

# FILM AS COMRADE-IN-ARMS: IMAGE, DRAMA, AND IDENTITY IN THE HÃ-HÃ-HÃE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

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*Abstract: The article reflects on the relation of drama, image, and anthropological "writing" from a visual anthropological perspective, based on the case of the Hã-Hã-Hãe indigenous people from northeastern Brazil and the production of a short participatory video documentary in support of the Hã-Hã-Hãe's case. Drama is discussed as a genre that provides the basis not only for the filmic representation of the Hã-Hã-Hãe's struggle for recognition but also for the public negotiation of the Indians' story and the social drama of which they are a part. Due to the nature of the subject, the article is presented as a work in progress, tracing the author's engagement with a continuously developing narrative and seeking to give an account of the fragmentary and event-oriented nature of ethnographic representation.*

On the day before the scheduled trial of the Hã-Hã-Hãe case at the Brazilian Supreme Court (Supremo Tribunal Federal, STF) in October 2011, which was supposed to bring to an end a lawsuit that had been filed by the Brazilian Bureau for Indigenous Affairs (FUNAI) almost thirty years before, the legal representatives of the state of Bahia petitioned that the final court hearing should be postponed "in view of the great public agitation and the eventual social unrest that a decision may cause." The petition was allowed by the judge in charge, and the trial once again was put on hold, prolonging the Indians' anxiety and frustrating their hopes that at least the legal aspects of their conflict would finally be resolved by the country's highest court.<sup>1</sup>

The court's decision of October 2011, which interrupted the legal proceeding against farmers who had installed themselves (with the help of Bahian state authorities) within the limits of the Indian reservation shortly following its demarcation in 1936 and 1937, was just another incident added to the drama of the Hã-Hã-Hãe people. But it triggered, or triggered again, a sensation of deep disbelief, a thorough loss of the Indians' confidence in the country's willingness to let justice prevail in their case. One of the Hã-Hã-Hãe leaders identified the court's decision not to decide as an act "of violence of the government," in an interview we videotaped a couple of months later for what was intended to be "a film in support of the Hã-Hã-Hãe's struggle," in the words of Fábio, the indigenous codirector.

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1. Despacho Petição Avulsa STF no. 82.661/2011, DJE no. 204. Available at: <http://www.stf.jus.br/portal/processo/verProcessoTexto.asp?id=3067650&tipoApp=RTF> (accessed February 2, 2014).

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Calling the Hã-Hã-Hãe's history a "drama" is, of course, a metaphor. As it happens, the Hã-Hã-Hãe's story could be called both epic and dramatic. It is a drama (from Greek δράμα, a deed, an act, an action represented on stage) inasmuch as it refers to "a state, situation, or series of events involving interesting or intense conflict of forces," and it is epic inasmuch as it "extend[s] beyond the usual or ordinary especially in size or scope."<sup>2</sup> The constantly shifting nature of the Hã-Hã-Hãe's story, alternating between infrequent but often violent action (around thirty community members have died since the Hã-Hã-Hãe started to reconquer their territory in the 1980s) and a state of eventless but profound suffering (a point I will get back to later), is at the crux of their story's "resolution" and its representation. The Hã-Hã-Hãe's story is not only saturated with dramatic deeds but also characterized by the epic endurance of its indigenous protagonists.

It would be difficult to say when the story began. One could pin its beginnings, for example, in 1926. That was the year when the Serviço de Proteção aos Índios (SPI, Agency for the Protection of Indians) approached the Bahian government and requested the reservation of land for the remaining Indians in the region. Attending to the SPI's request, the state of Bahia adopted a decree and, also in 1926, a law that reserved "fifty square leagues of forestland and *caatinga*<sup>3</sup> . . . for the conservation of the forested areas and at the disposal of the Tupinambá and Pataxó Indians."<sup>4</sup>

What looks like a generous commitment by the state of Bahia to the well-being of the scarce indigenous population—which had survived colonization, proselytization, and the expansion of agriculture and cattle breeding into the vast interior—was in fact no more than an attempt to confine the dispersed Indians within a determinate area where they would not hinder the further advances of "civilization." In fact, Indianness in itself was seen by the Brazilian authorities, at federal and state levels, as something transitory. This holds true not only for local and national politicians who felt indebted to certain ideas of development and the economic interests of big landowners. Even a renowned character like Marshal Cândido Rondon, founding father of the SPI, a committed positivist (in the Comteian sense), and considered one of the first Brazilian indigenists (being himself of Indian origins), argued that the indigenist agency should aim to "make the Indians gradually adopt 'civilized' habits." One of the tasks of the SPI, according to Rondon, should be to settle the indigenous population so that their labor could "augment the agricultural production" and help "to populate the country's interior" (Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, cited in Oliveira and Freire 2006, 113).

The promise to reserve an area of approximately 250 square kilometres was thus not born out of a humanist attitude. Moreover, it quickly fell into oblivion, as the boom in the cacao market at the beginning of the twentieth century must have made the situation appear in a different light. World exports of cacao had

2. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "epic," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epic> (accessed September 17, 2015).

3. A type of vegetation predominant in the dryer parts of the Brazilian northeastern interior, consisting mainly of thorny shrubs.

4. Decreto de 9 de março de 1929 and Lei Estadual no. 1.916, art. 1, vol. 1, fls. 03, cited in STF (2013, 7). All quotations originally in Portuguese translated by the author.

risen from roughly one hundred thousand tons around 1900 to a volume of more than seven hundred thousand tons just before the Second World War (Wickizer 1951, 263). Brazil alone accounted for 18 percent of prewar world production of cacao, with 95 percent of the exports originating from the state of Bahia (Wickizer 1951, 265, 266). From such an economic outlook, “fifty square leagues” probably seemed like a lot, and the area that finally was demarcated by the SPI in 1936 and 1937 amounted to rather less than a third of what had initially been promised by law (ABA 2011, 3).

