THE CONSTRUCTION OF BRAZILIAN FASHION AS A GLOBAL DISCOURSE: “RESOLVING” DIFFERENCE WITHOUT OVERCOMING INEQUALITY*

Miqueli Michetti**

** Miqueli Michetti holds a bachelor degree in Social Sciences, a master degree in Sociology, both from the São Paulo State University (Unesp), a PhD in Sociology from the University of Campinas, with a collaborative period at the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS/Paris) and has recently developed a post-doctoral research as a Visiting Scholar at Columbia University in New York City. She is a professor at the Department of Social Sciences, Center for Human Sciences, Arts and Letters, Federal University of Paraíba (CCHLA – UFPB). E-mail: miquelimichetti@gmail.com

Resumo: o artigo analisa a construção da “moda brasileira” enquanto um discurso global no mercado mundial de bens simbólicos. Depois de examinar a construção da identidade nacional brasileira do início ao meio do século XX, analisamos as recentes atualizações discursivas dessa identidade em termos de diversidade. Através da análise do discurso sociológico do campo da moda, investigamos a realização deste discurso como uma verdade social. A abordagem comparativa mostra que estamos diante de duas maneiras distintas de lidar com a diferença e configurar identidade e alteridade. Em um deles, o Estado era o agente principal, tentando assimilar as diferenças em uma única identidade. No outro, o Estado desempenha um papel de apoio e existe o Mercado e suas tentativas de produzir a diferença como mercadoria. No primeiro, a igualdade tende a mascarar diferenças e, no segundo, as diferenças tendem a mascarar as desigualdades.


Abstract: the article analyses the construction of “Brazilian fashion” as a global discourse in the world market of symbolic goods. After examine the building of the Brazilian national identity from the early to mid-20th Century, we analyze the discursive current updates of this identity in terms of diversity. Through sociological discourse analysis of the fashion field, we investigate the making of this discourse as a social truth. The comparative approach shows that we are in face of two distinct ways of coping with difference and setting up identity and otherness. In one of them, the State was the key player attempting to assimilate the differences into a single identity. In the other, the State plays a supporting role and there is the Market and...
its attempts to produce difference as a merchandise. In the former, equality tended to mask differences and in the latter, the differences tend to mask the inequalities.

**Keywords:** Diversity. Global Discourse. Discourse Analysis. Brazilian Identity. Fashion.

The high valuation of the discourse of diversity is a phenomenon that is accompanying crucial changes in the way that the market economy operates. In a context characterized by terms such as “the economy of culture”, “the economy of knowledge” and “the creative economy”, culture will be more than ever regarded as a resource that can be traded in the world market of symbolic goods and services, where specific cultural identities will become a valuable currency.

It is within the sphere of this “world trade in diversity” that Brazilianness will try and operate as a form of symbolic capital. For this to be put into effect, its architects should seek to understand the full range of their own identity at the time when the Brazilian nation was first forged, although this will also need to be brought up-to-date to address the question of the widespread valuation of cultural diversity within the context of **mundialisation**. Thus although this word may sound like an anachronism, “Brazilianness” or “national identity” will be endowed with new meanings and invoked to fulfil tasks that belong to the world of today.

We set out by examining how Brazilian identity was historically shaped to form an understanding of how and why it is being re-invented today as *diversity*. This task will be carried out by means of an analysis of how “Brazilian fashion” is being forged in global terms.

**THE CHALLENGE OF DIFFERENCE FOR THE MAKING OF BRAZILIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY**

The formation of nation States is closely linked to the relationship between singleness and multiplicity. In Brazil, the question arises in a more pressing manner in so far as **miscegenation** is a historical issue in the country. Social thought in Brazil has been permeated with attempts to “overcome” the problem of “cross-breeding” and at one moment sought to sidestep the issue or to tackle it by regarding it as an obstacle to the progress of the nation and at another, to embrace and welcome it as a national strength.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Century, the nation-state took on the main role in establishing a national identity. It became a political issue at a time when politics had a central position in the social structure. In this situation, the movement towards building the nation was driven by a search for the single to the detriment of the multiple.

