



# Practising Inclusive Citation in Modern Languages Research: The View from Brazilian Film Studies

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## ABSTRACT

As Modern Languages researchers and teachers we pride ourselves on our ability to read (and view) material beyond the Anglo-American canon, and we make use of this ability to argue that we offer fresh perspectives on theory and practice within the broad range of sub-disciplines that our subject area encompasses. As Modern Languages researchers, inclusive citation should, then, be our bread and butter. But to what extent are we really contributing to “decolonised” knowledge creation? How much attention, for example, are we paying to calls to #CiteBlackWomen? Taking as a case study my recent explorations of race and gender in Brazilian cinema, I offer some reflections on the impact that citing more inclusively has made on my understanding of Brazilian culture more broadly.

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For as long as I can remember, as Modern Languages researchers we have (quietly) prided ourselves on our ability to read (and view) material beyond the Anglo-American canon, and we have made use of this ability to argue that we offer fresh perspectives on theory and practice within the broad range of sub-disciplines that our subject area encompasses, because we cite, for example, Brazilians writing in Portuguese when we analyse Brazilian cinema, while simultaneously pushing for greater representation of, for example, Brazilian case studies in theoretical discussions beyond our sub-disciplines. But to what extent are we really contributing to the advancement of “decolonial” practices, about which we hear a great deal in relation to Modern Languages pedagogy<sup>1</sup> and of which there are plenty of really good examples to cite?<sup>2</sup> This article seeks to explore this issue by focusing on contemporary Brazilian film culture, and specifically, films produced by Afro-Brazilians. I begin by framing key terms such as inclusive citation, decolonisation of knowledge and decoloniality in the context of Brazilian film culture. I then foreground my filmic case studies with an overview of the so-called *cinema negro*, a growing body of films made by Black Brazilian filmmakers. I focus on two “alternative” forms of audio-visual production: a low-budget, five-minute short, and a music video by an established hip-hop artist. I consider, among other things, the extent to which these films challenge received wisdom regarding the relationship between domestic workers and their employers, a topic that has informed much (white) cultural production in Brazil over the last ten years. The interrelated questions that drive my discussion are: is it enough to cite Brazilian filmmakers, writers and philosophers, without giving thought to their own possible positions of privilege within the Brazilian academy and canon?<sup>3</sup> And what might researchers be missing if they do not, for example, actively #CiteBlackWomen?

The introduction of the phrase “inclusive citation” has been claimed by educator [Maha Bali](#), who suggested, in an influential blog post first published in the 2010s, that “seeking non-dominant references” should ultimately become a “lifestyle”: “if your citations aren’t diverse and inclusive enough”, she argues, “chances are, you’re missing some valuable perspectives” ([Bali n.p.](#)). In this article I read inclusive citation to mean both secondary *and primary* references, for while there might be nothing new within our subject area in calling for greater engagement with primary texts by “non-dominant” authors and filmmakers, this engagement, as we will see below, is still tentative in the context of Brazilian film culture, in terms of moving beyond a white, male-dominated canon. At the same time the privileging by academics of certain forms of audio-visual production as primary texts for scrutiny simultaneously discourages the citation of production by a wider field of filmmakers.

Inspired in part by work around Culturally Relevant Pedagogies ([Ladson-Billings 1995; 2021](#)), Bali’s useful checklist of practices to embed citation of a more diverse range of sources in one’s research routine resonates with recent “decolonising of knowledge” practices linked to the classroom. In the UK these were spearheaded by UCL’s 2015 student-led movement “Why is my Curriculum White?”, which coincided with the “Rhodes Must Fall” movement at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, initially a localised movement that would grow into the international campaign Decolonise Now, with its impact being felt, as we know, far beyond the academy. The now-defunct “Decolonise Our Minds” initiative,<sup>4</sup> a student-led movement at SOAS, University of London, that started in early 2017, appeared to crystallise a number of the claims and demands of these various movements: it too garnered considerable and often negative attention in the UK media, as a result of its seeming demand that white philosophers

1 See the [Decolonising Languages Network](https://ilcs.sas.ac.uk/research/decolonising-languages-network), founded in 2020 and led by Emmanuelle Santos and Joseph Ford: <https://ilcs.sas.ac.uk/research/decolonising-languages-network>.

2 See, for example, [Walsh and Mignolo’s On Decoloniality](#); [Lugones’s “Coloniality and Gender”](#); and [Smith’s Decolonising Methodologies](#).

3 A brief anecdotal aside: as the BFI/Sight and Sound 100 greatest films of all time poll gears up for 2022 at the time of writing, there has been discussion on social media among Brazilian and “Brazilianist” voters, many of whom are keen to demonstrate the extent to which their voting preferences seek to champion Brazilian cinema. Yet the vast majority of the films they highlight are feature-length movies made by white men.

4 The borrowing from the title of [Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s](#) widely cited book *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) reminds us how long demands to decolonise knowledge and thinking have been circulating in the academy. As [Angela Figueiredo \(87\)](#) reminds us, Black and Chicano feminists in North America, for example, were actively debating the decolonisation of knowledge in the 1980s.

be dropped from the SOAS curriculum.<sup>5</sup> Also in 2017, and largely flying under the mainstream media radar, the African-American feminist anthropologist [Christen A. Smith](#) called for greater attention to be paid specifically to Black female scholars. #CiteBlackWomen is a

campaign to push people to engage in a radical praxis of citation that acknowledges and honors Black women's transnational intellectual production [...] The idea was to motivate everyone, but particularly academics, to critically reflect on their everyday practices of citation and start to consciously question how they can incorporate black women into the CORE of their work. ([Cite Black Women n.p.](#))

In "Cite Black Women: A Critical Praxis", [Smith et al.](#) tackle the issue of decolonising the practice of citation in greater depth, and notably practise what they preach by citing and discussing the work of a wider group of African and Afro-diasporic writers,<sup>6</sup> including the Afro-Brazilian philosophers [Beatriz Nascimento](#), [Sueli Carneiro](#) and [Lélia Gonzalez](#). Perhaps as a result of its emergence in anthropology, a field with its "origins in the colonial encounter" ([Makhulu and Smith 177](#)), the #CiteBlackWomen collective draws attention to the need to acknowledge the difference between those (women) who are considered to contribute to theory/knowledge and those who merely supply or serve as "raw data". It is worth highlighting, then, that I do not treat film production in this instance as an example of raw data, given the significance, reach and influence of audio-visual culture with regard to shaping perceptions and understandings of Brazilian culture and cultural history. I thus regard the act of citing inclusively as encompassing Black women filmmakers, as well as Black women theorists and philosophers whose work can enrich our appreciation of *cinema negro* and Brazilian culture more broadly.

It is also worth drawing attention to the use of a term such as decolonisation in the Brazilian audio-visual context. The term itself was used as early as 1981 in a three-day seminar that took place in the north-eastern city of Salvador (Brazil's Afro-Brazilian cultural capital) entitled "Cinema e Descolonização", which was promoted by the Society for the Study of Black Culture in Brazil (SECNEB). A summary of the seminar, written by critic and academic [Ismail Xavier](#), was included in the prestigious film magazine *Filme Cultura's* 1982 special issue on "The Black in Brazilian Cinema", made up of reflective pieces by a couple of Black actors, one Black director, and well-known white directors such as [Carlos Diegues](#), who had made a number of films that engaged meaningfully with Afro-Brazilian culture from the 1960s onwards. Based on [Xavier's review](#) of the event, the term decolonisation appears to have been used to refer to the need to move away from a "colonial mentality" in relation to film culture, whereby dominant cinema (mainstream/Hollywood) dictated the terms and continued to negatively influence, for example, the portrayal of Afro-Brazilians. There was no mention, according to [Xavier's](#) summary, of calls to increase the representation of Afro-Brazilians behind the camera, but instead a focus on the importance of distinguishing between a "discurso sobre" (a discussion about) and a "discurso de" (a discussion with) Afro-Brazilians in terms of how they might be represented on screen.<sup>7</sup>

Such an interpretation arguably borrowed heavily from the writings of influential film critic [Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes](#) and *cinema novo* filmmaker and film theorist [Glauber Rocha](#), both of whom, writing in the 1960s under the influence of [Frantz Fanon's](#) *The Wretched of the Earth* (first published in 1961), described a scenario in which an internal colonialism pitted colonisers against colonised: the colonised, in this case, were never singled out as the Indigenous and

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5 See [Peters](#) and [Malik](#) for more information. See also the *Daily Telegraph's* attack on "inclusive justice" ([Somerville](#)).

