



**AN OPPOSITIONAL READING OF PATRIARCHY, LOVE,  
NEO-COLONIALISM, AND ANTHROPOPHAGY IN NELSON PEREIRA  
DOS SANTOS'S FILM "HOW TASTY WAS MY LITTLE FRENCHMAN"**

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**Abstract**

Nelson Pereira dos Santos's film, *Como Era Gostoso o Meu Francês* (*How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman*) provides a darkly humorous narrative that explores the clash of cultures and colonization by highlighting the practice of anthropophagy. Through a feminist oppositional reading and postcolonial lens, I focus on Sebiopepe, the central female protagonist of *My Little Frenchman* (MLF). In my interpretation of her narrative, I explore how the film's highly creative considerations of discourses on gender, race, and identity constitute a basis for present-day critical reflections on patriarchal and neo-colonial power. I conclude with suggestions on ways in which an oppositional reading of film can elicit reflexivity on the complexities and power dynamics in portrayals of gender, love, and *others* in visual culture.

*Keywords: visual culture, gender, anthropophagy, postcolonial, feminism*

**The Specter of Consuming Each Other**

Inspired by the 16th century travelogues of Hans Staden, a German adventurer who fought alongside Portuguese settlers against Tupinambá Amerindians in Brazil, Nelson Pereira dos Santos's film *Como Era Gostoso o Meu Francês* (*How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* (MLF), Brazil, 1971) offers a complex account of anthropophagy as a response to the enemy. Captured by the Tupinambá, Staden was sentenced to ritual cannibalization. However, before consuming an enemy it was the Tupinambá practice to first integrate him into the community (Bastos, 2006; Castro-Klarén, 2000; Sadlier, 2003). Thus, Staden lived with them almost a year, taking part in their customs. But he ultimately escaped and so lived to write *Viagem ao Brasil* (*Voyages to Brazil*, 1557/1892), a best-seller book that captured the imagination of Western readers with its tales of "savages" and cannibalism. Through an analysis of MLF, I consider anthropophagy—the consumption of human flesh for ritualistic purposes, for reasons other than hunger or greed (Andrade, 1928)—as a means through which cultural difference is consumed, assimilated, and transformed for the purpose of survival and contestation of hegemonic power.

Central to my analysis is Sebiopepe, the woman whom Cunhambebe, the Tupinambá leader, designated as Jean's (the Staden inspired character in MLF) companion. Sebiopepe's story is filled with tensions, co-optations, and negotiations from which I extrapolate a crucially different (oppositional) type of power—one involving dialogic encounters centered on non-Western, non-patriarchal ways of knowing, and possibly loving. Although influenced by Staden's adventures, MLF departs from Staden's account in important ways: the film's lead character and Tupinambá captive, Jean is French such that Dos Santos comments on French participation in the colonization of Brazil. And unlike Staden, Jean fails to escape and so is killed and cannibalized.

Most significant to this analysis and the film, is Sebiopepe. She becomes Jean's companion, translator, and lover, who helps Jean integrate into the community. Her role in some ways connects her to the themes of native women acquiescing to the desires of invaders and forming close alliances with them (See Alarcón, 1997; Bodanksy & Senna, 1974; Fuentes, 1970; Marubbio, 2006). But she also behaves in ways that connect her to the idea of the "savagery" of native women, as we will see.

