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GENDERED LANDSCAPES: EXPECTATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF MARGINALIZED
WOMEN IN BRAZILIAN CINEMA

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, Brazilian cinema has added many internationally critically acclaimed films to the world of cinema. While some critics would argue that Brazilian cinema itself has established itself as a key player in comparison to other national cinemas, Brazilian cinema, over time has established a definitive set of characteristics as well as genres that have made it stand out in its own right. The trajectory of Brazilian cinema over time has always been tightly linked with the unstable governmental and social issues. This is especially true of the *Cinema Novo* movement of the 1960s. Therefore, “what is generally true of film—the impossibility of separating filmic text from social context- is perhaps more obvious true in the case of Brazilian cinema” (Johnson and Stam 56). This characteristic has endured the development of Brazilian national cinema and still holds true today with many productions covering a wide variety of social commentary.

Contemporary Brazilian films are projecting similar themes that center themselves around particular Brazilian landscapes which encapsulate within them certain socio-historical characteristics. Such landscapes (in this case: the *favela*, the *sertão*, and the urban periphery) depicted within these films create unique sets of limitations and expectations for the people living within them. Particularly, this thesis will take a gendered lens to analyze these differences and similarities within three Brazilian films, of which the protagonist is female, looking at how gender is depicted within these marginalized landscapes.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When viewing a foreign cinema, from the eyes of an outsider, the film certainly speaks to the culture that it is originating. For the audience, these films not only queue us into the preferred style and technological capabilities of the country, but also the themes and tropes that undoubtedly reflect the current ideologies of a given culture.

Unfortunately, due to constraints centering around the flow of ideas through capitalism, Brazilian cinema is limited to the amount of viewers that it actually reaches in Brazil, let alone internationally. When asking a foreigner what they know of Brazilian film, they are most likely to respond with a quick reference to *City of God* (*Cidade de Deus*, 2002) or *Elite Squad* (*Tropa de Elite*, 2007), commenting on the violence, drugs, etc. While international and Brazilian audience highly praised both films, these two examples create a very limited illustration of the Brazilian landscape. Yet, these are the films that are marking Brazilian cinema on the map as a distinct national cinema. For our purposes here, however, these films more importantly do depict a distinct landscape of Brazil that reveals a very real set of social issues spanning from the deepest of political corruption to an examination of the crumbling infrastructure of the *favela*.

In Jaguaribe's 2004 research on the "Aesthetics of Realism" in Brazilian cinema she comments on a particular trope in Brazilian literary and cinematic works that serve as a catalyst for the rest of this paper:

They fraying of previous narratives and images of national identity has...brought to the limelight new cultural icons shaped by the media and popular culture...contemporary literary and cinematographic productions are attempting to come to terms with new portraits of Brazil that focus on marginalized, characters, *favelas*, drug cultures, and the imaginaries of consumption." (Jaguaribe 327-8)

Given this, my ultimate venture with this thesis is to show how we can use cinema as a lens to render social issues to its audience. By combining an analysis of setting and gender, my aim is to create a semi-encompassing vision of the depiction of females in varying Brazil-specific landscapes and how this reflects the ‘reality’ of the issues they face in patriarchal Brazil.

With over a century of films being screened, Brazilian film has taken on a characteristic of using current/past social issues as thematic elements of their films. “What is generally true of film- the impossibility of separating filmic text from social context- is perhaps more obviously true in the case of Brazilian cinema” (Johnson and Stam 56). Further, there is a strong connection between the political instability that shaped Brazilian history that have continued to affect contemporary artistic manifestations and the motifs that were found in these films. Drawing from Brazil’s most famous cinematic movement, *Cinema Novo*, we see lasting elements in contemporary film.

1.1 HISTORY OF BRAZILIAN CINEMATIC MOVEMENTS

To gather a greater sense of the impact of Brazil’s national cinema I want to begin with a brief look at how contemporary Brazil cinema was shaped from the beginning. Much of what is written in the English language regarding Brazilian cinematic history comes from the work of historians Randal Johnson and Robert Stam. As they conclude in a preface to their anthological exploration of the historical trajectory of film industry in Brazil, as important as *the Cinema Novo* movement was in shaping Brazilian films into a national cinema, “it is especially important to know that much came *before* Cinema Novo and that much has come *since* Cinema Novo” (Johnson and Stam 19).

Beginning in 1896, the first films were screened in Brazil. Popular film studies of the United States and Europe suggest that, internationally, films were a form of entertainment for the

masses. However, in Brazil, they started out as a pastime for the elite, depicting themes of the upper classes and a manifestation of class and status (Johnson and Stam 22). Coinciding with the early 1900s formation of the Old Republic, Brazil was booming with modernization, urbanization, and immigration. During this time there was a political surge for order and rationality, but at the same time progress was highly valued. This first period of Brazilian cinema was known as the *BelaÉpoca* that lasted for the first decade of the 20th century. Spearheaded by such successes as *Paz de Amor* (“Peace and Love”; 1910), which was a satirical musical depicting the political and social issues of Rio de Janeiro, this era of cinema also boasted a variety of cinematic genres. However, there was a significant lack of technology and aristocratic focused audience that limited its expansion. Further, competition between the films being produced in Brazil and their foreign counterparts highlighted the flaws of the Brazilian film industry. Ultimately, by the end of the first decade of its existence, Brazilian films were overshadowed by Hollywood and European films, which were in the forefront of the international market. Given this, the films of the 20s spawned a series of international influences looking to emulate, mostly through parody their foreign counterparts (Johnson and Stam 23).

From the 30s to the 50s brought with it the era of Vargas’s *Estado Novo*, Brazil’s first taste at democracy with the constitutional revisions of 1945, the perpetual mark of economic instability that prefaced the military-led coup d’état, as well as the film genre of the *chanchada*, “an indigenous musical format that celebrated the lives of a gallery of ne’er-do-wells who spend much of their time lazing around, concocting foredoomed small-change con games, and drifting cheerfully from one romantic entanglement to another” (Dixon and Foster, 165). According to Shaw’s analysis of this timely genre, it “helped to remedy the Brazilian masses’ unstable sense of belonging to a society that was experiencing dramatic shifts at its very core” (Shaw 17).

Appealing to a mass audience with lack of refinement and frequent use of colloquialisms made this genre easily relatable to the average person and echoed the experiences of many marginalized persons. Further, “[the] story lines of the films often centered on a character’s social advancement, usually by a quirk of fate, but nevertheless reassured audiences about their chances of making it...” (Shaw 18). This suggests that this genre created the beginnings of a connection between film and people, essentially creating a cultural reflection of the time in spite of the romanticized depictions of the average Brazilian.

The age of the *chanchada* concluded in the 50s with the founding of the *AtlântidaCinematográfica* studio which was ultimately overshadowed by the *VeraCruz* productions that fostered in the Cinema Novo movement that spanned a little more than a decade but will become the defining movement of Brazilian cinema. Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, divide Cinema Novo into three phases, the first running “from 1960 to 1964, the date of the first *coup d’état*; from 1964 to 1968, the date of the second *coup*–within–the–*coup*; and from 1968 to 1972” (30-32). With each phase divided in terms of the politics of the time it is obvious that the political climate is going to be the main factor in determining the thematic design of these films. In essence, “...Cinema Novo called for an alternative form of cinematic practice which would combat the idealistic illusionism of dominant cinema and at the same time participate in the struggle for national liberation” (Johnson 96).

Glauber Rocha’s 1965 reflective commentary on what he called “An Aesthetic of Hunger” illustrates the impact of the first phase on the rest of cinema:

Our originality is our hunger and our greatest misery is that this hunger is felt but not intellectually understood...Cinema Novo reveals that violence is normal behavior for the

starving. The violence of a starving man is not a sign of a primitive mentality... (Rocha as cited in Johnson 95)

In addition to Rocha's powerful image of violence and starvation, urban and rural class issues, religious topics, and economic exploitation also characterize the first phase. However, these films also tend to contain within them a glimmer of optimism that suggests a solution to these issues given their inclusion in popular culture productions (Johnson and Stam 34). In other words, the films aimed to expose the realities of Brazil's most underdeveloped landscapes in an effort to create an awareness on the part of the masses. This included a close examination into the depths of morbidity of this political and economic struggle, setting the films in the places where these struggles were most visible- the *favela* and *sertão*. Given this, the most important idea is that this phase characterized as a filmatic cultural production, is also a representation of the political and social instability. I will return to this phase in greater detail as I delve into my analysis of each film, as it echoes a significant portion of what many contemporary Brazilian films look like today.

