

The Spatial Construction of Difference in Milton Hatoum's *Dois Irmãos*

Marília Scaff Rocha Ribeiro

Michigan State University

Abstract: This essay offers a reading of Milton Hatoum's novel *Dois irmãos* (2000) through the focus on the description of space. Central to the book is the discussion of the ways in which differences may or may not be reconciled. I argue that the dispute between the twin brothers reflects a concern for other kinds of oppositions that are made visible through the juxtaposition of spaces such as the Amazon/ the Orient, the city/ the forest, the house/ the maid quarters, among others.

Keywords: Milton Hatoum, *Dois Irmãos*, space, Amazon.

[A Amazônia] é uma grandeza que exige a penetração sutil dos microscópios e a visão apertadinha e breve dos analistas: é um infinito que deve ser dosado.

Euclides da Cunha, describing the Amazon in a letter to Artur Lemos, 1905

*I liked the place; I liked the idea of the place.
Two rivers. Hadn't two rivers sprung
from the Garden of Eden? No, that was four
and they'd diverged. Here only two
and coming together. Even if one were tempted
to literary interpretations
such as: life/death, right/wrong, male/female
– such notions would have resolved, dissolved, straight off
in that watery, dazzling dialectic.*

Elizabeth Bishop, "Santarém"¹

These epigraphs might serve as a port of entry into the fiction of Milton Hatoum and his approach to space, since they also oppose a personal experience of place to collectively constructed definitions. Both Euclides's letter and Bishop's poem consist of reactions to the Amazon environment, and the change in perception such encounters entail. Bishop's poem makes reference to a visit to Santarém, but it might equally have been inspired by the meeting of the waters in Manaus. It does, after all, describe a common phenomenon in the rivers of the Amazon Basin: the conflux of two or more rivers whose waters, being of different colors, flow side by side for an unusual period of time before finally merging together. Manaus hosts one of the best-known meetings of the waters, since it is from such an encounter between the rivers Solimões and Negro that the Amazon River is formed. As in Santarém, the two rivers perform a choreography different from that of the Garden of Eden, although the reference to paradise seems fitting for the rain forest, commonly referred to in terms of its sublime and luscious landscape.

On a less celebratory tone, Euclides da Cunha, in the letter mentioned above and speaking about the Amazon in general and about Manaus in particular, mentions his will to write his own *Paradise Lost* as a record of his trip in the region. In fact, his disappointment stems from a discrepancy between his experience with the place and his expectations about it.² Bishop, on the other hand, seemed to have been able to watch the meeting of the waters as a spectacle of pure landscape, and retain its symbolic power. Bishop did not only like that place, she liked the "idea" of it: the references that it might (or might not) evoke, the rigid oppositions that it disavowed. She liked that the river resisted a simplistic explanation and that it offered a dialectical answer to "literary interpretations," which seem here to stand for a formalist way of looking at things and images.

The rivers' powers for dissolution and resolution are also at the core of Milton Hatoum's work, whose concern for the conciliation/irreconciliation of opposites is a constant *topos* in his fiction. I argue that one of the central points of *Dois irmãos* is the way in which differences may or may not be reconciled, and how this discussion is often mediated by a spatial vocabulary.

1. The Amazon and the Orient

The four novels published by Milton Hatoum have recurring motifs and similar ambiances. In *Relato de um certo oriente* (1989), an adopted child returns to Manaus to revisit the matriarch of the Lebanese family who adopted her. Through the narrative voices of family members and friends, she attempts to reconstitute the memories of growing up in this specific environment. In *Dois irmãos* (2000), it is again the narrative voice of an “adopted” child (in this case, the maid’s son) that tries to understand the past. Here, the conflicts of the immigrant family are concentrated in the dispute between the twin brothers and their improbable reconciliation. In *Cinzas do Norte* (2005), the narrative focuses on yet another dysfunctional family, and the opposition embodied by the twins in the previous novel is here made explicit through the contrast between two artists and their conflicts between ethics and aesthetics. Although in this novel the Lebanese descent is not central, it is still present, together with Native Brazilian characters, in the description of the social fabric that constitutes Manaus. *Órfãos do Eldorado* (2008) explores once again a difficult father-son relationship, and incorporates many Amazonian myths within the plot. The novels, put together in sequence, cover the temporal history of Manaus and the region spanning from the beginning of the 20th century and the vestiges of the rubber boom, to the 50s and 60s, and finally to the Zona Franca of the 70s and 80s. All of Hatoum’s novels published to date are set in the Amazon and tell stories of disaggregating families through the point of view of a first-person narrator who almost always witnesses the events without participating in them as protagonist.