Although the Proclamation of the Republic was in 1889, it was only in 1930 that Getúlio Vargas (a president who some years after being elected established a dictatorship in the country) made an attempt to construct and unify the Nation in modern terms. As well forming a geographical union, it was of crucial importance to consolidate a *nation* as such, and to establish one national identity and the institution of one people.

The forging of national identity entailed an attempt to unify a nation whose people would be under the guidance of the State, the main driving-force behind the Brazilian nation. The question of *unity* – whether geographical, political, symbolic or concerned with identity – determined the agenda of national construction and the *multiple* stirred the hearts of those who were committed to this kind of exercise.

As was stated well by Thiesse (1999, p. 11), the forging of nations is always an “international” undertaking in the sense that it is bound up with other processes, whether occurring at the same time or not, that are involved in forming the national edifice. In the context of the modern world, the shaping and consolidation of nation-states takes place through the establishment of a cohesive union that is consistent, and within limits, homogeneous. In Brazil, these “models” made themselves felt in the same way. The creation of the “national myth” “accomodated” the differences but in a way that “overcame” the problem of plurality, either by a romantic quest for representations of the supposedly “essential features” of the natives, or through praising the mestizo, praise that started from the realm of the multiple to conform to a single type.
The basic evolutionary premise of the 19th Century, which was made legitimate in this golden age of “scientific racism”, regarded the mestizo as a serious obstacle to progress and ironically sought to make him white through a “gambiarra” (clever sleight-of-hand). In contrast, modernism put faith in *anthropophagy* and in the 1930s a solution to this problem (which was both convenient and persistent) emerged from the pages of *Casa Grande e Senzala* [The Masters and the Slaves]. Following Gilberto Freyre, interbreeding which had previously been put forward as both a problem and solution to the great question of Brazil, ceased to be regarded as a deviation from the rule and began to be viewed and put forward as a model. The ailment itself became the cure.

Jesse Souza (2009, p.35) viewed the question from a similar perspective and argued that from the 19th Century to the mid 1920s, “racism had ´an international scientific prestige´”. He also noted “the paradox that the Brazilian national identity took shape on the basis of the fact that it was impossible to form a ´positive image´ for ´a people made up of mestizos´”. The author states that at this time, ´the cultural turning-point´ of Gilberto Freyre was of crucial importance because “although it is not entirely detached from a racial attitude, it has a decidedly cultural emphasis”. Souza argues that through the “romance of national construction” *Casa Grande Senzala* [“The Masters and Slaves”], Freyre had assembled “the self-image the modern Brazilian has of himself” (2009, p. 37). In the opinion of Souza, the combination of these ideas and the interests of established power formed a symbolic framework in which:

> [...] rather than being a matter of shame, the ethnic and cultural mix of Brazilians should, on the contrary, be regarded as a reason for pride. It is on this basis that we can think of ourselves as the people capable of creating a cultural convergence par excellence, between unity and diversity, that is able to form a single society in the world through our capacity to bring together and unite contrary forces (2009, p. 36).

The “aversion to conflict” will be represented as “the core of our ´national identity´”. This “cultural turning-point” in the formation of the Brazilian national identity was reinvigorated in a climate, where throughout the world, the obsession with unity also proved to be harmful. After the Second World War when the allied powers had defeated nazism, the world had to confront the problem of multiplicity again, particularly because one of the key victors in a conflict which helped to change the course of history was itself a “multiracial” country.

At the same time that UNESCO was founded with the aim of seeking “a common denominator for all the peoples” on the basis of culture and thus preventing a hecatomb, some research studies were commissioned about Brazil. The purpose of these was to probe the secrets of the country which was then regarded as a “racial democracy” that was opposed to explosive conflicts. The expression of the view that the country is a racial democracy as well as the criticism of this idea as being a myth are well-known episodes of the social sciences in Brazil. However, it was when the world began to distrust unity in the middle of the 20th Century, that the concepts of mixture and plurality began to be cited as positive values. Brazil has not been unaffected by this change, particularly because it has benefited from it. The self-proclaimed “most multicultural country in the world” could not see with better eyes that this sudden positive veering away from the notion of *diversity* (which began to take shape during the 1960s and 1970s), would be revived at the beginning of the 1980s and at present, it appears that it is being carried to extremes.

