

# Gaps in communication and film studies in Brazil: Feminism (and the intersection of gender and race) and film reception

## *Lacunas nos estudos de comunicação e cinema no Brasil: feminismo (e a intersecção de gênero e raça) e recepção fílmica*

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### ABSTRACT

From a bibliographical review, this study investigates two shortcomings in the research on communication and cinema in Brazil: 1) the weak confluence between the Brazilian feminist critique and the media studies (mainly of Anglo-American origin), which, combined with the historical non-recognition of race, determines the scarcity of research on black women; 2) the lack of dialogue between film studies and the theoretical-methodological production of cultural studies, one of the factors responsible for the precariousness of the cinematographic reception studies. Finally, as part of a propositional exercise, a few signs of change are presented, with new publications and research proposals in the areas of representation and reception.

**Keywords:** Brazilian research, communication and cinema, feminism, gender and race, film reception

### RESUMO

A partir de pesquisa bibliográfica, este trabalho investiga duas lacunas na pesquisa em comunicação e cinema no Brasil: a fraca confluência entre a crítica feminista brasileira e os estudos de mídia (principalmente de origem anglo-americana), que, aliada ao histórico não reconhecimento de raça, determina a escassez de pesquisas sobre mulheres negras; e a ausência de diálogo entre os estudos de cinema e a produção teórico-metodológica dos estudos culturais, um dos fatores responsáveis pela precariedade dos estudos de recepção cinematográfica. Ao final, como parte de um exercício propositivo, são apresentados alguns indícios de mudança, com novas publicações e propostas de pesquisas nos âmbitos da representação e da recepção.

**Palavras-chave:** Pesquisa brasileira, comunicação e cinema, feminismo, gênero e raça, recepção fílmica

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MATRIZES

**INTRODUCTION**

**T**HIS STUDY IS centered on a literature review in the field of cultural studies, feminist criticism and film theory, through which it aims to identify and discuss the confluence of two scenarios of scarcity that characterize Brazilian research communication and cinema: feminism (and research on the crossbreeding of gender and race), and studies of reception of film work. To achieve these goals, we first present a brief overview of the contributions of feminist criticism and its links with cultural studies, pointing out its importance in the Anglo-American trajectory of media studies, in contrast with the Brazilian context, in which such a connection is still incipient and features other gaps such as the limited representativeness of studies that approach gender and race in an integrated manner in both communication and film research.

Next, we analyze the new perspectives pointed out by cultural studies for reception studies, especially from Stuart Hall's coding/decoding model of the late 1970s, which maintains its vitality in the empirical research developed in Brazil, mainly on soap opera reception. These studies also integrate the contributions of the Latin American strand of cultural studies, but the same does not occur in cinema studies, in which, due to theoretical and political-institutional aspects, reception research is remarkably weak. Along with this critical intervention that points out the difficulties, there are also some signs of change, as well as proposals for the analysis of representation and reception of films and audiovisual products from gender and race (and other social markers), thus recognizing the production of meanings also in the interpretations and experiences of the audiences.

**“THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL”: CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE FEMINIST LOOK**

Regarding the innovations of feminist theory and of gender studies in the field of communication, it is worth mentioning their interrelationships with cultural studies, especially regarding the analysis of media products, in the scopes of production and reception. In contextualizing the problematics that were most striking in the development of cultural studies, Hall (2003, 2006) praises the “feminist intervention” as responsible for a decisive rupture that effects a conceptual decentering in the construction of the object of study of cultural studies. According to Escosteguy (1998, 2010), this is so because feminism influences an openness to the understanding of the personal as a political sphere, expanding the notion of power (formerly restricted to the public sphere), which

also begins to encompass gender and sexuality issues as well as including themes related to the subjective, the subject and psychoanalysis.

In this sense, the aforementioned author also emphasizes that it was in the area of reception that feminism has significantly contributed to the further development of cultural studies<sup>1</sup>, because of new questions related to the constitution of gender and class identities as well as generational and cultural identities and power relations in domestic contexts of reception of the media.

Such articulations between these two theoretical-methodological perspectives are explored by Messa (2008), in developing an Anglo-American trajectory of the so-called “feminist studies of the media,” which began in the 1970s. Of the various works cited by the author in this Anglo-American context, it is noteworthy the 1979 study *The search of tomorrow in today's soap operas*, by Tania Modleski, which, from Laura Mulvey's film theory (1975, 1983), emphasizes the pleasures and appropriations of spectators as constituents of feminine audience practices of soap operas. As early as in the 1980s, when such fields of study became consolidated, Angela McRobbie, in the 1982 work *Jackie: an ideology of adolescent femininity*, makes an analysis of the feminine magazines directed to the adolescent public and observes asymmetries of gender and race (in specific and intersected ways), since “the brunettes represented in the magazine always engage with someone else's boyfriend, with blond and shy girls being the goodies of the story, whose only life purpose is to have and keep a boyfriend” (McRobbie, 1982 apud Messa, 2008: 45).

