee and smoking two packs of cigarettes before auditioning him to tour
with her. Another vivid memory of his was in London, Amaya’s dressing room was full of
statuettes of Christ when she did her make up (Heredia 2019). I have been grateful to hear
stories and see photographs of this amazing woman that greatly impacted flamenco
historically as an international gitana star.

Years later, writing my dissertation, I decided to choose Josephine Baker and Carmen
Amaya as symbols to the influences of jazz and flamenco in my life, to honor the musical
traditions of these cultures and the influences of oppressed people choosing to rise up and
create powerful art. While I celebrate these women’s accomplishments as artists, I also write
to critically examine and ask questions about the political, patriarchal and racist landscape
that Baker and Amaya navigated during their careers. Baker and Amaya found challenges politically, racially, sexually, and culturally. They had to craft fluid water-like identities in a modern synthesis that could slide past various pigeon holes, rules and boundaries. Their complex synthesis of various identities in successful transatlantic careers has been a fascinating exploration.
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Introduction

Carmen Amaya (1918–1963) and Josephine Baker (1906–1975) are two of the most iconic dance figures of the twentieth century. They also lived around the same time. Both women experienced transatlantic stardom but came back to difficult political landscapes in their own countries; Baker facing segregation in the U.S. and Amaya facing a Spain controlled by Franco.

Both women complicated and challenged binaries and identity categories in their performances. Through their synthesis of identity categories in performance, I argue that Baker and Amaya created a new alternative modernity which is reminiscent of Monica Miller’s idea of subversive dandyism (Miller 2006:180-181). The dandy is a figure of modernity (Feldman 1993 in Miller 2006:184) that exhibited border crossing whether it be through traveling across the Atlantic or traveling across lines of gender, race, and sexuality.

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1 Scholar Montse Madridejos argues that Amaya was born in 1918 though this date has been disputed in the past (Madridejos 2015:178, 184-185n1)
(Miller 2006:183). Miller explains that the dandy is a “figure of paradox created by many societies in order to express whatever it is that the culture feels it must, but cannot, synthesize” (Miller 2006:183). Carmen Amaya and Josephine Baker seem to demonstrate similar qualities as they were transatlantic stars that synthesized paradoxical categories.

Therefore, I expand Miller’s concept of synthesis in subversive dandysim to include a wider discussion of synthesizing paradoxical identity categories by proposing a new terminology for this idea; modern synthesis. Modern synthesis is a synthesis of various ideas and identities which support a modern fluid identity that points to the idea of an alternative space that is beyond definition and human categorization. I view modern synthesis as a political and artistic tactic to dismantle categorization and disorganize the structures that support hierarchy. Amaya and Baker inspire me as figures of modern synthesis and I view myself as an artist who is a synthesizer of paradoxical categorization because I am a biracial dancer and choreographer that seeks to complicate categories through choreographic explorations in contemporary dance and flamenco.

The following research will first examine how Amaya and Baker were figures of modernity that challenged identity categories. Inspired by Gottschild and Washabaugh, I will also look at how Baker came out of a tragic/comic context of African American performers and how Amaya came out of flamenco, which Washabaugh argues is an ironic art form exhibiting simultaneous opposition (Washabaugh 1996:38-39). These women emerge out of the traditions of minstrelsy/vaudeville and flamenco which exhibit tragedy/comedy and simultaneous opposition but then forge new modern identities that are a synthesis of paradoxical identity categories. Out of these traditions which seem to exhibit the duality of an ironic existence (Washabaugh 1996:38-39), Amaya and Baker continue this legacy
through modern synthesis. These women became a “catalyst” of modernity (Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:27) and modern pioneers “of paradox created by many societies in order to express whatever it is that the culture feels it must, but cannot, synthesize” (Miller 2006: 183). The work will discuss the irony that flamenco and African American performance, which struggled with being viewed as modern (Woods 2012:108), actually defined modernity itself (Bennahum 2015:194, Thompson 1996 in Bennahum 2015:194) with assistance from artists like Amaya and Baker. The final section will conclude with exploring how these artists inspired the artistic philosophy of modern synthesis and my MFA choreographic work *Ink on Cotton.*
Part I: Josephine Baker

Tragic/Comic Historical Context:

Baker emerged from a legacy of a tragic/comic context for African American performers. Brenda Dixon Gottschild in her book *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance* develops five Africanist aesthetics in African American performance, one being high-affect juxtaposition. She writes that high-affect juxtaposition is an extreme contrast. As an example, Gottschild writes about how Anatole Broyard was appalled by a jazz singer’s transition from *Strange Fruit*, a song about lynching, to a love song (Gottschild 1996:14-15). Influenced by Gottschild’s theory, I expand my argument to not just juxtaposition but to the idea that there is a presence of a tragic-comic existence in African American performance.
An example that highlights this tragic/comic context is described by Blues singer Johnny Otis in an interview conducted by Sandy Carter (Carter 1995 in Gottschild 1996:29). Otis, who was a white musician that greatly appreciated black culture, recalls a tragic-comic instance when he went to a dance that was only for people of color in 1939 (Carter 1995 in Gottschild 1996:29). Otis explains his friend lied saying that Otis was actually a person of color because he was his cousin (Carter 1995 in Gottschild 1996:29). Otis recalls, “Then this big cop says, ‘Let me see your fingernails,’ And he looked at my nails and looked back at his partner and says, ‘Yeah, Bill, he’s a boogie all right.’ We laughed about that one, and cried about it…So ridiculous you had to laugh, but so bitter and so hurting you had to cry” (Carter 1995 in Gottschild 1996:29). The examples of the jazz singer’s dissonant song selection and Otis’s story highlights the ironic difficulties of blackness in the United States, the irony that for African American performers comedy has been nestled uncomfortably within tragedy historically.

I argue that this tragic-comic existence began with African American slavery in the United States. Scholar Edward E. Baptist cites the former slave William Wells story of crying slaves being forced to dance (Wells Brown 1993: 45 in Baptist 2001:1635). Wells writes that slaves “were set to dancing, some to singing, and some to playing cards. This was done to make them appear cheerful and happy…I have often set them to dancing when their cheeks were wet with tears” (Wells Brown 1993: 45 in Baptist 2001:1635). Baptiste interprets Brown’s testimony as a creation of commodifying slaves as “standard, acceptably happy, ready-made” (Baptiste 2001:1635). I argue that the idea of dancing/crying slaves seems to be the beginning of a tragic/comic legacy in African American performance and entertainment. African Americans were forced into comedy through tragic circumstances.
African Americans were also put into the role of a jester-servant by Euro-Americans. Scholar Robert Toll argues that the need for a racialized other for comic relief had English origins (Toll 1974:28). Toll argues, “In American drama, Negroes assumed the comic relief role that the ignorant Irish servant played in England, supplemented by some images of happy slaves” (Toll 1974:28). In the United States, Irish Americans displaced their jester-role onto African Americans, as some Irish immigrants used minstrelsy as a way to solidify their white status (Martelly 2010:9). Martelly writes, “working class Irish Americans legitimized their status as ‘white’ through their performances in minstrel theatres by creating social distance from the African Americans they caricatured” (Martelly 2010:9).

Therefore, the legacy of a tragic/comic dichotomy originated through situations created by European immigrants in the United States, such as forcing slaves to appear cheerful when crying (Wells Brown 1993: 45 in Baptiste 2001:1635), which stemmed from the desire of a comic figure of low status (Toll 1974:28). Therefore, I want to stress that this theory of a tragic/comic existence is not an essentialist quality of African Americans but is due to the historical situations that African Americans found themselves in. This duality of a jester-servant against the harsh reality of slavery gave birth to African American art that reflects an ironic existence in the United States.

This legacy continued into blackface minstrelsy, a performance genre that made fun of African Americans and was at one point the singular venue open to African American performers (Gottschild 1996:84). The only way for blacks in the nineteenth century to have a stable career as entertainers and performers was to work in minstrelsy (Toll 1974:216). Furthermore, due to segregation, only certain jobs were allowed to African Americans. The limited avenues open to African Americans highlights the forced option of the comedic
entertainment performance of minstrelsy or the tragic "extended servitude of the emancipated" (Hartman 1997: 9 in Martelly 2010:10) of working limited job options from segregation.

During blackface minstrelsy, a constant negotiation of balance existed between playfulness and tragedy (Gottschild 1996:19). One can see tragedy/comedy juxtaposed in the minstrel characters of Zip Coon and Jim Crow. Zip Coon was a dandy, a black man that adopted sophisticated qualities in the minstrel show, but was sad because he truly desired slavehood whereas Jim Crow was a cheerful comic bumpkin character (Miles 30 March 2019). Later transmutations of minstrelsy included vaudeville and variety shows, which continued the juxtaposition of comedy and tragic racism (Brown 2008:4-5). Variety shows, which followed the tragic/comic nature of minstrel shows (Brown 2008:5), set up the context in which Baker found herself in, which was performing stereotypes for white audiences.
Josephine Baker’s Early Career:

Baker was born in St. Louis, United States in 1906. She was born in the slums of a country where lynching of African Americans was occurring in the South and race riots were occurring in the North (Martin 1995:310, 317). When she was eleven years old, she witnessed a horrible race riot (Martin 1995:317). The riot was traumatic as Baker recalled in an interview with Henry Louis Gates Jr. that “All the sky was red with people’s houses burning. On the bridge, there were running people with their tongues cut out. There was a woman who’d been pregnant with her insides cut out” (Gates Jr. 2012:560). In this tragic context of racial unrest, Baker set out on a comedic career by joining a vaudeville group that went to New York (Martin 1995:310). By fifteen years old, Baker had married and left two men, her second husband being a railroad porter who gave Josephine Baker her last name (Ralling 1986).

Baker worked with Clara Smith and the Dixie Steppers and was a chorus girl in *Shuffle Along* of 1921 and the *Chocolate Dandies* of 1924 (Ngai 2006:149, oxfordmusiconline.com). In *Shuffle Along*, Baker would humorously make faces at the end of the chorus lines, which provoked other dancers to insult her as a monkey (Ralling 1986). Brown explains Baker used the “gestural strategies of a picaninny in the chorus line” from her work with Clara Smith and the Dixie Steppers in her solo debut in “Land of the Dancing Picaninnies” (Brown 2008:206), where she wore the minstrelized attire of blackface and clown shoes (Brown 2008:206). Baker stated that “‘when I rolled my eyes and made the very face that had earned me a scolding at school, the crowd burst out laughing’” (Baker and Bouillon 1977:26 in Brown 2008:206) and bragged that she was paid more because of her special skill (Baker and Bouillon 1977:34 in Brown 2008:206). Utilizing gestural vocabulary
of a picaninny\(^2\), Baker utilized her “living currency” (Brown 2008:24, 206) to create a career as a chorus girl in the United States.

Baker was launched into another historical and cultural context in 1925 (Brylawski 2001: Oxfordmusiconline.com) when Spencer Williams and Caroline Dudley offered her to perform in *La Revue Nègre* at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées in France, coincidently the same site where *Le Sacre du Printemps* had its debut (Ngai 2006:149). There, Baker would grow beyond a chorus girl into an international star and the particular ingredients brewing in French society were the perfect canvas to propel Baker into stardom.

**French Historical Context:**

When Josephine Baker entered the Paris Stage, she had the perfect qualifications to become a star in the historical context of primitivist modernism in France. Many Europeans were disillusioned with European civilization after the disastrous consequences of World War I (Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:22). There was a desire to return to “the primitive origins of mankind” (Baker Jr. 1987:86 in Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:22). Although there were a variety of peoples considered primitive (Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:22-23), African culture was set as a focal point and the vogue of primitivist modernism influenced various artists, composers, and writers (Beyad and Roshnavand 2013: 22-23, Washington 2001:32 in Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:23). Europeans in this time period used African art as a resource to revitalize their parched land and ideology (Gottschild 1996:39, in Beyad and

\(^{2}\) Brown notes that a picaninny was as a black slave child that was inspired from the name of the low-value coin of a *picayune*, to symbolize the “interchangeability” between a slave and money, which signifies that black slave children were literally “living currency” (Brown 2008:24).
Rohsnavand 2013:22, 25). It was believed that Negroes danced with passion and “European civilization was in dire need of Negroes whose blood could recultivate the ‘long-since dried-up land that can scarcely breathe’” (Ivan Goll in Lemke 1998:95 in Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:25, Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:25). This idea that Europe required a blood transfusion from African culture (Gottschild 1996:39) for survival is manifested in the belief that the body of Josephine Baker held “‘the secret that would impede them from dying from the weight of civilization’” (Lemke 1998:101 in Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:27). Therefore, through the pessimism of the devastating effects of World War I that left Europe parched and bloodless, Baker became a symbol of rejuvenating pleasure, fun, and fantasy for Europeans that wanted to redefine themselves.