## Eating the Other: A Dialogic Re-envisioning History, Identity Development, and Representations of the Native Other

In Brazil, poet and social activist Oswald de Andrade promulgated the idea of anthropophagy. In “Manifesto Antropófago” (1928)—a philosophical and aesthetic proposition—he called for the absorption of the enemy, i.e., the cannibalization of ascending U.S. and European economic and cultural imperialism in Brazil (Castro-Klarén, 2000; Shohat & Stam, 1994; Stam 2003; Stam & Johnson, 1995). Andrade’s manifesto contributed to new aesthetic and intellectual developments across many disciplines<sup>1</sup>. The concept of anthropophagy, through its proclivity to “copy” or appropriate outside influences, has been used widely in Latin American culture as a form of anti-colonial resistance to the hegemonic West (Mosquera, 2010, p. 12). For instance, according to art educator Flávia Bastos (2006), drawing on Andrade’s work, “Tupinambá Indians would devour and digest the enemy in order to take his strength,” and similarly by consuming and transforming European influences, Brazilian artists sought to “break with cultural dependency on foreign models and create art that was strongly Brazilian” (p. 102). Like Andrade’s cannibalist manifesto, via parody, militancy, and aesthetic provocation (Shohat & Stam, 1994), MLF suggests Cinema Novo filmmakers<sup>2</sup> engaged in cannibalizing neo-colonial powers. For Darlene J. Sadlier (2003), however, to devour is not simply to consume, appropriate, or assimilate

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1. Oswald de Andrade’s “Manifesto Antropófago” (1928) contributed to innovative thinking in literature (Carlos Jáuregui, Sara Castro-Klarén), philosophy (Enrique Dussel, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Levi-Struass), art (Tous Cannibales at La Maison Rouge, 2011; Mostra do Redescobrimento: Brasil 500 años, 2000; São Paulo Biennial, 1998), film and film studies (Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, Lúcia Nagib, Robert Stam), art education (Flávia Bastos), and queer theory (Belidson Dias).

2. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) write that Cinema Novo was part of a broader cultural movement and that Cinema Novo filmmakers sought to create films from what they considered the perspective of the people and to promote social transformation. Such filmmakers denounced government-supported developmentalism, i.e., economic expansion through foreign investment. One of Brazil’s most influential directors, Glauber Rocha called for a “hungry” cinema to promote alternative, anti-imperialist, anti-aesthetic films “concerned with provocation and militancy,” rather “than with auteurist expression or consumer satisfaction” (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 248).

cultural differences coming from outside; instead the “ritual of cannibalism becomes a metaphor for a paradoxical kind of modern consumerism that regards whatever it ‘devoured’ as an alien substance and is careful to resist being utterly transformed by it” (p. 172).

Anthropophagy takes diverse forms. For instance, Christian religious rites such as the Eucharist represent the metaphorical consumption of the body.<sup>3</sup> Divine consumption, however, inheres in a ritual designed to affirm belief. Similarly, cannibalism is not about consuming flesh. Anthropophagy is rife with complex and contradictory signs and processes, material and discursive layers used as conduits to channel anxieties and desires. For example, European colonizers in the Americas formulated the rhetoric of people-eating savages to justify inflicting torture, poverty, disease, transatlantic slavery, and genocide on native peoples (MacCannell, 1992; Shohat & Stam, 1994). MLF opens with a woodcut detail of a sailing ship and a voiceover reads a letter from Admiral Nicholas Duarte de Villegaignon addressed to French theologian, John Calvin:

The country is a barren desert. There are neither houses nor any other commodities ... The natives are barbarous savages with no courtesy nor humanity, different from us without any religion or any knowledge of honesty and virtue of what is right and unjust, they are beasts with human faces. (MLF, 1971)

Yet, the screen shows a green and lush landscape peopled by natives coexisting peacefully with Europeans. In the opening scenes, the natives offer food to the settlers, help them build shelter, and accept them into their communities. According to Sadlier (2003), film studies theorists Richard Peña and Randal Johnson see the opening scenes as “prepar[ing] us for a film that will consistently challenge official history” (p. 61). The film’s narrative opens up a space for an *oppositional reading*,<sup>4</sup> a counter-

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3. “Then Jesus said unto them, ‘...Who so eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him” (New Testament, John 6: 53–57, King James)

4. The concept of *oppositional reading* as used by cultural and feminist film theorists, operates under the idea that the text (e.g., film) contain competing discourses in which

narrative that calls for critical interpretation of accepted His-stories, i.e., history as told by White European men.