Essentially a response to the political movement of the previous era, films in the second phase of Cinema Novo was characterized by its "analyses of *failure*- of populism, of developmentalism, and of leftist intellectuals" (Johnson and Stam 35). Illustrating Marxist themes of alienation and exploitation of the working class set in an urban landscape. This shift in phase coincides with the military coup of 1964 which marks a significant point in Brazilian political history. However, at this point filmmakers were looking to change their message and ventured to reach a wider audience. "It was becoming clear at this time to many filmmakers associated with the movement that their preaching of a revolutionary utopia was both misguided...and falling on deaf ears (Dennison and Shaw 133). It was during this phase that the

Garota de Ipanema (1967) was produced. Significant in its own right as a step in the other direction from all that *CinemaNovo* represented. Showing the world that Brazil could create popular movies like its foreign counterparts that also had high cultural value (Dennison and Shaw 134).

The last phase of the *CinemaNovo* movement was labeled the *Tropicalista* phase. Johnson and Stam postulate that this phase manifests itself in film as a reaction to the very contradictory “modernization of the Brazilian economy and its archaic, colonized, and imperialized core” (39). Further, the oppressive military regime increased their censorship over popular media and many directors were forced to abandon their films (Dennison and Shaw 135). Due to the repressive political regime, those filmmakers that were not exiled or banned from producing certain films looked to covertly express their dissatisfaction with the government through indirect methods and allegorical storylines (Johnson and Stam 38). This phase was also centered around Oswald de Andrade’s idea of cannibalism, written about in his *Cannibalist Manifesto* (1928), which was based around the idea of cultural consumption of foreign influences that were regurgitated in combination with a national ideology to create something that was purely Brazilian (Dixon and Foster 290). However, the films of the time were a box office failure and led to the introduction of a cinema that was essentially everything *CinemaNovo* was not.

The 70s and 80s brought with it an anti-intellectual, anti-cinema, and fundamentally and deliberately “bad” film movement. *CinemaMarginal*, as it was labeled was also called *Udigrundi*, reminiscent of the English word for ‘underground’. Within this movement were a group of directors that produced low-budget and low-brow productions. One of the genres that came out of the movement was the *pornochanchada*, which combined elements of the comical

and light hearted *chanchada* of earlier decades with erotic, ‘soft-core’ pornographic scenes. Dennison and Shaw offer three reasons for the success of this genre given the stark shift of thematic elements, “the inevitable censorship of more politically motivated films of the times, the fact that foreign porn was banned, and...compulsory screen quotas that resulted in exhibition groups producing their own films...” (Dennison and Shaw 158). Seemingly due to the distraction from the political messages other directors were suggesting in their films, the government tolerated such tackless productions. They even were able to show political propaganda before these films, which reinforced the regimes strive for nationalism (Dennison and Shaw 164).

However, all this would change with the 1989 election of Fernando Collor de Mello whose efforts to modernize resulted in the reduction of the state’s financial support for all industry. This included disbanding the *Embrafilme* production company as well as removing the Sarney Law which gave tax incentives to businesses for their investments in national cinema projects (Dennison and Shaw 204). This significantly decreased the number of films produced during this time until the *Retomada* or renaissance of Brazilian cinema that began in 1995 with the release of *Carlota Joaquina, princesa do Brasil*. This movement was highly defined by its foreign influence of actors, directors, as well as a thematic focus on immigration (Dennison and Shaw 206).

Further, with a fairly new democratized country and new national identity, Brazilian film is looking to illustrate what it means to be “Brazilian”. Johnson and Stam offer a set of questions that set up the their analysis of Brazilian cinema that I would like to add to my introduction as a means to think about the films that I will be discussing in crux of my thesis: “How could cinema best express what the filmmakers were fond of calling “Brazilian reality?” What areas of

Brazilian experience had been neglect or distorted in cinema? How could cinema show Brazil its true face?" (57).

Contemporary Brazilian cinema, while not considered to have any specific genre on its own, has incorporated many of the styles that have been seen over the years, particularly those political and social commentaries of the *Cinema Novo* movement. "Since the late 1990s, there has been a boom in neo-naturalist fictional narratives and images that 'focus on marginal characters, urban violence, poverty and extreme experiences (and) avoid avant-garde experimentation...(Jaguaribe330). We can see these characteristics reflected in the films that I will discuss later, which allows for the exposure of meaning to the social commentaries that they hold within them.

1.2 GENDER AND BRAZILIAN CULTURE

Now that I have presented an outline of the medium in question, I would like to offer a brief introduction into the subject of my analysis. As David Foster so precisely puts it in his analysis of gender in contemporary Brazilian cinema:

Gender is an absolute ground zero for most human societies, something that can never not be present. Even when gender is not the thematic center of a cultural text- and it is, however, usually precisely the center...[gender is] an absolute horizon of social subjectivity in Brazil as in all of the West. (7-8)

Films that do not frame gender explicitly do so metaphorically. This is in direct relation to how the nations create and understand gendered identities. Foster continues his commentary in suggesting that females like Nossa Senhora de Aparecida and the girl from Ipanema have both created symbolic representations of femininity for Brazil society. Further, "films are ideological texts, in which gender and sexual roles are an intrinsic function of socio-historical reality."

(George 146). And it is this interaction between humans and society that cannot be disjointed as both are essentially linked.

Given this, any cinematic analysis would not be complete without looking at gender as a means of investigation. While my analysis will focus primarily on the female sex as the films I have chosen to analyze specifically highlight female characters, it is impossible not to ignore their interactions with their gendered landscape, which is primarily masculine, and their interactions with the males in their stories.

It is no secret that Brazilian national identity is closely tied to feminine stereotypes. Throughout history, the political climate has favored a patrimonial ideology placing the woman in the position of subordination, at home raising the family. This stems specifically from the first half of the 20th century when the state was increasingly aiming to control interpersonal relationships of its people, echoing the importance of family stating that status of the nation was in direct correlation to the state of individual families. This is most readily apparent in this quote from a political officer in 1940:

“The family is the foundation, the elemental and organic base of the State...the perfection and civilization of the State depends fundamentally on the moral and legal conditions of each of the families which constitute it. We consider the reconstitution of the family...to be one of the most serious problems of public order, deserving the triple protection of the State.” And he warned that if Brazilians did not help the state redeem the family while there was still time, they would be responsible for the “death of the Fatherland” and the “extinction of our race”. (Besse 4)

While this language may seem extreme, it is not only in their speeches that the government used to its advantage to keep women from advancing in life. With women at center of the family, discussion their role becomes instrumental.

In addition to an increased emphasis on familial responsibilities, the state had strong controls on education, employment opportunities, as well as muting the female voice on social and political issues. Education was a privilege granted to the upper and middle class urban women in the time of modernization and industrialization. Everyone seemed agreed that women should be educated, and while female participation in higher-education was significant the type of education that many women were receiving was not to aid her in becoming a functioning member of “modern” society but rather as M.F. Pinto Pereira stated, “we ought to educate her with great care so that she will be an intelligent and healthy mother of competent and enlightened men; that her principal education consists in the clear understanding of her principal mission [of motherhood]” (Besse 118).

Opportunities in employment were also controlled. While very few women received the opportunity to achieve what we would consider a normal education most of the education that women received directed women to certain vocations which ultimately reinforced the sexual division of labor. While employers were searching for female labor, and women were looking for labor equality, the state was promoting women to keep her interests focused on the family and reproduction (Besse 130). However, while women’s involvement in the labor force was helpful to the Brazilian economy, it didn’t really do anything for women themselves, as many women didn’t see their place in the work force as a priority, above familial and motherly duties.

While during this time women gained citizenship rights, their efforts at change were squelched by the traditions of authoritarian politics as women were advised not to interfere with

their maternal and familial duties. However, the women of this time also felt a taste new sense of liberation from abroad, but institutions were hard-fast to mold them into the ideal mother and producer of the future generations.

Given this, through time, it is important to see how this nationalistic view translates to contemporary cinema. As I have previously discussed, Brazilian cinema, during specific periods, tended to display a nationalistic view of Brazil. It is important to keep all of this in mind when looking at how women are portrayed in national cinema. Are these women representative of what a “Brazilian woman” is supposed to be, or does she deviate from this?

Today, while progress has been made over the years, finds women still in a marginalized position. This is not including the steadfast disparities that exist for those of marginalized races and lower socioeconomic statuses. Machistic mentalities still exist not only on the political/national level but also in homes and on the streets, in the eyes on employers, and education.

1.3 LANDSCAPE

It is generally acknowledged that people are the product of their environment. One theory, in particular, coined by French theorist, Henri Lefebvre centers around the use of geography and landscape as a social construction. Lefebvre considers the influence of space when he writes "(Social) space is a (social) product...the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action..." (Lefebvre 26). Certainly, as a Marxist, Lefebvre is considering the impact of capitalism in the construction of spatial influence, however, he acknowledges the importance of power relations within and of a space, and its active role in fostering social relations and societal construction. This is significant in terms of gender in that there are certain power distinctions that exist between men and women that create different experiences in particular spaces.

