ABSTRACT
This work seeks to identify and understand how gaucho female identity is represented in the documentary “Prendas 40 Anos – Ciranda Cultural de Prendas”, released in 2010 by the Gaucho Traditionalist Movement (GTM), during the fortieth Prendas Contest of Rio Grande do Sul. In order to achieve that, we operate a cultural-media analysis grounded in Cultural Studies and draw inspiration from the culture circuit protocols proposed by Johnson (2010) and Du Gay et al. (1999) to build a specific methodology for this study. We conclude that the representation of “prendas” in the audiovisual production points to women’s traditional as mother and wife.

KEYWORDS
prendas; identity; representation; cultural media analysis; documentary.

Gaucho culture and female identity: preliminary considerations

As a constitutive element of the real world, it is through and by culture that human beings, gathered in society, enable their interactions and ensure their survival. At the same time, as human product and legacy, it is also capable of enabling human operations in reality according to their needs and characteristics, transforming the world around them. However, methods of inserting and integrating members of a given culture - in particular those more complex – are never exactly analogous to each other. This is because each individual takes part in their culture in their own way, playing specialized and/or specific roles and functions (Laraia, 2008).

However, there is a minimum threshold of knowledge required, which allows the survival of the cultural system and coexistence among its members. We believe it is through tradition that transmission and perpetuation of the key constituent elements of a given culture take place. Thus, for culture, tradition is also important in the location of individuals, ei-

---

1 Paper presented at the Fifth International Congress in Cultural Studies: Gender, Human Rights and Activisms. Part of the research project “Estudos Culturais aplicados a pesquisas em comunicação e memória social: o circuito da cultura como instrumental analítico” (Cultural Studies applied to media and memory research: the culture circuit as analytical tool), coordinated by Prof. Ana Luiza Coiro Moraes and granted by the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico – CNPq – Brazil: Case no 462189/2014-7; Call MCTI/CNPQ/Universal 14/2014.

2 Journalism graduate, Federal University of Santa Maria. E-mail: janineappel1@gmail.com.

3 Professor of the Graduate Program in Communication at the Federal University of Santa Maria. Lead researcher at the Cultural Studies and Audiovisualities Research Group. E-mail: flavilisboa@gmail.com

4 Professor of the Graduate Program in Communication at the Federal University of Santa Maria and at the Graduate Program in Communication of Cásper Libero College. Vice-lead researcher at the Cultural Studies and Audiovisualities Research Group. E-mail: anacoiro@gmail.com
ther within their own group, in relation to other subjects, or in relation to other communities. This is because, to ensure the perpetuation of certain cultural aspects – at the expense of others - it also reinforces and establishes power relations, which are decisive for the construction and for the apprehension of reality by the subjects as well as for the construction of their idea of themselves and others.

Classified as a regional culture within Brazilian national culture, the gaucho culture refers to a set of tangible and intangible values which first recorded occurrence was in the territory of Rio Grande do Sul, a state located in Southern Brazil. Boosted with the European colonization process in the seventeenth century, it gathers cultural elements of Brazilian or national influence, from the countries of the Plate River Basin, such as the bordering Uruguay and Argentina, as well as genuinely American/indigenous aspects, African aspects, disseminated through the enslaved peoples, and European ones, inherited through the Iberian colonization and the waves of Italian and German immigrants who came to the state in the nineteenth century.

With the premise that there is a process of constant renewal of cultural systems, which does not occur without tensions between what is inherited from the past and contemporary cultural practices and is brought into effect via a process of acculturation or through internal upgrade traditions, currently, according Lisboa Filho (2009, p.175):

In Rio Grande do Sul, we have a constantly evoked and updated regionalism in various ways, including in specific media products of various kinds, both on television as well as on radio and the internet. [...] In this process, the constitution of gaucho identity is projected from the past and creates present practices, associated with other contemporary and even globalized ones 5.

An important concept that operates on the location or classification of individuals within the cultural system they belong to, and also in relation to other individuals belonging to other cultural systems, is the concept of identity. Thus,

[...] identity in a personal sense is something that a person presents to others and what others present to them. Identity presupposes the existence of a human group. It does not answer the question ‘who am I?’ or ‘what do I want to be?’ as much as it does the question ‘who am to the eyes of others?’ or ‘how would I like to be considering significant others’ judgment of me? (LARRAIN, 2003, p.34).

And identities, plural, as suggested by Hall (1996, p. 69), although constructed in relation to the past, which is evoked through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth, do not constitute a mere recovery of the past, “they are just the names we give to the different ways that position us and by which we position ourselves in the narratives of the past”. Hence, the author concludes: “Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of culture and history. Not an essence but a positioning” (Hall, 1996, p. 70).