6 By contrast, [Jacqueline Bobo's](#) influential *Black Women Film and Video Artists* (1998) contains no references to Afro-diasporic filmmaking beyond the US. And beyond academia, the Netflix gesture of support for the Black Lives Matter movement after the murder of George Floyd, a viewing list with a theme of racial injustice and the Black experience, is restricted to films and series set in the US, despite the potential to draw from material hosted by the platform from Brazil, among many other countries.

7 "Discurso de" is "understood as a discussion that comes from the group in focus, and that therefore expresses their manner of facing up to their experience, their vision of themselves and that of others" ([Xavier 24](#)). I am struck by how similar this distinction is to the concept of "thinking with", as opposed to "thinking about", as developed by [Catherine Walsh](#) and brought to my attention in the work of [Alexandre Embaoba da Costa](#), whereby the possibility for decolonial thought is opened up by the meaningful engagement with critical knowledge produced by Afro-descendant communities.

Afro-Brazilian inheritors of a colonial, plantation society, but rather meant anyone who had yet to free themselves from an exploitative local elite in cahoots with foreign interests.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond Brazil and more recently, the term decolonisation has become contentious, as a result of [Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's](#) far-reaching 2012 article “Decolonization is not a Metaphor” and the series of responses and counter-responses provoked by it.<sup>9</sup> [Tuck and Yang](#) warn against “the ease with which the language of decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences, supplanting prior ways of talking about social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches which decenter settler perspectives” (2). In their view, decolonisation is “a distinct project”, and as [Curley et al.](#) succinctly interpret it, “a political project in concert with demands for Native Sovereignty and land return” (1044).<sup>10</sup>

I acknowledge a certain sidestepping here of a complex debate about the place of Afro-descendants and Afro-descendant experiences in the decolonisation of settler colonial spaces as mapped out by [Tuck and Yang](#) (with their emphasis on Indigenous culture and the significance of land) and their respondents, but I am partly driven in this by a sense that the challenge to avoid thinking metaphorically in relation to the term is most effectively<sup>11</sup> aimed by the authors at institutions currently investing in initiatives around, for example, the “decolonised” curriculum/university; and I acknowledge in this regard the dangers, as put forward by [Tuck and Yang](#), of “settler fantasies of easier paths to reconciliation” (4). I also agree with [Tuck and Yang](#) in their assertion that “calling different groups ‘colonized’ without describing their relationship to settler colonialism is an equivocation” (17), which, I argue, problematises the use of the work of theorists such as [Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes](#) and [Glauber Rocha](#) in relation to understanding contemporary *cinema negro*.<sup>12</sup> I thus avoid the term “decolonisation” (or use it in scare quotes), and opt instead for decoloniality,<sup>13</sup> developed in the context of South America and with its perhaps more straightforward and less metaphorical mission to “advance the undoing of Eurocentrism’s totalizing claim and frame” ([Walsh and Mignolo 2](#)).

My subject position is important to highlight in this context. I am neither Black nor Brazilian, and as a white Anglo-Irish professor, whose research trips to Brazil are (mostly) funded by my institution and local research councils, I acknowledge my privileged position. While Black researchers continue to be under-represented in the higher education system in the UK, in Brazilian universities the proportion of Black lecturers in relation to the overall Black population is much lower: in 2018 Brazil’s education ministry calculated that out of 400,000 university faculty, 67,000 were people of colour: thus, less than 17% ([INEP](#)). And this is despite a growth in the number of Afro-descendant students in public universities to levels approximating the national demographic of 56% ([Valor Online](#)),<sup>14</sup> as a result of a raft of affirmative action initiatives.<sup>15</sup>

I position myself as an ally to Afro-descendant filmmakers and scholars in Brazil: drawing inspiration from the “decolonising” initiatives listed above, I want to consciously and actively champion the political, social and aesthetic value of their work. Thus, where possible in this article I cite the work of Afro-descendant and especially Afro-Brazilian women filmmakers and scholars. At the same time I do not seek to over-celebrate a situation in which Brazilian cultural production more broadly speaking has been under siege since the 2016 impeachment

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8 See, for example, [Salles Gomes's](#) “A Colonial Situation?” and “Cinema: A Trajectory Within Underdevelopment”, and [Rocha's](#) “An Aesthetics of Hunger”.

9 See for example [Garba and Sorentino](#); and [Curley et al.](#)

10 It is worth highlighting that [Tuck and Yang's](#) article has only recently been translated into Portuguese (in 2021), and it is yet to be widely discussed in Brazilian academic circles.

11 In this I do not wish to diminish the importance of [Tuck and Yang's](#) article in relation to understanding demands for Indigenous sovereignty and how current (white-led) debates around decolonisation can be construed to deliberately undermine such demands.

12 [Salles Gomes](#) did, however, make a significant contribution to the widening of the film canon in Brazil and was an early proponent of calls for the democratisation of access to films.

13 The term decoloniality was first introduced by Peruvian sociologist [Anibal Quijano](#) in 1990. Quijano’s concept of the coloniality of power, whereby colonial structures based largely on phenotypical prejudice continue to structure post-colonial societies, has proved popular with theorists of race relations in contemporary Brazil.

14 By Afro-descendant I am referring to those who self-identify as *negro* or *pardo* (Black and mixed-race), two distinct categories in the Brazilian census. The census includes the following categories: *branco* (white), *pardo* (brown), *preto* (black), *amarelo* (yellow/East Asian) and *indígena* (indigenous).

15 Some of the key initiatives are outlined by [Janaina Oliveira](#) (“Por um cinema” 45).

of President Dilma Rousseff, and particularly after 1 January 2019 and the rise to power of Jair Bolsonaro, following which many of the public policies that had a positive impact on Afro-Brazilian audio-visual production were either suspended or reversed, while the COVID-19 pandemic and Brazil's unaccountable security forces have decimated Black bodies. As [Tuck and Yang](#) (2) highlight, “the real and symbolic violences of settler colonialism” should not be overlooked.

While making the case for inclusive citation, I also acknowledge that the age-old issue of difficulty in accessing certain types of audio-visual production (lower-budget feature films and documentaries, for example) persists in Brazil, despite the growth in VOD platforms: it is doubly difficult, then, to access outside Brazil a great many Afro-Brazilian films, and especially those with subtitles.<sup>16</sup> The two case studies I use, Safira Moreira's *Travessia* (2017) and Emicida's *Boa esperança* (2015), are available (at least at the time of writing) with English subtitles on Vimeo and YouTube respectively.

Film activist [So Mayer](#) has argued that “[w]hile non-standard archival and distribution conditions affect hundreds of thousands of films [...] they disproportionately affect the few films made by filmmakers from marginalised and under-represented communities” (n.p.). They continue:

Dominant cinema—films by white cismen—has had over 100 years of a booster programme, maintained by the free gift of the lion's share of marketing, publicity, exhibition, scholarship and conversation: it's educational to wonder just how successful or celebrated they would be without that unfair advantage. (n.p.)

