

# IMAGE AND RACISM

## Racial anthropophagy and the limits of anti-racist and decolonial cultural production in Brazil

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we intend to discuss the representation of black people, pointing out how hegemonic images of Brazilian cinema corroborate the structural racism of our society, analysing films (and other visual narratives) from the 2000s, a period considered the “Resumption of Brazilian Cinema”. Cinema produced by black directors emerges as counter-narratives, deepening the way in which Brazilian cinema represents the racial issue in a stereotyped way. To think about this structural racism in the field of cinema we will deepen the concept of racial anthropophagy (Alves, 2018; Paixão, 2015) a kind of aesthetic of the flesh, in which the image of the “other” is appropriated and devoured in the name of art. We will also establish a dialogue with black feminism, emphasizing the importance of this movement and discussing image production around black women in Brazil.

Keywords: Brazilian contemporary cinema; Racial anthropophagy; Decoloniality; Anti-racist cultural production.

*I may not always be this strong  
But I will be there shouting against death  
Shouting against white male chauvinist power  
Now and forever, Marielle Franco!  
MC Carol*

*Through the historically and culturally organized inscriptions, the white skin, the secularized incarnate of racist, biologicistic, and imperial discourses since the nineteenth century, also becomes a material reality. This entails that ideologies cannot simply be broken like an evil spell by casting a good counter-spell – enlightenment. As opposed to magic, the material core of an ideological flesh and skin construction cannot be dissolved by mere words.*  
(Ensslin and Klink, 2014, p. 9)

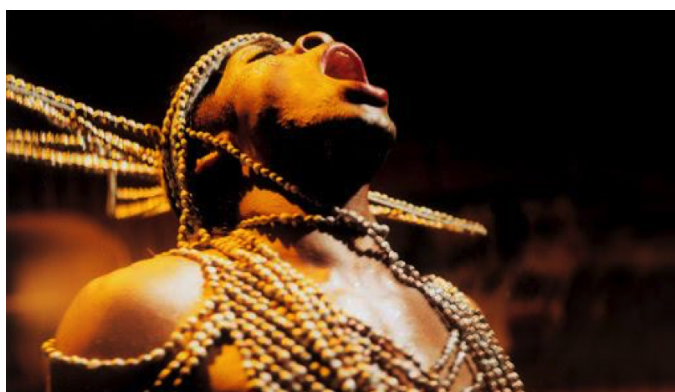


Figure 1: *Madame Satã*, Karim Ainouz  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contrary to the understanding that the supposed racial democracy in Brazil has founded some sort of friendly contact between three races, the image of black people in Brazilian cinema has always been permeated by stereotypical and marginal characters, living on the fringes of society and surviving socially in peripheral positions and seen as the violent body.

Mostly, we chose to analyse feature films made in the 2000s, a period known as “Retomada do Cinema Brasileiro.” The feature films chosen are not only important because of the exhibition circuits they passed through, becoming therefore important elements of contemporary Brazilian film culture, but also due to the way in which the diversity of films mentioned here represents black Brazilian society. In contrast to these films, we point to the production carried out by black filmmakers in Brazil, in order to present counter-hegemonic images that propose another look at blackness itself.

If we put the question in the context of women, the image of black women evokes the term *double-subalternity* (Spivak, 1988) given that, women are *the other's other* (Kilomba, 2010). Therefore, to consider the representation of black women in Brazilian cinema involves assuming the existence of a double negative. According to Sandra Harding (2004), feminism has a long history of association with liberal movements, which

has made feminism a current of thought often understood as elitist and racist by radicalized women who were not seen by white feminist thinking.

The approach to black feminism that emerged in the 1970s with feminists like Angela Davis and Audre Lorde, among others, points to the way in which liberal/reformist feminism views the discussion of gender as something homogeneous, and adds that to think about the path of oppression of women, it is necessary to relate other categories of subordination, such as race and social class, leading to assume the existence of a double negative for black women. The term intersectionality, however, comes a little later, with the studies of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). In Brazil, a similar theoretical path was led by black feminists like Lélia Gonzalez (1988) and Sueli Carneiro (2003).

At a time when reactionary and conservative political positions are exacerbated, we believe it is crucial to think about the inevitable context in which to revise the structural racism that pervades the domain of images in Brazil. It is important to mention that we will use images in an unorthodox way, without the specificities of the technical area or language, elaborating on issues concerning the representation of black men and women.

Therefore, this article aims to expound on the images of black people, indicating how image production since 2000 has translated into a fertile territory distinguished by cultural tensions in dispute and in search of a national identity, and how hegemonic images of Brazilian cinema corroborate the structural racism in our society. On the other hand, we will see dissonant peripheral images emerging as counter-narratives. We will develop the tension between the adoption of a racial anthropophagy (Alves, 2018; Paixão, 2015) involving an aesthetics of the flesh, through which the image of the “other” (black men or women) is appropriated and devoured in the name of art, and questions in the form of images arising from this process as counter-narratives: images produced by black men and women in the peripheries of Brazil, mainly after 2000. We also seek to establish a dialogue with black feminism and authors that helped to shape this movement (Gonzalez, 1988; Bairros, 2000; Carneiro, 2003; Pacheco & Moreira, 2010; Cardoso, 2014; Ribeiro, 2018), pointing out the specificity of this domain and discussing image production around black women in Brazil.