In addition, soon after the establishment of the reservation, the SPI began to lease part of the Indians’ land to cacao farmers and cattle breeders. At the time, the leasing of reservation territory to non-Indians was perfectly legal, a situation that continued until 1973. As a result, a large fraction of the lands originally reserved for the Indians became effectively occupied by farmers, who in any case had always considered the remaining indigenous population an obstacle to the economic exploitation of the Bahian hinterlands. What was not legal was the fact that the Bahian government eventually granted definite land titles to the farmers who had, little by little, driven out the Indians of their territory, in clear violation of the then-valid Brazilian Constitution of 1967, which in Article 186 guaranteed to the remaining indigenous population “the permanent property of the lands they occupy.”

#### TELLING THE HĀ-HĀ-HĀE’S STORY

A couple of months later, due to the growing tensions between farm owners and indigenous inhabitants in the area, the judiciary’s decision not to decide on the Hā-Hā-Hāe’s case eventually became unsustainable and had to be abandoned. In March 2012, the judge in charge of the case pleaded “emphatically for the reinsertion of the case on the adjudication agenda of the Supreme Court’s plenary assembly.”<sup>5</sup> Roughly one month later, on May 2, the case was unexpectedly put on the agenda during the afternoon session of the plenary, without advance notice to the public or the parties involved (a procedure severely criticized by one of the court’s ministers). In little more than three hours, the court put an end to a thirty years of processual history, ruling by a majority of votes that all of the land titles within the Hā-Hā-Hāe’s reservation were to be considered legally null and void.

“Will the proclamation of judgment put an end to the Hā-Hā-Hāe’s drama, or is it just another ‘plot-point’ in their story?” I asked rhetorically in the first draft of this article. But how could it put an end to their story? The story of societal entities or groups—and even the life stories of individuals, if one considers memory to be part of cultural history—is a time-transcending affair. What begins and ends is not the story but its narration: it is narration that imposes an often teleological order on things, an order that is not necessarily inscribed in reality itself. Although the Hā-Hā-Hāe’s story can justly be called dramatic, it is its rendering as a representation, based on certain formal structures, which turns it into a dramatic

5. STF, Despacho, April 3, 2012, <http://www.stf.jus.br/portal/processo/verProcessoTexto.asp?id=3138339&tipoApp=RTF> (accessed January 8, 2016).

account with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The process of *re-presenting* “life as it is” or “reality” through a certain medium (a written text, a film, etc.) has been a frequent matter of concern for a number of philosophers, writers, and visual artists. Jean-Paul Sartre once made one of his fictional characters reflect on how narration *constructs* “lives”—a reflection worth citing at length, as it is also of interest to social scientists:

You have to choose: live or tell. . . . Nothing happens while you live. The scenery changes, people come in and go out, that’s all. There are no beginnings. Days are tacked on to days without rhyme or reason, an interminable, monotonous addition. . . . Neither is there any end: you never leave a woman, a friend, a city in one go. . . . There are moments—rarely—when you make a landmark, you realize that you’re going with a woman, in some messy business. . . . After that, the procession starts again, you begin to add up hours and days: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday; April, May, June; 1924, 1925, 1926. . . . That’s living. But everything changes when you tell about life; it’s a change no one notices: the proof is that people talk about true stories. As if there could possibly be true stories; things happen one way and we tell about them in the opposite sense. You seem to start at the beginning: “It was a fine autumn evening in 1922. I was a notary’s clerk in Marommes.” And in reality you have started at the end. . . . [T]he end is there, transforming everything. For us, the man is already the hero of the story. . . . [W]e feel that the hero has lived all the details of this night like annunciations, promises, or even that he lived only those that were promises, blind and deaf to all that did not herald adventure. We forget that the future was not yet there. (Sartre 2007, 39–40)

Like writers, or being writers, anthropologists are storytellers, and their writings may be analyzed as literature, as Clifford Geertz (1988) has argued. Knowing “more exactly what doing ethnography is,” as Geertz stresses, is a basic requirement of understanding what anthropology itself is, and to what it “amounts to as a form of knowledge” (1973, 5–6). Anthropological writings (in the broader sense of the word, which would include, for example, film understood as text), like other texts, generally follow the rules of the genres within which they exist and which, in part, are their progenitors. Yet genres are multidimensional: they may comprise various subgenres or be themselves part of other, sometimes overlapping “umbrella” genres. For instance, one could assign anthropological articles in peer-reviewed journals to the academic writings genre, or else identify them with genre categories like nonfiction, prose, or even, following Geertz, with one of the subgenres of literature, for example, nonpoetic epic writings. This may seem a tedious and futile undertaking, but anthropology’s claim to tell “true stories” makes it worthwhile to consider how the genre within which its stories exist may possibly set the guidelines for their construction—that is, the way they set out to represent (or re-represent) a certain ethnographic “reality.” Literary processes, as James Clifford (1986b, 4) has reckoned in his well-known introduction to *Writing Culture*, surely bear upon that construction and “affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered, from the first jotted ‘observations,’ to the completed book, to the ways these configurations ‘make sense’ in determined acts of reading.”

My ethnographic account of the Hã-Hã-Hãe’s reality, and especially the court case they are involved in, goes back to a proposal of Fábio, one of the Hã-Hã-Hãe’s *lideranças* (leaders). I had worked with Fábio the year before on the editing of a short video about the excavation of funeral urns discovered on the Hã-Hã-Hãe’s

disputed territory—a find of the utmost symbolic importance to the Hã-Hã-Hãe, as it was considered irrefutable evidence of the legitimacy of their land claims.<sup>6</sup> Due to the positive reception of the video by the Hã-Hã-Hãe community, Fábio invited me to codirect another film, which was supposed to demonstrate the importance of the indigenous community for the economy of the reservation's adjoining cities. As Fábio explained to me in an email, the film's main objective would be "to show to society that, after the reoccupation of our lands, the economy in the neighboring cities flourished, and that the business folk who before were against the Indians have now changed their minds." That "should be the guiding principle of the film's editing," he added.