5 Except for Du Gay et al. (1997) in page 3, all quotes in this article were translated by the authors from Portuguese.
Woodward (2000) indicates the processes involved in the production of meanings are engendered through “systems of representation” connected to the different positions assumed by subjects within “symbolic systems” responsible for “classificatory structures that give meaning and a certain order to social life and to fundamental distinctions - us and them, outside and inside, sacred and profane, male and female - at the heart of cultural systems of meaning” (WOODWARD, 2000, p. 67-68).

For Du Gay et al. (1997) is through culture that things “make sense” and the task of “constructing meanings” is done through the way we represent them. Thus, it is through language and symbolic systems of representation that identities have meaning and “by language, we do not only mean language in the strict sense of written or spoken words. We mean any system of representation - photography, painting, speech, writing, imaging through technology, drawing [...]” (DU GAY ET AL. 1997, p. 13).

Therefore, representation symbolically acts to classify the world and locate our relationships inside. In this manner, identity construction is both symbolic and social - and to a certain extent, material. Personal objects are decisive for that statement of identity before the other. In this relation, from which the constitutive distinctions of identities emerge, the “national” or “regional” factor is sometimes stronger than other factors such as gender, for example.

In Rio Grande do Sul, there are many subcultures stemmed from the migratory flows that, over centuries of colonization, came to the territory now geographically delineated as a state - Azorean, Portuguese, Spanish, blacks, Germans, Italians, Jews, Poles, Japanese and others. However, the subculture elected to the detriment of all others is the gaucho, containing the symbology used to establish the region’s identity, especially in opposition and confrontation with other Brazilian regions. According to Oliven (apud JACKS, 1999, p. 72),

[...] representation of the gaucho figure, with its rural expressions involving the horse, the breeches, the mate tea and the construction of a free and brave social type also served as a model for different ethnic groups, which would indicate that this representation unites the people of the State in opposition to the rest of the country.

An institution directly linked to the legitimacy of that image and its identification with the idealized gaucho type is the Traditionalist Gaucho Movement (GTM), which was first structured in the state capital, Porto Alegre, in April 1948. The hegemonically widespread concept of what came to be “gaucho culture” is strongly linked to the concept of “gaucho identity” and the GTM’s institutional influence operates in its legitimacy by giving a very restricted meaning to what constitutes “being gaucho”. Today, civil society, state, GTM, and media intertwine as instances where gaucho culture is boosted and fed back. In this context, it goes beyond daily family or collective life extended to the immediate community. Therefore, what can be understood as gaucho culture is not restricted to each institution’s practices and values in an isolated manner. On the contrary: gaucho culture is, in fact, constantly and simultaneously influenced by each of these instances, and gaucho identity results from the tensions between them.

It is pertinent to remember that identities, especially in contemporary times, never enclose a contained concept of subjects. This is because, on the one hand, identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed, in a dialogic and dynamic process of counterpoint with
its different. On the other hand, contemporary subjects cannot be labeled as having only one cultural identity. The problem of identity is much more complex because in contemporary societies subjects assume multiple identities, sometimes even conflicting ones, that nevertheless coexist and are diachronically assumed by individuals (Hall, 1999).

Hence, it is assumed that the ways of being gaucho produced and reproduced by each of the instances that consolidate gaucho culture - state, civil society, media, and GTM - do not necessarily assert with each other and may even be in conflict. Therefore, we may infer that just as media discourse, which merely refers to a part of gaucho memory and tradition to represent the state’s identity, these other instances will also build necessarily partial representations determined by ideological choices, as is GTM’s case.

Regarding gaucho identity, the initial and immediate representation is with the male gender. According to Maciel (apud LISBOA FILHO, 2009), the word *gauche* originally referred to a man of Lusitanian and indigenous mixed origin. This human type, deprived of material possessions and without a family, skilled in the pampas work - especially horse taming - lonely wandered through São Pedro Continent territory - currently Rio Grande do Sul - in search of temporary work in the ranches. He served as cowboy and militiaman in the constant struggles for territory and defending borders against the Castilians, and was often involved with illicit work, such as cattle and leather smuggling, so much so that, for centuries, the term *gauche* identified a socially marginalized group. Kahmann (2006, *online*), however, states that “demarginalization” of the gaucho begins with the blossoming of regional literature through the Partenon Literário (Literary Parthenon) (1869-1885), with the release of images such as “Centauro dos Pampas” (Centaur of the Pampas) and “Monarca das Coxilhas” (Monarch of the Hills). The mythical representation of the gaucho man was thus built.