## 2. COLONIALITY AND RACIAL ANTHROPOPHAGY

In 1928, Oswald de Andrade (2017) published the *Anthropophagic Manifesto*, which began as follows: “Only anthropophagy unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically” (Andrade, 2017, 43). The anthropophagic concept marks the beginning of modernism in Brazilian literature and in the visual arts. It describes a movement in Brazilian art associated with the appropriation and recreation of foreign influences using the metaphor of cannibalism (Buchmann, 2014). This deliberate aesthetic act of imitation/appropriation/deglutition implies a certain sense

of rebellion against the “coloniser” (Buchmann, 2014), since it requires the digestion and elimination of what is ingested. According to Buchmann:

As European modernism appropriated the “meaning of foreign” – in its eye signifying “pre-modern” and “exotic” – concerning African and Asian modes of representation, Brazilian intellectuals and artists should appropriate, as disrespectfully as possible, European culture, which allegedly they would be merely imitating, and mix it with local traditions. (Buchmann, 2014, p.112)

Within the anthropophagic project, the use of disrespectful appropriation does not really challenge the Eurocentric system (Buchmann, 2014). Its matrix of representation and position within the notion of modernism already evidenced its Eurocentrism. The relationship between race and the construction of ‘Brazilianness’ has been widely discussed, based on the work of social scientists such as Gilberto Freyre (2003), one of the pillars of the myth of racial democracy and fiercely criticised by both intellectuals and activists. A reviser of the racism affecting institutions and access to full citizenship in Brazil, Abdias do Nascimento has dedicated himself to dissecting the racist thinking of Gilberto Freyre, emphasising his contribution to the denial of racism (Nascimento, 2016). On the other hand, Oswald de Andrade suggests a different reading of Brazil, although presenting a “reductionist” (Santiago, 2006, p. 138) and Eurocentric gaze that sees “historical truth in European reason” (Santiago, 2006, p. 138), making the foreign matrix the starting point of artistic and cultural creation.

Luis Felipe Garcia (2018) claims, however, that more than a metaphor for appropriation, anthropophagy is also a way to diagnose colonial domination and to promote a therapeutic process in a decolonial project. This option should not be completely excluded: the work of Rubem Valentim (Dardashti et al, 2018), for example, can be considered an example of decolonial art in the anthropophagic tradition. It promotes a transformation of the geometric abstraction, characteristic of constructivism and concretism, “through the drawings and diagrams representing the orishas of Afro-Brazilian religions”.

Therefore, the enhancement of appropriation acquires a protesting quality when it involves the appropriation of established aesthetics from European countries, using local precepts to critically rework and transform them. However, this repeats colonial patterns by pointing out a process of racial anthropophagy that uses racialised bodies to reinforce the overrepresentation of the hegemonic ethno-class. It is important to note that we have not attributed to the analysed films a deliberately anthropophagic aesthetics, which nonetheless has a defining role in Brazil regarding the appropriation practices and the establishment of, according to Buchmann, the anaesthetics of the flesh.

We agree with Garcia, in the sense that anthropophagy may indeed contribute to a diagnosis of coloniality, but only after acknowledging the significance of racism as a structuring pillar of ‘Brazilianness’ integrated in the coloniality process, which anthropophagic modernism has helped to structure:

(...) due to its self-mythologization, anthropophagy situates itself within and not in a mythical beyond a culture shaped by (post) colonial historiography. (Buchmann, 2014, p. 113)

The notion of anthropophagy undoubtedly contributes to the diagnosis of colonialism by focusing on consumption of the flesh. While Tupinambá anthropophagy, as described by Viveiros de Castro (1992), seeks to secure memory, the racial anthropophagy presented here seeks to annihilate it in an industrious and systematic way. The literature on Tupinambá anthropophagy describes it as a form of absorbing the other as a way to promote change (Viveiros de Castro, 1992). Tupinambá anthropophagy and Andrade's anthropophagic project have also been associated with *mestizaje* (Lopes, 2018). We propose a different reading of anthropophagy, whereby large Brazilian cities, like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, can be considered anti-black (Alves, 2018; Vargas 2018). Their citizens are united through anthropophagy, not a solidarity union but a cohesiveness based on racial and gender violence, the "anthropophagic economy of the flesh" (Alves, 2018, p. 17). Thus, the process of racial anthropophagy is central to Brazil's nation-building process (Alves, 2018; Paixão, 2015). In this article, we propose that the aesthetics of the flesh also belongs to the "anthropophagic economy" mentioned by Alves.

State violence, which mostly affects black bodies, is not a sign of a problematic democracy (Alves, 2018; Almeida, 2018; Vargas, 2010; Flauzina, 2006; Casseres e Pires, 2017) or a passive civil society. Police violence, as well as the whole judicial apparatus, is part of an extensive work process through which civil society is created. The raw materials are black bodies, including low-ranking black police officers (Alves, 2018). Image production is not beyond this context. In addition, anthropophagic economy/aesthetics of the flesh foster most of Brazil's audiovisual productions.

As Vargas (2018) has argued, in both Brazil and the United States, there is an "incipient" and "uncoordinated" movement that struggles for black self-determination and against anti-blackness. This struggle against the *status quo* gains strength as black communities perceive that the justice system "did not work for Blacks" (Vargas, 2018, p. 11). The consolidation of racism, not simply as an aesthetic imposition from the colonialist past but as a continuous political process, implies the standardisation of inequality and racial oppression/exclusion.

