

Representation and Stereotypes of Black Women in Brazilian Film

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Abstract: This article¹ presents a feminist critique of the Brazilian film industry through the analysis of the representation of black women in the highest-grossing movies released over the last years. Our effort is divided into three parts: first, we review the literature on gender and race in Brazilian film, showing that the interplay between these categories have been seldom explored and the few works that do it suffer from methodological flaws; then we make a descriptive quantitative analysis on the profile of the top-grossing movies produced in Brazil; and, finally, we propose a typology of stereotypes associated with black and brown female protagonists. The results allow us to conclude that black women are still severely underrepresented and predominantly represented by negative stereotypes that convey oversexualization, mischievousness, and domesticity.

Keywords: black women; Brazilian cinema; racism; representation; stereotype.

The growth of Brazilian cinema industry in the past years occurred in parallel with the increase of feminist criticism to its productions.² The number of movies produced has increased considerably, as well as their audience and state funds directed towards the sector (ANUARIO ESTATISTICO DO CINEMA BRASILEIRO, 2015, 2016). Brazil appeared in a selection of twelve countries in research by *Gender Bias Without Borders*, which defined its scope according to the profitability of audiovisual markets throughout the world. Published in 2015, resulting from the partnership between important international institutions, research centers, and universities, the study investigated ten of the top grossing movies from each chosen region and shed light on a negative global pattern of female representation in cinema: women play a minority of plots, have fewer lines, are rarely associated with prestigious professions, are more often sexualized, and have greater possibility of being linked to commentaries about appearance (Stacy SMITH, Marc CHOUEITI; and Katherine PIEPER, 2015).

The feminist criticism of movies produced in Brazil show a great methodological diversity. On the one hand, there are qualitative works that randomly select movies according to the authors' personal preferences or to a primary bias, such as the narrative having characteristics that can be considered relevant for investigation themes (Sônia MALUF, 2002; Debora BREDER, 2013; Paloma COELHO, 2013; Fabián NUNES, 2015). On the other hand, systematic studies that seek to delineate gender inequality in a more general scope in the cinema productive chain, such as *Gender Bias Without Borders*, are still scarce. In 2015 and 2016, the *Anuário Estatístico do Cinema Brasileiro* (Yearbook of Brazilian Cinema), published by ANCINE's Brazilian Cinema Observatory, added the variable *gender* to data about directing, but did not present descriptions about cast and character representation. In an academic scope, Paula Alves *et al.* contributed with an exception and showed, with quantitative methodology and a broad analysis corpus, that women are a minority in direction,

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script, cinematography, production, and protagonist roles (Paula ALVES, José ALVES, and Denise SILVA, 2011; Paula ALVES and Paloma COELHO, 2015; Paula ALVES DE ALMEIDA and José Eustáquio ALVES, 2016).

However, such scarce examples of broad attempts of capturing gender inequality leave aside an important aspect: intersections with ethnicity. The present paper aims at contributing to feminist cinema criticism with considerations about the participation and representation of black women in Brazilian feature films. We understand that unidimensional analysis, focusing only on gender or ethnic variables, end up ignoring crucial aspects of the intersection between these two modes of discrimination, responsible, simultaneously, for severe asymmetries in our society.

Black feminism has been, for a few decades, criticizing the use of the category “woman” as a homogeneous reference to a group transversed by countless internal differences. According to this argument, by not verifying the connections between race and gender, authors get a distorted vision of reality, underestimating the contextual specificities of black women (Angela DAVIS, 1981; bell hooks, 1982, 1992; Audre LORDE, 1984; Léila GONZALEZ, 1984; Kimberle CRENSHAW, 1991; Patricia COLLINS, 2000; Sueli CARNEIRO, 2003; Claudia CARDOSO, 2014). Ana Carolina Escosteguy and Márcia Messa (2008), Tania Montoro (2009), and Montoro and Ceíça Ferreira (2014) emphasize the absence of centrality of the ethnic question and the connections to gender in communication studies. In a similar direction, Giselle Santos (2016) notices, in the field of feminist studies in Brazil, the marginalization of intersectional perspectives, that is, considering the association between other variables – gender, ethnicity, class, etc.

Two perspectives that analyze the situation of black women in a somewhat broad sample of movies are worth mentioning: a study by the Multidisciplinary Study Group for Affirmative Action (GEMAA-IESP-UERJ) and the book *O Negro Brasileiro e o Cinema* (African Brazilians and Film), by João Carlos Rodrigues. In the first case, the publications present the participation of diverse populational groups in the main audiovisual occupations – directing, scriptwriting, and acting – as well as some characteristics attributed to the characters, using descriptive statistics. Considering a selection of commercially successful Brazilian movies from the past decade, results show that, among other profiles, black women are excluded from direction and scriptwriting roles and are the least represented group in casting (Marcia CANDIDO; Gabriella MORATELLI; Verônica DAFLON; and João FERES JÚNIOR, 2014; CANDIDO, Luiz Augusto CAMPOS; and FERES JÚNIOR, 2016). Journalist and researcher João Carlos Rodrigues’ work aims at reconstructing the history of the representation of African Brazilians in national cinema, providing criticism on an extensive filmography (João Carlos RODRIGUES, 2011).