To make room for women’s participation within the CTGs, the Traditionalist Movement delimited women’s ways of cultural integration - primarily to the state’s “prenda”6 contest, named “Ciranda Cultural de Prendas” (Cultural Ciranda of Prendas). In order to achieve that, GTM appealed to the memory of patriarchy and the foundation of the positivist model of society. Thus, traditionalism creates a representative of state identity for females, in accordance with its proposals of exaltation of memory and of the gaucho myth.

The social structure of the CTG invented the *prenda* and assigned her a social role, creating a set of expectations about the behavior of women representing the “gauche traditions”. Traditionalism made room for the entry of women in CTG, bestowing them with the responsibility of representing the *prenda* figure. The expected behavior for *prendas* results from a process of subjugation of these women to the Traditionalist Gaucho Movement’s social structure. The set of rules laid down by GTM is based on the difference of gender roles attributed to males and females. These standards are internalized by the *prendas*, who act in response to a structure that defines their space (Dutra, 2002, p.51-52).

Therefore, the Prenda representation, created by the Gaucho Traditionalist Movement, is the product of a negotiation between aspects of the Gaucho identity grounded in the male figure, and aspects of female identity according to what is expected of women, that is, the prenda is the heir to the “naturally feminine” values and characteristics that her supposedly

---

6 Within the Gaucho Traditionalist Movement, “prenda” is a gaucho woman paired with a “peão” (cowboy).
7 The word “ciranda” refers to a traditional dance.
valorous ancestors embodied. The meanings present in the prenda representation consequently give the idea of a “gauche woman” who remains, according to this logic, constant over time, and that are transposed to the cultural system that structures traditionalism. Hence, this study examines the intersections of the gauche identity and female identity in the media representation of the prenda, identifying the meanings it evokes and produces - considering the context of production, circulation, and reception of the “Ciranda Cultural de Prendas – 40 anos” documentary.

**Methodological path**

From the point of view of Cultural Studies, theoretical and methodological proposals modeled on cultural circuits for communication foster a research plan that integrates different elements - producers, texts, and receivers - and moments - production, circulation and reception/consumption - which constitute the entire communication process. Johnson (2010) and Paul Du Gay (1997) propose their own protocols for the analysis of each moment and element’s specificities, that is, of the axes involved in the circuit as a whole, without predetermining how these relationships are formed.

Richard Johnson’s circuit of culture (2010), originally proposed in 1986, whose diagram is shown in Figure 1 below, indicates that it is in production that lies the concern for the organization of cultural forms, while the way to treat symbolic forms is located in text. In reading, the focus is on social reception practices, understood as a space for the production of meaning. Johnson (2010) also points out the existence of lived cultures, wherein circulate the active cultural elements that guide both the space of production as well as that of readings (ESCOSTEGUY, 2007). Paul du Gay et al. (1997)’s circuit of culture proposal develops from the study of the Walkman as cultural artifact, articulating the axes of representation, which refers to symbolic systems constructed within language, such as text and images involved in the production of an artifact or cultural product, i.e., in its socially organized transformation that takes place under certain means of production. These systems, within representations, generate identities attached to them and have a regulation effect on social life, promoting consumption. This circuit is represented in Figure 2:

---

In this research exercise, however, we believe it is possible - and even rewarding - for analysis purposes, to appropriate the elements present in one or another of the above listed protocols. We have proceeded to compose a “hybrid” circuit whose elements enable views on the various aspects of the context of production of the representations of the gaucho woman in the documentary “Ciranda Cultural de Prendas – 40 anos”. Hence, we present our circuit for the analysis of the prenda representation in said documentary in Figure 3.

We ratify this methodological choice since the elements of identity - regional and gender – and representation are central to the analysis of the selected empirical object. Specifically, we want the focus of this analysis to fall on the representation of the prenda. However, we selected identity as the axis for the circuit of culture, observing the tensions caused by the negotiation between gender identity (woman) and regional identity (gaucho).

By ambience of production, we mean a great instance composed of two moments: Regulation and production. A further look on the moment of regulation of the contest promoted by GTM that elects the Prendas - Ciranda Cultural de Prendas - also seems relevant to deepen the research; so this is a factor to be considered in this analysis, since the meanings of being a prenda are also built from the regulation proposed by the event and, more broadly, by the hegemonic and institutional regulation of the gaucho culture operated by the Gaucho Traditionalist Movement.