Injustice and violence constitute the liberal/neoliberal economic order, as Sylvia Wynter (2003) suggested in her article "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom", adding that, nowadays, man, representing an ethno-class, is opposed to human struggle. Therefore, "our current struggle (...) is the struggle against [the] overrepresentation" of this man, this ethno-class (Wynter, 2003, p. 262; Maeso and Araújo, 2016). Hence, despite proposing an analysis of Brazilian image production, we should bear in mind the fact that we are not dealing with exclusively Brazilian issues.

The notion of coloniality differs from colonialism, as it allows us to understand that even after the formal process of decolonisation of

the European colonies, a hegemonic being in the world has prevailed (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Moraña et al, 2008; Grosfoguel, 2007; Walsh, 2007). This comprehension led to the establishment in academia of a movement entitled the decolonial turn (Grosfoguel, 2007). Cultural or epistemic destruction has a very close relationship to physical genocide. For example, the Inquisition burned Indo-European women along with their knowledge, accusing them of witchcraft. Since the passing on of knowledge was basically oral, this meant destroying knowledge and ways of being (Grosfoguel, 2015). According to Grosfoguel, colonialism rests on four different genocides/epistemicides:

- 1) against Muslims and Jews in the conquest of Al-Andalus in the name of “purity of blood”; 2) against indigenous peoples first in the Americas and then in Asia; 3) against African people with the captive trade and their enslavement in the Americas; 4) against women who practiced and transmitted Indo-European knowledge in Europe burned alive accused of being witches. (Grosfoguel 2015, 77).

The four genocides discussed by Grosfoguel served to allow Europe to think itself as the world centre in terms of economic production, knowledge and culture. After considering all the genocidal processes that formed modernity, it is possible to understand how Eurocentric notions of knowledge, spirituality, culture and art still legitimize genocidal dynamics within countries marked by persistent colonial structures, these being well described by Quijano through the concept of coloniality of power: “the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality.” (Quijano 2000, p. 533)

Europe and whiteness are still the measure of every other form of existence, establishing the “natural” relationship between things and the world. Eurocentrism is an often seemingly inescapable reality. We are facing a “metaphysical catastrophe” (Maldonado-Torres, 2016) associated with a “perpetual war” which afflicts people from all corners of the world. This metaphysical catastrophe can be exemplified by institutional and racist State violence, but also by the analysis of image production about racialised groups, always reducing them, via the aforementioned aesthetics of the flesh, to the ones who are seen and never the ones who see. In other words, the objectification of black bodies and the violent imagery appropriation of these bodies separate them from their selves. How can this process be reversed? How can anti-racist counter-narratives be created? How can other subjectivities be forged, anticipated, predicted? Can image production contribute to a process of decolonisation of thought? These questions, yet to be solved, permeate this article.

The challenge is: non-integrated subjects from the dominant ethno-class also need to be in control of image production processes and to possess the same aesthetic/creative autonomy in that area. However, obstacles abound, from the existing hierarchy in film production to the inequalities in economic resources. A study conducted by ANCI (2016),

(a federal agency that foments and regulates the cinematographic industry in Brazil established in 2001), shows that Brazilian film production is mainly handled by white men, who directed 75 per cent of films in 2016. It is puzzling that no black woman wrote or directed a feature film in 2016. Sabrina Fidalgo, a Brazilian black woman filmmaker who directed the medium-length film *Rainha* in 2016, raises an important question as Vanini points out (2019):

(...) films receive public funding from a mostly black population. When we feature in those productions, we are represented in mistaken locations, in stereotypical characters, subject to violence and subservience. What kind of cinema are we making for our country?

### 3. FILM AND BLACKNESS

#### 3.1 HEGEMONIC AND COUNTER-HEGEMONIC IMAGES

“Let’s go on a long journey to a place called City of God [Cidade de Deus].” Thus begins the album *Traficando Informação* by rapper and activist MV Bill, released in 2000. In 1998, the rapper had already released the surprising music video *Soldado do Morro*, showing young drug dealers wielding their guns next to the singer. The music video was directed by MV Bill together with Celso Athayde, both co-founders of CUFA, a third-sector institution that operates social projects in the favelas. The beginning of CUFA identifies with the impact of the music video *Soldado do Morro*, with carioca hip-hop taking centre stage in the visual representation of the favelas and the beginning of audiovisual production in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro. The emergence of more affordable digital cameras was the kick-start for a powerful heterogeneous cultural movement produced in the favelas and in the peripheries throughout Brazil; a movement capable of questioning the hegemony of Brazilian media discourse and, consequently, racist hegemonic cultural production.

We consider CUFA’s audiovisual production (though not exclusively), a powerful start for the creation and dissemination of counter-narrative images involving an intersubjective decolonial project, conducted by those who must reclaim image production processes and exercise creative autonomy. Until the 2000s, audiovisual production directed by black men and women was scattered and fragmented, though meaningful, as demonstrated by the trajectory of the director Zóximo Bulbull, for example.