Fábio's reference to the film's montage was not born out of the blue. During the editing of *Urnas Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe*, he and his colleagues had collaborated in the transformation of a number of video files into a short documentary film. Although Fábio at the time came to classify film editing as a "very tiresome" process, in the end he and his colleagues were quite satisfied with how we had managed to turn two dozen video shots into a "real" film—that is, a sequence of scenes that seemed to tell a story. When Fábio began thinking about how to proceed in the filming of what was to be his second film, from the outset he attached much importance to how certain images could effectively be used to achieve the film's objective. When we began to script the video during a brainstorming session with various members of the community, the topic considered most pressing was the question of "prejudice" against the local indigenous population. As one of our interviewees later phrased it, "All over Brazil, Indians are considered lazy"—a verdict willingly used, as he continued, by the local farmers to thwart the Indians' land claims.

Pondering how we could best exemplify prejudice in our video, it was suggested that we videotape a talk with one of the former mayors of Pau Brasil, a city of around five thousand inhabitants and gateway to the disputed area. When, on the first day of shooting, we called at the former mayor's place, to our surprise he consented to be interviewed. As he was about to leave at the time we arrived, it was agreed that we should return in the late afternoon. While Fábio was trying to explain to him, in somewhat vague terms, the purpose of our film, he found himself confronted with the peremptory affirmation that, as a matter of fact, there surely weren't any more indigenous people in Brazil—apart from "a couple of Indians I once caught sight of on the Rio Solimões, in the Amazon," as the former mayor put it.

Although Fábio refrained from responding to this verbal annihilation of his ethnic identity, his consternation was apparent. When we set off to see the next interviewee, we both began to reconsider our idea of having a filmed talk with the ex-mayor. Without doubt, it wouldn't be all too difficult to utilize his caricatural prejudices for our purposes, by means of montage. But would it be ethically correct to deceive him about the way we planned to use his appearance to construct *our* story? Fábio's concerns, however, were of a different kind: "*Aqui rola cabeça*," he

6. The film was called *Urnas Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe* (<http://vimeo.com/2409384>) (accessed January 8, 2016); see Etchevarne (2012) and Zoettl (2013).

said, “heads roll in this place,” recalling the violent struggle that was set off with the Hã-Hã-Hãe decision to reconquer their territory. It wouldn’t be wise to make a film that would make more enemies than strictly necessary.

#### THE MAGIC OF IMAGING

To explain why people tell stories, one could return to Aristotle. The “instinct of imitation,” Aristotle says, “is implanted in man from childhood”; it is “through imitation [that he] learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated” (*Poetics*, section 1, part 4). But from what does the pleasure of imitation derive? Michael Taussig (1993) has pointed to the “magical” admixtures of imitation. By imitating what is not part of ourselves, we apparently (or magically) gain control of the Other (or at least may try to do so, consciously or not). The “magic of mimesis,” according to Taussig, can be tied to the belief “that ‘in some way or other’ the making and existence of the artifact that portrays something gives one power over that which is portrayed” (1993, 13).

Filmmaking can indeed help to partially regain control of events seemingly beyond one’s influence, as I have discussed elsewhere with regard to a participatory video workshop carried out with young residents of a low-income neighborhood in the outskirts of Lisbon (Zoettl 2012). By producing an interview video (*Uma experiencia de vida*, “A life experience”) with a woman who had suffered domestic violence, the group of directors (including the woman herself as a co-director) jointly came to reflect on the case, the problem in general, its possible causes, and what could be done to make it public—one of the main objectives of the film. What Fábio and the other Hã-Hã-Hãe who participated in the production of the documentary that was to be called *Tudo OK! Os índios Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe e o desenvolvimento rural* (*Everything’s OK! The Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe Indians and Rural Development*) had in mind was likewise to make their concerns and their struggle public, which they understood would help them in some way or another to regain control over what seemed to be a never-ending story of suffering. The video (a true low-budget film) was thus actively supported by many community leaders, who rated Fábio’s idea not only as a chance to combat prejudice against the indigenous population among the general public, but also as a kind of filmed evidence in support of their thirty-year-old lawsuit. As soon as the postproduction of the video was finished, Fábio urged me to dispatch the DVD copies so he could hand them over to a delegation of Hã-Hã-Hãe leaders who were on their way to Brasília, and whom he entrusted with presenting a copy of *Tudo OK* to “every single minister of the Supreme Court.”

I believe that if we had decided to film the dreaded former mayor of Pau Brasil (the city’s name, incidentally, is the name of the plant that is said to be the country’s eponym) it would also have been an act of “magically” (if one considers editing a kind of magic) taking control of his words and, as a consequence of the film’s agency, his actions. To some extent, the magic of images derives from the fact that images make appear what is not physically present and, at the same time, render distant (as a picture or moving images) whatever they re-present. Susan Sontag, in her reflections on photography (1973, 25), accordingly points to an im-

age's ability to be "both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence." Re-presented to the audience, Pau Brasil's former mayor (whatever opinion he might personally hold on the presence or absence of indigenous people in Brazil) would thus have been present in our film only as a kind of domesticated doppelgänger of himself, converted into a benign stream of moving images.