In this part, being a media product commissioned by GTM to commemorate the fortieth edition of the State Prenda Contest, and directed primarily at the young Ciranda participants, we analyze the documentary’s context of production context, which is not only governed by technical standards for audiovisual production, but mainly by ideological choices that shape the product. To contribute to the analysis, interviews were conducted with the documentary production team, via email. Open question interviews with the board of the Traditionalist Gaucho Movement were also conducted, in person.
The documentary text itself - the audiovisual product - was taken into account and subjected to textual analysis. The methodological tool proposed in this research to take care of the text itself, i.e., the selected documentary, is textual analysis. This is due to our understanding of its applicability on audiovisual products. According to Casetti and Chio (1999), images and sounds that make up such products can also, for purposes of analysis, be considered as texts - that is, language and communication achievements working from a symbolic material with specific composition rules to produce certain meaning effects. This exercise resulted in the creation of a reading scheme based on categories of textual analysis proposed for the documentary “Ciranda Cultural de Prendas – 40 anos”: narrator and narrate, subject, scenery, and costumes, through which we seek possible answers to the question: “How it is female gaucho identity represented in that documentary?”.

Representations of female gaucho identity: search results

First, we can infer that the representations of female gaucho identity through the Prenda present in the documentary are ideologically regulated by the Gaucho Traditionalist Movement since the ambience of production. But this regulation can start even before, as the “Ciranda Cultural de Prendas” is the contest that “creates” the “ideal” representation of the gaucho woman, the Prenda, and that choice is completely regulated by GTM, mainly through the regulation of the Prenda’s competition in Rio Grande do Sul. Thus, GTM’s board, as creator of the documentary, exercised its regulatory power in the production of ambience to select the Prenda representations presented in the product, ensuring that the testimony of each invited participant was in line with its policies and its cultural interests.

However, by adopting the analytical protocol of the circuit of culture, we assume that one instance influences the other and therefore the notes on Prenda representation along the textual analysis are directly related to the ambience of production and regulation. By analyzing the documentary, we were able to map the representations of female gaucho identity designated for the Prenda in the product and found that most of them located the woman as a secondary subject, amidst a gaucho culture grounded in the male. Identified with the patriarchal family model and the positivist model of society, these representations relegate the Prenda to a supporting position in the cultural system - albeit in a veiled way. Even the representation of the Prenda identified with the participation in the Ciranda Cultural, of which she is the protagonist, gives her a role we think is at least debatable, since the competition plays an important role in affirming the GTM itself, whose foundations are exactly patriarchy and positivism, basis of the traditionalist legitimization to delineate the limits of female participation.

We could flatly summarize or unify the representation of female gaucho identity designated for the Prenda in the documentary “Ciranda Cultural de Prendas – 40 anos” as the wife and mother in the traditional model, and whose social role, specifically in traditionalism, is determined according to the activities then judged to be more suitable for females. This representation also points out a “natural” heiress and the continuer of the values of a supposed heroic and mythical ancestor, whose legitimate representative the Prenda of Rio Grande do Sul, participant or elected by the Ciranda Cultural de Prendas, will become. This is legitimated by GTM itself, instance that created this representation. And finally, this rep-
representation of the Prenda will be identified, mainly through the testimony of former participants and winners of the contest, with the subsequent conquest of the labor market and the contemporary female empowerment therefrom derived.

However, the documentary silences other representations which, we can conclude, do not concern the traditionalist context or include the objectives established for the product in question. When it was decided to present the representation of the gaucho woman in the role of wife and mother in the traditional family, consisting of father, mother and children, such a choice reverberated the valuing of heterosexual marriage over other types of loving relationships, including gay marriage - subject that exalts tempers within the CTGs. Since the product’s goal was to make a historical record in the occasion of the forty years of the Rio Grande do Sul Prenda Contest, it is expected that the predominant representation in the documentary was the Prenda identified with the Ciranda.

Final remarks

By telling the “evolution” of women’s participation in traditionalism, the documentary extols women’s occupation of several important positions in decision-making traditionalist structures. However, this “growing” women’s participation in traditionalism - verified both in numbers and in achievement of other spaces such as administrative and agricultural areas, for example - is very little explored in the documentary. We can conclude, to some extent, that the immediate context of Ciranda, though fundamental to the GTM, it is not a space for dialogue, construction, exchange between the prendas and other women participating in other instances or areas of traditionalism. Similarly, we also came to the conclusion that the documentary does not promote linkages between traditionalist women in general because it is reductive to the category of participant Prendas or winners of the Ciranda. In addition to what the text says, attention should always be payed to what the text did not say. When we attained ourselves to the analysis of production processes, we obtained very important information: GTM censored the invitation to certain traditionalists, demanded the edit of a Prenda’s speech and, for political reasons, some people refused to participate in the project. Reflecting beyond the representations of female gaucho identity presented in the documentary, we can speculate on the representations it failed to present. Ultimately, a number of new questions about the numerous representations of the gaucho woman who were not included in our empirical object take shape. Therefore, it is urgent that new studies on the representation of gaucho identity by the media start to emerge, particularly those whose focus is the identity of the gaucho woman.

References