The context of primitivist modernism was the perfect canvas for Josephine Baker’s performances which exuded childlike innocence and sexuality. Baker’s excessive sexuality perpetuated the belief that primitive peoples were sexual (Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:22) while Baker’s material appropriated from children (Brown 2008:251) supported the Freudian ideology that “primitive dances” were “childlike, simple, and innocent” (Burt 1998:138 in Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:25, Kraut 2003:435 in Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:25). Baker’s dances spoke to European interests in the primitive desires of the unconscious as Pierre MacOrlan wrote, “Josephine speaks to our unconscious…she turns upside down our way of seeing, displacing lines, calling to mind a primitive order’” (MacOrlan in Haney 1981:67 in Sowinska 2005: 56). Therefore, Baker’s hyper-sexualized and hyper-racialized performances were immensely popular with the historical context of primitivist modernism as her backdrop.
In addition to a fascination with primitivism, France was also in the midst of colonial expansion. Scholar Elizabeth de Martelly cites Thomas Pakenham’s research explaining that American minstrel show tours across the Atlantic coincided with European Colonial expansion in Africa (in Martelly 2010:14). Martelly also discusses Jayna Brown’s argument by stating that “past and present” were blurred as African Americans played slaves for Europeans dreaming of colonialism (in Martelly 2010:14-15). Martelly further analyzes Brown by stating, “This imagined contact with colonial Africans, mediated through simulated African-American slavery, played a critical role in shaping European attitudes towards blacks as natural workers tied to the land and requiring imperial management” (in Martelly 2010:15). Therefore, Baker who had performed slave stereotypes in the Plantation Club and Land of the Dancing Picaninies (Jules-Rosette 2007:58-59, Brown 2008:206) was easily able to transition into performing similar stereotypes for European audiences craving colonialism (Jules-Rossette 2007:177).
Due to the colonial interests of France, Baker was able to transform from a “carefree slave” character (Martelly 2010:14) in the U.S. to performing as one of France’s imagined “happy savages” (Sharpley-Whiting 1999:4). Baker became a colonial stock character without a specified racial origin that expanded her “spectacle of race”” (Kalinak 2000:330 in Sowinska 2005:56) to performing in 1930s French colonial films (Sharpley-Whitley 1999:4-5). Baker, who had played the “ignorant carefree slave” (Martelly 2010:14, Lott 1995:6 in Martelly 2010:14 and J. Brown 2008: 64 in Martelly 2010:14) rolling her eyes in *Land of the Picanninies* in the United States (Brown 2008:206), transitioned to playing a sexualized “happy savage” film star in various French colonies, where “lush landscapes” were not the only item advertised as “ripe for the taking” (Sharpley-Whiting 1999:4). Baker’s minstrelized “imported body” (Sharpley-Whiting 1999:9) transitioned to play a different colonized body in another cultural context.

This historical context sets the stage for us to theoretically examine Josephine Baker, who found herself in a tragic/comic context. We will now examine how she complicated dissonant binaries in her career through her use of modern synthesis.

**Josephine Baker: Modern Synthesis:**

Josephine Baker used modern synthesis in her career by creating a fluid identity that was able to navigate the complex demands of performing as an African American for French audiences. Martin explains that “Josephine Baker used the modernist concept of self-construction as well as the modernist interest in primitivism to create a series of dramatic personae that both parodied and challenged notions of essentialism in the arenas of race, class and gender” (Martin 1995:316). While Baker challenged various categories, I will focus
on how Baker used modern synthesis to complicate the binaries of savagery/royalty and attraction/repulsion through creating a parodic savage/royal “ultramodern and ultraprimitive” (Nenno 1997:155 in Sowinska 2005:54) persona and a hybrid-gendered persona in her banana skirt act.

**Baker’s Modern Synthesis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Binary:</th>
<th>Savagery/Royalty</th>
<th>Attraction/Repulsion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action:</strong></td>
<td>Crafting a Savage/Royal</td>
<td>Hybrid-gendered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>persona (Martin)</td>
<td>embodiment in banana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>skirt act (Sowinska)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theory:</strong></td>
<td>Subversive Dandyism</td>
<td>Woman with/as phallus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Miller)</td>
<td>(Schneider)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Uncharted hybridity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Roy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8 Baker’s Modern Synthesis Table

**Savagery/Royalty:**

In the United States, scholar Wendy Martin believed that Baker parodied minstrelsy in the U.S. and savagery/royalty in France. Martin writes of Baker in the U.S., “Half urchin, half hobo, wearing ragged stockings and abbreviated overalls, she rolled her eyes, contorted her face, and swiveled her body in a deliberate parody of the blackface vaudeville routines and the conventions of the Negro minstrel show” (Martin 1995:311). While Baker’s body vocabulary could be viewed as a parody of minstrelsy in the U.S. (Martin 1995:311), Baker transitioned from parodying minstrelsy in the United States to creating a complex parody of savagery and royalty in France (Martin 1995:311, 314).
Finding herself “suspended between civilization and savagery” (Sowinska 2005:54), Baker heightened her various roles to excess so she was both “ultramodern and ultraprimitive” (Nenno 155 in Sowinska 2005:54). Scholar Alicja Sowinska explains that Baker complicated binaries through “playing with and in-between primitivist conventions and refinement” (Sowinska 2005:52, Martin 1995:310-325 in Sowinska 2005:52). An example of this in-between embodiment of refinement and savagery can be viewed in Baker’s hybrid costumes that combined royal jewels with a banana skirt, which visually symbolized her embodiment of both worlds (Sowinska 2005:64). Figure 9, featuring Baker in a satin gown with a feline head, could be interpreted as an expression of her savage/royal persona. Martin explains that through using both savagery and royalty Baker was able “to gain more and more control over her reification as primitive. By juxtaposing images of the jungle and the royal court, the carnal and the cerebral, she subverted the trope of cultural evolution and progress” (Martin 1995:321).

In one particular example, Baker parodied savagery and royalty distinctly in an example of having a press release reveal what she enjoyed eating. Martin describes “Baker’s deliberate manipulation of the trope of the black exotic” as both “humorous and perhaps offensive,” when a press release explains that Baker enjoys eating cannibal sandwiches, which consisted of raw meat and onions (Martin 1995:313). Playing with the perceptions of
civilized sandwiches and savage cannibalism, Baker’s cannibal sandwich embodied the paradoxical world Baker found herself in.

Although Baker performed a savage role to audiences it is interesting to note that “When the curtain dropped, La Baker, […] ‘tried to be as civilized as possible’” (Sowinska 2005:52, Baker and Bouillon 1977:55 in Sowinska 2005:52). Baker played with savagery on stage but she also utilized subversive dandyism to play with royalty (Miller 2006:181). In “The Black Dandy as a Modernist” Monica Miller analyzes dandyism as a “black modern identity” that has “a potential for mobility” and notes that the “subversive dandyism” that existed in Harlem was a positive mosaic of black and white cultures (Miller 2006:180-181). Miller describes and defines dandyism:

As a potentially socially and culturally critical and subversive practice, dandyism requires a sense of self-possession and self-consciousness about style as a combination of dress and attitude that signifies ‘dignity, elegance, refinement, self-control, pride and lucidity.’” (Miller 2006:182, Moers 1960:30 in Miller 2006:182)

Furthermore, Miller explains that dandies created an alternate identity through “style and charisma” even if they were not born into wealth (Miller 2006:182). Although the Cambridge dictionary defines a dandy as a man that exhibits exquisite high fashion (Cambridge Dictionary 2019), this can be extended to Josephine Baker.

Figure 10
Although she was not born wealthy (Martin 1995:310), Baker utilized dandyism in Paris to create a “‘self-fashioned nobility’” (Garelick 1998:21 in Miller 2006:182) for herself that included a lifestyle of wearing tiaras and trains, owning a bed that belonged to Marie Antoinette in her chateau, dining on the delicacies of “‘fish heads and rooster’s combs served with special sauces’” and quenching her thirst through champagne (Martin 1995:313).

Although Martin suggests that Baker’s appropriation of royalty could have given proof to “the civilizing power of European culture” and that “even the most unrepressed savage could be tamed” (Martin 1995:314), I argue that Baker combined and synthesized the royal and primitive to create a modern synthesized identity. As France was utilizing primitivism for its own modernity, Baker synthesized her primitive persona with her glamorous star status as a pioneer for a new modern identity. Baker’s modern synthesis was valuable for her marketing and popularity in addition to creating new trends in French culture as bits of the primitive were packaged into modern products such as a Josephine Baker Custard, Baker’s ZouZou movie sticker advertisements on bananas at Parisian markets and anti-aging banana moisturizer (Sowinska 2005:61).

Baker modern synthesis also supported the creation of an alternative space, as Sowinska argues that Baker inhabited a liminal dreamworld by stating, “Baker was popularly situated in a sort of netherworld, suspended between civilization and savagery, and between the human and the animal” (Sowinska 2005:54). I expand Sowinska’s argument that Baker’s hybrid-creation of herself as a performer supported an alternative space where one does not need to be defined. I believe this supports my idea that modernity is built on a complex negotiation and pastiche of various identities that form a diverse community.
Baker created her own diverse community of children titled the Rainbow Tribe. Baker was an activist against racism (Jules-Rosette 2007:214) and later adopted children from countries around the world, calling them the Rainbow Tribe (Jules-Rosette 2007:190). Scholar Bennetta Jules-Rosette notes the connection between Baker’s diverse persona with her formation of the Rainbow Tribe by stating, “There was a sense in which the Rainbow Tribe reflected Baker’s performative persona by representing the multiple national and cultural identities that she had assumed on stage, on film, and in song” (Jules-Rosette 2007:190-191). It appears Baker could imagine an alternative space where identity categories and race cease to matter. Martin writes, “It was her hope that the international community she created could transcend antagonism and polarization based on racial and ethnic difference” (Martin 1995:315). It is possible that Baker’s mosaic identity was a way of proposing a new modernity that is a synthesis of various cultures and ideas and supported the imagination of an alternative utopian space free of marginalization.

Attraction/Repulsion:

Similar to a tragic/comic context, Baker also found herself navigating a history of attraction and repulsion in the U.S. and France, and utilized attraction and repulsion for her own means. Baker battled a long history of attraction and repulsion in the U.S. as historian Deborah Gray White cited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall explains that black women juggled “paradoxical stereotypes—they were disgustingly lustful…but exceptionally unfeminine. They were alluring but unattractive; they attracted and repelled at the same time” (White 1985: 27-35 in Guy-Sheftall 2002:23, Guy-Sheftall 2002:23). Guy-Sheftall explains that during slavery black women were stereotyped as “beasts of burden, workhorses and hypersexual” to
legitimize their abuse as sex slaves and land slaves “from sunup to sundown” (GuySheftall 2002:23). They were viewed as both attractive enough to abuse sexually yet repulsive enough to be subordinated to a low status as slaves. Martelly discusses Jayan Brown’s argument that the United States essentialist idea of blacks being land laborers seemed to transfer easily over to France’s colonial ideology and propaganda in African colonialism (in Martelly 2010:15). This long historical context of slavery influenced the attraction/repulsion that Baker confronted in her career.


The original Black Venus was known as the Venus Hottentot. She was a Khoikhoi South African woman named Saartajie Baartman who was captured and exhibited in England and France (Magubane 2001:817), died at age 25 (Gottschild 1996:36) and was dissected by Georges Cuvier (Magubane 2001:817). Baartmen’s brain, private parts, and skeleton were kept after her death (Brown 2008:227) and displayed in a Parisian museum (Elkins 27 Jan 2007). Her remains were not returned to South Africa until 2002 (Brown 2008:227).

Although many have made comparisons between Baartmen and Baker, we must remember that Baartmen was in Paris in 1814 (Magubane 2001:826) and Baker performed her first show in Paris in 1925 with La Revue Negre (Ralling 1986). These two women were
in two very different historical contexts and situations. Scholar Zine Magubane brilliantly writes:

Theorists who contend that there was a single ideology, central icon, or core image about Blackness and sexuality in the nineteenth century make two mistakes. First, they discount the extent to which ideas about Blackness were still emerging. Second, their analyses that this particular ideology magically escaped the types of conflicts that all other ideologies are subject to. (Magubane 2001:825)

Magubane’s argument is incredibly important as she questions and challenges post-structuralism for actually perpetuating ideology it wants to fight by assuming that theory now applies to the past and that a singular idea of blackness and a monolithic European perspective existed (Magubane 2001:824, 822). Magubane warns us that we must take care to not see Baartmen as part of a universalized black female experience or apply the racial ideology and theory of today to explain blackness when racial constructs were still forming in the 1800s, as there was still debate of whether Irish were negroes (Magubane 2006:823-825). Although frequently compared historically, we must remember Baker came to France a century later in a different context and circumstance than Baartman. However, I argue that they both experienced attraction/repulsion through the erotification and exotification of their bodies.

While the U.S. and France demonstrate histories of attraction and repulsion, Baker battled perceptions of repulsion and attraction in the U.S. versus France. Baker’s black beauty, unfortunately, was generally unrecognized in the U.S. In the U.S., there are many examples of Baker being viewed as unattractive. Baker was denied work as a chorus girl because she was “too thin, too small, too dark” (Rose 1989:53 in Dalton and Gates 1998:
910-911). Baker was called a monkey by other chorus girls in *Shuffle Along* as she crossed her eyes to make the audience laugh (Ralling 1986). When Baker returned to New York in 1936 after becoming a star in France to perform in *Ziegfield Follies*, a critic from the *American* stated, “she had a voice like a cracked bell with a padded clapper” (Ralling 1986, a critic in Ralling 1986). Furthermore, Baker’s successful French film *ZouZou* plummeted in the U.S. (Ralling 1986). They did not even celebrate that she was “the first Black woman to star in a major motion picture” (Robinson 2018) as a country that was not ready for a black film star until much later (Ralling 1986). Even after her death, some descriptions of her still hinted at her perceived unattractiveness. A critic from *Dance Magazine* explains that back then there was “Nothing very beautiful about a cross-eyed coloured girl. Nothing very appealing. But it was the folding knees and cross-eyes that helped bring back the choruses for those unforgettable encores” (Critic in Hammon and O’Conner 1988: 9-10 in Dalton and Gates 1998: 910). A *New York Times* article that reviewed Baker’s documentary *Chasing a Rainbow* states, “She was not a great dancer or singer, nor was she ravishingly beautiful. Yet Josephine Baker became one of the show-business legends of this century” (O’Connor 6 April 1987). Adelaide Hall, who was a chorus girl with Baker in *Shuffle Along* that became a singer that relocated to Europe (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 13 February 2019), explains in the documentary *Chasing a Rainbow* that in the U.S. *Shuffle Along*, Baker was “a comedian, you know, she wasn’t a dancer and she wasn’t what you could say beautiful, but she was fascinating” (Ralling 1986). These examples show that the U.S. tended to repel Baker, and do not describe her as a talented dancer or a beautiful woman. Baker had the

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3 1936 is the same year Amaya fled Spain (Madridejos 2015:178)
famous song *J’ai Deux Amours* (Jules-Rosette 2007:175, Ralling 1986) about her two loves of France and the U.S., but the U.S. did not seem to return this love (Ralling 1986).

