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“Indians’ and Ailing National Culture in Brazil under Vargas”

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‘Diacuí Killed Iracema’: Indigenism, Nationalism and the Struggle for Brazilianness¹

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If categories of ‘race’ and nationality are social and historical constructions laden with irrefutable meaning and consequences, then ethnic identities, like any other forms of identity, are means to other ends that may or may not be particular. Twentieth-century indigenist history in Brazil reveals how the cultural politics of indigenism and nationalism can coalesce in a tautological politics of identity that undermines individual liberty and democratic heterogeneity. The concepts ‘post-indigenism,’ ‘post-nationalism’ and ‘post-identity’ point to the strategic suspension of the infinite heterogeneity of the political subject as a means to widen the ground of shared experience and common interests beyond the realm of hollow and oppressive essentialisms.

Keywords: Diacuí Canualo Aiute, Brazil, indigenism, nationalism, identity, *Iracema*.

Despite the fact that indigenous peoples constitute less than one per cent of the Brazilian population,² Indians real and imagined have been key figures in intellectual and political debates over the meaning of Brazilianness since the ‘Golden Age’ of Romantic Indianist literature over 160 years ago.³ From the nationalist Indianism of

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 - 2 In 2003, the Brazilian population was estimated to be 182,032,604 (World Factbook, 2003). The approximately 370,000 who self-identify as indigenous comprise at least 220 peoples and speak over 180 languages. The vast majority live on approximately 614 protected territories distributed throughout the country and designated as *terras indígenas* (indigenous lands) (Instituto Socioambiental).
 - 3 For a detailed study of the protagonists of the Indianist movement during this period and their involvement in debates over racial mixing, Brazilianness, and the abolition of slavery, see Treece (2000: 147–241).

the late 1800s and the saga of 'Indian protection' in the first half of the twentieth century,⁴ to the divisive politics of the quincentenary celebration of April 2000 and violent clashes between Cintas-Largas Indians and diamond poachers in early 2004,⁵ the category and experience of Indianness have almost always existed in tension with the politicised imaginings of a single and cohesive national identity.⁶ More than three quarters of a century after the cannibalist metaphor became a popular icon of the intellectual elite,⁷ idealised notions of Indianness and Brazilianness endure in the popular imaginary in an anthropophagous symbiosis that makes the two categories interdependent and often mutually constitutive.

While the Indian has long been conceived alongside the Portuguese and the African as a fundamental pillar of a uniquely Brazilian *mestiçagem*, indigenism – in its many varied forms⁸ – has often served as a counter discourse to both the concept and the programmatic endorsement of nation-based homogeneity. And yet, even at the apogee of its tolerance for racial, ethnic and cultural difference, twentieth-century indigenist

- 4 Pertinent discussions of State-backed indigenism in Brazil during this period can be found in Costa (1943), Cunha (1960, 1969), Cunha (1987, 1992), Ribeiro ('Notas Críticas', 1952, 1970, 1995, 1997), Oliveira Filho (1987), Maybury-Lewis (1991), Lima (1991, 1995), Ramos (1998), Pires Menezes (1999), Rocha Freire (1990), Garfield (1997, 2001) and Devine Guzmán (2002, 2003).
- 5 In April 2004, 29 diamond poachers (*garimpeiros*) were beaten or hacked to death after illegally invading and stealing diamonds from protected territories of the Cinta-Larga Indians. Initial reports suggested that tribal leaders were involved in unlawful mining and smuggling rings long before the deadly conflict. See O massacre da Reserva Roosevelt em Rondônia (2004), Mendes (2004), Jabor (2004), Salina (2004) and Luiz (2004). For an indigenist perspective on the state of Indian affairs shortly prior to the conflict, see Nossa (2004).
- 6 Though an admirer of Indianist José de Alencar, and a late contributor to the Indianist movement, the celebrated novelist Machado de Assis (1962) objected to the perceived predominance of the indigenous theme in Brazil's nascent national literature. In 1873, he asserted, 'É certo que a civilização brasileira não está ligada ao elemento indiano, nem dêle recebeu influxo algum; e isto basta para não ir buscar entre as tribos vencidas os títulos da nossa personalidade literária' (The truth is that Brazilian civilisation is neither linked to nor influenced by the Indian element; this is sufficient reason not to search among the defeated tribes for the titles of our literary personality) (802). Two years later, abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco would punctuate the existing criticism of Alencar's 'Indianisation' of national identity in an extended debate with Alencar that was published in the Rio de Janeiro daily, *O Globo*. He insisted, 'Nós somos brasileiros, não somos guaranis' (We're Brazilians, not Guaranis) (Cotinho, 1965: 191). (These and all remaining translations are my own.)
- 7 Oswald de Andrade's Manifesto Antropófago (Anthropophagous Manifesto) was published in 1928. For studies of the cannibalist theme, see Campos (1983) and Johnson (1987).
- 8 I offer my working definition of this amorphous term: Indigenism (of which, literary Indianism comprises one crucial component) is the collection of theoretical, political and cultural production created in response to the questions of how and why Indian peoples should be included in or excluded from the nation-state, and the dominant ideas about the nation-state commonly referred to as national imaginaries. The variety of ideas and projects encompassing what has been referred to collectively as indigenism throughout the Americas suggests that perhaps the only unifying factor within all indigenist discourse is an imprecise preoccupation with native peoples and their

discourse in Brazil would not rise above the essentialisms of identity that had been a key target of its own social and political critique. The ideal of *mestiça* national identity thus came up against the ideal of unadulterated Indian identity [or, for the greater part of the twentieth century, Indian 'identifications' (Hall, 1996)] – and old binaries of culture and power would be inverted, rather than dissolved.

Although racist in hindsight, indigenist discourses in Brazil and throughout Latin America were elaborated in explicit or implicit opposition to the racial segregation and perceived cultural imperialism of the United States. Between the 1930s and 2000, while sociocultural critics considered the racially democratic notions of *mestiçagem* and *mestizaje* in terms of transculturation, heterogeneity and hybridity,⁹ indigenist thought was implicated both positively and negatively in the complexities and contradictions of those evolving paradigms. Transculturation's celebration of *mestiçagem*, which corresponded roughly to the dominance of the national-popular state formation,¹⁰ would promote Indian assimilation into dominant national society, while dominant theories of heterogeneity and its post-modern cousin, hybridity – both born of the violent crises of national populism – posited *mestiçagem* instead as a guarantee of further exclusion for already marginalised forms of being and thinking. The subsequent transfer of this ideological shift from indigenist thought into an indigenist practice was, as would be expected, inconsistent, contentious and uneven. Nonetheless, it would have

precarious relationships with nation-states. Although it has often been portrayed as such, the label 'indigenist' does not, therefore, necessarily indicate a favourable or sympathetic position regarding indigenous peoples, their societies or their cultural practices. Moving through time and space, it is evident that contrary to widely held notions about the political and social impact of indigenism, twentieth-century indigenist projects throughout the Americas did not always advocate the erasure or absorption of Indianness for the sake of nationalist homogeneity, along the lines of Mexican José Vasconcelos's messianic cosmic race (1925). At certain times and in certain places (e.g. Peru, during the first half of the twentieth century), dominant indigenist discourses sought to counteract social, cultural and racial homogeneity with programmatic efforts to thwart mixing and preserve particular forms of idealised Indianness at all costs. See, for example, López Albújar (1926), Valcárcel (1927, 1945, 1981), Plan de Acción de la Campaña Rural (1952) and Reglamento de los Núcleos Escolares Campesinos (1951). Prominent opponents to this position include Mariátegui (1927a, 1927b, 1970), Sánchez (1927, 1969, 1981) and Uriel García (1930, 1950). For the 1920s indigenist debates among these intellectuals, see Kapsoli (1980) and Aquézo Castro (1987). Recent studies include Vargas Llosa (1996), De la Cadena (1998, 2000), Degregori (1998) and Devine Guzmán (1999, 2002). A review of these interconnected national and international debates reveals that any discussion of indigenist discourse that fails to examine the regional and historical contexts to which that discourse pertains empties indigenism of any possible value as an analytical tool or even a descriptive concept.

- 9 The list is, of course, too long to include here. Major precursors or contributors to these paradigms during the period under study (arranged chronologically rather than ideologically) include Vasconcelos (1997), Freyre (1938), Ortiz (1973), Arguedas (1956, 1957, 1970), Ribeiro (1970, 1978, 1995, 1996), Cornejo Polar (1973, 1994), Rama (1984, 1982), Lienhard (1992), García Canclini (1990) and Vargas Llosa (1996).
- 10 For an elaboration of the national-popular, see Moreiras (2001: 162–183 and 264–300).

momentous consequences for the individuals and groups coerced or otherwise interpellated by it.

