

**BLACK DIASPORA CINEMA
AND THE SPACE OF AFRO-BRAZILIAN WOMEN**

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ABSTRACT: The interdependence that exists between arts and social reality as portrayed in creative works has turned out to be the master script of the content and context of contemporary society. There is no doubt that every creative work, such as music, poetry, prose, drama is a reflection of the reality of the society that produced it. This makes such products to become a ready source of information for researchers to extract information and data about a particular society. One favorite genre of such information is the cinema. It is generally held that a film literally speaks volumes on the subject society. This medium is particularly appropriate to the study of Brazilian literature and social reality where the language gap is a barrier for most researchers from this part of the world. Whereas, the official Brazilian trope of Racial Democracy seeks to present Brazil as a land of equal rights and opportunities for all its citizens, be they white, black or yellow, those who are familiar with the daily realities of Brazil are often shocked by the gapping socio-economic and political inequalities in the country. The direct victims of such inequalities are the Afro-Brazilian citizens. It is to this end that this work seeks to explore a Brazilian film – *Doméstica o filme* (2001) – produced by Fernando Meirelles. The aim of the paper is to analyze the condition and the space of Afro-Brazilian women in Brazilian cinematography. It will also study the challenges encountered by these women who are often classified as “subalterns” or second-class citizens. And in the face of the myth of racial democracy which continues to sustain the historical racism and systematic exclusion of people of African descent in Brazil, the metamorphosis of Afro-Brazilian women from passive victims of social exclusion to conscious citizens who fight for their rights will also be analyzed within the framework of the theory of *Escrevivência* propounded by an Afro-Brazilian female writer, Conceição Evaristo.

KEYWORDS: Racism; Subaltern; Self-esteem; Racial identity.

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Introduction

The history of Cinema started with the period of Pre-cinema, as Paolo Cherchi Usai, (1996, p. 6-7) affirms: “the history of cinema did not begin with a “big bang”. It includes the Edison patented invention of Kinetoscope in 1891 and the first film projection of the Lumière brothers, J.W. and I.S. Hyatt, to a paying audience in 1895”. The cinema itself, originally called the movies is the moving image as a form of collective entertainment, which developed and spread in the form of photographic images printed on a flexible and semitransparent celluloid base. The progressive evolution of Cinema also reflected in its spread from the First World to the Third World countries.¹

The population of the black Diaspora and their cultural diversity are mostly located in the Third World, especially in the regions of Latin and Central America and the Caribbean. These *Afro-diaspórica* communities share with the African continent a common history of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, military dictatorships and a rather slow process of socio-economic development. One cannot understand the Third World Cinema such as that of Brazil without firstly understanding the country as a part of the Third World, which, in the opinion of Michael T. Martin (1995, p. 1-2) qualifies its cinematographic productions as *minoritarian* cinema. In his paper titled “Framing the “Black” in *Black Diasporic Cinemas*”, Teshome Gabriel² theorizes on Third World Films by applying the famous three phases of literary (r)evolution developed by Frantz Fanon to the analyse the development of Third World cinema, taking his cue from Fanon’s affirmation that culture is an act of insemination upon history, and the product of this is liberation from oppression. The question of liberation makes the study of Third World culture viable for Third world films analysis. As Gabriel Teshome (2006, p. 1) points out:

¹ Paolo Cherchi Usai. “The early years, Origin and Survival”.In: *The Oxford History of World Cinema*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1996:8

² Teshome Gabriel, Ethiopian-born American cinema scholar, longtime professor at the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, and expert on cinema and film of Africa and the developing world.

From pre-colonial times to the present, the struggle for freedom from oppression has been waged by the Third World masses who in their maintenance of a deep cultural identity have made history come alive. Just as they have moved aggressively towards independence, so has the evolution of Third World film culture followed a path from 'domination' to 'liberation.'³

This Third World film culture having experienced a first foreign phase of alienation fashion on the audience as described by Teshome, it later moved to the second and third phases where the necessity to work on recognition of 'consciousness of oneself, national and the international consciousness were established.

The Third World film and the Brazilian films

Teshome Gabriel classified the Third World Films into three Phases. The first phase is the unqualified assimilation where the film industries in other part of the world identified with the Western Hollywood film industry such as Nollywood of Nigeria and Ghallywood of Ghana, while the other film industries in India, Egypt and Hong Kong accept to be called the 'Third World's Hollywood,' 'Hollywood-on-the-Nile' and 'Hollywood of the Orient' respectively. The themes remain close to the Hollywood, maintaining entertainment and profit making by producing films with the theme of romance, musicals, comedies, etc. Its focus is on re-investable fund as we have in the incorporation of the *Cinema Novo* in the Brazilian *EMbrafilme* (Empresa Brasileira do Filme). The style placed emphasis on formal properties of cinema, technical brilliance and visual wizardry, etc. The second phase is called "the remembrance phase". The film industry is concerned with the indigenization and control of talents, production, exhibition and distribution such as the 'cinema moudjahid' in Algeria, 'new wave' in India and 'engaged or committed cinema' in Senegal and Mozambique. The thematic concern of this phase centers on the return of the exile to the