However, in both approaches the union between quantitative data that maps the participation of black women in the casting of national cinema, and qualitative data describing how this group has been represented in film narratives, is absent. To fill this gap, we begin with a discussion on stereotypes and criticism of Rodrigues’ study (2011). Then, we describe the methodology employed in our research. Finally, we present data about the participation of black women in main roles and propose a classification typology of stereotypes, considering the one proposed by Rodrigues, but geared mainly towards black female protagonists, both of brown and black color.

The problem with stereotypes

Analyzing representations is swampy ground: meanings associated to images are frequently varied, and sometimes disconnected or even contradictory. However, this does not mean that images are incomprehensible and that we cannot explore and try to organize the meanings they enclose. Stereotypes are practices of representation and, therefore, acquire meaning within the cultural, social, and political contexts in which they are produced. Even if media studies consistently thematize stereotypes, rarely do they approach the articulation between axes of production – how they are formed and with what characteristics – and circulation – how they are propagated. There is still the axis of reception, which seeks to evaluate reactions that a certain cultural production causes in public. In the present paper, we prioritize the connection between production and circulation since we seek to describe the representations of black women propagated in movies with a wider audience.

On the other hand, it is worth noticing that not all representations are stereotypical, which leads us to the question “what is a stereotype?”. Stuart Hall calls attention to the distinction proposed by Richard Dyer between “types” and “stereotypes.” If, on the one hand, “types” are characterizations that help people make sense of the social world through general, flexible schemes, stereotypes work by using exaggerated simplifications (Stuart HALL, 1997, p. 258). To Hall, stereotypes are formatted by four logics: (1) essentialization; (2) reductionism; (3) naturalization of differences; and (4) construction of binary opposites. The representation of human groups using a few simple features involves their essentialization and reduction. Naturalization, on its turn, consists in affirming difference as about everyday life, intrinsic to reality and, in this sense, scarcely subject to contestation, such as the representation of a universal, fixed “truth.”

Contrary to what is inscribed in culture, which is subject to change, the construction of something as “natural” normalizes differences and stabilizes imaginaries on social roles related to

the portrayed groups. Establishing such positions is not a neutral practice. It involves power relations that sustain binary oppositions: black and white, women and men, rational and passionate, etc. (HALL, 1997). Feminist criticism highlights how the representation of women is always associated to the private world, to caregiving and family life. Such a characterization is built as the “Other” of the masculine, which appears dedicated to prestigious tasks, and the enjoyment of public space (Simone BEAUVOIR, 1967).

Since stereotypes involve asymmetrical positions, encompassing both enunciator and what it states, the reproduction of such representative schemes tends to be more prevalent in severely unequal societies (HALL, 1997). Stereotypes cannot be reduced to mere unreality: day-to-day experiences influence the formation of stereotypes, just as these affect perceptions and identities (Flávia BIROLI, 2011; Verônica DAFLON, 2014). In addition, the connection between stereotypes and power relations is not restricted to the dichotomy rulers/ruled: people in disadvantaged positions can mobilize stereotypes as instruments for political struggle and resistance (Antônio Sérgio GUIMARÃES, 2002; Paulo NEVES, 2005 apud. BIROLI, 2011), while others identify the possibility of subverting negative roles in stereotypical characters (Noel CARVALHO, 2005).

Even if there are strategic uses for stereotypes and resistance to them, it is important to consider that such representation practices are also entwined with inequalities concerning their capacity of circulation (BIROLI, 2011). Film productions supported by *Organizações Globo*, for instance, are spread through an extensive advertisement structure, which cannot be compared to the marketing possibilities of independent movies. Hence our choice of studying movies with a larger audience, since their social impact is potentially higher.

Facing the difficulties of assessing the movie circulation in the diverse spaces they circulate – internet, rental stores, etc. – we utilize public data provided by the National Cinema Office (Ancine). The selection of large audience narratives seeks to find out whether Brazilian cinema popularizes for black women what Iris Young (1990: 58) characterizes as “cultural imperialism,” a form of oppression that radiates established meanings that are exterior to the groups being represented, erasing their narratives and reproducing stereotypes at the same time.

Stereotypes are not always imagined as negative: the representation of brown or “mulata” women as sex symbols is part of an iconography that is celebrated within the conception of a miscegenated Brazilian nation. Nevertheless, such representations occlude the violence suffered by women as resulting from the hypersexualization of their bodies (DAFLON, 2014). The figure of the “mulata” is usually presented as a sexual object to which the possibility of mutual recognition in relationships of love and tenderness is denied (FERES JÚNIOR, 2006). It is a form of racial prejudice that ascribes to the body marks of inferiority, in this case, the non-aptitude for deeper relationships. It is this side of stereotypes that we aim at observing: in synthesis, we seek to examine the regularity of representations that confine black – and brown – women to singular positions of otherness in diverse social relations.