The books *Watching Dallas: soap opera and melodramatic imagination* (1985), by Ien Ang, and *Reading the romance: women, patriarchy, and popular literature* (1988), by Janice Radway, are also considered classics of cultural studies and feminist studies, especially because in addition to the analysis of the messages, they investigate ways of reception of such television programs, commonly considered as feminine genre, as claimed by Messa (2008), who also mentions the article “The color purple: black women as cultural readers,” by Jacqueline Bobo (1988), which is part of the collection *Female spectators: looking at film and television*, edited by Deidre Pribram in 1988. About this article, it is noteworthy that, given the controversy caused by the impact of the movie *The color purple* (by Steven Spielberg, 1985), based on the same name book by Alice Walker, and which divided opinions in the black community, researcher Jacqueline Bobo, through group interviews with black spectators, examined the ways a specific audience creates meaning from a dominant production and uses it for their personal and collective empowerment.

In the 1990s, when the institutionalization of cultural studies took place, the encounter of this field with feminist studies of media is characterized,

<sup>1</sup> Escosteguy (2016) reviews these relationships between feminism and cultural studies, through Stuart Hall's theoretical and political legacy, highlighting how the problematics of identity(ies), key in his reflections, still occupies a central place in the agenda and in the political practice of feminist studies.



according to Messa (2008), by the continuity of reception surveys, which articulate gender to such other variables as race and ethnicity. In this sense, the following works are considered as significant: *Women audiences and the workplace*, by Dorothy Hobson, 1990, which analyzes the reception of soap operas among workers; *The export of meaning: cross-cultural readings of Dallas* (1990), by Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes, investigating the readings of different audience groups on the Dallas series; and *Blacks in British television drama: the underlying tensions* by Preethi Manuel (1985), on the limited visibility of the black population on British television, highlighting that black women barely appear, whereas black men appear predominantly in subaltern characters or just as extras.

In this survey, studies that are not linked to the cultural tradition, for example, film studies, are mentioned as well, highlighting the pioneering article “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema,” by Mulvey (published in 1975 in the *Screen* magazine), which deals with gender asymmetries in cinema (in content and form) and still today is a reference for research communication and cinema in Brazil, being as well the subject of new and different readings and criticism.

This brief contextualization shows how the relationship between feminist critique and media studies (of Anglo-American origin), and more broadly with cultural studies, was significant for the analysis of media productions and their representations of gender and race, as well as their uses and appropriations in the sphere of reception. However, as a result of historical, political and institutional factors, such theoretical aspects were little absorbed in the Brazilian research on communication and cinema, as we will present next.

<sup>2</sup> By Laura Mulvey, the following translations are available: “Prazer visual e cinema narrativo” (In: Xavier, 1983 [originally published in 1975]), and “Reflexões sobre ‘Prazer visual e cinema narrativo’ inspiradas por *Duelo ao Sol*, de King Vidor (1946)” (in: Ramos, 2005a [originally published in 1981]); and by Angela McRobbie, the following texts are available: “Pós-marxismo e estudos culturais” (In: Silva, 1995) and “Pós-feminismo e cultura popular: Bridget Jones e o novo regime de gênero,” translated by Márcia Rejane Messa on the website *Cartografias: estudos culturais e comunicação* (2008) [originally published in 2006].

### GAPS IN COMMUNICATION AND CINEMA STUDIES IN BRAZIL

#### Context 1 – Feminism and the intersection of gender and race

From the small outline previously presented, in which ten authors and their respective works (among articles and books) of the cartography elaborated by Messa (2008) on feminist studies of the media are mentioned, only Angela McRobbie and Laura Mulvey have texts translated into Portuguese, two articles from each<sup>2</sup>. This almost total lack of translation of such references confirms Escosteguy’s argument (2012): the links between gender and media studies are still incipient in Brazil, which she proves from two aspects. The first is the realization that in the texts published in the two leading Brazilian feminist journals, *Revista de Estudos Feministas* and *Cadernos Pagu* (created respectively in 1992 and 1993), although one sees a variety of disciplinary and theoretical approaches, communication and media studies are almost absent.