³ Teshome Gabriel, H. "Towards a critical Theory of Third World Films" In: Michael T. Martin (ed), *Diaspora. Diversity, Dependence and Oppositionality*. Detroit, Michigan. Wayne State University Press. 1995; www.teshomegabriel.net/towards-a-critical-theory-of-third-films 2016:1

Third World's source of strength, i.e. culture and history. Other themes include the clash between rural and urban life, the traditional versus modern value systems, folklore and mythology. Sembene Ousmane's early film *Mandabi* (1968), based on a humble traditional man outstripped by modern ways characterizes this stage. *Barravento* (The Turning Wind), (1962), a poetic Brazilian film about a member of a fishermen's village who returns from his exile in the city, is a folkloric study of mysticism also *Quilombo* by Caca Diegues (1984), a film that tells the story of the rise and fall of the most famous Quilombo dos Palmares, the greatest free republic of runaway slaves in the Americas, located in the heartland of Brazil's *nordeste* region in the 17th century.

According to Teshome Gabriel, the major fault of this phase is the danger of making an exaltation of traditional virtues and racializing culture without applying a critical approach, leading to what he called a “blind alley” or, as Fanon himself would put it, a blind *cul-de-sac* emanating from its quest to avoid a cheap imitation of the cinematographic tradition of the metropolis, i.e. the First World. However, this category of Third World cinema is not without its virtues. Its credit resides in its break from the first phase and its intent on celebrating the culture and the agency of the oppressed. Moreover, the style of this second phase is also a plus in that it reflects a serious attempt at indigenizing the Western film style. Although the dominant stylistic conventions of the first phase still predominate here, there appears to be a growing tendency to create a film style appropriate to the changed thematic concerns. Some social cinematographic institutions of the Third World, like Argentina's *Cine Liberación* and the Cuban post-revolutionary cinema as well as other national film industries supported by the national governments – for instance, the Chilean Films of Allende's Popular Unity Socialist government, Algeria's *L'Office National pour le Commerce et l'Industrie Cinématographique* (ONCIC) and Cuba's *Institute of Film, Art and Industry* (ICAIC) are examples of this phase.

The third phase is called “the combative phase”, here, the filmmaking industry is a public service institution and it is not only owned by the nation and/or the government, it

is also managed, operated and run for and by the people. It can also be called a cinema of mass participation, one enacted by members of communities speaking indigenous languages as we have it in Nollywood films and some Brazilian films like *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos*, (1976), (Madam Flor and her two husbands). The themes of the third phase centres around the lives and struggles of Third World peoples. A very good example is Miguel Littin's *The Promised Land* (1973), a quasi-historical mythic account of power and rebellion, which can be seen as referring to events in modern-day Chile and the latest film by the same producer – *Alsino and the Condor* (1982) – combines realism and fantasy within the context of war-torn Nicaragua. The imagery in *One Way or Another* (1977) by the late Sara Gomez Yara, of an iron ball smashing down the old slums of Havana clearly depicts the issue of women/race in present-day Cuba. Some other Brazilian films like *Deus é brasileiro* (2003) and *Cidade de Deus* (2002) are examples of films that show the struggle of people in their day to day activities. The style of this period is seen in the equation of film to an ideological instrument, the agreement between the public and the film-makers and there is also the use of *flashback* which will brighten the present and equally illuminate what will occur in the future.

Nevertheless, it is good to note that there is fluidity among these three phases for example as presented by Teshome. Some Third World filmmakers have even opted for what he called a contradictory path. *Lucia* (1968), a Cuban film by Humberto Solas, based on the relations between the sexes, belongs to the Phase III while Glauber Rocha's early Brazilian films like *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (1964), (literally translated as 'God and the Devil in the Land of the Sun,' but advertised in the United States as 'Black God, White Devil!') and *Terra em Transe* ('The Earth Trembles') (1967), reflect characteristics of the second Phase while his last two, *A Idade da Terra* ('The Age of Earth'), (1980) and *Di Cavalcanti*, (1977), both in their formal properties and subject matter manifest characteristic that Tesome consider to be typically Phase III (Teshome Gabriel, 2016, p. 1-3).

It is a fact that all the Third World countries had many obstacles that impede their local production including Africa, Manthia Diawara (1995, p. 96), asserts

After the independence of most African countries in the early sixties, the filmmakers still could not have access to production facilities and to the movie theaters for the projection of their films in their own countries. They consequently increased the political pressure on their governments to intervene and restructure the organization of film activities in a manner that would encourage African production.

