

The Happy Ending at the Crossroads of Gender and Race: a Study of the Reception of the Film *Bendito Fruto*

O final feliz na encruzilhada de gênero e raça: um estudo de recepção do filme *Bendito Fruto*

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Resumo: *Objetiva-se investigar, à luz dos estudos culturais, as leituras que participantes de um estudo de recepção fazem do final feliz inter-racial do filme Bendito Fruto (Sérgio Goldenberg, 2004). Tal estudo foi realizado por meio da aplicação empírica do modelo codificação/decodificação de Stuart Hall, que possibilita analisar as articulações entre as representações audiovisuais e os imaginários sobre gênero e raça na cultura brasileira. A hipótese levantada é a de que a recepção pode suscitar formas diferenciadas de interpretação, negociação e resignificação das representações audiovisuais sobre as mulheres negras compreendidas por espectadores a partir de suas visões de mundo e de seus repertórios culturais.*

Palavras-chave: *Recepção fílmica; gênero e raça; final feliz; cinema brasileiro.*

Abstract: *The objective is to investigate, in the light of cultural studies, the readings that participants in a reception study make of the interracial happy ending of the film Bendito Fruto (Sérgio Goldenberg, 2004). This study was carried out through the empirical application of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, which makes it possible to analyze the articulations between audiovisual representations and imaginaries about gender and race in Brazilian culture. The hypothesis raised is that reception can give rise to different forms of interpretation,*

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negotiation and resignification of audiovisual representations about black women undertaken by spectators based on their worldviews and cultural repertoires.

Keywords: *Film reception; gender and race; happy ending; Brazilian cinema.*

Introduction

Couples in love in a wedding, reunion or reconciliation scene, integrate many of the happy endings of soap operas, TV shows and movies, which inhabit our imagination as a representation of love and happiness. These love stories, derived from fairy tales, photo novels, popular short stories, novels and newspaper serials, were transported to classic cinema, which, starting in the 1930's, with the happy ending, began to explore elements that stimulate the identification of the spectator with the heroes and heroines in their journeys and dilemmas, not only towards the resolution or appeasement of conflicts, but also towards the irruption of happiness, as highlighted by Morin (1997), who also emphasizes how much it is through the theme of love that cinema exerts its most direct influence, since the love behavior in the movies raises identification processes, articulating the film and life, imagination and what is real.

Such narratives disseminate socially accepted representations of gender, race and sexuality, and also inadequate ones, which affect the subjective formation of individuals, as pointed out by field of cultural studies (WOODWARD, 2000). Feminist theory also considers cinema as an object of study, as a cultural practice that reproduces the existing power relations in the social context (SMELIK, 1999), and thus also opens itself up to discursive disputes since it considers not only the meanings offered by the movies, but also those attributed to them by the spectators, based on their social, political, historic and cultural contexts.

Observing this intertwining between the practices of representation and the construction of identities, this article investigates the reception to the movie *Bendito Fruto* (Sérgio Goldenberg, 2004), through the application of the encoding/decoding model by Stuart Hall (2003 [1973]) in discussion groups. The analysis is centered on the mediations, readings and interpretations of spectators about the interracial happy ending and its articulations with the imaginaries about the intersection of gender and race, still in force in Brazilian society and cinema. The hypothesis raised is that in the reception there could raise different

forms of interpretation, negotiation and resignification of audiovisual representations about black women.

Based on Castoriadis (1982), we used the concept of the imaginary as a continuous relationship of power between the established meanings and the new possibilities of interpretation. Therefore, the role of cinema as a product and a producer of the imaginary is highlighted here, which encourages the spectator to adhere to the film's narrative and to the socially shared values. However, the scope of the reception may bring about resonances, contradictions and dissonances between the film's argument and the ways in which people relate to with such contents and messages in their mediation strategies, which, according to Jacks (1999, p. 48), can be understood as "a set of elements that intervene in the structuring, organization and reorganization of the perception of reality in which the receptor is inserted; and also a space that allows understanding the interactions between production and reception".

