

**A WANDERING SUBJECT:
HYBRIDITY IN *IRACEMA, UMA TRANSA AMAZÔNICA***

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RESUMO:

Numa narrativa em que a trajetória da personagem Iracema compreende o espaço mítico, romântico, outrora habitado pela “vestal” tabajara, e o espaço desencantado das estradas e dos bordéis de segunda classe, os constantes deslocamentos remetem ao igualmente constante trânsito de um cinema ficcional para um cinema documental, num processo de hibridação que marca a identidade da personagem. Este artigo se propõe a discutir essa identidade, com base nos conceitos de hibridismo, identidade e diferença.

Palavras-Chave: Hibridismo; Identidade; Diferença; Cinema Brasileiro

ABSTRACT:

In a narrative in which the trajectory of the character Iracema encompasses the mythic and romantic space, once inhabited by the tabajara "vestal", and the disenchanting space of roads and second-class brothels, the constant wanderings relate to the equally constant transit from a fictional to a documental cinema, in a process of hybridization that establishes the character's identity. This article aims at discussing this identity with the support of the concepts of hybridism, identity and difference.

Keywords: Hybridism; Identity; Difference; Brazilian Cinema

1. The presence of the Indian in Brazilian cinema

Brazilian contemporary cinema encompasses films that differ greatly both thematically and stylistically. I am referring here to films that were produced in the last five years of the twentieth century and in the first ten of the twenty-first century, in the historical period of the Brazilian cinema known as the *Retomada*, a trend in Brazilian cinema whose inaugural film is *Carlota Joaquina, princesa do Brasil*, in 1995 – “independently of any judgment of aesthetic quality, (it) works as a sort of ground zero of the *Retomada* in the Brazilian cinema”. (My translation).² (ORICCHIO, 2003, p. 26). This varied output includes films that present traits borrowed from television and publicity, films that seem to be fashioned to win attention at international film festivals, films that reveal great technical refinement, and films that purport to have an authorial perspective. Although it is very difficult to group these films, for they do not make up an aesthetically coherent whole, they might have a common denominator, which is the fact that most of them attempt to scrutinize Brazilian reality – they are always concerned with social issues, which, by the way, is not new in Brazilian cinema – which

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² In the original text: “independentemente de qualquer julgamento de qualidade estética, (ele) funciona como (sic) espécie de marco zero da *Retomada* do cinema brasileiro”.

leads some of these films to establish a link between a fictional narrative and the procedures of the documentary film - which, again, is not an innovation, but is perhaps more noticeable in these films -, in a hybrid form that can be related to the blurring of borders between social classes, ethnic groups and gender. Many of these films present undefined, porous identities that seem to exist in the borders, in the in-between.

The question of the relative effacement of borders between fictional and non-fictional narratives in contemporary Brazilian cinema – as can be seen in films as varied as *Jogo de cena*, *Serras da desordem*, *Iracema*, *uma transa amazônica*, and *Juízo*, to name just a few –, is far from unproblematic. Whereas researchers like Andrea França talk of “works that combine hybrid procedures, originated in fiction, in the fabulation of stories, in the documental field, [...] in which the explicit intervention of the filmmaker in relation to the objects is crucial”³, others, like Fernão Ramos, problematize “the ideology, still dominant in our times, that is somewhat proud of showing the tenuous borders between the fields of fiction and non-fiction, shuffling definitions”⁴. Ramos says that “Jorge Furtado’s short *O sanduíche* (2000, 14 min.) neatly reveals the attraction that narratives *en abîme*, in which the fictional and the documentary fields overlap without a clear definition, exert over contemporary sensibilities”⁵. Ramos’s main concern is discussing the specificity of the documentary in terms of its being capable of an objective, transparent representation – to use his own terms –, something that would be challenged by the contemporary ideological view that negates the possibility of representing something.

Ramos cites two central concepts – assertive proposition and indexation – that would allow for the possibility of establishing a definition for the documentary field. The first concept alludes to statements on reality, whereas the second refers to the previous social knowledge of the viewer that would allow them to know whether the film they are experiencing is a documentary or a fictional film.⁶ He argues that the intensity of the non-fictional image – the image of death, for instance – comes from what he calls the *circunstância da tomada*, which refers to the set of actions involved at the moment the camera registers what is before it, and with which the non-fictional cinema is concerned. In my view, moments like this are also present in films in which the borders between fiction and non-fiction are not clearly demarcated.

Apart from the academically relevant debate on the possibility of representation and the specificity of the documentary, the fact remains that there are films that heavily depend on the enactment of events and others that mainly record events. Between these

³ My translation of the original text: “obras que combinam procedimentos híbridos, vindos da ficção, da fabulação, do campo documental e, nas quais a intervenção explícita do cineasta na relação com os objetos é crucial.” (In: FRANÇA, Andréa. *Fronteiras e relações intersubjetivas no documentário contemporâneo*. Available in: < <http://www.ufscar.br/rua/site/?p=1637>>. Access on: June 24, 2010.)