The early and mid-twentieth-century predictions of Indian assimilation into dominant Brazilian society have now been proven inaccurate. For reasons ranging from improved health care to shifting perceptions of racial and ethnic identities (Ribeiro, 1997; Warren, 2001; French, 2003), the country's official indigenous population has increased by over 70,000 individuals over the last decade (Ramos, 1998; Instituto Socioambiental, 2004). After the emergence of indigenous movements and the mobilisation of indigenous peoples around the issue of representation,¹¹ intellectual and popular debates over politicised manipulations of Indian images took on a new set of consequences. If manifestations of what Cornejo Polar (1994, 1996) theorised as the heterogeneity of political subjects, discourse and society have for centuries been evident in Brazil and throughout the Americas, what about the relationships among the different expressions of heterogeneity? How have they been altered in recent decades by the proliferation of political actors and new interpretations of and demands on the concepts of democracy and plurality? Das and Kleinman (2001: 5) propose:

The links between aesthetic, legal, and political forms of representation are now recognized to be at the heart of the problem in the theorizing on the relation between culture and power. Yet, if we were not willing to experiment with how much one's own voice finds recognition in other voices – and, conversely, with when it is that in speaking for oneself one is also legitimately speaking for another – it would be hard to conceive of any democratic processes at all. Hence the category of shared experience as a ground from which this recognition may stem has some attractive possibilities, provided we do not slip into the idea of a pre-given subject to whom experience happens.

While many problems stemming from such 'pre-given subjects' in Brazil have remained essentially intact since colonial times, the key question of what happens when dominant ideas about Indianness come up against the lived experience of indigenous peoples has indeed changed radically over the last 50 years. By contrasting two crucial moments of indigenist politics and practice with dominant contemporaneous notions of race and nationhood, this essay considers some of the ways in which

11 Debate over the visual representation of indigenous peoples is of course inseparable from broader questions of subjectivity, representation and power explored by Baudrillard (1981), Foucault (1977, 1999), Spivak (1988), Laclau (1993) and Moreiras (2001), among others. For the Brazilian case, see Turner (1991) and the Video nas Aldeias (Video in the Villages) Project (www.videonasaldeias.org.br). On the indigenous video movement in Bolivia, see Schiwy (2003). In the context of Latin America, controversy over the testimony of Rigoberta Menchú Tum has been at the heart of all such debates for the last decade. See, for example, Beverley (1996, 1999), Stoll (1999) and Arias (2001).

indigenism and nationalism have come up against the boundaries of identity politics as they engaged in the struggle to determine the nature of Brazilianness.

'How do you say, "My darling" in Kalapalo?'

The case of Diacuí began in August 1952, when Ayres Câmara Cunha, a *gaúcho* from Brazil's southernmost and historically 'whitest' state (Rio Grande do Sul), decided to seek legal union with a young Kalapalo woman named Diacuí Canualo Aiute. The 35-year-old Cunha had worked in the Xingu forests for nearly fifteen years and was employed as a *sertanista*¹² by the publicly funded Fundação Brasil Central (Central Brazil Foundation) (FBC).¹³ One of the several State employees accused of maintaining improper relations with indigenous women during the same year,¹⁴ Cunha was determined guilty in an official FBC inquiry and subsequently threatened with the loss of his job and definitive expulsion from Xingu. Faced with a sentence that would have punished him for cohabiting with Aiute in the *aldeia* of Kuluene for six months, Cunha decided to seek an alternative outcome for the illicit romance; in response to the guilty verdict, he publicly declared his love for the young woman and announced his desire to make amends for his alleged wrongdoing by marrying her in both civil and religious ceremonies. However, because the adolescent Aiute (like all indigenous peoples in 1950s Brazil) was considered a legal ward of the state,¹⁵ Cunha would have to seek permission for the marriage from her official guardian, the Serviço de Proteção aos Índios (Indian Protection Service) (SPI), which was, at the time, a subsidiary of the Ministry of Agriculture.

While the SPI began deliberating a judgement on the proposed union, Cunha left Xingu for the then capital, Rio de Janeiro, to meet with indigenist officials and plead

12 The term '*sertanista*', derived from *sertão* (backlands) was used during the early nineteenth century to refer to the young men hired by the government's indigenist organisations to work as explorers, adventurers and 'Indian tamers' in rural areas of the interior.

13 See Ribeiro (1970, 1997), Garfield (1997, 2001), Ramos (1998), Williams (2001) and Devine Guzmán (2002, 2003). The SPI existed alongside the FBC, but was given no new role to play in the expansionist project, most likely because of the reputation for corruption and incompetence that it had developed by that time. Maybury-Lewis (1991: 221) noted: 'Significantly, the Vilas-Bôas (sic) brothers, who subsequently became famous as the protectors of Indians and the creators of the Xingu National Park, worked for the Central Brazil Foundation and not for the SPI'.

14 Well-known indigenist Leonardo Villas Bôas was also accused of having improper relationships with indigenous women (Tentação nas Selvas, 1952; Da Civilização às Selvas! 1952).

15 Indigenous peoples shared this legal status with orphans and the mentally impaired. Ramos (1998: 18) explains 'Always treated in Brazilian legislation as a residual category, Indians were inserted in the 1916 Civil Code as objects of guardianship to last until they became adapted to national society. They remained as orphans until 1928 when the Indian Protection Service [...] took over their guardianship from the judge of orphans. In the 1960s, married women, who had been included in the category of the relatively incapable, were liberated from this humiliating condition, but the Indians continued as before'.

his case for marriage. SPI director José Maria de Gama Malcher reportedly listened to the appeal with indifference, instructing the young man to put his request in writing and return at a later date for an official verdict (Cunha, 1960). Upon returning two days later with the requested paperwork, Cunha was received by SPI employees Darcy Ribeiro and Eduardo Galvão, in the director's place. The ethnographers dismissed his petition as ludicrous and advised the *sertanista* that the request to marry Aiute would ultimately be denied regardless of any documentation he might provide (Cunha, 1960). Angry but unwavering, Cunha went on record as having responded: 'Pois fiquem os senhores sabendo, uma vez por todas, que com o consentimento do SPI, ou sem o consentimento do SPI, eu casarei com a índia!'¹⁶ (Cunha, 1969).

Thus faced with the probable denial of his request, Cunha released his story to the press with the assistance of the powerful and politically connected newspaper baron, Assis Chateaubriand.¹⁷ Within days, newspapers throughout the country transformed the affair into a Romeo and Juliet production intriguing enough to rival most modern-day Brazilian soap operas. An initial interview published in Rio de Janeiro's *Diário da Noite* on 4 October 1952 would set the tone for a melodramatic media campaign that lasted for weeks. The headline read, 'O homem branco quer casar-se com a índia kalapalo: "Gosto mesmo de Diacuri (sic); não é romance de ficção"'.¹⁸

[...] Chamado pelo Sr. Arquimedes Perreira Lima, presidente da Fundação Brasil Central, para prestar esclarecimentos no decorrer da entrevista que ontem concedeu à empresa, o funcionário daquela repartição, Aires (sic) Câmara Cunha, forneceu uma nota curiosa à reportagem.

–Aproveito o ensejo para fazer um apelo, através da imprensa às autoridades competentes, no sentido de instituírem uma cláusula no regulamento do SPI, permitindo o casamento de brancos com índios. [...]

–Gosto loucamente de uma índia Kalapalo cuja aldeia está situada à margem do rio Kuluene. Gosto mesmo, não é romance de ficção, desses que se vêem nas livrarias.

–E o Sr. quer casar com ela? – foi a pergunta geral. [...]

–Diacuri, (sic) filha de um pagé Kalapalo, jovem, esbelta, bonita, ela é a minha escolhida.

–Como é que se diz 'meu bem' em Kalapalo?

–Ah! Não sei. Ainda não tive oportunidade de aprender. Conheço Diacuri há muito tempo, sei que ela gosta de mim, mas sempre a respeitei.

16 'Well, you all should know, once and for all, that with or without the consent of the SPI, I will marry the Indian girl!'

17 Chateaubriand owned several newspapers and had personal and professional ties with numerous members of the governing administration. See Morais (1994) for a detailed account of his influence on Brazilian media and politics during and after the Vargas period.

18 'White man wants to marry Kalapalo Indian: "I really like Diacuri (sic); it's not a storybook romance."'

E despedindo-se da reportagem, acrescentou o Sr. Aires Cunha:
–Não se esqueçam de fazer meu apelo. Façam isso por mim e pela amizade
que devoto a Diacuri (O Homem Branco, 1952).¹⁹

The prospect of inter-racial marriage between Cunha and Aiute sparked widespread debate about the country's so-called Indian problem and the SPI's role in solving it. Both reflected in and nourished by sensationalist coverage, the controversy hit the press at a critical moment in the history of indigenism and the cultural politics of race in Brazil.

By the time the Diacuí case became front page news, indigenist practice within the SPI had evolved since the institution's 1910 mandate to reflect diminished confidence in the viability of Indian assimilation and the increasing conviction that Indianness was, in fact, an immutable social and cultural marker that would not readily be undone by putting people in western dress and teaching them Portuguese. Contrary to its original mission as a civilising agency of the State, this re-tailored SPI sought to 'accommodate the Indian's resistance, understand its role to assure their right to live according to traditional customs, protect them from the violence of civilised invaders, and guide their progressive integration into regional life in a manner that would guarantee survival' (Ribeiro, 1970: 212). Official indigenism in the early 1950s hence began to resign frustrated assimilationist ambitions and acknowledge the pervasive indigenous subversion of assimilationist practices, yielding instead to the prevailing tenets of Lamarckian eugenics (Stepan, 1991; Schwartz, 1993; Maciel, 1999) which would call for improving Indians rather than trying to do away entirely with their Indianness.