In the Foreground: the Experience of Those Who Watch the Movie

The influence of cultural studies on film theory reached its peak in the 1980's and 1990's in a theoretical-methodological rupture from which the spectatorships began to be thought of as heterogeneous and active. Therefore, Robert Stam (2003, p. 257) states that "the history of cinema [...] is not only the history of movies and movie makers, but also the history of the successive meanings that the audience has attributed to cinema".

This understanding that the cinematographic experience is a dialogic process and that the meanings are not fixed became possible from the reflections proposed by the encoding/decoding model by Stuart Hall, first published in 1973, in which the theorist indicates three hypothetical positions: the preferential reading, which refers to the acceptance of codes according to the goals of those who produced it; the negotiated reading, which oscillates between the adaptation and the opposition to

the meanings; and the oppositional reading, which designates the ability to interpret the message in the opposite way, giving new meaning to it (HALL, 2003).

In this way, the interpretations of audiences shift between these three types of position, which means recognizing spectators as producers of meanings, as well as the context of reception as a fundamental sphere for rethinking the communication process, since it goes way beyond the moment of watching the movie or the soap opera. That is, it covers the rich array of social uses and form of consumption of audiovisual narratives.

Contemporary with cultural studies and to which they have established important connections in the analysis of the media and other cultural products, the so-called “feminist media studies” in the Anglo-American context also highlighted, beginning in the 1970’s, the relevance of reception studies, as pointed out by Messa (2008), when making the historical trajectory of this field of research. Concerning this, it is worth mentioning, for example, the study *The Search of Tomorrow in Today’s Soap Operas*, by Tania Modleski, published in 1979, which highlights the practices of the female audience of soap operas; and also the article “The Color Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers”, by Jacqueline Bobo. Published in the collection *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, organized by Deidre Pribram (1988). There is developed a reception study of the movie *The Color Purple* (by Steven Spielberg, 1985) with black spectators², and which finds that, in contrast to the opinions that the movie was racist, or reformulated pre-established stereotypes about the black population, in the readings carried out by this specific audience, the exercise of negotiation of the movie’s meanings emerges and the recognition of the overcoming story of the protagonist Celie (Whoopi Goldberg), supported by the character Shug (Margaret Avery) is seen as a reference to personal and collective empowerment.

2 O filme é baseado no livro homônimo da escritora negra Alice Walker, lançado em 1982.

Despite its relevance, cinematographic reception studies still occupy a marginalized position in research on Brazilian cinema, in which the analysis of messages is still the predominant line of investigation (BAMBA, 2013; MASCARELLO, 2005, 2009). This lack of interest results from the conjunction of some factors, such as the emphasis on productions and directors of the *Cinema Novo* movement, institutionalized as canonical; the obsolescence of film theory that is read and practiced in Brazil (still situated in the 1970's, prior to the contextualist perspective of cultural studies); and the emphasis on the analytic to the detriment of the theoretical and the empirical in scientific production in this area, points out Mascarello (2009).

In this sense, Jacks and Lucas (2019) also stress that, if in the 1990's there were no studies in this area, between 2000 and 2009, of the 209 researches that deal with reception processes and practices, only seven have cinema as the object of study and, more recently, from 2010 to 2015, this number increased to nine, in an universe of 102 reception researches, thus evidencing the lack of dedication to cinema audiences in Brazilian communication research.

It is important to indicate yet another scenario of scarcity: the studies on the intersection of gender and race, especially on black women. Such gaps are linked to the incipient connection between Brazilian feminist criticism and media studies (mainly those of Anglo-American origin), and also to the historical non-recognition of race as an axis of power that structures gender oppression in the country (CARNEIRO, 2011; FERREIRA, 2017). Therefore, Brazilian black women are at a crossroads, where multiple asymmetries, such as racism, sexism and social inequality intersect both in daily practices and in the representation, thus determining their forms of acceptance and social recognition.

In Brazilian cinematography, Candido, Campos and Feres Júnior (2016, p. 15) find that black and brown women are only 7% in the main casts of national movies with highest audience released in the last twenty years (1995 to 2014), while white women are 20%. Only 43% of black characters are named and only 13% participate in central dialogues, and

black female characters are often in spaces, professions and narrative places marked by inferiority.