It is not only important to talk about gender but also the different types of representations of women. Marginalization is the product of many forms. “Such disparities are particularly prominent in spatial terms where access (or its lack thereof) to certain basic amenities and rights may frequently be determined by the area or nature of the space one inhabits” (Allen 68). People are in constant interaction with their environment and vice versa. As Sadek states, “An emphasis on space and on spatial practices for analyzing the social and political dimension of the subalternity generated by capitalism and state power is particularly appropriate when considering Brazilian identity discourses” (61). In thinking about gender as a social construct, we can see how different environs affect the construction of the gender identities within them. This thesis is not only going to look at gender but also how the different physical spaces create an multiplicity of marginalization for the women portrayed in these films. How these films depict their female protagonists depends largely on the environment that they are in. This encompasses the never-ending web race, class, and gender, etc. For that reason, people have different experiences in different landscapes based on their gender or other parts of their identity. Specifically, when talking about connections with the landscape, I want to focus on how these gendered aspects created expectations and/or limitations on the women living in them.

1.4 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This thesis posits to examine three different contemporary Brazilian films in a similar manner. Looking at how their subject matter creates a complex vision of marginality that includes agendered and spatial disenfranchisement for the women in each of these films and how each of the landscapes creates expectations and limitations for these women, I have broken up my chapters into three different sections. The first chapter looks at the film *Antônia* (2006) which tells the story of four young Afro-Brazilian women living in the urban slums of São Paulo. In

this chapter I will take a closer look at the depiction the role of afro-Brazilian women within the streets of the *favela* in contemporary Brazilian film. Chapter 2 will be an analysis of the documentary *Estamira* (2004) that focuses on an elderly woman working in the landfill *Jardim Gramacho* in Rio de Janeiro. A representation of spatial marginalization at its core, *Estamira*, while suffering from mental illness, presents the audience with, at times, a very socially conscious commentary filled with gendered discourse of consumption and the role of masculinity in marginalization. The final chapter focuses on the film *Eu, Tu, Eles* (2000). Set in the *sertão* of northeastern Ceará, this film is a cinematic depiction of a true story of one woman and her three husbands. This chapter will focus on the traditional gender roles depicted in cinema and society and how this film breaks and bends them paralleling the backwardness of the landscape.

Generally, the main focus of this work is to analyze how these films and the women depicted in them experience the limits and pressures of their surroundings and what we can conclude about female inclusion in society. I have specifically chosen these three films because they depict three different landscapes that span the vast country that is Brazil as well as provide us with a variety of women to analyze. Finally, these films reflect a return to the themes that surfaced during the *Cinema Novo* movement which are heavily based on spatial and social issues. Given this, one the main social issues today is gender contention bringing to the forefront the discussion of women's identity and social inclusion.

CHAPTER 2: ANTÔNIA (2006)

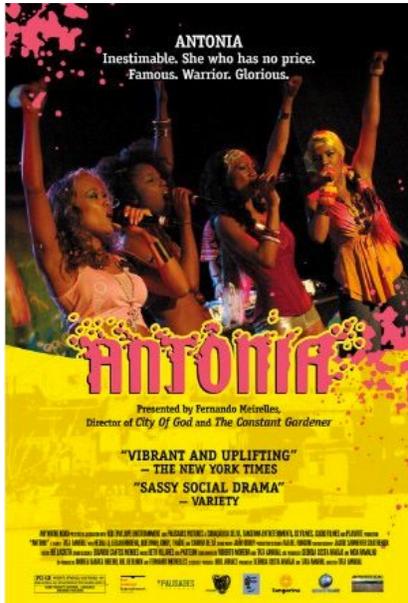


Image 1: Movie poster for Antônia

“With your voices, I need to find better places”

–Marcelo, *Antônia*

This chapter is going to focus on the film *Antônia* (2006), a musical drama focusing on the story of four afro-Brazilian women living, working, and trying to make it in São Paulo.

While their collective dream is to make something of themselves with their passion for singing and rap, each

woman faces the societal forces of poverty, urban violence,

and machismo pushing her back into her place. Directed by

Tata Amaral, this 2006 film is the third of three of Amaral’s productions that “explore archetypal aspects of the representation of women” (“Paint It Black, Say It Loud: An Interview with Tata Amaral.”). Following *Um Céu de Estrélas* (1996) and *A Través da Janela*, *Antônia* (2006) is unique in that it features Afro-Brazilian protagonists and deals with socioeconomic struggles of the *favela* alongside a powerful gendered discourse. The New York Times’ Jeannette Catsoulis praised the tone of the film writing that the film “explores cultural and sexual oppression with sensitivity and verve. The story may lack complexity, but it is loaded with irrepressible energy and a deep appreciation of female friendship” (<http://movies.nytimes.com>). While the plot does not necessarily offer anything ground breaking in terms of style or acting, it does cover many hard hitting issues of everyday life in a way that Brazilian film had not explored thus far.

Amaral was warned that a story like *Antônia*'s would not sell due to popularized images of the *favela* in movies like *Cidade de Deus* that are jam packed with violence and action. Shedding light onto a different side of *favela* life, in an interview Amaral expressed her vision as something distinct in that, she says, "we talk about people that are poor but I tried to humanize it and change this association with poverty and violence, although in the film we have a little violence. They are poor but not miserable" ("Paint It Black, Say It Loud: An Interview with Tata Amaral."). Boiling her story line down to a reflection of real life human experience, Amaral found the reception of her film was generally positive. Produced in the wake of a successful television series with the same premise, this film, while a risk, posed to be something that appealed to a marginalized group and as Amaral states, "For the first time we have four black women...portrayed in a positive way. They are protagonists. All the people living marginalized lives saw themselves for the first time on screen. It was very, very important. Everybody in Brazil identifies with *Antônia*." ("Paint It Black, Say It Loud: An Interview with Tata Amaral."). Given that the television series mirrors the same story of the film, this revolutionary relatable depiction of Afro-Brazilian women on the big screen rings true with the film as well.

These four women, Preta (Negra Li), Lena (Cindy Mendes), Barbarah (Leilah Moreno), and Mayah (Jacqueline Simão), face, through out the film, various barriers that ultimately place odds against them in rising above the oppression of *favela* life. However, more importantly the film is about how these women tackle these barriers and setbacks in their attempt to reach their goal. An underlying theme of this film is that "unlike what is generally believed, people in the *favelas* do not want to get out of them as soon as possible; in fact, *favela* residents want to improve their neighborhoods and build up better communities" ("Paint It Black, Say It Loud: An Interview with Tata Amaral."). This statement is important in understanding the end of the film

that depicts the four protagonists having overcome their obstacles, on the way to stardom, yet still performing in a street party setting similar to their first performance but now the lead act. While on the grand scheme of things, they might not have realized their goal of becoming successful, they *have* overcome the obstacles that broke them apart.

2.1 FAVELAS IN FILM

Before I dive too far into the analysis of the film, it is important to look at the landscape in question and how these women fit in to my broader analysis. This chapter is going to focus on the marginalization of afro-Brazilian women, in *Antônia*, living in urban slums, or *favelas*, who are plagued with the lack of resources and opportunities. Further, I will delve into the stereotypical representations of Afro-Brazilian women and how, this particular film, as a representation of many other Brazilian films, capture the limitations and expectations that these women face.

Geographically, *favelas* are located in the centers and margins of Brazil's cities physically displayed on hillsides overlooking the rest of the urban landscape. While the government and tourist agencies are looking to attract visitors to the tropical landscape of the beaches and sun and hide the visible reality of the streets, a recent touristic draw to the *favelas* has emerged out of recent internationally released films that have created a fascination with the urban drug trade and a foreign desire to observe the social reality of these marginalized communities that highlight poverty and inequality (Williams, 485).

In literature and cinema, *favelas* have become part of the national image of Brazil, "along with Carnival, football and beaches, but they are also often seen as a microcosm of Brazilian society, a kind of "imagined community" of the nation' (Jaguruibe 333). Within recent films the overwhelmingly negative depictions of life in *favelas*, more so than not, are depictions of gang

violence, death, drugs, and the representation of a landscape in which the marginalized people living with in them are trapped, having dreams of being something better but never being able to realize them.

The tropes of violence and drug-trafficking have, in the past, created a generalized image of the *favela* stereotyping the landscape and the people that live in it. On the other hand, *Antônia* depicts its residents as trying to make the best out of life in the slums. This particular community, *VilaBrasilandia* is the home of four young women, who like the men in *City of God*, are faced with everyday struggles based on their racial, social, and geographical marginalization. However, this film, based on the friendship of these four women, takes a lighter tone and opens up a different dialogue of what it is like for a female in the very masculine landscape of the *favela*.

2.2 AFRO BRAZILIAN WOMEN IN CINEMA

Originally, this thesis was going to be primarily focused on depictions of Afro-Brazilian women in contemporary Brazilian cinema however, due to the lack of such representations, I was constrained to expand my subject base. This is why a movie like *Antônia* is imperative for analysis in that the main characters, all Afro-Brazilian women, provide a depiction of how women who live in such communities are plagued by certain limitations and expectations.