While Baker initially played awkward minstrelized roles in the U.S., she transformed into a glamorous and desirable star in France. After her performance *La Folie du Jour*, which entailed her dancing in a banana skirt at the Folies Bergere, her popularity and income exploded in Europe (biography.com). Baker was publically and sexually desired, as Baker was proposed to over one thousand times (biography.com) and men gathered around her room as rumors abounded that she had an endless sexual appetite (Sowinska 2005:62). When Adelaide Hall described Baker in France in the same interview in *Chasing a Rainbow* she describes her differently: “Ostrich feathers all over, and she had beautiful long legs and she was a lovely coloring you know, [a] coffee color and she was very slim and very graceful” (Ralling 1986). Adelaide Hall’s descriptions of Baker in the U.S. versus France in the documentary *Chasing a Rainbow* seem to evoke her contradictory nature (Sowinska 2005:58) and highlight the idea of attraction/repulsion within the U.S. and France’s perceptions of her. While Baker negotiated being perceived as attractive or repulsive in France and the U.S., she also used attraction and repulsion for her own means through her use of eye crossing and hybrid-gendered embodiment in her banana skirt act.

Baker used the history of attraction/repulsion through her use of eye-crossing. If Baker was attracting her audience, she would then juxtapose this with eye-crossing to repel

In figure 12, Baker looks as if she is protecting herself by covering her breasts while simultaneously crossing her eyes. Although there could be many interpretations to figure 12, I argue that the image evokes an embodied paradox of the effects of tragedy/comedy and attraction/repulsion living simultaneously in the body, specifically the black body trying to negotiate a paradoxical and contradictory existence in society.

Baker also embodied attraction and repulsion in her career in her famous banana skirt act. Equipped with full bare breasts and multiple yellow phalluses (in Sowinska 2005:51, 60), Baker used modern synthesis to create a hybrid-gendered embodiment. Scholar Rebecca Schneider explains that a woman with a phallus was seen as unnatural, unattractive and repulsive yet a woman as a phallus was seen as attractive (Schneider 2013:38). To elaborate this idea, in her book in The Explicit Body in Performance, Schneider writes of the negative reaction to Shigeko Kubota’s Vagina Painting where she painted with a brush that was coming out of in her vagina versus the celebrated Yves Klein work where nude women were
used as phallic paintbrushes (Schneider 2013:38). Schneider concludes, “Woman as artist’s brush, woman fetishized as phallus was acceptable, even chic. But woman with brush was in some way woman with phallus and thus unnatural, monstrous, threatening, primitive—certainly not artistic” (Schneider 2013:38).

Baker heightens this idea as she is not a woman with one phallus but many. This could be considered to be even more monstrous and unnatural, yet she balances this repulsion with two attractive sexualized breasts. Baker’s phallus skirt challenges the Freudian idea that women were unequipped without phalluses (Irigaray 1985 in Sowinska 2005:58, Sowinska 2005:58) and that men feared castration from women who are not born with phalluses (Freud 1936 in Block and Ventur 1963:518). Baker pushed these fears to an extreme as she not only castrated one man but many. She kept evidence of this through her collection of “trophies” in her skirt (Sowinska 2005:62).

Embodying attraction and repulsion as a seductive siren, Baker’s bare breasts attracted her prey while her phallus skirt simultaneously repelled and gave warning of possible castration fears that were brewing in the minds of men who believed the Freudian and heteronormative ideology of the times.

Through the banana skirt, Baker synthesized gender to propose a new alternative space and identity that provides a synthesis of a modern “monstrous” (Roy1997:84) hybrid-gendered identity. Baker’s play within the liminal space between genders relates to Sanjoy Roy’s idea:
On medieval maps, the areas of unchartered terrain beyond the edges of the known world were imagined to be populated by strange creatures that could only be conceived as monstrous hybrids composed of elements that were already known—mermaids (half-woman, half-fish), griffons (half-lion, half-eagle), dragons (half-bat, half-lizard). In the modern age, that unchartered terrain is cultural, and those hybrids now appear not at the edges of the map, but at its very centre: the city. (Roy 1997:84)

Within the city center of Paris, Baker created a fluid gendered persona that was perceived as monstrous because it lays on the periphery of binaries and categories. It is distinctly her complication of these binaries and categories that form a modern identity that exists in the heart of the metropolis. Baker’s monstrous hybridity of a woman with many phalluses points to Roy’s idea that “We all, in fact, have plural identities that shift with context, place and time, often in contradictory ways; in short, we are all hybrids” (Roy 1997: 83).

Figure 14 Paul Colin’s *La Revue Nègre*.  
Figure 15 Paul Colin’s *Le Tumulte Noir*. 
Baker was a hybrid, paradoxical and contradictory figure that complicated categorization which seems to be highlighted in her portrayal within Paul Colin’s Posters. Sowinska argues that Colin’s *Le Tumulte Noir* poster of Baker dancing in a “banana sarong evocative of a ballerina skirt” presents Baker “in a very flattering way, refined and idealized, in contrast with other Colin’s posters, which have more crude tendencies” (Sowinska 2005:59) such as the minstrel influence and “exaggerated Negroid features” in *La Revue Negre* (Sowinska 2005:59). These two posters from the same artist of the same performer highlight the contradictory nature of Baker (Sowinska 2005:58).

Baker was powerful because she played in between binaries (Sowinska 2005: 50), and thus created dangerous contradictions (Sowinska 2005:58). One was not able to pin her down. Sowinska notes that if Baker was subversive in her career that “she can be recognized as not passively accepting the status quo, but consciously creating contradictions, ambiguities, and unsettling discrepancies that resisted one-dimensional readings and transgressed her social containment” (Sowinska 2005:58). Baker even argued that she defied categories (Gottschild 1996:38) and created a complex self-image which is highlighted in Colin’s paradoxical posters of her. Baker explains, “Not a dancer, not an actress, not even black: Josephine Baker, that’s who I am. I can go on my heels and I can run on all fours, when I want to, and then I shake off all the piercing looks….Because I’m not a pincushion either” (in Muller 1985:22 in Gottschild 1996:38). In addition to Baker’s image, Baker’s “constant movement denied fragmentation” and was nestled within the uncomfortable binaries of “action and objectification” together while “sending a message of resistance and agency while simultaneously challenging her audience” (Sowinska 2005: 64). Baker was simply undefinable. She created a modern synthesis that complicated many layers of identity.
Sowinska elaborates on Baker’s contradictory embodiment of savagery/civilization, gender, and race:

If she embodied a savage on stage, she would behave like a lady on the street; if men were dying for her as a seductress, she would put on a man’s suit and bend gender boundaries; if she was called a “black Venus,” she would treat her head with a blonde wig. When the perception of her became too refined, she walked her pet leopard down the Champs-Elysées or crossed her eyes and made faces,” (Sowinska 2005:68-69).

Through modern synthesis, Baker rattled French society by becoming a catalyst for the primitivist modernism that was brewing in Europe (Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:27, in Lemke 1998:101 in Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:27). Although Baker confessed that she felt more freedom in France than in the U.S. (Gates Jr. 2012: 561-562), Gottschild argues that “Of course, Baker was imprisoned by the white male gaze, defined and confined within the parameters of the primitive trope. The fact that she thought that she was free is only a measure of the relativity of the concept of freedom” (Gottschild 1996:38). Gottschild’s quote is a precursor to our next discussion about how Baker was used as propaganda for French colonialism veiled under the façade of freedom during World War II (Martin 1995:320, Brown 2008: 254, 261).

**Baker as Propaganda in France:**

Although Baker may have found more freedom in France, the reality is France just had a different kind of racism than the U.S. (Martin 1995:315). The U.S. and France had different historical contexts, as the U.S. had a history of slavery while France was in the
midst of colonialism (Martin 1995:317). Martin explains that the European “belief in the primitive as exotic, as well as belief in the civilizing mission of the nation, actually gave Baker more latitude in shaping her dramatic personae, where as in the United States she was limited to variations on the theme of master/slave relations” (Martin 1995:318). Scholar Kirsten Buick notes that Baker followed the footsteps of other African American expatriates forming careers in Europe that were able to navigate more freedom in societies that had not yet formed racism specifically against African Americans, even though Europe had developed systems of oppression for their African colonies (Buick defense 2019). Baker did not escape racism in France, yet France’s racism allowed Baker more range of artistic roles than the U.S. (Martin 1995:318).

Unfortunately, Baker’s ability to fluidly move between categories ended up being abused by France for its own means. While Baker was able to use modern synthesis to create a fluid identity that could complicate a wide range of identity categories for her career, her fluidity was also used as propaganda for France’s colonial agenda. France obsessed over its colonies and produced “colonial cinema” as a way to escape, solidify a French national identity and encourage colonialism (Sharpley-Whitley 1999:4-5). Due to France’s interests in colonialism, Baker’s screen and stage performances were based on French colonialism (Brown 2008:254). Shape-shifting from Vietnamese to Carribean to African, Baker often played an exotic love interest to French colonists in performances (Brown 2008: 254, 258, Jules-Rosette 2007: 3, 75, 76). Baker’s fluid identity was used by the French as she became a chameleon of race, participating in France’s colonial fantasy through her performances of many different races such as Haitian, Vietnamese and Tunisian (Brown 2008:252). Sowinkska cites Kathryn Kalinak who explains that “Baker, stripped of any ethnic, racial,
historical, or geographic particularity, is reduced to the archetypal savage,” (Kalinka 2000:330 in Sowinska 2005:56). France’s fantasy of Baker’s symbolic role of their colonial desire was manifested in Baker’s nomination of “Queen of Colonial Expansion” in 1931, even though she had never stepped foot in a French colony yet (Sowinska 2005:58). This highlights that Baker was a propaganda tool in the palm of French colonialism.

Although Baker played a fluid identity from various colonies (Brown 2008:252), Sowinska highlights that “Parisian audiences seemed not to care where Baker came from” (Sowinska 2005:56), because they actually cared more about themselves. The truth is that the origin or ethnicity of Baker, and Baartmen as well, was not really a concern because these women were just used for French identity formation (Brown 2008:258). For example, Magubane explains that Georges Cuvier, the scientist that studied and later dissected Baartmen (Magubane 2001:817), was less interested in Baartmen but in other Frenchmen from lower classes gaining power (Magubane 2001:820-821) and that he never described Baartmen as the missing link between humans and animals for fear of lower French classes gaining mobility (Magubane 2001:821). Magubane writes, “As strong as Cuvier’s fears about Baartmann’s corporeal difference were, it appears his fears about the potential political equality of his fellow Frenchmen were even greater” (Magubane 2001:821). This desire of European self-construction extends to Baker’s performances later in her career during WWII for the Free France Charles de Gaulle (Brown 2008:252, 258) de Gaullists⁴ (Brown 2008:240, 252). Brown explains Baker’s performances “served both Baker, in her self-creation as a figure of political freedom, and the de Gaullists, in their propagandist efforts,

⁴ The de Gaullists were a French group governed by Charles de Gaulle during World War II (Gaullism, merriam-webster.com 2019)
utilizing her public presence as a forum for their own self-construction” (in Brown 2008:258). Baker’s free movement vocabulary against poised European dance aesthetics inspired the French resistance to see her as a potential for “a symbol of freedom in opposition to the forces of Nazism” (Martin 1995:320). Therefore, Baker became a symbol to be used by the Resistance to form a French national identity (Martin 1995:320).

During WWII, Baker’s ability to employ modern synthesis started to become complex as she had to simultaneously perform and symbolize different ideology to various groups of people, a balance that became impossible and contradictory. Brown explains Baker played contradictory roles as she represented France, the French colonies and the United States (Brown 2008:240-241). Baker wanted to repay France for its generosity towards her, in contrast to the racism she had experienced in the U.S. (Brown 2008:259, Jules-Rosette 215, Baker and Bouillon 1977:116 in Jules-Rosette 216). Furthermore, Baker supported the de Gaulle movement because she believed it was fighting racism (Jules-Rosette 219). However, the irony was that while Baker may have had good intentions (Brown 2008:261), France was installing a different system of racism in North Africa; colonialism (Brown 2008:259). Furthermore, Baker had a strained relationship with the U.S., which had its own complex agenda of oppression/liberation as Baker had to perform for “segregated U.S. officer clubs in North Africa” (Brown 2008:240), yet her support of de Gaulle’s movement was against Americans trying to support the liberation of North African colonies (Brown 2008:258). Therefore, Baker had a very complex role as she was representing various countries that had conflicting ideologies of freedom and oppression. Brown explains that “While she represented the colonies in Paris, she also represented Paris in the desert, even as France’s colonial subjects remained unfree” (Brown 2008: 240-241). Brown asks the
important question “What does it mean when an artistically expressive black body represents a national body that does not represent its subjects” (Brown 2008:252-253)? Brown’s question illuminates that Baker ironically represented freedom for France and oppression for North Africans.

While Petrine Archer-Straw believed Baker’s “secret to her success” lay in the fact that she “could be all things to everybody” (Archer-Straw 2000:133 in Sowinska 2005:64), this was also the secret to France using her for their political propaganda. Baker’s fluidity allowed France to assign her as a middle man “between the nations and races” (Brown 2008: 253). She was black/other like France’s Carribean and North African subjects in the French colonies (Brown 2008: 261). She was also American, coming from a country that was against the Nazis yet trying to free North African colonies (Brown 2008: 258). And yet she was also a star that wanted to give gratitude and loyalty to France (Brown 2008: 252, 259, Jules-Rosette 2007:215, Baker and Bouillon 1977:116 in Jules-Rosette 2007:216). She was a perfect figure for France to use for their international relations because of her hybrid-synthesized identity. However, Baker’s chameleon effect which allowed her slippage between rival ideologies and countries provoked a complex circumstance for Baker, where she ironically represented freedom for the French de Gaullists and oppression for North Africa. This complex situation ended up putting Baker in a situation where she indirectly contributed to a system of oppression towards a different set of black subjects. In this way, I acknowledge that modern synthesis can have negative effects if used in the wrong hands for oppressive political agenda. However, although this may sound idealistic, I argue that modern synthesis can and should have the goal of evoking an alternative space where there is freedom of identity for all, a freedom that is not a façade for oppression or colonialism.
While Baker created and negotiated the complexity of modern synthesis during her transatlantic career in Europe, Carmen Amaya crossed the Atlantic during the Spanish Civil War and used modern synthesis in the Americas. However, as a gitana flamenco dancer, Carmen Amaya encountered a unique set of binaries to challenge in the Americas.

