

# Between Heaven and Hell: Perceptions of Brazil and the United States in *Brazuca* Literature

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**Abstract.** Brazilian emigration to the United States has increased considerably in the past three decades. Brazilian immigrants have begun using literature, music, and cinema to give expression to their experiences. After quickly discussing Brazil's shift from a land of immigration to a region of emigration, this essay introduces a number of aspects of *Brazuca* literature, and analyzes how the American experience has created changing perceptions of Brazil and the United States for this new minority group, which is a feature of their in-betweenness as immigrants.

**Key Words:** Brazilian-Americans, Brazilian cinema, Brazilian immigration to the USA, Brazilian literature, Brazilianness, *Brazuca* literature, ethnic groups, Latinos in the USA, minorities

Foram sempre brasileiros sólidos, originários de um país sem o costume  
de expulsar seus patriotas. Um país cuja natureza, farta e extensa,  
poupava-os do dissabor e da humilhação de recorrerem  
a um prato de comida além-fronteira.  
Jamais portando à testa o sinal de imigrado.  
Nélida Piñon, *A República dos Sonhos*

E, naquele momento, a caminho do trabalho, teve um forte  
sentimento de que já não se encontrava nem em um lugar,  
nem no outro. Que estava perdida em um limbo entre o  
presente e o passado, embora suas raízes nunca tivessem  
parecido estar tão fortes e vivas em seu íntimo.  
Angela Bretas, *Sonho Americano*

— Para mim, *too much* é tomate mesmo...  
Angela Bretas, *Sonho Americano*

Exiled in Europe as a result of her political activism during the military dictatorship in Brazil, the character Breta in Nélida Piñon's *A República dos Sonhos* describes her home country as a land unaccustomed to sending its citizens away. This is actually one of the differences that Piñon's narrative points out between Brazil and Galicia, the region from which Breta's grandparents emigrated to Brazil. Unlike Brazil, "esta terra galega tem o terrível dom de expulsar os seus homens," writes Piñon (69). Despite what Piñon's character says, it was precisely in the eighties, when *A República dos Sonhos* was published, that Brazilian emigration to countries such as the United States, Paraguay, Japan, Germany and Portugal increased significantly.<sup>1</sup>

Brazil has indeed always been known as a country that welcomed immigrants rather than one that produced emigrants. According to Plínio Carrer Júnior, the first immigrants arrived in Brazil in 1744, the majority of the families brought from the Azores and Madeira Islands (9). In 1812 D. João VI's government delivered 400 Chinese laborers to work for the Fazenda Imperial de Santa Cruz and the Botanical Garden in Rio de Janeiro (10–11). Roughly 1,700 Swiss settled in the state of Rio de Janeiro and founded the city of Nova Friburgo in 1818 (11). German immigrants arrived in 1824, 1827 and 1829. The first group went to Rio Grande do Sul, the second established themselves in the state of São Paulo, and the third in Santa Catarina (11). In fact, Germans composed

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*Hispania* 88.4 (2005): 713–725

the majority of the 19,527 immigrants that populated the fifteen colonies from the state of Espírito Santo to Rio Grande do Sul from 1819 to 1849 (Andreazza and Nadalin 29). Around 180 Italian immigrants arrived in Salvador, the capital of the state of Bahia, between 1836 and 1837 (11). Carnier Júnior explains that most of the immigration in the beginning of the nineteenth century was meant to populate uninhabited areas in Brazil (11). However, the reason for the arrival of over 3,500,000 immigrants between 1850 and 1914—most of whom were of Italian origin—was to strengthen Brazil's work force (Andreazza and Nadalin 29). Among Spanish, Portuguese and others, almost 150,000 immigrants entered the country during World War I and in the region of 600,000 between the World Wars. Over 18,000 immigrants of diverse origins sought refuge in Brazil due to World War II. And between 1945 and 1970, more than 870,000 immigrants from several areas of the globe made their way to Brazil (Andreazza and Nadalin 29).

It was for economic reasons that most European immigrants left their homelands for Brazil. And similar motivations have impelled Brazilians to immigrate to other nations during the second half of the twentieth century. Historian Darién Davis explains that the first Brazilians to come to the United States in the beginning of the twentieth century were generally upper-class tourists or students. In addition, he notes the presence of the musicians who traveled with Carmen Miranda in the 1930s and 1940s, and those who introduced the Bossa Nova in the 1960s (9). Davis reminds us that “economic and political events in Brazil during the 1960s and early 1970s contributed to the steady increase in Brazilian immigration to the United States” (9).

The shift from immigration to emigration and the numerous mass departures to the United States was not, however, peculiar to Brazil. As Adela Pellegrino explains, “A segunda metade do século XX viu consolidar definitivamente a transformação da América Latina de um continente de imigração em outro de emigração. [...] A emigração para os Estados Unidos converteu-se em um dos fenômenos sociais de maior envergadura para alguns países latino-americanos” (58). In fact, Maxine L. Margolis points out that Brazilian immigration to the United States and other countries “is not an isolated phenomenon. It is part of a global process in which emigrants from newly industrializing and less industrializing nations become ‘strangers at the gate’ of the industrialized countries, seeking employment” (*Little* xv).