Thus, from the middle of the 20th Century and with growing momentum, the Brazilian national identity would be defined from the standpoint of “the cultural melting-pot” and more recently, of “diversity”. It is based on exactly the opposite of unity which, on principle, would be expected to shape identity. In the modern period of national identities, each of them seeks to be different from others and internally there is an assumption that unity exists. However, the world has changed and the nature of identities has changed too. The global modernity has introduced new features to the question of identity.

In a very simplified way, it can be stated that from now on, identities will be understood as being multiple, reflective and constructed in the light of global dynamics. Moreover, they will increasingly be operated in the sphere of the market where global forces are operating with greater vigour. This
does not mean that the State has withdrawn from the scene as an agent of identity. It will now play new roles but if at times, it had a monopoly over the construction of social meaning, this prerogative will undoubtedly be revoked.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF BRAZILIANNNESS AS A GLOBAL SYMBOLIC ASSET

The current attempt to forge the notion of Brazilianness will seek to update it in accordance with the requirements that emerge from globalization. This will involve positing it in a plural form and reviving a set of arguments that were raised at the time of the national construction. Some of the essential discursive features that are reproduced in the construction of Brazilianness include the “anthropophagy” of the modernists, the equilibrium between the opposing forces of Freyre, the concept of friendliness, expressions of feeling and the “special knack of doing things” referred to by Sérgio Buarque of … All these representations will be evoked by sectors of symbolic goods as the basic material for “identity-making” to be offered at the global market.

The current attempt to forge the notion of Brazilianness will seek to update it in accordance with the requirements that emerge from globalization. This will involve positing it in a plural form and reviving a set of arguments that were raised at the time of the national construction. Some of the essential discursive features that are reproduced in the construction of Brazilianness include the “anthropophagy” of the modernists, the equilibrium between the opposing forces of Freyre, the concept of friendliness, expressions of feeling and the “special knack of doing things” referred to by Sérgio Buarque. All these representations will be evoked by sectors of symbolic goods as the basic material for “identity-making” to be offered at the global market.

It is set against this background that the notion of Brazilianness will be carried out discursively and/or aesthetically through a strategic selection of images and representations about the country that will illustrate its alleged attributes and define its character and its difference from other imagined identities. Far from being an arbitrary choice, the selection of a symbolic ballast for the goods being offered to the global market, does justice to what is expected and imagined throughout the world as constituting “the Brazil”. Nor is it a question of a unanimous choice. The definition of Brazilianness and its uses, arouses both expectations and uneasiness, depending on the position of each player who is present. Although some agents seek to establish a real and perfect understanding of what Brazilianness means, as a “umbrella” identity it must remain wide-ranging, broad and unspecified so that it can include all the expressions that it intends to cover.

There is no doubt that Brazilianness is one of the most important concepts in the global symbolic economy. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world. It is a concept that is used to construct and sell images of the country to the world.
In the view of this manager, globalization has had the effect of making everything with respect to Brazil that was formerly regarded as negative - “our cross-breeding, our peculiar knack of doing things” - begin to have a positive connotation. In this opinion, the singleness of the country, which is its main “differential”, is clearly based on its multiplicity.

The Brazilian Association of Fashion Designers (ABEST), a decisive player in “Brazilian fashion”, expressed a similar argument:

With a new fashion for the world, without labels and not predetermined, the colours are designed for us and provide a further translation of our Latin-American identity. Through its remarkable cultural and racial blend, Brazil epitomises modern global behaviour with a style that does not seek to be defined or summed up in a single word or phrase. We are many things at the same time and it is this that makes us different and attractive to the world. We are living at a time that is extremely opportune for things that come from Brazil and it is up to us to learn how to make the most of this situation.