#### MIMESIS AND NARRATION: FILMING THE HÃ-HÃ-HÃÊ'S STORY

As Aristotle reminds us, there are different forms of imitation. The poet, he says, may either "imitate by narration . . . or he may present all his characters as living and moving before us" (*Poetics*, section 1, part 3). Within ethnography and filmmaking, "imitation" in the Aristotelian sense is present in the act of representing or re-representing what people do, what has happened, or—in the realm of so-called fiction—what could possibly happen. Imitation is certainly a very anthropological undertaking: Taussig has linked the construction of alterity—a keystone for, at least, colonial anthropology—to the *mimicking* of the Other and points to the "impossibility of any representational act being achieved without the intervention of the mimetic faculty" (1993, 250). Inspired by figurines carved by the Panamanian Cuna Indians in the likeness of European "colonial types," Taussig highlights mimicry as—to use Clifford's (1986b, 24) words—"one of the principal things ethnographers do."

What magic lies in this, my wooden self, sung to power in a language I cannot understand? Who is this self, objectified without my knowledge, that I am hell-bent on analyzing as object-over-there fanned by sea breezes and the smoke of burning cocoa nibs enchanting the shaman's singing? Something trembles in the whole enterprise of analysis and knowledge-making here: the whole anthropological trip starts to eviscerate. . . . For if I take the figurines seriously, it seems that I am honor-bound to respond to the mimicry of my-self in ways other than the defensive maneuver of the powerful by subjecting it to scrutiny as yet another primitive artifact, grist to the analytic machinery of Euroamerican anthropology. The very mimicry corrodes by which my science is nourished. For now I too am part of the object of study. The Indians have made me alter to my self. (Taussig 1993, 8)

In a much more visible way than written anthropology, film is a very direct form of mimicking reality. The mimetic qualities of film and, even more, photography have frequently been stressed, particularly by the apologists of a kind of eidetic realism, a paradigm that has also haunted early visual anthropology. André Bazin (2005, 14), for instance, emphatically highlights the immediacy and unmediated nature of the photographic image, which, as he reckons, "is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it" and which would share, by virtue "of the very process of its becoming," the essence of "the model of which it is the reproduction." Other filmmakers and film theorists, though, have stressed that what might be true for a single picture doesn't necessarily condition the nature of the moving images. Vsevolod Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov, or Sergei Eisenstein, among others, emphasized the film director's power as a *creator*. From Pudovkin's (2007, 59, 69) point of view (to cite only one of them),

7. Clifford's phrase refers to writing, not mimicking.

it is during montage, through “the junction of the separate pieces” of celluloid on which the “real incidents” are physically reproduced, that the film director builds up a filmic space “entirely his own.”

Visual anthropologists generally prefer to emphasize the “indexicality” of film, that is, its nonarbitrariness in (Peircean) semiotic terms. Lucien Taylor, for instance, in his polemic paper “Iconophobia” stresses the “natural bond between the signifier and the signified” in film, and the way (analog) film is “photochemically permeated by the world, and analog video electrically infused with it” (1996, 75). Taylor cites this indexicality as the cause of film’s open-endedness and the fact that film is “susceptible to differing interpretations in a way anthropological writing is not” (1996, 75). However, Taylor confers this antiauthoritarian quality mainly to *observational* films, a documentary (and ethnographic) film genre characterized by, among others, an aesthetic that “favors long takes . . . and that discourages cutting” (1996, 75). Observational films, Taylor affirms, “empower the film’s subjects and the spectators alike: the subjects are less mutilated by the montage, and the spectators may garner meanings or simply come away with sensations and impressions that are at odds with the maker” (1996, 76).

Yet applying strictly the rules of observational filmmaking (long, uninterrupted shots, large depth of field, etc.)—already postulated in Bazin’s theories of filmic realism (cf. Zoetl 2009)—would ultimately strip film of all of its genuinely filmic means, that is, film language. Film without editing is generally referred to not as film but as filmic raw material. Indigenous (and other) communities with little experience in filmmaking often see no necessity at all to edit the filmic representations of their dances, rituals, and so on (cf. also Turner 1992, 7). But when cinematographic undertakings are geared toward making a statement (as in the Hã-Hã-Hãe’s filmic project in support of their struggle), to despise the idiosyncrasies of filmic montage is hardly an option. While the Hã-Hã-Hãe wouldn’t mind shooting, watching themselves, and exhibiting to others, in a single shot, the filmic representation of a *toré* (ritual dance) performance that lasts for several hours, they do, as much as other filmmakers, sense the necessity to cut from A to B when they need to develop a filmic argument that tells a story.

Doing so, they will find themselves, as much as other filmmakers, unavoidably trapped in (or at least bound to) the narrative rules of whatever filmic genre they opted for. What Aristotle sets out to do in his *Poetics* is precisely to reflect on the differing rules that are tied to the different representational (literary) genres. The poet, facing the task of producing an account of whatever subject matter he may choose, according to Aristotle, can either opt for an epic or dramatic form of representation. While epos narrates, drama calls for action. Epic and dramatic forms of imitation, following Aristotle, differ in various aspects of their structure. Tragedy (one of the principal forms of drama), for instance, “endeavors, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit, whereas the Epic action has no limits of time” (*Poetics*, section 1, part 5).<sup>8</sup>

Aristotle’s main concern in his analysis of the structure of epos and drama

8. Aristotle generally identifies drama with tragedy, e.g., when stating that “the Epic poets were succeeded by Tragedians, since the drama was a larger and higher form of art” (*Poetics*, section 1, part 4).



was to examine the ingredients of a “good” tragedy (*Poetics*, section 1, part 5). Many of his findings about the structure of drama can be recognized also in modern dramatic art forms. Scriptwriters like Syd Field (1979) or film directors like David Mamet (2002) frequently refer to Aristotle and point out structural similarities in the majority of commercially or culturally successful (that is, “good”) films. Field’s notion of “plot points” (occurrences that happen at a more or less predetermined point in time to carry forward a film’s action from one filmic “act” to the next), for instance, can easily be confirmed as a rule (even if implicitly followed) for the great majority of feature films produced within the standard length (90 or 120 minutes) of European or US films.