The struggle of Brazilians and their filmmakers passed through similar stages. The political revolution in Brazil that brought down the dictatorship in the mid 1980s also affected the social sensitization of the populace as well as the promotion of Afro-Brazilian values and identity, which eventually reflected in the film industry. Ana Del Santo and Abril Trigo (2016, p. 1) affirm that Filmmakers were actively involved in the fight for a change in order to invent alternative modes of distribution and exhibition, create different cinematographic languages, and intervene artistically in the modernizing, revolutionary, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist politics of the times, this is what led to the “Movimento de Cinema Novo” in Brazil in 1960⁴. This new cinema of the 1960s was initiated by young filmmakers like Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Glauber Rocha, Ruy Guerra, Carlos (Cacá) Diegues, and Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, and their focus was on producing films that can transform the Brazilian society. The high cost of film production like that of the Hollywood led to the situation of producing low cost films or seeking the state support that will encourage experimentation.

Carlos "Cacá" Diegues is a leading figure of Brazilian cinema. One of the first filmmakers to define the *Cinema Novo* (New Cinema) movement in 1962, designating it as part of a larger cultural movement whose ultimate goal was to transform the Brazilian society. A staunch supporter of the *auteur cinema*, Diegues believed that Cinema Novo's social

⁴ Anal Del Sarto, Abril Trigo. “Cinema novo-Brasil-film-wife-music, story”. www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Academy-Awards-crime-fi... 2017:1

commitment and political criticism would be possible only through unqualified artistic freedom, cinematic heterodoxy, and cultural pluralism. This conception of Cinema Novo as more of a collective vision of individual artists than an aesthetic school led him to explore very different cinematic styles, from his neorealist, pseudo-ethnographical, and didactic films of the 1960s, unmistakably related to the first phase of *Cinema Novo* and its aesthetic of hunger, to his embrace in the 1970s of *Tropicalism's* spectacular aesthetics and his denunciation of the submission of art to party politics, or what was called the "*patrulhas ideológicas*" (ideological patrols) by the agents of the then Brazilian military dictatorship. His earliest professional films, *Escola de samba, alegria de viver* (Samba School, joy of Living, 1962), a segment of *Cinco vezes favela* (The Slums Five Times) and *Ganga Zumba* (1963), frame Diegues' thematic and aesthetic concerns, bearing on the recovery of the historical roots and the contemporary expressions of Afro-Brazilian culture, and its influence on popular music (samba), religion (candomblé), and carnival. In *Quilombo* (1984), he returned to these themes, this time in the form of a spectacular super-production that further stressed the mythical elements of the story. *Xica da Silva* (1976), a carnivalesque rendition of historical events in colonial Brazil, tells the story of a female slave who shapes politics and the economy through sex, fantasy, and eroticism. The film generated a hot national debate and criticism. Its music, dances, eroticism, and carnivalization of traditions and the reversal of history all fit into the commercial formula of *Tropicalism*, a counter-cultural musical and artistic movement propounded by the trio of Bahian musicians Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil (who later became Brazil's Minister of Culture during the Lula Government) and Gal Costa.

The major trope of *Tropicalism* in both its musical as well as its cinematographic expressions was to profess a stubborn artistic and aesthetic stand against every form of imperialism and neo-colonization. Ana Del Santo and Abril Trigo summarize this *tropicalist* commitment in the *sétima arte*, i.e. the cinema, affirming that: "the Brazilian films differ from both Hollywood films, which were conceived as entertainment and instilled passivity in the consumer, and European auteur cinema, which was conceived as art and portrayed

existential angst and social alienation, Brazilian cinema produced a social and political critique of colonialism”.⁵ To cap, the application of this avowed *credo* of the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* (New Cinema) in the conception and production of Afro-Brazilian films is a coherent and focused implementation of the theories of the imperatives of Afro-Brazilian artistic and aesthetic independence and originality as projected in the formation of Black theatre groups in the late 1940s and 50s by Abdias de Nascimento’s *Teatro Experimental do Negro*.

***Domesticas, o filme* exposing racial discriminations and social inequalities suffered by afro-brazilian woman**

In recent years in Brazil, there has been a recurrent clamour for more Afro-Brazilian Cinema that would focus exclusively on the reality of racial and social discriminations and prejudices in Brazil. *Domesticas, o filme* (2001) was a response to such a demand. Maria José Somelarte Barbosa affirms that the white Brazilian film producers discriminate against the black characters in their production by giving them most stereotyped roles to play. A typical case study, according to her was the blockbuster *Cidade de Deus*, (City of God) and the reaction of some Afro-Brazilian critics to the racialization of violence in the Brazilian (especially the *carioca*) *favelas* or slum in the film. The film was condemned based on the fact that it affirms more stereotypes of Afro-Brazilians as innately violent and prone to criminality without looking at the root causes of the gang activities in Rio’s most notorious *favelas* such as racial inequalities and social injustice. Emanuelle K. F. Oliveira, a scholar at the Vanderbilt University, in an article titled “an Ethic of the Aesthetic: Racial Representation in Brazilian Cinema Today” described the Academy Award nominated film *Cidade de Deus*, (City of God) in the New York Times as an

irresistible (. . .) chronicle of crime, a film that illuminates the inter-relationship of poverty and crime in Brazil’s *favelas* (slums). The Conditions therein have led inevitably to crime especially drug trafficking, giving rise to a growing army of dispossessed, among them