On another occasion, the then President of the institution stated that:

In contrast with what might be thought, the relative lack of a definition is not due to a lack of material. Rather than this, it is the excess of information, references, history and historical accounts that lead to a certain imprecision with regard to the identity of national fashion [...]. Japanese or Belgian fashion can be defined in a few words but the same cannot be said for Brazil. An entire dictionary could be employed. For the time being, we use the easiest and most sincere form of “diversity”. If it is this that defines us, we will take this identity and control our destiny like a fashion and cultural industry - by showing the best and most diverse and multiple features of Brazil.

At the time when cultural diversity is supposed to be protected and fostered, instilling the idea that Brazilian identity involves mixture and diversity, as well as a lack of any single definition, can be helpful in political, cultural and economic terms.

The organization of the two main fashion weeks in the country also puts forward converging ideas with regard to the so-called “individual diversity” of the Brazilian fashion designers:

[…] Brazilian fashion design is really based on its diversity. And this is how it should be, because we are a continent with several different regions. In spite of being a continent, the North Americans from the US and Canada, for example, have not embodied this diversity in the same way as us.

It can be seen that the best way of using diversity is to list its features without diluting them. It is for this reason that although there have been attempts to create a single concept, the principle of unity does not involve being restricted:

We have seen that Brazilianness is a broad concept. We have already discussed here what Brazilianness is, together with the fashion committee, council and public, and the foreign purchaser already understands it. They ask why have the São Paulo Fashion Week, Fashion Rio, Capital Fashion Week and so on.... and the answer is just this. Brazil is a huge place with a cultural diversity that allows the country to display a powerful creativity. Moreover it is very clear what the international purchaser does not want. He does not want people to go to a Prêt-à-Porter fair or a Première Vision and copy what he sees there because he can buy this in China, Turkey or Vietnam; he can buy it all there and doesn’t need to come here.

The challenge is to display a unity that is both cohesive and multiple. This is because, according to the “Brazilian Fashion: discourse, as well as being individual like all the others, its identity comprises diversity, in a way that allows it to be boasted that Brazilian diversity is more diverse than other kinds. At the same time that it found itself at a disadvantage with regard to already recognised fashions, with a supposedly universal appeal, Brazil seems to be in a better position when it comes to valuing diversity, especially with regard to other “peripheral” fashions.

This is so much the case that in the first number of the ABIT publication designed to give information about its exports program in partnership with Apex-Brasil, can be read “in cultural terms. It has been to the advantage of Brazil to be able to show various cultures to the eyes of the world that are included within a single national range”\textsuperscript{11}. In the edition issued two years later, there is the same emphasis: the way to feature prominently in the “international market is to search for an identity and any signs that can distinguish us from the Europeans”. This would be possible through an “cannibalistic immersion” [mergulho antropofágico] which has proved to be “the best weapon for facing competition, including Asian products”\textsuperscript{14}.

The Brazil Fashion project gathers together the institutions and companies that belong to Complexo Moda Brasil [The Brazilian Fashion Complex] \textsuperscript{15}, and its catalogue was issued in a bilingual edition during the exhibition about the project organised for the 25th Edition of the São Paulo Fashion Week and supplies us with the terms of this discursive unification. Referring to the collection of institutions, Apex-Brasil enunciates the “Brazilian fashion” as a “kaleidoscope”:

Brazil: a kaleidoscope of fashion. The land discovered by the Portuguese is today a country that has been changed by having a population of mixed and interlocking origins. Brazil comprises 47% of South America but seems to have an entire world within its territory. This is reflected in society since the industrial sector – a center of creativity and change, with a growing presence of value-added products and Brazilian identity – is reflected in cultural expression such as literature, music and also fashion[...]. In Brazil, nature – which makes up 20% of the world biodiversity – is as rich as its social diversity. The country has traits originating from indigenous Brazilians, Europeans, Asians and Africans, which the permeable nature of the country has absorbed, united and reformed in a unique interpretation. The strength of popular culture is more apparent in the current stage of globalization. Both new and traditional reference-points combine ideas like sustainable development, labor supply incentives, the generation of currencies, and sophisticated design, among other concepts decorated with floral and perfumed motifs with the exotic aroma of cupuacu. [...] In the 1930s, Carmen Miranda, an icon of our culture used to sing: ‘Sai da toca, Brasil’ [Let’s get out of the house, Brazil]. And we are going out in response to the appeal of this notable figure. Now the world is our oyster”.