While Baker came out of a tragic/comic context as a legacy of African American performance, I argue that Carmen Amaya came out of a legacy of simultaneous opposition in flamenco. Flamenco is an art form that was born in Andalucía and is composed of the three elements cante (song), baile (dance), and guitar. A highly complex musical and rhythmical art form, flamenco has various cultural influences, but a key contributing culture to flamenco were los gitanos (also known as Roma). Washabaugh views irony as inherent to flamenco which can simultaneous embody the various cultures that contribute to its existence (Washabaugh 1996:38-39). We will now examine how Amaya comes out of flamenco to create a modern synthesis of various binaries to create a modern flamenco identity across the Atlantic.
II Carmen Amaya: Simultaneous Opposition:

Washabaugh describes flamenco as exhibiting simultaneous opposition. Washabaugh writes, “There are moments in which flamenco is simultaneously Andalusian and non-Andalusian, Gitano and non-Gitano, resistant and compliant. Embodying as it does these simultaneous opposites, flamenco should be described as an ironic musical style” (Washabaugh 1996:38-39). We will use Washabaugh’s idea of simultaneous opposition in flamenco as a springboard to view flamenco dancer Carmen Amaya’s embodiment of binaries as a reflection of this ironic quality present in flamenco.

This idea of simultaneous opposition in flamenco can be applied to Amaya presenting a modern synthesis in her dance career. Her simultaneous embodiment of contradictory binaries creates a modern synthesized identity that fluidly moves between categories. In her chapter on Carmen Amaya in Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance, scholar

Figure 16

Carmen Amaya: Simultaneous Opposition

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Michelle Heffner Hayes states that “The excess of Amaya’s performances as an international symbol of Otherness is performatively demonstrated in the fragmented narrative of her life and art: all attempts to contain her ‘original’ presence are frustrated by contradictory evidence” (Hayes 2009:150). Although Hayes continues in her chapter to discuss how Amaya’s biographical information has often been contradictory (Hayes 2009:150-151), I interpret Hayes’ quote to support the idea that Amaya’s performances complicated seemingly contradictory dichotomies through a modern synthesis. According to Hayes, Amaya seemed to avoid “pigeonholes even as she seemed to occupy them” and that “her body threatened to move beyond the boundaries of what could be expected” (Hayes 2009:150). I view Amaya’s performances as utilizing a modern synthesis of four binaries: 1) the regional binaries of Andalusian/non-Andalusian 2) perception of hyper-gitana⁵/hyper-American quality 3) gitana/classical elements in the context of the U.S. and 4) male/female stylization. Amaya found herself negotiating these complex regional, racial, national, and gendered dichotomies in her career.

Amaya was born into a family of great artists which included her guitarist father, El Chino, and her aunt La Faroana, who was one of the first women to dance farruca (andalucia.com, Goldberg 1995:172). Like Baker, Amaya was also born in poverty (Madridejos in Parés 2013, andalucia.com). Amaya was born in Somorrostro, Barcelona where she resided with her family in a cart with a canvas roof, which was a common lifestyle for gitanos of this time (in Goldberg 1995:168-169). At only three years old, Amaya began her dance training on top of the cart accompanied by her guitarist father (in

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⁵ I will generally be using the term gitana which is the female version of gitano because I am discussing a female performer.
Goldberg 1995:173). She made her debut at four or five years old in the streets of Somorrostro while dancing with her father’s guitar playing in order to gain income for the family (in Goldberg 1995:173). Amaya also began her role at this young age as the breadwinner for the family through dancing (Goldberg 1995:173). Amaya danced her national debut at Las Siete Puertas (in Goldberg 1995: 175, Leblon 2003:88) and her international debut at the Palace Theatre in Paris with her aunt La Faroana (in Goldberg 178). In 1929, Amaya performed with flamenco legends such as La Niña de los Peines and Manuel Torre when touring with singer Manuel Vallejo (andalucia.com, Goldberg 1995:181). As Amaya’s talent gained her fame throughout Spain, she bought her family a house and danced at the prestigious tablao La Villa Rosa (in Goldberg 184, Leblon 2003:88).

However, a dramatic change occurred as the Spanish Civil War catapulted Amaya from a national Spanish flamenco star into an international one (Goldberg 1995:192). Many exiled flamenco artists such as Antonio and Rosario and sisters Pilar Lopez and La Argentinita toured across the Atlantic because of the Civil War (Goldbach 2014:44). Amaya was one of these exiled artists, and she toured South America with great success (Hayes 2009:151, Madridejos 2015:178, Goldberg 206). These artists’ tours were supported by South America’s interest in Spanish culture and refugees (Goldberg 1995:195). While Argentinian audiences were familiar with Spanish dance artists such as La Argentina and La Argentinita, the reaction to Amaya’s dancing was so explosive that police were employed “to keep order at the box office” (Goldberg 1995:195, in Goldberg 1995:195). Through her successful performances, Amaya eventually made her way to New York City in 1941.
New York audiences had seen Spanish dance artists such as La Argentina, Vicente Escudero, La Argentinita, Pilar Lopez and Antonio de Triana (Goldberg 1995:213-214). Although American audiences had seen Spanish dancers, Amaya was something new and different (in Goldberg 1995:212), as she was viewed as a pioneer as a gitana that internationally presented work (Goldberg 1995: 98, 233) and capitalized on a unique Spanish gitana dance style (Goldberg 1995:219, 223). Amaya teamed up with impresario Sol Hurok who had worked with four thousand companies and artists throughout his life (Shelokhonov 1990-2019). He also accomplished the difficult tasks of bringing the Bolshoi Ballet to the U.S. when the Cuban Missile Crisis was occurring and brought black singer Marian Anderson to perform for seventy-five thousand people when black performers could not perform in high concert halls (Shelokhonov 1990-2019). Amaya was one of the many artists that Hurok worked with in the U.S.

Amaya ventured to the U.S. in 1941 with perfect timing, as the U.S. was still in the swing of “a Spanish craze” which lasted from 1915-1945 (Bennahum 2015:197). The craze began after the Spanish dictatorship of Primo de Rivera when Spain expanded its tourism interests by including a bureau of tourism in New York (Bennahum 2015:197). As a desire for Spanish art bloomed in New York, Spanish artists visiting or touring New York, such as La Argentina and Federico García Lorca, set the stage for Amaya (Goldberg 1995: 214, Bennahum 2015:197). Flamenco was considered a modern art form, and like the desire for Africanist culture in modernism, flamenco also contributed to modernity (Bennahum 2015: 196). Therefore, flamenco was an integral part in the modernist scene brewing in America.

Amaya ventured to the U.S. when it had an interest in Latin America. Because of the turbulence in Europe from World War II, Hollywood shifted its interest to cater to Latin
American audiences (Cortés 1985:99 in Hayes 2009:148). Furthermore, the U.S. wanted to cater to Latino audiences because they wanted to align the Americas against the Axis powers (Hayes 2009:146-148, Cortés 1985:99 in Hayes 2009:148). What is interesting is that the U.S. placed Spanish Amaya into their propaganda for Latin America, considering that Spain was not exactly neutral and had ties to the opposing side, as Spanish leader Francisco Franco had been aligned with the Axis powers of Germany and Italy (Goldbach 2014:18, Preston 2012: 434-435, 475 in Goldbach 2014:18). However, Franco also tried to distance Spain from the Axis powers when he was bribed by Britain to be neutral and realized Hitler would lose (Oppenheimer 2013 in Goldbach 2014:18, Goldbach 2014:21). Spain’s neutral positioning likely supported Amaya who was included in pan-Latino propaganda in the U.S. to align the Americas against the Axis powers (Hayes 2009:146-148, Cortés 1985:99 in Hayes 2009:148).

Amaya was placed into a pan-Latino performer category in the U.S. Amaya was supported by an obsession of Spanish/Latino culture that flourished in the U.S. all the way through the 1960s (Goldberg 1995:195). Hayes explains that in the late thirties and forties Amaya was placed in the same category as other Latino stars like Carmen Miranda and Desi Arnaz (Hayes 2009:148-149). Tom O’Sullivan in the Boston Traveler proposed that the performers from various Hispanic ethnicities such as Cuban Desi Arnaz, Spanish Carmen Amaya, and Brazilian Carmen Miranda were linked to the Good Neighbor policy (in Hayes 2009:149). The Good Neighbor Policy was created in 1933 by Franklin Roosevelt to promote “trade” versus “military force” in the Americas (history.state.gov). This pan-American bond was important as it united and aligned all but Argentina against the Axis powers of WWII (Hayes 2009:147-148). It is rather interesting though that Amaya who was an exile from
Spain rather than Latin America was viewed as one of the “‘unofficial couriers of Pan-American good will,’” with other hispanic stars in the Boston Herald after performing for President Roosevelt (in Hayes 2009:149). In summary, Spain’s neutral position plus the blurring of nationality to create pan-Latino propaganda in the U.S. likely worked in Amaya’s favor for her success in the U.S.

Did Amaya’s popularity create a strategic unified bond throughout the Americas? Although Spain had ties to the Axis powers, Amaya had fled Spain at the start of the war and had caused Latin America to fall in love with her dancing on tour. Amaya toured the U.S. from 1941-1945, right in the middle of World War II which lasted from 1939-1945. Amaya was supported by an intrigue of Spanish/Latino culture that flourished in the U.S. and was supported by Latin America’s interest in Spanish exiled artists (Goldberg 1995:195). When U.S. president Roosevelt gifted Amaya “a diamond-embroidered vest” when she performed for him (Madridejos 2015:178), was this his silent thank you for Amaya’s unification of the Americas through their common love of her dancing? Is it possible that the Pan-American love of Amaya had been used as propaganda to align them against the Axis powers?

Considering this historical context, there were specific conditions and interests that supported Amaya’s transatlantic success. However, she came into contact with dichotomies that attempted to pigeonhole her so she formed a fluid modern identity of synthesis for a successful career by complicating the binaries of Andalusian/non-Andalusian, hyper-gitana/hyper-American performance, gitana/classical elements in the U.S. and male/female stylization.
1. **Regional performance: Andalusian/non-Andalusian:**

Although flamenco dancer Carmen Amaya was from Barcelona, there was a public demand and desire to see Andalusian-ness performed (Woods 2012:27) which may be due to the fact that flamenco has been viewed as “an Andalusian cultural product” (Hayes 2008:32). The international public’s desire for the pairing of flamenco and Andalusia stems from the historical exotification of flamenco and Andalusia from French Romantic writers and artists, such as Prosper Merimée’s who wrote the famous novel, *Carmen* (Hayes 2008:38). Considering this internationalized and historical exotification of flamenco and Andalusia, Carmen Amaya fit into this desire by playing an Andalusian gitana role that was advertised and performed to a point of excess, even though she was not Andalusian (Goldberg 1995:192-248) ⁶.

When Amaya first arrived in the U.S. in 1941, her group performed *cuadro*⁷ for Sol Hurok, which previously had not been seen in the U.S. (in Goldberg 1995:217). In order to aid Amaya’s success in the U.S., Hurok got Antonio de Triana, who had worked with La Argentina, to assist Amaya in developing performances that were palatable for American audiences on the concert stage (Goldberg 1995: 217). While Triana worked on the dancing, Hurok focused on advertising, creating “‘a fabulous propaganda campaign in the New York Times’” about Amaya’s “‘Original Gypsy Dances’” in 1941 (in Goldberg 1995:217-218). Hurok’s short film the *Original Gypsy Dances* states, “From the historic city of Granada in

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⁷ *Cuadro* is an ensemble of flamenco performers that consists of one or more singers, guitarists, dancers and *palmeros* (hand clapping and percussive accompaniment).
Moorish Spain there has come to this country the greatest gypsy dancer of our time, Carmen Amaya. As a child dancing in the shadow of the ancient Alhambra, Carmen learned to express the vibrant soul of her people” (Original Gypsy Dances 00:52-01:08).

Figure 17 Spanish Regional Map.

Although flamenco is considered to be born in Andalucía, as writer Néstor Luján describes flamenco as “that mysterious Andalusian dance, whose ancient form flickers like fire” (Luján 1947 in Madridejos 2015:183), Amaya was actually born in Barcelona, in the northern region of Catalonia. However, in the Original Gypsy Dances, Hurok advertised Amaya as being from Andalusian Granada, rather than Barcelona (in Goldberg 1995:218).
Some biographers believed that she had “origins” in Granada and Domingo Alvarado did tell scholar Meira Goldberg in an interview that Amaya had a family connection to Granada (in Goldberg 1995: 169, n40 Goldberg 1995: 421). Despite this, Amaya did not grow up “as a child dancing in the shadow of the Alhambra” (*Original Gypsy Dances* 1941:01:08) but grew up dancing on a cart in the streets of Somorrostro, Barcelona (Mañas 1991:14 in Goldberg 1995:173, in Goldberg 1995:173). Scholar Eva Woods Peiró explains that Amaya’s “Barcelonese, as opposed to Andalusian, heritage clashed with demands for Andalusian locations, themes, and characters” (Woods 2012:27). Amaya was likely aware of this international demand for Andalusian character portrayal, as Goldberg notes that Amaya may have added to the image of Andalusian mystique by telling Argentinian interviewers in 1936 that she was from Sacromonte, Granada (Goldberg 1995: n49 Goldberg 1995: 421). Creating an image that would fit the stereotypical desire of an authentic Andalusian gitana character, Amaya was advertised as and performed an Andalusian gitana identity in *Original Gypsy Dances*.