In *O Negro Brasileiro e o Cinema*, João Carlos Rodrigues uses the notion of “archetype,” inspired “in the Jungian sense of symbols that express universally appealing sentiments” (RODRIGUES, 2011, p. 22). Inspired in the work of anthropologist Pierre Verger, who described characteristics of African Brazilian deities, the author formulates a typology of the roles played by black actors in Brazilian cinema, whose meanings were forged by the imagination and ambiguous feelings of whites, some originating from slavery, others not. Literature and television characters guide, along with cinema, the representation of thirteen archetypes on black people: “old-black-man” (nice, kind, religious, and wise), “black-mama” (suffering, conformed, and selfless), “martir” (strong and resilient to life’s misfortunes), “white-souled black person” (able to avoid adverse situations, polite, seeks to integrate with white people), “noble savage” (hard-working, worthy), “angry black person” or “politicized militant” (belligerent, rebellious, revolutionary), “negão” (sexualized, perverted, insatiable), “malandro” (ambivalent, unstable, violent, sincere), “favela person” (honest, hard-working, samba enthusiast, humble, fearful, marginalized), “crioulo doido” or “nega maluca” (naïve, childlike, nice and funny), “mulata bombshell” (beautiful, vain, irritable, sassy, prostitute), “muse” (respectable prude), and “African-Bahian” (a black person trying to reaffirm cultural heritage from the state of Bahia). Besides oscillations within each archetype – the favela person, for instance, can be either hard-working or marginalized –, Rodrigues also highlights other subcategories, such as the “street rat,” who floats between the categories of “malandro” and “crioulo doido.”

The book’s most recent edition presents a filmography released until 2010, totalizing 229 cases. However, some wide-reaching productions with black female protagonists were left out: *Amarelo Manga* (2003), *Amor por Acaso* (2010), *As Alegres Comadres* (2003), *Baixio das Bestas* (2007), *Flordelis* (2009), *Mulheres do Brasil* (2006), *Narradoras de Javé* (2004), *Saneamento Básico* (2007), *Mais Uma Vez Amor* (2005). If the amount of black male characters in cinema is already higher than black female characters, such unjustified absences increase the imbalance between gender groups and, moreover, exclude productions that were on the spotlight in the audiovisual market. Research that intends to reconstruct the history of African Brazilians in the national audiovisual cannot, or at least

should not, underestimate female participation. Adelia Sampaio is a remarkable example of this problem since she was the first black woman to direct a feature film in Brazil – *Amor Maldito* (1984) – and she is not even mentioned. This movie is a landmark not just for the gender and heritage of the director, but also for representing a rare theme in Brazilian cinema: a romance between two women.

Even though, throughout his text, Rodrigues narrates episodes of resistance and contestation, such as the experience of Black Experimental Theater, by Abdias Nascimento, or the claims by black artists and intellectuals for the presence of more individualized characters, the author seems to suggest, as his conclusion, that the responsibility for the subaltern situation in the art world lies with the black population itself. That is, he ends up reducing a broad social issue to the same stereotypes identified in his work: the image of African Brazilians associated to samba and beer - central aspects of the figure of the “*malandro*.”

Evoking only the lack of money is inconclusive, for many events about blacks continue to have a white majority in the audience, while samba and beer gatherings remain full. There still seems to be a profound lack of interest by African Brazilians in any intellectual activity that reflects about themselves (sic). “Being black” is enough, which is another typical symptom of our neocolonial sub-development. Such crucial questions can be answered only by the community itself, and this will only happen when it sees itself in a less idealized and self-congratulatory fashion, without falling into the isolationist trap of multiculturalism, and keeping its syncretic and anthropophagic characteristics (RODRIGUES, 2011, p. 151).

It is no less symptomatic that one of the main Brazilian works to gather filmography with black participants results in such disconnected statements about the structural character of social inequalities that affect people based on ethnicity. We intend, in the following pages, to offer an analysis with a more strongly delimited methodological scope, paying special attention to the social group that is most affected by inequality in cinema, that is, black women.

It is important to highlight that the present work aims to approach the possible recurrences of specific social roles related to the group, not to establish moral judgment on such roles or about the social criticism present in the plots. The notion that cinema represents reality can serve as a foundation to justify that most characters in a situation of poverty are black since they are the most affected by social inequalities. However, the representation of reality cannot serve to ignore other realities. The repetition of a few characteristics for broad groups of society suggests more of the reproduction of prejudices than of a clear correspondence with the population.

Methodology: sources, criteria, and period

The scope of movies under analysis was selected based on data from the National Observatory of Brazilian Cinema (OCA) and National Cinema Office (Ancine). Due to the audience's focus on a few works, we selected the first 20 movies in yearly listings, in a timeframe covering 13 years (from 2002 to 2014). In 2014, for instance, 114 movies were released, but the 20 most successful in terms of public were responsible for 94% of the people who attended exhibition rooms. In 2002, excluding documentaries and children's movies, there were only 18 releases. It is worth noticing that we chose not to consider the two genres for believing they require different analytical frameworks. The sample amounted to 257 audiovisual productions, with the exclusion of the movie *5x Favela*. Due to its high quantity of directors, scriptwriters, characters, and narratives, which, despite being set in the same urban space of the favela, compose a set of short films, we believe it ends up being a deviant case.