According to Maldonado-Torres (2016, p. 27) in decolonial art “the embodied subject emerges as someone who can not only reflect about but also mold, shape, and reshape subjectivity, space, and time.” In this sense, imagery production opposing the traditional representation of black people in cinema fulfils a decolonial role, as in the films suggested below – either peripheral films shot in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, or audiovisual production arising from the music performed by black singers, such as MC Carol (see the epigraph of this article). It seems that image

production can fulfil a decolonial role, should it overcome its reflection role, as a reproducer of super-representation, introducing other counter-hegemonic voices and images while reinforcing the role of intersubjectivity and memory. The metaphysical catastrophe mentioned by Maldonado-Torres occurs not only in political terms or at a national level, but also through intersubjectivity and experience (Maldonado-Torres, 2016), insomuch as racism often boosts the social and intersubjective isolation of racialised people. Considering intersubjectivity does not mean ignoring structural racism; even when people do not engage in intersubjective racism, institutions still reproduce racist structures.

Bill and Athayde's *City of God* is also the setting for Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund's film of the same name (*City of God* [Cidade de Deus]), released in 2002. Inspired by Ivana Bentes' (2007) influential essay "Sertões e favelas no cinema brasileiro contemporâneo: estética e cosmética da fome", we point out how the representation of black people in this film does not go beyond the showing of virtuous and empty violence, the common fate of black young people in the favelas. The film *City of God*, narrated by the survivor Buscapé, who wishes to become a photographer – therefore, a producer of other images – presents an obscure dream amid the colourful brightness of delirious lights which invade scenes of conflict, mutual annihilation and drug consumption.

The actual dispute over new modes of representation of black people and the questioning of subjectivation modes established by racism, emphasising the production of a new gaze concerning black people, the favela, and the peripheral populations of Brazil, prompted the resumption of Brazilian cinema during the 2000s, which until now has not been subject to a critical or historiographic review regarding the prevailing structural racism.

This resumption also produced the films *Bus 174* (*Ônibus 174*) released in 2002, and *Carandiru* and *Garrincha: Lone Star* (*Garrincha: Estrela Solitária*), released in 2003. The first, a documentary directed by José Padilha – who years later would release *Elite Squad* (*Tropa de Elite*) and *Elite Squad: The Enemy Within* (*Tropa de Elite II*) – suggests an analysis of violence in the city of Rio de Janeiro, but it fails to break with the social stigma surrounding the image of the young black, forever condemned to a life of crime. By addressing a hijacking incident involving the 174 bus line in the afternoon of 12 June 2000, Padilha tries to rewrite the trajectory of Sandro, a survival of the Candelária massacre and the hijacker of the 174 bus who held ten people hostage, and whose action was continuously broadcast live on Brazilian television. The same incident inspired Bruno Barreto's film *Last Stop 174* (*Última Parada 174*), released in 2008. Both films' fictional characters engage in a perpetuation of social and racial prejudice.

During the emerging peripheral audiovisual production which marks the early 2000s, another super-production would contribute to the international imagery of black people in Brazil. The film *Carandiru*, released in 2003, with a budget of 12 million Brazilian real, also focuses on violence by retelling the tragic massacre of 111 prisoners in a São



Paulo prison, assuming the comfortable point of view of the prison doctor. Even without the aesthetic virtuousness of *City of God*, how should we consider a film that tries to represent the everyday life of the prison population in Brazil, yet casts the actors Rodrigo Santoro and Caio Blat (well-known white actors in the Brazilian soap operas) as its prisoners? This is not a criticism of the two actors, whose performances are remarkable. However, knowing consensually that the prison population in Brazil is distinguished by colour and race, it is extremely difficult to look at *Carandiru's* cast and not talk about whitening or racism.

The cast of *Carandiru*, however, is not an isolated case. In the same year, the film *Garrincha: Lone Star* was released, about the black football player Manuel dos Santos. The character is played by the white Globo TV actor André Gonçalves, and his performance, yesterday and today, clearly – though unmentioned – alludes to the North-American blackface of the 19th century, in which black characters were stereotypically performed by white actors “disguised” as black. In general, the resumption of Brazilian cinema of the 2000s is still strongly characterised by racial anthropophagy (Buchmann, 2014), stressing representation patterns no less stereotyped than in previous decades.

Meanwhile, even in hegemonic narratives, that is, feature films and major audiovisual productions, there is also a gradual questioning of the image of black people as well as an attempt to break with the imagery pattern of our racial anthropophagy. An example is the film *Madame Satã* (2002) by Karim Ainouz, a director from the state of Ceará, which points to a performative inversion of the image of the black body in Brazilian cinema by loosely retelling the life of João Francisco dos Santos, an emblematic character from the bohemian carioca period of the 1930s’.

João’s black body, in drag, performed by Lázaro Ramos, opposes the elitist, racist and homophobic pattern of Rio de Janeiro’s nightlife, past and present. As a character constructed in a complex, ambiguous and contradictory way, *Madame Satã* is a humanised type: besides being a capoeira expert, João is a drag queen, an artist and a hustler, an adoptive father, and an extremely sensual, affectionate and charismatic figure. He shares his life between the *baphon* of Lapa and his family’s domestic environment, which consists of Laurita, Tabu and his adoptive daughter. Between the comings and goings to and from prison, João’s black body longs for pleasure and love. Nevertheless, his social context does not escape the stereotype, the transgressions and the criminalisation. He survives by taking odd jobs, immersed in a daily life whose atmosphere is one of profound social, cultural and emotional marginalisation, but he is a free black body, constantly struggling for affection, for existence and for life. In several scenes, João rebels violently against prejudice and against the social role that has been imposed upon him. In a scene in a Lapa cabaret in which João is surprised and reprimanded for having worn his employer’s clothes, he reacts furiously and quits, tearing his clothes off and destroying part of the dressing room: “Did you have to talk to me like that over such trifles?”