The dramatic evolution of indigenist practice within the State's primary indigenist body was, however, taking place in the broader context of President Getúlio Vargas's pro-active, citizen-making populism, which outlawed racial discrimination for the first time in national history while sanctioning racist practices in public institutions ranging from schools and museums to government agencies.²⁰ Building upon a model of social

19 'Beckoned by Mr. Arquimedes Perreira Lima, president of the Central Brazil Foundation, to give details in an interview conceded yesterday to the same organization, FBC employee Aires (sic) Câmara Cunha added a curious bit of information to the report.

–I'd like to take advantage of this opportunity to make an appeal, through the press, for the appropriate authorities to add a clause to the rules of the SPI permitting the marriage of whites to Indians. [...]

–I'm crazy about a Kalapalo Indian woman whose community is located on the banks of the Kuluene River. I really like her, it's not a storybook romance, the kind you see in bookstores.

–And you want to marry her? was the general question. [...]

–Diacuri (sic), daughter of a Kalapalo medicine man, young, svelte, pretty, she is my chosen one.

–How do you say, "my darling" in Kalapalo?

–Ah! I don't know. I haven't yet had the opportunity to learn. I've known Diacuri for a long time, I know she really likes me, but I always respected her.

Concluding the report, Mr. Aires Cunha added:

–Don't forget to make my appeal. Do it for me and for the friendship that I devote to Diacuri.'

20 On 3 July 1951, just over a year before the Diacuí scandal, Vargas passed the Afonso Arinos Law (No. 1390) outlawing all forms of racial discrimination (*Índice Fundamental do Direito*). For recent analyses of racial discrimination of groups other than Indians during the Vargas regime, see, for example, Cunha (1999), Lesser (1999), Maio (1999), Seyferth (1999) and Williams (2001).

liberalism that had for decades been formulated in radical contrast to segregationist governance in the United States, Vargas embraced the Freyrean assessment of Brazil (1938) as a utopia of racial mixture in order to round out the administration's complementary strategies for the economic, social and cultural development embodied in the 'Push to the West'.²¹ The FBC in which Cunha was employed was indeed one of the organisations fashioned by Vargas to help carry out westward expansion, develop the interior and secure the country's precarious western and northern borders. A centrepiece of the dictatorial regime, the expansion initiative embodied for the President an 'integrated alliance between the campaign of the founders of Brazilian nationality – namely the *bandeirantes* and *sertanistas* – and the processes of modern culture' (Rocha Freire, 1990: 200).

In the overlapping aims and operations of indigenist and development organisations, the Indians – despite their relatively miniscule numbers – took on a leading role in the drama of frontier expansion that played out in the popular press. In contrast to the anti-assimilationist SPI, which now aimed to preserve Indianness in an enhanced and thus more acceptable form, Vargas's agenda vis-à-vis Indianness was in close keeping with earlier twentieth-century goals of doing away with cultural, social, racial and linguistic differences and homogenising the overall population. The doctrine of Varguismo therefore came to bestow tremendous importance upon the symbolic Indian while simultaneously working to make real indigenous peoples fade away into an expanding *mestiça* and increasingly developed sociocultural landscape.

The opposing goals of Varguismo and its foremost indigenist agency became increasingly evident throughout the *caso Diacuí*. Although indigenist officials disagreed deeply over Cunha's request to marry Aiute, the initial verdict of the SPI's governing council, the Conselho Nacional pela Proteção aos Índios (National Council for Indian Protection) (CNPI),²² was to prohibit the marriage. The decision was based on the premise that the primary goal of Indian protection was to assure that 'uncorrupted' Indians would remain so – at least for as long as possible.²³ In this view, the legal union of a white man and Indian woman would set a dangerous precedent and potentially jeopardise the physical well-being and moral integrity of indigenous peoples in all government protected areas. The SPI leadership also frowned on the fact that Cunha and Aiute neither spoke nor understood a common language, adding that as a member of an extremely primitive tribe, the young woman was still too Indian to marry a civilised man. Such coupling could only be rightfully considered, they argued, when the Indian in question had been tempered with enough of dominant national culture to be considered 'neo-Brazilian' (Conselho, 1952).

Darcy Ribeiro – the SPI ethnographer who would later become a well-known educator, politician and writer – was serving as the head of the SPI Educational

21 See Lima (1995: 286–305). For an engaging analysis of how the expansion initiative affected Indian Policy in general, and the Xavante in particular, see Garfield (2001). On Vargas and nation building, see also Gomes (1994) and Pandolfi (1999).

22 This administrative body was established, like the FBC, under the Vargas administration.

23 Changes in SPI goals and policies in this regard are discussed in Ribeiro (1970, 1997), Lima (1995) and Devine Guzmán (2002, 2003).

Sector at the time the Diacuí case developed. When asked to testify to the CNPI, he introduced the notion of neo-Brazilianness to explain and justify his own disapproval of the marriage. In characteristically impetuous and impassioned style, he submitted:

Toda a experiência de 40 anos de atividades indigenistas de S.P.I. que não só permite, mas estimula os casamentos interraciais na maioria de seus postos, nos ensina que o casamento não é um processo de assimilação, mas o resultado de aculturação em sua fase final [...]. O índio Guaraní, Iawano, Kadiwéu, Bakaerí, Tembê e de inúmeras outras tribos que se casa com um civilizado [...] faz não como índio vinculado à sua vida tribal, mas como um *neo-brasileiro*, integrado já em nossos costumes, falando nossa língua e tendo uma idéia concreta da vida que o espera como cônjuge. Inúmeros casos concretos nos dizem que casamentos semelhantes resultam, frequentemente, em uniões felizes. Entretanto, para um Xavante, um Urubá, um Caiapó e um índio Xinguano que vivem isolados em seus territórios ainda não alcançado (sic) pela nossa sociedade, que não falam senão sua própria língua e que têm do casamento a idéia e as associações emocionais de sua tribo, a união com um estrangeiro é uma aventura sem possibilidades de sucesso (Conselho, 1952; my emphasis).²⁴

With the benefit of hindsight, the weight of Ribeiro's convictions must be considered alongside the fact that during his own ethnographic fieldwork, he also maintained sexual relations with indigenous women he qualified as 'decadent'.²⁵ Nonetheless, with respect to the Aiute-Cunha affair, his position was shared by the majority of CNPI

24 'The forty years of indigenist activity in which the SPI has not only allowed but encouraged inter-racial marriage in the majority of its [Indigenous] Posts demonstrate that marriage is not a process of assimilation, but the result of acculturation in its final stage [...]. The Indians of the Guaraní, Iawano, Kadiwéu, Bakaerí, Tembê, and so many other tribes that marry civilized people do not behave like Indians linked to tribal life, but like *neo-Brazilians*, who are integrated into our customs, speak our language, and have a concrete idea about what awaits them in married life. Countless concrete cases tell us that such marriages frequently result in happy unions. However, for a Xavante, a Urubá, a Caiapó, and a Xinguano who live isolated in their territories, which have yet to be reached by our society, who don't speak any language other than their own, and understand marriage in terms of the emotional associations of their tribe, the union with an outsider is an adventure without any possibility of success.'

25 Years later, Ribeiro spoke openly about the fact that he had had sexual relationships with indigenous women while working in their communities: 'Eu fui educado para não trepar com índia. [...] Eu passei meses com os índios, arranjava um jeito de ter uma. [...] Eu não comia as índias Urubú-Kaapor porque estava trabalhado com os Kaapor, mas comia índia Tembê, que eram umas índias meio decadentes que havia lá.' (I was taught not to screw Indians. [...] I spent months with the Indians, and came up with a way to have one. [...] I didn't do the Urubú-Kaapor women because I was working with the Kaapor, but I did Tembê women—some relatively decadent Indian women around there.) (Ribeiro, 1996: 36–37; see also 1997: 167–180).

council members, who after days of intense debate finally vetoed the marriage with a vote of five to one.²⁶

While the CNPI and the SPI deliberated over the nature of Indianness and Brazilian-ness, the media support that Cunha had received from Assis Chateaubriand upon being denied permission to marry Aiute was generating a torrent of public opinion about the implications of the case for Brazilian society at large. In 1952 – eight years prior to the inauguration of Brasília and long before the widespread use of television – indigenous areas were inaccessible to most residents of the urban southeast, where much of the debate over the prospect of inter-racial marriage was taking place. The limited nature of national travel meant that most Brazilians had to rely on a handful of personal accounts to get even a glimpse of the more imagined components of their national community (Anderson, 1991). Faced with a lack of unsensationalised ethnographic information, popular recourse to the realm of the imaginary made the influence of widely read Indianist novels increasingly significant. For many urbanites, Diacuí Canualo Aiute would fatefully turn out to be the materialisation of José de Alencar's legendary *Iracema* (1865).