Furthermore, I argue that white male directors will continue to dominate film studies courses and research outputs, for as long as these focus on feature-length films and in isolation from other forms of audio-visual production. If we include short films, documentaries, TV series, music videos, video art and mixed-media productions, as well as fictional feature films, as examples of Afro-Brazilian audio-visual production, we find that we have a very substantial field on which to draw.<sup>17</sup> This need to shift focus away from feature films is ably captured in [Girish Shambu's](#) “For a New Cinephilia”, a manifesto published in *Film Quarterly* in 2019 which also highlights the need to broaden the terms of pleasure in relation to film. Shambu states that:

The old cinephilia is the cinephilia that has dominated film culture for the last seventy-five years. Its origin story recounts its rise in post-World War II France, its auteur worship, and its cult of *mise-en-scène* [...] the new cinephilia wants to multiply a diversity of voices and subjectivities, and a plethora of narratives about cinephilic life and experience [...] For the new cinephilia, with its expansive notion of pleasure and value, films that center the lives, subjectivities, experiences, and worlds of marginalized people automatically become valuable. (32)

With its emphasis on the social situatedness of spectators, on placing cinema within wider understandings of the role of culture in society, and on an expansive notion of pleasure, thus distinguishing itself from other, earlier decolonising approaches such as [Solanas and Getino's](#) concept of Third Cinema, the manifesto strikes me as a useful tool for thinking decolonially about film in the twenty-first century. As we will see, the most salient points for this discussion in Shambu's manifesto are the idea of the centring of non-white, non-male filmmakers and their subjectivities, experiences and worlds, coupled with Shambu's call to decentre the feature-length film.

## **CINEMA NEGRO: OVERVIEW OF A BURGEONING FIELD OF STUDY**

Brazilian *cinema negro* is defined as films directed by or made with significant creative input from Afro-descendants. The number of films being made in Brazil has increased considerably, partly as a result of the shift to cheaper, digital formats and an internet-driven sense that

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<sup>16</sup> It is worth highlighting too the difficulty in working with and teaching audio-visual materials that are only available on online platforms (including unauthorised uploads to YouTube), given that it is impossible to know how long they will remain online and available for consultation.

<sup>17</sup> As [Janaina Oliveira](#) (“Por um cinema” 45) underscores, film production by Afro-Brazilians (men and women) has grown out of short-form filmmaking.

anyone with any imagination and wherewithal when it comes to working with technology can make films. But more importantly, there are more film studies places at universities, because there are more university places and successful affirmative action policies to encourage more Black students to attend university, either introduced or reinforced during the Workers' Party (PT) government (2003–16). And, at least until 2018, there were a number of funding calls that targeted so-called harder-to-reach groups and encouraged these students to take the plunge and move from student videos to marketable short and even feature-length films. A good example of this phenomenon is Glenda Nicácio, a graduate of the film course at the Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahia, Cachoeira campus: a “new” university opened by President Lula in 2004. Nicácio and fellow graduate Ary Rosa set up a production company in Cachoeira, Rosza Filmes, in 2011 and have gone on to make four very well received feature films.<sup>18</sup>

However, scholarship in English (or any language, for that matter, including Portuguese) has been slow to reflect this growth in Afro-Brazilian film production. Furthermore, a quick online search of Black Cinema courses taught in English reveals an almost universal absence of reference to audio-visual production in the world's largest African diaspora,<sup>19</sup> and there continue to be very few university film studies programmes that engage meaningfully with films made by Afro-Brazilians, although this is slowly changing. It is little wonder, then, that the “structuring absence” of Afro-Brazilian cinema continues unabated in the UK and even in most Brazilian university classrooms.

Interest in the prolific Afro-Brazilian short film production, for instance, is very recent, and results from Brazilian film festivals' appointment of specialist curators to their festival teams. By way of example, the presence of Tatiana Carvalho Costa on the curatorial team for short films at the Tiradentes Film Festival since 2019 has helped solidify its reputation as one of Brazil's foremost festivals for showcasing innovative Afro-Brazilian cinema and new forms of storytelling.

In his new cinephilia manifesto, Shambu warns against the cult of drawing up film lists and rankings. It is interesting to reflect that in the Brazilian film context, the Brazilian film critics' association's much-cited list of the 100 best Brazilian films, published in 2015, includes 97 films by white Brazilian men and three films by white women, and nearly all the films are feature-length (*Dib*). And it is worth considering the concurrent obsession with another kind of list: the box-office list, especially on the part of Ancine, the state film agency. A recent Ancine initiative, to offer targeted funding for the most commercially successful filmmakers, seems designed to maintain the racial and gender status quo, given that the more expensive a film is, the more likely it is to be a box-office success, and the less likely it is to have a non-white or female crew ([Dennison 60](#)).

Shambu goes on to describe a myth of scarcity long cultivated and deployed by auteurism. This myth of scarcity is already being vigorously challenged in relation to women filmmakers, with a number of exciting research projects carrying out rescue efforts to research not just the “unsung auteurs” but also women's contribution in various roles along the production, distribution and exhibition chain. In Brazil this is amply illustrated by Tata Amaral's groundbreaking thirteen-part TV series on women filmmakers entitled *As protagonistas* (2021). The aforementioned curator Tatiana Carvalho Costa reports that when she first joined the Tiradentes Film Festival team, there were no records kept of the gender and ethnicity of the directors of films submitted to the festival. Once those records started to be kept, she was taken completely by surprise by the number of submissions to the short film section from Afro-Brazilians. In other words, reports of scarcity are greatly exaggerated and appear to serve to maintain the canonical status quo.

There is also the issue, which Carvalho Costa and others have begun to address, of film appreciation, when films are submitted to festivals that demand to be read beyond an auteurist curatorial tradition. The most widely cited example of this is Yasmin Thayna's *Kbela* from 2015. The film was ignored first time around by festival curators in Brazil, but picked up by the Rotterdam International Film Festival, which has done a great deal to raise the profile of Afro-Brazilian film production: it organised a game-changing retrospective of *cinema negro* in

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18 *Café com canela* (*Coffee with Cinnamon*, 2017), *Ilha* (*Island*, 2018), *Até o fim* (*To the End*, 2020) and *Voltei!* (*I'm Back!*, 2021).

19 Brazil is home to nearly half of the 200 million Afro-descendants living in the Americas.

2019. After it appeared in Rotterdam, *Kbela* went on to win awards in Brazil the following year. *Kbela* is a striking, elegantly composed film that explores Afro-Brazilian identity through a series of contested representations of Black hair: it is available free to view on YouTube.<sup>20</sup>

In a similar vein to Shambu, curator and academic Janaína Oliveira, citing Michael Boyce Gillespie, warns against the cult of Black exceptionalism. “There’s always someone who came before”, she argues (“Towards a Quilombo Cinema” n.p.). This sense of exceptionalism is reinforced by a canon that celebrates sole-directed feature films above other forms of audio-visual production. The first feature film by an Afro-Brazilian woman, Adélia Sampaio’s *Amor maldito* (*Damned Love*, 1984), was almost entirely forgotten until greater attention began to be paid in the twenty-first century to films made by women.<sup>21</sup> The irony here, which not only throws into question the exceptionalism of *Amor maldito* but also serves as a timely reminder of the precariousness of film archiving in Brazil, is that Sampaio also made two short films that predate *Amor maldito*,<sup>22</sup> the negatives for which are currently lost in the notoriously underfunded film archive at the Modern Art Museum (MAM) in Rio ([Santiago](#)). Much has been made of the fact that it was not until 2020 that a second film was made by an Afro-Brazilian woman: Viviane Ferreira’s *Um dia com Jerusa* (*One Day with Jerusa*), based on her acclaimed short film *O dia de Jerusa* (*Jerusa’s Day*, 2014). As well as a host of short films, there were, in fact, three other feature-length films made by Afro-Brazilian women before *One Day with Jerusa*: two of Glenda Nicácio’s co-directed feature films mentioned previously, and [Camila de Moraes’s](#) *O caso do homem errado* (*The Case of the Wrong Man*, 2017), a feature-length investigative documentary that examines the case of Júlio César de Melo Pinto, who in 1987 was mistaken for a burglar and arrested by police in the southern city of Porto Alegre.<sup>23</sup> Photojournalist Ronaldo Bernardi was on the scene when the arrest was made: Júlio was photographed alive in the back of a police van, yet he was dead on arrival at the hospital, having been shot twice. Only two years into the Brazilian post-dictatorship phase known as redemocratisation, the case drew considerable media attention and mobilised human rights and Afro-Brazilian groups, representatives of which are interviewed in the film. The case serves as an illustration of Brazilian racism as a perfect crime, as described by the Brazilian-Congolese anthropologist Kabengele Munanga (in [Milena](#)), given that all but one of the police officers involved in Júlio’s death were absolved on appeal. Júlio’s death became known rather euphemistically as “the case of the wrong man”, forcing the filmmaker to ask: “Existe homem certo no caso de execuções?” (Can there be a right man in the case of executions?) ([Moraes](#)). Moraes’s overlooked film is an important document of the growth of protest movements against what [Achille Mbembe](#) would later call necropolitics: the use of (in this case) police power to determine who lives (white, affluent Brazilians) and who dies (the Black and mixed-race population, and particularly young Black men living in marginalised communities).<sup>24</sup>