⁵ Ibid, 2017:2

many black and mixed-race citizens. “City of God” (dir. Fernando de Meirelles, 2002), which was based on Paulo Lins’ novel, reflects a growing tendency in the Brazilian cultural scene. However, the representations of contemporary urban violence, literature, cinema, and popular music especially hip-hop, have been used as vehicles to reproduce Brazilian social realities and anxieties. The residents of poor communities, however, have been voicing an acute criticism of the new cinematic representations, which seek to promote social denunciation, but instead help to construct stereotyped perceptions of Afro-Brazilians⁶.

Perhaps, as a continuation of his interest in the daily existential issues of Afro-Brazilians in the urban settings, Fernando de Meirelles produced *Domésticas, o filme* (2001) to project the question of house maids and domestic servants, a professional class that is most prevalent in the Brazilian society. The film, set in São Paulo, documents the lives of six Afro-Brazilian domestic servants in their quest for daily economic and social survival in Brazil’s largest metropolis. Our special interest in the film stems from the fact that, for the first time in Brazilian cinema history, we have a film that features Afro-Brazilian women as protagonists. Although not all maids in Brazil are Black, Afro-Brazilian women form the bulk of domestic workers, filling more than 90% of the vacancies for domestic workers in the big capitals and small cities of Brazil. As is the case with drug traffickers, prison inmates and *favela* (slum) dwellers in Brazil, the presence of a small percentage of White Brazilians is more of the exception than the rule, because, as Ayoh’OMIDIRE (2014b) points out, these are all categories exclusive to the so-called PPP – *pretos, pobres e periféricos* (negros, poor, and ghetto dwelling people).

In Meirelles films however, it is striking that among six domestic workers starred in the film, three are Afro-Brazilian women (Zéfa, Quitéra and Créo), while the other three – Shirley, Cida and Roxane – are white Brazilian women of the lower class, i.e. poor and illiterate white *paulistas*. In line with the objective of this study, we intend to discuss and

⁶ <http://ejournals.library.vanderbilt.edu/index.php/lusohispanic/article/view...> Accessed on: 1st March, 2018.

analyse solely the Afro-Brazilian characters in the film in order to set them as a counterpoint in the process of the popular and social identity construction in the Brazilian society.

It is important to mention that cinematic representation is more than just a sequence of photographs, like the plot of *Domésticas, o filme* that is about the daily existence of the aforementioned domestic workers without the appearance of any of their mistresses throughout the film. This absence of the employers of the *domésticas* (that is actually the professional name given to all domestic workers in Brazil) could be considered by some critics as a way to silence or minimize the oppression of this class of workers in the society. However, this study considers it as a total lens projection towards these class of women, giving room for total visibility of domestic workers in a way that is unprecedented in Brazilian Cinema. To a certain extent, the film almost suggests a leaning towards the documentary cinema, if not that all the characters are purely fictitious. In our opinion, the absence of the *patroas* (employees) in the film, rather than minimizing the burden of blame of the social, racial and sexual inequalities that the film seems to be denouncing, has a greater advantage of given full vent to the feelings of the protagonists whose constant motif in the film are the recuperation of their human dignity, quest for social ascension and identity within the Brazilian society.

The film shows the confusion and the problems faced by this category of workers, the problems of professional hazards emanating mostly from their ignorance and illiteracy which the society explores and abuses as well as their worries about basic existential issues such as marriage, love, robbery, adultery, single parenthood. In spite of all their ignorance, virtually all the characters aspire for social emancipation, each nursing the ambition of climbing the social and economic ladder. It is pertinent to add here that this is actually a faithful depiction of the aspirations of most domestic workers in Brazil, apart from their powerful advocacy which has made this category of workers to be included in the pensionable professions within Brazilian labour laws, with rights ranging from the thirteenth month salary (*décimo terceiro*) and paid annual leave, most domestic workers in Brazil have gotten so

chic that from the salaries they make working in the homes of their employers, they too employ others as domestic servants to work in their own homes too!