In all novels, spatial dimensions play a prominent role. It is noteworthy that the reviews of the novels, both in Brazil and abroad, have emphasized the exotic, luscious element present in the conjunction of the Amazon and the Orient. Hatoum’s novels have become part of a tradition of Amazonian novels³ that surpasses the limits of a national Brazilian literature. But Hatoum’s work is original in juxtaposing the Amazon and the Orient: two “regionalisms,” two spaces especially fertile in assumptions and stereotypes in the popular imagination. Outside Brazil, the Amazonian aspect of the book has called, as anticipated, much attention. On the back cover of the English translation of *Dois*

irmãos, for instance, we read that the *Sunday Telegraph* describes the book as “strange and haunting,” depicting “an exotic world, a dangerous world,” while the reviewer from *Publishers Weekly* is mesmerized by “the dances, exotic sights, smells and fragrances of luscious Brazil,” describing the book as “atmospheric, passionate, enigmatic.”

The reactions of readers and reviewers stem from both aspects present in the book and of the expectations that they bring to the reading. One example of an element that may be read as regionalist is the photography on the cover of *Dois irmãos*. In *The Brothers*, the English edition, the cover depicts a house on stilts, whitish muddy water rising almost to its doorstep, and a boy clinging to the window. The cover of the Brazilian edition chooses a more panoramic view of the harbor, with the old city market in the background and a gathering of fishermen and vendors by an Amazon River filled with small boats. It is ironic that while the narrative plot revolves mainly around family relations and private matters, the covers show images of outdoor, public spaces (the market, an unidentified boy, the river). These particular covers both elicit a certain naturalistic or ethnographic reading of what the book might contain. However, the graphic designer’s work can be seen as toning down a possible exotic reading, by neutralizing the colors and choosing (in the case of the Brazilian edition) a black and white photograph from 1900. The somewhat faded greenish color of both covers, as well as the cloudy skies and the absence of dense forests avoid a more “tropical” representation of the novels and point to the memorialistic, melancholic and confessional aspect of the prose.

The ambiguous reading rendered by the covers is also an issue that pervades the narrative itself. While depicting a space that, in the imagination of most readers, is the epitome of exoticism, the novels engage in the debate of whether it is even possible to avoid a regionalist reading from the start. What the narrative can do, however, is position itself within certain traditions and work actively with the assumptions that certain themes usually bring to mind. In the case of the Amazon, the cliché is the image of the luscious forest, or, as Candace Slater has stated, the forest as a “giant” (14)⁴. Milton Hatoum has written about this *topos* of grandiosity as it is extended to the city of Manaus:

Quase tudo na Amazônia é visto de forma hiperbólica. Os superlativos em torno da grandeza e da exuberância escondem o que há de mais prosaico, o chão mesmo do nosso cotidiano. A retórica oficial e iconoclasta atribuiu à cidade a grandiosidade e a exuberância da Natureza. O luxo urbano-arquitetônico de Manaus teria, enfim, encontrado os adjetivos que antes só eram atribuídos à floresta que a envolve. Muitos mitos foram fabricados em torno desse urbanismo ostentoso. (“Amazonas, capital Manaus” 61)

The author was thus very much aware of these assumptions and has mentioned in different interviews and essays his conscious attempt to avoid a traditionally regionalist or epic diction when writing his novels. On the occasion of his first novel, *Relato de um certo oriente*, much of the critical attention focused on whether the book could be considered regionalist and whether it exoticized the Amazon region and the cultural environment of Manaus. Maria Zilda Ferreira Cury has written that “O espaço da Amazônia é aqui [in *Relato*] despido de exotismo. A cidade de Manaus apresenta-se mesmo como incaracterística e tristemente semelhante a qualquer região periférica e pobre do planeta” (171). Tânia Pellegrini, on the other side of the spectrum, claims that *Relato* and *Dois irmãos* are very regionally marked, and that there is enough evidence to consider these novels regionalist. She does not, however, see it negatively that Hatoum follows this specific tradition. Her point is to show how his work can offer innovative nuances to regionalism and how this dialogue with literary tradition prevents his fiction from becoming a superficial “multicultural text.” Through a “relativization of the exotic,” these novels are able to revisit the regionalist tradition without becoming trapped in the limitations of the genre.