Therefore, through the application of Stuart Hall's model of mediations in the reception of the film *Bendito Fruto* (Sérgio Goldenberg, 2004), we seek to analyze the interpretations that spectators make of the interracial happy ending experienced by the characters Maria and Edgar. Such proposal represents an opportunity to understand the articulations between representation and reception, since it investigates how people relate with audiovisual productions in this experience of group decoding, in their daily practices and with other media content.

The Movie, the Soap Opera Love and the Happy Ending

Figure 1 – Movie poster



Source: Promotion of the movie *Bendito Fruto* (Sérgio Goldenberg, 2004)

Bendito Fruto (Figure 1) is a comedy built from the reunion of two old school friends, the hairdresser Edgar (Otávio Augusto) and the widow Virgínia (Vera Holtz), which causes a twist in the undisclosed interracial relationship that Edgar has with Maria (Zezeh Barbosa). They both have lived together since their childhoods, as he, the son of the boss, Dona Consuelo, and she, the maid's daughter, grew up together and had a son, Anderson (Evandro Soares), not recognized by his father or by his paternal grandmother, who did not approve of the relationship. Although the grandmother is dead, she remains alive in the memories of the characters and inside the house, through the large portrait in the living room,

After the death of this matriarch, the couple goes back to living in the same house, in the traditional Botafogo neighborhood. In addition to Virgínia's arrival, this love triangle will be transformed with Anderson's return to Brazil. He is a DJ in Spain and is dating actor Marcelo Monte (Du Moscovis), heartthrob of the soap opera *Primeiro Amor*. He is admired by Maria, Choquita, Telma and Virgínia, who share the dream of finding and living "a soap opera love".

The romantic scene in the soap opera that Maria and Edgar are watching (in long shot) activates in the female character (alone in the foreground) the memory of another couple in love kissing on the TV screen. It is a flashback, in which the camera travels around the environment to the sound of the song *My first love*, showing Edgar (as a teenager) lying on the sofa, his mother (in silhouette) and Maria, still a girl, sitting on the floor, from where she watches the soap opera and writes a declaration of love for Edgar on the cover of a record.

The film's soundtrack is from the soap operas, like the song *Na Linha do Horizonte*, which reminds the couple of the soap opera *Cuca Legal*, shown by Rede Globo, in 1975; they dance holding each other and then appear hugging on the bed. However, when Maria talks about the return of their son, Edgar avoids the subject. She gets irritated and says she is going to her room; then, we see her

in a small bedroom, full of old utensils, located next to the service area, that is, the maid's room.

These two moments in the movie illustrate the coexistence between affection and asymmetry in Brazilian interracial conviviality, which is expressed by the forms of treatment, by the position and transit in the filmic space, as the rooms in the house (bedrooms, maid's room, service area, kitchen and living room) also designate a specific social hierarchy; and due to the lack of bonds, Maria's subordinate position and Edgar and Virgínia's privileges regarding gender, race and class identities are shaped. However, throughout the narrative, this black female protagonist does not accept the situation of the non-recognition imposed by Edgar, who treats her with indifference, but is extremely kind to Virgínia (they flirt and enjoy themselves on trips to tourist spots, which insinuates the desire they have to live this flirtation from the past).

Maria's positioning, who, in the face of Edgar's betrayal, returns to her home in a poor neighborhood, exposes the submerged hierarchies in their coexistence since childhood, in their affective relationship and in his racist attitude in not assuming paternity. Thus, after all the changes triggered by the arrivals of Virgínia and Anderson, Maria seems decided to break up the relationship, but the hairdresser has an asset: the declaration of love that she wrote on a record cover, when she was a girl (according to the mentioned flashback).

They have an argument, but end up making peace and decide to stay together. This reconciliation turns the maid's room into a storeroom with many old objects and utensils; in the living room, Dona Consuelo's portrait is replaced by another painting, thus indicating the end of the matriarch's dominance in the house and the life of the couple, who have their happy ending represented by a walk on the beach. This sequence begins with the couple getting ready to leave the house, when Maria reads a postcard sent by Anderson (Figure 2). Voice over, the son asks if she liked the present, "a new television so she can watch many soap operas"; he sends Edgar a hug and says that he "can't call him Dad, but it's good to know that he's alive". The narration pauses for a change of

environment and now, on a busy street in Botafogo, we see a close-up of Maria and Edgar's intertwined hands, and then they appear smiling in the center of the frame.