The second aspect is the impact of this shortage on the trajectory of three researchers linked to these themes: Ana Carolina Escosteguy in communication, investigating the problem of reception, combined with its development under the British and Latin American cultural studies, and analyzing the production on communication and gender; Esther Hamburger and Heloisa Buarque de Almeida, in social sciences – sociology and anthropology, respectively –, with research on Brazilian soap opera and its importance in the national context, also taking reception as a focus of interest<sup>3</sup>.

On the field of communication, Escosteguy (2012: 179) indicates that “there seems to be a certain reluctance in the field to welcome feminist ideas.” Such aspect is related to the fact that the engagement with this theme occurred by contact with the foreign literature, still of little circulation in Brazil, which makes the encounter between feminist criticism and media difficult.

<sup>3</sup> A complete survey of researchers contributing to this field of study would exceed the limits of this article. However, some of the major research developed, especially in the field of communication, are referenced herein.

If, on the one hand, the academic production of feminist women on women’s issues is indisputable, on the other hand, the specific interest in media-related issues and their connection with gender issues is still timid. It is only from the 2000s that this approach has been gaining some breath. Contrary to the encounter between feminist criticism and media studies that happened in the Anglo-American context, these respective lineages traced parallel paths with a weak confluence. (Escosteguy, 2012: 181)

According to the author, this marginalization of such research lines should be considered in the context of the development of the Brazilian feminist movement, which in the 1970s, due to the military dictatorship, was divided between specific concerns, such as the discussion of issues related to women’s condition in the Brazilian society and the fight against the repression imposed by the military regime and the struggle for democracy, that is, collective demands were prioritized. According to Escosteguy (2012: 182), this “also contributed to the fact that culture-related themes were not prioritized on the horizon of the feminist reflection.” This would only happen at a later time, which

would justify, in part, the scarcity of feminist studies in conjunction with communication. On the other hand, the centrality of the media in Brazilian society, at least in the last two decades, requires urgency in the development of studies that articulate feminism and the mass media. Thus, it is worrying that little is thought about it, either from researchers coming from Communication or from other areas of knowledge. (Sifuentes; Silveira; Oliveira, 2012: 197)

According to Escosteguy & Messa (2008) and Montoro (2009), some of the challenges faced in the production of communication studies from the feminist and gender perspectives are the difficulty in incorporating the subject into university curricula and the lack of a complete survey of the scientific production of this area. In order to solve the second problem, these authors mapped the research developed in graduate programs in communication and audiovisual and other areas of social sciences. Also using articles, book chapters and papers presented at conferences and scientific associations, such as Socine (Brazilian Society of Cinema and Audiovisual Studies) and the National Association of Graduate Programs in Communication (Compós), from 1995 to 2008, Montoro (2009) highlights the scarce production on the intersection of race and ethnics in the analysis of films and television products.

This limited representation of studies on the intersection of gender and race in communication research in the country is also verified by Montoro and Ferreira (2014) in a recent survey of these topics in scientific articles published in July 2013 in 36 journals, rated by Capes/Qualis assessment as A1, A2 and B1. According to the authors, of the 314 abstracts analyzed, 241 deal with the issue of gender in communication (77% of the total), while the intersection of gender and race is addressed in only 30 articles (9% of the total). Racial themes are analyzed in 43 studies (14% of the total).

Besides being an absolute majority, the articles that analyze the question of gender still cover a variety of topics (such as the representation of masculinities and the articulation of gender and other social markers, such as age; the use of theoretical and methodological innovations, with a highlight to the methodologies of reception), while the tiny amount of studies addressing race and gender in an integrated way proves, according to Montoro and Ferreira (2014), the persistence of a monolithic view on the constitution of gender in the country, and also still prioritizes the study of audiovisual messages, to the detriment of the subjects' experiences and their modes of reception and spectatoriality.

Such voids pointed out by the aforementioned authors in the field of communication are related to another mismatch between Brazilian and American feminist production: the understanding of race in the constitution of gender relations. According to Azerêdo (1994: 204), in the United States of America the racial issue was incorporated into feminist productions, but here, "a racist and unequal country like Brazil, where the experience of slavery was so striking, the racial issue remains largely silenced in our theoretical and practical production."

Although acknowledged as subsumed under the general issue of women, the recognition of race and the privileges existing in the Brazilian society makes it possible to understand how white and black women experience social, gender

and race asymmetries differently. Therefore, since the 1970s, this question is a historical claim of black feminists pointing to a double non-recognition: of race in women's studies and of gender in race studies (Bairros, 1995; Carneiro, 2011; Gonzalez 1984).