A place to begin is with the film *Xica da Silva* (1976), one of the first films whose story line centers on an Afro-Brazilian woman. Albeit that this film is based off of a historically unique situation, the film sought to reinvent the image and the national discourse about Brazilian history. It offers a highly exaggerated and stereotypical image of the Afro-Brazilian female slave. The plot centers on Xica who uses to her sexual prowess to gain ‘power’ and a false sense of liberation in the midst of a highly racist colonial Brazilian landscape. While the film shifted

the way people looked at historically difficult time, it created contention surrounding the hyper-sexualized afro-brazilian female.

Other cinematic representations of Afro-Brazilian women come on the form of small background roles, stereotypical and exaggerated. Forced to secondary positions as the sexualized object of the male gaze, black mammy,maid, or slave, Afro-Brazilian women have over the years lacked the representation and voice in not only society but also through the camera lens. Depictions of the highly sexualized, hypermasculinity of the *favela* have in the past, have created limited space for the female voice. And while these masculine features have been downplayed within in *Antônia*, this cinematic theme, finds itself within the background, creating the central conflicts that the protagonist face in this film.

2.3 THE WOMEN OF ANTÔNIA

Within Amaral's trilogy of films, she sought to give voice to the marginalized and depict archetypal representations of Brazilian women. *Antônia* offers the archetypal representation of an Afro-Brazilian woman. What is interesting within this film in particular is that the archetype is represented in each of the four women and together they create one protagonist. The plot of this film generally supports the notion of searching for an empowered Afro-Brazilian female identity, through the voice of "Antônia". With each of the women bringing something different to group, together, they represent, despite its stereotypical qualities, a portrait of life for an Afro-Brazilian woman living in the urban slums. However, just as their collective identity is beginning to be realized and their luck changed in terms of their success, the group, one by one, starts to dissolve. The problems that they encounter present themselves as real issues faced by women in these circumstances.

The trajectory of the film centers around the friendship of these four women, their ambition, the struggles that break them a part, and their dreams that bring them back together. Lena's character represents the struggle of machismo. From the very beginning her boyfriend seems to control her. Foreshadowing events to come, in the beginning he grabs her and pulls her into the shower with him, making her late for her rehearsal with the group. Her struggle comes in the form of pregnancy and what her boyfriend thinks of this situation. While Lena wants to continue singing with the group, her boyfriend thinks otherwise. He even blames her for the pregnancy, shouting, "How could you let this happen!" when Lena tells him that she's pregnant. Thinking quickly to remedy the issue, her boyfriend is quick to set up an abortion, having no desire to be a father and at first not even recognizing how Lena might feel about the situation. After Lena breaks down, he comforts her telling her that she can have the baby, but there will be conditions. The first of which the audience discovers is to quit the group as he only sees her performance is putting herself on display for men to watch her. We find out later in the film, when Preta is trying to reunite the groups that he has forbid her from seeing her friends and family. He calls it "breaking their deal" when she wants to reunite and sing with her friends because *he* gave her a house and *he* gave her a child: a very different perspective from when he was blaming her for becoming pregnant in the first place. Finally, as Lena calls for respect and goes to leave the house, he grabs her back and violently hits the wall next to her, showing the control that he has accumulated over her life since she quit the group.

Preta experiences similar struggles with her relationship as Lena. However, Preta takes a different road than Lena in that her struggle is for independence. Having found that her boyfriend, Hermano has been lying to her and seeing him flirting with Mayah, she takes her daughter, Emilia, and moves in with Barbarah. Mayah is the stereotypically hyper-sexualized

woman and also the first to leave the group. Most of her dialogue in the beginning of the film centers around high-heels and short skirts, one of the boys even comments on the lack of clothing that she wears on stage. What is important about these characteristics is that she is kicked out of the group after flirting with Preta's boyfriend.

Preta's challenges become even more pressing with the disintegration of each member of the group and her struggle to support her daughter economically. We see her self-resistance tested when Marcelo Diamante, Antônia's manager, offering to make their relationship something more than professional. He sings to her, promising to take care of her yet, in the end Preta chooses her independence as she turns and walks away from his song. With the unreliable support of her boyfriend, Preta's parents often take care of Emilia while she is performing, but they do question her choice of career at one point her father asking if she made any money at the performance she returned from.

Preta's young daughter, Emilia, while minor, brings a great commentary to this discussion. Emilia, represents the future of the female Afro-Brazilian living in the *favela*. Her innocent but very aware dialogue draws the audience's attention to the very real limitations of their life, but her hope for a better world parallels the ambition of her role models, the members of *Antônia*. Emilia hopes that the rain stops destroying their homes, that her mommy and daddy quit fighting, and that friends don't fight with each other. Additionally she wishes for chocolate cake everyday which makes us realize the innocence of her voice.

In this same scene where Emilia cannot sleep and discusses her hopes for a better world, she crawls into her mother's bed where she tells her mother about the nightmare she had where a monster cut up her body, put it in the fridge, then ate it with her flesh and blood. Preta, doing what any mother would do, reassured her daughter. But wise Emilia questions her mother's logic

in saying “who’ll put back all the pieces?” Preta responds with “*Eu*”. This scene marks the turning point in the film where Preta decides to put back “pieces”, and she starts on her quest to reunite *Antônia*.

The final member of *Antônia* to leave the group is Barbarah. Her challenge is living in an environment where violence is a part of daily life. Barbarah, herself, practices martial arts with her brother Duda, as we see them fighting on upon the rooftop. Duda, who is secretly homosexual, is violently attacked in the streets. The attack kills his boyfriend and leaves him with a broken leg and unable to move throughout his community. One scene in particular



Image 2: Barbarah carrying Duda on her back up the stairs after he is attacked.

illustrates the masculinity of the *favela*. When Duda returns home from the hospital and he cannot walk up the stairs. The girls call for one of their male friends to help carry Duda up to his home however, just having found out

that he is a homosexual, their friend refuses to help. Barbarah then puts Duda on her back and carries him up the stairs. Symbolically, and ironically, showing that the physical restrictions that *favela* have on what could be considered someone who is “less masculine” because of his sexuality.

A later scene, in which Barbarah and Preta are returning home from a performance, they are followed by a boy who begins to harass them, making sexist comments and eventually revealing himself to be the ringleader behind Duda’s attack. In turn, Barbarah lashes back

beating the kid to death. Unlike the kids that beat up Duda and killed his boyfriend, Barbarah is imprisoned for manslaughter. This, in turn, leaves Preta to be the sole member of Antônia.

While the hyper-masculine depiction of the *favela* is not explicitly displayed in this film in terms of gangs, drugs, and violence, the masculine authority still seeps through the cracks and pays a toll on the women of Antônia. The machismo of Lena and Preta's boyfriends causes them to be respectively imprisoned and forced to fend for herself because of the controlling and unreliable behavior. Finally Barbarah is the victim of the injustice in the face of violence that is typically characterized within this landscape.

What eventually brings this group back together is facing the gendered barriers against them. Preta forgives Mayah, Lena stands up to her boyfriend's control and walks out of the house even after he violently pulls her back in, and all the women reconnect at the women's prison where they Barbarah is being held. They bond over song writing and put on a performance for the other inmates.

2.4 MUSIC AND RESISTENCE

It is not only the gendered challenges that these women face that make this film stand out in terms of this analysis. It is also the music and the trajectory of their musical careers that is important to break down for this discussion. Traditionally, music has broken through the everyday marginalization of *favelados* and created a form of resistance, a means through which this particular group of people can speak out against the racial and socioeconomic limitations that they face on a daily basis.

Symbolically we see their resistance to what their socioeconomic circumstances have dealt them in particular scenes after their performances. As they return from their performances, always dropped off at the end of the street, the women, while each time dwindling in numbers,

switch their high-heels to flip flops or more comfortable shoes. While subtle, this represents their transition from the world of music back into their proscribed status of the *favela*. Further, after their performances is when most of the films main plot points center (Duda's attack, Lena reveals that she is leaving the group, and Barbarah murders the boy who attacked Duda). This switch back into the world of the *favela* is therefore further highlighted by their transitions back into the reality of their lives after their momentary escape through music.

Hip-hop and rap itself has always been a form of expression used to contest certain marginalized realities. Particularly popular within urban settings in which these marginalized persons live, it gives voices to those that are essentially silenced by the institutions that they sing about. Further, the world of rap itself is a space of male-dominance and this film in particular is the journey of these four women's attempt to break through the gender barrier that historically is a stereotypically masculine identity.

We see this struggle within the different performances that the women do. Antônia's lyrical message is all about female empowerment and equality. We see this from their very first performance of the film and when they open for their male friends' group "The Power". However, once the group starts to disintegrate their message changes, this also can be equated to the amount of success they are receiving. At their first gig after being signed by Marcelo, they are already down to three members and they are already singing "Killing Me Softly" by American rapper Lauryn Hill. With each performance their songs become less in the style rap/hip-hop and lose their message of empowerment. Preta's last solo performance is of Lulu Santo's "Como Uma Onda", an 80s pop song, that speaks of change in slow melancholic tempo. All the while this is happening, they are being told that they are being told they are stars and have bright futures, yet they are changing who they set out to be.