Figure 2 – The happy ending



Source: Frame of the movie *Bendito Fruto* (Sérgio Goldenberg, 2004)

Anderson continues to talk about the trip with Marcelo, who is now part of the voice over narration. In the end, Anderson sends kisses to his mother and wishes that all their dreams come true... Or almost all of them (Marcelo intervenes); the two argue about whose postcard it is, which Edgar begins to read, sitting on a bench on the beach, while Maria plays with the dog Tamba; then the hairdresser joins them. Embracing and again to the sound of the song *Na Linha do Horizonte*, Maria and Edgar walk along the beach, with the beautiful landscape of the Corcovado mountain in the background, an ending that confirms the promise of happiness for this interracial couple (Figure 2).

The approach to aspects of the interracial coexistence and of the gender relations in Brazil justifies the selection of the movie *Bendito Fruto* (Sérgio Goldenberg, 2004) for the reception survey with 58 participants, divided into three discussion groups. Group 1 (students from the University of Brasília – UnB) was composed of 33 participants aged between 18 and 24 years old, with single marital status and family income of three to more than ten minimum wages (87%). Group 2 (association of the elderly), had the participation of fifteen students from the class of Youth and Adult Education (EJA) at the Municipal School Dona Belinha (located at the Brazilian Elderly Association [AIB], in Goiânia), who are INSS retirees or pensionists, between 55 and 88 years olds and family income of one to three minimum wages. Group 3 (reference center) gathered ten participants, mostly public servants of a governmental institution of policies for women, also located in Goiânia, aged between 30 and 59 years old (30%) and family income between one and six minimum wages (70%).

The technique of the discussion group is articulated with different versions and origins of the focus group: an American one, first used in the 1920's in sociological research, in the 1940's in audience studies of radio shows and in the following decades used in market research; and also a European version (more specifically Spanish) used in sociology and in studies of culture and communication, which became known in the area of social sciences as a discussion group (LEÓN, 2007; ARBOLEDA, 2008) and enables an interaction situation, in which the group context combines the individual experience with the relationships between participants, their disagreements and contradictions, performative practices and world views, that is, fragments of broader systems of meaning, through which people structure their subjectivities and relate to the world, points out Cervantes Barba (2001).

In order to encourage spectators to participate in the discussion, we explored repertoires of the audiovisual culture shared by members of groups 1 and 3; in group 2, composed of elderly people, the strategy was to work on aspects of everyday life, with which they were closer. According

to Arboleda (2008), in order to guide the conduction of this collective discussion, a script was elaborated, with seven questions, structured in three axes: 1) the film and its relation to daily life; 2) representations and memories associated with black women; and, 3) the exercise of creating a black female protagonist. This instrument allowed us to direct the discussion towards the objectives of the research, but it was also flexible, given that the “happy ending” theme was not predicted, but it provoked different readings within the groups.

Taking into account the circuit production-circulation-reception of the movie, this work investigates what types of relationships (resonances, contradictions and dissonances) are possible to be observed between the intention of the film’s argument and the ways of interpretation by the audience, that is, the ways in which participants read, interpret, appropriate or give new meanings to the representations conveyed in the movie *Bendito Fruto*, in other audiovisual productions and in culture in general, as well as how they relate these images and visual memories with their daily practices and their cultural contexts. Along with the encoding/decoding model (HALL, 2003), we also used the contributions by Orlandi (2013) to analyze the meanings present in the participants’ speeches.

The Production of Meanings in Filmic Reception

The interracial happy ending presented by the movie *Bendito Fruto* instigates PREFERENTIAL POSITIONS of the three groups. Groups 1 (UnB students) and 2 (Association of the Elderly) accept the codes offered by the audiovisual narrative, emphasizing the happy ending as a representation of love for the couple Maria and Edgar and also the performance of the character Virginia in the dispute for Edgar, seen as the “other one”. In group 3 (Reference Center), a reading of the happy ending emerges as a narrative construction unrelated to the gender issue.