Tabu, played by the actor Flávio Bauraqui, is a sensitive black body who completely breaks with the social stigma of violence, his frailty deconstructing the image of the agile, strong and violent body. His name, Tabu, represents a synthesis of his own marginal condition. By supporting João, he is thrown into the shadow of Madame Satã's violent power. About the characters, the filmmaker Karim Ainouz (2003, p. 180) comments:

In that Lapa neighbourhood, people wash, iron, cook, take care of the children. Despite the apparent normality, everyone there chooses their role but no one is limited to it: Laurita is a mother and a prostitute, João is a father and a tyrant, Tabu is at once coward and brave. To a certain extent, they subvert the stereotypes and adopt a strategy of survival: they are not Manichaeian or unidimensional, but dynamic and contradictory.

From 2002 is the film *The Trespasser (O Invasor)*, by Beto Brant. In the film, the skinny trespassing body of the rapper Sabotage invades the middle-class sphere in which the film is set and literally becomes a visual fracture: Sabotage is aesthetically different, not only from his surrounding environment, but also in the colour of his skin, which contrasts with the other actors – Alexandre Borges, Marco Ricca, Paulo Miklos. Sabotage is the invasive element, the body that transits from the periphery into the middle class, where he is cruelly placed with a certain exoticism. A contrast in the city of São Paulo, Sabotage is the image-synthesis that could summarise the aforementioned *The Anti-Black City* by Jaime Amparo Alves. But he is a short-circuit character: he composes, he sings, he insists on an honest performance in the scene in which he appears next to the hired killer, Anísio. On January 24, 2003, after having composed the soundtrack and soon after the film was released, Sabotage was found dead, shot in the back four times.

Alongside these film productions, all directed by white filmmakers, another important peripheral film signalling a change towards the representation/representativeness of black people in Brazilian cinema is the 2006 documentary *Falcão – Meninos do Tráfico*, by MV Bill and Celso Athayde. Narrated by the rapper during his time spent in favelas throughout the country, the film prompts a fundamental discussion about language, about who narrates the images, and about the significance of audiovisual production in the favelas from the point of view of its residents. The documentary shows surprising accounts of young people involved in drug-dealing and their combination of dreams, despair and social conditions, and also political analyses of the marginalisation and criminalisation of poor black people in Brazil. The documentary attempts to establish relationships and affections in a clear decolonial exercise of loosening stereotypical images, as some of the young interviewed pointed (they appear on the screen without mentioning the names): “My dream is to see the circus”; “I wish I knew a mother’s love, an aunt’s, I’ve never had that, I wanted the love of a family”; “When you think about the future, what

comes to your mind? Once I get out of the drug house? Future? When I get out, I want to be a clown.”

The notion that drug dealers have no future is a common narrative one can find in films and journalism. Even though violence does cut short the lives of many young people, it does not mean that young people working in the drug business do not think about the future or make plans. In order to deconstruct stereotypical images, it does not suffice to have a black cast, it is also necessary to create images that counter the dehumanization promoted by white media.

The documentary *Falcão – Meninos do Tráfico*, was broadcast in three parts in the Globo TV Network Sunday programme *Fantástico* in March 2006, thus providing great visibility to the complex reality of young people who deal drugs in Brazil, as well as to CUFA’s audiovisual production. Filmed over six years, on the occasion of the film’s première, only one of the seventeen young people interviewed was still alive.

In the wake of racial and social prejudice against black and poor people in Brazil, a large number of films somehow dealing with racism and discrimination since the resumption of Brazilian cinema have not been able to escape a certain “predictable” subjectivity in their representation of black people as marginal, violent or socially subaltern characters surviving on the threshold of crime and drug consumption. In this imagery category, we can also include the films *City of Men (Cidade dos Homens, 2007)*, a feature film originating from the Globo Network TV series of the same name broadcast between 2002 and 2005, *Linha de Passe (2008)*, directed by Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas and *Eye of the Storm (No meu Lugar, 2009)*, directed by Eduardo Valente, among others. Considering the *corpus* suggested in this article, we came to the conclusion that a large number of films which reproduce racial anthropophagy as an aesthetic project are directed by white filmmakers who, to a certain extent, can hardly break with the stereotypes, with a few exceptions.

In 2013, the significant *City of God: 10 Years Later (Cidade de Deus: 10 Anos Depois)*, directed by the duo of Cavi Borges and Luciano Vidigal, once again proved the need to show stories narrated by the residents of the favelas themselves. The film, produced by Cacá Diegues, resumes the discussion initiated by MV Bill in 2004, when Fernando Meirelles’ film was nominated for the Academy Awards. Ten years later, according to the documentary, the lives of the actors/residents of the favela City of God had not significantly improved, in some cases having become tragically worse. Narrated by the black actor Leandro Firmino da Hora, the unforgettable Zé Pequeno from *City of God*, the film shows the paths followed by the actors from the 2003’s film, caught between sudden fame and post-film everyday life: some are involved in crime, others continue pursuing an artistic career.

It should be mentioned that the rental and production company Cavídeo, founded by Cavi Borges, one of the directors of the 2013’s film, was responsible for many low-budget films, as well as film clubs throughout the peripheries of Rio de Janeiro, and significant extremely low-budget production. Alongside important film festivals and screenings

during the 2000s (Mostra do Filme Livre, *Visões Periféricas*, among others), Cavídeo effectively contributed to the creation of counter-hegemonic images in Brazilian cinema.