Eventually this reverses when they are reunited in the woman's jail. Having written new original lyrics the meaning is returned to their music. Juxtaposing this performance with their first performance, they are now standing on their own, no longer in the background of their male counterparts. They are also only in the midst of women, which contrasts to the heavy male gaze from their performance in Brasiliandia. This transition in gaze can also be compared to the gaze of the *favela*

itself in terms of the urban environment.

By shifting the male gaze of the performances in the *favelas* to



Image 3: The women of Antônia performing at the woman's jail

the women on the jail we are adjusting the power relationships and the gaze is therefore equal, mirroring the equality that they speak about in their lyrics.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The *favela* and the afro-brazilian woman together are the function of double if not triple marginalization. Specifically, we see that the landscape of the *favela* creates a particular marginalization on of Afro-Brazilian women in that it's most naturally thought of to be a highly masculine space. The film Antônia allows the audience to evaluate how the female fits into this space and what effects the hyper-masculine characteristics has on the women who live there.

In this case, the women face the pressure to be supported by a male who can be at times, controlling and violent, exuberating the stereotypical characteristics of machismo associated with

Latin American males. Further, these women challenge these expectations of stereotypical motherhood and try to defy the limitations that come with these expectations in the landscape of the *favela*.

CHAPTER 3: *ESTAMIRA* (2004)

“Take a look, the hills, the ridges, the mountains...
Landscape and Estamira”
–*Estamira*

“It should come as no surprise that the revival of the Brazilian film production, that restarted in the early 1990s, is marked by a new trend towards non-fiction” (Labaki, 97). Given

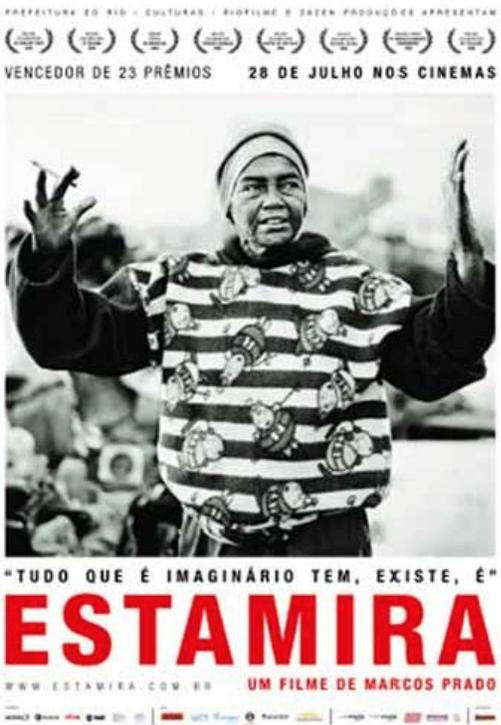


Image 4: DVD cover of *Estamira*

this, the film *Estamira* (2004) takes a different approach to telling a gendered story of a landscape.

This documentary, produced in 2004 by Marcos Prado tells the real-life story of our protagonist, Estamira who is a 63 year-old woman living and working in the landfill outside Rio de Janeiro called *Jardim Gramacho*. Over several years we get a glimpse of the life of Estamira, accompanied by the narration of Estamira herself and the voices of her family.

What is important to understand about this film is that Estamira, while not only being marginalized on the levels of gender and

socioeconomic standards, is also mentally handicapped. This makes analysis of her commentary particularly difficult in that her words stem from a place of which, the majority of time, is plagued with schizophrenic delusions of grandeur and hallucinations. However, what is significant is that Prado’s mission, essentially is not to exploit the ramblings of Estamira, but to

illustrate the “authorial voice and poetic truth” (Jaguaribe 271) that Estamira believes she has the right to share with the world.

As previously stated, documentary film has become a leading genre of Brazil film in contemporary cinema. Stemming from a long tradition of *Cinema Novo*'s tendency to illustrate political commentary through documentary (Johnson and Stam 328), filmmakers ventured away from the ‘formal’ cinema of its international competitors to capture the real human condition. José Carlos Avellar highlights the style of documentary when he writes:

...the cameras concern with not acting merely as a machine for seeing and hearing, but rather with reacting as a person: participating in the conversation, cutting a sentence in the middle of the emotional reaction to what is said so requires, and placing one statement beside another in order to complement or contradict it. (Avellar 330)

Documentary film, particularly Brazilian documentaries aim to “give voice to people normally excluded from public speech and outside the political power structures” (Chanan 203). These marginalized peoples, like Estamira, are typically found within landscapes that are neglected by the government and allow for a socially conscious commentary regarding their inhabitants.

Particularly since the 80s there has been a surge for these marginalized peoples and their supporters to create a testimonial in the quest for visibility in otherwise socially silenced situations (Jaguaribe 261). Whether Prado's choice to highlight the life of Estamira was a product of coincidence or motivated socially conscious effort to expose the “truth” that Estamira claims to possess, it is without a doubt that Estamira does exude a desire to show the world that there are many problems that exist not only on the landscape she inhabits but that these issues are prevalent as a result of a culmination of forces that exist within and outside the hills of garbage of *Jardim Garmacho*.

3.1 GEOGRAPHICAL MARGINALIZATION

The landscape of the landfill depicted in this film represents marginalization at its most literal. The opening shots of the film show Estamira's journey to the landfill from her permanent home in *Campo Grande*. As she walks from the bustling city to the landfill there is a distinct transition between the image of the zooming buses and cars to the wide shots of Estamira, alone with the desolate landscape. A particular image of the road sign to the landfill highlights its distance. The sign reads "Gramacho última saída" (Gramacho, last exit) and reinforces the seclusion of this particular space from that of the rest of the world. As Estamira enters *Gramacho* for the first time in the film, and as she changes her clothes, the color palette changes from black and white to vibrant colors signifying her transition into the landscape.

One of the largest landfills in the world, *Jardim Gramacho* was the work site to over 1,700 people who sifted through over 9,000 tons of waste that was dumped their daily. Since the filming of Estamira, the ironically named landfill ("*jardim*" meaning garden) has been transformed into a plant that is more environmentally cautious displacing the workers and people like Estamira who would often sleep up top the debris covered wasteland (Caivano USA Today). Central to the theme of this film is that of the repercussions of consumerism. The vast, seemingly endless shots of piles of waste are a consistent reminder through the film that what we would consider waste, is in fact, a way of life for many people, such as Estamira. This is reminiscent of the common image of Brazilian cultural production of garbage. Used "particularly by the Udigruদি filmmakers of the 1960s who coined the term 'aesthetics of garbage', to engage with peripheral groups and their subsistence on leftovers from a 'dominant culture'" (Stam70), the idea of garbage aesthetics stems from the Rocha's "aesthetics of hunger" used to characterize the

desperation of society during the *Cinema Novo* movement (Stam 70). Once again we see historical themes being reproduced within contemporary landscapes in film.

The location of the landfill, situated within the urban periphery is not only the geographically marginalized space. It is also used as a symbolic landscape that parallels that commentary, a place where Estamira is able to tell her story, reveal her truths, and expose the viewers to the 'realities' of living on the margins.

3.2 RETURNING VOICE TO THE OTHERED

What is significant for the sake of my analyze is not only that Estamira is a impoverished Brazilian working in the hills of Gramacho, but further that her testimonial is giving a voice to the "Othered", and more so has a gendered commentary underneath and in-between her battles with lucidity. Estamira, herself is disenfranchised in the most apparent ways as "an elderly, dark-skinned woman in a precarious mental condition - it would seem that Prado has chosen to focus upon the social grouping most vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination" (Allan 86). Robert Stam, in his article on the 'palimpsestic aesthetics' of garbage, highlights these characteristics in the 'feminization, and the racialization, of social misery' (Stam 72). However, the importance of Prado exposing her story to the world allows for a female voice to expose the role of masculinity in her marginalization, empowering her to ultimately, as she constantly reminds us, reveal the truth.

At the most basic level, her name, and the title of this documentary hold a significant meaning. The name "Estamira" in Portuguese '*estar*', to be and '*mira*' of *mirar*, to see, symbolically represent Estamira's empowered gaze over the world. She also claims to be "Estamar, Estaserra, and Estafogo" which further link her to the nature and the landscape.

The feminization of Estamira's story comes two fold. The first is centers around how

Prado chooses to characterize her. While at times distracting and sometimes in a different language (one scene lasts several minutes with Estamira speaking on the phone in gibberish) there are points of contention that she brings up during her narration. What is particularly interesting about this film is Prado's choice to include Estamira's episodes of mental illness, as a way to dictate the message he is trying to convey likening her to prophet at times which she self declares with certainty. 'My mission, aside from being Estamira, is to reveal the truth, only the truth'.