A useful point of departure for research and teaching on Afro-Brazilian cinema is Zózimo Bulbul’s short film from 1973, *Alma no olho* (*Soul in the Eye*), currently accessible via YouTube. Bulbul, who died in 2013, had acted in a number of *cinema novo* films before writing, directing,

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20 The extent to which a meaningful shift in appreciation has taken place over the last few years, at least in the context of film festivals, is demonstrated by the interest shown in *Olhos de erê* (2020), an “accidental” short feature recorded in portrait mode on a smartphone by six-year-old Luan Manzo that documents the spiritual and affective life of an Afro-Brazilian community in the state of Minas Gerais: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4W\\_-h2AIG8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4W_-h2AIG8).

21 It is interesting to reflect here on the extent to which Julie Dash’s US production *Daughters of the Dust* has been heralded as a “first” in Afro-descendant filmmaking. Sampaio’s feature film predates it by seven years.

22 *Denúncia vazia* (1979) and *Adulto não brinca* (1981). Both films, along with *Amor maldito*, are available free to view on Sampaio’s YouTube channel. For a discussion of the films, see [Freitas](#).

23 A case is frequently made for the inclusion of Raquel Gerber’s seminal documentary on Black social movements in Brazil, *Orí* (1989), in the canon of *cinema negro*, given that the script was based on lengthy conversations with Afro-Brazilian philosopher [Beatriz Nascimento](#), who features very heavily in the film. Both Gerber and Juana Elbein dos Santos, director of the important short film *Orixá ninú ilê* and a founding member of the aforementioned SECNEB (the Society for the Study of Black Culture in Brazil), are examples of white intellectual allies to the cause of the Black movement in Brazil. However, as the rights-holder of the film *Orí*, Gerber occupies the potentially problematic position of gatekeeper of part of the intellectual legacy of Nascimento: as the Afro-Brazilian film critic [Heitor Augusto](#) puts it, the keys to the larder remain in the same hands. [Gilberto Alexandre Sobrinho](#) and [Noel dos Santos Carvalho](#) highlight a number of important earlier films that feature heavily the work/words of Afro-Brazilian thinkers, including Ras Adaúto and Vik Birkbeck’s *Mulher negra TV* (1985), featuring activist Tereza Santos.

24 Mbembe’s 2016 *Politiques de l’inimitié* (*Necropolitics*) was translated into Portuguese and published in Brazil in 2018: it continues to be very widely cited by Afro-Brazilian scholars.

producing and starring in this experimental short, which is quoted by a number of the new generation of Black Brazilian filmmakers as a huge inspiration in their film work and activism: it notably lent its name to the aforementioned Rotterdam retrospective of 2019. With no dialogue and shot with a static camera in a studio, Bulbul uses facial expressions, movement and focus on different parts of his body (armpits, torso, buttocks) to convey in eight minutes 500 years of colonial and post-colonial Black history, which tellingly ends with both a literal and figurative breaking of shackles. As fellow Black filmmaker Joel Zito Araújo has argued, the story of Afro-Brazilians making films did not begin with Bulbul, but the story of Afro-Brazilians assuming their own blackness and making films began with *Soul in the Eye*. Bulbul would go on to make numerous short and medium-length films on Afro-Brazilian themes, as well as the feature-length *Abolição* (*Abolition*, 1988), a striking documentary made on the 100th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Brazil that debunks the myth of a progressive, inclusive future for Afro-Brazilians in the nation post-abolition, and which significantly includes footage of the Afro-Brazilian crew responsible for making the film (Sobrinho and Carvalho 133–4). Bulbul founded both the Centro Afro Carioca de Cinema and the Encontro de Cinema Negro Brasil, Africa e Americas film festival in 2007: as well as belatedly elevating his own filmmaking profile to its deserved place as a forerunner of *cinema negro*, his curating initiatives continue to be references for Afro-diasporic cinema in South America and provided the impetus for a great many projects that support the promotion of *cinema negro* and international dialogues between filmmakers, producers and curators.

The rediscovery of this film ignited interest in self-representation and marked a shift away from representations of Afro-Brazilian experience as directed by white filmmakers.<sup>25</sup> But if *Soul in the Eye* is now the accepted point of departure, this has only been the case in the last five years or so.<sup>26</sup> Until then the usual starting point in discussions of Afro-Brazilians and film was Joel Zito Araújo's *A negação do Brasil* (*Denying Brazil*, 2000), a documentary based on his PhD thesis that analysed Brazilian TV soap operas. While there is no doubt that *Denying Brazil* was instrumental in opening up discussion in audio-visual media more broadly about absences and stereotyping,<sup>27</sup> these discussions still focus on the representation of Brazil's people of colour by white film directors, such as Carlos Diegues. Araújo would make, together with the Oscar-winning US director Megan Mylan, *Raça* (*Race*, 2013), a documentary that followed three Afro-Brazilians over the course of five years and that serves as a potent reflection on the position of Afro-Brazilians under the Workers' Party government.

*Raça* might not be the easiest film to locate, but the issue of accessibility does not fully explain why as academics we have not been able to do a better job of directing discussions of Afro-Brazilian screen representation in the twenty-first century away from films made by white directors such as *Cidade de Deus* (*City of God*, 2003). Since it is based on a novel by Black author Paulo Lins, and since its almost entirely Black cast reportedly provided input into the script, *City of God* is often still included in discussions of *cinema negro*, despite being viewed by many critics as a vehicle for the perpetuation of racial stereotypes (see Dennison 99). In the spirit of decolonial practices and inclusive citation, I want to suggest that it is not enough that we centre *City of God*, and then ethically “cover ourselves” by talking around the edges and duly critiquing this misrepresentation. Why not, instead, centre a film such as *5 x favela, agora por nós mesmos* (*Favela X 5, Now by Ourselves*, 2010), available on DVD with subtitles, with its five self-contained stories of favela life directed by Afro-Brazilians?<sup>28</sup>

One year before the release of *Denying Brazil*, film studies graduate Jefferson De, together with other Black filmmakers, launched an influential film manifesto dubbed “Dogma Feijoada”, in a call for greater representation of Afro-Brazilians behind the camera and a more considered representation of the Black experience on screen. Combining the spirit of the Danish Dogme 95

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<sup>25</sup> It is not the purpose of this article to rehearse such representations (see Stam and Dennison in English, and Rodrigues and Carvalho in Portuguese) but precisely to focus instead on Afro-Brazilian culture and life experiences as envisioned on screen by Afro-Brazilians themselves.

<sup>26</sup> It is worth reflecting on the fact that *Soul in the Eye* is afforded one short footnote in Robert Stam's highly influential *Tropical Multiculturalism* of 1997, meaning that the history of race in Brazilian cinema is explored in the book exclusively through the lens of white directors.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to acknowledge Afro-Brazilian anthropologist Sueli Carneiro's impactful article published in the *Folha de São Paulo* broadsheet in 1999 highlighting the racist portrayal of Black communities in the soap opera *Terra nostra* (Carneiro, “*Terra nostra*”).