Beyond the discussion on regionalism, but centered on space, Luiz Costa Lima’s review of *Dois irmãos* highlights the rootlessness of the local as a distinctive trait of the novel. Manaus is “uma cidade sem raízes, formada por estratos que se dissipam e desaparecem quase sem vestígios” (318). This lack of specificity, though, is the ideal scenario for the novel, and therefore the absence of a “rooted” regionalism is precisely what makes the narrative so connected with the marginal space it portrays. Costa Lima is incisive when he

concludes that “erraria o leitor que visse na ambiência dos dois romances de Hatoum o mero lugar onde uma história humana se desenrola” (319).

The resistance with which the regionalist label is usually met can be attributed, at least in part, to its association with local color and geographical determinism. The defense of the local against the universal, adequate for the purposes of a newly constituted nation—as was the case with the Romantic novels with indigenous themes—, has gradually lost favor as the tensions between center and periphery have shifted and as concerns about national identity have become secondary or even non-existent in recent literary production. Hatoum refuses the label of regionalist writer precisely because of the localist paradigm it entails. Although the Amazon plays a central role in his narratives, it is a universalist worldview that informs the conception of each of his works.

In an essay about his writing process, Hatoum has described his attempt to tone down possible regionalist descriptions, while acknowledging that for him the ambiance of his novels has less to do with portraying or describing a specific place than with resorting to the writer’s own personal experiences and memory, which will unavoidably inform his works:

O Oriente e o Amazonas podem formar o perfeito par exótico. ... Escrever sobre índios, seringueiros e a floresta exuberante pode significar um aceno à imagem que muitos leitores estrangeiros (e brasileiros) esperam de um escritor do Amazonas. Por isso, uma das minhas preocupações foi evitar o exotismo e a descrição da natureza, que, muitas vezes, podem tornar-se uma camisa de força, uma forma de inscrever o texto numa área geográfica. Numa obra literária os traços da cor local e as circunstâncias históricas, geográficas e sociais são inevitáveis, pois o escritor está sempre rondando suas origens; às vezes, sem se dar conta, são sempre essas origens que o seguem de perto, como uma sombra, ou mesmo de longe, como um sonho ou um pesadelo. (“Um certo oriente” 10-12)

The spatial referent, being part of the writer’s lived experience, is described as a “shadow” or a “nightmare,” a circumstantial element that nevertheless

informs much of the ambiance of the novel. The dividing line here is a space that is staged from an internal perspective, through the mediations of memory and storytelling, as opposed to a space portrayed as a backdrop only, as a picture that can be observed and analyzed from a distance. Hatoum uses photographic images to refer to his attempt to reverse the prevalent hyperbolic characterization of the Amazon and the city of Manaus: “De modo que pus de lado o projeto de um romance espacial, de grandes panorâmicas sobre a região, e fechei a angular, usando uma lente de aumento para ver de perto um drama familiar” (12).

This has been his method for all novels. Although the aforementioned debate on exoticism has concerned primarily *Relato de um certo oriente*, it does apply to a large extent to *Dois irmãos*. I will now discuss the ways in which the spatial references work in amplifying the debate on the possibility or impossibility of assimilation of differences that is one of the main aspects not only in the plot but in the conception of the novel as a whole.

2. Domestic and Urban Topologies

The first sentences of the novel corroborate the image of the abandonment of a domestic place framed within the context of its geographical surroundings on one side, and the temporally and geographically distant space of memory and childhood on the other:

Zana teve de deixar tudo: o bairro portuário de Manaus, a rua em declive sombreada por mangueiras centenárias, o lugar que para ela era quase tão vital quanto a Biblos de sua infância: a pequena cidade no Líbano que ela recordava em voz alta, vagando pelos aposentos empoeirados até se perder no quintal, onde a copa da velha seringueira sombreava as palmeiras e o pomar cultivados por mais de meio século. (11)

The movement through space (of immigration, of leaving the house, of wandering in the garden) enacts the juxtaposition of Lebanon and the Amazon: Biblos is fused with mango trees, rubber trees, the port of Manaus. The reader does not understand yet who Zana is and why she has to leave everything. But he or she is confronted with the fact that it is not the first time she

has to leave somewhere and that places and displacements are going to be a prominent theme in the novel. There, condensed in the first paragraph of the novel, are many of the aspects that singularize Hatoum's fictional world.