A prevalent figure in the national (and nationalist) imaginary since the late nineteenth century, Alencar's indigenous heroine was the 'honey-lipped virgin' whose forbidden romance with a Portuguese soldier resulted in the *mestiço* love child, Moacyr. For generations to come, the mixed blood of this Brazilian 'son of pain' would embody the idealised fusion of Old World civilisation with the New World hopefulness that had formed the intellectual and spiritual essence of the Romantic Indianist movement.

An anagram of America, *Iracema* has been treated by prominent literary scholars as an allegory of the colonial encounter as it was politicised in support of a particular set of intellectualised nation-building projects (Driver, 1942; Brookshaw, 1986; Sommer, 1991). Building upon those analyses, Treece (2000) examines the vigorous political upheavals and profound social reformulations that served as the backdrop for Alencar's interventions into debates over issues including Abolition, Republicanism and the burgeoning notion of Brazilianness:

Once combined with the concept of miscegenation, Alencar's mythology acquired an ideological force that reached far beyond the Indianist movement itself, for this notion of a conciliatory, collaborative relationship between races, on the basis of a history of intimate social and sexual contact, is the first manifestation of the most influential tradition of thinking about race relations and national identity in Brazil to date: a tradition of *mestiço* nationalism that is best known in its twentieth-century form as elaborated by Gilberto Freyre and associated with the phrase 'racial democracy' (179).

Thus Alencar, like the earlier Indianist antagonists, Antônio José Gonçalves Dias and Domingos José Gonçalves de Magalhães, used Indian images to advance his own

26 The Council was made up of six members: General Júlio Caetano Horta Barbosa, President of CNPI; Heloisa Alberto Tôrres, Director of the National Museum; General Boaneges Lopes de Souza; Guilherme de Almeida; Coronel Amílcar Botelho de Magalhães; José da Gama Malcher, President of the SPI and Professor Boaventura Ribeiro da Cunha. Only Boaventura voted in favour of the wedding (Cunha, 1960: 210).

political position on Empire and the racialised legacies of colonialism while broadly championing a non-European sense of nationhood. In working to loosen dominant intellectual discourses either delicately or forcefully from their strong Portuguese roots, Romantic Indianists engaged the most divisive politics of their day, planting the seeds for explorations of Brazilianness that would flourish throughout the twentieth century and coalesce tragically around the case of Diacuí.

The immediate result of Ayres Cunha's collaboration with the news mogul, Chateaubriand, was an intense public debate over the SPI's veto of the marriage. Ironically, the saga of the dubious union would play out like a modern-day *folhetim*²⁷ – the popular serial form in which another famous tale of white–Indian romance had appeared nearly a century earlier.²⁸ Although editorial pages revealed limited resistance to the idea of indigenous peoples living outside their 'natural' surroundings, the majority of public opinion was favourable to Cunha and critical of indigenist authorities. With the influence of sympathetic politicians (including João Cleofas, the Minister of Agriculture who finally reversed the initial SPI decision²⁹) public enthusiasm aroused by the spirited media crusade paved the way for Cunha to meet his fiancée at the altar.

In November 1952, Aiute was authorised by the SPI to accompany Cunha to Rio de Janeiro. Hyped by stirring headlines, her visit to the 'Marvellous City' was an awkward spectacle during which she either fulfilled or frustrated the Indianist fantasies of those who flocked to see her. The couple's arrival at the Santos Dumont Airport was witnessed by thousands of spectators who created havoc to get a glimpse of the exotic 'Flor dos Campos'.³⁰ The following day, headlines read, '*Delírio Indescritível no Aeroporto: Diacuí no Rio; A Multidão Rompeu os Cordões de Isolamento*'.³¹

Straight from the forests of Xingu, the young Kalapalo woman would for many urbanites fall short of the prevailing ideal of Indian comeliness. To rectify the problem, she was treated to a well-publicised Helena Rubenstein makeover, embellished with 'Indian-looking' necklaces and given a colourful parrot to accompany her around town. Elite bridal stores scrambled in competition for the privilege of creating the much anticipated wedding dress, and the winning gown – adorned with white heron feathers – was 'inspired by jungle themes' ('Diacuí está feliz, 1952; Inspirado em motivos silvícolas, 1952; Inspiração para a nova moda feminina, 1952). Wedding

27 For the history of the *folhetim*, see Meyer (1996) and Tinhorão (1994). Excellent information is also available online from S. B. Ximenes, Blog do Romance: <http://www.blogdoromance.com/Blog102.html>.

28 Alencar's *O Guarani* appeared in the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* in 1856. In it, Alencar reversed the archetypal gender roles of the colonial encounter to create an idyllic union between 'white virgin' Ceci and former Indian slave Peri, which, after due conflict, would manage to survive in the sheltered refuge of the forests. For an engaging reading, see Treece (2000: 180–193).

29 While the SPI was attempting to garner support for its decision from the CNPI and other centres of anthropological expertise throughout the country, including the National Museum and the Universities of São Paulo and Brasília, Cleofas authorised Diacuí's visit to Rio de Janeiro. He later served as the 'godfather' of her civil marriage to Cunha, and Chateaubriand was godfather of the religious ceremony that followed (Rocha Freire, 1990: 263–265).

30 Diacuí means 'Flower of the Fields' in Kalapalo.

31 'Indescribable Delirium at the Airport: Diacuí in Rio – Crowd Breaks Through the Cordons'.

arrangements were covered in minute detail throughout the country, and editorial pages revealed a mix of delight and disgust over the series of changing decisions that led up to the marriage. Finally, on 29 November 1952, Cunha and Aiute were wed in the presence of some 10,000 witnesses who packed into the Candelária cathedral to watch the unusual and historic ceremony (Unidos, 1952).

As Cunha had promised to Kalapalo and indigenist authorities, the couple returned to Xingu after the wedding, and newspaper debates dwindled. Nine months later, however, public opinion was roused once again when Aiute suffered fatal labour complications in her *aldeia* while Cunha was away from the community, presumably at work. Grief-stricken by the news he encountered upon his return, the *sertanista* participated in the ceremonial burial of his wife and, refusing Kalapalo offers of a replacement bride, left the forest with his newborn daughter for his mother's home in the south of Brazil. The controversy that had tapered off after the wedding was quickly revived, and despite the fact that Aiute's death was effectively unrelated to the unusual circumstances of her marriage, the SPI's initial attempts to prohibit the union were largely vindicated in the public eye. The indigenist specialists who had opposed the marriage lamented her death by reiterating the exclusive nature of the State's tutorial power³² over the indigenous peoples within its borders, and notwithstanding its growing reputation for incompetence and inefficiency, the SPI was momentarily able to reaffirm its role as the rightful protector of Indian peoples in Brazil. The sombre lesson of Diacuí's death, they would contend, was that the authority of the State's indigenist experts was not to be subjected to the whims of uninformed public opinion.

The 'Real Story' of Diacuí

Nearly eight years later, Ayres Cunha published an intimate autobiographical narrative about his controversial relationship with Aiute.³³ Following the footsteps of colonial chroniclers who sought to captivate distant readers with unabridged and truthful versions of the Conquest, Cunha beguiled his audience with an epic tale entitled, 'Entre os Índios do Xingu: A verdadeira história de Diacuí' (Among the Indians of Xingu: The Real Story of Diacuí). The commentary of Willy Aureli, editor of the Club do Livro publishing house that issued one of Cunha's later books, points to the power of one man to serve as the interpreter of savage and mysterious realities by producing adventurous ethnography for audiences with little contact with indigenous peoples in Brazil or anywhere else:

Ayres não é novato no campo literário. Seu livro, *Entre os Índios do Xingu* (1960) que está esgotado em sua terceira edição, diz-lhe do real valor

32 For an extensive discussion of the SPI's 'tutorial power' see Lima (1995).

33 In this book, Cunha discusses his childhood in Rio Grande do Sul, life as a *sertanista* with the FBC, encounters with the Kalapalo that preceded his relationship with Aiute, married life in Xingu, and the events surrounding his wife's untimely death. He went on to publish other titles, including *Nas selvas de Xingu*, *A Expedição Roncador-Xingu*, *Viagem ao Monte Roraima*, *Aventuras de um Sertanista* and *Viagem pelo interior do Brasil*, all of which illustrate the commercial value of the 'Indian adventures' recounted in his writing.

como narrador, observador, e, por que não dizê-lo? historiador de realidades indianísticas (sic) quase totalmente desconhecidas pelo grande público. Faço votos sinceros para que ele colha em larga escala os louros por mais este empreendimento, que revela a sua magnífica e valiosa contribuição ao estudo de um mundo novo e selvagem, belo e profundo como o mistério das matas majestosas e impressionantes of (Cunha, 1969: 11).³⁴

Consistent with the drama surrounding his marriage, Cunha's rendering of the story reads like a romantic fantasy in which he appears as an upstanding citizen and passionate hero, who out of disillusion with the frivolous nature of bourgeois society sought a simple and peaceful life in the upper Xingu forest.³⁵ Cunha recognised, however, that his relationship with Aiute was not just a forbidden romance, but also a symbolic covenant for the future of Brazil between white and indigenous, conqueror and conquered, modernity and antiquity:

[O] desejo da noiva Kalapalo e do homem branco passou a ser [...] uma verdadeira reivindicação nacional, pois o povo, em suas diferentes camadas, juntamente com as altas autoridades civis e militares, é quem queria a realização das bodas, porquanto todos viam, objetivamente, na união dos noivos das selvas do Xingu mais que uma felicidade comum—um sinal do conagraamento das raças brasileiras e um processo para a integração gradativa dos silvícolas na comunidade nacional (Cunha, 1960: 208–209).³⁶

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- 34 'Ayres is no novice in the field of literature. His book, *Entre os índios do Xingu* (1960), which is sold out in its third edition, reveals his true value as a narrator, observer, and – why not say it? – historian of indianistic (sic) realities that are almost entirely unknown to the public at large. I truly hope that he reaps great rewards from this additional undertaking, which reveals his magnificent and valuable contribution to the study of a world that is new, savage, beautiful, and profound like the mystery of the majestic and impressive jungles.'
- 35 He explains, 'Desnecessário é dizer em este depoimento que me casei com Diacuí unicamente por amor. Eu era sertanista, já tinha meus 35 anos e sentia-me bastante decepcionado do mundo exterior. Nada mais esperava dos homens. Desejei, tão-sómente, terminar meus dias no isolamento de uma tabua de índios, longe da Civilização e das convenções sociais. Talvez a consequência do meu profundo desalento fôsse falta do amor—este sentimento irresistível que consome destinos, regenera facínoras, modifica gênios e transforma a vida dos poderosos' [It's not necessary to say in this testimony that I married Diacuí only for love. I was a *sertanista*, already thirty-five years old, and I felt rather disappointed by the outside world. I didn't expect anything else from mankind. I wanted only to finish out my days in the isolation of an indigenous tribe, far from Civilization and social conventions. Perhaps the consequence of my profound depression was a lack of love—that irresistible feeling that ruins destinies, rouses criminals, modifies temperaments, and transforms the life of the powerful] (Cunha, 1960: 174).
- 36 'The desire of the Kalapalo bride and the white man came to be [...] a true national vindication. The people, from their different walks of life, together with high civilian and military authorities, wanted the wedding to take place because everyone saw, objectively, in the union of bride and groom in the jungle of Xingu, signs of more than just happiness – the coming together of the Brazilian races, and a process for the gradual integration of jungle dwellers into the national community.'

Thus positioning himself in direct opposition to SPI 'racists'³⁷ who had spoken out against his marriage, Cunha recounted how even the primitive Kalapalo leaders had been forward-thinking enough to agree to the union: 'Concordei com a exigência dos Kalapalos: casar-me-ia com Diacuí e, com ela, viveria eternamente na taba dos índios. [A]ssim [...] concretizou-se o romance racial do homem branco, da Idade Atômica, com um selvagenzinha da Idade da Pedra'³⁸ (Cunha, 1960: 179).

In line with the social progressiveness of Varguismo, Cunha posited that non-racists had endorsed his union with Aiute because they favoured racial unity within Brazilian society. Those who opposed the scientific expertise of the SPI and CNPI, he pointed out,³⁹ applauded his marriage as a valuable continuation of his patriotic service to the country (Cunha, 1960: 205). By marrying Aiute, he reasoned, he had helped drag the 'uncultured' young woman – whose language he neither spoke nor understood⁴⁰ – out of her backwardness and into the Nation. Considering that no

37 '[A] questão "casa-não-casa" tornou-se uma tremenda polêmica que apaixonou vivamente todo o mundo. O pensamento dividiu em duas tendências. O ardor dos argumentos era tão intenso quer da parte dos racistas como entre os que estimulavam a união das duas raças' [The question 'to marry or not to marry' became a tremendous polemic that made everyone extremely emotional. Thought on the matter was split. The passion of the arguments was equally intense from the racists and those who sought the union of the two races] (Cunha, 1969: 207).

38 'I agreed to the conditions of the Kalapalos: I would marry Diacuí and live with her forever in the Indian community. And so was settled the racial romance between a white man from the Atomic Age and a little jungle woman from the Stone Age.'

39 The most prominent proponents of the marriage were Assis Chateaubriand, Getúlio Vargas and notably, SPI founder, Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon (Rondon Favorável, 1952).

40 The language barrier was one of the primary justifications for the SPI's initial refusal to permit the marriage. In the Twelfth Report of the CNPI Acts, a committee of seven prominent ethnographers explained their opposition to the marriage. Heloisa Alberto Tôrres, who voted with the majority against the union, argued '[...] 5) A índia Diacuí não sabe falar senão a sua língua indígena. 6) A índia Diacuí não entende outra língua senão a sua. 7) Ayres Câmara Cunha não fala Kalapalo. 8) Não há interprete (kalapalo-português) entre os índios que acompanharam Diacuí ao Rio de Janeiro. 9) Não se conhece quem fale kalapalo no Rio de Janeiro' [5) The Indian Diacuí does not know how to speak any language other than her indigenous language. 6) The Indian Diacuí does not understand any language other than her own. 7) Ayres Câmara Cunha does not speak Kalapalo. 8) There is no Kalapalo-Portuguese translator among those who accompanied Diacuí to Rio de Janeiro. 9) There is no known person in Rio de Janeiro who speaks Kalapalo] (Conselho, 1952). Echoing Darcy Ribeiro's concern for neo-Brazilianness, Tôrres added '[...] Se essa indígena estivesse em situação de compreender os compromissos que pretendem que ela assuma perante os homens e perante Deus, se vexaria de ver o seu retrato completamente nua correndo de mão a mão. [...] Este meu voto não tem fundamento em razões de ordem científica teórica; assenta [na...] política de respeito e de proteção à população tutelada do Estado [...]'] [If that indigenous woman were capable of understanding the obligations they want her to take on before men and God, she would be ashamed to see a portrait of herself completely naked passed around from hand to hand. My vote is not based on reasons of the order of scientific theory; it rests on the policy of respect and protection for the tutored population of the State] (Conselho, 1952).

verbal exchange was likely to have occurred when Aiute met with Vice President Café Filho,⁴¹ the Minister of War, the Minister of Agriculture and members of the National Congress on her first and only trip to the capital, the calculated symbolism of such encounters far exceeded their practical value. Those State representatives, alongside Cunha, were welcoming the young woman into civilisation and neo-Brazilianness.

Outside the principal indigenist apparatus, the patriotic duties carried out by representatives of the Vargas regime spoke to one of the most widespread criticisms of the SPI and CNPI during the middle of the twentieth century. As one editorialist lamented, '[...] o índio brasileiro pode e deve ser incorporado às populações ativas do país. Temos dentro do território nacional pelo menos quinhentos mil pares de braços que poderiam estar produzindo para o bem estar de todos nós—nada fazemos para que isso se transforme em realidade' (Ciema, 1952).⁴² The indigenists, in short, had not been doing a particularly good job at turning out neo-Brazilians. For many members of dominant society, the ambition was an achievement long past due considering the SPI's four decades of service.

The nature of neo-Brazilianness was customarily indistinct, although arguments in its favour alluded predominantly to issues regarding language and the social value of material labour serving the collective national good. To those ends, indigenous education was fundamental to neo-citizenship. Upon learning of Diacuí's death, President Vargas intervened personally to ensure that a proper education be provided for Cunha's daughter. Many of those who expressed concern over the circumstances that brought 'Diacuizinha' into the world were heartened by the administration's effort to guarantee that the motherless child would at least be provided the opportunity to become Brazilian. At the same time, however, others expressed the desire for some aspect of Indianness to remain: an aspect that harked back to the dreamy Indianist tradition of a native world unscathed by the corruption and disappointments of modernisation and urban life. One editorial writer explained:

Eis que o presidente Getúlio Vargas acaba de assumir uma atitude que comove o país inteiro: resolveu amparar a garotinha, proporcionando recursos para prover a sua educação. [...] O chefe da Nação vem, assim, ao encontro dos sentimentos do povo brasileiro que desde logo aprendeu a estimar a indiazinha kalapalo. Diante da história singela e comovente de Diacuí, quase que teríamos um desejo insopitável: que o rio Kuluene enviasse para a civilizada Guanabara outras índias tão místicas e tão

41 Cunha claimed that Vargas was unable to visit them personally due to illness (Cunha, 1960: 205).

42 'The Brazilian Indian can and should be incorporated into the active populations of the country. We have within the national territory at least five-hundred thousand pairs of arms that could be producing for the well-being of us all. We do nothing to make that a reality.'