Meirelles' films are generally characterized by an intense narration and simple characterization, giving time to every character to express him/herself perfectly. Enriched by a clear sonority, *Domésticas o filme* is classified as a comedy or a light mood film because of its many scenes that border on the comical and ludicrous situations common among the lower classes in the Brazilian society. The film is thus spiced with episodes such as the robbery scene where the two young unemployed black youth tried to hold up a commercial bus with a toy pistol, which one of them unwittingly allowed to fall from his hand in the course of the 'operation'. Urban Hip Hop music is also used to add emotion and support to the scenes. The film has a good photographic quality which projects well cut out angles and sharp images.

However, the most original quality of the *Domésticas, o filme* is its handling of the racial and social discourse as presented by the different characters in the course of executing their daily chores as domestic workers. This is emphasized by the Afro-Brazilian theorist Conceição Evaristo in her theory of "Escrevivência" (i. e. Writing the living acts) which indicates the intensity and the complexity of racial and gender relation in Brazilian society, "Escrevivência of double phases, a "space of social and ethnic" which joins the concept of class to that of complexity that exists in Brazilian society. That is not just talking about a woman and her black race but, also talk about her closed class of subaltern."⁷

Zéfa the eldest character in the film, is an old Afro-Brazilian house maid. Her long stay in the profession reflects in the experience she displays in the execution of domestic work and also the way she mentors younger workers. Through-out the film, she is projected as the guardian and protector of other young domestic workers. Apart from being the god-mother of one of the two unemployed young black males named Gilvam in the film, she

⁷ Escrevivência de dupla face, um "lugar social e étnico" que junta a questão de classe à esta complexidade que existe na sociedade brasileira. Isso quer dizer que não só fala de mulher e de sua raça negra, mas também fala de sua classe fechada de sub-alterna. Bárbara Araújo Machado (2014:34).

also stands as guarantor for most of the newcomers in the service of the mistresses and other employers of domestic workers living in the big condominium where most of the actions of the film took place. Her reputation as a faithful maid is so solid that Quitéra, a young Afro-Brazilian lady uses her as the ‘referee’ to get her new employment. Just by mentioning her name, the job is secured, “*Bom dia, meu nome é Quitéra, foi Zéfa da casa de dona Sonia que me mandou*”, (Good morning, my name is Quitéra, it was Zéfa who works in the house of Madam Sonia that sent me to apply for a job her). In the film, she is depicted as the reserved, uncomplicated maid who knows and accepts her place and social functions in a typically capitalist society without much preoccupation about racial or gender oppression, for instance, she couldn’t fathom the impatience and ambition of her younger colleagues who are often fired for insubordination. Here she questions Quitéra who was dismissed from her recent job: “*Como é que você consegue ser mandada embora em 3 horas, Quitéra!?*” (What on earth did you do to get yourself dismissed within 3 hours of landing a job, Quitéra?). Essentially, therefore, Zéfa who is respectfully called “*dona Zéfa*” by other maids represents a conformist to racial exploration and inequality, and also to her position of subaltern a condition that the theory of *Escrevivência* found to have been naturalized over the years and condemns in an artistic production. That is why a film like this confirms the quest and ideology of the theorist, Conceição Evaristo. And her theory of *Escrevivência* calls for more artistic productions that will expose the racial inequality and register the daily life of Afro-Brazilian, which in a way has affected the Afro-Brazilian identity,

...Uma escrita que [registra] mais que as necessidades do momento. É uma escrita que guarda a memória do cotidiano, da premência da vida no dia a dia, entremeada, às vezes, por uma lembrança mais antiga. A nossa memória familiar, que cultua os nossos avós e bisavós (...).⁸ (DUARTE E FONSECA, 2014, p. 105)

⁸ (...) as a writing that (registers) more than the necessities of the moment. It is a writing that keep the quotidian memory, the pressure of life in day to day, intermingles, at times, for an old remembrance. Our family memory that affects our grandmother and great-grandmother.

Much like Monteiro Lobato's *Tia Anastásia*, Zéfa's role in the film readily reminds one of a similar image of matronly Afro-Brazilian slave women whose docile demeanor and unconditional loyalty endeared them to the master and his household. One can thus say that, for Afro-Brazilian women like dona Zéfa, professionalism apart, not much has changed since the 1888 Abolition of Slavery in Brazil. Zéfa is a woman without any formal education, but over the years she has apparently gathered an enviable professional experience and her sole mission in life seems to be to help others in her category to become responsible workers and self-sustained citizens in the society knowing that she is locked out in social ascension due to lack of formation and racial concept. This is strikingly clear in one of the episodes in the film where a white maid was complaining about the indignities of their profession and discussing her dream of becoming a model, Zéfa said she didn't have any ambition problem. Despite her poor social condition, Zéfa is contented with her job and that seems to be the intention of the producer: to project a 'realistic' view of the Brazilian society in which abound many Afro-Brazilian Zéfas.

