

## **Black Brazilian Film: identity and the invention of new communities**

### **Cinema negro brasileiro: identidade como lugar de invenção de novas comunidades**

Natasha Roberta dos Santos Rodrigues  
Gilberto Alexandre Sobrinho

**Abstract:** *Black Brazilian Film has grown significantly in the 21st century, expressing itself in a plural way and internally comprising distinct disputes over visibility and recognition. The creation of moving images based on the discourse of racial identity produces representations that go beyond national borders and imagine new communities. Based on the studies of Stuart Hall and the film analysis of the short films Liberdade (2018, Pedro Nishi and Vinícius Silva) e Aurora (2018, Everlane Moraes), this article sets out to recognize the fabulation and the use of identity as a pair in the political project of self-affirmation and reinventions of the self in filmmaking.*

**Key words:** *cinema; identity; fabulation; Black film; Brazilian film*

**Resumo:** *O cinema negro brasileiro cresce significativamente no século XXI, se expressa de modo plural e compreende internamente distintas disputas por visibilidade e reconhecimento. A criação de imagens em movimento apoiadas no discurso da identidade racial concebe representações que avançam os limites das fronteiras nacionais e imaginam novas comunidades. A partir dos estudos de Stuart Hall e da análise fílmica dos curtas Liberdade (2018, de Pedro Nishi e Vinícius Silva) e Aurora (2018, de Everlane Moraes), este artigo se propõe a reconhecer a fabulação e o uso da identidade como pares no projeto político de autoafirmação e reinvenção de si no fazer cinematográfico.*

**Palavras-chave:** *cinema; identidade; fabulação; cinema negro; cinema brasileiro*

## Introduction

The ethnic-racial composition of Brazilian cinema players has changed in recent decades. Although research shows that this market is still mostly made up of white men<sup>1</sup>, historically marginalized social subjects compete for leadership roles in the construction of narratives. In the 21st century, Brazilian Black cinema, supported by public policies in the fields of culture and education, is constituted by social activism and the cinematographic actions of Black people in distinct roles and conceptual reflection. Organized by and evolved from internal debates and repositioning, contemporary Black cinema is a living cultural movement, in which agents occupy and face different spaces in the chain of production, research, training, curation, criticism, and dissemination, among others.

Although identity discourse in artistic practice risks essentialism, Stuart Hall's studies allow us to observe that identity, used strategically, centralizes the agency of historically marginalized subjects and, above all, recognizes its narrative and fictional character. The temporary attachment position to which the identification process refers also includes the decoding of gaps and erasures and the creative appropriation of these gaps in official history, which allows us to conceive of identity as a place of self-invention and plural expression. To achieve this feat, the exercise of storytelling becomes a fundamental and inevitable tool in cinema.

In the mix of documentary and fiction, resistance to racism and the plurality of Black existences become temporary sutures that overcome national identities and project new community ties. From the reworking of ancient fables into unique images, short films such as *Aurora* (2018, by Everlane Moraes) and *Liberdade* (2018, by Pedro Nishi and Vinícius Silva) articulate, through the fabrication of elements of racial identity, memories and communities that overcome the Afro-Brazilian experience

- 1 The 2017 GEEMA (Multidisciplinary Study Group for Affirmative Actions) newsletter – Race and gender in Brazilian cinema: 1970–2016 – points out that, of the mass-market feature films released between 1970 and 2016, 85% were directed by white men, while 71% of the scripts were written by people belonging to this ethnic-racial group.

and direct these issues towards a new global order. Exploring racial issues through language, this contemporary Black cinema becomes artistic, political, and conceptual avant-garde.

### **Black cinema in the 21st century**

The beginning of the 21st century presents fundamental transformations for Black people in the audiovisual sector. The Manifesto do Dogma Feijoada (Feijoada Dogma Manifesto)<sup>2</sup>, in 2000, and the Manifesto do Recife (Recife Manifesto)<sup>3</sup>, in 2001, constitute the first public demands of Black authors in national cinema. These actions result, firstly, from the historical struggle of Black people for new representations and are anchored in the effects of public policies from the end of the last century, namely, the Rouanet Law, of 1991, and the Audiovisual Law, of 1993 in Brazil. The creation of the Audiovisual Secretariat (Secretaria do Audiovisual, SAV - 1993) and the National Cinema Agency (Agência Nacional de cinema, Ancine - 2001), responsible for issuing affirmative call notices<sup>4</sup> for audiovisual content (LIMA, 2022), supports the increase in Black people in the field from the 2000s onwards. Furthermore, the publication by researcher Noel dos Santos Carvalho (2005), *Esboço para uma história do negro no cinema brasileiro* (Outline for a history of Black people in Brazilian cinema), includes the contribution of different Black people to the Brazilian cinema and presents Black cinema as an object of analytical and scientific interest, expanding the reflective potential of this field.