In the following year, *White Out, Black In* (Branco Sai, Preto Fica), by Adirley Queirós, became one of the most powerful films concerning the debate around the supposed racial democracy. Between fiction and documentary, the film tells the story of a fateful night in 1986 when the police harshly raided one of the *bailes* of black music that frequently took place in Ceilândia, a satellite town of Brasília. The expression in the title is a direct indication of the attitude of the police who, by violently bursting into the party, declared: white out, black in. The ones who stayed were beaten, mutilated and crippled. Once again, the narrative of the survivor takes centre stage in the discourse. However, nothing is obvious in Adirley's cinema: the film shows the precariously beautiful landscape of Ceilândia, in Brasília, explores a politically incorrect humour and evidences a hopeful wish for justice and change for the future. Furthermore, it re-enacts, not only via the centrality of its subject matter (racism in Brazilian society), but also via Adirley's experimental language, a decolonial creation through which new images are forged for both the future and the past.

### 3.2 ESTABLISHING A DIALOGUE WITH BLACK FEMINISM

If the 2000s are characterised by the emergence of relevant institutions in the favelas and led by their own residents, next to audiovisual production and hip-hop, rap and funk are also extraordinary vehicles for the mass circulation of the voices of peripheral black women. These black voices correspond to an impactful decolonial counter-narrative explosion that took place mainly in the second decade of the 2000s and that is strongly characterised by intersectional feminism and by the trajectory of influential black women, such as Conceição Evaristo, Lélia González, Sueli Carneiro and, most recently, Djamila Ribeiro.

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality at the end of the eighties and her objective was to address intersecting forms of oppression, associated with race, class and gender. Intersectionality became a buzz word and part of a gender mainstreaming strategy (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments and multilateral organisations adopted the term to address gender inequalities (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This widespread use can have the opposite effect to the one Crenshaw had in mind, since she clearly aimed to bring black women to the centre by criticizing hegemonic narratives that render them invisible. In 1988, Lélia Gonzalez (1988, p. 12) wrote:

It is undeniable that feminism as theory and practice has been playing a fundamental role in our struggles and achievements, and as it presented new questions, it not only stimulated the formation of groups and networks, it also developed the search for a new way

of being woman. By centralizing the analysis around the concept of patriarchal capitalism (or capitalist patriarchy), it highlighted the material and symbolic bases of women's oppression, which constitutes a crucially important contribution to the direction of our struggles as a movement. By demonstrating, for example, the political character of the private world, it triggered a whole public debate in which the thematization of totally new issues emerged – sexuality, violence, reproductive rights, etc. – that the traditional relations of domination/submission have articulated.

This paragraph was followed by the statement that even though different struggles saw important developments over time, including feminist struggle, racial oppression against black women was not normally acknowledged by white feminists. In Gonzalez's words: "What is generally seen in feminist texts and practice are formal references that denote a kind of oblivion of racial issues." (Gonzalez, 1988, p. 13) Despite recognizing the importance of feminist struggles, Gonzalez stresses that different social movements benefited from black movements but did not address racism. One should note that while Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989, one-year earlier Gonzalez was already questioning the invisibility of black women in feminist movements.

Let us begin the film analysis by quoting the music video *Prostitute* (*Prostituta*), released in 2002 and directed by the white filmmaker Kátia Lund, which initiated the career of Gisele Gomes de Souza, aka Nega Gizza, a relevant voice in female hip-hop, and MV Bill's partner since 1999. In the video, we see black girls dancing sensuously to the chorus of the song: "I am a whore, yeah, my life is my own. A prostitute on the offensive, I go on dribbling prejudice." In the music video, the images of young black girls, incredibly sexualised and exploited, contrast with the voice and performance of Nega Gizza: this imposes a strong contrast between an image produced by a white woman about a black woman and the voice of the black woman. The video suggests a new decolonial creative space arising in Brazil: audiovisual production directed by and starring black women, nowadays gaining momentum.

The leading role of Nega Gizza, also a co-founder of CUFA, identifies with the emergence of another significant black voice in the early 2000's: Tati Quebra-Barraco. Along with Gizza, Tati's lyrics emphasise racism and prejudice, but they also talk about sex, pleasure and love, like in the songs *Fama de putona* (*Slutty reputation*), *Orgia* (*Orgy*) and *Boladona* (*Pissed Off*). The black woman of the favela creates intersubjective and decolonial alternatives using hip-hop and *baile funk* to initiate a fundamental debate about the body and sexuality.

At the beginning of the decade, pertinent research by Joel Zito Araújo (2001), *A Negação do Brasil: O Negro na Telenovela Brasileira* (*Denying Brazil: The Black Man in the Brazilian Soap Opera*), was published. In it, the director conducts a forceful analysis of the presence of black actresses on television: mostly in supporting roles, as background artists, even in soap operas about slavery or the colonial period. Joel Zito

Araújo opportunely expounds on the problematic of the representation of black women in the film *Daughters of the wind (Filhas do Vento)*, 2005, whose central plot revolves around the sisters Cida and Maria Ju, played by Taís Araújo and Talma de Freitas, respectively. Avoiding the stigma of black women stereotypes on television (the black mother, the hot *mulatta*, the crazy black woman), the film tells the story of two sisters: one sister dreams of becoming an actress and experiences all the conflicts and prejudices faced by a black female performer, whereas the other remains connected to her origins and a lifestyle characterised by male chauvinism and patriarchy.