As one of the first filmmakers to represent the history and culture of Brazilian indigenous peoples on the big screen, dos Santos drew from Brazil's rich historical, cultural, religious and aesthetic traditions. Although the actors in MLF are Brazilian not Tupinambá,<sup>5</sup> the film is groundbreaking as the first to use Tupi (Tupinambá dialect) as the primary language. Most importantly, the Tupinambá appear as complex people living in complex times. They are implicated in their own hegemonic struggles within tribal (Tupiniquin) and communal wars as well as entangled in imperialist expansion and in battles with the Spanish, Portuguese, and French. Consequently, the Tupinambá represent neither the noble savage nor the barbaric Other, often seen in Western films<sup>6</sup>.

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one discourse, usually dominant ideology, asserts its power over others. Oppositional readings are productive insofar as an interpretative strategy, the language of self-reflexivity and critique challenges and exposes what hegemonic ideology seeks to naturalize, obscure, exclude, negate, and contain (de Lauretis, 1984, 2007; Hall, 1980; hooks, 1992).

5. According to Claus Clüver (2001), the characters in MLF played by “whites painted red,” i.e., “by Brazilians who are most likely an ethnic mix,” do not come across as “realistic” representations of Tupinambá natives. He argues that using non-native actors “undermine[s] the ostensible authenticity of the film’s anthropological reconstruction” (p. 43). Yet, it is also important to note that even today, few films are produced, directed, and acted by native people. My focus is the complexity of the narrative and the epistemological spaces it provides. Films by Chris Eyre (2012) and Alanis Obomsawin (1998) provide examples of cinema produced, acted, and directed by Native Americans.

6. Western films, including “progressive” films such as *Dances with Wolves* (1990), privilege a White protagonist and often use native peoples as background (Shohat & Stam, 1994). Many such films represent indigenous peoples as either completely benevolent or completely evil, leaving notions of colonialism intact and reinscribing stereotypes of native peoples, especially the treachery and primitive nature of native women. The adoration of White women, also a long tradition in Hollywood films (Shohat & Stam, 1994), advances notions of European racial superiority and desirability, e.g., *King Kong* (2005) directed by Peter Jackson.

### Anthropophagy Ceremony: A “Love” Story

Oppressive power and violence inflicted on women have been constant factors in colonization processes. In MLF, as is usual in Tupinambá society, the tribe’s male leader assigns a keeper/companion (“wife”) to the man under sentence of cannibalization (Sadlier, 2003; Salem, 1997). It is not possible to know if Sebioepepe can refuse to become Jean’s companion. Perhaps, retribution from her community would have accompanied refusal, or perhaps the practice is so accepted that Sebioepepe, far from being a passive victim, may have willingly taken on the role. Simplistic notions of victimization are problematic<sup>7</sup>, yet it is clear that the practice of trading, assigning, or gifting native women make them an object of exchange. The Spaniards traded native women among each other during the colonization of the Americas. Sebioepepe’s designation as Jean’s wife can be seen as a similarly violent act within a patriarchal system. MLF disrupts patriarchal power dynamics by telling a very different story about the fate of one native woman, namely, Sebioepepe. By describing key scenes from MLF that highlight Sebioepepe’s story and dos Santos’s development of her character as paradoxical and complex, I offer the film’s oppositional reading of Tupinambá history and culture as an expression of anti-patriarchal and anti-colonial tensions, co-optations, and negotiations.

Sebioepepe plays the key role in assimilating Jean into Tupinambá society. She teaches him the Tupi language, through which he learns Tupinambá customs and practices. Jean is eager to learn the Tupi language, and he adopts the native hairstyle and dress (essentially nudity), and even fights against Tupinambá enemies. Throughout the film, the idea, implicit and explicit, remains that one day Jean will return home. However, in MLF, Jean is ritually cannibalized in the eighth month of his captivity (Salem, 1997), with Sebioepepe at his side. Sometime before this ceremony takes place, Jean asks Sebioepepe if she will weep when he is executed. Sebioepepe answers, “Yes I will feel unhappy.” Jean inquires further, “but then you will eat me?” Sebioepepe smiles gently and nods in the affirmative. The sky is clear, the sun is shining, and the blue ocean shimmers