⁴ My translation of the original text: “a ideologia, ainda dominante em nossa época, que tem um certo orgulho em mostrar fronteiras tênues entre os campos da ficção e da não-ficção, embaralhando definições”. (In: RAMOS, Fernão Pessoa. *O que é o documentário?*. Available in: <<http://www.bocc.uff.br/pag/pessoa-fernao-ramos-o-que-documentario.pdf>>. Access on: June 24, 2010.)

⁵ My translation of the original text: “*O Sanduíche* (2000), curta (14 min.) de Jorge Furtado, revela bem a atração que exerce sobre a sensibilidade contemporânea as narrativas em abismo, nas quais os campos ficcionais e o documentário sobrepõem-se sem definição clara.” (In: RAMOS, Fernão. Pessoa. *O que é documentário?* Available in: <http://bocc.ubi.pt/pag/pessoa-fernao-ramos-o-que-documentario.pdf>. Access on: June 24, 2010.)

⁶ All the references to Fernão Pessoa Ramos in this paper concern the text “O que é o documentário?”. (RAMOS, Fernão. Pessoa. *O que é documentário?* Op. cit.).

two extremes lie the films that to varying degrees try to efface the boundaries between the two types.

The number of Brazilian films that tackle the issue is relatively small, if compared, for example, with films that deal with afro-Brazilian themes, as Robert Stam points out in *Multiculturalismo Tropical* (p. 42). Andrea Tonacci, the director of *Serras da desordem*, says in an interview⁷: “Now, a film with five Indians, who wants it? They say: ‘C’mon, Andrea, you’ll make a film about Indians?’ You see? That’s the reasoning.” (My translation).⁸ This disregard for the representation of native populations in Brazil is related, on one side, to the relatively small number of indigenous groups in the country. FUNAI’s official site (FUNAI is a foundation for the protection of the indigenous populations and their land) gives an impression of grandness in its description of the existing native populations in Brazil: “Brazil has a wide ethnic and linguistic diversity, one of the widest in the world. There are 215 indigenous societies, and about 55 groups of isolated Indians, about whom there is no objective information yet. 180 languages, at least, are spoken by the members of these societies, which belong to more than 30 different linguistic families” (My translation).⁹ The fact remains that the total number of Indians today is 358,000, according to the IBGE census of 2005, against an Indian population estimated in one million to five million individuals in 1500.¹⁰

The unconcern for the representation of native populations in Brazil might be related to a certain way of regarding these populations, a fact that is commented on by the editors of FUNAI on their official site; it relates to a sort of prejudice towards a group of people that is more or less invisible to the medium and upper class citizens – who vaguely and idealistically see them as the rightful owners of the land and closely attached to nature, against whom they have no complaints provided they remain in their place. It also relates to a view of the Indians as an annoyance to rural dwellers who have to compete with them for jobs and also have to justify the “invasion” of their land by disqualifying them, by labeling them as lazy and drunkards, in a well-known process that has often occurred with other communities in other parts of the world.¹¹

Having said that, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that there have always been Brazilian films dealing with indigenous populations. Back in 1937, Humberto Mauro produced *O descobrimento do Brasil*, that, despite being a retelling of the official story, differs in terms of the representation of Indians from American films, for example, in that the natives speak *tupi* and do not represent a threat to the white characters. (STAM, 2008, p. 24). This, of course, is the reading of a foreign subject, who does not perceive the colonialist slant of the film: it sanctions the official story and depicts the natives as naive and in need of being under the tutelage of an invading

⁷ This interview can be found at the following address: <C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Home/Meus%20documentos/textos%20p%C3%B3s-doc/tonacci%20e%20serras.htm>. Access on: June 24, 2010.

⁸ In the original: “Agora, um filme com cinco índios, quem quer? Dizem: ‘Pô, Andrea, vai fazer filme de índio?’. Entende? Esse é o raciocínio.”

⁹ In the original: “O Brasil possui uma imensa diversidade étnica e linguística, estando entre as maiores do mundo. São 215 sociedades indígenas, mais cerca de 55 grupos de índios isolados, sobre os quais ainda não há informações objetivas. 180 línguas, pelo menos, são faladas pelos membros destas sociedades, as quais pertencem a mais de 30 famílias linguísticas diferentes.” Available in : <http://www.google.com.br/#hl=pt-R&source=hp&q=o+que+%C3%A9+a+funai&meta=&aq=f&aqi=g10&aql=&oq=&gs_rfai=&fp=976f46c5092c9997>. Access on: April 15, 2010.

¹⁰ Available in: <http://www.ibge.gov.br/ibgeteen/datas/indio/numeros.html>. Access on: April 15, 2010.