Quantitative studies on diversity in Brazilian cinema follow two patterns in selecting characters: on the one hand, exclusively protagonists (ALVES; ALVES and SILVA 2011; ALVES and COELHO, 2015; ALVES DE ALMEIDA and ALVES, 2016) and, on the other hand, considering those who had lines or were named (SMITH, CHOUETI e PIEPER, 2015). In an attempt to expand the analysis beyond protagonists, our initial criterion was to investigate all characters who appear in three ways in the movies' marketing material: (1) relevant appearance in the movie preview, (2) mention in the synopsis available at the website Cineclick (www.cineclick.com.br), and (3) presence in the official posters. This phase counted 1,181 characters who were then analyzed according to their protagonism in the narratives.

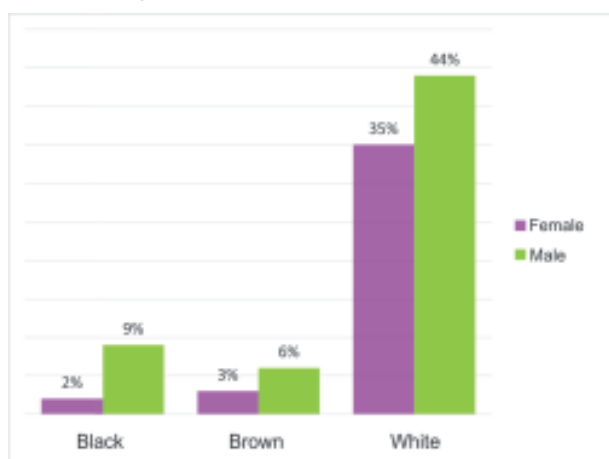
Besides organizing by genre, we computed the ethnic identity of the actresses. We attributed this identity by the method of hetero-classification, that is, by analyzing photos found in search engines. Doubts about the identification of certain characters were submitted to more turns of classification by more than one coding. We employed the same categories as the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE): white, black, brown, yellow, and indigenous (Rafael OSÓRIO, 2003, p. 7). This method of establishing ethnicity is far from unproblematic but has its advantages, as pointed out by Campos e Machado (2015): ethnic classifications are fluid, and there is the ethical issue of imposing an identity onto another human being. However, when this effort is made collectively, the classification has a higher chance of corresponding to consensual perceptions at play in a given society. Moreover, recent research shows that data resulting from a process of hetero-

classification resemble data from self-declaring (DAFLON, 2014). Finally, it is practically impossible to obtain ethnic self-declaration from all actors, which forces us into choosing to determine such an identity or not to research at all.

Results: sub-representation and stereotypes

Three marketing strategies are frequent in the movie industry: previews, synopses, and posters. Intending to measure the participation of black women in Brazilian cinema in a wider-reaching fashion, we exhibit in **Figure 1**, the distribution of characters found in these media according to gender and ethnicity. Data indicate, intense ethnic inequality in casts, with 79% of roles played by white actors. On the other hand, if we cross gender and ethnicity, data show that black women (2% black and 3% brown) have the lowest representativity, comprising only 5% of a total of 1,181 characters. Such exclusion is more evident when we cross-reference it with the presence of these groups in the actual population: according to the demographic census of 2010, blacks and browns are 50.7% of the population (43.1% self-declared brown and 7.6% black). White individuals are 47.7%, yellow 1.1%, and native 0.4%.

Figure 1: the proportion of characters in the main cast of movies with the biggest audience according to gender and ethnicity



Source: our elaboration using data obtained from the Brazilian Cinema Observatory (OCA).

these movies do not steer away from the commonplace views of black protagonists. Ceci is a prostitute, *Na Quebrada* has the favela as its setting and problematizes the scarcity of professional opportunities for the youth, *S.O.S. Mulheres ao Mar* portrays its only relevant black female character as a maid, with little education, speaking non-standard Portuguese, and approached with a comical aspect.

In movies where black women were protagonists, the predominant social class was low. However, in some cases, it was possible to verify narratives that differed from stereotypes, even if these represented a marginal proportion of the total number of productions analyzed in the research. Out of the selected works, six had black protagonists, eleven had brown protagonists, and one had two protagonists, one black and one brown. The protagonism of this group was found in the following narratives: *Made in China* (2014), by Estêvão Ciavatta; *Totalmente Inocentes* (2012), by Rodrigo Bittencourt Ramos; *Eu Receberia as Piores Notícias dos Seus Lindos Lábios* (2012), by Beto Brant; *Capitães de Areia* (2012), by Cecília Amado; *Amor por Acaso* (2010), by Márcio Garcia; *Flordelis* (2009), by Marco Antonio Ferraz; *Antônia* (2007), by Tata Amaral; *Baixio das Bestas* (2007), by Cláudio Assis; *Saneamento Básico* (2007), by Jorge Furtado; *Ó Pai Ó* (2007), by Monique Gardenberg; *Mulheres do Brasil* (2006), by Malu de Martino; *Filhas do Vento* (2005), by Joel Zito Araújo; *Mais uma Vez Amor* (2005), by Rosane Svartman; *Quanto Vale ou É por Quilo* (2005), by Sérgio Bianchi; *Bendito Fruto* (2005), by Sérgio Goldenberg; *Narradoras de Javé* (2004), by Eliane Caffé; *As Alegres Comadres* (2003), by Leila Hipólito; e, *Amarelo Manga*, (2003) by Cláudio Assis. It is worth highlighting that in the years of 2002, 2008, and 2013 no major production in terms of audience had a black female as its protagonist.