Quitêra, an Afro-Brazilian maid, a young lady, almost an adolescent. She is projected as highly inexperienced and naïve, and she had to learn the hard way the rules and hazards of life as a domestic worker. She behaves in the film like an unstable person and this explains in part why she always has problem with her employers. On one occasion, her naivety, inexperience and lack of education landed her in Police custody when a group of white fraudsters came to her employers' house to cart away all the furniture and domestic appliances under the pretext of taking them for repairs. She was fooled by a piece of paper with which her *patroa* had purportedly authorized the removal of the furniture. She was unable to read the fake note presented by the fraudsters and for this, she was arrested as an accomplice to the crime. She was so naïve that she even served the thieves cups of freshly made coffee while they were packing the furniture. The episode at which she recounts her ordeal to her colleagues confirm her lack of experience and professional astuteness. She described to her colleagues how the thieves convinced her:

Thief: Good morning, is this Mrs Regina dos Santos's house?

Quitéra: Yes, she lives here.

Thief: (Showing a half concealed document to Quitéra), well, we are from the "Regional", we are here to take your household appliances for warranty evaluation.

Quitéra: What evaluation! She didn't inform about anything of that nature, she has traveled and will be back next Monday.

Thief: You can call Adilsa, she knows us, we come to do such services here on a regular basis.

Quitéra: She no longer works here, young man.

Thief: Well, what are we going to do now?

Quitéra: How do you mean? Anyway, I was about to go out, I'm afraid you won't be able to work here today

Thief: Well, it's all up to you. But your employer will have to pay the fine, she will lose all the warranty rights and the deadline is already indicated here.

Quitéra: She will lose the warranty on all her appliances?

Thief: (Giving the document and a paper to Quitéra to sign) If such a thing happens, she surely won't be happy with you and that could cause you a lot of problems.

Quitéra: (Looking at the paper, unable to read it), It's true, she is always furious, but why didn't she mention this to me (,,).

Thief: (Scratching his face), Well it's up to you to decide. Just sign here please to show that we were here but you did not permit us to pack the appliances.

Quitéra: (Holding the document and biting her fingers). The appliances.

Thief: Hum.

Quitéra: (Returning the document and the pen to the man) Okay, go ahead and take them.

Thief: Wow! Tomorrow we will return them all promptly.

Unfortunately, the thieves packed all the properties in the house, the dialogue already pointed at a missing key- lack of education. It is pathetic that a young Quitéra of about 17 years of age cannot read nor write in a country where the myth of racial democracy is celebrated as the guarantee for equal opportunities and access to education for all with the government adopting slogans like *Brasil, patria educadora* (Brazil, an educative fatherland) to celebrate its investment in the education of the citizenry. Obviously, Afro-Brazilians live Quitéra has been excluded from this educational project because they, as PPP who have to opt out of school early in life in order to work for the survival of themselves and their

families. Creuza Maria Oliveira, the National President of Domestic Workers in Brazil laments this situation indicating that most times under the survival pressure, a lot of these young ladies or adolescents accept to work in some family homes just for free accommodation and feeding instead of a fixed salary, an arrangement that will never allow the poor employee to get out of her desperate economic and social dependence,

I'm sad because I know that this is a situation common to many us domestic workers, including the young adolescents. Even at this very moment, in the National Federation of Domestic Workers (Fenatrad), I'm currently monitoring the case of a worker whose pathetic situation has further convinced me of the imperative and urgent nature of this (unionist) struggle to which I have dedicated all my life: she worked for a family from age 10 to 20 years without the right to any salary. Neither was she given the opportunity to go to School (...).⁹

The problem of Quitéria and the exploitation of many young Afro-Brazilians working as domestic servants is a representation of so many people in this category. Excruciating poverty and blatant illiteracy are their trade marks. These young girls are often inexperienced and this is an opportunity for the employer to pay them cheap salary or keep them working round the clock under their roof, receiving little or nothing. The producer of this film brings us to the melting point of fiction and reality and denounces the serious problem caused by illiteracy among many Afro-Brazilians. This confirms the position of the Afro-Brazilian theorist concerning the urgency of promoting both literary and cinematographic works that will serve as eye opener to racial exclusion, marginalization of Afro-Brazilian

⁹ Creusa Maria Oliveira, "Minha Luta é para ver tornar-se real o Sonho do trabalho Doméstico Decent". Ibid, 2013:17.