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7. See Alarcón’s (1997) discussion of women’s victimization in the context of colonization, which she analyzes through Malintzin’s story.

beyond the cliff where Jean and Sebiopepe stand. What follows is one of the most playful, erotic, and darkly humorous scenes in the film. Systematically, Sebiopepe demonstrates how the Tupinambá will kill and eat him. Jean playfully goes along and becomes an active and willing participant in role-playing his own demise. “You will show yourself brave as a warrior does,” Sebiopepe encourages him. “You can’t escape,” she says, touching the top of his head, running her fingers down his nose, and gently caressing and rubbing the sides of his face (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. In this screenshot of a [film clip](#), Sebiopepe lovingly explains the anthropophagy ritual to Jean.

She kisses him playfully and sensuously. “Cunhambebe [the tribe’s patriarch] will bring the *ivarapema* [killing instrument] and will say,” she deepens her voice: “I am here to kill you because your people have killed many of ours.” The next scene is a close shot (face/neck/upper torso). The Frenchman is in the foreground, Sebiopepe immediately

in the background. Both face the spectator. Sebiopepe walks toward Jean, and when close to him, she advises him to respond with these words: “when I die my friends will come to avenge me.” Jean gets it wrong, and substitutes the word “avenge” for “revenge.” However, Sebiopepe corrects him. Standing arms stretched out as if crucified, the Frenchman repeats the phrase correctly. This is a sardonic reversal from Hollywood film productions, where natives “denude of their own idiom, mouth pidgin English [Spanish or Chinese], a mark of their inability to master the ‘civilized’ language” (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 192).

“He will beat you just upon your head,” Sebiopepe continues. She gives him a blow to the head with the imaginary weapon. Still standing, the Frenchman drops his head and pretends he is dead. They both laugh. The “women will pour hot water on your body,” Sebiopepe explains as she gently coaches him to lie down on the rocks. “Both your arms and legs will be cut and everybody will eat a piece.” She then lies on top of him, kisses his neck, and affectionately says “my little neck.” The neck is the body part that corresponds to (and will be eaten by) the captive’s companion, in this instance, Sebiopepe (Salem, 1997). She touches his arms and runs her hands over his torso. Laughing with excitement, Jean puts his arms around her. They roll down the hill out of view and make love.

After making love, Jean falls asleep. On awakening, he realizes that he must escape. He retrieves his treasure (gold and Brazilian wood) and makes his way toward a canoe. Sebiopepe watches him from a distance, and with perfect precision, she stretches out her bow and arrow and shoots him in the leg. Jean falls, but with great effort continues toward the canoe, only to find that Sebiopepe has made a gigantic hole in the vessel. In a violent rage, he screams at her, “leech”—a funny twist because Sebiopepe’s name in Tupi means bloodsucker (Sadlier, 2003; Salem, 1997).

### Ultimate Transformation: The Anthropophagy Ceremony

The next scene is the anthropophagy ritual, which for the most part accords with Sebiopepe's demonstration. Nonetheless, Sebiopepe has omitted some important information. Previously, in a gentle voice, Sebiopepe had assured Jean that she would be unhappy at his death. At the beginning of the ceremony, Jean is tied with rope and held by two warriors. A group of women painted with ceremonial designs gather to shout insults at him. Sebiopepe, who is among them, seems far from unhappy. Instead, she smiles and only becomes more animated as the ceremony unfolds. She taunts Jean by making alveolar trill sounds and calling out to him, "what delicious meat" and "my little neck." Sebiopepe is involved in every aspect of the ceremony. She even inspects the killing instrument, which she also shows to Jean and takes to the leader. Upon her return to Jean's side, she makes one last effort to exhort him to express bravery by prodding him to give the response they had practiced together. Cunhambebe approaches Jean, states the reason for the execution and deals a blow that kills Jean in an instant. Sebiopepe's failure to tell Jean the extent of her participation is part of a negotiating tactic that will ensure her safety and possibly a better or safer position for herself within two patriarchal systems—the cultural gendered forms of domination from her community and the misogynist social practices of the colonizers (Portuguese and French)—a double jeopardy, I discuss next, and I might add, forms of multidimensional oppression that are well known to subaltern women.<sup>8</sup>