In fact, the procedure of evoking names and elements that will only make sense later in the narrative is also present in *Relato de um certo oriente* and *Cinzas do Norte*. The result is that the pieces of this singular narrative will only fit together when read through. There is no description of the land and of the landscape separate from the human dramas of the family. Rather than opening with a panoramic view of the river and the regional trees, or with a description of Zana's childhood memories in Biblos, the first paragraph of *Dois irmãos* sets the tone for the entire novel: the physical space is here filtered by personal experiences. The space of the novel cannot be described in broad strokes; it has to be treaded, constructed little by little, microscopically; it is interwoven with events and circumstances particular to that family. It is in this sense that domestic space plays an important role between public and private experiences. The prominence of the house as a privileged site for the unfolding of conflicts is made explicit in the detailed description of rooms, gardens, decoration, in which domestic divisions point to the hierarchy of those living in it in relation to the matriarch. The narrator, Nael, as an illegitimate son of either Omar or Yaqub, lived with his mother, the servant, in a separate room in a corner of the backyard, outside of the house proper; Zana's two sons and daughter are also allotted their space accordingly:

Rânia significava muito mais do que eu, porém menos do que os gêmeos. Por exemplo: eu dormia num quartinho construído no quintal, fora dos limites da casa. Rânia dormia num pequeno aposento, só que no andar superior. Os gêmeos dormiam em quartos semelhantes e contíguos, com a mesma mobília; recebiam a mesma mesada, as mesmas moedas, e ambos estudavam no colégio dos padres. (29-30)

The way in which each brother organized his own space illustrates again the contrast between them, and two opposing poles in the novel: Omar's room was filled with ashtrays, bottles filled with sand, women's underwear, and seeds,

in extreme contrast with Yaqub's room, empty, without personal marks. Domingas, in their absence, continued to clean up their rooms everyday. "E se os remos e as tralhas do caçula lhe exaltavam o ânimo, o despojamento do espaço de Yaqub lhe esfriava a cabeça." Nael concludes: "Talvez minha mãe gostasse desse contraste"(107).

The house is, indeed, the epicenter of a novel that has other spatial markers such as the city and the region (not to mention the country and the interstices of immigration). Given the visual appeal of the novel, it is not surprising that Hatoum, an Architecture school graduate, has claimed to have projected a floor plan for the house depicted in the novel, in order to guide his writing process ("Interview with Cláudia Antunes"). The author's interest in architecture and urbanism has led him to write about the history and development of Manaus as a city. A recent example is a book published by the Secretaria da Cultura do Pará, *Crônica de duas cidades*, in which Hatoum authors the section dedicated to Manaus while Benedito Nunes writes on Belém. In this book, Hatoum chronicles the historical transformation of Manaus and its attempt to become a modern city. He focuses on the decisions of urban planners and administrators to give the city a rational and supposedly more efficient plan, in opposition to the chaotic mixture of straw houses and brick buildings that followed the patterns designed randomly by the *igarapés* and was part of the cultural tradition of the native people. He discusses the contradictory lack of parks and green areas in Manaus, a city located in the midst of the Amazon forest.

The city that denies its origins and its surrounding space is visible in the way Manaus is described in *Dois irmãos*. The unfair process of urbanization and the deterioration of living conditions for the riverside inhabitants are not only chronicled in detail, but are also paralleled with the fate of the troubled immigrant family. The experience of domestic migration and immigration at once echoes the multiple spaces that coexist in the city, not always peacefully. The meeting of the waters is again a powerful image, one that evokes the dynamics of assimilation and resistance.

Of course the main opposition in the book consists of the struggle between the twin brothers, similar in appearance yet so different in personality. But there are other oppositions that underscore seemingly unproblematic

differences, such as those of class, religion, ethnicity, and gender. The first paragraph of the novel, quoted above, and other passages concerning immigrant life in Manaus might give the impression of a city with open arms, in which the confluence of different spaces and origins results in a somewhat homogeneous mixture. Yet, towards the end of the novel, the city, like the family, is engulfed in a self-destructive whirlpool, and it is with melancholy that Nael witnesses both processes: “[eu] olhava com assombro e tristeza a cidade que se mutilava e crescia ao mesmo tempo, afastada do porto e do rio, irreconciliável com o seu passado” (264). The final tone of the novel is one of irreconcilability, in opposition to that first paragraph, in which the rubber tree and the cedars seemed to coexist in a space full of hope and optimism.