Besides the low participation in casting and the absence in directing and scriptwriting, black women appear only in two movies of the romance genre. In other genres, they appear predominantly in a stereotyped fashion.

When looking at the movies themselves, we find black female protagonists in only 7% of the narratives (n=257). The definition of protagonism considered its literal dictionary meaning. Houaiss (www.houaiss.uol.com.br) defines a protagonist as “the main character in a play, a book, a movie, a soap opera, etc.” Thus, productions such as *Noel, o Poeta da Vila* (2007) and *Garrincha - Estrela Solitária* (2003), despite giving significant attention, respectively, to the characters Ceci, played by Camila Pitanga, and Elza Soares, played by Taís Araújo, were left out for having male characters at the core of their stories. Other emblematic cases were *Na Quebrada* (2014) and *S.O.S. Mulheres ao Mar* (2014). In both cases, black characters have visibility, but Jerson, played by Jorge Dias, and Adriana, by Giovanna Antonelli, are the main references in both plots. Except for Elza Soares, a biographical character,

In order to explain the way such representations are constructed, we propose the following stereotype typology for black and brown women: (1) *mulata*; (2) *favela* woman; (3) Evangelical; (4) street rat; (5) angry or militant; (6) maid; and (7) a fighter. Moreover, we show the few deviant cases that do not fit these stereotyped roles. We believe that black women's subaltern position in mainstream Brazilian cinema requires special attention to the particularities of how the development of the characters' social roles is described. Thus, the proposed typology of the present paper differs from Rodrigues' (2011), since the author does not highlight female participation in the historical reconstruction of the black presence in Brazilian cinema.

"Mulata"

The symbolic role of the *mulata* as a national icon was propagated by different cultural media, from literature through television (Mariza CORRÊA, 1996; RODRIGUES, 2011). The same applies to film: this was the most recurrent profile among black and brown characters. On the one hand, it is a stereotype that celebrates sensuality. On the other, the *mulata* appears as producing social dissent, marked by immorality outside conjugality. While the version of national identity based on supposed ethnic harmony grants the *mulato* men the possibility of agency in constructing the country and, to some extent, his destiny, the *mulata* woman is limited to being an object of desire, mainly for white men. In her pioneer study, Mariza Corrêa (1996) already highlighted the process of invention of the Brazilian *mulata*, who is doubly exposed to issues of gender and ethnicity. Sônia Giacomini (2006) defines the figure of the *mulata* as stuck between two poles: dancer and prostitute. The author also captures the reification of the *mulata* in popular culture.

Such a stereotyping process of black women is not restricted to Brazil. Bell hooks identifies dehumanizing stereotypes in US representations that associate black women to sexual savages, prostitutes, and homewreckers (hooks, 1982). But the Brazilian case presents its peculiarities. The *mulata*, due to her ambiguous representation, is sometimes brought closer to the beauty standards of whiteness, serving to operate a rejection of blackness (CORRÊA, 1996). The 1950s provided the *mulatas* a chance to become sex symbols in terms of beauty. Nonetheless, such a process was rather incomplete, since several roles intended to be represented by black women ended up being played by white women (RODRIGUES, 2011).

The 1970s *pornochanchadas* have some extreme examples of hypersexualized images around *mulata* women. Movies such as *A Mulata que queria pecar* (1977) and *A Gostosa da Gafieira* (1981) express in their very titles (respectively, *the mulata who wanted to sin* and *the samba ballroom bombshell* in free translations) the social roles defined for these women, not just concerning sexuality but also their professions and settings (RODRIGUES, 2011). Our research shows that in contemporary Brazilian film, this stereotype is present in 50% of the works that include brown protagonists.

The recurrence of the same actresses also accompanies the repetition of such a stereotype associated with black women. Camila Pitanga plays prostitutes or the stereotypical *mulata* in most of the productions she appears in. In *Eu Receberia as Piores Notícias dos seus Lindos Lábios*, her character Lavínia is saved from prostitution and drug use by a white evangelical minister, who ends up marrying her. The plot does not end there and creates more content for the unfaithful *mulata* stereotype, who is not attached to ties of marriage. It exposes the affair between Lavínia and her lover Cauby, played by Gustavo Machado. The husband finds out about the affair, assaults Lavínia and kills himself. As a result, the protagonist slips into madness. Just as highlighted by Rodrigues (2011), the few representations of interracial relationships in Brazilian cinema always wind up in tragic endings. Another movie in which Camila Pitanga takes up the *mulata* role is *Saneamento Básico*. She is not a prostitute in this production, but her beauty is her main characteristic and the object of desire of nearly all men in the plot, with nudity scenes in both narratives.

