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The search for the self in The Brazilian Road Movie

The search over the meaning of one's national identity in the midst of social and political upheaval is far from new to Brazilians and is not a recent phenomena of the country's current economic boom. Throughout much of the history of Brazilian Cinema, Brazilians have been confronted with contradictory images of themselves on screen, from the early commercial productions of Vera Cruz to the political cinema of *Cinema Novo*, with its focus on the *sertao* (arid back lands) and *favelas* (slums), to the recent internationally acclaimed *Central Station* and *City of God*.

Although inserted in a different political and economic context which is more optimistic about the future, questions on what the nation stands for and the role of the individual in it, as well his/her existentialist quest for a meaning to life, seem to be the underlying themes that unite the diverse collection of essays by distinguished and emerging scholars in Sara Brandellero's *The Brazilian Road Movie* (2013). The book is part of the Iberian and Latin American Studies series and was published by the University of Wales Press. It is a timely contribution and is unique in its attempt to offer a critical examination of the road movie as a *genre*, with its narratives of displacement, hopelessness and *urge to belong*, and which have been present throughout many different Brazilian films spanning productions from the silent era to contemporary films.

The introduction starts situating the meaning of the road movie as a genre. We learn how it can be understood as a metaphor for hope in its emphasis on the significance of the journey as a means of self-discovery, reflecting the strive to find one's place in a confusing and chaotic (nation). This *aesthetic of feeling* seems to have defined the road movie in many films and has not only influenced Brazilian cinema, but many European productions of the 1950's, from Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) to North American films of the 1960's, including Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969), seen as the very epitome of the classic road movie.

The *Brazilian Road Movie* thus adds on to the growing sophisticated literature on Brazilian film that is being written in English, including Lucia Nagib's work (i.e. *Brazil on screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema and Utopia*) and other classics, like Johnson and Stam's *Brazilian Cinema*, which are key international references on Brazilian film and culture, whilst also opening up space for emerging authors. For those non-experts in the field, the book offers solid research and critical investigation of key Brazilian productions which cut across cinematic movements and time.

This existentialist angst is played out on screen by directors of different movements, spanning from Silvino Santos' geographies of Brazilian cities and focus on Rio de Janeiro as an example of modernity to Caca Diegues' 1979 *Bye Bye Brasil*, filmed during the dictatorship years, to Nagib's search for the core nation in "Foreign Land's Geography of Exclusion". We get acquainted with the origins of the genre from mainly the two first texts by Luciana Martins and Samuel Paiva ("Silvino Santos and the Mobile View" and "Paths of the Brazilian Road Movie", respectively), as well as discussions of curious films like *God is Brazilian* (2003) through Adriana Rouanet.

Other highlights of the edited collection include the analysis of three of Walter Salles' films (*Central Station* (1998), *Foreign Land* (1995) and *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), which explore the sense of rootlessness and search for hope in other countries and landscapes. This is case of the journey made inwards within Brazil of the two main characters of *Central Station*, the older lady played by Fernanda Montenegro and the young abandoned boy, who move away from the violent reality of Rio in search for the peacefulness of the North East setting, traditionally associated with underdevelopment.

Amongst Brazil's most internationally acclaimed productions, the chapter on *Bye Bye Brasil* also deserves attention. The film follows the adventures of a group of travelling artists struggling to make ends meet, moving around the country's territory in search for audiences. As *Brandellero* argues, in this film the director himself leaves the claustrophobic urban setting of the country's big cities to embark on a "journey of discovery for himself and the crew". The film closes by posing a

question to Brazilians, “where is Brazil heading?”, a philosophical concern that seems to run throughout the diverse narratives of these road movies.

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Affiliation:

Dr. Carolina Matos
Lecturer in Media and Communications
Department of Sociology, City University London
Northampton Square
London EC1V 0HB
E-mail: Carolina.Matos.1@city.ac.uk
Tel: 020-7040-4172 Room: D627