Still in the first decade of this century, new paths opened for Black cinema, with the contribution of filmmaker Zózimo Bulbul. With

2 Manifesto read by director Jeferson De at the 11th São Paulo International Short Film Festival and created by Dogma Feijoada, a group of Black filmmakers in São Paulo: Ari Candido, Jeferson De, Lilian Solá Santiago, Daniel Santiago, Rogerio de Moura, Noel Carvalho, Luiz Paulo Lima, and Billy Castilho.

3 Manifesto signed by the artists Joel Zito Araújo, Thalma de Freitas, Antônio Pompêo, Milton Gonçalves, Ruth de Souza, Luiz Antônio Pillar, Zózimo Bulbul, Maria Ceíça, Antônio Pitanga, Maurício Gonçalves and Norton Nascimento, read during the 5th edition of the Recife Film Festival.

4 They are the Affirmative Short Film of 2012 and 2014, the Affirmative Feature Film of 2015 and the Afro-Indigenous Documentary of 2018 (Lima, 2022).

a career that began as an actor in the 1960s, Zózimo is recognized as the first Black protagonist in a Brazilian soap opera (*Lives in Conflict* (*Vidas em Conflito*), 1969, written by Teixeira Filho and directed by Henrique Martins), in addition to important performances in acclaimed films, such as *Five Times Favela* (*Cinco Vezes Favela*) (1962, by Leon Hirzman), *Zumba Ganga* (1963, by Carlos Diegues), *Earth in Trance* (*Terra em Transe*) (1967, by Glauber Rocha), *Waiting Time* (*Compasso de Espera*) (1970, by Antunes Filho), among others. His first work as a director, the short film *Soul in the Eye* (*Alma no Olho*) (1974), represents his discomfort with the roles reserved for Black people in cinema, a dissatisfaction that guides his subsequent production<sup>5</sup>.

His biggest generational deviation was to pursue film authorship, an unprecedented choice, almost forbidden for a Black man of his social background. Even with just a few movies, he opened a new perspective on the racial issue. The first of his feats was to avoid the left-wing nationalism common in films from the Cinema Novo generation. In this, the Black person is frequently an allegory of the nation as the people, the peasant, the favela dweller, the social outlaw, etc. The second was to experiment and invent new forms of representation of the Black person, and his history corresponds to what many Black artists around the world were producing (CARVALHO, 2012, p. 20).

Committed to the demands of social movements, the filmmaker's work has a strong link with the affirmation of racial identity. The activist nature of Bulbul's work is embodied in the founding, in 2007, of the Centro Afro Carioca de Cinema, in Rio de Janeiro, with the main objective being to promote training, debates and events in the audiovisual field aimed at black people and to hold the annual Encontro de Cinema Negro (Black Cinema Convention), to date, the largest festival in Brazil on the subject.

5 Aniceto's *Manumission Day* (*Aniceto Dia de Alforria*, 1981); *Abolition* (*Abolição*, 1988); *Samba on the Train* (*Samba no Trem*, 2000-2001); *Little Africa* (*Pequena África*, 2002); *Tiradentes Republic* (*República Tiradentes*, 2004-2005); *Carioca Harbor Zone* (*Zona Carioca do Porto*, 2006); *References* (*Referências*, 2006); *African Renaissance* (*African Rebirth*, 2010).

The thesis defended by Souza (2013) positions the birth of Brazilian Black cinema through the hands of social activism. The author contributes to the extent that she includes and makes visible the participation of Black female filmmakers in the formation of this Black cinema and proposes the investigation of a “Black female cinema” (p. 84). Interested in consolidating this Black female cinema proposed by Souza, Oliveira (2016) understands Black cinema as a “work in progress”, which aims to achieve the basic right to self-representation and strives to build a trajectory for this production with a focus on the work of Black women. Coming from different regions of the country and working mainly in the production of short films, the new generation of this cinema is composed mostly of women, according to Oliveira.