An interesting article “A Theory About Andalucía” from theorist José Ortega y Gasset discusses the idea that Andalusians are self-imitators and spectators (1937:90). Ortega y Gasset writes, “The propensity of Andalusians to play themselves and to imitate themselves reveals a surprising state of collective narcissism. The only man who can imitate himself is he who can act as a spectator of his own person” (Ortega Gasset 1937:90). Although this text was essentialist towards Andalusians, one could argue that performing identity, like theorist Judith Butler who focuses on gender as a performance (Bial and Brady 2016: 214, Butler 2016:215), is a form of self-imitation and self-spectatorship. Expanding off of Butler’s
theory that gender is performative \(^8\) (Bial and Brady 2016:205, 214, JL Austin 2016:205, Butler 2016:215) and Ortega y Gasset’s theory of self-imitation (Ortega y Gasset 1937:90), one could argue Amaya exhibited self-performative signs of Andalusian and gitana identity in her films, performances, and advertisements, even though she was a non-Andalusian playing an Andalusian. Amaya, therefore, reflects Washabaugh’s quote as being simultaneously Andalusian and non-Andalusian, as Amaya wedges herself between this binary as a non-Andalusian playing the part of an Andalusian.

2. **Performing nationality and race: Hyper-gitana and Hyper-Americana Performance**

Amaya created a hyper-gitana persona in the U.S. (Goldberg 1995:238) and later was viewed as hyper-American after leaving the U.S. (in Goldberg 1995:250, in Madridejos 2015:183-184). In the U.S., Amaya and Hurok created a hyper-gitana image for Amaya. The dual agenda of hyper-gitana performance and marketing from Amaya and Hurok added fuel to Amaya’s success in the U.S. Sol Hurok’s marketing and advertising supported a hyper-gitana persona for Amaya because he knew Amaya’s gitana-ness was what made her unique from other Spanish artists so this is what he emphasized for marketing (Goldberg 1995:219, 233-234). While Hurok marketed Amaya’s gitana-ness, Amaya emphasized her gitana-style (Goldberg 1995:219, 233-234, 238). According to Goldberg’s observations, Amaya exaggerated her gitana stylization to excess in her early career abroad (Goldberg 1995:238). Goldberg explains that “during the course of her early years in South and North America,

\(^8\) J.L. Austin coins the idea that performatives are words that actively do things, like “I do” in marriage (Bial and Brady 2016:205, JL Austin 2016:205). Judith Butler expands this idea by arguing that gender is performative and appears natural through repetition throughout time (Bial and Brady 2016:214, Butler 214-215).
Amaya exaggerated the wilder aspects of her dance to make them more visible” but that as “Amaya’s critics and audience began to know and connect with her, and through the course of her career she steadily tempered the flagrant exaggerations of her own early style” (Goldberg 1995:238).

Amaya heightened her gitana aesthetics in her dancing. Scholar Cristina Cruces-Roldán discusses that “a ‘hyperracialized’ Gitano flamenco aesthetic […] resists and even impugns categories such as technique, style, discipline, virtuosity, appearance, order, and control. The body requires a capacity for action (‘agency,’ in Gell’s words) that bets on spontaneity, radicalism, defiance, intuition, baroque style, and chaos” (Cruces-Roldán 2015:219, Gell 1998:21 in Cruces-Roldán 2015:219). The adjectives of gitana style, especially spontaneity, radicalism, and chaos, describe Amaya’s aesthetic, as she was a strong improviser (Goldberg 1995:200, 221-222) and was able to evoke a calculated and artistic sense of chaos in her dancing.

In one interview, Amaya’s sisters told Goldberg that Amaya was permitted to express individuality and dance footwork, which was historically reserved for men because it was “a racial thing” (in Goldberg 1995:174). I remember dancer and scholar Marisol Encinias explaining that there are dancers that dance more racial and some more classical (Encinias 29 Jan 2019). Visually, it seems that racial style seems to evoke an earthier organic movement quality versus favoring classical line. Therefore, the idea that gitana style is racial is interesting as the word raza was originally used to describe a stain in sheep’s wool (Goldberg 2019:7, Massine 101 in Goldberg 2019:7, García-Marquez 1995:80-81 in Goldberg 2019:7) and that this system was expanded to provide support for a system of

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9 Bracketed ellipses signal my omission of the author’s word in the quotation
slavery, Spanish colonies, and Spanish society (Goldberg 2019:7). Are those who are racial with the stain of raza los negros, los gitanos, and non-Catholics? Woods writes “Although terms like white or black were less frequently employed by Franco’s political-religious National Catholic rhetoric or Falange propaganda, notions of whiteness were safeguarded by constant references to raza and lo castizo (racial purity)” (Woods 2012:7).^{10} Diverse Spanish categorization reduced itself into a dichotomy of white and other as Woods explains that “Spanish identity thus inherited the binary of white, Visigothic, Christian, European versus black, Arab, Jew, Gypsy, African, Native American” (Woods 2012:7). Considering this historical context, we can view that Amaya utilized a more racial stain to color her dancing versus previous Spanish non-gitano artists touring in the Americas (in Goldberg 1995: 218, 223). Amaya’s racialized dancing complicated historical binaries of raza/castizo and other/white.

It is ironic that when Amaya initially left the U.S. in 1945 after performing hyper-racialized gitana performances of excess, there were complaints that she had become too Americanized (Goldberg 1995: 248, in Goldberg 1995: 250, in Madridejos 2015:183-184). In 1946 in Peru, there were complaints that she needed to rejuvenate her gitana roots back in Spain (in Goldberg 250). Goldberg cites Dance News in Peru stating that “‘local critics unanimously praised the dancer but found that she has been too much ‘americanized.’ They suggest a trip to Spain to re-establish a direct relation with authentic Gitana style’” (in Goldberg 1995: 250). This highlights a theory from Ortega y Gasset in “Teoria de Andalucía” that “A Galician outside of Galicia can go on being a Galician, but a transplanted

^{10} Woods notes “Andalusians can also be castizo, even though castizo usually implied a Castillian” (Woods 2012:7).
Andaluz is no longer an Andaluz. The peculiarity that makes him himself evaporates. To be an Andaluz is to live with the Andalusian soil” (Ortega y Gasset 1937:101). Although I do not agree with Ortega y Gasset’s essentialist claims about Andalusians in his article, the idea that Andalusians had to be connected to their land for authenticity may have been a stereotype that existed and impacted these critics and Amaya’s audiences. Although we established that Amaya was a non-Andalusian performing as an Andalusian, did the stereotype that an Andalusian must be connected to Andalusian land for authenticity pressure Amaya to return to Spain?

When Amaya did return to Spain in 1947, a critic from Ritmo magazine also felt Amaya had become too Americanized and wrote:

We went to see the outstanding artist, and frankly we were disappointed. We conceive of Spanishness-and Andalusianness-in a completely different way [than Amaya]. Carmen Amaya returns ‘Americanized.’ There were moments in which we saw her do tap dance. And those brusque moves, those vertiginous turns may have a great deal of merit as gymnastics, but we are far from believing they have anything to do with the rite, the reverie that everything Andalusian holds within. Carmen Amaya speaks to us of music made movement, of the gesture, the angry grimace made music. Everything about this show is speed, frenzy, whirlwind, hyperesthesia, in sum abnormal. We are convinced that Amaya and her Gypsies-faithful disciples of their maestro-use and abuse a tic that perhaps in America electrifies the crowd, but that, at least upon us, has the opposite effect: it is the barrier that impedes our view into the emotional pulse of any of our most typical dances” (in Madridejos 2015:183-184).
Oddly, for the critic in *Dance News* in Peru and *Ritmo* magazine in Spain, Amaya’s dancing of Andalusian self-imitation (Ortega y Gasset 1937: 90) abroad had become so excessive that it ceased to be viewed as Spanish. Ortega y Gasset’s theory of a transplanted Andalusian losing authenticity seems to be an ideology these critics believed, that Amaya had lost some of her authenticity from Americanization and living away from Spain. Therefore, Amaya complicates categorization as she was simultaneously viewed in her career as both hyper-gitana and hyper-Americanized, demonstrating her complex navigation of creating a modern synthesized identity that was a hybrid form of her experiences in Spain and the U.S.

3. Gitana/Classical Elements in the U.S.:  

During the Spanish Civil War and World War II, many flamenco and Spanish dance artists combined elements and utilized creativity to broaden their repertoire to survive touring in the Americas (Golbach 2014:44). Scholar Theresa Goldbach explains many artists used many types of Spanish dances to broaden flamenco performances and artists like Antonio and Rosario even utilized South American elements (Goldbach 2014:44). Amaya was part of a phenomenon of Spanish dancers pulling different elements to add variation and creativity to their repertoire (Goldbach 2014:44). Amaya was influenced by the staging and theatricality of the more classical Argentina and also by Antonio de Triana, who had worked with La Argentina and helped Amaya stage her works (in Goldberg 1995: 217, 221). Amaya’s program featured a
diverse collection of classical compositions from Albeniz and Manuel de Falla to flamenco palos such as peteneras, bulerías, taranto, and farruca (Program 13 Jan 1942, Carnegiehall.org). While Amaya was among these many exiled artists utilizing classical, flamenco and other elements, we will discuss how a dichotomy was drawn between classical and non-classical in particular by critic John Martin in the United States.

Amaya used flamenco vocabulary with classical elements such as castanets and orchestral music (Goldberg 1995:209). This blend of gitana aesthetics with classical elements can be seen in Amaya’s fandangos in the 1939 Cuban film El Embrujo del Fandango (El Embrujo del Fandango youtube.com). Encinias notes that Amaya as a gitana dancer using classical elements was not unusual as there is a long history of gitano dancers dancing classical forms (Encinias Email 2019). Gitana dancers such as Josefa Vargas, Adela Guerrero, Petra Cámara and Manuela Perea danced both classical bolero dance and flamenco (Mora 2015: 112, Encinias Email 2019).

However, in the United States, there appears to be a dichotomy drawn between classical and non-classical by critic John Martin who was frustrated by Amaya’s stylistic synthesis as a gitana artist dancing classical works (Goldberg 1995:234). Goldberg explains Hurok’s advertisement of Amaya’s gitana-ness backfired as some critics wanted to pigeon-hole Amaya into performing gitana-ness rather than classical works (Goldberg 234, María y Campos 1948 in Madridejos 2015:181). Martin writes of Amaya:

For the most part she was smothered by a conventional and largely mediocre Spanish dance evening. She should never do such a number as her first solo to the ‘Cordoba’ of Albeniz dressed in classic costume with castanets and presenting, according to the
program, ‘a fiery characterization of the gypsy spirit.’ There is nothing classic about her. (Martin 14 Jan 1942, 25).

However, he writes, “When, however, she trails her ruffled skirt across the floor and breaks into the wonderfully strident singing of ‘Ay! Que Tu,’ grimacing, crossing her eyes, making mock of her imaginary lover, things begin to happen” (Martin 14 Jan 1942, 25). While Martin reprimands Amaya’s classical appropriation, Martin’s praise of Amaya’s crossed eyes and grimaces sounds more like a Josephine Baker performance with minstrelized vocabulary.

Amaya found herself confronted with similar racism to black artists in the United States. Gottschild writes that “the road for the black artist borrowing from high-culture white forms has been posted with ‘no trespassing’ signs” (Gottschild 1996:28). Amaya found herself coming across the same obstacles as black artists. Like Goldberg’s title, Border Trespasses: The Gypsy Mask and Carmen Amaya’s Flamenco Dance, Amaya was trespassing through borders that were guarded by critics. Martin, who had critiqued Amaya’s use of classical elements (Martin 14 Jan 1942, 25), was also displeased with black dancer Talley Beatty’s “‘serious dallying in ballet technique’” in Katherine Dunham’s company (Martin in Emery 1988:255 in Gottschild 1996:66). Gottschild explains there was a belief of an “inappropriateness of the black dancing body for ballet” (Gottschild 1996:31-32). Considering the context of American racism, this could have tainted Martin to believe that classical dance was unfit for a gitana artist as well as a black artist. Martin believed in essentialism as he tried to criticized Beatty’s and Amaya’s use of classical dance (Martin in Goldberg 1995:235), believing that Amaya dances “‘best…when she is doing characteristic gypsy dances’” (in Goldberg 1995:234). Therefore, Martin was pleased when Amaya
returned to Carnegie Hall in 1942 and danced more gitana pieces stating, “The program on the whole was superior to that of the Amaya concert debut earlier in the season, largely because Carmen’s material was less classic” (Martin 18 May 1942, 19). Martin’s comments pigeonholed Amaya and black artists into performing what their race was “supposed” to perform.

In contrast to disliking Amaya’s Cordoba, Martin praised La Argentina’s Cordoba dance, in addition to “the variety of her performance” when he reviewed her show that featured a “peasant dance,” a “Cordoba” dance and a “Fire Dance” (Martin 18 Nov 1928, X11). Martin wrote of La Argentina’s successful hybridity of castanets and zapateado stating:

Occasionally she reproduces the rhythmic pattern of the music, but more frequently she provides a supplementary rhythm of unimaginable intricacy, in which castanets and heel tapping play in opposition to each other. Here would seem to be the realization of that intangible thing that has been sought without success in the efforts to blend the variety of jazz rhythms with legitimate musical forms. (Martin 18 Nov 1928, X11)

In contrast to La Argentina being compared to the difficult task of incorporating jazz in classical music, there was a Spanish critic named Armando de María y Campos that compared Amaya to a jazz artist butchering Chopin: “Full out, without rhythm, making a racket over those delicious melodies to which Antonia Mercé created her immortal choreographies! It’s like when ‘jazz’ irreverently decides to take hold of Chopin or Schubert and grind them in a pot” (María y Campos 1948 in Madridejos 2015:181). It is shocking that La Argentina was compared to the idea of an unattainable blend of classical and jazz music
by Martin when Amaya was criticized by María y Campos by being compared to a jazz musician destroying Chopin. And, although María y Campos and Martin critiqued Amaya for touching something classical that La Argentina would do, they failed to recognize that La Argentina would sing *Herencia Gitana* or *Gypsy Inheritance* when she was not gitana (Goldberg 1995:201). Woods explains that actual gitana stars in films such as Carmen Amaya, Pastora Imperio, and quarter-gitana Lola Flores were in the minority as “white women” often played gitana roles (Woods 2012:135).