Camila Pitanga's last character to fit this stereotype appears in *Mulheres do Brasil* by Malu de Martinho. Esmeralda, played by Pitanga, is voluptuous, lives in a small city, belongs to a traditional family, and is spoiled by her father. From an early age, she sneaked out to go on dates and did not seem to be inclined to more romantic attachments with men. As she moves to a bigger city to study, the plot suggests that the character makes ends meet by escorting politicians and important men. At last Esmeralda goes back to her mother's house after a long bout of depression, resulting from the loss of the child she was expecting after being beaten up and harassed by the child's father, a politician. Pitanga also played prostitutes in supporting roles in the movies *Redentor* and, as mentioned earlier, *Noel, o Poeta da Vila*.

Dira Paes, classified as brown, is another actress who often plays characters who fit the stereotype of the *mulata*. Psilene, her character in *Ó Pai Ó* goes back to her birthplace, the city of Salvador, after years abroad trying to make it as a prostitute. Her fate is to live in the slums under her sister's roof. Bela from *Baixio das Bestas* faces an even harsher destiny. After going out with three clients, she is sexually assaulted, appearing naked and nearly dead, in one of the strongest scenes in national cinema. The character claimed to enjoy the naughtiness and did not show any empathy towards her colleagues, being hostile to the ones who did not enjoy the profession and celebrating

when one of them was assaulted. This case shows, more than the others, the dehumanizing aspect, as mentioned by bell hooks, present in the construction of stereotypes (hooks, 1982). Complex feelings are not part of Bela's character, who seems restricted to sexuality and misogyny.

Finally, in *Totalmente Inocentes*, Gildinha, played by Mariana Rios, is a woman wanted by everyone in her neighborhood. Even though she is not a prostitute, she uses her condition as an object of desire to get an interview with the community's drug lord and becomes famous in the journalistic milieu. At the same time, she is a fighter, impetuous and opportunistic. The *mulata* stereotype mixes with the *favela* woman: she has a strong personality, lives in a *favela*, and is acquainted with the local drug dealers. However, since it is a romantic comedy, she finds happiness and love in the end.

"Favela woman"

The stereotypes related to *favelas* involve themes such as poverty, criminality, violence, drugs, work, and samba. In general, the *favela* stereotype is attributed to men, as shown in relevant national movies such as *Rio 40 Graus* and *Cidade de Deus* (RODRIGUES, 2011). However, the selection of black female protagonists showed that, among the few black characters, the stereotype of *favela* woman was the only one that repeated itself. Besides Gildinha, classified as brown, the movie *Antônia* exposes the daily life of a group of black women who seek to make a living through rap music. The characters, who live in a *favela*, must deal with local violence and the hardships of making ends meet with their work. Although the rap group consists of four women, two characters have more protagonism: Preta, played by Negra Li, and Barbarah, by Leilah Moreno. Preta struggles but makes a living, providing for her daughter on her own while her husband fulfills the stereotype of the *malandro*. Barbarah, also struggling, is arrested for her involvement in murder after assaulting the young man who beat her brother up. The end of the story narrates her release from prison, the reunion of the group, and their musical success. The movie emphasizes their strength, struggling through everyday life without giving in. In popular language, the characteristic associated with the characters can be described by the term *barraqueira*.

Samba music serves as a background for the other protagonist who fits into the stereotype of the *favela* woman. In *Mulheres do Brasil*, Telma (played by Roberta Rodrigues) lives in a small house at the top of a slum with her mother. Her life goal is to be the standard-bearer of a victorious samba school in Carnaval. Placed in a scenario of poverty, the character works night and day sewing the costume she is going to wear, without worrying about the loss of the one job that paid her bills. After attempting suicide, moved by disappointment due to an event on the day of the parade, Telma survives and ends up happy upon learning that her school was the champion.

The last character among the brown and black actresses who fit the role of *favela* woman is in a biographical production and interacts with another stereotype, the Evangelical. The movie *Flordelis* narrates the real story of a minister, who gives her name to the movie. The character lives in a *favela* and gets involved in conflicting situations to help people in her community. Relationships with drug trafficking, prostitution, and adoption of abandoned minors are some of the themes approached by the movie, which ends with Flordelis' successful career as a religious leader. Even if the movie's narrative shows real situations, the repetition of black characters in settings of poverty, drugs, prostitution, and crime confirms once more the limited view that audiovisual productions provide as to the representation of such women. It is also worth noticing that out of the sixteen women in the movie, only four are black and one of them brown.

"Evangelical"

The stereotype of the Evangelical woman reproduces the evangelical religion as the main aspect of the character's dialogues and experiences. This is what happens with *Flordelis*, classified as black; with Kika, played by Dira Paes in *Amarelo Manga*; and with Dona Joana, Luciana Souza's character in *Ó pai Ó*, both considered brown. Moralism, with the appeal to religion, conducts Kika's and Dona Joana's narratives. Kika is married and faithful to her husband. However, when she finds out her husband is having an affair, she changes her behavior, gets sexually involved with another man, and takes revenge on her husband's lover. From the Evangelical stereotype, who is passive and obedient to her husband's wishes, she turns into the image of an impetuous woman with agency, closer to the *mulata* stereotype. Like other films with Dira Paes – such as the aforementioned *Baixo das Bestas* – this plot presents the actress in scenes of explicit nudity. On the other hand, Dona Joana conserves the strong moralist Evangelical stereotype, looking rather foolish at times. The tragic ending that befalls on the character involves the death of her two sons, brown children who, when playing outside, are mistaken for street rats and murdered by a corrupt and vengeful policeman.