Although Margolis's argument concerning “the globalization of international migration” is pertinent, the explanation is not sufficient to alleviate Brazilians' general feelings of sadness regarding this issue. As Thomas Skidmore has stressed, emigration “is a bad sign because Brazilians are famous for their optimism about the country. Even during the military regime, people who went into exile came back as soon as they could. Optimism is in short supply in Brazil” (qtd. in Margolis, *Little* 3). After all, as José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy remarks, Brazil is “o país da América do Sul que mais exporta seus filhos” (41), a distinction which he—and certainly other Brazilians—consider “vergonhoso” (41). Nevertheless, Ana Cristina Braga Martes remarks that “O Brasil não é, contudo, um país de emigração, pois trata-se de movimentos espontâneos, não induzidos por políticas governamentais” (21).

Davis complained in 1997 that “despite their growing importance, there [had] been little scholarship dedicated to Brazilians in the United States or *Brazucas*, as they are often called, although many short articles have appeared in both the Brazilian and the American press” (8). He cited José Victor Bicalho's *Yes, Eu Sou Brazuca* and the work of Margolis and Frank Goza as examples of the few studies that had been done in the field (8). Davis comments that this lack of information has helped to create stereotypes and misinformation about Brazilian-Americans.

This picture has changed quickly, however. Alluding to Margolis's well-known 1998 book, *An Invisible Minority: Brazilians in New York*, Christopher Mitchell suggested in 2002 that due to the recent proliferation of literature about Brazilian emigration to the United States “o que antes era considerado uma ‘minoridade invisível’ tem se tornado consideravelmente mais visível” (177). Without a doubt, both the number of Brazilian immigrants in the United States and the studies about their conditions have increased greatly. According to the Palácio do Itamarati, that is, the *Ministério das Relações Exteriores*, there are 800,000 Brazilian immigrants in the United States (qtd. in Meihy 40). However, Meihy suggests that a more realistic number would be

around 1,500,000 (41). Not only have Margolis, Goza and Davis continued their work on the subject, but other scholars such as Teresa Sales, Ana Cristina Braga Martes, Bernadete Beserra, and, more recently, José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy have contributed actively to the discussion of several aspects of Brazilian immigration in the US. Even the *Rede Globo de Televisão*, the most powerful TV network in Brazil, is exploring the theme of the immigration to the U.S. in *América*, one of its current soap operas. Written by Glória Perez and directed by Jayme Monjardim, the TV “superprodução” aired in March 2005, and was recorded in Texas, Miami, and in Rio de Janeiro.

Literature soon became one of the ways through which Brazilian immigrants “documented” their experiences in the US. I am calling the genre composed by these texts “*Brazuca*” literature, borrowing a term commonly used to designate Brazilians living and working—generally illegally—abroad. *Brazuca* texts set the beginning of the “Brazilian-American” literature, although most of them were written in Portuguese and published in Brazil by people residing in the U.S. only temporarily. There is certainly already a group of people in the United States that can be called Brazilian-American due to their American birth and Brazilian origins. The first generations of Brazilian-Americans *per se* are beginning to reach adulthood and, as is the case with other immigrant groups, will soon begin to discuss the complexities of their identity and their experiences at the crossroads of two (or more) cultures, giving continuity to the work that *Brazuca* authors have started.<sup>2</sup> While these explorations may take diverse (artistic) forms, literature (or fiction), in its capacity both to represent and contest reality and to serve as an intersection between the past and the present, frequently emerges as the medium of choice for those bi-cultural individuals who wish to document and give expression to their specific experience of “in-betweeness.”

In an interview with Meihy, 82-year-old New York resident Guttemberg Moreira claims to be responsible for the appearance of the term “Brasuca.” Moreira says that he played on a soccer team in Central Park in which all the players were called by their nationalities. He was known as either “Brasileiro” or “carioca,” which is a term for Brazilians from the city of Rio de Janeiro. Since most foreign players on his team could not pronounce either “Brasileiro,” or “carioca,” he became “brasoca,” which is a combination of both words. With time the term became “Brasuca” (38). According to Martes, the term “*Brazuca*” sometimes carries a pejorative connotation, “um tom de deboche,” but to me it seems to be more frequently used merely to state and emphasize Brazilians’ nationality and identity abroad.<sup>3</sup>

There is, however, some disagreement regarding the spelling of the term. At present three alternative spellings exist. *Brasuca*, *Brazuca*, and *Brazuka*. *Brazuca* seems to be the most common and it is the one I have adopted, following José Victor Bicalho’s example in the title of his book *Yes, Eu Sou Brazuca*, which was my first exposure to the term. Margolis also uses it in her pioneering work, and so does Sergio Vilas Boas in his novel *Os Estrangeiros do Trem N*. Meihy, on the other hand, spells it *Brasuca*. It makes sense, if we look at the junction of the spellings of “Brasileiro,” and “carioca,” which, as we have seen, is how he was told the word came into being. However, foreigners, especially Americans, would perhaps be more likely to spell the word with a “z,” since the letter “s” sounds like one in the word “brasileiro” in Portuguese. Not to mention that the word “Brazil” is written with a “z” in English, which was probably the language used in Moreira’s soccer games in Central Park. But perhaps keeping the “s” was Meihy’s way of making the word more “Brazilian.”

The spelling *Brazuka* appears in the title of the article “Brazukas de Boston,” published in *Revista Veja* in 1990 (qtd. in Martes 48), and in a number of websites created by Brazilians abroad.<sup>4</sup> This use is analogous to Meihy’s own use of the word, but semantically opposite to it. While Meihy “Brazilianizes” it, those who spell it with a “k” unconsciously—and perhaps unwillingly—“Americanize” it. It is relevant that the differences in the spelling of the term have to do with the use of the letters “s” and “z” or “c” and “k.” The vacillation between “s” and “z” or “c” and “k” in the word *Brazuca* can be seen as representative of the shifting of cultural positions between Brazil and the United States in which *Brazucas* are often involved. Whereas “s” and “c” can be easily associated with Brazil, “z” and “k” point to the United States, as these are

some of the letters which allow for the distinction between a number of cognate words in Portuguese and American English. A good example is the word “Brazil” itself, which is written with an “s” in Portuguese.