¹¹ BRASIL. Ministério da Justiça. Fundação Nacional do Índio. *Índios do Brasil, identidade e diversidade*. Available in: <http://funai.gov.br>. Access on: April 15, 2010

"civilized" group. There have been adaptations of literary canonical novels such as *O guarani* (*O guarani* – versions of 1912, 1916, 1920, 1926, 1950, 1979, and 1996), *Iracema* [*Iracema* (1919), and *Iracema, a virgem dos lábios de mel* (1979)], and *Ubirajara* [*Ubirajara* (1919), and *A lenda de Ubirajara* (1975)], in which the idealization of the natives followed the Romantic vein of the source novels, with the exception of *Iracema, a virgem dos lábios de mel*, which invested in the erotic image of Helena Ramos, an actress that stood out in the pornochanchada movies of the time. The chanchada film *Casei-me com um xavante* (1957) exploited the supposedly comic situation of a white man who becomes a chief in an Indian tribe. The films of the 1970s that addressed indigenous themes were concerned with the political question of "digesting" the foreigner, as in *Como era gostoso o meu francês* (1971) – *Hans Staden* (2000) dealt with the same subject –, or the question of the confrontation between progress in a civilized world and a presumed essential Indian identity, as in *Uirá, um índio em busca de Deus* (1973). The harmful influence of capitalist interests and religious prejudices are present in *Brincando nos campos do senhor* (1991). *Avaeté, a semente da vingança* (1984) reinforces the concept of an Indian identity, whereas *Caramuru, a invenção do Brasil* (2001) focuses not on the Indians but on the white characters. *Brava gente brasileira* (2000) shows the violent nature of the encounter between the Portuguese and the kadiwéus Indians in eighteenth-century Brazil, and *Tainá, no país das Amazonas* (2000) manifests a concern with ecology and the relation with nature.

This brief account of some of the Brazilian films that tackle the subject of native Brazilian populations allows us to see that, roughly speaking, either the films adopt the maintenance of the idealized, Romantic image of the Indian, untouched by the evils of civilization, which is a way of setting the Indian apart, marginalizing her/him, or show the inevitable cultural shock experienced by the contact between colonizers and the native inhabitants of the land.

My concern, in this paper, is to analyze the film *Iracema, uma transa amazônica* (Jorge Bodansky; Orlando Senna, 1976), which was for this reason left out of the account above. The comings and goings of the title character, her existence in a world that is neither the jungle nor the big city, her wanderings, the indefiniteness of her trajectory, and the rambling nature of the film's storyline make the film an example of contemporary Brazilian cinema *avant la lettre* and enable it to be analyzed in terms of hybridity, for although this concept, as Robert Stam (GUNERATNE; DISSANAYAKE, 2003, p. 32) points out, "has been a perennial feature of art and cultural discourse in Latin America – highlighted in such terms as *mestizaje*, *indianismo*, *diversalite*, *creolite*, *raza cosmic* – it has recently been recoded as a symptom of the postmodern, postcolonial and post-nationalist moment." I will try to point out in the film characteristics of hybridity, not only formally – for example, the insertion of "real life" elements into the fictional account –, but also in relation to the representation of the main indigenous character, Iracema.

2. The question of identity – multiculturalism, heterogeneity, and hybridization

As identities are not fixed, but exist in the locus of negotiation between the local and the global, I will resort to concepts of multiculturalism, heterogeneity, and hybridization. The main concept here, and the one that will guide this study is the concept of hybridization – as part of the more general studies in globalization –, as it is forwarded by Canclini (2008, p. XIX): "By hibrydization I understand sociocultural

processes in which discrete structures or practices, which existed separately, combine with each other in order to generate new structures, objects and practices. (My translation.)”¹² Later on he adds: “I find it attractive to treat hybridization as a translation term among miscegenation, syncretism, fusion and the other words used to refer to particular mixtures”. (p. XXXIX, my translation).¹³ The relevance of the concept of hybridization, in all its meanings, for the analysis that I intend to do will hopefully become more evident as I dwell on the concepts of identity and difference – which will also play an important part in the analysis –, which are slippery and can very easily be associated with essentialist notions of purity, segregation, and truth, and must thus be problematized.

Canclini proposes the transference of emphasis from identity to the concepts of heterogeneity and intercultural hybridization, and points out that identitary groupings that were more or less stable, such as the nation, classes, and ethnic groups, have been challenged in the globalized context, as they have been trespassed by notions of transnationality, transclassism, and interethnicity. (CANCLINI, 2008, p. XXIII). Thus, ideas of purity, of univocity, would be replaced by ideas of syncretism, creolization, and crossbreeding, and Canclini believes that the politics of hybridization would help deal with difference in a democratic way (p. XXVII). At this point it must be clear that the concept of hybridism is not alien to Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism, due to its characteristic of dissemination, of “contamination”. As Bakhtin refers to the chronotopic multiplicity – in terms of communicative utterances – that enables not only literal citations but different texts from different epochs to co-exist palimpsestically, it is possible to speak of temporal hybridity – as well as cultural hybridity – in relation to the cinema. Quoting Stam:

The cinema, I would argue, is ideally equipped to express cultural and temporal hybridity. The cinema is temporally hybrid, first of all, in an intertextual sense, in that it “inherits” all the art forms and millennial traditions associated with its diverse matters of expression. [...] But the cinema is also temporally hybrid in another, more technical sense. As a technology of representation, the cinema mingles diverse times and spaces; it is produced in one constellation of times and spaces, it represents still another (diegetic) constellation of times and spaces, and is received in still another time and space (theatre, home, classroom). Film’s conjunction of sound and image means that each track not only presents two kinds of time, but also that they mutually inflect one another in a form of synchresis. (GUNERATNE; DISSANAYAKE, 2003, p. 37).