While Amaya was not praised by Martin for using classical elements, La Argentina was praised by André M. Levinson in John Martin’s review for her innovation of using folk dance for inspiration (Levinson in Martin 4 Nov 4, 1928, 129). La Argentina became famous after André Levinson’s reviews and support (Goldberg 1995:164, Martin 4 Nov 1928, 129). Levinson states in “The Spirit of the Spanish Dance,” “‘What were these magnificent dancers? Were they merely Spanish Gypsies of Albaicín gotten up as they are today for the purpose of beguiling foreigners? Certainly not! They were members of the corps de ballet of the royal theatre’” (Levinson in Martin 4 Nov 1928, 129). Levinson writes, “‘Argentina, like any creative artist, was merely transposing the themes of Spanish folk-lore, the native dances which are the first rude stammer of primitive instinct into style’ and that “It is an art, uniquely her own, built upon the themes of peasant dancing, but recreating them to her own ends, giving them form and meaning’” (Levinson in Martin 4 Nov 1928, 129).

Levinson’s statements obviously praise a classical Argentina for reforming the “‘primitive’” folk dances of Spain (Levinson in Martin 4 Nov 1928, 129). He praises the
beaten path of classical artists appropriating folk dance (Gottschild 1996: 27-28). He also belittles gitanos dancing for tourists, however it is important to note that cuadro flamenco and classical cuadro bolero had been performed for tourists in the café cantante era of 1847-1936 (Antonio el bailarín in Marina Grut 52 in Goldbach 2014:44, Hayes 2009: 38-39) 11. Therefore, both classical and gitana forms have been performed “for the purpose of beguiling foreigners” (Levinson in Martin 4 Nov 1928, 129).

Although gitanos danced classical forms and flamenco and bolero had been performed together historically, Amaya was not granted the same license to play with flamenco and classical elements as La Argentina by some reviewers. So why was La Argentina praised for employing gitana elements and Amaya was criticized for utilizing classical elements in the context of the United States? 12

Gottschild explains that, “Given the politics of racism, it is predictable that the powers-that-be attempt, against all odds, to stricture this exchange into a one-way street. The ‘high’ is sanctioned to borrow from the ‘low,’ whites from blacks, ballet from folk dance, and so forth” (Gottschild 1996:27-28). Martin viewed Amaya as traveling the opposite direction on a one-way street by using classical elements and Argentina was using the...

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11 It is rather interesting to note that flamenco and classical dance have shared the same space in the cafes cantantes “flamenco bars” to perform for tourists from 1847-1936 (Hayes 2009:38-39, Antonio el bailarín in Marina Grut 2002:52 in Goldbach 2014:44). Antonio el bailarín remembers that escuela bolero dancers had also danced in cafés cantantes as there was both “cuadro flamenco” and “cuadro bolero” (Antonio el bailarín in Marina Grut 2002:52 in Goldbach 2014:44). This demonstrates that flamenco and classical dance had both been performed for tourists (Hayes 2009:38-39).

12 It is interesting to note that Argentina actually had some similarities to Baker and Amaya. Argentina was an international star that also performed at the White House and New York (Bennahum 2015: 202) like Amaya (Madridejos 2015:178). Furthermore, La Argentina was a star around the same time as Baker as Bennahum writes “The likenesses of La Loïe, Isadora Duncan, Josephine Baker and, by the 1920s, La Argentina—could be seen throughout Paris” (Bennahum 2015: 206)
appropriate pathway of classical dance utilizing folk dance. La Argentina was supported by a long tradition of classical dance utilizing folk dance that supported her as ballets began utilizing folk dances in 1786 (Orellana 2015:73). This laid the framework for Spanish dance being incorporated into ballets later on (Orellana 2015:73). This trend of appropriating folk culture supported Argentina’s “search of regional sounds, colors, and stories, which she used to people her ballets” where “She breathed life into centuries-old Gypsy dances, while paying close attention to the rituals and customs found in Gypsy culture” (in Bennahum 2000:10).

Writer Ralph Ellison compares flamenco and jazz as folk forms which have influences of old songs from the oppressed (Ellison 2001:98). While some scholars propose that flamenco is not a folk form but a classical form like Faustino Nuñez13 (Nuñez 2005), if we view flamenco and jazz as folk forms, then Amaya flipped the script of the trend of classical borrowing from folk forms. Amaya demonstrates a synthesis of elements and cultures that challenged hierarchal categorization in the arts in the United States. Amaya was viewed as a non-classical artist using classical elements which was threatening to reviewers like Martin. Amaya’s blend of classical and gitana elements proves that a new modern identity can exist going in the opposite direction on a one-way street.

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13 Flamenco has been debated to be a classical form. For example, Faustino Nuñez believes flamenco is a classical form (Nuñez 2005), and that flamenco is an interpretation of Andalusian folk traditions (Nuñez 2005). Nuñez states that flamenco is classical because especially singers would interpret the old masters (Nuñez 2005). I’m curious if Nuñez classifies flamenco as classical because it utilizes and reinterprets folk forms for innovation (Nuñez 2005), which is similar to Antonin Dvorak and other classical composers (New York Herald 21 May 1893, 42)?
4. Gendered Aesthetics: Male/Female Stylization:

Amaya also created a modern synthesized identity through her formation of hybrid-gendered stylization. Rather than performing farruca like her aunt La Faraona, who was one of the first women to dance farruca in the 1910s-1920s (Goldberg 1995:172), Amaya danced Alegrías in pants in a palo that women had traditionally performed “at the turn of the century” (in Goldberg 1995:166-167).14 Goldberg explains that “at the turn of the century women had danced mainly variations of the Alegrías and Solea and men had danced forms of the zapateado and tangos, forms such as the farruca, seguiriyas, the bulerias, a Flamenco version of the older jaleos, and the ‘chuflas,’ a burlesque form of tangos were staged” (in Goldberg 1995:166-167). In addition to utilizing a traditionally female palo, Amaya juxtaposed this with incorporating aesthetics of old-style male flamenco dancers. According to dancer José de la Vega’s observations, Amaya exhibited old masculine stylization reminiscent of artists such as El Gato and Faíco (Vega in Madridejos 2015:181). Madridejos explains that Vega noted Amaya’s performance in pants would have been quite unusual during the time in Seville (Vega in Madridejos 2015:181, Madridejos 2015:181). José de la Vega writes of Amaya’s performance:

I have never seen anything like it. That dance had nothing to do with the bailaoras that I applauded in the 1940s. If Andalusian bailaoras promenaded in the Rosas de la Alegrías, which their characteristic bombast: braceando hacia afuera [opening their arms outward], tronachás hacia atrás [backwards cuts], tracing the righteous and

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14 Another dancer that also did a similar experimentation to Amaya was “Antonio ‘El Estampio’” who made “a masculine” Alegrías dance (in Goldberg 1995:168).
exclusive arabesques of the feminine hand [...] Carmen Amaya’s
dance was completely the opposite. Carmen’s dance was vertical, she
moved her arms inwards, like the old-time farruca dancers like Faíco,
El Gato o los Pelaos. (Vega in Madridejos 2015:181)

Vega describes typical female flamenco dance aesthetics for the time and how Amaya
dismantled these through incorporating masculine aesthetic influence from Faíco and El
Gato. Goldberg explains that Faíco and El Gato were important gitano dancers of “the purest
masculine style of dance” (in Goldberg 1995:162, Puig 1977:42 in Goldberg 1995:162) and
Faíco had even created the farruca (in Goldberg 1995:188). Similar to her influence from La
Faraona, Amaya also was influenced by El Gato and Faíco because she
had connections to them (Goldberg 1995:168, 172, 188). Amaya
worked with a guitarist relative of Faíco and El Gato and also worked
with El Gato in Barcelona (in Goldberg 1995:188). Both families
became acquainted, therefore Amaya was likely influenced first hand by
El Gato and Faíco in addition to her aunt La Faraona (in Goldberg
1995:188). These artists contributed to her unique blending of gender
aesthetics in her dancing. Furthermore, it is important to note that there
were many female flamenco dancers at the time that cross-dressed in
male attire (Goldberg 1995:176). Supposedly the trend of female
flamencos dressing in male costume began with Trinidad Huertas “La

Although other artists had dressed as men, Amaya was still a
pioneer as she emphasized male footwork when traditionally women
danced with their upper body (andalucia.com). Historically, flamenco has had prescribed stylization for both genders as men would typically emphasize footwork and women focused on graceful upper body movement (Cruces-Roldaán 2015:214, 216-217). However, gitano style dance allowed for more flow of gender stylization (Cruces-Roldán 2015:214, 219). This may have given Amaya more freedom to play with gendered aesthetics. Amaya’s style was unique as she used stylization of both genders simultaneously and utilized this hybrid-gendered identity in her costume. For example, Hayes mentions that Amaya performed with feminine style shoes rather than boots when she dressed in a male costume (Hayes 2009:150). Therefore, Amaya’s hybridity through costume and style allowed her to simultaneously embody both genders at the same time.

While Amaya’s Alegrias in male attire was extremely popular in Spain before she toured the Americas (Goldberg 1995:189), Goldberg explains that Amaya’s dances in male costume may have resonated well with American women who were beginning to wear pants, in addition to other stars who were beginning to wear pants such as Marlene Diedrich (Goldberg 1995:199). During WWII, women were encouraged to wear pants and take on male jobs. Rosie the Riveter propaganda came out to encourage women to go to work during the war when the men were away (Breig 2018) which coincided with Amaya who was dancing in pants. Boris explains “During the 1930s, pants on women were unacceptable in industrial workplaces ‘because of a possible production hazard in distracting male employees’” (Elkouri and Elkouri 1985:768 in Boris 2006:124) while the 1940s actually “required women to wear slacks to avoid danger involved in working around industrial machinery” (Elkouri and Elkouri 1985:768 in Boris 2006:124). Amaya clearly came at the right time to dance in pants in the U.S. from 1941 to 1945 as the U.S. did not enter World
War II until after Pearl Harbor in 1941, which propelled men to go to war and women to work male jobs.

Furthermore, Amaya’s explosive performances lead reviewers to compare her to “non-human, violent forces, including machine guns and tornados” (Goldberg 1995:237). Hurok advertised Amaya as “‘A Female Blowtorch’” (Hurok in Hayes 2009:149). John Martin explained that “Amaya can make more noise […] than half a dozen riveting machines” (Martin 14 Dec 1942,18). Amaya’s explosive feminine agency dancing in men’s attire fit with an era where women were called to work male jobs in male dress. Amaya’s performances may have been celebrated in the U.S. as a way to convince women that it was acceptable to dress as a man and excel at a man’s job. Amaya, who dressed as a man and danced male dance vocabulary, was a role model for women to appropriate male dress and work for World War II.¹⁵

Josephine Baker inspired women across the Atlantic in France to exchange corsets for freedom (Chasing a Rainbow 20:23-21:09). The narrator of Baker’s documentary Chasing a Rainbow, explains that French women from the 1920s saw Baker as “a symbol of the new freedom they felt that was within their grasp” (Chasing a Rainbow 20:27-20:31). Amaya was likely also a symbol of freedom on the other side of the Atlantic for American women in the 1940s taking on male occupations in pants.

¹⁵
However, this new female empowerment was a potential threat to patriarchal structures. It is interesting to note that during this era, a bombshell was used to describe a sexy woman that was “potentially destructive” (Goldberg 1995:235). Even though Hurok’s advertising of Amaya as a bombshell backfired (in Goldberg 1995:235, Goldberg 1995:235), Amaya was potentially dangerous, just as women working in male clothes for World War II were viewed as a possible threat to men’s jobs (Boris 2006:129). Amaya and the rosies were dangerous women as they were pioneers of change because they challenged limitations set on what was acceptable for women to do.

Furthermore, Amaya’s hybrid-gendered form was met with some resistance because it challenged old school gendered dance stylization (andalucia.com). In contrast to Judith Butler’s idea of gender performativity, that gender is not natural but appears natural because of its repetitive performance (Butler 2016:215), there were many who believed that essentialist, natural and inherent qualities existed for men and women. For example, American flamencologist purist Donn E. Pohren firmly believed that men and women should dance in specific ways stating, “The condition that men be men and women, women, or at least appear to be, is an absolute necessity in the baile flamenco if it is to be effective” (Pohren 1964: 179 in Hayes 2009:70). Pohren was against cross-dressing artists such as Trinidad Huertas La Cuenca, who began the “‘deterioration’” of female flamenco dancing by incorporating male elements (Pohren 1964: 216 in Hayes 2009:72). However, Amaya adopted more feminine dance aesthetics in her later years (andalucia.com), which was to the relief of Pohren who stated, “Carmen gradually began outgrowing her masculine type of dance. As she matured she began altering her style, adding more elements of femininity, more ruffles, more flowing arms and hands, more tranquility, a more subtle fire and passion”
Amaya’s return to the feminine was also a relief for La Meri who was pleased when “‘Amaya gave up all her male flamenco dances which are traditionally done in male attire and wore batas that were proper for a grown woman’” (La Meri in Pohren 1964: 231-232 in Hayes 2009:153). Both Pohren and La Meri viewed Amaya’s subversive cross-dressing as youthful experimentation and were pleased by her settle into prescribed gender norms. However, they failed to note the genius of Amaya’s cross-dressing performance and subversive critique of gender norms, continuing the legacy of female artists playing with gender and paving the way for incredible artists in the future such as male dancer Manuel Liñán who has done extensive choreographic work in bata de cola (EFE 9 junio 2018).