Looking back at the production of *Tudo OK*, it strikes me how often we ended up unconsciously applying many of Aristotle’s rules for good drama. First of all we had to choose a central topic for the film (“the Indians and rural development”) to make the story fit the twenty minutes we had projected for it. This seems self-evident, but for Fábio and the community members, it was difficult to accept that we couldn’t tell “the whole story”—as the question of “the Indians and rural development” was in manifold ways related to the whole history of the Hã-Hã-Hãe people. By defining the film’s main topic, we had taken the first step in transforming the Hã-Hã-Hãe’s “reality” into a filmic story, which, by the nature of the filmic genre, had to follow the structure of drama and be told within a certain limit of time. For, from an Aristotelian point of view, the Hã-Hã-Hãe’s story is not dramatic but epic, not least because it doesn’t “confine itself to a single revolution of the sun.” To make a film out of it, we had to transform “the whole story” into an account limited in time and “constructed on dramatic principles” (*Poetics*, section 3, part 23).

Apart from the necessity of defining what the film would be about, we also soon came to realize that our film would need “action” as a vehicle for mediating content. Good drama, according to Aristotle, relies on action, not on narration, for being “an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality” (*Poetics*, section 1, part 6). Unfortunately, one of the film’s central topoi—prejudices against the indigenous population—was difficult to film in action. That led us to the idea of interviewing people who were known to be averse to the Hã-Hã-Hãe’s interests, in an attempt at least to exemplify prejudice, instead of merely referring to it (by interviewing pro-indigenous people). As we had only two shooting days available, we also failed to tape a sufficient number of images showing Indians in their daily routine of agricultural work. Sensing the lack of such images (which would have been important for our filmic statement against the idea of indigenous laziness), Fábio suggested reenacting the work on the field while we still had a camera at our disposal.

Another example of how the rules of the drama genre were, in part, setting the stage for the construction of our story can be found in Aristotle’s claim that drama should “excite pity and fear,” and that this would best be achieved by showing the “unmerited misfortune . . . of a man like ourselves” (*Poetics*, section 2, part 8). In fact, our film was from the beginning drafted to follow an implicit script that sought to present the indigenous population as agricultural workers “like all the

others" but victimized by the "misfortune" of having been robbed of their lands. And during editing we naturally allowed ourselves to pick out those passages of the interviews that confirmed our story in a vivid and idealized way, as if tacitly following Aristotle's recommendation that drama should, while "reproducing the distinctive form of the original," make a likeness "which is true to life and yet more beautiful" (*Poetics*, section 2, part 15).

#### FLOW OF LIFE, EVENTLESSNESS, AND PUBLIC DRAMA

Aristotle's emphasis that good drama has to build on action poses a problem. How can we tell the story of something that is not imbued with action? How to talk about the "nothing" that, following Sartre, makes out our living, the flow of life in between the rare moments when people "make a landmark" (2007, 39)? How can we picture, for instance, "the hum of unmarked, impersonal existence" that Clifford (1986a, 106) reckons to perceive in the words of Nisa, the !Kung woman who lent her story to Marjorie Shostak's (1981) ethnography of !Kung life? Could Nisa's words—"We lived in that place, eating things. Then we left and went somewhere else," or "we lived and lived" (Shostak, quoted in Clifford 1986a, 106)—possibly be transformed into "good" Aristotelian drama?

In *Economies of Abandonment* Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) describes how the chronic but unspectacular character of their suffering renders the hardships of (Australian) indigenous people nearly invisible in public discourse. While the health situation of the indigenous population, for instance, is dramatic, their individual diseases normally are not. The "typical illnesses that afflict indigenous people are chronic and endemic, infectious and cumulative," diseases like "staphylococcal and streptococcal infections, parasites such as scabies and giardia, circulatory diseases, diabetes, respiratory diseases" (Povinelli 2011, 144). The chronic nature and ordinariness of indigenous suffering turns every single incident into a "quasi-event," too unspectacular to actually "achieve the status of having occurred or taken place" (2011, 13). Such quasi-events, Povinelli affirms, "neither happen nor not happen." The "ordinary" usually finds its way only into statistics as a "variety of socially distributed ordinaries" that transform the "qualities, scale, and agency of quasi-events into self-evident eventfulness" (2011, 153). Yet in public discourse, events generated by statistics fail to awake the "slumbering critical public," as by transforming the experiential qualities of suffering they "obliterate the very nature" of the "kind of death" they describe (Povinelli 2011, 153).

Lack of dramatic action is thus not only a problem of the playwright. The "hum of existence" is not only difficult to represent (be it in writing or by audiovisual means); its "eventless" nature (or its lack of action) brings with it the danger that it goes altogether unnoticed. While this problem could be dismissed as purely academic as far as "ordinary" ordinariness is concerned, it can become a question of life and death when the quiet extermination of publicly invisible minorities is at issue. As a matter of fact, the Hā-Hā-Hāe's century-long suffering only earned them the chance of public negotiation at the STF's court hearings after they had managed to transform their continuous struggle into an "action-packed" violent conflict by reoccupying their reserve's territories. The reporting

judge's reference to the "extremely grave" situation in the reserve and the case's sudden prominence in the media, as much as the presiding judge's reference to the "unusual" and "uncommon" nature of the reported "facts," which would result in the recommendation to finally decide on the thirty-year-old lawsuit, point to the event character that the Hã-Hã-Hãe's case had suddenly acquired (STF 2013, 68, 71).

While stressing the problem of public invisibility of "quasi-events" in what she terms late liberalism, Povinelli (2011, 133) curiously mentions film as a suitable medium in which to represent the "ongoing flow of the everyday." Citing Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (1979) as a successful example of portraying "the modes of exhaustion and endurance that are ordinary, chronic, and cruddy rather than catastrophic, crisis-laden, and sublime" (2011, 132), Povinelli praises film's capacity to picture the "little things" in life. *Killer of Sheep*, Povinelli states, would allow the viewer to sense the "ongoing flow of the everyday," the eventless "something and yet nothing" that gradually exhaust and enervate Burnett's marginalized African American heroes (2011, 132). Although Povinelli is talking about a fiction film and not a documentary, her remarks somehow match Taylor's comments on (observational ethnographic) film's ability to represent lived experience. Drawing on Vivian Sobchack, Taylor emphasizes the filmic medium's ability to explore "existence in all its ambiguity" and to express "the undifferentiated significance of the human condition" (1996, 80).