Further, we can take a look into the cinematographic choices that Prado makes in his depictions of Estamira. It is important to highlight that Estamira is not always portrayed in attractive fashion. She is a clearly worn and aged woman, and despite her mental illness, carries an immense amount of hatred and baggage that comes from her experiences in the world. Beatriz Jaguaribe comments on this when she says:

Estamira is oftentimes cast in a grotesque light; she curses with spiteful resentment, she is authoritarian and denies any point of view that is not her truth. She is often preposterous if not indecent as in the episode where she is outraged by her grandson's proclamation of God's existence and she lifts her skirt to reveal her sex declaring that it wasn't God that created his mother but herself. She is also reduced to a poor, powerless individual when she enters the domains of the public clinic. She is not a rounded character but an assortment of disparate visions. (Jaguaribe 271)

We see Estamira, as Jaguaribe points out, take a very demanding stance when it comes to her beliefs of which, when she is in the space of the landfill allow her to have some control over her world and she is free to express her beliefs. However in contrast, when she steps out of the world of the landfill, this case when she is visiting her family she is forced to defend her beliefs and

becomes easily enraged. Further, when she is walking in the city or, as stated above, in the public clinic, she is reduced to her marginalized, othered, self.

Prado's bodily depictions of Estamira further highlight this distinction between spaces and the empowerment that is exuded. For much of her dialogue Prado has a tendency to zoom in on Estamira's mouth, calling all attention to her words, essentially captivating the audience to what she is saying and giving her control over the story. These close ups can be compared with the wide shots of Estamira and the landscape. One particular shot of Estamira against the impressiveness of the landfill highlights her significance. While the grainy, black and white filter of the shot renders her as a mere silhouette compared to the vastness of the landscape, she is the



Image 5: Wide shot of Estamira scaling the landfill of Jardim Garmacho

sole person in the shot, which draws attention to the empowerment that the landfill provides her with.

The second gendered commentary that this film suggests is a product of Estamira's personal story and background. This is where we can truly come to understand the real Estamira, outside of the manipulations of Prado's personal and cinematic motivations. While Prado's choice of editing and shots create tension and spectacle of this already extraordinary situation, what is important to understand in terms of how Estamira got to be in the situation she is in

stems largely from her life previous to her life at *Jardim Gramacho*.

Her background is narrated throughout the film by Estamira's children as well as herself. It unravels slowly over the course of the film as to seemingly not take away from the other commentary. However, for my purposes here, it provides the crux of a gendered analysis of this film. Throughout her life, the male figures in Estamira's life have either been absent or abusive.

When she was young, her father died, leaving her to be taken care of by a single mother. Her mother, described as more mentally unstable than Estamira, suffered from similar delusions and hallucinations. Further, her grandfather abused both her and her mother. Estamira describes a moment when she asked her grandfather for a new pair of sandals to which he provided, but only in exchange for sex. She also recalls going to her "grandfather's house" which was, in reality, a brothel. Estamira was then introduced to prostitution.

Her instable relationships with unfit male figures and the sexual exploitation extended into her adult years. In a teary eyed interview with Carolina, Estamira's daughter, she describes their father as "rude and temperamental". She goes on to say that he was a "good man and he liked her" but in the same breath, she describes his unfaithfulness. He had several other women on the side, even bringing them into their home, introducing them as his friends. However, since he had money so Estamira stayed with him choosing economic stability and necessity over respect. "It was life, a real life" she says. This went on until one night they got into a knife fight and he kicked them out, with nothing. Carolina concludes her recollection of her father with a reflection on how Estamira's life now, the way she lives, is in correlation to those years with her husband. "She lives the way she lives only to forget what we've been through".

However, Estamira's hardships do not end there. After being kicked out of her husband's house, she began to work in the landfill and only after her children begged her to quit after five

years she went to work in a supermarket. On the way home one night she was raped. This happened again a second time on her daughter's street. Carolina retells the story saying that when the man was finished raping her multiple times he told her to get lost. And this was all before she started to have hallucinations.

Her relationships with her family and are another mode of analysis in terms of Estamira's marginalization. The most understanding of her situation are her daughters that have a certain sympathy towards her situation. Understanding her past hardships, they see Estamira's choice to live and work at *Jardim Gramacho* as something that allows her freedom from her past. However, her son is far from understanding, not only desiring her to be institutionalized, but disgusted with her rejection of religion and God, claiming that she is possessed by demons (Jaguaribe 274-5). With the rest of the world labeling her as this and that, Estamira does find solace with her relationships in the landfill. There a couple of scenes in which a boyfriend of sorts is pictured with Estamira. They talk about marriage and truly seems to find companionship together. While they playfully bicker, her boyfriend makes a point of saying that he never abuses her.

3.3 CONCLUSION

Allen comments on the effects of her abuse experienced outside the landfill and throughout her life:

The vulnerability of her body throughout the course of her life is readily demonstrated through reference to the sexual abuse she suffered at an early age, enforced prostitution and multiple rapes, all of which add a clearly gendered dimension to her experience of bodily disempowerment. (89)

This discourse of disempowerment and marginalization stems back to the idea of being

“Othered” and how Estamira got to the edges of the periphery in both her personal life and in a geographical sense. Through the torment of sexual abuse and mistreatment throughout her life she was placed in a subordinate position by others, slowly being pushed further and further into the margins. After being plagued by mental illness, she went back to the landfill, to a place where she could escape the mistreatment of the world, and speak her story. The landscape of the landfill is geographically depicted in this film as a place where those who are marginalized from the outside world can go to be heard.

CHAPTER 4: *EU TU ELES* (2000)

“God prevent you from having a daughter” –*Eu Tu Eles*

The last film I am going to analyze is *Eu, Tu Eles* (*Me, You, Them*) directed by Andrucha Waddington in 2000. This film represents, according to Jack Draper “...a narrative exploration and visual celebration of regional popular culture and history with reinterpretation of women’s



Image 6: DVD cover of *Eu Tu Eles*

agency and subjectivity in the face of...patriarchal domination, economic marginalization and geographic isolation” (Draper 244). Taking place in the Brazil northeastern region of the *sertão*, a region that is plagued with drought and economic instability, this film explores brings a fresh look to the possibilities of the region and of the people living in it. Based off of the true story of a woman and her three lovers, the film traces her struggle to create a complete and secure life in the uncertainty of the *sertão* landscape.

Movies like this one reflect the films produced during the Cinema Novo movement, which focus heavily on this region as a means to express the social-economic desperations of the people that inhabited the barren landscape. Most dramatically illustrated by the film *Vidas Secas* (1963) translated as *Barren Lives* the story of an impoverished family forced to migrate around the region in search of economic stability, the message of the movement is clearly summed up in the film’s depiction the alienation and exploitation of its main protagonists. They end up where

they began, impoverished, without hope, and on the move in search of a better life for themselves.

Eu, Tu, Eles essentially tells a similar tale of hopelessness depicting the story a woman searching for happiness and fulfillment in a landscape that cannot even sustain itself. The film centers on her relationships with her three lovers and how each one fulfills a different need in her quest to create a completeness in the emptiness of the world around her. The discourse of the film is heavily gendered in that it speaks to the feminine and masculine roles and responsibilities that our protagonist, Darlene (Regina Casé), and her three lovers (Osias, Lima Duarte; Zezinho, Stênio; and Ciro, Luís Carlos Vasconcelos) embrace and challenge along the way. Further, this film clearly reflects the essentially female challenge of creating an independent and empowered existence in the face of traditional feminine responsibilities and identity.

4.1 THE 'BACKWARD' *SERTÃO*

Like the landscape of the *favela* that I discussed in my second chapter, the landscape of the *sertão* is a common existence in Brazilian cinema. As previously stated, it was widely depicted in films of the Cinema Novo movement to reflect, metaphorically, the desperation of the Brazilian people in terms of the socioeconomic neglect they felt from their government. This characteristic is common of the late 90s film production of during the *Retomada*. Sadek comments on this in her article on this resurgence of the *sertão* as a central landscape in contemporary Brazilian cinema:

This historicizing gesture focuses on the recurrence of spaces considered emblematic of marginality in Brazil: the vast, arid and drought-stricken Northeastern *sertão*....While the Cinema Novo's *sertão* was a land whose stark features inspired the audio-visual means...to explore the politically subversive potential of the exploitation and poverty

characteristic of the region, critics concur that the contemporary filmic return to the sertão adopts a depoliticizing attitude towards the region's history and cultural identity.

(Sadek 60)

This is particularly significant in that the film *Eu Tu Eles*, while the setting of the *sertão* offers many of the similar representations of disparity and alienation, these themes are illustrated through the interpersonal relationships of the characters. Further, as Sadek continues in her analysis, "Cinema Novo films made the spatial practice of the *sertão* formally and thematically relevant, giving them an important yet overlooked role in the movement's subversion of social and cinematographic norms by diegetically combining them with different types of love" (61). We can see this transition most readily in *Eu Tu Eles* as it strays away from the politicized tones of the traditional capitalistic tones of marginalization and focuses more centrally on the social relationships as a means to describe the almost backwardness of the landscape.