3. Two Rivers, Two Brothers

The conflict between tradition and modernity is also figured in the characters of the two brothers, Omar and Yaqub. Indeed, while many passages confirm the association of Yaqub with a modern Brazil, Omar is depicted as a traditional *malandro*. The dispute between the brothers points to a critique of the politics of development and modernization, but also of the old patriarchal system in Brazil.⁵

Scattered throughout the book are passages that signal a confluence between the drama of the family, especially in terms of Yaqub's experience, and the historical fate of Brazil as a nation confronting modernity. The first chapter of the novel relates Yaqub's return to Brazil after being sent to Lebanon by his parents against his will because of a fight between the brothers. His father Halim goes to Rio to fetch him, and he arrives together with the soldiers that had gone to Italy to fight in the First World War (13). Some other historical events mentioned are the construction of Brasília, the military coup of 1964 and the creation of a Zona Franca, which fomented the electronics industry in Manaus. All of these events point to a modernizing discourse, which preached economic growth as the sure and fast way to secure for Brazil a place among the great nations of the world. Just as Yaqub was “o montanhês rústico que urdia um futuro triunfante” (32), the subliminal feeling at the end of the war and the next decade was one of optimism—the feeling that the country could jump from backwardness to modernity without any mediation. In fact, when Yaqub decides to move to São

Paulo in 1950, the narrator points explicitly to this future: “Naquela época, Yaqub e o Brasil inteiro pareciam ter um futuro promissor” (41).

It is clear from the start, however, that Yaqub’s success would entail a series of compromises, just as a critique of the political direction the country took is patent in the narrative. The parallelism of Yaqub’s and Brazil’s destiny allows for a reading that avoids the easy differentiation between the “good” twin and the “bad” one. Brazil, after the euphoria of Brasília, underwent a long period of authoritarianism followed by an economic development that offered little help to the marginalized—those who populate the floating city that the narrator (himself a marginalized character) describes so well. Yaqub’s coldness and his egotism—which did not impede his social climbing—are thus reflected in the national political scene: “Um outro Yaqub, usando a máscara do que havia de mais moderno no outro lado do Brasil. Ele se sofisticava, preparando-se para dar o bote: minhoca que se quer serpente, algo assim. Conseguiu. Deslizou em silêncio sob a folhagem” (61).

Towards the end of the narrative the hopes and dreams that surrounded the idea of modernization are unmasked. The blackout in Manaus, during Brasília’s inauguration, is telling of the limitations of benefits brought about by such modernization. And the “futuro promissor” that had appeared on page 41 to indicate the hopes for Yaqub and Brazil appears again later, loaded with sarcasm:

Noites de blecaute no norte, enquanto a nova capital do país estava sendo inaugurada. A euforia, que vinha de um Brasil tão distante chegava a Manaus como um sopro amornado. E o futuro, ou a idéia de um futuro promissor, dissolvía-se no mormaço amazônico. Estávamos longe da era industrial e mais longe ainda do nosso passado grandioso. (128)

The death of the family patriarch, Halim, coincides with the year in which the heavy hand of the dictatorship began to be felt more dramatically. The death of Halim in 1968 is significant in that it marks the historical “death” of an old system in which opposites could be absorbed, in which a *malandro* such as Omar could still transit between the poles of order and disorder.⁶ The new order is clear in relation to Halim’s business: his traditional store, in which all kinds of people

stopped to chat, play chess and eventually buy one thing or another, gave way to the efficient management of Rânia, who, instructed by Yaqub, transformed the family business into a lucrative albeit impersonal enterprise.

As we have seen, the change lays less in the fact that many different peoples were coming to the city and more in what seems to destabilize the characters throughout the novel—the lack of a clear definition of boundaries or contraries. If before everyone “knew their place,” in Manaus’s new order there is no straightforward definition of boundaries; indefiniteness is the word of the day, and most characters feel displaced without a rooted connection to their place of origin or election.

It is not surprising that, as the novel progresses, it becomes more and more difficult to take sides in relation to the brothers. If in the beginning it seems natural to sympathize with Yaqub and pity him for having been sent to Lebanon against his will as a child, as well as easy to criticize Zana for overprotecting Omar to the detriment of Yaqub, the narrative deconstructs these certainties little by little. At the end, the narrator’s verdict is clear: “A loucura da paixão de Omar, suas atitudes desmesuradas contra tudo e todos neste mundo não foram menos danosas do que os projetos de Yaqub: o perigo e a sordidez de sua ambição calculada” (264). As I have attempted to show, the ambiguous characterization of Yaqub reflects the ambiguous nature of modernization in Manaus and in Brazil in general. Yaqub, himself the symbol of modernization, feels as much of a misfit in São Paulo as the enormous rubber tree that he was surprised to find in Praça da República while living there (59-60).