Diacuí Canualo Aiute: 'A Flor dos Campos.'

suaves como a suave e mística ‘flor dos campos’. Assim, sentiríamos de vez em quando um pouco de poesia agreste em meio a tantas falsidades cidadinas e a tantas mentiras fantasiadas de beleza. (Getúlio 1953).⁴³

Unravelling the Indianist Fantasy

Diacuí Aiute and her love affair with civilisation were interpreted simultaneously as real and imaginary, fact and fiction, theory and practice. Likened by the general public to the mythical characters of Indianist literature for her ‘exotic beauty’, Aiute was at the same time subjected to the scientific scrutiny and bureaucratisation of the State’s indigenist apparatus. In neither case was she treated as an individual with ideas or opinions about her own situation or about the world around her.⁴⁴ Self-expression was thus limited to a few shy smiles and a handful of poses for the photographers who sold her ‘naked innocence’ to the local papers. The above ‘scandalous’ picture appeared nationwide and was published in Rio de Janeiro’s *Diário da Noite* on 22 October 1952 with the headline, ‘*Lances Empolgantes do Romance que Nasce na Selva: A Nudez Inocente de Diacuí*’ (Dramatic Events in the Romance Born in the Jungle: The Innocent Nudity of Diacuí). CNPI member Heloisa Alberto Tôrres later used the circulation of the photograph to support her arguments against the marriage.⁴⁵

While State functionaries quarrelled over the rationale and execution of ‘Indian policy’, popular intervention into the Diacuí case brought to light the vacuous nature of much of the academic and legal discourse upon which that policy had been based. As the goals of the SPI became at best ambiguous, and at worst absurd, for the general public, the inter-racial scandal became a thorn in the side of the official indigenist institutions. By drawing attention to an area of public policy that had gone unseen or been ignored by much of mainstream Brazilian society, the controversy called into question what the SPI and its collaborators had been doing with the public resources spent on Indian posts in remote regions of the country. Public outrage over the prohibition of a white–Indian marriage thus encapsulated the cynicism that had arisen over the State’s involvement with indigenous affairs by the mid-twentieth century. As one irritated commentator protested:

43 ‘President Getúlio Vargas has demonstrated an attitude that has moved the whole country: he decided to save the little girl by providing resources for her education. [...] The leader of the Nation is in touch with the sentiments of the Brazilian people, who from the beginning learned to favour the little Indian girl. Confronted with the extraordinary, moving story of Diacuí, we have but one abiding desire: that the Kuluene River send to the civilized people of Guanabara other Indian [girls] as mystical and delicate as the “Flower of the Fields”, so that we might feel from time to time a bit of rustic poetry in the midst of so many urban falsities and lies dressed up as beauty.’

44 In all of the published and unpublished material I have reviewed about this case, Aiute is not recorded as having expressed a single word, other than a few indirect quotes included in Cunha’s memoirs.

45 See note no. 40.

[...S]omente um louco poderia admitir esses escrúpulos raciais dentro de uma Pátria como nossa, gloriosa justamente por causa de sua colcha de retalhos étnicos, despida por inteiro desses preconceitos, que, lá fora, nas velhas civilizações, apenas são desenterrados para acobertar interesses econômicos [...]. Segundo os 'big's' do Serviço de Proteção dos Índios (sic) [...] esse casamento é impossível por três razões: 1) por causa do tal regulamento que tanta alegria daria à alminha do falecido Conde de Gobineau;⁴⁶ 2) por causa da mestiçagem, que s.s. acha inferior e 3) por causa da nenhuma cultura da bela Diacuí de sorriso esplendido e grandes seios nus. [...] Como se vê: cretinices mais deslavadas ainda não se disseram sob estes céus tranquilos e gostosos de nossa terra! [...] Se a proteção que eles dão aos nossos pobres selvícolas (sic) é esse espetáculo de segregação racista, de irmãos Vilas Boas (sic) ameaçando raptar índias com teco-tecos do Governo [...] para que continuarmos gastando tanto dinheiro com esses vira-latas das selvas tão fartos em barbas e em estupidez? (Serviço, 1952).⁴⁷

Such condemnation stemmed, in large part, from idealised notions of Brazilianness propagated through conventional historiography, in which Vargas's populist rule had found a comfortable ideological home. Popular criticism flourished: How could the indigenists adhere to rigid, foreign notions of racial difference while progressive intellectuals and politicians were struggling to heal the deep social wounds inflicted by decades of Eurocentric racism and imported racial engineering? Why keep indigenous peoples isolated from 'mainstream society' when influential thinkers like Gilberto Freyre, Cândido Rondon and even President Vargas were promulgating the vision of Brazil as a harmonious amalgam of diverse races and cultures?

Significantly, the national debate over the case of Diacuí took place during the same year that the recently established UNESCO undertook an extensive analysis of Brazilian race relations, aiming to demonstrate the relative success of ethnic and cultural assimilation and inter-racial harmony in Brazil compared to racial segregation in the United States, and other forms of racial discrimination in other parts of the Americas. Investigations carried out in Bahia, Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro and São

46 Gobineau, who served as French Ambassador to Brazil from 1869 to 1870, is well known for having characterised Brazil as a 'deserto povoado de malandros [com] uma população toda mulata, com sangue viciado, espírito viciado e feia de meter medo' [a desert inhabited by scoundrels with a fearfully ugly, half-bred population of vitiated blood and spirit] (Maciel, 1999: 124).

47 'Only a crazy person could permit these racist principles in a Fatherland like ours, whose glory lies precisely in its ethnic patchwork, completely stripped of the prejudices that there, outside, in the old civilizations, are only unearthed to protect economic interests [...]. According to the "big wigs" of the Indian Protection Service, that marriage is impossible for three reasons: 1) because of the rule that would give so much happiness to the little soul of the deceased Count Gobineau; 2) because of *mestiçagem*, which the good sir considers inferior, and 3) because of the zero-culture of the lovely Diacuí, with splendid smile and big, naked breasts. [...] As you can see, more audacious idiocies had yet to be declared below these tranquil and pleasing skies of our land! [...] If the protection that they give our poor Indians is this spectacle of racist segregation, of Vilas Boas (sic) brothers threatening to kidnap Indian women in small government airplanes, [...] why continue to spend so much money with these mongrels of the jungle, so abundant in beards and stupidity?'

Paulo all demonstrated, however, that quite contrary to national and international expectations, the systematic and individual discrimination of blacks and mulattos was abundantly evident in all four states.⁴⁸ Darcy Ribeiro – a key figure from the Diacuí case and proponent of “neo-Brazilianness” – was charged with the portion of the UNESCO project examining indigenous assimilation into dominant Brazilian society. In keeping with his unfavourable verdict on the Cunha–Aiute marriage, he generated a report that was disappointing to racial democrats for its outright negation of popular imaginings about the inclusive promise and power of Brazilianness:⁴⁹

Em todos os casos que pude observar, nenhum grupo indígena se converteu numa vila brasileira. É certo que [...] diversos locais de antiga população indígena deram lugar a comunidades neobrasileiras. Não houve porém nenhuma assimilação que transformasse índios em brasileiros (Ribeiro, 1997: 190–191).⁵⁰

Like the troublesome Diacuí debates, the unexpected findings regarding Brazilian race relations included in the UNESCO study seemed to indicate that the popular perceptions of progressive racial attitudes and cordial racial politics adopted and perpetuated by the Vargas administration⁵¹ were, in fact, counter to many of the social realities of the country.

In favouring Aiute’s ‘improvement’ through marriage, antagonists of SPI ‘racism’ upheld the belief that caring persuasion could provide an alternative to civic education and brute force in working towards the goal of national unity. What motivation, after all, would be more powerful than romantic love to facilitate the arduous process of integration, which for over two decades had been deemed vital to national modernisation and development? In light of that rhetorical uncertainty, the concept of neo-citizenship that had been used to deny Cunha and Aiute the right to marry would also contain the redemptive possibility of Brazilianness: the Nation would only be possible if the real, as well as the symbolic, union of whites and Indians could prevail. The widespread criticism spawned by the censure of one such union therefore reflected not only the ongoing critical interrogation of race and national identity, but also the intensifying divergence between a burgeoning civil society and the increasingly authoritarian and contradictory cultural authority of the State.⁵² The Diacuí case thus marked a watershed in the politicisation of ethnic

48 The study was led by Charles Wagley and Thales Azevedo, in Bahia; Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes, in São Paulo; Luiz de Aguiar Costa Pinto, in Rio de Janeiro and Renée Ribeiro in Pernambuco (Ribeiro, 1997: 190).

49 Nearly twenty years later, Ribeiro published his ‘theory of ethnic transformation’ in a book-length expansion on the 1952 report, *Os Índios e a Civilização* (1970).

50 ‘In all the cases I was able to observe, not one indigenous group turned into a Brazilian village. It is true that [...] several sites previously occupied by indigenous peoples gave way to neo-Brazilian communities. There was not, however, any assimilation that transformed Indians into Brazilians.’

51 See note 20.

52 Williams (2001) refers compellingly to conflicts over the representation of Brazilianness during the first Vargas regime as ‘culture wars’.

identification: the clash over the nature of Brazilianness between the discourse of the indigenist apparatus and the discourse of citizen-making populism ultimately placed the State's operation of identity politics into direct conflict with itself.

The Pervasive Preference for the Imaginary

Although Aiute and Cunha's relationship was summarily reduced to ethnography and political debate, the symbolic value of their marriage eventually outweighed its scientific and legal consequences. While lawyers, politicians, bureaucrats and academics considered the matter in technical terms, the broader population was caught up in issues too passionate to be sanctioned by the scientific scrutiny of the moment. Notwithstanding the inconsistency of both popular and intellectual notions of Indianness, Brazilianness and *mestiçagem*, the Diacuí case illustrates that a common conceptual contradiction was at play across a broad spectrum of indigenist thinking and its different points of intersection with a politics of identity. That is, while Indians were the unqualified referent of all versions of indigenist discourse, ranging from those seeking the preservation of Indianness to those seeking its hasty disappearance (as well as all positions in between), there was no underlying ideological or operational scheme in place to establish what it meant to 'be Indian' in lived human experience, in Rio de Janeiro, or in the forests of Xingu. Simply put, who would be considered Indian, by whom, and on what grounds?