### Dos Santos's Filmic Strategies: A Move Toward Dialogic Feminist Perspectives

The cinematic narrative for Sebiopepe's character creates multiple possibilities for feminist perspectives. Dos Santos creates a film that re-

8. There is a long history of women that faced and rebelled against multiple sites of oppressions. For example, during the Civil Rights Movement, Latina and Black women struggled against the double oppression of sexism and racism from inside and outside their communities.

deploys frequently repeated conventions in Hollywood films such as depictions of native people as noble or ignoble savages, or the exotic Other. Initially, Brazil's Federal Police banned MLF from theaters because of its nudity. Native men and women as well as Jean are unclothed throughout most of the movie. Yet, dos Santos's *mise-en-scène* does not inscribe the naked bodies of the Tupinambá men and women, or that of Jean, as erotic spectacle. In this respect, he decenters the phallic gaze<sup>9</sup>. Robert Stam (2003) notes that Cannes, "land of bikinis and semi-nude starlets," and its film festival, rejected MLF "precisely because of its non-voyeuristic normalization of nudity" (p. 217). Furthermore, and contiguous with Edward Said's (1978) theories, dos Santos negates the Orientalist's gaze that constructs the native people as hypersexual, naïve, and irrational. Thus, dos Santos creates an alternative aesthetic to mainstream film and film viewing, one that supports a decolonized, i.e., an anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-imperialist view of Brazil's native peoples, and especially of nude native women.

Pereira dos Santos counters mainstream romantic love stories in film—paternalistic narratives that encumber female characters' autonomy and power. Sebiopepe does not seduce Jean, and Jean does not court Sebiopepe, nor is there a typical transition in which they fall in love, experience conflict, and reunite. Sebiopepe's desire, whether imposed or voluntary, for intimate relations with Jean is evident (Sadlier, 2003). The intention here is not to impose a Western feminist, sexual liberation worldview on Sebiopepe, but simply to point out from a feminist perspective, that her sexuality is not repressed, demonized, or romanticized. Nor is her sexuality legitimated by procreation or maternal sacrifice—dilemmas such as conceiving the child of a colonizer or accusations of betrayal and abandonment for having done so, as in the case of other

9. In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, originally published in 1975, Laura Mulvey argues that the cinema industry (i.e., mainstream Hollywood), the cinematic apparatus (the camera itself, editing, *mise-en-scène*), and cinematic viewing conditions (e.g., a darkened room), facilitate voyeuristic and fetishistic ways of looking that objectify female characters for the male gaze (Mulvey, 1989). She concludes that the phallic gaze as constructed through male privilege lead spectators to identify with male characters.

indigenous women, namely, La Malinche<sup>10</sup> (Mexico) and Iracema<sup>11</sup> (Brazil), whose life-stories are represented in numerous historical narratives, folklore, literature, and film.

Dos Santos's film has special resonance for our times, because similar to the films that M. Elise Marubbio (2006) analyzes in *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film*<sup>12</sup>, MLF "offers a starting point for understanding how deeply embedded the Native American woman is in violent and romantic images of American nation building" (Marubbio, 2006, p. 225). In film, sexualized, racialized, and violently colonized representations of native women, as Marubbio (2006) and others argue, have not changed much over the years (Rollins & O'Connor, 2003; Stam & Johnson, 1995; Shohat & Stam, 1994).

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10. In 1519, Tlaxcalteca warriors from Tabasco gave Malintzín Tenépal, a female slave of indigenous noble descent to the Spaniard Hernán Cortés. Cortés re-named her Doña Marina. She became his interpreter, translator, informant, liaison, strategist, concubine, and the mother of his children (Alarcón, 1997). The miscegenation of European and indigenous peoples resulted in a new group of people, the Mexican people. The progeny of Cortés and Malintzín were among the first Mestizos. Consequently, in historical accounts, folklore, and literature, Malintzín evolved as the originator of the Mexican people. Paradoxically, Doña Marina, known after the conquest as La Malinche, came to represent the fallen Mexican Eve—the "mother/whore" who "betrayed" her own kind by helping Cortés conquer Mexico (Fuentes, 1970; Paz, 1961). For a revisionist interpretation of Malintzín's signification from a feminist perspective, see the work of Norma Alarcón (1997).