The amalgamation of a historical reference with the fictional plot constitutes one of the many instances in which there is an overlap or a confluence between two or more disparate elements. However well integrated these elements might seem to be (the Catholicism of Zana and the Islamism of Halim, for example), the novel works gradually to deconstruct this apparent harmony.

In spatial terms, there are juxtapositions on many levels: the houses and the “floating city,” the Amazon and the Orient, Manaus and São Paulo, Brazil and the United States (through Omar’s comparison of the two rivers, the Mississippi and the Amazonas, during a trip). I have already shown how the first paragraph of the novel foreshadows many of the topics developed throughout

the narrative, and especially that of the juxtaposition of spaces: the house, the city and Lebanon. The setting of the entire novel emphasizes the multidimensional aspect of space. Yet, such multiplicity comes to mean different things as the narrative unfolds. Biblos, Zana's father's restaurant, is an example of one of those plurilingual and multicultural spaces, a place where the exchange of everyday experiences was possible:

Desde a inauguração, o Biblos foi um ponto de encontro de imigrantes libaneses, sírios e judeus marroquinos que moravam na praça Nossa Senhora dos Remédios e nos quarteirões que a rodeavam. Falavam português misturado com árabe, francês e espanhol, e dessa algaravia surgiam histórias que se cruzavam, vidas em trânsito, um vaivém de vozes que contavam um pouco de tudo: um naufrágio, a febre negra num povoado do rio Purus, uma trapaça, um incesto, lembranças remotas e o mais recente: uma dor ainda viva, uma paixão ainda acesa, a perda coberta de luto, a esperança de que os caloteiros saldassem as dívidas. (47-48)

The confusion of voices, in spite of the many languages and ethnicities involved, is actually a means of expressing experiences, local gossip and regional news, but also feelings, emotions, and the relationships that bound the community together. The same sort of cheerful diversity appears in the description of the guests at Halim and Zana's wedding: "Uma mistura de gente, de línguas, de origens, de trajas e aparências" (53). But those were Halim's words, told to Nael in moments of nostalgia, of longing for a time when he and other immigrants arrived in Amazonas with the intention of building a new life there. Halim's arrival in Brazil in the first decades of the century signaled for him a time of open possibilities, of an investment both in himself and in the country, his adopted homeland.

The scenery Nael experiences himself, half a century later, is different from the earlier immigration period he learns about through Halim's memories. Manaus, a traditionally diverse city, goes through one more wave of immigration during the 1970s at the prospect of new jobs in the electronics industry. It is interesting to investigate why this new phase of "multiculturalism" in

Manaus is considered a sign of change for Omar, himself a son of the international aspect of the city. After Halim's death, Omar tells his grieving mother about the changes in Manaus, a city that continues to be populated by a confluence of peoples: "Manaus está cheia de estrangeiros, mama. Indianos, coreanos, chineses ... O centro virou um formigueiro de gente do interior ... tudo está mudando em Manaus" (223). But Omar's words hardly echo those of Halim. The diversity brought about by the implementation of the Zona Franca is seen in a different light, as a product of an industrialization boom fueled by globalization. The mass-culture orientation is evident in the metaphor for Manaus as an "anthill of people."

The winds of globalization are embodied in the character of Rochiram, a businessman from India who comes to Manaus in order to build a modern high-rise hotel. In direct contrast with the earlier description of immigrants and workers in Manaus, Rochiram represents a traveler with no sense of roots; his relationship with spaces is dictated solely by economic interests:

Ele vivia em trânsito, construindo hotéis em vários continentes. Era como se morasse em pátrias provisórias, falasse línguas provisórias e fizesse amizades provisórias. O que se enraizava em cada lugar eram os negócios. Ouvira dizer que Manaus crescia muito, com suas indústrias e seu comércio. Viu a cidade agitada, os painéis luminosos com letreiros em inglês, chinês e japonês. Percebeu que sua intuição não falhara. (226)

A different conception of business, of trading, also contrasts Rochiram and the Lebanese immigrants from the beginning of the century. One may read a hint of nostalgia in Hatoum's pessimistic portrayal of a more contemporary Manaus; what is clear throughout the novel, however, is a critique of a specific kind of multiculturalism, which reduces diversity to a collection of commodities, made of commercial products that can be bought and sold in the globalized international market. What becomes lost in a superficial idea of multiculturalism is exactly the link with rooted experiences that Halim prized so much.