This lack of rigidity can in fact help to illustrate the in-betweenness of the *Brazuca* category. Immigrants naturally undergo a twofold cultural experience due to the pairing off of their personal background and the new foreign reality they encounter. In the case of the *Brazucas*, as Kátia Santos Mota explains, this in-betweenness is accentuated even more because of the transitory quality they attribute to their immigration: “os imigrantes brasileiros dizem estar vivendo temporariamente em terra estrangeira na intenção de fazer dinheiro para retornar ao país. Estabelece-se, assim, uma situação de vida dividida entre duas realidades: estar nos Estados Unidos para organizar a vida no Brasil” (Mota 151). This is how the character Miro in *Yes, Eu sou Brazuca* puts it: “O verdadeiro brazuca seria aquele que não mais conseguiria viver no Brasil, aquele que ficaria em um vaivém sem fim. Esta é a definição dele” (Bicalho 56).

By shifting between “s” and “z” or “c” and “k,” *Brazucas* have been creating and defining their own *entre-lugar*, a space in which Brazilian culture interacts with American society, and a micro-image of a Brazilian society is created within American culture. It is this impression that allows Édel Holz to name her play “Meu Brasil é Aqui!” But that image is not a perfect match to the one many Brazilians had while they were living in Brazil, since *Brazuca* experience is born out of a renegotiation of cultural identity as the result of the need for contextualization, integration, and survival. It is an ongoing battle between memories of a past gone by that is constantly threatening to return, and the desire—or lack thereof—to assimilate, function, and perhaps, belong.

*Brazuca* art already manifests itself not only through the novel, but as film, drama, and poetry as well. In whatever form it appears, *Brazuca* art documents the history of the Brazilian immigrant experience in the United States. This documentary function is clear in the movie *A Fronteira*, by Roberto Carminatti and Zeca Barros. This is how writer and co-producer Barros describes the film:

[It is] the saga of two Brazilian families who put everything at risk and cross the border into the United States from Mexico, in search of a better life. Having gotten over the first leg of the journey, they all confront unexpected obstacles as they struggle to both reach their goals and adapt to their new reality. They face the pain of homesickness and unexpected mishaps. They fight for their dreams with the same courage and determination with which they cross new frontiers that appear on their way. (42)

*A Fronteira* was chosen as “best film” in the 2003 Latin American Film Festival in New York. Though it has yet to be officially released, it has been featured in American higher-education institutions such as Harvard and Brown Universities and Middlebury College. It was also shown at the Good Time Theater in Somerville, Massachusetts, from January 10 to 13 in 2005.

Performed at the Actor’s Workshop Theater in South Boston from September 17 to 19 in 2004, Holz’s play “Meu Brasil é Aqui!”—like *A Fronteira*—“é um retrato da vida do imigrante brasileiro nos Estados Unidos.” It depicts aspects of the *Brazuca* experience such as “a dificuldade em aprender um novo idioma depois de uma certa idade, a solidão, a saudade dos que ficaram do outro lado do mundo, o *buzzy*,<sup>5</sup> os *days off*, a convivência com outras pessoas, o amor pelo Brasil, o desejo de não voltar, o desejo de voltar.”<sup>6</sup> Examples of *Brazuca* poetry can be found in the recently published compilation *Brava Gente Brasileira* (2004). The anthology was organized by *Brazuca* author and Florida resident Angela Bretas, who put together works by *Brazucas* in the United States, Japan, Germany, and Switzerland.<sup>7</sup> Like Carminatti’s movie and Holz’s play, Bretas’s anthology helps us to “conhecer a face do brasileiro em países estrangeiros, na voz dos próprios imigrantes” (9).

However, the novel is unquestionably the genre that has most commonly attracted the *Brazucas*. I have pointed out elsewhere that “*Brazuca* novels are generally rich and important documents that discuss not only Brazilian immigration to the United States, but also the cultures of Brazil and the United States” (576). Moreover, “these authors create a dialogical relationship

between a Brazil seen from a geographical distance and with the authority of memory and a utopian vision of a new Brazil, created from expectation as well as influenced and legitimated by the immigrant perspective and experience” (576–77). Other characteristics of this genre are the use of everyday language and simple structures, and focus on verisimilitude (577). Although they have been written in the so-called postmodern age, these novels are realist works and attempt to reproduce reality as it was experienced. That is why there are elements of genres such as the report, autobiography and biography, testimony and journalistic writing in them (577).

Antonio Candido believes that “desde o início a ficção brasileira teve inclinação pelo documentário, e durante o século XIX foi promovendo uma espécie de grande exploração da vida na cidade e no campo, em todas as áreas, em todas as classes, revelando o País aos seus habitantes, como se a intenção fosse elaborar o seu retrato completo e significativo” (172). *Brazuca* fiction comes from within this Brazilian tradition. By portraying Brazilian emigration to the United States, they not only reveal a very important phenomenon in contemporary Brazil, but also follow the path traced by earlier literary works and movies that described the foreign immigrant experience in Brazil. Earlier authors such as Antônio de Alcântara Machado, contemporary writers such as Nélida Piñon and Moacyr Scliar, as well as films such as *O Quatrilho* and *Gaijin* have discussed immigration to Brazil. Therefore, it is only natural that Brazilian emigration to other lands has now become the subject of fiction.