<sup>28</sup> See Dennison 100–1.

film movement<sup>29</sup> and Brazil's national dish (black bean stew), with its close associations with plantation slavery (*feijoada* is said to have evolved in the slave quarters, using offal and cuts of meat discarded from the plantation mansions), the manifesto notably demanded that films should be directed by Afro-Brazilians, have a Black leading character, and that the storyline should be connected to Afro-Brazilian culture.<sup>30</sup>

Each of these trailblazers (Bulbul, Araújo and De) has a body of work that can be examined by researchers and teachers (access permitting), lest we believe, given the precarious nature of so much film production in Brazil, that *cinema negro* is made up only of cinematographic ephemera. There is also a tendency not to consider Afro-Brazilian audio-visual production when focusing on genre rather than individual films or filmmakers, or even to think of *cinema negro* as a kind of film genre in its own right, but we can find really interesting examples of genre film within this heterogeneous production.<sup>31</sup> Both the aforementioned Joel Zito Araújo and Jefferson De continue to make feature films in a variety of genres: Araújo's latest feature, *O pai da Rita* (*The Father of Rita*, 2022) is a comedy, while De released a biopic, *Dr Gama*, in 2021, based on the life of the Black abolitionist lawyer Luis Gama. Both films were co-produced by Globo Filmes, the production company linked to the mighty Globo media corporation responsible for almost all of the home-grown box-office hits of this century. Jefferson De has directed a number of series for television in Brazil, and his feature film *M8: quando a morte socorre a vida* (*M8: When Death Rescues Life*) was picked up by Netflix in 2021. A crime drama with elements of the supernatural, the film follows a first-year medical student, the only Black student in his class, who uncovers a plot by the school to use the cadavers of undocumented Black youths, forcing him to confront the thinly veiled racism of his white classmates and the police, and revealing to him the innate power of *ancestralidade*, or shared Afro-Brazilian heritage and life experience.

The burgeoning field of Brazilian horror is ably represented by the co-directed portmanteau film *O nó do Diabo* (*The Devil's Knot*, 2018). The film is noteworthy for the episode directed by Gabriel Martins, a member of the Black film collective Filmes de Plástico formed in 2009, whose filmmakers, both individually and collectively, are responsible for some of the most critically acclaimed, thought-provoking Brazilian short and feature films of the last few years.<sup>32</sup> There is in fact a very rich vein of contemporary Afro-Brazilian filmmaking at the intersection between sci-fi, fantasy and horror.<sup>33</sup> By way of brief example, the Carvalho brothers' short film *Chico* (2017) and the high-profile Black actor and activist Lázaro Ramos's recent big-budget directing venture *Medida provisória* (*Executive Order*, 2022), are set in a very near future in which the government takes action to "resolve security issues" by fitting Afro-Brazilian children and teens with electronic ankle tags in *Chico*, and by the forced "repatriation" of Afro-Brazilians to Africa in *Executive Order*. As well as reading such films within the Brazilian genre movie tradition, to date a white-dominated landscape, they can be usefully examined in the cultural context of Brazilian Afrofuturism, an Afrocentric philosophy of imagining a Black future that has proved popular with Brazil's rapidly expanding body of Afro-Brazilian film critics and cultural commentators (Freelon).

Afro-descendant creators are increasingly contributing to LGBTQIA film culture in Brazil. This contribution ranges from films that travel the festival circuit and are frequently honoured in specialist strands such as the Berlin Teddies (for example, the stunning documentary *Bixa*

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29 See <http://www.dogme95.dk/the-vow-of-chastity/>.

30 In 2001 similar calls were made by Afro-Brazilian audio-visual producers at a film festival in Recife. The Manifesto do Recife (Recife Manifesto), as it became known, was more politically inflected than Dogma Feijoada (Sobrinho and Carvalho 138). Among the signatories of the manifesto were Zózimo Bulbul and Joel Zito de Araújo (Carvalho).

31 Writing in 2018, Afro-Brazilian film critic Heitor Augusto declared an expectation of now seeing "Black filmmakers literally making every kind of film". As Thiago Macedo Correia of the Filmes de Plástico film collective recently put it, "We need to occupy all the spaces in order to hack the system" (Bahia n.p.).

32 For example, Martins's *Rapsódia para um homem negro* (*Rhapsody for the Black Men*, 2015) and *Mars One* (2022), and André Novais's *Fantasma* (2010) and *Temporada* (*Long Way Home*, 2018). For an English-language introduction to the collective's work, see Margulies.

33 These range from feature films such as Glenda Nicácio and Ary Rosa's aforementioned *Voltei!* and Adirley Queirós's *Branco sai preto fica* (*White Out, Black In*, 2014) and *Era uma vez Brasília* (*Once There Was Brasília*, 2017), to commissioned lockdown shorts such as Grace Passô's *República*, and music videos, for example rap artist Emicida's *Eminência parda* (*Éminence grise*, 2019).

travesty [Tranny Fag, 2018])<sup>34</sup> to very low-budget, lo-fi short films that push even further at the boundaries of intersectional representation, such as Diego Paulino's *Negrum3* (Blackn3Ss, 2018), *Perifericu* (Rosa Caldeira, Stheffany Fernanda, Nay Mendl and Vita Pereira, 2020) and Stanley Albano's *Morde & assopra* (2020). What these films have in common with, for example, *Soul in the Eye*, *M8* and a number of contemporary films made by Afro-Brazilian women, such as Thayná's aforementioned *Kbela*, is a focus on the Black body: its unique characteristics, the historical abuses it has suffered, and its challenge to the idea of the white (conservative) universal subject.

While the themes and tropes of anti-racism, *ancestralidade* and Afrofuturism are evident in some of the contemporary Afro-Brazilian film production made by men cited above, much of the most thoughtful audio-visual production that actively engages with a range of Afro-Brazilian philosophies is being made by Black women. In fact *Janaína Oliveira* ("Por um cinema") goes so far as to define contemporary *cinema negro* by the presence of Black women both in front of and behind the camera. Two recent intermedial works by Afro-Brazilian women derived from performance pieces stand out for their aesthetic virtuosity and the opportunity they provide to explore Afro-Brazilian philosophies in greater depth. The first is Michelle Mattiuzzi's 2016 *Experimentando o vermelho em dilúvio II* (*Experiencing the Flooding Red II*) in which, dressed in white and "muzzled", the artist walks through Rio de Janeiro's old slave auction district to the words of Afro-Portuguese writer Grada Kilomba. The second is dancer Ani Pi's *Noirblue: deslocamentos de uma dança* (*NoirBlue, The Movements of a Dance*, 2018), an evocative audio-visual essay in which Pi explores, partly through dance, the experience of visiting the African continent for the first time. Both of these works were screened in Rotterdam as part of the *Soul in the Eye* retrospective in 2019, opening the path for other curators, particularly in Brazil, to create a space for them, even though they do not fit into the pre-existing categories of feature, short, documentary and so on. And while it is beyond the remit of this article to develop this point, such films should also be informing discussions of intermediality in Brazilian film production, which to date have focused heavily on the work of white filmmakers. The extent to which directors make use of a wide repertoire of media to serve as a form of modern *griot* could usefully be explored, for example.

## CASE STUDY I: TRAVESSIA

*Travessia* (*Crossing*) is the first film made by Safira Moreira, a photographer and director from Bahia in Brazil's Northeast. Split into two parts, the first lingers for three minutes on a photograph of a Black woman with a white child in her arms. We see the reverse of the photo: the place, date and name of the child are included: the Black woman is referred to simply as nanny. A lack of photos of her own grandmother, who had been a maid, inspired Moreira to make the film (*Kas*): the photo she uses in the opening sequence was picked up cheaply from an antiques fair and is of unknown provenance. Moreira sets out to fill the photographic void, to "create a Black cartography, a space to navigate between the past and the present-future" (*Kas n.p.*). From the still photograph the film moves to a sequence showing a young Afro-Brazilian woman looking to camera, holding up a selection of photographs of Black families, with accompanying voiceover from Moreira's mother, who describes how family photographs were rarely taken, and only on special occasions. We are then presented with moving images of groups of Afro-Brazilians who prep and pose for imaginary photographs, possible future examples of the Black cartography Moreira refers to above.