This idea of synchresis prevents the danger of a work of art representing folklorically only one identity, which may give birth to nationalism, to patriotism. As Canclini states, “aesthetics abandons the attempts made in the XIX and XX centuries to convert it in patriotic pedagogy”¹⁴. (CANCLINI, 2008, p. XL, my translation). He then

¹² In the original text: “Entendo por hibridação processos socioculturais nos quais estruturas ou práticas discretas, que existiam de forma separada, se combinam para gerar novas estruturas, objetos e práticas.”

¹³ In the original text: “Considero atraente tratar a hibridação como um termo de tradução entre mestiçagem, sincretismo, fusão e os outros vocábulos empregados para designar misturas particulares.”

¹⁴ In the original text: “a estética abandona as tentativas dos séculos XIX e XX de convertê-la em pedagogia patriótica”.

warns us against another danger that can replace the danger of folklorizing or of nationalist destiny:

(The other threat) is the one that the seduction of the globalist Market brings: to reduce art to a discourse of planetary reconciliation. The standardized versions of films and songs of the world, of the “international style” in visual arts and literature, sometimes suspend the tension between what is communicated and what is separated, between what is globalized and what insists on the difference, or is expelled to the margins of mundialization. (CANCLINI, 2008, p. XL, my translation).¹⁵

In short, in relation to cultural products, hybridization does not mean leveling, attenuating cultural traits in order to get a more homogenous work. That would be an unwanted reaction to what was common practice in the past – the highlighting of identity traits that led to dangerous nationalistic or patriotic ideas. Hybridization means the mixing of elements that are already mixed, in which the former elements can still be seen, in a sort of Derridean play with these multicultural elements. Multiculturalism would stand halfway through hegemonic assimilation, which is undesirable for it means the disappearance of minority groups, and ethnic separatism, which is also undesirable for it does not take into consideration the existing syncretic nature of all cultures. (STAM, 2008, p. 37).

The hegemonic assimilation, mentioned above, with its metaphor of the “melting pot”, would favor an ideology of monoculturalism – the universalization of a single culture –, and the consequent favoring of only what pertains to the so-called “high culture”. This was the scenario that dominated the United States before the emergence of the Civil Rights and counterculture movements in the 1960s. The groups that made up these movements, although set in the margins of society, kept their own set of values, so that negotiations with the dominant society would be able to occur. (GOLDBERG, 1995, p.5-6). Such negotiations are necessary, otherwise separatism will be generated, and groups will firmly demarcate their boundaries, which is the other end of hegemonic assimilation, already referred to in the paragraph above.

Monoculturalism was the dominant force in the first half of the twentieth century. Multiculturalism, which challenged the monocultural Euro-American dominance, took into consideration other voices, other identities – debates were then centered on identity and difference, concepts that are far from unproblematic. They will undoubtedly be summoned as I analyze the film *Iracema, uma transa amazônica*, so I will take some time to discuss them in detail, in order to figure out when they can be helpful and when they can be deleterious to my readings of the film.

It is important to assert that multiculturalism – a concept that embraces the debates on identity, difference, heterogeneity and hybridism –, is not seen here in the liberal sense of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity. As Tomaz Tadeu da Silva argues, “no matter how edifying and desirable these noble feelings may seem, they prevent us from regarding identity and difference as processes of social *production*, as

¹⁵ In the original text: “(A outra ameaça) é aquela que a sedução do Mercado globalista traz: reduzir a arte a discurso de reconciliação planetária. As versões estandardizadas dos filmes e das músicas do mundo, do “estilo internacional” nas artes visuais e na literatura, suspendem às vezes a tensão entre o que se comunica e o separado, entre o que se globaliza e o que insiste na diferença, ou é expulso para as margens da mundialização”.

processes involving power relations. [...] Identity and difference have to do with the allocation of meaning to the social world and with the dispute and struggle in relation to this allocation”.¹⁶. (In: SILVA, 2007, p. 96, my translation). Underlying the supposed positive aspect of tolerating the different is the assumption that homogeneity is the norm, hence something to be desired. That notion is simply reinforced by the “progressive” attitude of including representatives of the marginalized or minority groups in the social system without any effective change in the social organization. (GOLDBERG, 1995, p. 29).

Identity is not a given, and does not have a natural essence; it is a cultural construct and has to be defined relatively – *I am this because I am not that* –, “that” being the other, the different one. However, like the language system, in which it is difference that determines meaning, we do not have to take identity as the norm that will serve as a measure tape to evaluate what we are not – it is difference that comes first. But both identity and difference, no matter which of the two elements is the central one, are the result of linguistic creation – they are not something that is there to be “discovered” or “tolerated”, but they are something that has to be produced by speech acts, which reinforces what was said above – that difference determines meaning, for that is the way linguistic meaning is constructed. (SILVA, 2007, p. 76). Having made this parallel between the concepts of identity and difference and the language system, we can go a step further. Language, as we know, is an unstable system, the presence of the referent in the sign being indefinitely deferred. Besides this deferring, there is also the difference of the sign from other signs, that is, the sign is subject to *différance*, to use Derrida’s term, which encapsulates both *differing* and *deferring*. An important consequence, Silva (2007) points out, results from this: as identity and difference are partly defined by language, the instability and undecidability we identify in the language are also present in these two concepts (p. 80), so that it is possible to say that there is no fixed identity.