Valéria Barbosa de Magalhães proposes that “as obras de ficção sobre brasileiros nos EUA poderiam ser divididas entre aquelas publicadas na década de 80 e aquelas publicadas na década de 90” (2). According to Magalhães, this division is important because the 1980s were considered the “lost decade” for immigration scholars, whereas the 1990s showed a more consolidated immigration (2). The author cites José Victor Bicalho, Henfil, Reinaldo Moraes, Sônia Nolasko, Carlos E. Novaes and Silviano Santiago as members of the 1980s generation. In the 1990s she mentions Tereza Albués, Roberto Athayde, Júlio Bráz, Silvana Batista, Norma Guimarães, Thales de Leon, Regina Rheda, Luis Alberto Scotto, and Sérgio Vilas Boas (2). For her, it is possible to find thematic similarities between the works in each decade:

O período em que cada livro foi publicado resulta em temas que traduzem as preocupações da época à qual se referem. Os romances da década de 80 enfatizam o deslumbramento com o consumismo e com a vanguarda “oitentista” nos EUA e ressaltam bastante o contato dos brasileiros com as drogas, muito em voga no período. Aqueles que se remetem à década de 70, tratam também do tema do exílio. Já os livros da década de 90 se voltam mais para o mercado de trabalho, para o medo da deportação, para o dilema do retorno e para a convivência entre os brasileiros no exterior. (2)

Furthermore, she identifies four recurring myths in the novels she analyzes: the myth of passage, which describes the change to a new life, the myth of paradise, which can be seen in the immigrant’s feeling of awe and experience of success in the new land, the myth of Phoenix, which is in the immigrant’s heroic search for a rebirth, and the myth of the eternal return, which is present in the constant indecision whether to go back to Brazil or not (5–6).

Despite the increase in the number of *Brazuca* works, it is still important to point out that “a cultural production reflective of the Brazilian-American experience is still at an early stage” (Davis 13). Nevertheless, the existing works exhibit and analyze several important aspects of the *Brazucas*’ in-betweenness. The *Brazuca* experience is an occasion of self-awareness. Between “s” and “z,” *Brazucas* question and review racial, ethnic, cultural and national identities. In a previous essay, for instance, I have shown how some of these texts discuss *Brazucas*’ identity as Latinos in the United States, and proposed that they are situated in an in-between position in which they both admit to and reject their *latinidade* (Tosta). In this paper, however, I will concentrate on another characteristic of the *entre-lugar* of the *Brazuca* immigrant experience: the shift between positive and negative in their perceptions of both Brazil and the United States. Hence I have chosen the title “Between Heaven and Hell.” From this perspective we shall look at examples of *Brazuca* literature in order to gain an understanding of how the American experience creates changing opinions about both countries.

The polarity, “heaven versus hell,” indicating oppositions such as “good against bad” or “love as opposed to hate” is a recurring theme in *Brazuca* works. This is clear, for instance, in the opening lines of Holz’s play “Meu Brasil é Aqui!”<sup>8</sup> The character “Malandro” enters the stage saying,

Se você saiu do Brasil:

- 1: Porque cansou de viver por um fio
- 2: Porque o Collor roubou seu dinheiro
- 3: Porque você sempre sonhou viver no estrangeiro
- 4: Porque se entupiu de dívidas
- 5: Porque tava mais apertado que saco de travesti
- 6: Mais duro que pau de tarado
- 7: Tudo estava dando errado
- 8: Acredita que o dinheiro traz felicidade
- 9: Não tinha mais trabalho pra gente da sua idade
- 10: Roubaram sua casa, seu tennis, sua mulher...

Se você se identificar com pelo menos 3 opções acima, você é um dos nossos. Diga adeus a pobreza. Agradeça. Aqui é melhor que agência lotérica. Você está nos Estados Unidos da América! (2–15)

Malandro’s speech reveals a number of significant aspects of Brazilian emigration to the United States. He lists not only some of the principal reasons why Brazilians have left their country, but also why they chose the United States as their destination. All of his reasons, however, are economic, including the consequences of the “Plano Collor,” a harsh measure taken by President Fernando Affonso Collor de Mello’s government in 1990 which changed Brazilian currency from the *Cruzado* to the *Cruzeiro* and blocked Brazilians’ access to any amount above Cr \$50,000 (around US \$50 at the time) in their checking and saving accounts. The “Plano Collor” confiscated 80% of Brazilians’ money, which is why it has been considered one of the primary motivations for the departure of many Brazilians from Brazil.

The character Miro, in *Yes, Eu Sou Brazuca*, has a different perception from Malandro’s regarding the reasons that have led to Brazilian emigration. For him, “poucos são aqueles que só buscam o dólar. Por detrás do dinheiro existe, muitas histórias; muitas vezes o dólar é apenas uma justificativa, uma artimanha que possibilita um corte, uma mudança” (Bicalho 57). In fact, Malandro defines the *Brazuca* as a person who left Brazil due to economic hardship and came to the United States in search of wealth. Such a definition, different from Miro’s, seems to limit the *Brazuca* community to the illegal immigrants, as it would exclude those who came to the U.S. first as students or to work in their professional fields—such as the musicians Davis mentions in his essay (9). In addition, it establishes a contrast between Brazil and the United States: the first as “hell,” where one faces suffering and destitution, and the second as “heaven,” where all problems are solved and dreams can come true.