Stereotypically, the *sertão* is traditionally depicted as a "barren wasteland" (Draper, 244). And we can see this depicted throughout the ages in films and literary narratives of the landscape. These descriptions, even outside of artistic representations, depict this landscape as incapable of development and in many ways "backward" in terms of progress. This is also the case of the social norms of the region, which typically adhere to tradition. Dennison and Shaw describe the *sertão* and its people as:

Backlanders or *sertanejos* are traditionally understood to be stoic, passionate people, given to mysticism. The landscape they inhabit is rugged, forcing many to pursue a nomadic existence, and the difficulty in surviving in an environment so prone to vicious droughts, where successive central governments have been slow to invest any money, has proved an irresistible metaphor for the nation's Third-World woes. (207)

In this sense we can reevaluate how we look at *Eu tu Eles*, as not only a film about a group of people challenging their prescribed gender roles but as a group of *sertanjos* reflecting the unstable landscape in their adherence to gender roles.

4.2 DARLENE'S QUEST FOR FULFILLMENT

Our main protagonist, Darlene, is a woman unlike many in terms of her actions in this film. The film begins with a pregnant Darlene, leaving her house in the Brazilian northeast, saying good by to her mother. Setting the tone for the film, her mother's last words to her daughter are "God prevent you from having a daughter". Obvious enough, her mother is referencing the hardships that women face in the world and hopes that the child Darlene is carrying will have a better chance than she does. Ironically, we will find out as the film progresses, that Darlene gives birth to only males from her fertile womb.

In reference to her fertility, we see our first comparison to gender and landscape. This comes with the fact that Darlene is extremely fertile. So fertile that just about every time we see her engage in sexual relations on screen she becomes pregnant. This fertility can be contrasted with the barren landscape around her, on top of which most of the sex scenes take place. "The typical tropes associated with both land and woman in this traditional pairing are that of the



Image 7: Image of Darlene against the landscape of the sertão

nurturing mother, and of the lover to be conquered or possessed...the conflation of woman and land ultimately limits women's agency and subordinates them to stereotypical roles..." (Draper 245-246) All in all, Darlene gives birth to four boys, with four different men: Dimas, Edinaldo, Edinaldo, and Edivaldi. However, motherhood, in this sense is not approached in the traditional sense throughout the film. While it can be inferred that Darlene is a fit mother as she does everything she can to provide for her children, we also see Darlene struggle with the idea of maternity and being a mother, again and again.

This comes in two distinct scenes. The first is about 30 min into the film, right after second child is born. A series of events and commentary (not getting paid enough, the undrinkable water, and a murder in a near by town) leads Darlene to take her first born and give him to his father. This scene is particularly powerful in that during the encounter, we are not able to see the father's face, leaving the focus to be on the mother-son farewell. There does not appear to be an explicit or definitive reason as to why Darlene takes Dimas to his father. Rather we can infer that from the scenes leading up to this one, it is not that she does not want Dimas, but rather that he will be better off in the care of his father, who will be able to take better care of him given the environment they are living in.

The second scene comes at the end of the film after she discovers that she is pregnant with her last son, Edivaldi by Ciro. In a dialogue between Darlene and Zezinho, Darlene reveals to Zezinho that she pregnant again, but that she didn't want it. She says "I didn't want any more children in this life". And as Ze tries to comfort her by caressing her, she continues, "It's almost like a punishment". Given the hardships that she has to endure in creating a fulfilling life for herself, another child most certainly adds yet another complication. However, in this case, I

would suggest that the punishment comes not from her unwillingness to be a mother but rather her insatiable sexual desire.

Characterized almost instantly as an unattractive woman by her long face and teeth and large, worn stature, Darlene's hyper-sexualized persona seems almost out of place, by normal standards. Sarah McDonald compares her looks to other typically beautiful actresses when she writes, " Although her character is a sexual figure she cannot be placed neatly within the parameters of the iconic female sensuality of Brazil. The lead of Darlene...whose physical appearance does not reflect the image of beauty we can see in the character of Dona Flor" (McDonald, 121). Typically, this role can be seen played by the beautiful female character whose primary role in any film is to be the object of the male gaze. And conversely, Darlene's character fits more readily with the stereotypically hyper-sexualized male character, who typically sexually exploits the female characters. This allows the audience to associate Darlene with the active agent rather than passive object usually associated with this characteristic (McDonald, 121). This desire, in this case, characteristically sexualize, is a product of, as Sadek explains:

...the attitudes of Cinema Novo's female characters towards romantic, matrimonial and/or filial love result from a dialectics of choice and obligation through which these women redefine love, as they are forced to renounce a key aspect of their lives in a process that leads them to define a new type of love or reorient their affects. (Sadek 63)

In this case, keeping with the notion that this film challenges the traditional role women, sexual desire overwhelms Darlene as she is forced into situations of which she does not entirely choose. This meaning that given her circumstances, Darlene is forced to sacrifice traditional love.

However, given that this film is about her search for fulfillment, we see her, time and after time, exploring this notion of ‘love’ with each of her lovers.

Further, it is not only through her traditionally masculine mentality of sex that she challenges gender roles. She also exhibits a rough exterior, calloused through hours and hours in the hot sun working in the fields. While her first two lovers, Osias and Ze stay at home all day, Darlene is the breadwinner of the family. However, as I will discuss in further detail later, she not fully taking on the role of the provider for the family, she still economically speaking brings in the money of which we see exchange hands over to Osias on several occasions.

It is important to point out as I conclude my brief discussion of how Darlene challenges the stereotypical feminine roles, which it is not only that she challenges them, but also plays a dual role, taking on both male and female roles. Meaning, she still has to fulfill the role of mother, wife, and homemaker, all at the same time she takes on these other roles. Essentially, the masculine roles that she does take on are ones that are not fulfilled by her three lovers.

4.3 MASCULINITY CHALLENGED AND EMBRACED

What is important to highlight about this film is that it is not only about Darlene and her quest to self-fulfillment, but rather the relationships she has and what they add to her journey. In particular, this film is heavily focused on illuminating the gender roles, traditional and unique and therefore, as with any discussion of gender it is impossible to eliminate the inclusion of the male influence on how we see our female protagonist.

This is most readily apparent with our three male characters, Osias, Zezinho, and Ciro, each proscribing to a different need of Darlene’s. As Sadek affirms, this film centers around “the representation of a female protagonist who creates the conditions to ‘love’ through cyclical negotiations in which male dominance is perpetually affirmed and then undermined” (Sadek 64).

What is important to understand about Darlene's relationship with her three lovers, as Sadek points out, using quotations around the word *love*, is that it is not necessarily love that Darlene seeks out from these three men. As a previously stated, each of these men provides her with some need and together create one 'ideal' husband. This is not to say that Darlene is in a position of the typical, masculine exploitative role as would be the case if the roles were reversed, but rather that their relationships are based of a sense of obligation to each other given the circumstances surrounding their situation. This then goes back to the idea of landscape in that, their situation requires that they depend on each other for completeness, holes that cannot be filled given the tropes that encompass living in the *sertão*. Whereas films of the Cinema Novo movement center on a strict set of patriarchal rules, of which are based on honor, this films familial prototype is polyandrous (Galvão 390). With the focus now on the woman, the role of the male is no longer focused on protecting the honor of the family in the traditional sense, but rather on providing stability.

Darlene's first, and only official husband is Osias Lima de Linhares, an older man living in the town where Darlene originated. Upon Darlene's return to the backlands after leaving for three years, her first encounter is with Osias where she comments on what a nice house he has. Clearly set in his old ways, he propositions Darlene after her mother's funeral. Their agreement is that if she marries him, she can have a place to live and raise her children, but also Osias gets to have a share in the money she receives from doing hard manual labor in the fields. He fulfills Darlene's need for protection and shelter, however also proscribing to the stereotypical machistic characteristics in his attitude.

Osias's role as the provider of shelter is characterized by his obsession with property. His pride that stems from ownership of 'things' overshadows his ability to be a complete husband

and father to Darlene and her children. As previously mentioned, the only reason why they are together in the first places is because of Darlene's comments about his house, of which he is constantly working on when he is not sitting in his hammock. Further, Osias is more times than not pictured listening to his radio, another possession that which appears to limit his ability to completely fulfill his role. Most, importantly the end of the film sums up his desire for ownership. After Darlene gives birth to 4 children, none of which are biologically his, Osias takes the children into town to have them legally registered under his name. This is not to say that he is willing to take responsibility for being their father, but rather it is symbolic of his need for control and possession.

Darlene's next lover is Zezinho, Osias's cousin. Out of all of the men, his role is the most reversed in terms of traditional gender roles. He takes on the role of the companion. Providing Darlene with a partner, he accompanies her to dances, comforts her in times of need, and until Ciro comes along, provides her with sexual partner as Osias has no interest in moving from his hammock to fulfill these particular needs. On the other hand, Zezinho understands the multiplicity of responsibilities that Darlene has taken on. Specifically, this is reference to a scene where Zezinho is shaving Osias. Ze questions Osias about Darlene, asking about financial responsibilities, her job working in the fields, and her role taking care of the house. Ze comments, "But she's a woman. We're the ones who should be in the field." To which Osias responds, "She doesn't mind, a strong squaw like that". Here we see a clear difference on their view of the roles that Darlene should proscribe to.