"Street rat"

Carvalho (2011) suggests that white phobia is one of the motivations behind the stereotyped construction of the racialized "other." Such an example is the figure of the "street rat," usually associated

with male characters, characterizing minors, who frequently live on the streets and commit petty crimes. Inspired by Jorge Amado's work, the movie *Capitães de Areia* tells the story of socially marginalized homeless children. Dora, played by Alessandra Storch, experiences poverty while her brother takes care of everything around her. It is worth noticing that she is the only brown child to protagonize a mainstream film in the studied period of thirteen years, and that her trajectory is associated with suffering, crime, and a tragic ending: violent death.

“Angry” or “militant”

White authors often exclude women from more aggressive social roles or with strong power of agency. João Carlos Rodrigues (2011), when formulating his list of archetypes in Brazilian cinema, argues that there is an evolution from the “rebellious black man” to the “politicized militant.” The former is linked to the context of slavery and revolts before the absence of rights, whereas the latter is set in current political dynamics. According to the author, this caricature would be associated only with male characters, who envision utopias, react to situations of oppression, and are usually destined to fail. In mainstream Brazilian film, we find a feminine version of this stereotype: Arminda, played by the black actress Ana Carbatti, in *Quanto Vale ou é Por Quilo*. A militant and a fighter, upon following the corrupt doings of civil society organization and politicians, she rebels and denounces the cynical exploitation of social problems. The movie ends with Arminda's murder and the murderers not being punished.

“Maid”

The “black mama” stereotype has its origins in slavery, which is common to Brazil and the US. The *Mammie*, seen in Brazil as the “black mama,” is the role of unquestionably subservient black women who waive personal interests to provide care for white people and their families (hooks, 1982; HALL, 1997; RODRIGUES, 2011). The suffering and conformity before certain social positions accompany such a representation, currently linked to the figure of the “maid.” The movie *Bendito Fruto*, the only romance in our sample to have a black woman as the protagonist, narrates the story of Maria, played by Zezeh Barbosa. The feature portrays the romance between the white employer and the maid and does not refrain from infusing into Maria the usual characteristics of the “black mama.” The character is in love with her employer, Edgar, who only treats her with tenderness in private. Edgar is ashamed of assuming his romance with Maria due to her being black. Maria's dissatisfaction with Edgar's treatment is only expressed when the character starts flirting with a love from his past, a white woman. At the end of the movie, we find out that Edgar is the father of Maria's son, but he does not recognize him as such. Despite the explicit racism in the plot, it has a “happy ending” with the couple getting together.

“Fighter”

The stereotype of the “fighter” is not present in the usual literature on the subject. But, besides integrating a series of stereotypes mentioned above, it also defines another brown protagonist. Such cases represent the everyday struggles for income and constant search for solutions to the hardships of life. Even if it is not a negative stereotype, it is almost commonplace in the representation of black and brown working-class women. In the recent production *Made in China*, Regina Casé plays Francis, a saleswoman in a store at Saara, the main area of popular commerce in Rio de Janeiro. She is smart and humble, has little money and a big heart. Other than Francis' character, the movie portrays the Chinese in a stereotyped way and reaffirms the belief in the “big butt” as the ideal representative of Brazilian women.

Other cases

The seven stereotypes listed so far, when considered only from the perspective of racial issues, present the regularity of what Stuart Hall (1997) calls “racialized regime of representation,” which considers the repetition of images that attribute meaning to groups due to their ethnicity. The stereotypes of rebellion, related to the *favela* or petty crime – theft and pickpocketing – tend to be associated to black men, but can also be applied to women (CANDIDO, CAMPOS e FERES JÚNIOR, 2016). On the other hand, the stereotypes of *mulata*, Evangelical, and “maid” suggest a “gendered regime of representation,” which designates stereotypes ranging from the hypersexualization of black women to the moralization of their behavior and the restriction of their activities to their function in the private domain.

Not all movies present such clear-cut stereotypes. Some work to break away from such an essentialized construction, demonstrating that such representations are not natural or unavoidable. Among the productions under analysis, the following are relevant in this regard: *Filhas do Vento*, *As Alegres Comadres*, and *Narradores de Javé*. In *Amor Por Acaso* and *Mais uma Vez Amor*, in turn, we are once again faced with the figure of the romantic woman.