This characterization, however, is not in any way rigid. Rather it is, in fact, very fluid and unstable. Holz’s play demonstrates this very clearly. A scene that follows Malandro’s entrance on stage shows musicians singing “Vim pros Estados Unidos pra poder enriquecer / Vim pros Estados Unidos pra mandar dólar proce” (18–19). The lyrics elucidate the in-betweenness Katia Santos Mota and others have noted, since it talks about a *Brazuca* who remains connected to Brazil by the desire to return, suggested by the act of sending money home. The portrayal of the United States as a place where one can acquire wealth alludes to its “heavenly” character. However, this identity is simultaneously destroyed by the tune to which the words are sung: the well-known Brazilian song “Retirantes,” by Dorival Caymmi and Jorge Amado, which served as the theme song for the 1976–1977 soap opera “Escrava Isaura,” broadcast by *Rede Globo*. The soap opera was an adaptation of Gilberto Braga from Bernardo Guimarães’s 1875 homonymous novel. The original lyrics are as follows: “Vida de negro é difícil/ é difícil como o que” (1–2). The song has since become an anthem used to describe not only the injustices of slavery, but also the toil of ordinary Brazilian people.

By coupling Holz’s words and Caymmi’s music, the author of the play creates a semantic

intersection that highlights both the positive and negative aspects of the *Brazuca* experience in the United States. *Brazucas* are implicitly compared to slaves, which is a way to draw attention to their subaltern and oppressed condition in their new home. Subalternity and hard work are paired off not only by Caymmi's music, but also by the play's action, when, "ao mesmo tempo, os atores no palco, passam com vassouras, mops, pás de neve" (Holz 48–49). The brooms, mops, and snow shovels are cleaning tools and as such are both symbols of a typical occupation of *Brazucas* in the U.S., and of their struggle to succeed.<sup>9</sup> Maria, the protagonist of Angela Bretas's *Sonho Americano*, for instance, "fazia faxina em quatro casas por semana" (53). In fact, an entire chapter is dedicated to housecleaners in Bretas's novel (55–57), in which they are described as "mulheres guerreiras" who are "carentes, tristes, solitárias" (55) and "cansadas" (56). The association with hard work is made at the very beginning of the chapter, in the author's short poem which serves as epigraph. It is entitled "Colméia" (Beehive), suggesting not only the cleaner's strong sense of community, but also their industriousness: "Na luta diária, / labuta a / operária" (55).<sup>10</sup>

The snow shovels in Holz's play are also evocative of the harsh North American winters, during which the amount and intensity of cleaning work tends to increase (48–49). These narratives therefore suggest an otherwise unlikely connection between occupations such as housecleaner or dishwasher, and wintertime, since both are associated with the act of cleaning and linked to the carrying out of laborious chores.<sup>11</sup> From this perspective the United States is perceived as "hell." One can get rich in the U.S., but only as the result of an uphill struggle: "Da América você leva o ouro, mas deixa o couro" (Bicalho 36). This is how Bicalho's character Toni puts it: "O Brasileiro só sai de casa para trabalhar, não estamos acostumados com isto, as pessoas ficam melancólicas, as ruas desertas" (Bicalho 30). For Toni, this overload of work is characteristic of the *Brazuca* experience and, as I have noted, it "goes against the Brazilian stereotype of being relaxed" (Tosta 579). That is why Toni believes that "Este negócio de ser brazuca é foda" (Bicalho 10).

*Brazucas* are constantly referring to how much work they have, both in their fiction and in real life. In his song "Diáspora Brasileira," *Brazuca* musician and composer Fernando Holz implies that the hard work of the immigrant is an obstacle in the way of the *Brazuca* experience. The composer alludes to the opportunities for prosperity, "They told me life over there / will be better than here / [...] / a thousand promises" (1–3), but he also emphasizes the effort one needs to put forth: "Seven days of hard labor, / Of sweat, of painful struggle" (14–15). The amount of work itself even becomes a justification for ending the American experience for some *Brazucas*, when "hell" becomes unbearable: "To tão bizado / Só faço trabalhar / To tão cansado / To pensando em voltar" (Holz 44–47).<sup>12</sup>

Wanderley, a newly-arrived *Brazuca* in Holz's play, considers returning to Brazil because of the backbreaking nature of the work he must do. In his case we also see a shift from "heaven" to "hell"—and the other way around: "Eu quero ir embora, tio. Achava que o trabalho na roça era pesado, mas a dish washer, a pintura e a construção ganham da roça mil vezes. Só vou juntar o que eu preciso, e voltar ligeirinho pro Brasil. Isso aqui não é vida não [...]" (255–58). For Wanderley, his life in Brazil was "hell," and he anticipated finding "heaven" in the United States. His expectations are not met, however, and his perceptions of both Brazil and the United States are transformed after his American experience. The United States becomes "hell" and Brazil is now viewed as an idyllic heaven-like place. But the shift from "hell" to "heaven" does not stop at this moment in the scene. When Wanderley decides to return to Brazil, he is again reminded of that country's "hellish" side: "Do jeito que o Brasil tá, não dou seis meses proê voltar pra cá" (424–25); "Quem experimenta o dolinha seminal, jamais se acostuma de novo com o real" (491–92). In fact, Wanderley himself agrees with this comment: "Vou sentir falta das verdinha" (490).