While Darcy Ribeiro's (1952) contemplation of neo-Brazilianness and subsequent elaboration of the concept of 'ethnic transformation' (1970: 241–503) approximate such questions, comparable questioning at the crossroads of indigenist thought and indigenist practice are not evident in the documentation of the case at hand. What's more, the indigenist 'criteria of Indianness' outlined nearly 30 years after the death of Diacuí Aiute would seem to indicate that an indeterminate notion of Indianness would long outlive the SPI, which was disbanded by the military dictatorship and replaced by the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) in 1967. Ramos (1998) critiqued the 1981 'Indian test', which was created under the direction of retired Air Force colonels and FUNAI heads, João Carlos Nobre da Veiga and Ivan Zanoni Hausen:

[...] Zanoni created a committee of three FUNAI employees to prepare a list of more than sixty items meant to be traits of Indianness. [...] Among the items were such things as whether the candidate for Indianness displayed 'primitive mentality,' [...] 'undesirable cultural, psychic, and biological characteristics,' 'representative cultural traits,' enigmatic 'social characteristics to be defined,' or 'qualitative physical features' such as the Mongolian spot, [...] nose shape or profile, and amount of body hair. Included in the test was whether the candidate dressed, ate, and performed like an Indian (Ramos, 1998: 249).

The racist distribution of social power at the heart of the Diacuí case and countless other political discussions regarding Indianness throughout the Americas before and

after 1952 indicate how the bureaucratisation and administration of identity requires taking a step back from the materiality of daily life into fictitious or scientific abstraction with little or no capacity to represent individuals or groups who are identified or self-identify in ethnic terms. Apart from recently discovered or “pacified” groups and white-Indian conflict on the expanding borders of civilisation, flesh-and-blood indigenous peoples were not newsworthy in Vargas’s Brazil, despite the administration’s efforts to fashion them into protagonists of the nation-building enterprise. In perpetual conflict with and contradiction to the realm of lived experience, the Indians of an idealised national history became ever more real as people held on tighter and tighter to their treasured visions of fantasy. One concerned citizen was inspired to comment on the Diacuí affair after an unpleasant encounter with Indians begging near her home in São Paulo:

Sim, foi um rumoroso caso o da índia que veio com cacique da tribo, deavião, cheia de agrados e que acabou, como nas histórias, casando com o príncipe. Mas, não era preciso tanta preocupação com os efeitos do seu casamento, aquelas questões todas de raça ou acomodação e efeitos de civilização e não sei mais o quê. Há muito índio solto e abandonado, a morrer nas esquinas, a estender a mão à caridade, esse realmente mais precisa de proteção do que seus irmãos, mais inteligentes, que ficaram nas suas matas, sem roupas, é verdade, mas vestidos de um pouco da sua dignidade [...]. Iracemas e Moemas, Ubirajaras e Peris, onde andam glórias e beleza, canções de poetas e verdes mares sussurrantes? Nem Gonçalves Dias nem José de Alencar, numa tarde de sábado poderiam, depois disso, escrever um poema ou contar, num romance, a beleza agreste dos índios do Brasil (Gáudio, 1952).⁵³

Even if the essence of Gáudio’s criticism was displeasure over the fact that so much time, energy and money had been spent on a single individual while the overall situation of indigenous peoples remained deplorable, the only benchmark by which she would (or perhaps could) assess their well-being was the Indianist Romanticism that preceded the 1910 foundation of the SPI by nearly half a century.

As another writer explained, people all over the country were shocked by grief:

Todo o país está sob a dolorosa [...] morte de Diacuí [...]. Em torno de sua quase lendária silhueta feminina, em que adivinhamos [...] a sonha-

53 ‘Yes, a remarkable case, that of the charming Indian girl who arrived with the chief of the tribe in an aeroplane, and ended up, like in fairy tales, marrying the prince. But there was no need for so much worry over the effects of marriage, those questions about race and adaptation and the effects of civilization and I don’t know what else. There are many Indians on the loose, abandoned to die on street corners or beg for charity, who are more in need of protection than their more intelligent brothers who stayed in the jungle, without clothing, it’s true, but dressed with a bit of their dignity. Iracemas and Moemas, Ubirajaras and Peris, where are the glories and beauty, the songs of poets and green gurgling oceans? Neither Gonçalves Dias nor José de Alencar could, on a Saturday afternoon, after this, write a poem or tell a tale of the rustic beauty of the Indians of Brazil.’

dora beleza de Iracema, formou-se um halo de admiração que tinha algo de sublime e inefável. O Rio se preparou para receber Diacuí como se prepara para acompanhar uma procissão ou assistir condignamente aos pomposos rituais de um casamento de princesa real. [...] Ela corporificara sem dúvida, aquela outra indiazinha ‘de lábios de mel’ que José de Alencar nos apresentou, em nossa infância, através de sua obra imortal (Getúlio, 1953).⁵⁴

Some, however, were less than convinced by the aura surrounding Aiute and her ‘legendary feminine silhouette’. One commentator found the inspiration for his mis-directed hostility in the polemical photographs that had become a centrepiece of Cunha’s crusade for ‘racial justice’. For him, Diacuí’s life ironically marked the death of the cherished Indianist tale:

Diacuí é, sem dúvida, um tipo de beleza indígena. Todos viram sua plástica, quando foram publicadas as primeiras fotografias, ao natural, sem tanga, nem nada. Falando francamente, temos que reconhecer que não agradou. E os que leram os nossos indianistas ficaram desencantados. Então, era [...] assim [...] Iracema? A falta de harmonia do conjunto, certa obesidade e a flacidez dos tecidos serão compatíveis com as idéias que muitos faziam da virgem dos lábios de mel? O Guerreiro Branco ter-se-ia apaixonado por uma índia sem elasticidade, cujo passo molengo e pesado não lembra absolutamente um raio de luar deslizando pela grama? Diacuí, pelo jeito, veio golpear de morte o encantamento de uma lenda nacional. Talvez para salvar a tradição romântica de Alencar, tenham apressadamente vestido a filha dos Kalapalos. Salões de beleza, cabeleiros, modistas, tudo foi mobilizado. Mas não adiantou. Diacuí matou Iracema (*A nossa opinião*, 1952).⁵⁵

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- 54 ‘The whole country bears the painful death of Diacuí [...]. Around her nearly legendary feminine silhouette, in which we discovered the sleeping beauty of Iracema, was fashioned a halo of admiration, both sublime and ineffable. Rio prepared to receive Diacuí as if to take part in a religious procession, or watch, with due distinction, the wedding rituals of a royal princess. [...] She embodied, without a doubt, that other little Indian girl “with lips of honey” that José de Alencar, through his immortal work, gave to us in our childhood.’
- 55 ‘Diacuí is, without a doubt, some type of indigenous beauty. Everyone saw her physique when the first photos were published au naturelle, without a cover-up or anything. In all frankness, we have to recognize that it was not pleasant. And those who read our indianists were disenchanted. Was Iracema like that? Would the lack of harmony, the overabundance and flaccidity of body tissue, be compatible with the ideas held by many about the honey-lipped virgin? Would the White Warrior have fallen in love with an Indian lacking elasticity, whose sluggish, heavy steps do nothing to evoke a moonbeam skimming across the grass? Diacuí, with her ways, came to kill off the charm of a national legend. Perhaps it was in order to save Alencar’s romantic tradition that they dressed the daughter of the Kalapalos in such haste. Beauty salons, hairdressers, stylists, everything was mobilized. But it didn’t help. Diacuí killed Iracema.’

Clearly, popular opinion, whether favourable or not, was a legacy of the Indianist imagination. Given that fictionalised images were preferable to the jarring images of real life, indigenists treated Aíute like the embodiment of an abstract social problem while the public fashioned her into the reproduction of a familiar romantic plot. The tragedy of her story thus centres not only on her death, but on how her life revealed a critical rift between the theorisation of the 'Indian question' and the variety of efforts meant to resolve it. Abstract reflections on Indianness and national identity were seldom considered alongside the varied material conditions that would have made it possible or impossible to transform ideas into practice, and existed independently of the diverse interests and desires of the people that practice was aimed to protect. In that pervasive gap, which is in many respects symptomatic of the problem of administering any form of identity, lies the fundamental contradiction that made it impossible for indigenist or nationalist discourse to craft a homogenous or homogenising set of political, social or cultural projects.