The idea of the invisible maid in Latin America has been widely explored: from Peruvian photographer *Daniela Ortiz's* controversial exhibition of photographs extracted from social media accounts,<sup>35</sup> to films such as Anna Muylaert's *Que horas ela volta?* (*The Second Mother*,

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<sup>34</sup> While *Tranny Fag* was directed by two white Brazilians, scriptwriting is attributed to the star, the Black trans performer Linn da Quebrada.

<sup>35</sup> *97 empleadas domésticas* (*97 House Maids*, first exhibited in 2010) consisted of images extracted from Facebook in which maids appear in the background or clumsily cut out of photos of white Peruvians socialising: see <https://www.daniela-ortiz.com/en/97-empleadas-dom%C3%A9sticas>. The controversy surrounding the exhibition arose partly as a result of Ortiz using images (shared publicly on the social media platform) without the permission of the posters. As the photographer herself reflected, this perceived infringement of copyright completely overshadowed the political statement Ortiz sought to make in relation to domestic workers' rights. For an analysis of the exhibition, see *Sacco and Panella*.

2015) and Kleber Mendonça Filho's *Aquarius* (2016), with their deliberately truncated, blurred or erased stills and shots of maids interrupting intimate middle-class family moments. *Travessia* begins in a similar vein, with the focus in the first photograph being on the white infant, Tarcisinho, whom the nameless nanny is holding. As the film progresses, the director arranges fragments of the photo in close-up: by the time the camera draws back, we cannot help but look at the maid who appears both luminous and somehow more in focus. As Juliano Gomes observes: "the dark skin of the woman [...] has nuance: the photometric gauge conforms to her skin tone, which leaves the bright parts devoid of details" (49). We barely notice that this focus shift has taken place as a result of the decentring of the white child, a process that, interestingly, does not take place in the work of the (well-meaning, white) photographers and filmmakers cited above.

*Travessia* is another example of a multimedial work encompassing photography, moving images, the written word (the words, spoken in the first part of the film, belong to the foremost Afro-Brazilian writer, Conceição Evaristo) and music. The film gives considerable pause for thought in relation to the link between images and memory, and the extent to which contemporary filmmakers make use of photography and even moving images (personal photographs and home movies, for instance) to explore questions relating to identity and the past.<sup>36</sup> *Travessia* reminds us that in Brazil, not only is the home movie a privileged medium, but so is the concept of the family album for a great many, and especially Afro-Brazilians.

The film also provides a fascinating exploration of the relationship between still and moving images. The moving images that appear in the second part of the film are essential to demonstrate the agency of the Afro-Brazilian couples and families who take their time to fix their hair and arrange themselves as they see fit for their portraits to be taken.<sup>37</sup> This is in stark contrast to images of Black Brazilians historically "captured" by white photographers, such as the old photograph of a Black nanny that frames Consuelo Lins's short film *Babás* (*Nannies*, 2010).<sup>38</sup>

*Travessia*, along with the aforementioned *Experiencing the Flooding Red II* and *NoirBlue*, challenge the received wisdom that film and cultural production in Brazil to a great extent operate in a vacuum, or at least in relation to cultural production in Latin America and in the context of the Portuguese-speaking world.<sup>39</sup> If the evidence we examine is feature films, then this holds true to a considerable extent. But there is a remarkable consistency in *cinema negro* of referencing common ground with Africa and African diasporic countries, whether through the citation of writers, or the inclusion of songs by Cubans, Colombians or, in the case of *Travessia*, the Cape Verdean singer Mayra Andrade.

All three of the above films (*Travessia*, *Experiencing the Flooding Red II* and *NoirBlue*) were discussed by [Tatiana Carvalho Costa](#) in *QuilomboCinema*, an online course run in 2022 by APAN, the Brazilian Association of Black Audio-Visual Producers. *Quilombo* is the term originally given to the runaway slave communities, many of which are now recognised (although not uncontroversially) as ancestral lands belonging to Afro-descendants in Brazil. The term *quilombo* in relation to culture has been explored at length by Afro-Brazilian philosophers, including Abdias do Nascimento and (unrelated) Beatriz Nascimento: as Carvalho Costa explored in the course, it refers more to a state of mind than a physical space, a spiritual safe space that centres Afro-descendant culture and life experiences: "*Aquilombamento* (marronage) is a possible key to understanding a series of counter-colonial processes that together form a

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<sup>36</sup> The list of filmmakers is seemingly endless, but the work of Petra Costa (e.g. *Olhos de ressaca* [*Undertow Eyes*, 2009]; *Elena* [2012] and *The Edge of Democracy* [2019]) stands out for its reliance on both still and moving images from the filmmaker's family archive to construct narratives in her films.

<sup>37</sup> In an article published in *Film Quarterly* entitled "The Impossible Embrace: *Ilha*, *Travessia* and Black Brazilian Cinema Now", Afro-Brazilian film critic [Juliano Gomes](#) takes *Travessia* to task for having its Afro-Brazilian subjects recreate a white tradition of portraiture, dismissing the film's ending as too conformist. It is interesting that the Portuguese-language version of this article published in 2021 on the online film criticism site *Cinética* has the subtitle "For a Disobedient Black Cinema", pointing to what he interprets as lacking in a film such as *Travessia*. What Gomes fails to appreciate, in my view, is precisely the agency afforded by the shift from still to moving images in this sequence: no photographs are taken and displayed of the Afro-Brazilian subjects.

<sup>38</sup> *Babás* is another example of a film based in part on a white family archive of moving images. See [Randall](#).

<sup>39</sup> It is perhaps worth nuancing this point with a relevant example: while the phenomenon of domestic worker-focused films stretches across the whole of Latin America, it does not follow that Brazilian filmmakers are in dialogue with, and looking for inspiration from, the producers of these films.

pattern of actions carried out by Black people in the Arts, and more specifically, in cinema” (Carvalho Costa, “QuilomboCinema” n.p.).<sup>40</sup> Rather than relegating this information to the usual footnote, I have deliberately referenced Carvalho Costa, APAN and the QuilomboCinema course here in the spirit of citational politics as outlined by the #CiteBlackWomen statement on critical praxis, in recognition of their importance in the development of my recent thinking in relation to Brazilian film culture.

As the course amply demonstrated, there is a great deal of theoretical work that can inform our research into Afro-Brazilian cinema that is being produced by Black women. I cite here a number of authors in order to point readers in the direction of their work (in English): [Tatiana Nascimento](#) (*cuírlombismo*), [Denise Ferreira da Silva](#) (*Negridade*) and [Janaína Oliveira](#) (oppositional blackness).<sup>41</sup> Within current academic research on Afro-Brazilian audio-visual culture, one of the most widely cited authors is Leda Maria Martins, whose work deserves to be much better known outside Brazil.<sup>42</sup> [Martins’s](#) (dense) work on performance and spiral time (*tempo espiralar*) has proved particularly popular in thinking through the specificities of contemporary Afro-Brazilian audio-visual practice, especially that produced by women. Beyond academia perhaps the most influential voice in relation to *representatividade* (“representativity”, as opposed to representation) is that of [Djamila Ribeiro](#),<sup>43</sup> best known for her work on the *lugar de fala* or place of speech, an influential demand within the Black movement in Brazil that consideration be given to who has the right to speak on behalf of whom. While on one level it calls for an uncontroversial recognition of the existence of a “geo-politics of knowledge” ([Mignolo](#)), it has also rubbed a number of (white) public intellectuals up the wrong way, because of what they see as the sidelining of erstwhile valued opinions, but which in reality is merely an overdue centring of Black voices.<sup>44</sup>