"Meu Deus do céu / Num guento esse frio," complains a character in Holz's play (23–24). Winter is "hell" for *Brazucas* not only because of the work one has cleaning driveways and streets. The emphasis on the cold season provides a contrast between Brazil and the US at two levels. First, it highlights the status of Brazil as a tropical country. Second, it associates the coldness or warmth of the weather with the culture and people of each nation. It is in winter then

that Americans are more commonly perceived as “Americans,” and as “cold” people by *Brazucas*. This becomes evident in *O Sonho Americano*, when the protagonist Maria complains that “Fazia muito frio no inverno e ela sentia falta de um banho de mar” (54). “Going to the beach” indicates not only one’s connection to a tropical area, but also to a warm-hearted culture and people, as opposed to the stereotypical image of the United States as a “cold” country. However, let us not forget that winter is also part of the “heaven” image that some Brazilians have of the United States prior to their immigration. As snow is very rare in Brazil and is often associated with romantic scenes in American movies, many Brazilians incorporate such idyllic, wintry images into their conception of the American experience.

But as the following part of the lyrics to a song in Holz’s play shows, while cold weather and snow look good on screen, they do not necessarily cause the same impression when experienced on a daily basis: “Eu via a neve nos filmes e achava uma beleza / Hoje escavo o meu carro / Pra mim isso é uma tristeza” (Holz 40–42). This is, in fact, one of the ways in which Holz’s play discusses how one’s outside perception of a foreign country might be different from the actual cultural experience. Holz uses a conversation on foreign-language teaching, in which Wanderley talks to his uncle about his interview with the immigration officers upon his arrival in the US, to emphasize this idea:

WANDERLEY. Pra não dar bandeira, eu só falei uma coisa o tempo inteiro: “The book is on the table.”  
GERALDINHO. O que?

WANDERLEY. “The book is on the table,” eu falei pros homi.

DORIVAL. Vem cá, tudo o que te perguntaram, oce respondia isso, Wanderley?

BOLO FOFO. Mas é só isso que a gente aprende de inglês em escola no Brasil: “The book is on the table.”  
E essa frase não serve pra nada, Wanderley. (122–28)

Most Brazilians who have studied English in Brazil will recognize “The book is on the table”—and its choral repetition—as the classic suggestion of traditional and ineffective English language teaching. It is generally a reference to the overuse of non-contextualized repetition drills, as is common in foreign-language-teaching methods such as the Audiolingual.<sup>13</sup> Here language represents culture. Therefore, the sentence suggests not only Wanderley’s lack of knowledge of the English language, but also Brazilians’ ignorance of American culture. The uselessness of the sentence indicates his lack of preparation to face the new culture he is about to encounter. This is yet another example of the many ways in which “heaven” turns into “hell” in these works as the protagonists find their actual cultural experiences to be vastly different from what they had expected.

Considering that *Brazucas*’ impression of winter is negative in part because the nature of the season in most parts of the United States is so unlike Brazil’s tropical weather, one could generalize and claim that the “hell” image is usually the result of *Brazucas*’ contact with “difference.” Let us consider the following passage, for instance: “Era um rigoroso inverno e Maria, sozinha dentro de seu apartamento, via através da vidraça um mundo que até pouco tempo era desconhecido para ela [...]. Como poderia estar vivendo assim em um continente tão carente do calor tropical? Questionava a si mesmo e nostalgicamente relembrava as manhãs ensolaradas e quentes do Brasil” (*Sonho* 83). This excerpt is from a chapter entitled “Manhã de Inverno.” It is winter and the character is isolated and lonely. The text connects Maria’s suffering to her relationship to the unknown, that is, to her inability to deal with difference, and with the “other.” Maria, then, regards the American experience as “hell,” whereas her memory of warm, tropical Brazil seems to her a kind of “heaven.”

However, one cannot really equate winter to otherness and to “hell,” as my own reading of the previous scene indicates. It is possible to destroy such an idea, for example, with one reading of Bretas’s poem “Manhã de Inverno,” inserted in her homonymous chapter: “Pessoas contínuam deitadas / Felizes, descansadas / Tranqüilas e satisfeitas / Por acordarem em uma manhã de inverno” (*Sonho* 85). Winter, therefore, does not constitute a purely negative experience. Rather it allows people to rest and to take a break from the everyday fast-paced rhythm of their immigrant



lives. It is thus associated here with happiness, peace, and satisfaction. Moreover, there are other aspects of the United States that are perceived as new, and therefore indicate a higher level of *Brazucas'* contact with otherness, that are also depicted as positive, that is, as "heaven."

A common example is the allusion to the United States' economic superiority. This is sometimes demonstrated through the increased buying power of characters. In *Meu Brasil é Aqui!* there are at least two examples of this. One is when the character Bolo Fofó complains that Geraldinho broke his "perfume de 100 dólares" (163–64). Bolo Fofó's sentence contains more information than the price of the perfume. It implies that the perfume is expensive, and that he would never be able to buy it if he were in Brazil. He emphasizes the price of the perfume because he wants to call attention not only to what he lost, but also to his augmented economic power. In this case, the United States is "heaven" because material possessions are easier to acquire here.

An emphasis is also placed on buying power when Bolo Fofó scratches Nestor's automobile. "Ai, minha mercedinha novinha," exclaims his wife. It is not unintentionally that the author chooses a Mercedes as his car. This kind of vehicle is very expensive in Brazil and, as such, is a symbol of the aristocracy, a group to which Nestor certainly does not belong. It is worth noting that it is also not unintentional that his character is wealthy. Nestor is a "crente," and there are leaders of some Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches in Brazil whose true religiosity is questioned because they have gained considerable wealth. It is not unusual for Brazilians to criticize those Evangelical pastors who put their imported cars on display. The same suggestion of illicit gain of wealth among Brazilian evangelicals and consequent implication of disapproval is put forward in this scene in Holz's play.