Joel Zito Araújo's *Filhas do Vento* has the specificity of thematizing the difficulties imposed by racism to the inclusion of black women in soap operas. It is a movie directed by a militant for the participation of black people in means of communication. The construction of more complex characters and higher participation of black protagonists are aspects highlighted in studies about the work (Cláudia LAHNI, Nilson ALVARENGA, Mariana PELEGRINI, and Maria PEREIRA, 2006). The characters Maria da Ajuda and Maria Aparecida, the black protagonists of *Filhas do Vento*, have their trajectories followed from youth into old age. Four actresses are responsible for playing the two main characters in different periods of their lives. Maria da Ajuda is played by Talma de Freitas in her youth and Léa Garcia in her senior years, and Maria Aparecida is played by Taís Araújo and Ruth de Souza, respectively.

The movie *As Alegres Comadres*, another production with a black female protagonist, carries a specific tone as it narrates the friendship between two women who share the same social position, one white and the other black. Elisa Lucinda plays Miss Rocha, the wife of a wealthy merchant. The role destined to the friends is the same not just as to social class, but also as to personal relations. Both are resolute, faithful women. The common stereotypes of black women are not present in this narrative. However, as for gender roles, the movie reiterates the place of female characters in the private sphere, worried only about aspects of sentimental and domestic life.

In *Narradores de Javé*, the character Deodora escapes the common representations given to brown women. She is presented in a complex, non-stereotypical way. In the movie, directed by Eliane Caffé, characters formulate stories about the small city they live in, to create socially relevant images to avoid expropriation of the territory. Among other protagonists, Luci Pereira's character, Deodora, a woman with a remarkable personality, tells a version of a neighborhood story that highlights female agency.

At last, Juliana Paes, an actress whose color classification is ambivalent – sometimes defined as white, sometimes as brown – is a particular case as she reinforces in two movies the role of the “ideal woman.” Márcia, in *Amor por Acaso*, is independent and holds a management position. Another independent woman, Lia in *Mais uma Vez Amor* is a mother represented as a “spinster.” They are, respectively, comedy and romantic comedy movies. *Mais uma Vez Amor* is the only romance circulating in the national mainstream to have a “brown” protagonist in the past few years. The ambivalence with which Paes is identified in exercises of racial perception can explain her getting roles usually designated for white actresses. Moreover, not corresponding to a racial stereotype does not stop such representations from highlighting gender prejudices.

Final Remarks

The present paper aimed at providing a panorama of the representation of black women in Brazilian film, contributing to feminist criticism by proposing a typology of stereotypes with exclusive attention to this ethnic group. Despite several national studies having sought distinguishing inequalities in audiovisual, they do not usually analyze the interaction between ethnicity and gender, nor do they consider a wide-reaching film corpus. João Carlos Rodrigues' effort (2011) in reconstituting the history of African Brazilians in national feature films is extensive, but suffers from evident gender bias, excluding the important participation of black women.

The present work combined quantitative data with qualitative analyses and sought to map the present types of representation destined to black women. Initially, we located productions that had black women (black and brown) in their main cast, which led us to only 2% of characters played by black actresses and 3% by brown actresses. Between the years 2002 and 2014, 22 characters protagonized 18 movies. It is worth mentioning, once again, that the years of 2002, 2008, and 2013 saw no brown or black women as protagonists.

As if the under-representation was not enough, analysis of the characters we encountered highlights narratives that lack diversity and are often tragic. Almost a third of the protagonists had very different endings from the “happily ever after” of the classic film. Stereotypes represented more than half of the black characters: “favela woman,” “Evangelical,” “angry/militant,” and “maid.” For brown women, the image of the sexualized “mulata” was the most frequent and was often associated with prostitution. The “Evangelical” stereotype was also present. The stereotypes of “street rat” and “fighter” also appeared.

Even though Brazilian cinema has seen considerable changes in the past few years, the structural pattern of black women representation has not yet revealed any significant changes. Stereotypes, sources of prejudice and discrimination, prove to be recurrent when protagonists belong to the studied group. Any suggestion that audiovisual art mirrors reality, instead of being a source of replicating discrimination and sexism, runs into the limitation of the results: black women in the real world are far from having their existence exclusively in the domestic space, or reduced to objects of sexualization or agents of deceit.

Even though Brazilian film has seen considerable changes in the past few years, the structural pattern of black women representation still has not evidenced any significant changes. Stereotypes,

sources of prejudice and discrimination, prove to be recurrent when protagonists belong to the studied group. Any suggestion that audiovisual art mirrors reality, instead of being a source of replicating discrimination and sexism, runs into the limitation of the results: black women in the real world are far from having their existence exclusively in the domestic space, or reduced to objects of sexualization or agents of deceit.

Stereotyping, insulting, and denying recognition are also human forms of expression. Some might even argue that they should not be banned, for without transgression and some symbolic violence, art becomes a normalizing moralist agent. Nothing stops us, however, from identifying the occurrence of stereotypes and trying to determine which social groups are affected by them. This contributes to a higher individual and collective critical consciousness about such representation practices, as well as fostering debate. To conclude, most of the stereotypes here identified are far from transgressive. On the contrary, they redundantly reaffirm the traditional prejudice with which Brazilian society has historically treated those who fail its whiteness test.

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João Feres Júnior - The author contributed substantively in the design of the arguments of the article, in the preparation of the manuscript and discussion of results.

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