In addition to the affirmative call notices for film production, it is possible to identify the influence of the Quota Law (Lei de Cotas)<sup>6</sup>, which, in response to the demands of Black movements, expanded opportunities of higher education to more Black people. For Oliveira and Cohen (2020), the generation that emerged in the 2010s took on the legacy left by Zózimo Bulbul and expanded it to broader frontiers, which allowed us to recognize Black cinema as a consolidated movement.

Therefore, to understand the female protagonism in black cinema in the Brazilian scenario, it is necessary to open the scope of interpretation to encompass some events in the country’s recent history, such as, for example, the expansion of access to university and to training/qualification courses that occurred (such as, for example, actions in Pontos and Pontões de Cultura, which are accredited entities backed by the Ministry of Culture offering cultural and socioeducational activities in communities), in the last 15 years as a result of global education policies (OLIVEIRA, 2017, p. 23).

Regarding the work of Black female filmmakers in documentary production, [AUTHOR (year)] states that this creative participation has radicalized the representation of Black people in Brazilian cinema;

6 The Quota Law states that “federal higher education institutions (...) will reserve, in each college entrance exam (the Brazilian ‘Vestibular’) for undergraduate admissions, by course and shift, at least 50% (fifty percent) of their places for students who have completed their entire secondary education in public schools” (BRAZIL, 2012).

however, this contribution is usually invisible. The distancing of Black female directors from mainstream fiction feature films is part of the strategy of occupying and recognizing the vast and diverse production of Black women (FERREIRA; SOUZA, 2017), present particularly in short films and documentaries. The exhibition *Black Female Directors in Brazilian Cinema* (*Diretoras Negras no Cinema Brasileiro*)<sup>7</sup>, curated by Paulo Ricardo Gonçalves de Almeida and Kênia Freitas, held at Caixa Cultural (Brasília, in 2017, and Rio de Janeiro, in 2018), highlights this. The exhibition reveals the effervescence of a new generation of Black filmmakers, showing forty-six films, of which only two are feature films.

Curation and film review activities are also areas of dispute in this context. In 2015, Caixa Cultural, in Brasília, curated by Kênia Freitas, received the exhibition *Afrofuturism: Cinema and Music in an Intergalactic Diaspora* (*Afrofuturismo: Cinema e Música em uma Diáspora Intergaláctica*)<sup>8</sup>, with twenty-one movies and a catalogue with texts on the subject. In the same field, as curator of the special exhibition *Black Cinema: Chapters of a Fragmented History* (*Cinema Negro: Capítulos de uma História Fragmentada*), held in the 20th Belo Horizonte International Short Film Festival<sup>9</sup>, film critic Heitor Augusto presents twenty-five short films by Black filmmakers, made between 1973 and 2018, to compose a family tree of sorts of the Black Brazilian cinema.

Regarding dissemination, the number of festivals and affirmative exhibitions throughout the country is growing, such as EGBÉ - Sergipe Black Cinema Showcase, in Aracaju (SE). With screenings in the state's capital and in the countryside, EGBÉ shifts the concept of contemporary Black cinema away from the southeast axis, centralizing the northeastern experience of racial identity. It is also worth mentioning the Rio de Janeiro film club initiative of filmmaker Clementino Junior, the

7 Available at: [https://issuu.com/tj70/docs/catalogo\\_cinema\\_diretorasnegrasnoci](https://issuu.com/tj70/docs/catalogo_cinema_diretorasnegrasnoci). Accessed: Jul. 2024.

8 Available at: [https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/7965556/mod\\_resource/content/0/Afrofuturismo\\_catalogo.pdf](https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/7965556/mod_resource/content/0/Afrofuturismo_catalogo.pdf). Accessed: Jul. 2024.

9 Available at: <https://www.festcurtasbh.com/catalogos>. Accessed: Jul. 2024.

Cineclube Atlântico Negro (CAN), created in 2008, which aims to make visible and discuss works by Black filmmakers. Founded in 2016, there is also the Association of Black Audiovisual Professionals (Associação dos Profissionais do Audiovisual Negro, APAN), promoting festivals, training and discussions and playing a significant role in defending the rights of these professionals in proposed laws and call notices for the audiovisual sector. Finally, Socine – Brazilian Society of Cinema and Audiovisual Studies (Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos de Cinema e Audiovisual), approved a Thematic Seminar on Black cinema in three consecutive periods<sup>10</sup>, thus becoming a qualified academic space for presentations of Brazilian academic research, at the largest congress in the field of cinema and audiovisual in the country.