After Zana's death, it is the name of Rochiram that will appear on a sign at the entrance of the family's house, now converted into a trinket store

with imported goods from all over the world. The transformation of the house into “Casa Rochiram”—made possible thanks to the debt incurred by the two brothers in their attempt at revenge at each other—is the touchstone in the history of decline of Manaus and the family as retold by the novel:

Os azulejos portugueses com a imagem da santa padroeira foram arrancados. E o desenho sóbrio da fachada, harmonia de retas e curvas, foi tapado por um ecletismo delirante. A fachada, que era razoável, tornou-se uma máscara de horror, e a idéia que se faz de uma casa desfez-se em pouco tempo. (255)

Here there is no harmony between the opposites. The synthesis is no longer possible: only the harsh contrast is visible. The resort to eclecticism does not yield space for diversity—rather, it reinforces the artificiality of all those architectural elements taken out of their context and the impossibility of a coherent totality. Such an appropriation of disparate elements implies one of the characteristics of globalization according to Stuart Hall, namely, the assertion that “at a certain point, globalization cannot proceed without learning to live with and working through difference” (181). The actual way or working with difference may vary, though, and Hall identifies two models of globalization: “1) an older, corporate, enclosed, increasingly defensive one that has to go back to nationalism and national-culture identity in a highly defensive way and try to build barriers around it before it eroded; and 2) a form of the global postmodern that is trying to live with—and at the same time overcome, sublimate, get hold of, and incorporate—difference” (183). Rochiram’s globalization seems to follow the second model: by appropriating difference, it somehow becomes able to neutralize it; by using multiculturalism as a façade, it eliminates disparate elements.

From the perspective of the novel, neither option listed by Hall seems particularly enticing. Just as the conflict between the twin brothers can be resolved neither through inflexible resistance nor through a complete effacing of differences, so too do the other contrasts and asymmetries—especially those regarding space, such as the Amazon/ Orient, the city/ forest, the house/ maid quarters—call for an alternative resolution, that is still to come. What the novel seems to suggest is that this third alternative might take as an example

the meeting of the waters at the Amazon River: two waters flowing side by side, defying the opposition between resistance and dissolution. That brief moment of suspension might offer the ideal image for a possible coexistence of differences, even if only briefly, before they are dissolved, as in Bishop's poem, in "that watery, dazzling dialectic."

Notes

¹ This epigraph is also used by Candace Slater in her *Entangled Edens*, but the interpretation and connection to Milton Hatoum's work is my own.

² "Quanta coisa a dizer!—o desapontamento que me causou o Amazonas, menos que o Amazonas que eu trazia na imaginação," said Euclides in a letter to Oliveira Lima written in Manaus in 1905 (*Correspondência* 254-55).

³ Milton Hatoum, according to João Carlos de Carvalho in *Amazônia revisitada*, was a beneficiary of an existing corpus of Brazilian Amazonian novels throughout the twentieth century written by, among others, Darcy Ribeiro, Antonio Callado, and Márcio Souza. They in some ways had already mapped the region, creating a solid existing tradition that allowed for Hatoum's investment in other formative matrixes other than the strictly regionalist. Carvalho implies that the existence of a writer of Hatoum's stature was made possible thanks to the slow maturing of a regionalist focused Amazonian narrative, which paved the way for other themes in Amazonian fiction (166).

⁴ Slater argues that this gigantic vision of the Amazon and its focus on nature and on a select cast of natural peoples (native índios and, more rarely, rubber tappers) has done a great deal to conceal a very much diverse group of people who live there (*mestiços*, descendants of slaves, *colonos* that make up a great part of the riverside population), and therefore alienate them from an international debate on the role that Amazon should have in the world arena in the future and the processes that would enable it to come to term.