Group 1 – UnB

“[...] The ending surprised me, I didn’t expect Edgar to commit to the relationship with Maria and decide to stay with her, I felt that in the beginning she was only a part of his house and that with the arrival of another woman he would easily replace her, but he decides to stay with her, putting their relationship first”.

“The part that touched me the most was in one of the last scenes, when Maria and Edgar go out for a walk and decide to hold hands, not caring about what other people would think, just happy with what they were feeling”.

“[...] Virgínia invades Maria and Edgar’s home, she infiltrates this affective relationship to steal Maria’s husband”.

“I thought the movie was very good. The part that she (Maria) complains to Edgar, at the end of the movie, her desire to have a family with him”.

Group 2 – Association of the Elderly

“In the beginning he [Edgar] was not committing to the relationship, right? Only at the end of the movie did he commit to it, because he saw that he liked Maria, and Virgínia, she was the other one! Virgínia was just a pastime!”.

“I liked everything, you know? That time when [...] what is she called? [Maria? – Moderator], no! Virgínia! That part I didn’t like, it spoiled the romance! [...] but I liked the ending, because they ended up together! Despite the betrayal, it was good!”.

Group 3 – Reference Center

“[...] the movie has a structure that has nothing to do with the gender issue! So it has a happy ending only because it is a hegemonic structure of cinema, so it is unlikely that you’ll see an unhappy ending, even if it was a white man and a white woman, it would end with that little couple, that’s the narrative structure!”.

“[...] it’s a totally real and linear story; the maid that passes from generation to generation is the black woman who works in the white man’s house and lives there in the small maid’s room. And the other one, who comes from

the interior of São Paulo, where they have a totally patriarchal society [...] but in real life, this is what would happen: he would have stayed with the white woman [that's it! – P3] and the black woman would have gone back to the small room, I think that would be the only difference, but in a classic cinema narrative, the good guy will always end up with the young lady!”.

In this way, we can observe the maintenance of the heteronormative pattern on which the classic system is anchored, since in these first two groups there is the conformation of the romantic imaginary, with the image of the couple as a synonym of union and the roles of wife and lover. In the third group, this representation of the happy ending is seen by one of the participants as something so sedimented that it seems unnecessary to analyze it from the gender bias.

It is precisely the efficiency of classic narrative cinema as a cultural pedagogy that makes Louro (2008) problematize audiovisual representations and their implications in the constitution of subjectivities. Through film narratives, representations of legitimate and deviant, healthy and inappropriate practices and behaviors are conveyed, which may take on effects of truth in the construction processes of sexualities, bodies and gender identities, stresses the author.

These aspects are explored in the movie through the character Marcelo Monte (Du Moscovis), who plays the heartthrob of the soap opera *Primeiro Amor* and is desired by all the female characters, but in real life he dates Anderson (Maria's son). They are also represented through the binary construction between the two women that compete for Edgar's love, because even though Maria is not officially his wife (she oscillates between his companion and the maid), participants of groups 1 and 2 see Virgínia as “the other one”. Therefore, we can observe excessive attention to the gender issue, which may indicate the naturalization of male power or the difficulty to perceive the racial dimension, even though this is disguised in the emphasis given to the hairdresser's attitude of staying with Maria, which reiterates the inferiorization of this black female character.

Throughout the entire narrative, she wishes to be recognized as the wife, a position of legitimacy that is denied to black women, usually associated with the status of servant/maid and with informal relationships. Thus, we can consider that this movie maintains a classic narrative, the gender binarism and the racial stereotypes, but it also presents small subversions at the intersection of gender and race, with its interracial happy ending and, especially, because it has a black woman as the protagonist, since in Brazilian feature films released in the last twenty years (from 1995 to 2014), “[...] only 1.4% of the non-white actresses are protagonists” (CANDIDO; CAMPOS; FERES JÚNIOR, 2016, p. 15).

Regarding the outcome given to Maria and Edgar’s story, the speeches of groups 1 (UnB students) and 3 (Reference Center) that discuss the likelihood of the happy ending constitute NEGOTIATED READINGS, observing the fact that Maria forgives Edgar’s betrayal (some participants see this as passivity) and the emphasis on taking care of the house and husband or on the desire to have a companion as something associated with the feminine.