As well as the touchstone of the *quilombo*, the approaches developed by these authors to reading Brazilian cultural history challenge, to one degree or another, the concept of the white universal subject. Some tackle the ascendancy of linear time, the pre-eminence of Christian morality (thus inspiration is drawn instead from African-derived religions) and the issue of the *carrego colonial*, or burden of a colonial past which prevents engagement with *ancestralidade*. These scholars often cite the work of earlier Afro-Brazilian intellectuals such as [Lélia Gonzalez](#) (*Amefricanidade*), [Beatriz Nascimento](#) and [Abdias do Nascimento](#) (*quilombismo*), and the more recent work of [Eduardo Oliveira](#) (*ancestralidade*). They seek to decolonise and reconstruct language, as can be seen in relation to neologisms such as *cuírlombismo* (queer + quilombo) and *Amefricanidade* (Africa + America). Black women authors should not, therefore, be exclusively read for the light they can shed on intersectional issues, as crucial as these are. As the #CiteBlackWomen collective puts it:

Once you have immersed yourself in Black women’s work, take the time to let it soak in and shift your thinking. To truly engage, you must let our ideas transform your thinking and let them lead, not follow, traditional, hegemonic approaches to your field. ([Smith et al.](#) 14)

It is precisely this challenge that I am seeking to take up in this article, extending the use of primary and secondary readings/viewings of material produced by Afro-Brazilians to reflect on Brazilian culture more broadly.

## CASE STUDY II: BOA ESPERANÇA

I now want to consider an example of *cinema negro* from 2015, taken from Brazil’s rich music video tradition: *Boa esperança* (literally Good Hope), a video created by MC and activist Emicida. Brazilian hip-hop has been marked by sociopolitical engagement: hip-hop stars frequently

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<sup>40</sup> According to [Janaína Oliveira](#) (“Por um cinema” 46), Zóximo Bulbul would refer to *cinema negro* using the term *quilombo*.

<sup>41</sup> See [Nascimento](#), “Literary Cuírlombism”; [Ferreira da Silva](#), “Black Feminist Poethics”; [Oliveira](#). “With the *Alma no olho*”.

<sup>42</sup> See [Martins](#), “Performing Time, Performing Memory” and “Performances”.

<sup>43</sup> Philosopher and activist Ribeiro coordinates the excellent *Feminismos Plurais* book series, which makes available key works by Afro-Brazilian authors at affordable prices.

<sup>44</sup> For an illustration of the controversy surrounding the term in relation to filmmaking, see [Dennison](#) 105–6.

frame their engaged songs and lyrics in “narrative videos” that depict acts of racism and police violence that continue to impact the lives of, in particular, Black men and youths living in favelas and the *periferia* (the poor suburbs). The focus of *Boa esperança* shifts away from the more frequently represented contemporary male-dominated urban spaces to the symbolic *casa grande*: literally the big house, the plantation home associated with the period of slavery (finally abolished in Brazil in 1888).

According to Katherine McKittrick (“On Plantations” 949), “the plantation in the Americas provided the blueprint for future sites of racial entanglement [...] the plantation serves as one (not the only) meaningful geographic locus through which race is made known (and bodies are therefore differently disciplined) across time and space.” McKittrick envisages the “futures” of the plantation as forms of the modern containment of Black bodies, such as urban spaces and prisons. In Brazil the containment of Black bodies is often represented in cultural production as continuing in a space that is much closer to the *casa grande* of the period of plantation slavery, partly as a result of, for example, the continued existence of large, white-owned homes in rural areas supported by non-white staff, and the architecture of middle-class urban houses and apartments, with their built-in, separate staff quarters.

The music video *Boa esperança* taps into an exploration at the time in various forms of media of the extent to which the relationship between Brazil’s (mostly white) elites and their live-in domestic staff reproduced the relations of the *casa grande* and the *senzala* (the slave quarters). For example, Anna Muylaert’s aforementioned box-office hit feature film *Que horas ela volta?/The Second Mother*, about the relationship between a housemaid and her employer, was released in the same year (2015) and very widely discussed in Brazil: the film itself was a reaction to changes in the law in 2013, which very belatedly ushered in regulations in the working conditions for Brazil’s army of (mostly Black, and mostly female) domestic servants. And educator, activist and ex-housemaid *Preta Rara* in 2016 gave a TED-style talk entitled “Eu, empregada doméstica” (Me, the Maid), with to date close to one million views online. The memorable refrain from the talk is “A senzala moderna é o quartinho da empregada” (The modern slave quarters are the maid’s room).<sup>45</sup> For McKittrick (“Plantation Futures” 8), the plantation (whether symbolic or not) is a “site of black dispossession, antiblack violence, racial encounter, and innovative resistance”, all of which play out in Emicida’s video.

In *Boa esperança* a wealthy white family preparing for a pre-wedding lunch in their sprawling mansion, through a series of (hitherto accepted?) condescending gestures, provoke the ire of the (mostly) Black uniformed staff, who take revenge in ways that mirror the behaviour both of their employers and of the masters and mistresses of the slavery period. The first condescending gesture we witness is an instructional glance shot by the “mistress” in the direction of an older maid, who then takes a younger maid to one side and puts a net hair-covering on her already tied up, tidy hair. The second is when a guest arrives and carelessly drops his keys instead of handing them over the valet at the door to meet him, forcing the valet to pick them up off the ground. The third occurs when the same guest whispers in the young maid’s ear, visibly upsetting her. The mistress’s reaction is to roughly wipe off the barely visible lipstick from the maid’s face with a napkin. All three gestures speak to the legacy of fear of domestic staff’s “unclean body” (*Pinho*), while the mistress’s reaction to the maid’s lipstick places the blame for guest’s lack of decorum on her “provocative” behaviour: the equivalence in the time of slavery is self-evident. Quoting Paul Gilroy, Achille Mbembe describes the “extralinguistic ramifications of power at work in shaping communicative acts” (75), while Nicholas Mirzoeff develops the idea of *visuality* (relevant here, as the images we see are not accompanied by intra-diegetic sound) as a regime of *overseeing* that dates back to the days of plantation slavery. These “common memory images that are habitually called forth to construct blackness as silent, suffering, and perpetually violated” (Keeling, in McKittrick, “Plantation Futures” 9), are, however, juxtaposed with an increasingly aggressive, defiant and urgently delivered rap, which challenges the idea of silence, of impotence, and so on.

The servants’ first gesture of resistance is to communally spit in the food they are about to serve. The ensuing rebellion then plays out in a series of aggressions that hark back to punishments meted out to the enslaved: the mistress is bound and gagged, the older maid threatens the

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<sup>45</sup> For a thoughtful analysis of the maid/mistress relationship as discussed in *The Second Mother*, see Sá. *Preta Rara*’s talk can be found here with English subtitles: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_d\\_n-z3s8Lo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_d_n-z3s8Lo).

other guests with a metal chain that she is wielding like a whip, and the family's clothes are burned. The bride-to-be's unexpected reaction (she is seemingly turned on by the violence and begins making out with the valet) serves to further emphasise the moral decadence of the family and their guests, and the extent to which they continue to sexually objectify Black Brazilians.

The video is shot in slo-mo with blurred, obfuscated and/or awkwardly angled camera work and choppy editing in order to challenge the viewer to make sense (or make a *different* kind of sense) of the story unfolding before them. It picks up on some of the lyrics and mood of the song. For a start, the title, literally good hope (as in Cape of Good Hope), is used ironically by Emicida (the Cape meant the opposite of good hope for those in the slave ships being “exported” to the new world from Africa—the *navios negreiros*, referenced in the track's chorus). It thus points to the need to look beyond surface meanings and challenge traditions, even linguistic ones. The chanting at the beginning of the chorus that opens and closes the track has Afro-diasporic resonances in terms of style. The chorus itself mentions lack of empathy for “brothers”, the fact that favelas are a modern-day *senzala*, and the presence of a ticking time bomb. The build-up of tension in the video matches the pace of the track, with its own build-up of tension highlighted by the increasing urgency of the vocal delivery. The verses speak of ancestral ties with Africa, and of entities from Afro-Brazilian religions. These are represented in the video by the older maid, who appears to morph from the traditional docile figure into a kind of *preta velha*, an entity from the syncretic religion *Umbanda*, complete with cigar and wild hair.