Through creating a modern synthesis of simultaneous opposition, Amaya complicated the four binaries of 1) the regional binaries of Andalusian/non-Andalusian 2) hyper-gitana/hyper-American performance 3) gitana/classical elements in the U.S. and 4) male/female stylization. Amaya navigated a complex identity in the middle of the political context of the Spanish Civil War, World War II in the Americas and later in the Franco dictatorship when she returned to Spain.

**Amaya’s Return to Spain:**

When Amaya returned to Spain in 1947, much had occurred while she was away. The Spanish Civil War lasted from 1936-1939. The previous dictator José Antonio Primo de Rivera was killed in 1936 and general Francisco Franco ruled Spain from 1939 to 1975 (Goldbach 2014: 11-12). Although Franco stated his government was “‘totalitarian’” (Payne
1987: 627 in Goldbach 2014: 8), franquismo’s three ingredients were fascism, Catholicism and Spanish nationalism (Goldbach 2014:12).

Fascism had an interest in cante jondo (deep song) in flamenco (Goldbach 2014:17) which paired with Spain’s increased interest in tourism in 1949 (Pack 2010:53 in Goldbach 2014: 38, Goldbach 2014:17). Considering fascist Spain’s interest in flamenco and tourism, a marriage of flamenco and tourism became important to the Franco regime and Spain’s economic survival (in Pack 2010:50, Pack 2010: 45-47). By the 1950s, tourism had become so important that it was the main source of foreign economic support for Spain which was “compelling evidence of its acceptance by democratic Europe” (Pack 2010:47).

After WWII, Spain had turned to combine dance/folk culture with tourism as propaganda in order to distance the international memory of Spain’s history with fascism (Goldbach 2014:40). Franco’s concern with Spain’s international image stems from Spain’s concern historically with its image of modernity to the rest of Europe (Moreno 1995 in Pack 2010:50, Poutet 1995 in Pack 2010:50). Spain was concerned with its image of modernity and tourism allowed Spain to construct “a modern national image” (Garrido Pack 2010:50, Poutet in Pack 2010:50).

To give some historical context, Spain was very aware of its image to the rest of Europe. After the Spanish American War in 1898, Spain lost its colonies and its status (Goldberg 2014:93). Goldberg writes about Spain losing its colonies by stating, “In light of these changes to Spain’s stature and its shrinking colonial power, it was increasingly perceived by other European powers as exotic and ‘African’” (Goldberg 2014:93). Europe perceived Spain as African which is elaborated through Alexander Dumas’s famous quote “Africa begins at the Pyrenees” (Dumas in Goldberg 2014:93, Goldberg 2014:93). Thus,
Spain was aware of its subordinate status in Europe and the stereotype of Franco’s Spain being “antimodern” (Pack 2010:54). This idea of modernity highlights Kirsten Buick’s idea that white status is not a fixed concept but can be taken away and Spain was in negotiation of its status of whiteness and modernity (Buick 2017). Using tourism as a political tool of constructing a national image, franquismo excavated grand images from Spain’s past to construct a new future and identity for Spain (Washabaugh 1996: 13, Goldbach 2014:12).

The Ironic Formation of Modernity through the Marginalized:

![Figure 22](image1.png)  ![Figure 23](image2.png)

Although the Spanish and African Americans struggled with being perceived as modern (Goldberg 2015:129, Woods 2012:108), African American arts and flamenco were ironically instrumental in modernity (Thompson 1996 in Bennahum 2015: 194, Bennahum 2015: 194). Scholar Ninotchka Devorah Bennahum writes that “Rooted in African and African American

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16 I learned this information in Kirsten Buick’s course (Un)natural Histories: Representing the Pathological Body in the 19th and 20th Centuries at the University of New Mexico
tradition, flamenco played a central role in the formation of a modernist and civil cultural identity and artistic sensibility in Europe and America” (Bennahum 2015:196). Therefore, ironically, the cultures which struggled with being viewed as modern ended up shaping modernity.

Amaya and Baker, dancers from these marginalized groups, became vessels of modernity. Goldberg sums it up nicely stating “Amaya was in many senses an artist who appealed to a Modern sensibility: in the liberty which she took to costume herself in male dress and to pull the male movement vocabulary into her unique dance style, in her interest in improvisation, process and dynamic over polish, variety and balance, and also in the fact that she was Gitana” (Goldberg 1995:159). This could also be applied to Josephine Baker who was a modern “catalyst” with her impeccable timing of fitting perfectly with the interests of France forming a new modern identity through primitivist modernism (Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:27, in Lemke 1998:101 in Beyad and Roshnavand 2013:27). Both women created a modern synthesis of contradictory identity categories in countries that had political and international interests that laid a background for their transatlantic stardom. Although many artists contributed to the modernity and dispersement of African American arts and flamenco in the world, I argue Amaya and Baker aided the development of flamenco and African American performance being viewed as modern.

Miller writes “modern identity is-if at all definitive-essentially ‘mixed’” (Miller 2006:200). Baker and Amaya fit the criteria of modernity as they both combined binaries to create a modern identity that is a synthesis. Amaya and Baker in addition to the ideology of modern synthesis were essential in the creation of my MFA concert, *Ink on Cotton*. 
Part III: Ink on Cotton

Ink on Cotton Ideology:

Miller’s idea that modernity is a mixture is inspiring to me as I view Amaya and Baker as role models ahead of their time that complicated identity categories and binaries. As a biracial woman studying different dance forms, such as contemporary and flamenco dance, it is exciting to imagine a modern identity that moves towards what Miller proposes as “a black modernist discursive practice that finds its specificity in heterogeneity, not authenticity or imitation” (Miller 2006:200). Although both women were placed into roles of authenticity, they challenged and forged new paths for gitano and African American performers. Miller encourages us to see modernisms, from her analysis of the black dandy, “as both black and white, mulatto” (Miller 2006:200). Baker and Amaya who were able to complicate various identity binaries of male/female, classical/gitana, white/black, seem to evoke the possibility of a new modernity of synthesis. This inspired me as a young biracial artist studying contemporary dance and flamenco to create a new identity that does not need to be defined.

Figure 24: MFA Performance Poster
Recently I attended an artistic discussion by Daniel Doña while he was a guest artist in residence at the University of New Mexico in the spring of 2019. He explained that he is interested in carving out a space for dance that is free from labels and is informed by various techniques such as escuela bolero, flamenco, and contemporary dance (Doña and Martín 2019). This was incredibly inspiring to me; dance can be informed by a variety of experiences and techniques.

I feel like I am an eclectic artist and synthesizer which was reflected in my MFA show *Ink on Cotton*. I created choreographies inspired by artists such as Carmen Amaya and Josephine Baker. I also wanted to investigate reappropriating and playing with the racialized images of the watermelon and banana in African American history and create a new phenomenological experience, to form a new correlation and relationship between the signifier and the signified (Changingminds 2002-2019). I wanted to find if there was a way to explore these racially stigmatized images to create new meaning and possibilities. Through vivid imagery, this work explored connections between African American performance and flamenco historically. In the center of the work, there was a theatrical scene that hovered around a central idea that these art forms and groups of people rise like lotus flowers through the mud of oppression (Johnson 2003:109-110). The shared experience of artists in African American art and flamenco rising up through oppression to create art is highlighted in Ralph Ellison’s quote:

> In its more worldly phases, the flamenco voice resembles the blues voice, which mocks the despair stated explicitly in the lyric and it expresses the great human joke directed against the universe, that joke which is the secret of all folklore and myth,
that though we be dismembered daily we shall always rise up again. (Ellison 2001:100).

During my MFA defense, committee member and scholar Kirsten Buick noted that African Americans were able to find freedom because France had not yet defined racism for them. She compared this to Albuquerque for middle-class blacks as the police would target Latinos, indigenous and poor whites (Buick 2019). I found this really interesting because I felt like I did have more freedom moving to Albuquerque for this MFA to create *Ink on Cotton*. But I had some fear in creating this work because I imagined riots in my head. I remembered once I had created a piece titled *Biracial Barbie* where I posed like a doll in a pink box and the accessories were linked to racialized ideas like W.E.B Debois Double Consciousness Sunglasses. The side of the box included a quiz such as “guess my race” and showed how mulattos, octoroons, and negroes were priced differently, highlighting the nation’s racist ideology of colorism. I heard someone in the audience was angered because they did not know it was a satirical work. Some viewers of this performance art piece looked uncomfortable.

I was surprised that the response to *Ink on Cotton* was quite positive. I secretly wondered if I performed the piece in a predominately black city if the response might have been different because looking at racialized images could produce a stabbing feeling, like a bad memory flowing from past generations. Considering black male scholar Houston A. Baker Jr.’s frustration with “mulatto modernism” as lightening the black experience (Baker Jr. 2001: 33-34), and due to my personal experience of not being perceived or sometimes even acknowledged as black, I was fearful if a mixed woman’s experience would be seen as
valid. However, I view my “‘mixed’” (Miller 2006:200) modern experience as a synthesis of ideas, cultures, and identity, not as an erasure or watering down of blackness. This relates to Miller’s historical interpretation of black dandyism in Harlem (Miller 2006: 180-181) where she offers the idea that an:

alternative history establishes the black dandy as a figure of both European and African/American origins, who expresses with his performative body and dress the fact that modern identity, in both black and white, is necessarily syncretic, or mulatto, but in a liberating, rather than constraining way. (Miller 2006: 181)

Miller’s idea of a positive liberating mulatto synthesis supports my idea of modern synthesis. I view my artistic synthesis as a collage of ideas that support a modern identity.

I created *Ink on Cotton* because I knew that I wanted to create work to wake people up and create an alternative space where I can be who I am. I wanted to make an alternative mulatta utopia, a liminal dream world where a synthesis of cultures, genders, and ideas can exist in time and space without needing to be defined. Therefore, modern synthesis is attractive to me as a proposition, a new utopian ideology of creating an artistic landscape that escapes the confines of identity categorization, racism, sexism, and societal rules.

I will now conclude with descriptions of three works: *Negrita del Harlem* a flamenco work, *Sassy* and *The Little Funhouse Mirror on Lennox Ave.* a section inspired by Josephine Baker and *Negras Bulerías/Ink on Cotton* which is an exploration of hybridity which I see as a culmination of modern synthesis.
Negrita del Harlem:

Negrita del Harlem was a hybrid homage to past African Americans and gitanos. This work was a synthesis of information honoring those who came before me. However, I initially made the work to honor my grandfather who had told me that a janitor was the best job a person of color could get back in the day. I was surprised, as he had been a janitor and I did not realize that this was one of the best options at one point and time for African Americans. This idea made me think of Federico García Lorca’s line “your hobbled, great king in the janitor’s uniform” (Lorca in Belitt 1955: 21) in his poem El Rey del Harlem, which explored the harsh conditions of segregation for African Americans which he observed from his travels to New York from 1929-1930 (Maurer ix). I created the dance to honor African Americans facing segregation and Lorca who fossilized and snapshotted an interpretation of their experiences in his poetry. I also was inspired by Carmen Amaya and my personal experience of looking at photographs of her in René Heredia’s17 house and so I also wanted to honor her as well. I created a hybrid-gendered costume inspired by her by wearing trousers

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17 Heredia was Amaya’s guitarist after Sabicas left Amaya’s group for his solo career (Heredia 2019).
and letting out my wild curly hair. I originally performed the work in red boots but later wore black female flamenco shoes in the performance.

What I think flamenco shares with African American arts is the idea of citation of the past with innovation for the future and that was my goal, to honor and to innovate. Therefore, I was creating a homage that synthesized letra from Lorca, a costume inspired by Carmen Amaya, pasos from various guest artists and I dedicated it to my grandfather and African Americans in the past that faced segregation.

I chose the palo of a solea por bulería/bulerías por solea because I felt that it embodied a tragic/comic legacy of African American performance. The solea por bulería is a form that embodies the idea of a hybrid identity as well because it exists in the liminal space between solea and bulería. It is a paradoxical palo of the solemn solea and the playful bulerías, which seemed to reflect an experience of past African American performers.

I remember that I had doubt and fear in the creation of this work. Creating non-traditional letra, dancing in red male flamenco styled boots and trying to reorganize guest artist pasos was a challenging experience for me. I was met with some resistance in creating new letra from Lorca’s poem because it was not of tradition. For many, the cante is the most revered part of flamenco, more than the baile (dance) or guitar. Therefore, a dancer creating unconventional letra may be seen as tampering with tradition. I knew that I was doing something unconventional and I was bending the rules, so I felt fear in making the work. But I also knew I was creating an innovative project to honor the past. I kept feeling this strong pull, an external sensation and an urgency that pushed me to make this dance dedicated to my grandfather. My grandfather passed away a few days after my New York debut where I performed this work.
There was this mysterious external presence where I felt encouraged to create this solea por bulería to honor my grandfather. It did not make sense logically, yet I had to make this work. Maybe God or the universe knew my Grandfather would be leaving before I did, and I was meant to create this work to honor him when he was still alive.