In resuming the narrative account of the origins of the country, stress should be laid on its plurality so that it can be claimed that currently, the “whole world” is represented in our territory. There is nothing more useful to a sector that wants to achieve globality – another key-value in the current market of symbolic goods – than to argue that its constitution would be equally global. It is claimed that this globality might be reflected in Brazilian goods, including fashion. As a result, it is stated that these could be attractive to the global market by claiming to offer (to the detriment of pasteurised products that are the outcome of a harmful type of globalisation) “good globality”, made up of diversity and rooted in a popular culture and that rather than wasting away, would only be likely to flourish.

It is thus not surprising that in this attempt to find a new significance for national identity in the global situation, the movement had recourse to “the arsenal of identities” of the 1930s, the period when the Brazilian national identity was being constructed (as we noted earlier), it was forged in international terms. For this reason, Carmem Miranda was invited to use a golden key to close the identity parade which was planned by the main funding organizations for the internationalization of “Brazilian fashion”. However, - and it is a very emphatic ‘however’ - its nationalist “appeal” was made in global terms so that “the place of Brazilian fashion” was nothing more and nothing less than “the world”. In addition, although an attempt is being made to instil this identity with features that are taken to be as “timeless” as nature and belonging to the past, the forging of the identity of national fashion also takes full account of the global requirements of the contemporary world, where it has recourse to terms such as biodiversity, socio-diversity and sustainable development.

In the extract below, which is from the same catalogue which we discussed above, some of the factors are shown that seek to instil identity in diversity:

Brazil is formed of a fine cultural mosaic. There are a thousand of Brazils, all peculiar and unique. [...] The multiplicity of our culture undoubtedly makes us one of the most beautiful
countries in the world. The wealth of its raw material is tending to change Brazil in global terms and fashion is taking advantage of this endless supply of resources. Embroiderers are using their yarn to make our life-style bright and colourful. From the efforts of clothes-designers, stylists, illustrators and designers, new combinations are arising that point the way to other kinds of creativity. In the streets, we can see the same explosion of colour which explore the curves of the female figure without any shame. It is a living testimony of Brazilian fashion which can satisfy the concept ‘Made in Brazil’. It increasingly shows our talent to match colours and blend high technology with craftsmanship, as well as our daring in creating clothes that are increasingly skimpier for bodies that are increasingly healthy. We are no less sensitive in music. We create and mix rhythms and capture what we want to listen to, as occurred with bossa-nova and the tropicalist movement. It is our cultural wealth that is interpreted in a hundred different ways. The remarkable beauty that results from the use of our powers is what distinguishes Brazil and arouses interest. We are going to launch things that other countries still don’t have. The reason for our success is endless diversity. What is it that Brazilians have? As Caymmi said, the answer is that they have grace like nobody else!

It is again through the rhetoric of diversity and multiplicity that Brazil is regarded as a global attraction. On the basis of this “endless diversity”, it would be possible to build a kind of fashion in its own right and this is something that would soon appeal to the eyes of the global market. Hence, the diversity of Brazilian culture would be the main merchandise for a market with an avid interest in our new (anti)commodity.

In this period which is propitious to the discourse of diversity, it is suggested that because Brazil is habituated to its mixture of influences, it could design a kind of fashion that is in line with the benchmarks of the kind of fashion officially sanctioned throughout the world. It could seek to attain the most coveted status of the market – a fashion that is local and global at the same time, while being both individual and universal.

Regional diversity, which is also not subsumed beneath a national ‘whole’, will be set apart from the conspicuous wealth of "Brazilian fashion", as can be noted in the words of the President of the Brazilian Footwear Industries Association (ABICALÇADOS):

The style – sometimes irreverent, sometimes restrained – that is typical of a tropical country has everything that can attract the most demanding customer in the world. It’s obvious! From the German punctuality of the factories of Rio Grande do Sul, to the serious and committed style of São Paulo, moving on to the artistic side of Minas Gerais and then reaching the North and North-East of Brazil, where the rhythm of life on the beaches dictates the fashion produced there – Brazil shows when its production is mapped out, that there is really a type of creativity that caters for everybody’s taste.