However, at the time of my second visit to Fábio and the Hã-Hã-Hãe community of Água Vermelha (one of the reserve's villages), the signs of the times were pointing more to imminent violence than to further endurance of "eventless" suffering. Fábio reminded me that we should finish our small documentary as soon as possible as there was a general presentiment that the conflict with the farmers, as much as the legal proceedings, were coming to a decisive point. I had already left Água Vermelha when the struggle between the Hã-Hã-Hãe and the farmers became increasingly action-packed. The reoccupation of the last *fazendas* (farms) within the reservation's territory was followed by the death of a non-Indian woman, shot, according to the state capital's newspaper *A Tarde*, by "a gang of six hooded and well-armed men, lying in ambush on the road from Itaju do Colônia to the district of Palmira," adjoining towns of the reservation.<sup>9</sup>

The local press was quick to accuse the Indians of murder, and the national press joined in. The country's most widely watched TV news show, *Jornal Nacional*, broadcast a couple of days later a report in which it quoted an official of the Polícia Civil (Criminal Investigation Department) affirming that the Indians had at their disposal machine guns and other high-caliber weapons from army stocks.<sup>10</sup> Interviewing indigenous occupants of one of the recently reconquered farms, the journal's reporter was eager to present the Hã-Hã-Hãe as idle good-for-nothings who violently drive industrious farmers away from their inherited property, posing questions like "What are you actually doing here? . . . Aren't you

9. *A Tarde*, April 14, 2012.

10. *Jornal Nacional da Rede Globo*, April 13, 2012, <http://g1.globo.com/jornal-nacional/videos/t/edicoes/v/piora-o-clima-de-tensao-entre-indios-e-fazendeiros-no-sul-da-bahia/1903196/#>.

producing anything? Are you spending the whole day . . . ?" (2:26). These questions were followed by a shot depicting a pregnant woman sitting idly on the porch of a farmhouse, together with her husband and child (3:04).

Victor Turner has described the arts as a form of reflection on what he names "social drama" (e.g., Turner 1988; 1974). Social drama, writes Turner, is "the 'raw stuff' out of which theatre comes to be created as societies develop in scale and complexity and out of which it is continually regenerated" (1988, 105). While Turner lists "folk-epics, ballads, dramas, and *märchen*" as examples of genres that "interact with one another and with social reality" (1988, 42), I would also include the "report" (the quotes are of course disputable) of the *Jornal Nacional* and the Hã-Hã-Hãe's film *Tudo OK* in that category. They both comment on the Hã-Hã-Hãe's story and the story of their opponents, the farmers, although in differing ways, employing different means in terms of form and content and drawing very different conclusions. And they both may have affected the very social drama they comment on. At least *Rede Globo's* news show was widely watched, as I realized during the following days, when friends usually not concerned about indigenous affairs (but who knew about my fieldwork in the area) began to warn me about the "imminent danger" of being "among Indians."

In fact, a good part of the jaundiced view of the Brazilian indigenous population could be tied to the work of major TV stations and some print journals like, for instance, the popular middle-class magazine *Veja* (cf. Zoettl 2013, 2015). Social dramas are influenced by their performative counterparts; they often "draw their rhetorical form from cultural performances," as Turner (1988, 42) observes. To the same extent that representational dramas like news shows (one might also think of *telenovelas*) are forged by social drama (defined by Turner [1974, 37] as "units of aharmonic or disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations"), they may also wield an influence on the way social dramas are "plotted." Cultural performances, Turner (1988, 24) argues, are not "simple reflectors or expressions of culture" but also *agents* of change, "representing the eye by which culture sees itself." They are an expression of what is going on in society—and especially of what is going wrong in society. While social drama normally cannot itself reflect on social structure (because of being "on the same plane as the agonistic events being scrutinized," as Turner puts it [1988, 107, 95]), cultural performances have the ability to mirror social dramas, assign meaning to them and lead individuals and society at large to a better understanding of society.

#### JUDGING THE HÃ-HÃ-HÃE'S STORY

Turner's observations on the mutual influence of social and cultural drama can also be traced in the Hã-Hã-Hãe's story. The conflict between Indians and farmers may be described as a social drama acted out locally through the direct (and often violent) confrontations between the two adversaries, and publicly in the media and on other institutional public stages. One of the most important and visible platforms for the acting out of the Hã-Hã-Hãe drama has been the Supreme Court (STF) in Brasília, itself highly mediatized: the court's hearings are broadcast live

by TV Justiça and Rádio Justiça, and it runs an official channel at YouTube.com where all major sittings are available for playback.<sup>11</sup>

Although in the thirty years during which the case has been pending at the STF only seven plenary sessions were held, the huge number of petitions, certificates, referrals, publications in law gazettes, services of process, court orders, requests for access to court files, declarations of expiry of the term, counterstatements, and defendant's pleas build up a veritable script of the Hã-Hã-Hãe drama, accessible on the Internet.<sup>12</sup> The case's narrative, as it is inscribed through this script (at the time of writing, the printout of its summary filled over 40 pages, the case files 31 volumes, 19 annexes, and 9,050 pages), cuts through a good part of Brazil's modern history. In 1982, when the case was filed, the country was still under military rule; seven presidents of the republic have been elected democratically since, and Brazil has developed into the seventh largest economy on the planet. The Supreme Court itself has seen twenty presidents come and go, and the judge-rapporteur of the Hã-Hã-Hãe case has had to be replaced five times.