That Diacuí Aíute was exploited to advance an 'anti-racist', integrative nationalism and a segregationist ethnic politics at the very same time illustrates how the figure of the Indian has operated as both 'other and us' in popular and intellectual Brazilian discourse (Ramos, 1998: 292). If the desire for 'model' Indians still creates a disjunction between 'Iracemas' and the people of flesh and blood who have been subjected to decades of ethnographic study and political manoeuvring, it is partly due to the fact that popular, intellectual and State-backed indigenist discourses still revolve around the notion of Indianness without having dealt with the question of what it means to be an 'indigenous person' in a diverse post-colonial society. While modern-day indigenous activism in Brazil confronts the same thorny question from the other side, it certainly stands apart from tales of assimilationist *mestiçagem* that either deny the richness of ethnic difference altogether, or rest on the comfortable metonymical claim that '*o índio é o povo*' (the Indian is the people) (Torres, 2000).

Elite hegemony in the creation and imposition of ethnic and cultural markers continues to govern both the real and the imaginary, conferring upon subaltern categories like 'Indianness' a seemingly interminable malleability. The 'Indian simulacrum' – a Baudrillardian (1981) substitution of far-fetched images for the thoughts and experiences of real people – has indeed only in recent times become subject to conspicuous controversy. To be sure, more than 50 years after the death of Diacuí Aíute, and although the intensification of indigenous activism now complicates the facile manipulation of Indian images, the other/us paradox of Indian objectivity and subjectivity remains, in many ways, alive and well.

Back to a Future that Never was

Fast forward to 2000. From the streets of Rio de Janeiro at the outset of the new millennium, it was impossible not to notice the impending commemoration of Brazil's '500th birthday'. In preparation, the Globo TV network had displayed enormous countdown clocks in strategic locations nationwide, including the heart of national and international tourism, Copacabana Beach. Adorned with a map of Brazil superimposed



'Indians' and the quincentenary celebration. (Galvão, 2000).

upon a globe, the monumental timekeepers ticked away the days remaining until 22 April. The marking of five centuries since Pedro Álvares Cabral arrived on what would become Brazilian soil was expected to inspire patriotic festivity, and many official activities were planned accordingly. One key event would be the meeting of Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio in the Bahian city of Porto Seguro, close to the spot where Cabral's crew first arrived to secure the Portuguese foothold in the New World.

Just as perceptible as the tremendous clocks, however, was the reaction that they provoked. A typical *carioca* response to Copacabana's massive timepiece, which cheerfully read, for example, '364 days till Brasil 500', was an ironic '364 days till that clock goes away!' The cynicism was telling, and as it turned out, festivity was remarkably absent on 22 April. Instead, protest rocked the sites of the official celebration, culminating in a violent confrontation between demonstrators and military police.

Protestors from throughout the country were of all ages, backgrounds and ways of life. Indigenous groups, Sem Terras, Afro-Brazilian organizations and university students, for example, united momentarily to question the celebration of the colonial encounter whose legacies still scar Brazilian society, and to condemn a broken and unjust system of which many posited themselves as victims. As they had in 1992, several indigenous groups repudiated their role as tokens of a benign intercultural encounter. In the light of the violent suppression of their demonstration, the Pataxó, in particular, stood out from the diverse group of protestors as protagonists of anti-

colonialist sentiment. Indian images hit the press almost immediately, and in the days and weeks to follow became emblematic not only of indigenous rejection of 'Brasil 500 Anos', but also of cynicism throughout the country over the uncritical nature of the commemoration.

Although indigenous protestors had included specific appeals for legislative and institutional reform as part of their opposition platform, the symbolic power of their resistance quickly outweighed its political efficacy. Drawing upon the entrenched imagery of Indian audacity as the flipside of indigenous suffering, many interpreted the organised protests metaphorically rather than literally. In keeping with the other/us paradigm, caricatures of Indians proliferated, while indigenous protest was adopted as a symbol of malcontent from society at large. The press reproduced the images with irony, mocking the 22 April 'fiasco' and exploiting the figure of the Indian to embody general distress over Brazil's now familiar characterisation as one of the most inequitable countries in the world. Reminiscent of the Diacuí case, the chaotic quincennial encounter sparked an analogous reflection on the social legacies of colonisation, revealing the workings of the Indian simulacrum nearly half a century later.

In 2000, unlike in 1952, however, the promulgation and questioning of racist attitudes in the mainstream media did bring along at least one important change in an otherwise familiar story: indigenous participation in the now tired, but still painful, discussions over Indianness and the unmindful manipulation of ethnic stereotypes. In synch with the protests of 22 April 2000, several organisations represented by the National Indigenous Conference drafted a letter to the Human Rights Commission of the Câmara de Deputados (House of Representatives) to protest what they saw as an extremely negative portrayal of Indians on a popular television soap opera called 'Uga! Uga!' The program, they claimed, depicted indigenous people 'without feelings', as 'circus animals used to get the attention of television spectators'.⁵⁶ The open letter published in Rio's *Jornal do Brasil* concluded, 'Queremos deixar bem claro que somos povos com memória viva; não nos esquecemos do que se passou nestes 500 anos de história. Temos nossas culturas e exigimos respeito com relação aos nossos costumes e nossas tradições [...] (Índio quer respeito, 2000).'⁵⁷

56 The popular Globo soap opera began in Brazil shortly before the events of April 2000 and was aired for the first time in other South American countries beginning in September 2003. The *novela* depicts the life of a young white man who was lost in the wilderness as a child and raised by Indians who adopted him as a member of their community. Eventually making his way back to 'civilisation', the protagonist discovers he is heir to the estate of his biological grandfather. Struggling to learn Portuguese and make his way as an outsider in upper-class society, the blond-haired, blue-eyed 'Indian' is torn between gratitude for his indigenous community and affection for newly-found family. Caught between 'native' past and 'civilised' present, the character accomplishes what intellectuals have fantasised about for well over a century: the feat of being white and Indian at the very same time.

57 'We want to make it very clear that we are peoples with a living memory; we have not forgotten what happened in the last five hundred years of history. We have our cultures and we demand respect for our customs and traditions [...].'

Post-indigenism, Post-nationalism, Post-identity?

The preference for the imaginary that marked the controversy surrounding the relationship between Diauí Aiute and Ayres Cunha in 1952 was as evident in the nineteenth-century intellectual endeavours to romanticise the Indian into a national icon as it was in the country's 500th-anniversary commemoration, where the idea of Indianness proved to be considerably more influential than the hundreds of indigenous people who showed up to protest the event. Ironically, the melding or exchange of the real and the imaginary that is evident within indigenisms past and present is, at the same time, the condition of possibility for the formulation and proliferation of any politics of ethnic identity. At the crossroads of indigenous activism and indigenist discourse, the Indian simulacrum holds the potential promise of egalitarianism and democratic heterogeneity alongside and in tension with the potentially dangerous claim to authenticity and the dilemma posed by any claim to ethnic or cultural truth with the power to de-legitimise the lived experience of others. Those who self-identify as indigenous are, like the indigenists, subject to the perils of the hyper-real.⁵⁸ And yet, without the willingness to brave the tightrope of personal truth over the bottomless pit of authenticity, and experiment, as Das put it, 'with how much one's own voice finds recognition in other voices', there can be no representation of subalternity that does not always already re-inscribe a condition of relative disadvantage.⁵⁹

If we recognise that categories of race and nationality are social and historical constructions laden with meaning and irrefutable real-world consequences, then ethnic identity – like any other identity – can only be an articulated means to other ends that may or may not be particular. One thing is clear: if communication is now or has ever been possible, it is not only due to individual life stories or the sum of their parts – call them nationalities, races, ethnicities or cultures – but in spite of them. Whether meant to speak for tolerance or intolerance, to protect individual rights or to trample them, the story of one remarkable individual could never reflect the reality of a whole people because there is, in the end, no such thing. There are only the infinite heterogeneities that we struggle to condense and imagine into chosen or assigned communities, so that we might try to continue with the business of life. While the infinite heterogeneity of each political actor necessitates that all discursive practices and social formations evolving from them are also infinitely heterogeneous, the governance of a democratic society relies on some level of categorical assumption that will always and inevitably suspend the infinite heterogeneity of every political actor, every discursive practice and every social formation. If that suspension is neither strategic nor voluntary, however, democracy cannot be served, for the idea of a social contract rests, of course, on the precarious boundary between liberalism and totalitarianism. Contrary to a tautological politics of identity that both relies on and generates a 'pre-given subject to whom experience happens', recognising the suspended heterogeneity of those subjects widens the ground of shared experience beyond oppressive essentialisms and into the all but

58 A centerpiece of the controversy over the testimony of Rigoberta Menchú, the notion of hyper-reality is theorised by Baudrillard (1981) and elaborated by Ramos (1994, 1998) with particular reference to indigenism in Brazil.

59 See note no. 11.

forgotten certainty that, as the saying goes, '*cada pessoa é um mundo*' (every person is a whole world).

Any lesson drawn from recent indigenist history in Brazil must acknowledge the reconstitution of the notion of national community brought about by the radical reformulation of political subjectivity and the critical examination of the 'other/us' paradigm – both of which came about in the decades following the day that a hushed Kalapalo bride probed the meanings of Brazilianness by gracing the front pages of the daily papers. Securing respect and legal protection for different ways of being and thinking entails not just loosening up entrenched concepts of indigenism and nationalism, but also replacing the circumscribed politics of identity with a recognition of heterogeneity that might finally allow Diacuí Canualo Aiute to be herself instead of Iracema.

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