11. José de Alencar's *Iracema* (1865) is an epic nineteenth-century novel about the colonization of Brazil by Portuguese invaders. In this tragic story, Iracema (anagram for América) in a moment of passion, gives herself to Martim, a Portuguese colonizer. As a result, Iracema "can no longer function as the protector of her community" (Sadlier, 2003, p. 68), and she abandons her family. Later, her people, the Tabajara, are all but destroyed by an enemy tribe. Iracema dies of grief, but her son in whom both races are united survives (Sadlier, 2003). Also see *Iracema-Uma Transa Amazônica*, a film by Jorge Bodansky.

12. M. Elise Marubbio (2006) uses the trope of the Celluloid Maiden to examine representations of Native American women in film dating from the silent movie era to the present. She writes that the Celluloid Maiden is a young native woman who enables, assists, loves, or sides with a White colonizer. As a result of the alliance, the Celluloid Maidens all die tragically. Their demise is "justified" because the films construct indigenous women as "inherently bad" (Marubbio, 2006, p. 8).

Furthermore, native women are rarely represented as important characters in the stories produced and disseminated in visual culture. Unlike the characters in countless tragic stories of sexualized and colonized native women in cultural texts (La Malinche, Iracema, as well as those in the 300+ films analyzed by Marubbio in *Killing the Indian Maiden*), Sebiopepe's character is fully developed. Her story offers a different way to imagine relationships between native women and European colonizers. For instance, the male colonizer is the captive not the native woman. And, when Jean has the opportunity to escape, he fails to convince Sebiopepe to go with him. She refuses to pursue a "romantic" relationship with the European male, bear his children, or leave her community. The association between the two is not a romantic relationship that confuses or oppresses Sebiopepe. Romance does not flourish, at least not in a hegemonic or Hollywood sense (Sadlier, 2003). In this respect, dos Santos offers a cinematic narrative that opens up to an oppositional reading, a critical interpretative strategy that I use to theorize and imagine what a non-Western, anti-colonizing, and potentially non-essentialist *feminist romantic* relationship might look like.

But, given that Sebiopepe participates in a violent act, is it possible to claim her relationship with Jean as feminist? If we understand the subject and knowledge as socially constructed, as Donna Haraway (1990) and Judith Butler (2005) propose, women's experiences cannot be ontologized into absolute realities or *truths*. In other words, to understand Sebiopepe's story in a Western semiotic grid would entail inscribing a type of semiotic decoding that operates under the idea that knowledge "is already completely codified" (Rommens, 2010, p. 7). This action would erase any difference between the Tupinambá and the Europeans. For example, eating the Other—a violent act by most standards is not coded in the same way in Tupi culture as it is in Western culture. My intent is not to diminish the violent exchange between people involved in processes of colonization but to bring those experiences to the forefront. It should be noted that Tupi understood life and death as a continuum and not as an end, or as a dichotomy between life and death (Castro-Klarén, 2000). Anthropophagy, whether internalizing the oppressor literally or metaphorically, is not an operation of synthesis but one of ongoing repetition, hybridity, and alterity, i.e., becoming the self through the Other.

In fact, Bastos (2006) argues that hybridity is “the ultimate act of absorption with the other” (p. 115). In short, my objective in this article is less to claim Sebiopepe’s relationship with Jean as categorically feminist or anti-feminist (based on the fact that she consumes Jean or participates in the anthropophagy ritual), and more to articulate through Sebiopepe’s story a de-territorialization of knowledge (i.e., a decentering of the loci of enunciation of Western knowledge) that foregrounds the will and agency of women to resist and to reformulate oppressive power from an anti-colonizing and potentially anti-essentialist feminist perspective.