While the official mission of the STF is of course "to guard the constitution,"<sup>13</sup> I want to suggest that its judges also play an important role as cultural performers within the public negotiations of social dramas like the Hã-Hã-Hãe case. That is to say not only that the STF has considerable power of decision with regard to major social conflicts of Brazilian society (like the issue of Indian land claims against the interests of rural landowners). It is to say that the STF acts out its role as a social-judicial referee in a way that is informed both by legal considerations and by certain formal structures that partly derive from the realm of the performative arts—like drama.

John and Jean Comaroff (2009) have recently compiled (mainly from a US and South African perspective) abundant material on the commodification of culture, identity, and ethnicity, and the "lawfare" ("the use of legal means for political and economic ends," Comaroff 2009, 56) by which conflicting interests based on group identities are often fought out. "Differences of all kinds," they affirm, are more and more "being dealt with by means of law," whether they involve "private freedoms or public resources, access to medical treatment or title to territory, cultural knowledge or civic authority" (2009, 55). For the Brazilian context, Vianna, Baumann, and Martins (2007) confirm a similar tendency, identifying a widespread "judicialization" of politics. Others, like Paixão (2007, 209), have acknowledged the "political activism" of the Supreme Court, notably since the adoption of the postmilitary constitution of 1988 and the presidential elections of 2003 (in which Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the leftist Brazilian Workers Party was elected president). Ever since, according to Paixão (2007, 211), the STF has "adopted fully its role as an arbitrator of the conflicts between legislature and executive."

Following the STF's plenary sessions of cases related to Indian affairs, it be-

11. See <http://www.youtube.com/stf> (accessed February 2, 2014).

12. See <http://www.stf.jus.br/portal/processo/verProcessoAndamento.asp?incidente=1454490> (accessed February 2, 2014).

13. Article 102 of the Constitution of 1988.

comes conspicuous that it is not only the legal opinions of the eleven judges that differ. The personality and the worldview of, for instance, the (now-retired) judge Carlos Ayres Britto, elected president of the court in 2012, couldn't be more different from that of his counterpart Marco Aurélio Mello. The two of them exemplify not only differing legal points of view but also differing attitudes and styles within the public Brazilian societal discourse that are especially pertinent when it comes to the rights of indigenous minorities. Ayres Britto and Marco Aurélio (and their colleagues) could be described as representatives (or representing actors) who embody certain group interests—based on certain group values—on a public stage: the mediatized Supreme Court. The “role” or “part” that each of them plays in the STF's plenary may be identified in a variety of different cases. The following two quotes are part of the transcription of the final plenary session of the notorious Raposa Serra do Sol proceedings and exemplify the diverging fundamental convictions of the two STF's ministers:<sup>14</sup>

Ayres Britto: “From the day of our sentence on, Brazil will look into the mirror, and will not blush any more with shame. With this sentence, Brazil will recover its dignity and treat the Brazilian Indians like our beloved brothers. To recognize indigenous culture is to put into practice what Paulo Freire said: ‘There is no superior or inferior knowledge, only different types of knowledge.’ And we have, here and now, the humbleness to recognize that the Indian people may teach us a lot, and that they also may catechise us a bit.” (STF 2010, 531)

Marco Aurélio: “I'm in favor of a correct demarcation. And that can only be the result of a proper legal proceeding, for which the prevalence of a perspective of redemption of a historical debt is absolutely inadequate, a simplistic historical and romantic perspective based on the fact that Brazil was once exclusively populated by Indians. The economic data presented [to the court] proves the importance of the [reservation's] area for the economy of the state and the importance of the presence of the farmers within the region.” (STF 2010, 651)

If we consider, for the purpose of my argument, Ayres Britto and Marco Aurélio as cast members of the public enactment of the Hã-Hã-Hãe's drama (for instance in the role of performers of the chorus of the Hã-Hã-Hãe tragedy), staged in the plenary assembly room of the STF in Brasília, their voices cease to be those of individual jurists and become the voices of apologists for certain societal opinions, tendencies, and movements. In Greek drama (which historically developed out of the chorus), the function of the chorus was to comment on the crucial parts of the dramatic action. It provided the necessary background information to allow the audience to understand and follow the action. At the same time, the chorus constituted a kind of ideal audience, that is, an audience that would interpret the course of action presented in the right way.

Evidently, my comparison of the STF judges with Greek choristers is somehow flawed, as the ancient chorus presented a homogeneous, collective voice and not

14. Raposa Serra do Sol is an Indian reservation in the northeastern state of Roraima. The demarcation and homologation of the reservation was contested by the state of Roraima, but finally validated by the STF in 2009 (see STF 2010).

those of individual “performers” like Ayres Britto or Marco Aurélio. But if we understand the STF as a public stage where social dramas are fought out in the light of day (or under the spotlights of TV Justiça), its judges’ “chants” serve in a similar way to substantiate and publicly defend certain points of view (termed legal opinions) and to justify a final judicial verdict that will eventually hold great societal importance. At the televised sessions of the STF, a judge’s plea is more than a judicial-academic interpretation of the country’s constitution, it is also a public statement, put forward in order to make Brazilian society accept a certain argumentation as being the *right* (that is, “just”) interpretation of, for instance, the Hã-Hã-Hãe’s drama—a plea declaimed in order to “enchant” the public audience.