Likewise, Stuart Hall argues against an identity that is fixed in that binary opposition – *us/them*. He proposes instead the concept of “cultural identity” and says that there are two ways of thinking about it. “The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.” (HALL, 1990, p. 223). He then speaks of a second position, according to which, “as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather - since history has intervened - 'what we have become'. [...] Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'.” (p. 225). Although meaning is constructed by difference, he argues, it is not fixed, and he then invokes Derrida’s concept of *différance*, referred to in the previous paragraph.

It is not idle to insist that the binary oppositions, the *us/them* oppositions, involve the question of power, which is unequally distributed. The persistence of that sort of opposition made power, mainly the power of Western thought, to be maintained for a long time without being challenged – whenever we have a binary structure, one of the elements tends to be the dominant one, the other element being seen as the deviant,

¹⁶ In the original: “Por mais edificantes e desejáveis que possam parecer, esses nobres sentimentos impedem que vejamos a identidade e a diferença como processos de *produção* social, como processos que envolvem relações de poder. [...] A identidade e a diferença têm a ver com a atribuição de sentido ao mundo social e com disputa e luta em torno dessa atribuição”.

the “wrong” one. Thus, the elements on the “correct” side are the ones related to the dominating group, that is, Western culture, and we have then oppositions like *high culture – low culture, men – women, straight men – gay men, and white women – black women*. Kathryn Woodward, in her article “Concepts of identity and difference”¹⁷, reminds us that whereas to Saussure binary oppositions inhere in language and in the structure of all thinking, to the feminist writer H el ene Cixous (siksi) the extraordinary force of Western thinking is the result of a longtime historical and cultural determination. Cixous gives the example of the binary groups that can be associated with the roles played by both men and women in society: *active – passive, sun – moon, culture – nature, day – night, father – mother, head – heart, intelligible – sensitive*. (SILVA, 2007, p. 51-52). The question is whether these pairs, no matter if they are part of thinking or culturally constructed, can be destabilized. This is where the discussion that was developed earlier, in which the slippery nature of identity, due to concept of *diff erance*, and Hall’s idea of cultural identity as a process of becoming, shows its relevance.

Besides the drawbacks of the concepts of identity and difference discussed so far, there is a strong argument, put forth by Goldberg, according to which these concepts, in spite of their having been proved “theoretically, politically, and pedagogically valuable [...] , can cut both ways” (GOLDBERG, 1995, p. 12). On one hand, identity can be related to what holds people together, to what gives them a sense of belonging to a certain group, a feeling of affiliation, but, on the other hand, it may mean that people are urged to be part of a group – based, for instance, on an essential aspect, like race – in which they do not want to be, and it may also mean that people who would like to be in that group might be rejected. The same can happen in relation to difference, and the results can be drastic, for people can be segregated for being different, whether in relation to race, gender, or social class. Says Goldberg: “Identity can sustain fascist social movements as readily as emancipatory ones, and difference may license genocide almost as easily as it does celebration.” (GOLDBERG, 1995, p. 13).

He then suggests that the debate on identity and difference should be transferred to heterogeneity. The counterpart of heterogeneity, that is, homogeneity, is championed by detractors of multiculturalism, who forward the argument that homogeneity is the desired condition for civilization, on the basis of its being natural and also the best way to preserve traditions. They say that homogeneity is a natural condition, perhaps not genetically determined, but related to the process of natural selectivity, and they support their argument by saying that, for example, when survival is at stake, people choose kin. (p. 21). Besides, monoculturalists say, there would be a set of values and customs worth preserving, and the most effective way to preserve them would be through homogeneity. (GOLDBERG, 1995, p. 21).

Goldberg regards these arguments as fallacious. First of all, the human race is historically nomadic – people have always migrated and are always migrating, for the most varied reasons: to escape natural disaster, to find better living conditions, to escape war, to find better climatological conditions, to colonize or escape colonialism, to work (voluntarily or as slaves), to escape political repression or persecution, or simply to fulfill a dream or a whim. “So the representative condition, the prevailing one historically – especially throughout modernity – has been movement and migration, heterogeneous mixing in ethn racial and cultural terms.” (GOLDBERG, 1995, p. 22).

¹⁷ I used the translation of this article, that can be found in SILVA (2007), referred to below.

Heterogeneity, thus, would be a result of this movement and this migration. Says Goldberg:

Groups of people or subgroups – immigrants and migrants, colonialists and capitalist entrepreneurs, coolie labor and guestworkers, refugees and exiles, lingering tourists and travelers, students and intellectuals – move into new spaces or territory and become part of or integral to that space or society. (1995, p. 22).

It just so happens that iconic figures of monoculturalism were heterocultural: Aristotle belonged to the Greek academy but was Macedonian; Plato travelled extensively; St. Augustine was born in North Africa; St. Thomas Aquinas was Italian, studied in Paris and Cologne, and taught in Paris, Rome and Naples; Marx and Freud traveled in Europe and settled in London. People are always moving to universities and their surroundings, for a long or a short period of time. It is heterogeneity, then, that intensifies human interaction and enables human relations, not ideas of isolation, of sameness, of homogeneity, for the concept of atomism does not agree with the idea of social interchange.