Other aspects of the United States that are perceived as new and depicted as positive are certain federal and state laws. For example, the character Dorival in Holz's play is pleased by the fact that "16 anos aqui, já pode dirigir" (Holz 147). The law allows him to give his son a car as a reward for his good performance in school. At the same time, the U.S. can turn into hell due to its excess of regulations. This is the case when Rui, Hugo, Maria, and Marlene go camping and they complain about the area's many rules:

Lotado, naquela época do ano, o *camping*, repleto de barracas, possuía regras e mais regras: - Não pescar com isca tal. / Não usar isqueiros. Atente ao fogo. / Proibido caçar aves silvestres. / Barulho após as 22 horas é proibido. / Só é permitido utilizar as churrasqueiras destinadas. / Proibido nadar na cachoeira. / Não atrapalhar os ursos! / Não pisar em áreas verdes, caminhe pelas trilhas destinadas. / Não subir em árvores. / Não perturbar seu vizinho de barraca. / Bebidas alcoólicas são proibidas. (*Sonho* 79)

The enumeration of rules—and prohibitions—in this scene is clearly a commentary on the Brazilian perception of American society as a whole. They suggest a number of typically American characteristics such as organization, concern with nature, cleanliness, respect for the others and their rights, as well as discipline. All of these restrictions lead the *Brazucas* to pose the question, "Isso é camping ou campo de concentração?" (79). This question reveals the extent to which *Brazucas* perceive Americans as rigid and disciplined, which suggests, not surprisingly, that Brazilians see themselves as more relaxed and flexible.

As we can see, *Brazuca* works show both negative and positive perceptions of the United States and Brazil. The first is a place where dreams can be achieved, but at a very high cost, as expressed in Bretas's poem "La dulce vita?": "No tacho de cobre / O doce ferve / ... e cansa o braço" (*Sonho* 121). Bretas questions how "sweet" life really is in the United States, since one does manage to achieve one's goals, but pays a considerable price for it. "De quê adianta minha filha estar cursando uma universidade se nunca a vemos na hora da ceia?," asks an elderly Hispanic woman in *Sonho Americano* (144). Bretas's protagonist also wonders the same: "O trabalho de faxineira finalmente estava abrindo-lhe as portas para a América. [...] Mas a aventura de imigrar para os Estados Unidos transformava-se crescentemente em uma realidade assustadora" (*Sonho* 54).

Americans are frequently characterized as selfish, bad-humored, and boring in *Brazuca* works: "O ônibus lotado de pessoas com expressões cansadas e carrancudas seguia sua rotina

habitual” (Bretas *Sonho* 39); “aqui na América é cada um por si e Deus por todos” (*Sonho* 33). However, this stereotype is dismantled, for instance, when the character Maria realizes that “naquele país, aparentemente tão distante e frio, há pessoas capazes de fazer um gesto gentil” (*Sonho* 41). Nevertheless, it is true that, as Martes suggests, in these works “Os americanos são, invariavelmente, identificados nas entrevistas como sendo ‘frios’, ‘duros’, ‘muito sérios’, ‘distantes’, ‘excessivamente formais’, ‘só pensam em dinheiro’ etc. A estes ‘adjetivos’, os entrevistados contrapõem a ‘alegria’, o ‘calor’, a ‘amizade’, a ‘informalidade’ e não raras vezes o ‘jeitinho’ dos brasileiros” (Martes 158).

The same shift in attitude is seen when Brazil is discussed. “Saudade” helps these characters choose good, special memories about their homeland. “Bateu a saudade infinita, de sentir novamente o sabor dos paezinhos quentes e fresquinhos nas manhãs preguiçosas, comprados na padaria da esquina” (*Sonho* 144); “Lembro-me de quando era criança e dos inesquecíveis passeios” (*Sonho* 91–92). Because of their personal limitations as undocumented immigrants, Brazil becomes a paradise, “heaven”: “Que saco... To com saudade de casa que é brincadeira, viu? As praias do Nordeste, aquele mar lindo... To presa, sem poder sair daqui. Isso me mata!” (Holz 187–89), while the United States is depicted as a prison, “hell.” But when they remember the economic crisis, Brazil is perceived once again as “hell.” That is what occurs when Maria’s boyfriend Lucas is deported and tells her that “a situação no Brasil não estava nada boa, que a crise econômica e a inflação eram assustadoras” (*Sonho* 44). Memory does not always work in favor of Brazil either. As Martes points out, “Quando os brasileiros olham para os Estados Unidos contrastando este país com o Brasil, tendem a convergir para um campo comum: a valorização do respeito e da cidadania que eles percebem existir na sociedade Americana. Neste sentido, a memória cultural trazida do país de origem é capaz de reforçar positivamente suas percepções acerca da sociedade hospedeira” (166).

Thus, while these texts expose a number of stereotypical judgments about both countries, a more careful reading reveals that they question and deconstruct these same ideas as well. The following passage, a dialogue between an American woman and two *Brazucas*, illuminates this ambiguity: “Tudo porque o Brasil ficou no meu coração e na minha cabeça desde 1976. Quero aprender português de qualquer jeito. Ainda vou morar no Brasil!” (Holz 108–10). The American loves Brazil and desires to live there, where she believes she will find happiness. The two *Brazucas* reflect on her answer, replying: “CLOVIS. E a gente querendo aprender inglês pra viver aqui pra sempre... / BRUNO. Ninguém tá satisfeito com nada” (Holz 211–12). Here we see one of the ideas many of these novels emphasize: Brazil and the United States, their people and culture, are simply different, and not better or worse than one another. Like every nation, both have positive and negative aspects. Criticizing is part of human nature, and finding happiness in one or the other place does not have anything to do with nationality, but with one’s individual experiences. Thus, as Martes comments, “os brasileiros tendem a avaliar positivamente suas experiências migratórias pessoais” (103).