#### ECONOMY OF TRUTH

It may seem presumptuous to conceptualize the STF’s decisions as not the result of a meticulous weighing of strictly legal arguments but as a ritual-like counterbalancing of antagonistic interests of the diverse segments of society. However, Marco Aurélio, one of the court’s most extroverted “actors,” has been quoted as saying, “First I conceive the fairest solution. . . . Only afterwards do I seek support of it in law” (Ariel Kostman, cited in Pretzel 2007, 3). Then again, his opponent Ayres Britto, as the court’s acting president, fell back on German classics to justify the missing advance notice for the resumption of the Hã-Hã-Hãe’s case in May 2012, affirming (erroneously) that “Goethe said: the law is powerful; more powerful though is reality” (STF 2013, 72). Paixão (2007, 216) has noticed that “the tendency of the Supreme Court to exercise political functions” often varies according to “the degree of popular backing that the other governing powers can command” at a certain political conjuncture. Marco Aurélio’s allusion to the economic importance of the farmers who were occupying the Indian reservation of Raposa Serra do Sol in turn illustrates Leonardo Paixão’s observation that the STF, apart from strictly legal aspects, is open to considering “the macroeconomic aspects of the decisions it plans to take. Though the economic (and political) considerations are never referred to as the main reasons for its decisions, as the primacy always lies within legal grounds, the Supreme Court, in its capacity as an institution of state authority, increasingly takes into consideration the economic consequences of its decisions” (Paixão 2007, 221).

Michel Foucault, at various points in his oeuvre, underlined the close linkage between power, truth, and discourse. The power the Brazilian Supreme Court holds, by virtue of the country’s constitution (its “formal delimitation of power,” in Foucauldian terms), enables it to produce “truth”—that is, an interpretation, henceforth to be considered the ultimately righteous interpretation—of the very constitution that establishes its power. However, to exercise its power (and the power to reproduce that power through the production of “truth”), the STF, like other social bodies, needs to promote its point of view and communicate what it found to be the correct interpretation of law; it has to *perform* truth. In Foucault’s words:

In a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. . . . [I]t is truth that makes the laws, that produces the true discourse which, at least partially, decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power. (Foucault 1980, 93)

The truth produced by the STF on Indian affairs is a truth that arbitrates—on the formal grounds of the constitution and put into words by the judges' pleas—a variety of social conflicts inherent in modern Brazilian society, like the (real or apparent) conflict between cultural diversity and economic development. Within this process of establishment of "truthful" discourses, the judge Ayres Britto could be depicted as representing the culturalist part, speaking up against the "colonialist vision of Indians, a vision that is prejudiced, cruel, exploitative, in short, a vision that espouses slavery" (STF 2010, 707). Marco Aurélio, on the other side, may be seen as acting out the nationalist position, advocating the "integration" of "acculturated Indians" and the "liberty of Brazilians to go wherever they want" (2010, 652). Yet it would be too simplistic to label their dispute as one of the idealist or romantic (as Marco Aurélio likes to portray his opponent) against the (depending on one's own political stance) realist, apologist for progress, neoliberal, or even lobbyist. Both judges being the spokesmen of the societal discourse they embody, their parts should rather be conceptualized as those of actors within a social drama, the outcome of which is determined not so much by the judges' personal views or legal considerations but, in good part, by the state of the balance of power that makes certain interpretations of the present social order appear, at a certain point in time, more or less true in public discourse than other interpretations.

#### LIVE OR TELL

Anthropological praxis, as George Marcus (2009, 26) has affirmed, is not only a question of methodology but also of aesthetics of method. Anthropologists cannot *not* represent, and by representing they are guided, if not confined, as much by form as by content. To what point anthropological writing is forged by drama-like structure or narrative is a question beyond the scope of this article. For sure, anthropological journal articles do have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and much as the film business offers scriptwriting courses, one can find courses that claim to teach people how to write good scientific papers in the academic world. While peer-reviewed articles in anthropological journals are usually not limited to ethnographic accounts that confine themselves "to a single revolution of the sun," there do exist very strict rules that establish how many words or characters any such article may contain. And it would probably not be too difficult to identify a number of "plot-points" within most of the published articles (that is,



those articles found to be “good” by editors and reviewers) that take the thread of anthropological reasoning from one act to the next. Geertz’s classification of anthropological writings as “*fictiō*” (“something made,” “something fashioned,” Geertz 1973, 15) or Wagner’s (1981) notion of fieldwork as an act of “invention” of culture may serve as further clues to the fact that a textual analysis of anthropological writings could eventually provide valuable insights. As Marcus (2009, 29) observes, there is “no representation which is exclusive to anthropology.” Anthropologists have to draw on other genres, and they may do so in ways that may, as Marcus and Cushman (1982, 29) put it, disturb “the tacit consensus about ‘what anthropologists do.’” To consider anthropological discourse as drama and film as a form of anthropological writing may be two possibly “disturbing” ways of performing anthropology.

Films have to end, as do anthropological articles. With the real story of the Hã-Hã-Hãe constantly developing, it seems even more difficult to judge to what extent the words, sentences, and paragraphs of this article could be considered a true representation of the subject matter. Though the Hã-Hã-Hãe won their legal battle in May 2012, their day-to-day, eventless struggles to overcome economical marginalization and, eventually, achieve emotional recognition as full-fledged Brazilian citizens within society at large, continues. As Geertz informs us, the crux of interpretative approaches is the fact that it is difficult to tell what is, and what is not, a “good interpretation of anything” (1973, 18). The “besetting sin of interpretive approaches to anything,” he goes on, lies in their tendency “to escape systematic modes of assessment” (1973, 24). But, in the end, what would it actually mean for a story to be “true” or an interpretation to be “good”? To answer this question, even Geertz resorts to metaphor, defining good ethnography as whatever “takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation” (1973, 18). Anthropologists, like other writers that practice imitation, have to decide, live, or tell—another difficult-to-solve problem posed by the ethnographer’s self-chosen role as a participant-observer (a contradiction in itself, if one follows Sartre). The real story of the Hã-Hã-Hãe (if it exists) is an epic, not a drama. But if it is drama that lies at the foundations of anthropological writing, the anthropologist cannot help but fool the reader, giving a conclusive form to what is actually a story with manifold beginnings and endings—a truly disturbing exercise.

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