Fico triste, pois sei que essa ainda é a trajetória de várias de nós, inclusive adolescentes. Agora mesmo, na Federação Nacional das Trabalhadoras Domésticas (Fenatrad) estou acompanhando o caso de uma trabalhadora que me faz ter ainda mais certeza do quanto é necessária a luta a que tenho dedicado minha vida: ela trabalhou dos 10 aos 20 anos sem ter direito sequer a salário. Não estudou.

women, among many other Florentina Souza believes that artistic production geared towards remolding of Afro-Brazilians representations will assist in building self-confidence and affirmation of black identity, (SOUZA, 2005, p. 106)

The theory of *Escrevivência* also comes readily relevant here in terms of total representation of Afro-Brazilian reality in all artistic production as commented by José Luanga and Márcio Barbosa that defend the respect and equal opportunity for black race in Brazil, (Souza, 2005, p. 108). Film critic Dudley Andrew, has also studied this realist image of characters in film in his book titled, *Concept in Film Theory* that all films present themselves to us as real/image according to various ratios. (Andrew, 1984, p. 43). Due to this submission, this producer of the film, *Domésticas o filme*, positions this character to represent a contra discourse, responding to the challenge of rewriting the history of Afro-Brazilian, “(...) a challenge to rewrite the history of Afro-Brazilian in which touches the saga of Africans and its descendants in Brazil; an emphatic denunciation against racism and social injustice that weigh down the black in Brazilian society” (Ibid, 2014, p. 114).

Créo the last Afro-Brazilian character in the film is a sad looking, “poor, black and ignorant person” as she describes herself in her introductory monologue. She represent the category of Afro-Brazilians suffering from low esteem:

Birth, death, birth, death. Each time someone is born, such person is a different person. Someone is born to be rich, another Japanese, another born to be a merchant, another a wall painter, one is born a man another a women, one a homosexual, another a transvestite, some are born to be fat, poor, black; others born to be courageous while yet others are born to be idiots. We witness all sorts of births and destiny. Every day I wake up saying that it is God that writes the destiny of each person in this world. That was what I was the (Kardecian) spirituality taught me, it is called reincarnation. But why did I have to be born like this: poor, black and ignorant? Every morning is another life for me, full of dirt. Can someone tell me why? I can't fathom why I got to be like this. My great grandmother was a slave, my grandmother was a domestic worker, when I was born, my mother said she preferred to see me dead than see me become a domestic worker. Today, I am a domestic worker!

A completely disillusioned with life and with no hope of ever making a change in her life. Through Créó we identify similar problems that other characters discussed above have: lack of education, the vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy. That is Créó is also triply condemned by the ruthless laws of sexism, racism and poverty—poor, Afro-Brazilian and female in a society where social ascension is controlled by the skin colour and level of education. Her usage of Black people’s language or “favela Portuguese”¹⁰ characterized with miss-pronunciation and grammatical errors” is a proof to her imbalance situation. Here is the linguistics characterization of Créó while arguing with her daughter who plans to travel with her man friend:

Créo: A resposta é não. (The response in no).

Filha (Daughter): Por que não? (Why no ?)

Créo: Errado por conta de que não conhece bem o rapaz. (It is wrong because you don’t even know this guy properly yet).

Filha: A senhora que sabe. (Well, that is your opinion mother).

Créo: *Ffya* escuta sua mãe..., *tá* errado *ffya*, *tá* errado..(Daughter listen to your mother...it is wrong daughter, it is wrong...).

In this dialogue Créó pronounces “ffya” instead of “filha” which means daughter. She turns a double syllable word to monosyllable as in the verb, “Estar”, she pronounces “tá” instead of “está”. This is practically the representation of the linguistic capacity of subaltern. Dudley Andrew again discusses this in his paper: “The Ideology of Realist Representation”, making it clear that no matter what appears on the screen, the audience will instinctively shape it into a representation of something familiar to them,

The film that gratifies this attempt, the most satisfyingly representational film, we call realist. Such film will cut up the world into perceptual images organized into patterns, which exist in our culture. Without effort, we can identify in the film something we have identified already in our culture as important. Thus, the film reinforces the world we have constructed. (1984, p. 47).

¹⁰ A “favela Portuguese” is a type of popular Portuguese among the lower class that do not have any academic formation. These people tend to speak the language without respecting many grammatical rules.

A character like this confirms the intention of the theory of *Escrevivência* to expose all the exclusion and marginalization suffered by the Afro-Brazilians, “Nossa Escrevivência não pode ser lida como história para ‘ninar os da casa grande’ e sim, para incomodá-los em seu sono injusto”.¹¹ (Our *Escrevivência* cannot be classified as a history to pamper the people of the big house, (the White Brazilians), and yes, to make them uncomfortable in their unjust sleep).