Heterogeneity may cause discomfort for its characteristic of destabilization, for questioning discipline, and everything that is organized and ordered, for destabilizing the familiar, for assumed notions of purity and normality, and, most important of all, for challenging positions of power. Goldberg (1995) says that “multicultural heterogeneity is concerned with contesting oppressive power, marginality, and exclusion in its local contexts.” (p. 33), and mentions the four virtues of heterogeneity selected by Iris Young. First, it allows the interaction and the intersection of different social positions; second, it promotes variety; third, it takes into account new, unfamiliar possibilities; fourth, it is visible, public. (GOLDBERG, 1995, p. 31).

Among multicultural practices, heterogeneity and the related phenomenon of hybridization seem to me to be the appropriate yardstick with which to analyze the representations of a native Brazilian subject in *Iracema, uma transa amazônica*. One of the aspects that will be taken into account in this work is the question of power – which is unbalanced in the very production of the film, for the filmmakers are white men. Robert Stam states that white directors’ films about Indians are also “about” white men, for everybody is ethnic. He questions the idea of non-ethnicity, which postulates that the whites are non-ethnic, which, for him, is normalizing whiteness. (STAM, 2008, p. 40-41). This is something this research will take into consideration, for if we do not think that being white is being ethnic, we are favoring the first element of the binary group *white man – Indian*, which goes against the theoretical frame this work has adopted. Of course, this will relate to the question of self-representation, as the same Robert Stam and Ella Shohat point out elsewhere: “Could only an Afro-American have directed Malcolm X, as Spike Lee has argued? [...] When does the fear of ‘appropriating’ turn into a form of mental segregationism and the policing of racial borders, a refusal to recognize one’s co-implication (Chandra Mohanty’s term) with otherness?” (SHOHAT; STAM, 1994, p. 343).

The concept of identity that can be helpful in the analysis of this film, in which *Iracema* seems to exist in a borderline space, is the concept of identity developed by Stuart Hall in relation to the modern subject. Having presented what he calls his discussion of the three concepts of identity, in which he deals with the unified identity of the Enlightenment subject and the socially active identity of the sociological subject, he moves on to the modern subject. Here a more complex, fragmented subject emerges,

a figure that is estranged from the world, who lives the life of a flaneur, wandering from place to place. (HALL et al., 1992, p. 275-285).

Hall also elaborates on the distinction between *tradition* and *translation*, proposed by Kevin Robins, following Bhabha, which is related to the types of subject referred to above. Some local identities, feeling threatened by the existence of other ethnic groups, try to regain what is lost in terms of purity, to reinforce traditional values, and in the process place themselves in a defensive attitude against these ethnic groups that supposedly will impair their social life. These groups, in turn, may retreat to their own cultural values, related to their original cultures, in an attitude of affirmation and reaction against what Hall calls *cultural racism*. (HALL et al., 1992, p. 308). Another possibility is the production of new identities, which are *translated*, that is, which do not return to their origins, their roots, and do not assimilate or homogenize either. These people, who have left or been driven away from their places of origin, are still connected with their past, but cannot return to it. They still keep traces of the cultures that molded them – their traditions, religious beliefs, languages –, but as they have been in contact with (an)other culture(s), they have incorporated histories and other cultural traits, and can no longer have the “unified” selves they once had. And Hall concludes his reasoning by saying:

People belonging to such cultures of hybridity have had to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of ‘lost’ cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism. They are irrevocably *translated*. The word ‘translation’, Salman Rushdie notes, ‘comes etymologically from “bearing across”’. [...] Cultures of hybridity are one of the distinctly novel types of identity produced in the ear of late-modernity, and there are more and more examples of them to be discovered. (HALL et al., 1992, p. 310).

3. Beyond, far beyond that range of mountains, away from the Transamazônica, Iracema was born.

To most Brazilians the name Iracema brings to mind José de Alencar’s nineteenth-century novel *Iracema*. Most of them will recall she is “the virgin with the honey-flavored lips”, and will have memories of a very poetic narrative in which an idealized *tabajara* Indian, a sort of vestal virgin of Ceará under whose care is the secret of the *Jurema* – a magical drink used in certain sacred indigenous rituals –, falls in love with an invading Portuguese warrior, Martim, who abandons her and takes their son Moacir with him. Her name is an anagram for America, and the novel can be read as an allegory of the colonization not only of Brazil but also of the Americas.

The Iracema of the film *Iracema, uma transa amazônica* is also an Indian but different, in every respect, from her Romantic counterpart. She is a fifteen-year old prostitute, does not have an ennobling role like the daughter of the *pajé* of the *tabajaras*, lives in Pará, and is abused by most of the people she meets. But she also encounters a white man (a truck driver from another region of the country, the South, thus a sort of “foreigner”) with whom she travels for some time and who abandons her later – she ends up in a third-class brothel, decadent and worn out. The irony already present in the use of the proper name Iracema in the title is reinforced by the complement *uma transa*

amazônica, which makes a pun with the word *transa* (a popular noun for sexual intercourse) and the word *transamazônica* (the name of the 4,000 km road connecting the states of Paraíba, Ceará, Piauí, Maranhão, Tocantins, Pará, and Amazonas)¹⁸. According to Aristón Portugal, a member of the executive coordination of the Fundação Viver, Produzir, Preservar (FVPP):