Emicida's music videos are produced through his own company Laboratório Fantasma, set up in 2009, and they are frequently directed by well-known filmmakers: *Boa esperança* was co-directed by Katia Lund (*City of God*) and documentary filmmaker João Wainer. Emicida's often elaborate narrative videos, which incorporate beyond-the-track dialogue, are part of a much wider audio-visual repertoire associated with the star: he produced and starred in *AmarElo: It's All For Yesterday* (2020), available to view on Netflix worldwide, a behind-the-scenes look at his groundbreaking concert in the elitist Municipal Theatre in São Paulo which is designed to raise awareness of the history of racism in Brazil.

With its longer length, cinematographic overhead opening shot, list of credits and dialogue that both pauses the track and is heard after the track itself has finished, *Boa esperança* can be inserted in a raft of recent music video productions that subvert classical and conventional videoclip paradigms in order to simultaneously make a political statement and find a sizeable audience beyond music video fans online. It offers a contribution to debates about race relations in contemporary Brazil, created in the most part by Afro-Brazilians (the idea for the story and look of the video came from Emicida). For these reasons I posit that it constitutes a widely viewed (4.5 million hits on YouTube) contribution to *cinema negro*. It offers an antidote to so many feature and short films about maid/mistress relations made by white filmmakers, which appear to serve primarily to “extirpate middle-class guilt” (Randall 283)<sup>46</sup> and prioritise discussions of class over race.<sup>47</sup> In *The Second Mother*, for example, the (lone) maid only tentatively rebels against the system when she quits her job as a “second mother” (or nanny) and goes to live with her own daughter. In *Boa esperança* the communal rebellion and succeeding flight to an unknown space is an act of resistance against cruelty but also containment. Its framing draws a clear analogy with slave resistance and the (literal and figurative) *quilombo*. In this it reconfigures discussions away from the concept of *cordialidade* (cordiality) that has dominated the analysis of cultural production depicting housemaids in Brazil over the last decade or so.<sup>48</sup> As off-screen news reports inform us at the end of *Boa esperança*, the servants protest over pay and conditions, provoke similar rebellions elsewhere and do not physically harm their white

46 In her monograph on class in Latin American cinema, [María Mercedes Vázquez Vázquez](#) refers to these films as “cine clasmediero” (middle-class cinema).

47 I have argued elsewhere ([Dennison](#)) that it really should be anathema to disambiguate race and class in the Brazilian cultural context. It is interesting in this regard to note the choice of light-skinned/white actresses to play the maid in both *The Second Mother* (Regina Casé as Val) and *Aquarius* (Zoraide Coletto as Ladjane), arguably opening up the film texts to be read as a critique of prejudice stemming from class rather than race. In a more recent film featuring a housemaid, Sandra Kogut's *Três verões* (*Three Summers*, 2019), the housekeeper (played once again by Regina Casé), while demonstrating greater agency than Val in *The Second Mother*, still relies on paternalism to get on in life: she inherits an apartment from the father of her boss, who is portrayed in the film as humble (i.e. lower-class, like the housekeeper) and incorruptable, unlike his dodgy, incarcerated son.

48 See, for example, the articles in the special issue of the *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* that I guest edited in 2018.

bosses. They do, however, still wreak a sneering, humiliating revenge on them,<sup>49</sup> which proved particularly satisfying for Emerica's Black and "white ally" fanbase to view.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Afro-Brazilian philosopher Sueli Carneiro (*A construção do outro*) develops *Boaventura de Sousa Santos's* idea of epistemicide ("The Fall"; *Epistemologies*) as indicative of the refusal to recognise Brazilian Afro-descendants as producers of knowledge. There are creative ways that we can challenge this epistemicide, beyond screening more Afro-Brazilian films and discussing the work of Afro-Brazilian philosophers. For example, a number of universities already work closely with Latin American film festivals, or even organise their own, to ensure that the latest films can be accessed by students and researchers, such as Duke University's hosting of the North Carolina Latin American Film Festival, which in 2021 took as its focus Afro-Latin American film production. We can (and often already do) record and share guest lectures by Afro-Brazilian filmmakers and thinkers and provide interpreters when needed. We can formally pool our knowledge of sourcing material, through open access resource-sharing sites such as *Cinegogia*, which includes Afro-Latin American films. Journals, publishers and research quality assessors are slowly waking up to the importance of translation-as-research and not only as one research tool among many others. The founder of the #CiteBlackWomen initiative, *Christen Smith*, was involved with an excellent example of translation-as-research in the field of Afro-Brazilian Studies: together with Archie Davies and Betânia Gomes (daughter of Beatriz Nascimento), she published "*In Front of the World: Translating Beatriz Nascimento*" (2021), a long article that combines rigorous scholarship and long overdue translations of Nascimento's work. It is an excellent example of collective knowledge production and the potential such an approach has for "decolonising" the practice of citation, meaning that Nascimento's work can now be applied to other disciplines. Perhaps those of us working in Modern Languages with the linguistic skills and contacts beyond (white) Anglo academia, with the support of our institutions that are keen to "decolonise" the university, could commit to a "radical praxis of translation and transnational collaboration" (*Smith et al. 12*) in order to ensure that the work of key authors (such as Leda Maria Martins and *Djamila Ribeiro*) is better known outside their countries of origin.

At the same time, Katherine McKittrick (*Dear Science 25*) warns against the mere signalling of "a handful of key scholars", thus reducing them to "tokens of exchange". As the #CiteBlackWomen collective provocatively puts it, "Don't just slap us onto your bibliography—critically engage us." What is striking in relation to new forms of Afro-Brazilian film curation is that they are themselves frequently framed around complex theoretical concepts devised by African and Afro-diasporic scholars that will require our close attention. Here I reference again the important work of Tatiana Carvalho Costa: her "*Cosmopoética do invisível*" (*Cosmopoetics of the Invisible*), a textual discussion around the idea of *quilombo* cinema and the poetics of refuge based on the work of both *Beatriz Nascimento* and the more recent scholarship of Deneten Toam Bona, introduced a strand of Black filmmaking at the FestCurtasBH short film festival in Belo Horizonte in 2021.

As I hope to have demonstrated in this article, there is much to be gained from the perspectival shift afforded by actively seeking out the work of non-canonical filmmakers and thinkers. Even while actively critiquing or debunking them, I acknowledge that I have relied for too long on theories of Brazilian national identity that either offer generic, universalising interpretations of Brazilianness, such as Buarque de Holanda's "cordiality", or that, to borrow a phrase from *Beatriz Nascimento*, offer a vision of race relations "of the *senzala* as seen from the *Casa Grande*", such as the work of Gilberto Freyre. Through my analysis of *cinema negro* and in particular *Travessia* and *Boa esperança*, audio-visual works that are "non-canonical", "non-dominant" but at the same time represent very different types of production that occupy very different spaces within film culture, supported by readings almost exclusively drawn from Afro-descendant scholars, I have been obliged to adjust my thinking in relation to the transnational quality of contemporary

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<sup>49</sup> The fact that *Boa esperança* portrays a community-led revenge against white patriarchy, in contradistinction to US-based singer Rihanna's *Bitch Better Have My Money*, was picked up on and praised by African-American audio-visual blog *Shadow and Act* (2015). The two race-inflected revenge videos were released within a day of each other.

film production and the make-up of genre film. Perhaps most importantly, I have been given pause for thought with regard to the relationship between so-called “maids and mistresses”, a topic that I have too readily published on and taught without considering the *lugar de fala*, or how the vision of (well-meaning) white filmmakers and theorists cannot be taken as universal.

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