Further, and more importantly, Zezinho also takes on typically female gender roles throughout the film. During the dialogue described above, Ze is shaving Osias. In other words, he is taking care of Darlene's husband. He moves into Osias's home after being kicked out by his

sister and immediately starts cooking and cleaning for the family. He often seen preparing meals of which he delivers to Darlene, and eventually Ciro, in the fields during the workday. Zezinho's gentle demeanor, kind eyes, and caring smile all symbolize his more effeminate role within the family, even going by the diminutive '-inho' of his name.

Ciro, the mysterious stranger that Darlene stumbles upon at a dance, is her third lover. The title 'lover' that I have been using to describe the men in Darlene's life most readily applies to Ciro in that his main contribution is to fulfill her lust. A tall, dark, and handsome young man, Ciro takes Darlene up on an offer for a place to stay while he gets on his feet, but ends up staying and eventually fathering her last child. Typically representing the migrant worker, travelling throughout the northeast looking for economic stability. Finding refuge in Osias's home (of which he makes very clear is *his*), Ciro alongside Darlene works in the fields and provides an additional income for economic stability. Towards the end of the film, keeping with his migrant tendencies, Ciro suggests that Darlene and the children run away with him. However, pregnant with his child, Darlene, looking for stability, insists that Osias build an addition to his house to accommodate Ciro instead.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Essentially what we can take away from this film is the reconstruction of gender role possibilities within this particular region. Typically thought of as stuck within the traditions of patriarchy this tale of polyandry suggest that depictions of this landscape can be transient. Through films such as *Eu tu Eles*, and its heavily centralized view of gender relations, a new dialogue about this region emerges. However, it is also important to understand that this new commentary springs from the similar themes of patriarchy, economic instability, and hopelessness that traditional depictions of the *sertão* represent. Through these desperate and

uncertain circumstances grow new potential for change in terms of Darlene's search for fulfillment. However, it is important to conclude that in her relationships with these three men, she is not challenging patriarchy in the sense of replacing it, but rather Darlene represents a new kind of woman in that she finds her feminine identity, which includes what each of these men have to offer her instead of creating an identity independent of male influence.

CHAPTER 5: GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Today, Brazilian film takes on many faces. Genres are revisited and reinvented to fit contemporary issues and Brazilian cinema has started to take shape in the international market. However, critics have suggested that it is not the films itself that are not being successfully produced, but rather the distribution of Brazilian films to the international market has proved to be unfruitful (Nagib XX). Johnson and Stam also comment on interaction between the North American and Brazilian market:

The flow of sounds and images tends to be unidirectional. Thus while Brazil is inundated with North American cultural products- from television series and Hollywood films to best-sellers- Americans receive little of the vast Brazilian cultural production. While American films are seen daily throughout Brazil, Brazilian films do not reach their potential audience in the United States or even within Brazil itself. (18-19)

This one-way flow of information finds places Brazilian cinema in a marginalized position, pushed to the side to make way for international, Hollywood films, even within Brazil itself. Given this, we can see a correlation between the films being produced and the messages that these films are trying to convey. “It deprives Americans of the rich experience of one of the most culturally vital and formally innovative cinemas in the world” (Johnson and Stam 19). It is also important to recognize that this causes an issue with not only American’s not being exposed to these valuable cultural productions but more so, that Brazilians are not being exposed to it as well.

Spanning the test of time, Brazilian cinema has always been rich with social commentary, using the camera as a lens to highlight not only the country’s vast and beautiful people and landscapes but also taking a hard hitting look at the Brazil’s most pressing issues. Contemporary

Brazilian film is no exception. While not having a particular genre of its own, it has adapted characteristics from past time periods and reinvented itself through those traditions. Particularly, as in this case, the *Cinema Novo* movement and its inclination towards depicting marginalized people and spaces has proven still be heavily influential in today's Brazilian cinema.

In the wake of the election of Brazil's first female president, Dilma Rousseff, in 2011 gender politics regarding equality have from to the forefront of discussion. Women in Brazil have, throughout the history of this country, been placed under the shadow of machismo. Marginalized as second-class citizens.

Further, the connection between the women and place on these marginalized landscapes creates a commentary, as I have attempted to outline throughout this thesis, that speaks to the gender roles that accompany these spaces as well as how these particular spaces create certain expectations and limitations of the women who inhabit them. By examining these films with a gendered lens a new dialogue of social inclusion is opened wherein the already rich history of masculinity and patriarchy can be reexamined with a female gaze.

The films that I chose to analyze more readily allow for this reexamination in that their individual landscapes already have a history of association with masculinity however, the protagonists are now all female. *Antônia*, *Estamira*, and *Eu Tu Eles* representing women in the *favela*, urban periphery, and *sertão*, respectfully, encapsulate a gendered commentary that links their geographic and physical location to their marginalized existence. What's more is that within each of these films we see a resistance to their proscribed circumstances that allows them to challenge the cards they have been dealt.

Tata Amaral's film *Antônia* offers up a glimpse into the complicated lives of four women living and trying to make it in the urban *favela*. Particularly, these four women are of Afro-

Brazilian decent and tells the tale of friendship and female empowerment. It brings a fresh look at the place of Afro-Brazilian women in cinema in the wake of a stark lack of representation in significant roles.

Their quest is simple, to make music and share their message with the world, however, they are one by one hit with barriers that stand in their way of success. These women use music as their inspiration and mode of resistance against the male-centric world of the *favela* of which they are reminded of with just about every obstacle that comes their way. Challenged with motherhood, single parenting, controlling men and their machismo, and violence at every corner, these women have to overcome their individual obstacles using the message of empowerment that they preach in their music before they can reunite.

The space of the *favela*, the setting for many contemporary Brazilian films, creates a set of expectations and limitations on these four women that centers on the traditionally hyper-masculine characteristics of the landscape. This film allows the viewer to see how women function in this space, as primary subjects rather than secondary characters. Further, it breaks the traditional clichés of *favela* films in that our protagonists are rewarded in the end for breaking out of the stereotypical constraints of the landscape.

Estamira commands a different kind of attention than that of the other two movies analyzed in this paper. The only documentary of the three, this film pays particularly close attention to the use of documentary style to create a story that conveys a particular social commentary. Director Marcos Prado, invites us into the extraordinary world of Estamira. Marginalized in most, if not all, areas of her life Estamira represents social misery at its core.

Her unique story traces the ways in which the socially marginalized end up where they do. Estamira, essentially “Othered” by a life of abuse and sexual exploitation leave her mentally

unstable to live and work in the landfill of *Jardim Gramacho*. This is the only place where she can be herself, thrown away like the garbage that engulfs her by society, Estamira finds solace in the wasteland of the landfill.

Finally, the film *Eu Tu Eles* takes place on the last landscape of the Brazilian backlands, or the sertão. The subject of many of *CinemaNovo's* best films, this landscape has held tight to particular depictions of its traditional and patriarchal characteristics. In past cinematic productions the earth of the dry barren land was the home to migratory people who searched for economic stability in the face of hopelessness. This film set in the same landscape introduces us to Darlene, a passionate woman whose quest in life is not for the same economic stability as was common in previous plots taking place in the backlands. Rather, her pursuit for stability comes in the form of an individual fulfillment that she is as she attempts to raise her exponentially growing family.

Charged with discourse heavily set in depictions of gender roles, we see how herself and her three lovers take on their traditionally proscribed roles as well as challenge what is to be expected of them. Darlene eventually creates a family comprising of herself, her three lovers, and her 3 sons. Taking the best qualities of each of the men, she creates the ideal husband and family. This film gives us an innovative and new way to look at the traditions of the region and reevaluate what it means to be a fulfilled woman.

In the wake of this paper, I'd like to end with a quick commentary on the evolving role of women in the world of cinema. Since the beginning of film there have been women involved in the movie making process. However, "they have often performed in *front* of the camera, but they have but rarely worked *behind* it" (Munerato and Darcy de Oliveira 340). Munerato and Oliveiras article "When Women Film" highlights the contributions that women directors have

made to the field, but like the female protagonists in the landscapes discussed in this paper, women directors have always faced barriers in succeeding in the business. In the landscape of cultural production, there has been a slow and steady increase in female directors overtime (Marsh 258). However, the market driven Brazilian cinema market leaves many women directors without access to funds or resources. Nevertheless, the final productions produced by Brazilian female directors have been applauded by the industry, creating new trends and opening up gendered dialogues for socially conscious audiences despite their difficulty gaining speed (Marsh 268). Give that, this paper ventured to illustrate how gender is a pertinent theme within Brazilian cinema, or any cinema for that matter, as it allows for an evaluation of the current ideologies regarding gender relations and social inclusion, of which can be translated into broader social, political, and cultural commentaries that affect not only women but society as a whole.

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