Martes points out that “É olhando para o Brasil que [os imigrantes brasileiros] avaliam a sociedade Americana. Não por acaso, vários aspectos considerados positivos nos Estados Unidos são justamente aqueles considerados negativos no Brasil, e vice-versa” (153). Similarly, as Martes suggests (166), Brazilian immigrants also turn to the United States in order to evaluate Brazil. Renato Ortiz proposes that “toda identidade se define em relação a algo que lhe é exterior, ela é uma diferença” (7). It is natural that Brazilians look at the new culture and society with which they have come into contact, first through a Brazilian lens. Difference, in this case, might generate negative perceptions. In these cases the United States will be portrayed as “hell”—essentially because it will fail to offer some of the attributes that are inherently Brazilian—and Brazil will thus nostalgically become “heaven.” However, when difference produces positive perceptions of the host country—now “heaven”—it will almost always reflect poorly on Brazil since, as Ortiz (and Martes) suggests, it is difference and their analysis of otherness that are guiding these viewpoints.

On the other hand, the shift from “heaven” to “hell” in these texts reveals both positive and

negative traits of both Brazil and the United States. Moreover, this recurring change of perceptions underscores the fact that they are actually personal judgments, rather than cultural truths or societal characteristics. *Brazuca* works also suggest that the Brazilian community is still not very well integrated into American culture in general, which means that some of the present perceptions may change in the future, as more *Brazucas* become fluent in English, manage to interact with American people and thus participate more actively in American society. As this new exchange between Brazilians and Americans in the United States intensifies, the marks of Brazilian identity on American culture become more noticeable, as do the influences of the American experience on Brazil.

## NOTES

Christopher Mitchell comments that Brazilian immigration to the US started "almost abruptly in the mid-1980s" (177). Teresa Sales also points out that "os primeiros tempos da imigração brasileira [foram] em meados dos anos 80" ("Identidade" 18). See Mehy 40 and 41 for official and unofficial estimates of the number of Brazilians living abroad.

Due to the intense immigration the country has experienced, Brazilians, like Americans, have also experienced cultural confluence in their native land. Although Brazilians generally tend to consider themselves first and foremost Brazilians, the American experience is likely to awaken them to their parents' or grandparents' ethnic roots.

<sup>1</sup>Ana Cristina Braga Martes, e-mail to the author, 17 Jan 2005.

<sup>2</sup>See, for instance, <<http://www.ubiratanmalta.ubbi.com.br/>> and <[http://www.misura.org/cgi-bin/mf/ngthsoflp.cgi?entry\\_id=812](http://www.misura.org/cgi-bin/mf/ngthsoflp.cgi?entry_id=812)>. The spelling *Brazuka* also appears in the title of Bicalho's work *Yes, Eu Sou Brazuca* as it is printed in Martes's bibliography to her book *Brasileiros nos Estados Unidos*, which was just a typographical error.

<sup>3</sup>The author is playing with the English adjective "busy," as if a Brazilian with a poor command of English had attempted to use it, to indicate the amount of hard work Brazilians have in the United States. The word is, in fact, commonly used among *Brazucas* within the Brazilian communities in the United States. As some *Brazuca* novels do, Holz's play attempts to reproduce aspects of the every day life of *Brazucas*, including their usage of English and Portuguese. That is why there are several instances of non-standard Portuguese, as spoken in some rural areas or by less-educated people, and examples in which English words are mixed with Portuguese ones.

<sup>4</sup>This quote and the previous one are from the brochure handed out to the audience at the Actors' Workshops during the performance in South Boston in September 2004.

<sup>5</sup>It is still too early to state whether or not the term "Brazuca" will be used only in relation to immigration to the United States. My guess is that it will be expanded to include works by Brazilian immigrants all over the world, since the term *Brazuca* seems already to be used to describe Brazilian immigrants in countries other than the U.S.

<sup>6</sup>I am quoting from a script provided to me by the author and citing it with permission.

<sup>7</sup>Martes comments that "entre os trabalhadores autônomos, os que se ocupam da faxina domiciliar formam o nicho ocupacional mais expressivo dos imigrantes brasileiros em Massachusetts" (100). Margolis's research in New York pointed to "domestic service," which includes housecleaning, as the number one occupation among Brazilian women in New York, and "dishwasher/busboy," as the major occupation for men (*Little* 112).

<sup>8</sup>Martes points out that "a faxina é igualmente percebida como uma forma de imersão na cultura local. Fazendo faxina, o brasileiro entra na 'casa do americano'" (109).

<sup>9</sup>*Brazucas* also find extra jobs during winter, cleaning sidewalks, for instance: "Em punho, a pa, que é seu instrumento de trabalho. Foi contratada para limpar a neve que cobriu a calçada na frente de um condomínio durante a noite" (Bretas, *Sonho* 111).

<sup>10</sup>"Bizado" means "ocupado." It is a mixture between the English word "busy" and the Portuguese word "ocupado." It is commonly used by the *Brazucas*.

<sup>11</sup>See Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, "The Audiolingual Method," *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 44-63.

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