In addition to the actions mentioned above, the scope of this cultural movement stands out in terms of the inclusion and recognition of the work of Black LGBTQIAPN+ people in cinema. Organized into community, academic or political groups, these individuals move away from the role of mere filmed objects and become the focus, centralizing their narratives, their memories, and their bodies [AUTHOR, year]. These initiatives represent the intention to acknowledge the latent plurality of Brazilian Black cinema and, mainly, the different directions towards which the productions and disputes are pointing. Made up of thought collectives (CARVALHO, 2020), Black cinema encompasses particular origins and trajectories. With external and internal disputes, milestones, references, conceptual tensions, founding myths and, finally, artistic innovations, a cinematographic field is identified whose identity affirmation makes it one of the most pertinent and innovative cultural movements in contemporary Brazilian cinema.

10 2021-2022 “Black cinema: aesthetics, narratives and audiovisual policies in Africa and the Afro-diasporas”, coordinated by Janaína Oliveira, Gilberto Alexandre Sobrinho and Jusiele Oliveira; 2023-2024 – “Black cinema: aesthetics, narratives and audiovisual policies in Africa and the Afro-diasporas”, coordinated by Janaína Oliveira, Kenia Freitas, and Morgana Gama. 2018-2019 – “Black African and Diasporic Cinema - Narratives and Representations”; 2021-2022 “Black Cinema: Aesthetics, Narratives and Audiovisual Policies in Africa and the Afro-Diasporas”; 2023-2024 – “Black Cinema: Aesthetics, Narratives and Audiovisual Policies in Africa and the Afro-Diasporas”.

### **Cinema, identity and fabulation**

The composition of a Black cinema raises discussions about the proposition of artistic practices linked to identity discourse. Often accused of essentializing the concept of Black, this cultural movement, as well as others of a similar nature, has its creative value reduced in the name of the political issues to which it is linked, namely, the fight against racism and the protagonism of Black people in decision-making roles. However, interest in the identity creation in Brazilian cinema is not old and, at this moment, it is expressed towards the plurality of ethnic-racial existences. From national identity to post-globalization identities, its contingent and discursive character encompasses the decomposition and recomposition of signs in culture, as well as the openness to invention and fabulation.

The main source of the subject acknowledgement – and of homogenization of internal differences –, the Brazilian culture, as a reflection of globalization, is being now understood as a “structure of cultural power” (HALL, 2006, p. 59) that has control over discursive media. Under this concept, as contrary to a fixed and permanent idea, identity becomes reflexive and contingent; the multiplicity of representations results in the inference of an agency in the process of identification with the interpellations, an active and political stance, in short, on the part of the individuals. However, the author states that the term should be seen as a tool for perceiving the process of identifying discursive practices. Questioned in different directions and with a transitory connection, identity, from this reflexive approach, is conceived “as a construction, as a process never contemplated” (HALL, 1996, p. 106).

I use the term “identity” meaning the meeting point, the suture point, between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices that attempt to “interpellate” us, speak to us or summon us to assume our places as social subjects of specific discourses and, on the other hand, the processes that create subjectivities, that make us subjects to whom one can “speak”. Identities are, therefore, points of temporary attachment to the subject



positions that discursive practices construct for us (Hall, 1995). They are the result of a successful articulation or “fixation” of the subject to the flow of discourse (...) (p. 111-112).

Far from evoking common origins or established traditions, appealing to identity implies highlighting power relations in culture, understanding the appropriation of memories and their editions, and distinguishing gaps and deletions from official history. Therefore, affirming racial identity is not about questioning “who we are” or “where we come from,” but rather about asking the culture “how we have been represented” and “how this representation affects the way we can represent ourselves” (p. 108). Once again, the subject’s agency is centralized and positions him as the author of his own discursive connections, injecting his desires and projects into the gaps of the national imaginary.

They [identities] arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process does not in any way diminish its discursive, material or political effectiveness, even if the feeling of belonging, that is, the “suturation to history” through which identities arise, is, in part, in the imaginary (as well as in the symbolic) and, therefore, always, in part, constructed in fantasy or, at least, within a fantasmatic field (HALL, 1996, p. 108-109).

It is therefore noted that identity is configured as a place of creation, of articulation between memory and its edition. Narrativity and fictional character constitute the identity of subjects and reach them not only as those being questioned, but also as narrators of themselves, since “it is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we constitute ourselves and who we are” (HALL, 2003, p. 346). In this sense, in addition to the demand of social movements for new representations and visibilities, the affirmation of identity in film production configures itself in the political act of being able to tell stories and narrate its own self and the world: the right to self-representation.