Conclusion

It is important to note that lack of formal education among many Afro-Brazilians is a major problem in Brazil. This is a byproduct of slavery and poverty. Many Afro-Brazilian children start to engage in menial jobs from a very tender age to survive while they ought to be in school. The few that make it to the secondary school level still have to struggle a lot before they gain admission into the university. This social deficiency is unveiled in this film to awaken the authority to do more than what Lula’s regime put in place. To improve this situation the former President of Brazil, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva approved the law 10.639/03 and many other policies of Affirmative Action such as the *Sistema de cotas* (a quota system of entry into higher education, which favours the blacks and the poor). All in an attempt to correct centuries of racial and educational inequalities and increase the number of Afro-Brazilian in tertiary institutions in Brazil. It is worthy of note that the film *Domésticas, o filme*, was supported by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture and the reason for this is to give room for producers who are conscious of the racial prejudice and social problems that mark the Brazilian society to reach their audience. All these projects and governmental interventions are necessary to eventually correct the racial inequalities in Brazil, for, as Robert Stam affirms: (...) the structural mecha-

¹¹ Conceição Evaristo, Blog *Nossa Escrevivência*, 2013. www.nossaescrevivencia.com.br. Accessed on: 15th September 2015.

nisms of the Brazilian social formation systematically deprives Blacks, and to lesser extent mulattoes, of economic and political power.¹² This film can thus rightly be said to have positively challenged the Brazilian government and sensitize the people towards the situation of the domestic workers in Brazil. As the National President of Domestic Workers in Brazil rightly said, there is a need to promote the profession and make it a dignified job:

All that I'm doing and what I believe is making the profession of domestic workers to be considered as a dignified job like any other one by the majority of Brazilians. I dream of a day when the members of our association, after so much sacrifice to study and improve themselves, will not have to repeat the same old discourse that 'I'm doing this in order not to repeat the history of my grandmother and my mother (...). (2013, p. 27)

All the Afro-Brazilian literary theorists are of the opinion that the greatest advantage of the theory of *Escrevivência* resides in its insistence on promoting a space of difference, awareness, denunciation and affirmation of Afro-Brazilian identity in Brazil. The same has been seen to be true of this film, *Domésticas o filme*, whose adhesion to the *Escrevivência* project is undeniable. The plight and reality of Afro-Brazilian Domestic workers is projected in the film in a way that justifies government intervention to improve their lot. Today, it is a thing of joy that efforts like this have started to yield good fruits in Brazil, with the creation of SEPPPIR in 2003 by President Lula da Silva, a ministry established towards the promotion of racial equality. Also a compulsory inclusion of domestic work as pensionable under a law that was signed by the past Dilma-led PT Government which stipulates clearly the obligations of every employer of domestic workers to register such a worker with the Ministry of Social Security and make all necessary deductions and payments into the pension scheme within the very first month of employing such

¹² Robert Stam. "Samba, Candomblé, Quilombo, Black performance and Brazilian Cinema". In: *Cinemas of the Black Diaspora. Diversity, Dependence and Oppositionality*. Michael T. Martin (ed). Detroit, Michigan. Wayne State University Press. 1995:282.

a worker. Heavy sanctions have been stipulated for any defaulting employer and, certainly, this will greatly improve the lot of *empregadas domésticas* in Brazil.

A DIÁSPORA DO CINEMA NEGRO E O ESPAÇO DE MULHERES AFRO-BRASILEIRAS

RESUMO: A interdependência que existe entre as artes e a realidade social, tal como retratada nas obras criativas, acabou por ser a escrita mestra do conteúdo e contexto da sociedade contemporânea. Não há dúvida de que todo trabalho criativo, como música, poesia, prosa, drama, é um reflexo da realidade da sociedade que o produziu. Isso faz com que esses produtos se tornem uma fonte pronta de informações para os pesquisadores extrair informações e dados sobre uma sociedade em particular. Um gênero favorito desta informação é o cinema. Geralmente afirma-se que um filme fala literalmente muito sobre a sociedade do sujeito. Este suporte é particularmente apropriado para o estudo da literatura brasileira e da realidade social, em que a lacuna de linguagem é uma barreira para a maioria dos pesquisadores dessa parte do mundo. Considerando que, o tropo brasileiro oficial da “democracia racial” procura apresentar o Brasil como uma terra de direitos e oportunidades iguais para todos os seus cidadãos, sejam eles brancos, negros ou amarelos, aqueles que estão familiarizados com as realidades diárias do Brasil frequentemente se deparam com desigualdades socioeconômicas e políticas no país. As vítimas diretas dessas desigualdades são os cidadãos afro-brasileiros. É para este fim que este trabalho procura explorar um filme brasileiro – *Doméstica o filme* (2001) – produzido por Fernando Meirelles. O objetivo do artigo é analisar a condição e o espaço das mulheres afro-brasileiras na cinematografia brasileira. Ele também estudará os desafios encontrados por essas mulheres que são frequentemente classificadas como “subalternas” ou cidadãos de segunda classe. E diante do mito da democracia racial que continua sustentando o racismo histórico e a exclusão sistemática de afrodescendentes no Brasil, a metamorfose de mulheres afro-brasileiras de vítimas passivas de exclusão social para cidadãos conscientes que lutam por seus direitos também serão analisados no âmbito da teoria da Escrivência proposta por uma escritora afro-brasileira, Conceição Evaristo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Racismo; Subalterno; Auto estima; Identidade racial.

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