The road was strategic from the geopolitical and social point of view: “to integrate in order not to give away” was the word of command. On the other hand, the regime expected Transamazônica to represent an exhaust valve of social pressure for agrarian reform. But from the economical point of view it was always seen as secondary. As early as 1975, the government disappeared. People were thrown into a situation – extremely hot weather, with violent and lasting rains, dirt roads as the only infra-structure – that would be considered natural calamity in other parts of the country. It was total chaos. (My translation).¹⁹

The title thus refers both to the brief encounter between Iracema and the driver and the gigantic project developed during the harshest years of the Brazilian military regime. An enterprise that was supposed to integrate isolated parts of the country proved unfeasible and brought mayhem and impoverished the already poor peasants, as the many “interviews” of the film attest. Irony overflows the title and permeates the whole film: the truck driver calls himself Sebastião Brasil Grande and popular slogans and patriotic catch-phrases of the time, such as *Brazil, love it or leave it* and *Our greatest mother is the Brazilian nation* abound in the film. Most of these slogans and mottos are connected with Sebastião (Tião), and refer to the “economic miracle”, to the “order and progress” that the country, under the rigid control of the military, was supposedly experiencing at the time. However, in a striking contrast with this ufanistic nationalism, the film displays, in the context of the burning down of forests, of land-grabbing, and of infantile prostitution, the appalling situation of the people that Iracema meets along the way, people whose helpless condition makes them find solace in the expectation of miraculous solutions for their social problems. It is no coincidence that the boat that brings Iracema to town has the inscription *Graças a Deus (Thank Heavens)* and that the front bumper of a truck bears the words *Vá conmigo [sic] que eu vou com Deus (Come along with me for I walk with God)*. Also, one of the first scenes of the film takes place during the religious procession of the Círio de Nossa Senhora de Nazaré – it is in the festivities that Iracema meets Tião.

In spite of Iracema being the main character of the film, as the title indicates, she always seems to be at the margins of events – we learn practically nothing about her personal life, her family, what she thinks about things. That the film does not marginalize her is most probably due to the fact that she is favored with a great amount of close-ups, whereas the other characters are often portrayed in medium shots or

¹⁸ According to Alessandra Soares Brandão (BRANDÃO, 2009, p. 96-97).

¹⁹ In the original text: A rodovia era estratégica do ponto de vista geopolítico e social: 'integrar para não entregar' era a palavra de ordem. Por outro lado, o regime esperava que a Transamazônica representasse uma válvula de escape da pressão social pela reforma agrária. Mas do ponto de vista econômico sempre foi vista como secundária. Já a partir de 1975, o governo sumiu da área. As pessoas ficaram jogadas numa situação - um clima extremamente quente, com chuvas violentas e duradouras, estradas de terra como única infra-estrutura - que em outras partes do país seria considerada de calamidade natural. Foi o caos total. (In: RAMOS, Fernão Pessoa. *O que é o documentário?*. Op. cit.)

medium close-ups. Her sometimes puzzled, sometimes inquisitive face is often shot in the middle of a crowd, with telephoto lenses. Things happen around her, people act and talk, and their actions and words seem either to resonate in her or provoke a sort of reaction on her part. This happens because of the way the film is constructed.

Iracema, uma transa amazônica is a fictional film with an auteur outlook: it was directed by Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna, photographed by Bodanzky in 16mm, later enlarged for general release, and scripted by Senna. It bears an amateurish look, mainly in scenes in which the sound seems “to be turned on” too late or “turned off” too early, or in scenes which deceptively appear to have been poorly edited and lit, displaying a dim color palette. All of this lends the film a sense of urgency, of events that are not staged, but caught at the very moment of their happening, which is true in relation to many sequences. Pereio, the actor playing Tião Brasil Grande, would address a man at work and start talking to him – what the man would say was not indicated in the screenplay²⁰. The participation of non-actors, the local inhabitants of the city, playing themselves, and passersby looking at the camera in street scenes, creates a process of distancing that parallels Iracema’s observation of things happening around her. During a lunch-time scene in a restaurant the camera suddenly abandons the main characters’ conversation in order to follow a customer who has just arrived or a group of people at another table, as the conversation among the main characters goes on. At these moments the film acquires a documentary status, for unplanned interferences on the part of non-actors become part of the film diegesis.

There are several “interviews” conducted by Tião along the film, in which peasants or workers speak of their plights. In one of them, a man says that the rich people take the poor people’s land, with false land bonds, and that the INCRA (the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform) takes the land for the *tubarões* (an old slang word to refer to the very rich). Tião defends the powerful by saying that the people are ignorant and do not ask for papers, that they must contact INCRA before buying land. There is then a close-up of Iracema’s puzzled face, her eyes going quickly from one speaker to the other. The men are not talking about her, but the whole matter of displacing people and settling them down somewhere else affects her. In another scene, Tião – who buys lumber illegally and believes everything the official press says – talks to a man working in the construction of his own humble house: “-You have to struggle in order to have progress, in order to improve, isn’t it right?”. He then addresses Iracema: “If it weren’t for the road, this man wouldn’t be on his land, he’d be working for other people.”²¹ Iracema listens for some time, then stands up and leaves.