Committed to making modes of existence visible and combating prejudices, Black cinema thus understands internal tensions regarding the articulation between themes, Black representations, and the power of free creation (BARROS; FREITAS, 2018). When talking about Black cinema, it is interesting to know “(...) what are the (im)possible/ existing tradeoffs between autonomous Black authorial creation and the racialized political, epistemological and ontological contexts of this creation (...) [and] how creative expressiveness and aesthetic/narrative reflections on Black works are permanently modulated by each other” (FREITAS, 2018, p. 161). In this way, the creation of films in the field of Black cinema is dedicated to reflecting on the editions about Black memory, to admitting its role as narrator and inventor of itself, rearticulating images, and sutures, shuffling and attaching imagination and desire to the narrative gaps of official history.

Unlike universally representing a culture or integrating subjectivities, fabulation responds “only to the strategic need to save a culture from alienation, to allow the flourishing of a subjectivity, to wrest a language from silence” (PELLEJERO, 2008, p. 73), that is, it removes from the hegemonic and homogenizing narrative at least one voice, which expresses itself in “an excess of possibilities” (p. 66). In the hands of these players, fabulation represents the expansion and blurring of the imaginary limits of Black subjectivities, of the incorporation of specific forms of life, not conditioned by stereotypes. As it constructs fables about racial identity, contemporary Black cinema imagines communities<sup>11</sup> connected by experience and resistance to racism, crossing national borders and dismantling homogeneous and exclusionary representations of national identity. A common element in many works in this scenario, the mix between documentary and fiction becomes a recurring strategy for identity narration, which eclipses the illusory fixity of Black identity and germinates the appropriation of the fictional character of self-narration and racial affirmation.

11 Here, the concept coined by Benedict Anderson (2008) of imagined community is used to talk about a nation.

Before moving on to the case studies, it is worth mentioning that the cinematographic fable is designated, according to Jacques Rancière (2001), by the lack of distinction between reality and fiction, by open and directionless constructions, by the launching of stories into voids and by assuming their own movements, without dramatic function, just as life moves. This mode of expression is achieved through the “work of disfiguration,” the removal of old fables and their repositioning and linking, generating new fables, which do not serve the art of action and reaction, of verisimilitude or of cause and effect, and which find their representative characteristics blurred. Through the fog existing between fiction and reality and the disfiguration of old fables, contemporary Black cinema moves towards the creative appropriation of memories, the constitution of new subjectivities, the politics of expression as a form of racial identification, the overcoming of national identities and the imagination of new community ties.

The plurality of productions by Black people in the field of short films suggests that inventive forms of racial representation can be identified in this film format. Therefore, we have chosen two works with wide circulation and recognition outside the affirmative circuit - namely, exhibitions and festivals dedicated to Black filmmakers -, demonstrating their potential beyond the racial debate and projecting an Afro-Brazilian director and a Nipo-Brazilian director, from different regions of the country, as highlights of contemporary Brazilian cinema. The short films *Aurora* (2018, by Everlane Moraes) and *Liberdade* (2018, by Pedro Nishi and Vinicius Silva) feature the recognition of outdated fables about Black bodies and the insertion of creative images that contemporary Black cinema points to. The analysis of the works seeks to highlight them as examples of the exercise of fabulation, in which one can recognize the active stance of the authors in the process of racial identification, the appropriation of memories and the narrativization of oneself as an identity constitution, the highlighting of power relations through cinematographic language, achieving sutures of racial identity that overcome national borders and imagine new communities.

## Autora and Liberdade

Directed by Everlane Moraes, with her background linked to Bahia and Sergipe states<sup>12</sup>, the location of the short film *Aurora* was Cuba in 2018, and its duration is approximately fifteen minutes. Straddling between documentary and experimental, the film presents, on an abandoned theater stage, three Black women of different ages, who reinterpret their stories and memories. Filmed through open, static shots, the spectator can see where the characters find themselves. Frontal shots centralize the characters who, in actions contained in a shot without cuts, look directly at the camera.

The setting offers large empty spaces, generally the same for the three actresses, which do not, however, present spatial continuity in narrative terms. The social actresses (NICHOLS, 2016) do not interpret fictional actions, on the contrary, they act out their own experiences and perceptions, fictions of themselves. The moving bodies in the scene transform subjective aspects of each character's life condition into performance. The slow action, looking at the camera and the emptiness of the space reinforce the solitude of these women's presence on this stage. In photographic terms, lighting works with Black and white and the sharp contrast of light and shadow, which highlights nuances of different skin tones and the marks on their faces, resulting in a contrasted and voluminous portrait. The close-ups of the characters' faces highlight the expression lines and their gaze, demonstrating the passage of time and their memories.