In Brazil, the few black actresses who achieve a certain prominence are related to the soap opera circuit, where many have initially been cast in the “usual” racist and sexist roles of black women: the housekeeper, the nanny, the lover, the slave or the black mother, as Joel Zito (2000) points out. Such actresses include Camila Pitanga, who emerged on the television scene and then migrated to cinema, for example. Among other characters, she plays Lavínia in *I’d Receive the Worst News from Your Beautiful Lips (Eu receberia as piores notícias dos seus lindos lábios)*, by Beto Brant and Renato Ciasca (2011), a mixed-race woman, between black and indigenous, whose body is an object of desire but also a subject of pleasure.

In 2017, Daniela Thomas’s film *Vazante*, a co-production between Brazil and Portugal, was released. The debate caused on the occasion of its release as the film critic Juliano Gomes points out (Gomes, 2018), exposes once more the fact that the modes of subjectivation of black women are still completely stereotyped and empty, even in films that re-enact the everyday life and coexistence of white and black women during the colonial period. The limit transposed by Daniela Thomas’s film is abusive, for even though claiming to be a “political film,” *Vazante* addresses germinal issues concerning the sociocultural development of Brazil, which today, because of the virtuosity and frenzy of a growing historical revision of colonialism, are profoundly disputed.

The film rebuilds the colonial environment on the shoulders of black men and women, preserving everything as it was, and re-establishing in the 21st century the historical divisions of gender and race as they have always been perceived, separating the places and landscapes of the interior state of Minas by a colour contrast. In addition, it re-enacts occasional and asymmetric relationships between black men and white women or between white women and black men, in a clear sexual game in which power establishes exchange, reducing the bodies and the black men and women in the plot to emptiness and impotence. The film was severely criticised during a screening at Festival de Brasília (2017) and this controversy resulted in a relevant essay by the film critic Juliano Gomes (2018), an excerpt of which containing a brief analysis of the character Feliciano is as follows:

Even a potential reading through the prism of gender signs becomes quite fragile, to the extent that Feliciano, the character

that traverses most of the universe of the film and that contains a tremendous amount of unexplored vectors, is never transformed into an object of active exploitation *by* the film. She is the history of Brazil, a history of permanent uncertainty, of non-belonging, which Jai Baptista is able to show via a subtlety of the body, the gaze, constructing a woman who always seems to convey the feeling that something is amiss – something that keeps resisting, for it does not conform – a latent insubordination. In her eyes seems to reside the germ of decolonisation, a will to destroy the whole colonial rule. Only with this key, of non-reconciliation, can a revision on the insistence of enslavement exist. Blood has been drawn and the game is yet to begin.

Representing the end of the current decade, *baile funk* keeps releasing unknown black voices onto the Brazilian musical scene and creating decolonial previews of the black body, among which I emphasise the work of MC Carol, from Niterói, a direct influence of Tati Quebra-Barraco, and the rapper Karol Conka. If, in the beginning of the decade, black women demanded representation in the cultural and artistic scene in order to deal with issues such as prejudice and male chauvinism, the emergence of a vast heterogeneous intellectual field, nowadays designated as intersectional feminism, has begun influencing the music scene in Brazil, and vice versa. Intersectional feminism's agenda is characterised by the cultural enhancement and self-esteem of black women, the visibility of black transfeminism, and sexual and financial freedom, evidencing a profound rupture with the metaphysical catastrophe referred to by Maldonado-Torres (2016) and with the notion of racial anthropophagy, for there is a formal refusal to exploit the black body.

In the 2018, music video *Business Woman (Mulher de Negócios)* by MC Carol, for example, whose script was written by the artist herself, MC Carol plays a powerful woman who is going through a troubled relationship with a gangster: she is his lover and “manager.” She fluctuates between the role of the submissive wife and the woman in charge. Between interior locations and aerial landscapes of Rio de Janeiro, the music video assumes a regular YouTube language, though extending beyond it. MC Carol is the protagonist of a detective story, an action film, always wielding a gun and commanding her “troops”, but also her body and her pleasure: “Sweaty and horny / Completely unarmed / I love you, man / But don't play me for a fool (...) I am your businesswoman / I'll deal with the partners / If I have to kill / I'll defend what's ours.” There is a clear decolonial desire to break with the submissive position of black women and to impose new subjectivities: “shape, and reshape subjectivity, space, and time”. (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 27)

Similarly, in the song *100% Feminist (100% Feminista)*, MC Carol shouts: “I represent Aqualtune, I represent Carolina / I represent Dandara and Chica da Silva. I am a woman, I am black, I have coarse hair (...) I represent 100% feminist women.” It is a clear acknowledgment of significant women in Brazilian culture, reinforcing once more the role

of intersubjectivity, memory and ancestry, an absolutely present issue in countless audiovisual productions by black women. The philosopher Djamila Ribeiro (2018) led a similar movement after the publication of the pertinent *O Que é Lugar de Fala*. The discussion about the social place occupied by black women in Brazil has become an unavoidable debate.