Sassy and The Little Funhouse Mirror on Lennox Ave.: 

![Image of Sassy and The Little Funhouse Mirror on Lennox Ave.](image)

Figure 26: Photos of Sassy and The Little Funhouse on Lennox Ave., Photo Credit Pat Berret

Two works were inspired by Josephine Baker in *Ink on Cotton*. The solo *The Little Funhouse on Lennox Ave.*, was inspired by Josephine Baker navigating the context of primitivist modernism. The title *The Little Funhouse on Lennox Ave.* was inspired by Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s quote “Because other performance outlets were closed to them, African Americans, on entering minstrelsy, had no choice but to step into a white-constructed mirror that distorted their reflection” (Gottschild 1996: 83) This made me think of the Cotton Club, which was on Lennox Ave. in New York, and how performers had to perform stereotypes that disturbed their reflection like a funhouse mirror for oppressive white audiences. Therefore, the title *The Little Funhouse on Lennox Ave.* was born. I realized there was a long legacy of African Americans performing distorted stereotypes from minstrelsy to Josephine Baker to the Cotton Club. Inspired by Josephine Baker’s vocabulary and the jungle themed
imagery in primitivist modernism, I created a jungle scene using Goldlink’s 2018 Meditation. Below is an excerpt of my thoughts and experience performing the work…

I wore a palm tree romper against a giant projection of vivid palm tree leaves engulfing the space. Inspired by Meira Goldberg’s idea of Jump Jim Crow’s limp disabling him from leaping for redemption like the Spanish Pastor Bobo from Spanish Villancicos who could leap for redemption and escape poverty (Goldberg 2018:20-21), I ran determined to the four corners of the box of light enclosing me. I tried to jump for redemption, trying to escape this enclosed box of racism that the United States contained me in. Get me out of the box, I was tired of choosing a box and checking a box! I was claustrophobic gasping for air. Buttocks reverberating, shuffling pattering feet, I was a minstrelized doll moving in a frenzied dream embodying a stereotype I did not want to but had to. I secretly flipped off the audience without them knowing it, hiding it in the dance vocabulary, fucking an oppressive class that wanted to see me become a fantasy that enclosed me in a box. I collapsed, murmurs permeated my mind from the audio track until a gunshot was heard, the reality of this country, the death of blackness that was at one point an alive, limping, entertaining awkwardness searching for a way out of the box.

The duet that was inspired by Josephine Baker included two tall beautiful muscular black women. In the creation of the work, I noticed there were questions to why I was incorporating bananas, and why I had them hold bananas. The dancers’ thoughts and questions were valuable, exposing the reality of whether these racist images can actually be appropriated, is there a way to use them for empowerment, for healing? Can we distance ourselves from history even if we are connected?
Sassy utilized a transmutation of Rebekah Kowal’s theory of “semiotic excess” (Kowal 140). Kowal coins “semiotic excess” in her article *Staging the Greensboro Sit-ins* to describe an African American protestor hyper-demonstrating an excess of signs of whiteness in order to convince a waitress to serve him in protest to segregation laws (Kowal 2004:140-142). Rather than using semiotic excess to prove racial equality (Kowal 2004:140-142), I created an experiment of what occurs when there is an excess of racialized images and signs in time and space. The two dancers in *Sassy* were dressed in vintage provocative outfits featuring off-the-shoulder blouses with banana print and satin yellow mini skirts. They each held a banana when dancing while giant bananas swirled against a pink screen. Later, the dancers exchanged their bananas for watermelons and the screen transitioned to watermelons that rained down on a black screen. The movement vocabulary was inspired by Josephine Baker with flashes of wiggling fingers and the Charleston which later transformed into a collapse of historical time by incorporating vogueing and twerking.

Time was not linear in this work. Charleston knocking knees were juxtaposed with Rhapsody’s 2018 *Sassy* featuring lyrics inspired by Maya Angelou’s *Still I Rise*. Vogueing inspired arm gestures accentuated Machito’s Afro-Cuban band’s 1950 *Mambo* (Austerlitz 2016: xl, youtube). A non-linear time and space exuded the simultaneous citation of the past with innovation in the present. This idea of honoring the past while innovating for the future is a quality I perceive to be of importance in African American performing arts and flamenco and I wanted to use this as a grounding ideology for the creation of the work as a whole. I set out to create a modern synthesis of the present informed by the past.
Negras Bulerías/Ink on Cotton:

The last work *Negras Bulerías/Ink on Cotton* was a synthesis of flamenco and contemporary elements formulated into a defiant hybridized form that violently asserted a paradoxical undefinable existence. The seed for this work began when I was 21 years old and came from the very real feeling that there was no place for me. This work was further developed for *Ink on Cotton* in 2019. Below is my experience performing this work…

The work began with eerie sounds of the jungle bathed in green light. Then Bulería Negra del Gastor from *Son de La Frontera* hums into focus as dismembered Horton laterals and pirouettes slice through the air and end sliding in compás on the ten into a narrow pocket of silence. The forest sounds return. Soon thumping bubbles up from the Earth’s heartbeat. My palm flexes and a fast series of reactions assume from the zapateado from Belen Maya’s audio track of footwork from Saura’s Flamenco. A door closes on my left, I look and fall back. I release into the ground and run. I’m on the floor aiming, hands up, don’t shoot me!18

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18 I was inspired to include material addressing blackness and hinting at the Black Lives Matter movement from scholar and dancer Anusha Kedhar’s work at Colorado College.
I roll into a ball that contracts upwards spiraling through space into a flying leap. Short bursts of turns, I release, I hear a guitar strum. I run like a bird with open wings, I’m shot down, I grab dust falling in my palms. I’m fighting for my life to survive, there is no place for me but I fight. The viewer is attacking me with their eyes, I’m frantically running for my life, there is no place for me! A storm of fury of desperately expressing that I exist even though I’m trying to be blotted out. I spit through the movement at ghosts of a colonized mind attacking me through space. I feel like a wild free spirit that does not want to be contained, will not be contained. I have no people but insist that I exist, I will not be defined. Slicing through space and spiraling through shards of glass made from light, I grab my long satin gown and I shake it vigorously with the cante that seems to pierce through that pain I’m experiencing. I spin into a series of turns finishing with my hands up, will you shoot me now, I ask defiantly? I will not surrender in fear but pride.

I turn back and release my sternum to a cloud of charcoal smog that billows into a clear white space. What is this ink billowing down? Is it a black seed in white space? Is it love? Is it the fear of blackness taking whiteness by storm? Or rather is it the abstract interaction of blackness and whiteness? Is it the raza or the stain\textsuperscript{19}, that beautiful stain that really is in us, all of us? Is it Francisco de Quevedo’s “hot imaginings “of black sex as “an image of ink on cotton,”\textsuperscript{20} Is it an abstract embodiment of Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s idea of the harmonious black and white American body that dances\textsuperscript{21}? As I write this, I feel tears are coming down. There is something painful and very real about this piece to me like I am

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transported to this dream world where I am fighting for my right to be here. Grappling with a synthesis of who I feel that I really am. A fearful courage of pain from many sources. I don’t want to be blotted out, so maybe the ink runs for me like a thunderstorm of black tears on a white sky.

_Ink on Cotton_ seems to link to Maharaj’s words:

The community to which we belong’—what is it? All too often, it appears as a choice between native and foreign (or West and East, white and black, coloniser and colonised): Either identity A or Not A. But the immigrations had left one feeling one was both, split by a dividing line which might also be seen, paradoxically, as the line along which the pieces join together. A borderline identity, belonging to both sides or neither?” (Maharaj 1991: 80 in Roy 1997: 75-76).

_Ink on Cotton_ used modern synthesis as a way to carve an alternative space for myself and others who do not fit in. Sanjoy Roy writes that in an “unsettling sense, […] the hybrid cannot be placed on a map of prior knowledge” (Roy 1997: 81). This alternative space existed in the performance of _Ink on Cotton_, where identity, space and time melted into fluid forms that traced the liminal space between boundaries. _Ink on Cotton_ was the courage to imagine an alternative space outside the confines of this world. Maybe the existence of this space will only come after death where what is or was ceases to exist or matter. Maybe this alternative space may not be found in this lifetime. But for now, I find myself still in search for that liminal line, to keep tracing that line ————.

To keep tracing that line and to keep dreaming and striving for a true modern synthesis where binaries and categories cease to define us but are ingredients to create who we are and a utopian space where we can be who we are.
Appendices:

Appendix A: Vimeo Link to Performance Footage: https://vimeo.com/310453469

Appendix B: Ink on Cotton Program
INK ON COTTON
Choreographed by Justice Miles

Program Notes Master's Thesis
Ink on Cotton is an artistic response and exploration of African American history from the 1800s to contemporary times. A main theory explored throughout the work is “semiotic excess” a theory by Rebecca Kawals. Staging the Greensboro Sit-ins; originally the term was used to describe an excess of signs or hyper-demonstration of whiteness by an African American protestor requesting to be served by a waitress at the Greensboro Sit-ins during the civil rights movement.

However, became interested in the theory of what happens when an excess of racially charged signs are in space? One image I use in this work is the watermelon, which according to William Black in the Atlantic, was originally a symbol of African American freedom after slavery and later became a sign to make fun of blacks in the U.S. The banana, which also appears in the work, was inspired by the banana skirt of Josephine Baker and also has a problematic racialized history. I was curious what would happen if there was an excess of signs with charged meaning in space, is there a way to re-appropriate these signs or not? Why did racism exist? Does blackness or any race for that matter really exist or is it just a series of performative stereotypes that get performed again and again by all of us?

Ink on Cotton features many artistic explorations, such as building sets from Federico Garcia Lorca and Francisco de Quevedo poems on the conditions of African Americans to creating choreography inspired by the subversive beginnings of the cakewalk, which was a slave plantation dance that made fun of slave master minstrels that ironically became popular for European elite; according to scholar Elizabeth de Martelly. Ink on Cotton is an artistic response inspired by theoretical and historical research from scholars and writers such as Brenda Dixon Gottschald, Maira Goldberg, William Black, Brooke Baldwin, Elizabeth de Martelly, Rebecca Kawals and more.

“Once we dare see the naked truth...we shall see a body, the American dancing body. It is a black-and-white portrait, an affirmation of opposites, in which the negative contains a positive” —Brenda Dixon Gottschald 78, Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts

Warning: Adult Language

Choreographer/Arranger: Justice Miles
Dancers: Morgan Godbait; Andrea Lozano, Natesa McGowan, Justice Miles
Poet: Jacqueline Erin Behrens
Los Flamencos: Dolores Garcia, Eloy Gonzalez, Andrea Lozano
Film Makers: Max Schraber, Noor-un-nisa Touchon
Lighting Design: Louise Alexia Browne and Katie Gallegos
Motion Graphics Designer: Amy Taylor

THE STARS AND SKY
Written by Justice Miles
Performed by Jacqueline Erin Behrens

WATERMELON WOMAN
Choreographed and performed by Justice Miles
Music: Gallivois Cakewalk composed by Claude Debussy and played by Chenyin Li
Film by Justice Miles

THE CAKEWALK
Choreographed by Justice Miles
Performed by Morgan Godbait, Natesa McGowan and Justice Miles
Music: Solely by Miles Davis and Spanish Joint by D’Angelo

TANGOS
Choreographed by Andrea Lozano
Canto: Dolores Garcia
Guitarra: Eloy Gonzalez
Baila: Andrea Lozano

NEGROTA DEL HARLEM
Various guest artist material arranged by Justice Miles
Cante: Dolores Garcia
Guitarras: Eloy Gonzalez
Baila: Justice Miles
Palmases: Andrea Lozano
Letra: El Rey del Harlem by Federico Garcia Lorca, Norma y Paraiso de los Negros by Federico Garcia Lorca, Baile de la galeria/Los galeotes by Francisco de Quevedo

EL REY DEL HARLEM
Written by Federico Garcia Lorca
Performed by Jacqueline Erin Behrens and Eloy Gonzalez
Film by Max Schraber and Noor-un-nisa Touchon

RIO DE GUADALquivIR
Canto: Dolores Garcia
Guitarras: Eloy Gonzalez
Palmases: Andrea Lozano
Film by Max Schraber and Noor-un-nisa Touchon

THE LITTLE FUNHOUSE MIRROR ON LENNOX AVENUE
Performed and choreographed by Justice Miles
Image: Cycas Revoluta by Rosalba Matta-Machado
Music: Meditation (feat. Jazmine Sullivan & KAYTRANADA) by GoldLink

LOTUS
Written by Justice Miles with additions from Jacqueline Erin Behrens
Performed by Jacqueline Erin Behrens and Justice Miles

STILL I RISE
Written by Maya Angelou
Performed by Jacqueline Erin Behrens

SASSY
Choreographed by Justice Miles
Performed by Morgan Godbait and Natesa McGowan
Motion Graphics by Amy Taylor
Music: Sassy by Rapsody

MAMBO
Choreographed by Justice Miles and dancers
Performed by Morgan Godbait and Natesa McGowan
Animation by Amy Taylor
Music: Memobo by Machito

BULERIAS NEGRAS: FORKED TONGUE
Choreographed and performed by Justice Miles
Music: Exotic Jungle by Jamie Llewellyn, Buleria Negra del Gastor by Son de La Frontera, Exotic Jungle by Jamie Llewellyn, Belen Maya and Tomatito in Carlos Saura’s film Flamenco, El Caperuza in Carlos Saura’s film Flamenco Flamenco

INK ON COTTON
Choreographed and performed by Justice Miles
Music: Tinkers Tailor Soldier Sailor Rich Man Poor Man Beggar Man Thief by Radiohead
Film: Ink Drip/Drip in water 004: Royalty Free Stock Footage by CyberWebFX
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Figure 8. Baker’s Modern Synthesis Table.


Figure 24 MFA Performance Poster. Buchanan, Ivy, and Myriah Williams. *Ink/Body/Rain Poster*. August 2018. Ink on Cotton section, Photograph and Poster.

Figure 25 Negrita del Harlem. Berret, Pat. *Negrita del Harlem*. August 31- September 2, 2018. Photograph.

Figure 26 Photos of Sassy and The Little Funhouse Mirror on Lennox Ave. Berret, Pat. *Photos of Sassy and The Little Funhouse Mirror on Lennox Street*. August 31- September 2, 2018. Photographs.

Figure 27 Negras Bulerías rehearsal photo. Miles, Justice. *Negras Bulerías rehearsal photo*. August 14, 2018. Photograph.