Group 1 – UnB

“The movie really caught my attention because it’s not a story that is portrayed very often in Brazilian cinema”.

“[...] the movie portrayed a not very realistic ending if compared to the weight of the denunciation that it proposes”.

“The role of the woman conveyed in *Bendito Fruto* is very cliché, which made me a little uncomfortable. Most of the characters wanted to get married and to have a husband/companion, they had attitudes aimed at pleasing the loved one [...]”.

Group 3 – Reference Center

“[...] why does the happy ending have to be the romantic ending in which she is the one who forgives? The guy [Edgar] got drunk, screwed up many times, had sex with another person [inside their house! – P1], and the movie never shows her [Maria] moving on with her life!”.

“[...] Sometimes it’s very easy for us to say: ‘Oh, the ending, the ending was romantic, heteronormative etc.’, but for people who come from the academy, from gender studies, it’s easy for us to say that! She didn’t move on with her life because women do not move on! [...] Even empowered women don’t move on! This is a matter of structural male chauvinism in society!”

Although Edgar’s privileged position is not mentioned in the movie, participants in the reception study point out the gender asymmetries based on the characters Maria and Virgínia. They cook, do the housework, wish to get married, while the clumsy Edgar always poses as someone who needs to be taken care of, helped, and thus he enjoys what each of them offer; and as the title itself indicates, Edgar is the “blessed fruit” among so many women.

The couple’s reconciliation and the construction of the happy ending give rise to different readings. One participant questions the romantic ending, which reiterates the female character tied to male acceptance and, out of love, she forgives him and they end up together. In this sense, Lagarde (2001, p. 38) states that “the problem of love is political”, that is, love relationships are anchored in power relations, which reproduce the dominant patriarchal culture, in which men are in a position of privilege and women, in a condition of subjection.

Another participant, relating the movie and the social context, questions the limits of this critical reading of the happy ending as romantic and heteronormative. She indicates that, such as the protagonist Maria, many “real” women experience difficulties to achieve autonomy. That is because, in a sexist society, the loving mechanism teaches them every day that their existence is limited to male acceptance, points out Zanello (2018), who also highlights:

To say that the loving mechanism presents itself as a privileged path of subjection for women in our culture, means to say that women subjectify themselves, in their relationships with themselves, mediated by the look of a man that “chooses” them. In other words, love, to be chosen by a man, is an identity fact for them. It tells about a certain way of loving that

is addressed to them. In our culture, men learn to love many things and women learn to love, above all, and especially, men. We have seen how varied and effective are the gender technologies (magazines, films, songs, soap operas etc.) that address performances related to this mechanism, as well as the way they colonize affections. (ZANELLO, 2018, p. 84)

Having black women in representations of affection is still not common in Brazilian cinema, as mentioned by a participant; and another one considers this happy ending too idealized. Such visions allow us think of the visibility regimes imposed on black women, that is, even if this outcome is still stereotyped, it is necessary to ask: “what women are we talking about?”, as the philosopher Sueli Carneiro (1994, p. 190) does when she criticizes the notion of feminine identity, emphasizing that black women “[...] are portrayed as the anti muses of Brazilian society, because the aesthetic model of women is the white woman”.

In an interview with journalist Débora Stevaux (2016, *s/ponline?*), the activist Stephanie Ribeiro also points out how the emphasis on whiteness as the ideal of beauty excludes black women, especially the ones with darker skin, who make up more than 52% of the population, and, according to the census carried out by IBGE in 2010, are alone, in a kind of definitive celibacy. Thus, she stresses how racism impacts the affectivity of black women, and this does not necessarily refer to being or not in a relationship, but to the fact that “[...] black women are not seen as subjects to be loved”.

Group 2 (Association of the Elderly) does not present negotiated readings about the couple’s happy ending, because the agreement with this outcome prevails in it. However, these participants, based on their own experiences, indicate the imposition of marriage as the only destiny for women.

Group 2 – Association of the Elderly

P.1: [...] When I was young, girls didn’t study so that they couldn’t write to their boyfriends!