12 Some of the director's films: *Caixa d'água* (Water tank): *Qui-lombo é esse?* (2013); *Conflitos e abismos: a expressão da condição humana* (Conflicts and Abysses: The Expression of the Human Condition) (2014); *Allegro ma non troppo: la sinfonia de la belleza* *Allegro ma non troppo: the symphony of beauty* (2016); *La santa cena* (The Holly Supper) (2016); *Monga, retrato de café* (2017); *Pattaki* (2019); e *A gente acaba aqui* (We end here) (2021).

Figure 1 – Frame of *Aurora* (2018, by Everlane Moraes)Figure 2 – Frame of *Aurora* (2018, by Everlane Moraes)

With little sound intervention, the short film favors silence, which helps focus attention on the characters' actions. With no cuts and with slow performances, time expands, motionlessly observing the beginning and end of each action. Beginning and ending with a direct gaze into the camera, the image creates a clash between contemplative observation of

the actions and the intense mobilization of the spectator, challenged by the characters' gaze. The montage keeps open the nature of the bond between the women represented. Unity is achieved through the great voids, the centrality of the characters in the shot, the close-ups, the contrasting light, the volume of expression lines, the black and white portrait, the look into the camera.

In opposition to the frayed representations of Black women in the history of Brazilian cinema, in which subordination and objectification are observed, in *Aurora* these women occupy a central position and are proud when facing the camera. The choice of lighting that makes Black skin a narrative and poetic surface reveals, together with the aforementioned elements, the reconfiguration of obsolete images of Black women, generally obscured by the inability to recognize dark skin in films during the 20th century.<sup>13</sup> This strategy highlights the film's interest in recognizing and remodeling power relations expressed in cinematic language. Although speech is a place of dispute in the anti-racist struggle, silence is used to expand the characters' discourse. As we do not know what they are saying, it is up to the spectator to formulate what the experiences that these women expose in their actions and views are about. In this sense, if speech could provide possibilities of existence, silence, in turn, exceeds them, since it depends on the active stance of the public in the construction of meaning.

Overriding the strength of the documentary, in which interviews and testimonies are almost indispensable strategies for social indexing, the quality of indiscernment between reality and fiction that the work presents positions racial identification in the place of narrativization, reinforcing its fictional and, therefore, active, and political character. The experience of sexuality and loneliness comprise the threads that connect Afro-Cuban women to other Black women around the world;

13 The Shirleys, as they were called, were photographs of light-skinned women that served as a parameter in photographic laboratories from the 1940s onwards to calibrate the skin colors to be recorded on film. Defined by cultural issues, this choice represented the difficulty in recognizing the nuances of dark skin, negatively affecting the visibility of Black bodies in the images (Roth, 1926).

the dimension of nationality does not interfere in the recognition of shared experiences. Racial identity is constructed through intimacy, remodeling outdated images and manufacturing collective Afro-diasporic memories. In the opposite direction to the frayed representation of hypersexualization, subalternization and marginality, Aurora creates images of Black women with depth, expressing their desires, limits, and subjectivities.

Figure 3 – Frame of Aurora (2018, by Everlane Moraes)



As in *Aurora*, in which the reality of the characters is translated through acting, in *Liberdade* the documentary merges with fiction, resulting in a nebulous narrative. Directed by Pedro Nishi<sup>14</sup> and Vinicius Silva<sup>15</sup>, from São Paulo, the short film is approximately twenty-five minutes long and was completed in 2018. Highlighting the memories of the

14 Some of the director's films: *Retratos para você* (Portraits for You, 2017); *Tempo de ir, tempo de voltar* (Time to Go, Time to come back, 2018); *Livro e meio* (A Book and a Half, 2020, co-directed by Giu Nishiyama); *Contos da família Pu* (Tales of the Pu Family, 2020); *Você Pode Mais* (You Can Do More 2021); *Doadores Sem Fronteiras* (Donors Without Borders, 2021); *Extinção é para Sempre* (Extinction is Forever, 2021); *Parques Naturalizados: Paisagens para o Brincar* (Naturalized Parks: Landscapes for Play, 2022).

15 Films by the director: *Deus* (God, 2017); *Quantos eram pra tá* (How many were supposed to be, 2018); *Galho de Arruda* (Branch of Rue, 2020); and *00:17:35, ZL*, 2020).