In similar terms, the Manager of the Texbrasil Programme of ABIT states that "our cultural regionalism is also a competitive factor. For example, the fashion that is produced in Bahia is not the same as the fashion of São Paulo. And the international buyers are beginning to understand the wide variety of Brazilianness. In view of this, there would be local differences that together could allow Brazilian fashion to design desired articles for the whole world, since diversity (in this case regional) is required to construct both the identity and the global ambitions of national fashion.

It is worth noting that in a similar discourse, the differences seem to be more significant the less they are mixed. However contradictory this may seem, there are signs in this rhetoric of the idea that it would be more appropriate if each "source of diversity" remained intact, which could lead to the dangerous notion of a purist identity. But this is a question for another occasion.

For the time being, it should be stressed that the more the recognition of the value of local differences is pronounced, the more it is concerned with spreading the idea of the supposedly “sustainable” nature of fashion in the country. The extract below allows us to have a snapshot of how this question is dealt with in unified terms:

There is great diversity in Brazil, with a lot of opportunities and impressive results but the essence is just one factor: recognizing the value of culture, safeguarding the environment and believing in
creative and skilled manpower. From various standpoints, Brazil is a single whole, united by parts that are so distinct that they seem like a complicated patchwork quilt with points that are so intricately stitched that they acquire a new unity through their very multiplicity. Our culture is a byword for multiculturalism. The appreciation of the value of our handicrafts brings about ethical and aesthetic benefits and increasingly they require funding and recognition. Through this social commitment to create jobs, revive traditions, value skilled manpower, and boost self-esteem, income self-sufficiency and the resulting good practices for socialization, financial currencies are created that are grounded in cultural bases designed to foster Brazilian identity. The Brazilian people are not just aware of the value of these concepts of sustainability but, in fact, practice them through initiatives taken by both NGOs, entrepreneurs and governments. It is a real way to adapt to the current climate to have a good social standard of living and planetary survival. They are projects that challenge people’s creativity to find better ways of being in the world through reflection and material production involving the sustainable use of natural resources. From the north to the south of the country, it is a question of taking initiatives to value and spread a sustainable design for Brazil. This includes a better world for the embroiderers and weavers of the North-East, socio-environmental projects in the Amazon region, professional qualifications schemes and social inclusion for the socially-deprived – both in the shanty towns of Rio de Janeiro and the poverty-stricken and indigenous regions in the Centre-West and North of the country, as well as numerous other activities required by all the States that form the Federation.[...]

We should recognize the value of our country, raw material and people, as well as the creative and symbolic interpretation we make of them so that Brazil can be included in the world scene. Our raw material, forms, colors, smells and expertise, which are generously provided us by our abundant nature, serve as the raw material and inspiration that can be turned into a sustainable product with an identity.\textsuperscript{18}

In this conception, the country does not suffer on account of this multiplicity – quite the contrary. If its nature could be conceived as a “patchwork quilt”, it would be possible for the entire range of our national features to be reconstructed as a whole from its distinct parts. The recognition of the value of “our land”, “our people” and nature, is what has shaped the identity of the products inspired in Brazil. Thus, through the enumeration of the different territories which correspond to different cultures, the idea can be reaffirmed that the unity of Brazilian cultural identity could be based on multiculturalism and diversity.

The appreciation of this diversity must also be adapted to the new times and the enunciation of the notion of “sustainability” enters the scene. With regard to this, Paulo Borges, the legitimate spokesman on behalf of national fashion, states the following:

I think that if anyone can sell goods that are sustainable, ecologically correct and creative, it is Brazil. Of course, Brazil has an abundant source of wealth in this area – of biodiversity, technology and nature – and so can provide a wide range of diverse products. It is beginning to look as if we might miss the boat but we mustn’t miss this boat because selling goods that are ecologically correct should be the label of Brazilian products.\textsuperscript{19}

The executive staff of ABIT join in the sustainability’s chorus in the voice of the superintendent of the association:

We have to move on, we have got a fantastic biodiversity, we have got nature and we must translate this into wealth, and goods that are coveted and sustainable. This is the great challenge and I think that it is a path that Brazil must follow and can do so with great ability. Bringing together designs and the wealth of materials we have, and combining all this with a sustainable vision, is a way to conquer the world.\textsuperscript{20}

The term sustainability seems to emerge as a contemporary substitute or even a means of updating the idea of tradition as well as the term diversity which appears in situations where the idea of the exotic tended to feature. But if the exotic gives up space to the diverse, this space appears to be currently filled by players in positions that resemble those occupied by the exotic. The affirmation of sustainability and/or cultural diversity builds the main discourse through which the fashions once regarded as traditional or exotic tend to become globalized.
In the golden age of the exotic, the nations that only had this difference to show in the march towards human progress, were labelled as traditional, an adjective that put them at the tail end of the procession moving towards ‘modernity’\textsuperscript{21}. Today, the regions that are not decked out in a “global” character, are viewed as repositories of diversity that are supposedly threatened by the process of globalisation. When culture begins to be regarded as a resource, an attempt is made in some regions to employ this capital to improve their positions in the race to get ahead in the “creative economy”.

Thus, the representations of Brazil and its supposed diversity (cultural, social, national, regional and individual) would be taken as the ‘identity material’ for “Brazilian fashion”. This “guideline” ensures that a set of activities is organised within the key institutions promoting “Brazilian fashion” and their combined practices strengthen their discursive unification. Given the fact that these entities are the main driving-force behind Brazilian fashion in the world market, this will be the hegemonic discourse surrounding “Brazilian fashion”.

It is a question of a generalized and concerted discursive strategy which will set the tone for global promotional schemes of “Brazilian fashion”. The discourse is given legitimacy by being driven and is driven to be legitimized. It is strengthened when it is unified and becomes unified to the extent that it gains strength. It is within the constitutive interrelationship between the objectivities and discourse that we can understand the current position of “Brazilian fashion”, as well as the way Brazilianness operates in the contemporary world, while taking account of the discursive component of social practices and we should add, the discourse itself as a social practice.

In this discourse, the notions of Brazilian identity in the period of national construction are brought up-to-date and overcome. This sets out from ideas like miscegenation, mixture, cannibalism [anthropophagy] and amalgamation but is inevitably steered towards diversity. In the light of this, the forgers of “Brazilian fashion” will begin to cite Brazil as a country that is above all diverse and with an identity that lies in diversity itself and the lack of any synthesis or enumeration.

It is thus a question of enumerating differences rather than “resolving them” as unique types. In a time that is keen to have diversity, it will be a waste of effort to think of a single melting-pot in which there are different ingredients that form an indistinct and homogeneous stew. There is more point in using the image of a colourful buffet supper where the ingredients are not mixed in a definitive way but are suitably combined in accordance with specific requirements. If the logic of identities at the heart of the Nation-State shows an inclination towards unification and, for this reason, has appealed to the melting pot when necessary, the dynamics of the identities that lie at the heart of the niche markets, follow an altogether different recipe.

These are two distinct ways of coping with difference and setting up ‘otherness-identity’. In one of them, there is the State as the key player attempting to assimilate the differences into a single identity. In the other, the State plays a supporting role and there is the Market and its attempts to produce ‘difference’ as a merchandise. In the former, equality tends to mask differences and in the latter, the differences tend to mask the inequalities.

In this new balanced approach to difference, what is called social diversity, for example, conceals the transformation of inequality into a differential attribute at the heart of the world market of symbolic goods. The enhancement of biodiversity possesses the potential to turn nature into a merely economic resource. Finally the praise of national “ethnic diversity” conceives human populations as “genetic human capital”\textsuperscript{22} that can be investigated and exploited.

The unconditional valuation of cultural diversity risks making the players (those who are fixed in the roles they have assigned to them) become hostages of their cultural belongings and even sidestep the political potential of their claims for identity. When the “knack of doing things” (jeitinho) becomes “creativity” and “a sleight of hand” (gambiarra) turns into “flexibility”, inequality can be dubbed as “diversity” and it is likely that the contradictions will be “resolved” without being finally overcome.