### Feminist Regressions and Advances in MLF

MLF offers important possibilities for feminist perspectives, yet it reinscribes recalcitrant patriarchal hierarchies and gender stereotypes. For example, Cunhambebe assigns Sebiopepe, his brother’s widow, to become Jean’s keeper/companion. Whether Sebiopepe and the community have any part in this decision is not known. In MLF, men in general and the Tupinambá as the male leader have the power to declare war, pronounce death sentences, and assign/gift tribal women to native and foreign males. Furthermore, warfare in the film is coded as a male-gendered activity. Consistent with gender-biased paradigms, dos Santos casts only the women in the role of inciters during the anthropophagy ceremony. He, thus, supports, ideologies that posit women as treacherous and as capable of rousing men such that trouble and violence ensue.

Discourses about troublesome women or women who invert gender norms were (are) often translated into narratives to regulate acceptable female behavior (Castriota, 1995; McCaffery & McCaffery, 1989; Moxey, 2004; Wurtzel, 1998). For instance, one of the most complicated tensions in the film’s narrative is the role native women play in the consumption of human flesh—an act that inverts European, i.e., civilized norms. The inversion of gender norms abounds throughout history<sup>13</sup>. In

13. The myths of the fierce and over-sexed Amazon warrior women in need of containment (Castriota, 1995), the medieval world upside-down topos composed of insubordinate wives responsible for henpecked (emasculated) husbands (Moxey, 2004), and the Manichean Iberian interpretations of Mesoamerican goddesses as good and evil (McCaffery & McCaffery, 1999), all represent women who invert gender norms.

turn, these ideologies are used to support patriarchal norms and values in sexuality, marriage, religion, child rearing, customs, and practices that support asymmetrical relationships of power (Finch, 2012; Price, 2003). European men used accounts and images of savage women attacking, dismembering, roasting/boiling, and consuming European males as a cultural antithesis to regulate, liberate, Christianize, civilize, violate, and conquer native women.

Similarly, the credit sequence in and poster for MLF depict art prints found in Staden’s (1557/1892) book of both native men and women engaging in cannibalistic acts. Nevertheless, the women feature more prominently in the preparation and consumption of human flesh. In MLF, dos Santos presents the spectator with images of native women hacking human limbs, biting entrails, grilling human flesh, and preparing to stew humans in gigantic cauldrons. In the film, Sebiopepe describes for Jean how the women will cut and prepare his flesh for consumption, again, reinforcing the active and aggressive role of native women in eating European male human flesh. Significantly, at the end of the film, the only person the spectator observes engaged in the actual act of cannibalism is Sebiopepe herself.

By making native women the agents of violence, dos Santos mirrors Eurocentric paradigms that conflate women with cultural traditions. As the gender that inverts, violates, and devours human flesh, women are naturalized as the Other. Because native women are inscribed as the embodiment of cannibalism, as in the film’s penultimate scene, the role that Tupinambá and European men in creating the conditions that bring war, in violence against women, and in the eating of enemies, remains unmarked. Hence, native woman as cannibal becomes the central focus, glossing over the material conditions under which traditions and cultural practices (e.g., anthropophagy) become codified.

On the other hand, one of the most interesting differences between Staden’s (1557/1892) book and dos Santos’s (1971) film is the representation of women. In his travel narratives, Staden mentioned women only occasionally, speaking of and defining them strictly as a group (Sadlier, 2003). Dos Santos’s film, in contrast, develops Sebiopepe’s character both as an individual and as part of a group. Sebiopepe is always in the spectator’s view, and by the time the spectator views the anthropophagy

ritual and penultimate scene, Sebiopepe has become the central character. This is especially evident in one of the film's most memorable, aesthetically pleasing, and deconstructive scenes: when Sebiopepe gazes directly at the spectator, and with great intentionality masticates Jean's neck. Her gaze is not an exchange in which she triumphs over Jean, the Tupinamba over foreigners, the Cinema Novo filmmaker over Hollywood film productions, or women over men. Instead, it is a complex process in which she physically and metaphorically consumes Jean and by extension all that he embodies. Sebiopepe's anthropophagy enacts Jean's ultimate transformation into the Tupinambá tribe (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Film still of Sebiopepe enacting Jean's ultimate transformation into the Tupinambá tribe.