⁵ The most obvious references here are the biblical stories of Jacob and Esau as well as Machado de Assis's 1904 novel *Esau e Jacó*. While Machado focused on the transition from an imperial to a republican political system, deploying a more explicit political allegory than *Dois irmãos*, Hatoum embodies in the two brothers the similarly ambiguous responses to modernization throughout the twentieth century. The references to the feuding brothers from the Bible are also scattered in the narrative. For instance, among the many ways that the novel differentiates between the brothers is the fact that Omar had more body hair, prompting Zana to nickname him "o peludinho." The passage on Esau and Jacob in the Bible also mentions this difference, and the fact that the name "Esau" means "hairy" in Hebrew only highlights the importance of this physical trait. The characterization of Omar and Yaqub ("Jacob" in Arabic) follows the biblical narrative in many aspects: Esau likes the outdoors, while Jacob is studious and prefers to be indoors (Gen 25:25). In the Bible, Esau is his father's favorite son, while in the novel it is the mother, Zana, who makes her preference for Omar obvious. Also, while in the Bible Esau is born first but loses his birthrights to Yaqub, who skillfully acquires the first-born status through a deceptive transaction, in the novel Omar is always "o ççula" and much of the special treatment he receives from his

mother stems from the fact that he was born second. The characterization of Yaqub as calculist and vengeful has, however, a strong connection to the biblical account.

⁶ I refer here to Antonio Candido's essay "Dialética da Malandragem" (included in *O discurso e a cidade*), in which he describes the *malandro* in literature as a figure capable of oscillating between positive and negative spheres in society until he is finally absorbed by the conventionally positive sphere. Such a reading of course presupposes that the boundaries within society are flexible enough for this kind of movement. It is exactly these notions of boundaries that would tend to crystallize during the military dictatorship. Candido's essay was published in English as "Dialectics of Malandroism," in *On Literature and Society*.

Works Cited

- Assis, Machado de. *Esau e Jacó*. Rio de Janeiro: Garnier, 1988. Print.
- Bishop, Elizabeth. *The Complete Poems, 1929-1979*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984. Print.
- Carvalho, João Carlos de. *Amazônia revisitada: de Carvajal a Márcio Souza*. Rio Branco: EDUFAC, 2005. Print.
- Cunha, Euclides da. *The Amazon: Land Without History*. Trans. Ronald Sousa. Ed. Lúcia Sá. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. Print.
- . *Correspondência de Euclides da Cunha*. Ed. Walnice Galvão and Oswaldo Galotti. São Paulo: Edusp, 1997. Print.
- Cury, Maria Zilda Ferreira. "De orientes e relatos." *Trocas culturais na América Latina*. Ed. Luís Alberto Brandão Santos and Maria Antonieta Pereira. Belo Horizonte: PosLit/ Nelam/ Fale/ UFMG, 2000. 165-77. Print.
- Hall, Stuart. "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity." *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*. Ed. Ellen Shoat et al. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. 173-87. Print.
- Hatoum, Milton. "A dois passos do deserto: visões urbanas de Euclides na Amazônia." *Teresa: revista de literatura/USP* 1 (2000): 183-94. Print.
- . "Amazonas, capital Manaus." *Crônica de duas cidades: Belém – Manaus*. Belém: Secult, 2006. 48-70. Print.
- . *The Brothers*. Trans. John Gledson. London: Bloomsbury, 2002. Print.
- . *Dois irmãos*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000. Print.
- . "Interview with Cláudia Antunes." *Brasil/Brazil. Revista de literatura brasileira* 31 (2004): 93-103. Print.
- . "Passagem para um certo oriente." *Remate de males* 13 (1993): 165-68. Print.
- . *Relato de um certo oriente*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1989. Print.
- . "Um certo oriente." *Letterature D'America. Rivista Trimestrale*. 93/94 (2002): 5-17. Print.
- Lima, Luiz Costa. "O Romance de Milton Hatoum." *Intervenções*. São Paulo: Edusp, 2002. 305-26. Print.
- Pellegrini, Tania. "Milton Hatoum e o regionalismo revisitado." *Luso-Brazilian Review* 41.1 (2004): 121-38. Print.

Slater, Candace. *Entangled Edens: Visions of the Amazon*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2002. Print.
Souza, Antonio Candido de Mello e. *On Literature and Society*. Transl. and ed. Howard S. Becker.
Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995. Print.

Marília Scaff Rocha Ribeiro is Assistant Professor at the Department of Romance and Classical Languages at Michigan State University. Her research interests include contemporary Brazilian novels, visual studies, autobiography, and the relationship between narrative and concepts of experience. She received a PhD in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies from Brown University.