Moderator: Girls weren’t allowed to study?

[Participants answer in chorus]: No!

P.2: Because then they would write letters to their boyfriends! [...] girls went to class just to learn how to sign their names, so when they got married, they knew how to sign her names. Women weren't even allowed to vote, because in those days women didn't vote. [...] this was back in my time, in my mother's time they couldn't even go to school. [the other women agree].

Moderator: Do you think that being a woman hindered some things?

P.1: Oh! Yes it did, because a woman's dream, our dream in those days, was to read and write, ah!, to dream, right? But what we learned was how to crochet, embroider, cross-stitch, [to spin – P.2] [...] and how to suffer, only! [and raise children – P.2] and how to get married to raise children, to get married fast [she gesticulates with her hands, indicating a hurry]; at 16 you had to get married, and then you would buy this and that for a bed, a table [...].

Such speeches point to the preparation of women for the roles of spouse, housewife and mother, which hindered or even prevented female autonomy, which, for these interviewees (aged between 55 and 88 years), meant to have access to education. For most of these participants, this could only be resumed now, in maturity and old age. Differently from the other groups, participants in group 3 – Reference Center – elaborate OPPOSITIONAL READINGS of the happy ending portrayed in *Bendito Fruto*, when they contest the meanings offered and claim other possibilities for the ending of the film narrative.

Group 3 – Reference Center

“Why couldn't there be another happy ending? Why does it have to be that ending? [...] Why can't she have found another man, black or white? Why can't she move on with her life?”

“They should have shown her with a new experience, ah!, having changed, [Edgar] giving her a new television [...]. They just went for a walk! For me, going for a walk was no happy ending!”

These oppositional interpretations point out the inequalities of gender and race, when a participant questions the ending, problematizing the place of the black female character, who could have had other affective experiences or even subverted the norm of having a relationship; another one stresses that Maria's wish to get a new television (indicated in the opening sequences of the movie) is not fulfilled by Edgar, but by her son, Anderson. Furthermore, the walk is also something already mentioned by the character during the narrative, when Maria goes to the salon to invite him, but Edgar ignores her and prefers to go for a walk with Virgínia. Therefore, when considering the narrative as whole and thus also Edgar's racist posture, this ending is not considered a happy ending by the participant.

The different configurations of meaning attributed by the participants to the happy ending, an initially unforeseen theme, but which emerged from the discussion groups, indicates the importance of such discursive construction anchored in a model that is “[...] heteronormative, monogamous, faithful, committed to the institution of marriage and the formation of a family” (BARBOSA, 2011, p. 4) and still very present in audiovisual productions, but which gains different interpretations in terms of reception.

Final Considerations

The undertaking of this empirical research made it possible to confront the meanings offered by the movie *Bendito Fruto* and the ones that are elaborated by the receivers, in a context of reception groups. Based on such repertoires, the participants elaborated a set of readings that includes the confirmation of this representation of a happy ending, the negotiation of meanings with the perception of functions usually associated with the feminine and also the resignification of the message, highlighting what they consider a happy ending. Such aspects confirm the importance of the filmic reception as an instance in which speeches and world visions emerge permeated by ambiguities, tensions and polysemy also emerges, as in the readings of group 2, in which the

elderly women, although they agree with the happy ending, question the imposition of marriage.

Considering the movie and the imaginaries that it raises, it is also worth pointing out the meanings that are not perceived in this decoding process, which refer to the intersection of gender and race in the representation of black women. In the case of groups 1 and 3, perhaps due to the access to reflections on gender, we observe an incisive positioning regarding the happy ending, which makes it possible to denaturalize the gender asymmetries.

However, it still demonstrates the difficulty to observe other aspects of innovation offered by the film (despite its limitations), such as the selection of actors and actresses aged between 40 and 50 for this love triangle, and especially the intersection with race, given the limited perception of the existence and performance of this black female protagonist, who has a happy ending, a story, subjectivity and contradictions that give her humanity. These elements can be considered as a possible displacement of the current visibility regimes, in which black women usually do not have a place in love stories and happy endings, because the model of beauty and femininity is the white woman.

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