Liberdade neighborhood in São Paulo, the film interweaves the lives of three characters: Abou, a Guinean artist; Satsuke (Cristina Sato), the ghost of a Japanese woman; and Sow, Abou's cousin, recently arrived in São Paulo. Abou lives in a boarding house in Liberdade with other immigrants and relies on Satsuke's help to welcome his cousin.

Filmed predominantly in open, static shots, the film shows streets and squares in the region, the boarding house where they live, their backyard, their rooms, and the interaction between the characters; the ghost and the protagonist communicate in Portuguese. The use of archival images informs about their past, presenting black and white photographs of the Japanese family and color photographs of the Guinean family, which demarcates the temporal distance between the records. The photographs do not explore Abou and Satsuke's memories, on the contrary, they offer a similarity of experiences between them, reinforced, mainly, in the use of songs in the mother tongues of both characters.

Figure 4 – Frame of *Liberdade* (2018, by Pedro Nishi and Vinicius Silva)



The voice in off by the narrator-character Abou, in French, reveals the history of slavery in the territory and informs the project of invisibility of black memory in the neighborhood. The character talks about the



early 20th century immigration of Chinese, Japanese and Koreans to Brazil and reinforces the current immigration movement of Guineans, Congolese, Angolans, Haitians, and Togolese, whom he refers to as “us”. In this plural pronoun, Abou sets aside the specificities of the nationalities and ethnicities that comprise them to privilege the convergence between the different immigration experiences, highlighting especially the connection with the Africans brought to Brazil for the purpose of slavery. This “we” is, therefore, configured in the identification and memory intersection of identity reformulation and life project.

The invisibility of such memories and connections is reflected in the shot through the boarding house’s African and Haitian residents, centered in the image under a shadow. As the film progresses, their faces light up and you can see these characters looking at the camera, with the city in the background, marking their presence and subjectivity in the neighborhood’s memory. Again, this memory does not correspond to the recovery of an erased past, but rather to the forging of the presence of these individuals on this new ground, their ancestral recognition as ancient Africans and, once again, the deletion of their contribution to Brazilian identity.

Figure 5 – Frame of *Liberdade* (2018, by Pedro Nishi and Vinicius Silva)



Figure 6 – Frame of *Liberdade* (2018, by Pedro Nishi and Vinicius Silva)



Finally, it is worth mentioning that Satsuke presents herself as a welcoming and supportive figure for the protagonist and her ghostly nature is only revealed at the end of the film. Living with the spirit does not generate panic or surprise. The characters of the boarding house

are also found in these layers of reality, fiction, and fantasy since the film addresses social actors and actresses acting out their own daily experiences. The fog that forms from this interweaving of experiences creates a fabrication of racial identity, highlighting national identities and then blurring them, soon after, in the recognition of immigration. The identity in *Liberdade*, therefore, appears in the memory that is drawn from the blurred interrelationship between many pasts and the current black presence in this neighborhood.

As in *Aurora*, the adequate skin lighting also becomes an element to question the white hegemony in the identity construction used by cinema until then. In the same way, looking at the camera reclaims the pride and protagonism of narrating one's own story; instead of talking heads, static shots construct portraits of subjects who speak without words. Silence, in this case, is superimposed on the voice-over narration of the history of the neighborhood and recent migratory movements, relating official memories to collective and invisible experiences. The confrontation of racial power relations expressed in cinematic language is articulated in the constitution of new fables, which appropriate and re-edit old symbols.

In the difficult task of representing these individuals in terms of identities, the work combines the fiction of the self, the self-narrative through the performance of social actors and actresses, with the recognition of previous migratory processes, thus enabling identifications and recognitions of different origins - Eastern, African and Haitian - in the constitution of Brazilian identity. The free movement between fiction and documentary fosters openness to new signs and, consequently, new sutures, so that racial identification goes beyond the boundaries of identities fixed in national cultures. Far from the essentialist identity mobilization, *Aurora* and *Liberdade* propose perspectives of Black identities that highlight power structures in language, trigger and disfigure old fables, re-edit memories and fictionalize real experiences, stitching together new recognitions and communities.