Another parallel between the fate of the dispossessed people and Iracema’s is made in the sequence in which she and another prostitute are taken, by plane, to a distant farm in order to entertain its owner. They have been promised a return flight but something else happens instead. A group of men and women are brought to work on the farm. In order to have absolute control over them, the foreman has retained their identity cards and is not willing to pay one thousand *cruzeiros* for each one of them to a man who is “selling” them. The “seller” says it is a good price, for they will work for three or four years in exchange for flour and dry meat only. But, because the foreman thinks the price is too high, only half of the people will stay, and the other half will be taken to another farm, where they will be “sold”. The two prostitutes, who witness this trade, are told to climb into the back of the truck and join the departing workers – the two women

²⁰ According to *Era uma vez Iracema*, a documentary that accompanies the DVD version of the film.

²¹ The lines of dialogue are freely translated from the aural track of the film.

will be left on a road to get a ride back home. They protest, because they had been promised a plane trip back, but are beaten up and forced to go. Later, during a rest stop, the driver leaves Iracema behind and takes the other prostitute along with him. The predicament of the unpaid laborers is equated to that of the exploited women – they are as devalued as the workers. As a woman, as an Indian, and as a devalued professional, Iracema's punishment is harsher: she not only is not taken back home, but she is also left in the middle of nowhere.

Iracema is a drifter in search of something – she seems to ignore what it is. She is restless, always on the move. She arrives for the procession of the *Círio*, is seduced by the fancy jewelry she sees in display in a stand in the street, by the rituals of the religious ceremony, and by the “severed head” of the “bodiless woman”. At first she looks like a child lost in the big city. But soon we see her smoking, in a sexy black and white dress, obsessively applying make-up in front of a mirror, putting on an orange-red dress, taking a ride with Tião. Most of the time she is seen coming and going, taking rides, planning to leave. As a matter of fact, everyone in the film seems to be on the move: Iracema's friend wants to move to São Paulo, later the two girls fly to a farm, Iracema is for some time on the road with Tião, then she takes a ride to Altamira, where she serves the tables for the workers, and her friend travels with the foreman who is driving the unpaid workers to be sold on another farm. As a quote by Goldberg reminded us above, the human race is nomadic – migration seems to be a natural condition for people.

Iracema's dislocations and waywardness indicate her unstable subjectivity, the indefiniteness of her character, related to the fact that she finds herself between two worlds, although she denies being an Indian. Tião tells her that make-up does not suit her, especially because she is an Indian. “I'm no Indian”, she says. “What are you, white? Daughter of English people?”, Tião asks, scornfully. “Not English people, Brazilian”, she answers, trying to define her identity, which is not so clearly established as she wishes it to be. Later on, she says: “God did not want me to be a seamstress, my fate is another, run the world, fool around aimlessly. Nothing enters my mind, no embroidery (meaning she will not learn how to embroider), I can only run the world.” She denies her Indian identity, but she is not accepted in the group she wants to be part of. She is different, and seen as different, the recognition of the difference being no guarantee of her inclusion in the group, a group that can be held responsible for the destruction of her dwelling place, the forest, for that matter. Difference here implies inequality. Just as she does not homogenize she does not retreat to the cultural values of her ancestors, either. At the end of the film, completely defeated, she begs Tião to take her along, or at least to give her *cinco conto* (five cruzeiros). Her life now is to take rides from one place to another, but men will not pay for her services anymore.

Just like the onlookers who curiously gaze at the camera lens during the shooting of street scenes are part of the filmic social canvas, and transform what is fiction in a sort of documentary, the depicting of Iracema without psychologizing strokes, without the presentation of her story, but simply letting her exist as she wanders from hope to despair – from the *Círio da Nossa Senhora de Nazaré* to the rundown warehouse in front of which she drinks from a bottle of *pinga* –, reveals much more of her condition of displacement. She does not have a voice, for the only identity she overtly acknowledges is that of a prostitute, perhaps the most unprestigious occupation in the world. As an Indian, a teenager, and a prostitute, she sides with the other nameless destitute people that appear in the film. At times all of them essay a sort of reaction against the oppression produced by the owners of power (even Iracema, decadent as she is at the end of the film, rails at Tião, and the “interviewees” take every chance they

have to criticize the ruling elite), and the film, in its unadorned fashion, sides with them and reacts against a more ostentatious way of filmmaking. Just as *Iracema*'s identity is not only that of a displaced, wandering Indian girl, but also that of an adolescent prostitute trying to survive in a fictional Brazil of progress, integration, and social welfare, Bodanzky and Senna's film is a hybrid in which the boundaries are blurred, the boundaries between a fictional account of the misfortunes of an imaginary character and a documentary-like account of the oppression, indifference, and waste of money and energy by an arrogant and deceitful regime.

One of the factors that make *Iracema, uma transa amazônica* relevant is the fact that it takes into account other voices, other identities, apart from the ones of the dominating culture, and in so doing shows how complex the process of hybridization is and how difficult it is to define the identities of subjects who exist in the interstices of two worlds.

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