### **Implications for Art Education: Diversity and Gender, Visual Literacy, and Self-reflexivity**

The conquest of native peoples is interpreted not only in written historical and literary accounts but also in visual culture (paintings,

photographs, architecture, print media, and film). As a metaphor for cultural cannibalism, anthropophagy inheres in the idea that assimilation of difference is possible “by means of ingestion and digestion of the ‘other’ by the subject” (Castro-Klarén, 2000, p. 297). Yet, in the act of devouring, “the subaltern culture transforms from a passive entity into an active agent capable of transformation that affects both self and other” (Castro-Klarén, 2000, p. 297). MLF's paradoxical, multivocal, deconstructive, and darkly humorous allegory explores exactly this terrain. And through Sebiopepe's narrative in particular, the film offers an account of the power dynamic between colonizers and colonized. For students, therefore, the film offers a production that provides opportunities to offer critical reflections on the complexities, ambiguities, and power dynamics inherent in visual culture representations of gender, race, nation, love, and cultural traditions.

As films tend to re-inscribe social stereotypes, it is important for students to learn to challenge the objectivity of what is shown to them in this context and by extension in regards to all media (Bordwell, 2006; Drinkwater, 2011). Much like the opening scene of MLF, students can question the neutrality of what is on the screen or the identities constructed through visual codes as a way of considering oppositional readings. Native peoples (Marubbio 2006), African-Americans (Dines & Humes, 2003), Latinos (Berg, 2002; Nericcio, 2007), and Arabs (Shaheen, 2003) are represented and misrepresented in visual culture. Looking at images across cultures help students understand how visual (re)presentations operate in a broader cultural field and how through critical visual literacy they can consider relationships between images (Mallinger, 2003; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009; Thorsby, 2011).

MLF also provides opportunities to promote student discussion about how gender-based norms acquire visibility through media culture. In Hollywood films, the native female body continues to be “a vehicle through which colonialism is continually presented visually and metaphorically” (Marubbio, 2006, p. 20). Sebiopepe's story offers a different perspective, a counter-narrative that demonstrates the power of the cultural text, in particular, the visual culture text, and the potential of film analysis, for interrogating relationships of power in complex ways. For instance, students could reflect on the legacy of colonization by analyz-

ing the impact of sexist ideologies on people's lives, such as the trafficking of women on a global scale,<sup>14</sup> which continues the trading of women as represented in MLF.

Student might also consider how visual culture impacts the way that they personally come to know and interact with others. Such critical self-reflection is important because it allows students to consider their own ideology and actions and to understand that identity and culture are constructed through social processes. Each of us is implicated in the processes of identity formation. Christine Ballengee Morris and Patricia L. Stuhr (2001), remind us that for students to address cultural identity in critical and complex ways, entails considering “who they are empowering or disenfranchising through their personal lives, actions, and work, which includes making and interpreting the meaning of art and visual culture” (p. 6).

In closing, meaning making is determined as much by the experiences of the audience, as by the visual representations, context, and content of the film or visual culture (Drinkwater, 2011; Savva, 2011; Sullivan, 2004; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). In this article, I propose that as a methodological approach, postcolonial and feminist oppositional readings dedicated to challenge the apparatus of oppressive power, highlight the significance of multiple and contradictory meaning. In so doing, counter-hegemonic interpretative strategies, foreground the ambivalence, rupture, and tensions that are in operation in the negotiation for meaning. These tensions can be used to elicit critical reflection, as I try to do here, and reconstruct power in ways that create possibilities for encounters centered on non-patriarchal and anti-colonizing perspectives. Contiguous with this vision, my oppositional reading of dos Santos's film aims to decenter Western ways of knowing and loving.

14. *Lilya 4-Ever* directed by Lukas Moodysson (2002) offers rich terrain for examining structural violence against women and the trafficking of women on a global scale.

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