## Final Considerations

Brazilian Black cinema, in short, consists of a mosaic of different initiatives and paths. Its activist and political character, practical interventions from Black authors in distinct roles in this chain, and, finally, reflective disputes in the field of research reinforce the field and meaning of the images in these productions. In defense of the political and aesthetic contribution of this cultural movement to Brazilian cinema, the aforementioned trajectories reposition the works of these filmmakers in the study of contemporary cinema, to recognize them as artistic vanguards. This movement is growing in number and quality, women and Black LGBTQIAPN+ people substantiate their existence and contribution in the field and pluralize representations; the frontiers of Brazilian Black cinema expand, and its projects point in multiple directions.

The creation of images based on questions of identity, in this contemporary scenario, tears apart the boundaries of national identities, outlining subjects who identify themselves through the recognition of racial experiences. The concept of identity centralizes the power structures behind representations and the strength of interpellations on subjects. This understanding makes the terrain of identity an unstable, yet creative place, in which one acts on what is possible to imagine and invent based on outdated fables. *Aurora* and *Liberdade* are examples of a cinematographic exercise that addresses racial issues and that, at the same time, traverses language as an expressive and political form, in which the boundaries between real and imaginary, documentary and fiction, Afro-Brazilian and Afro-diasporic, between identities are tested.

From the dissociation of symbols and meanings, new fables are extracted from old fables, tracing singular territories of subjective existence and conceiving an infinity of possibilities of oneself and the world. The alternative of fabulation finds in the gaps of memory the power to connect political activism to creative strategies, committed to the fictionalization of oneself as resistance: aesthetic activism. As a political and artistic avant-garde, Black Brazilian cinema therefore deserves extensive investigation and due recognition in the context of contemporary cinema.

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## Filmography

00:17:35, ZL (2020, de Vinícius Silva)

Abolição (1988, de Zózimo Bulbul)

A gente acaba aqui (2021, de Everlane Moraes)

Allegro ma non troppo: la sinfonia de la belleza (2016, de Everlane Moraes)

Aniceto Dia de Alforria (1981, de Zózimo Bulbul)

Aurora (2018, de Everlane Moraes)

Caixa d'água: *Qui-lombo é esse?* (2013, de Everlane Moraes)

Cinco Vezes Favela (1962, de Leon Hirszman)

Compasso de Espera (1970, de Antunes Filho)

Conflitos e abismos: a expressão da condição humana (2014, de Everlane Moraes)

Contos da família Pu (2020, de Pedro Nishi)

Deus (2017, de Vinícius Silva)

Doadores Sem Fronteiras (2021, de Pedro Nishi)

Extinção é para Sempre (2021, de Pedro Nishi)

Galho de Arruda (2020, de Vinícius Silva)

Ganga Zumba (1963, de Carlos Diegues)

La santa cena (2016, de Everlane Moraes)  
 Liberdade (2018, de Pedro Nishi e Vinícius Silva)  
 Livro e meio (2020, de Pedro Nishi e Giu Nishiyama)  
 Monga, retrato de café (2017, de Everlane Moraes)  
 Parques Naturalizados: Paisagens para o Brincar (2022, de Pedro Nishi)  
 Pattaki (2019, de Everlane Moraes)  
 Pequena África (2002, de Zózimo Bulbul)  
 Quantos eram pra tá? (2018, de Vinícius Silva)  
 Referências (2006, de Zózimo Bulbul)  
 República Tiradentes (2004-2005, de Zózimo Bulbul)  
 Renascimento Africano (2010, de Zózimo Bulbul)  
 Retratos para você (2017, de Pedro Nishi)  
 Samba no Trem (2000-2001, de Zózimo Bulbul)  
 Tempo de ir, tempo de voltar (2018, de Pedro Nishi)  
 Terra em Transe (1967, de Glauber Rocha)  
 Vidas em Conflito (1969, novela escrita por Teixeira Filho e dirigida por Henrique Martins)  
 Você Pode Mais (2021, de Pedro Nishi)  
 Zona Carioca do Porto (2006, de Zózimo Bulbul)

## About the authors

*Natasha Roberta dos Santos Rodrigues*: Master's degree in Multimedia, Media, and Communications at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP). Attended the 2024 Student Training Program of the Center for Critical Imagination: Political Economy and Citizenship (CCI), at the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (CEBRAP). Email: [natasharsrodrigues@gmail.com](mailto:natasharsrodrigues@gmail.com). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8425-5524>.

*Gilberto Alexandre Sobrinho*: Associate Professor at the Department of Multimedia, Media and Communication, Institute of Arts, at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP). Postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Cinema, New York University. E-mail: [gilsobri@unicamp.br](mailto:gilsobri@unicamp.br). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5083-384X>.

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