Equally worthy of note is the audiovisual production by black women living in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and Baixada Fluminense. We point out the filmmaker Yasmin Thainá and the short film *Kbela* (2015), in which coarse hair is the main theme, as well as the recent web series *Face it! (Afronta!)*, (2017) by the filmmaker Juliana Vicente. As in the lyrics of *baile funk*, both audiovisual works focus on the production of the subjectivity of black women, thus contributing to the discussion about black memory and ancestry, still quite absent from the Brazilian academic debate.

#### 4. RACIAL ANTHROPOPHAGY: TURNING THE CRANK OF THE TURNTABLE

Sueli Carneiro wrote about feminism as an important social movement. She affirmed that the feminist movement “was among the movements with best performance” in Brazil (Carneiro, 2003, p. 117). In this same article, however, she affirmed that “feminism was also, for a long time, a prisoner of a Eurocentric and universalizing vision of women”. (Carneiro, 2003, p. 118) This remains a critique developed by black feminists, despite the proliferation of terms, such as intersectional feminism or fourth-wave feminism. More recently, Ribeiro affirmed that “by coining the concept of intersectionality, black feminists are claiming that there can be no primacy of one oppression over the other” (Ribeiro, 2018). Image production is a fruitful field to understand how the double-subalternity of black women persists today, raising the importance of remembering the original objective of the term intersectionality. How does image production today question this state of double-subalternity?

The imagery production concerning *baile funk* singers, such as MC Carol, Tati Quebra-Barraco or rappers like Nega Gizza and Karol Conka, vehemently contradicts the predominant representation of black women as subaltern subjects or social victims. However, we should still ask ourselves: can cinema and the image production associated with *baile funk* contribute to race and class equality? Resuming the initial discussion of this article, when we look at Brazilian cinema, we realise that the answer to this question must observe a different understanding of anthropophagy. In reference to Darcy Ribeiro’s expression “grinders for wearing people down” (Ribeiro, 1995, p.106), the term racial anthropophagy has been used to describe the necropolitics resulting in the death and abuse of black bodies (Alves, 2018). By emphasising, aestheticizing and introducing black flesh as the cheapest on the market, does cinema belong to this grinding machine?

Throughout this text we realise that many contemporary Brazilian image productions have played a role in reinforcing the association



between black bodies, territories and violence, while a growing visual and audiovisual counter-production which contradicts the usual racist aesthetics is emerging in the peripheries of Brazil. In this sense, besides not improving the lives of those in these communities, as exemplified by the reception of the film *City of God*, they contribute to inflaming the stigma faced by black people and black communities. Thus, the imagery of Brazilian cinema belongs to a broader process which puts the city and civil society against the racialised subject, who then becomes an enemy of the State (Alves, 2018).

According to Silviano Santiago (1992), Oswald de Andrade considers black people to be the ones capable of turning the “crank of the turntable” and by “mistake” conducting “loaded locomotives” toward a historical direction opposed to modernity. We cannot help but visualise imaginary trains crowded with white people moving towards a racial anthropophagic future. The use by Oswald de Andrade of the word “locomotive”, instead of train or carriage, is significant. The metaphor, created by Blaise Cendrars (1976), a white writer naturalised as a French citizen, provides black people with the potential power to change Brazil’s destination, failing to mention the consequences of operating the crank while disregarding a mapped-out path. The possibility of “turning the tables” through insurrection is not considered, Cendrars (1976) mentions the word “mistake”. Concerning this image, Silviano Santiago states the following:

Blaise Cendrars, according to the ‘Manifesto of Pau-Brazil Poetry,’ was the first to attract the attention of Oswald de Andrade to the double question: ‘You have the trains loaded, you are ready to leave. A Negro turns the crank of the turn-table beneath you. The slightest mistake will make you leave in the direction opposite to your destination.’ The image is powerful: intrepid train engineers, beware of the Negro at the turn-table. On the journey towards Brazilian modernisation, according to the patterns of western modernity, you cannot evade him. Either go back or go forward. Reducing him to the condition of a controversial passenger is such a misguided gesture as granting him the position of the only train engineer. (Santiago, 1992, p. 170)

## 5. CONCLUSION

In the double question of the acceptance or refusal of the black body in Brazil’s nation-building, the black body is used as raw material for the construction of a civil society guided by the myth of racial democracy and the oblivion proposed by racial anthropophagy which swallows and then expels what it does not need (Paixão, 2015; Alves, 2018). The oblivion of consciousness as ideology is imposed on memory, so that consciousness itself seems to forget its own ideological character, as well as the entire history of colonialism and slavery. Paixão and Silviano Santiago seem to

agree that Andrade was a minor anthropophagist, considering that the elites have conducted much more exhaustive work through assimilation and reductionism.

Racial anthropophagy consumes the “other” within Brazil’s own territory. Black people have been ground and consumed physically and culturally by the State for the construction of Brazil’s national identity. Nowadays, the black element is emerging and exploding through language (cinema, hip-hop, feminism). It brings out new ways and non-hegemonic images denouncing how racism and coloniality structure the production of hegemonic images of Brazil.

Despite starting with a national frame (Brazilian cinema), our analysis aims to show the limitations of this perspective to understand structural racism. Thinking about Brazil beyond the national frame is not just about considering the variety of external elements processed through anthropophagy. One has to consider the cracks and exclusions of hegemonic images. The national is not a term that can be pacified and, even less, crystallized into a cohesive identity. One can only satisfactorily think of the category ‘Brazilian cinema’ by considering all kinds of problems that it entails. Despite the immensely relevant production of black filmmakers, it does not supplant hegemonic images produced on a massive scale.

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