\textbf{Notas}

1 With regard to this concept and it’s difference concerning “globalization”, see Renato Ortiz, \textit{Mundialização e Cultura} (1994).
The term "gambiarra", in Brazilian Portuguese, refers to the capacity to find imaginative ways to deal with adverse or unexpected situations with scant resources or improbable and unsuitable materials. This capacity to improvise is regarded, whether from the standpoint of Brazilian social thinking or through common sense, as an attribute that is peculiar to the Brazilian people. The expression is often used in a pejorative sense to designate something that is poor, shoddily made or made in a hurry. The radical irony lies in the fact that the "progress" which links us to Western modernity, rationality and the ability to comply with formal rules, should be attained by means of a "gambiarra" or in other words, through an improvised solution.

The so-called Brazilian modernist movement appeared in the 1920s and its hallmark was the The Modern Art Week of 1922. At this first period of inquiry into "the identity of Brazilian culture", the metaphor of anthropofagy was evoked by intellectuals and national artists to characterize what would be their stance with regard to "foreign influences", especially the European cultural vanguard which the movement was inspired by and sought to distinguish itself. The term refers to some indigenous groups that inhabited Brazilian territory before the period of colonization and who cannibalized their enemies defeated in war with the aim of acquiring their characteristics so that they could conquer and assimilate them at the same time. In a comparable way, the modernists regarded cultural anthropology as being the way to become "authentic" by integrating their own characteristics with some of the features if the European "other".

As stated by Mattelard, A. Diversité culturelle et mondialisation [Cultural diversity and globalisation].


Sérgio Buarque de Holanda is another exponent of Brazilian social thinking during the period of national construction. In 'The Roots of Brazil' the author analyzes what will be the challenges facing the young Brazilian nation. From the Weberian matrix, the author seeks the similarities and differences between the conditions in the country with regard to European modernity. Whereas in Europe, especially in the regions characterized by Protestantism, modernity is expressed in rationalist terms, the "Iberian heritage" that was bequeathed to Brazil, was a sentimental and emotional burden that was opposed to the impersonality of norms and formal relationships and which would prove an obstacle to Brazilian modernization. This conception of the author about Brazil gave rise to the notion of the "friendly practical man" and alluded to "the Brazilian way of doing things". This notion comes close to the conception of 'gambiarra' and consists of achieving determined goals without having recourse to what might be regarded as appropriate means or in other words, solving problems by means of informal and personal means which might involve breaking or disregarding laws, norms and social conventions. Consult Buarque de Holanda (1976) and DaMatta (1979, 1984) for further information about this.


Interview granted to the author by the Project Manager (in the fashion area) of Apex-Brasil, São Paulo in 2010.

Extract from the editorial of Vogue Brasil-ABEST (Spring-Summer edition, 2010), endorsed by the then Chairman of the institution. The publication is issued by the institution in a bilingual and English edition for the national and international events in which it takes part.

Extract taken from the editorial of Vogue-Brasil-ABEST (Winter edition, 2011), endorsed by the then Chairman of the institution. Our translation. The publication is, characteristically, in English.

Interview granted to the author in October, 2008 by the Director of Communications of the Luminosidade Company in São Paulo.

Interview granted to the author by the Manager of the Texbrasil programme in São Paulo, in 2009.

Extract from the subject "Brazilian Identity of the Catwalk" published in ABIT Texbrasil magazine, No. 6, 3rd June, 2011, p. 28.


Editorial with the heading Identity. Published in Vogue Brasil—Brazilian Footwear (Winter edition , 2010).


20 Interview granted to the author by the Superintendent of ABIT in Paris in 2010.
21 Regarding this, consult the work of Anne-Marie Thiesse, 1999.

References
ABIT Texbrasil Magazine. n. 01, ano 01, agosto 2009.
ABIT Texbrasil Magazine. n. 06, ano 03, junho de 2011.
VOGUE Brasil /Brazilian Footwear. Edição de inverno de 2010.