These absences are also repeated in film studies in Brazil, as Carvalho (2006) points out, stating that only recently and still in an incipient way has attention been given to the presence of the black in the national cinema, which justifies the small number of studies on racial themes in Brazilian films.

Even scholars of race relations and black culture have not devoted themselves to the subject. Film studies in Brazilian universities are incipient and began in the 1960s. In addition, almost all of them are concentrated in a few public universities located on the south-east axis. So that *a researcher interested in studying the black in Brazilian cinema will be faced with the almost total lack of relevant literature and will have to start from scratch.* (Carvalho, 2006: 19, emphasis added)

From this sparse bibliography, it is worth mentioning *O negro brasileiro e o cinema* (The Brazilian black and cinema), by journalist João Carlos Rodrigues (2012). Originally published in 1988, this is a pioneering study on the subject, but it is limited to the classification and description of black archetypes and caricatures in national cinematography related to slavery and Afro-Brazilian religions; and also the reflections by Araújo (2008) and Couceiro of Lima (1996), who point to the persistence of whiteness (disguised by interbreeding) as an aesthetic ideal common to all media in Brazil, especially soap operas and movies, which reproduce a project of national identity based on the exclusion of the black population.

Recent research has used race as an analytical category, and through them it is possible to glimpse new possibilities for this scarcity scenario. Generally speaking, it is worth pointing out the historical overview of the racial issue in Brazilian cinema produced by Carvalho (2005), which includes the nationalist context of the 1930s, the *chanchadas* of the following decades and the transformations caused by the emergence of the New Cinema movement in the late 1950s and in the 1960s, as well as its developments. Of these, the researcher highlights the production of black filmmakers, such as Zózimo Bulbul, Antonio Pitanga and Waldir Onofre, who entered as actors in the *Cinema Novo* movement and in the 1970s began to direct their own films, from which they addressed the race issue in line with the political and cultural agenda of the black movement in that decade.

Anchored in the historic trading of race in culture and national cinematography, Lopera (2007, 2012) discusses the politicization of racial categories in contemporary Brazilian cinema productions, such as *Quanto*

*vale ou é por quilo?* (Sérgio Bianchi, 2005) and *Quase dois irmãos* (Lúcia Murat, 2005). These new discursive practices, by articulating the racial category with other social markers, such as gender and class, contradict “a tradition that appeases racial relations, emphasize the dimension of the (filmic and extrafilmic) conflict in which they are constituted” (Lapera, 2007: 2). The researcher relates this film production to the social and political changes in the country over the last decade, especially the victories of the black movement in the political arena, with the approval of the policy of quotas for black people and the poor in universities<sup>4</sup> and in public contests, the emphasis on racial issues in the media (as the agenda of debates on television shows and printed media). In this sense, it is noteworthy the repercussion of reports of racism, in recent cases involving presenter Maria Júlia Coutinho and actress Taís Araújo, who in 2015 were victims of racist attacks in social networks.

<sup>4</sup> For the first time in its history, the University of São Paulo (USP) approved on July 4, 2017 the reservation of vacancies for public school and self-declared black, brown and indigenous (PPI) students in undergraduate courses of the institution from next year.

The trajectory of more than seventy years of the actor Grande Otelo in Brazilian cinema is Hirano’s object of study (2013). Based on the intersection of race, gender, body and sexuality, the researcher investigates how this black actor negotiated and articulated such elements in his performance, both on and off screen, which, combined with his talent, allowed him to take part in the different aesthetics movements that marked the national cinematography, from the *chanchadas* to the *Cinema Novo* and the peripheral cinema.

In the very few national studies about black women in cinema (its presence or absence), there is a very specific temporal and/or methodological focus such as in the historical research by Nascimento (2014) on the representations of black women in the movie *Rio, 40 graus* (1955) by Nelson Pereira dos Santos; and Lima’s thesis (2010), which uses the films *As filhas do vento* (Joel Zito Araújo, 2005) and *O céu de Suely* (Karim Ainouz, 2006) to investigate the representation of female subjects in social exclusion conditions in resumption movies. This context also includes studies by foreign researchers, such as Dennison (2006, 2013) of the University of Leeds (England), who uses the concept of whiteness to analyze the gender and race crisscrossing in the performance of celebrities like actress Sonia Braga and presenter Xuxa; and also Stam (2008) of the New York University, who develops a comparative historical analysis of race in the Brazilian culture and cinema, from which he points out: “the most notable absence in Brazilian cinema is that of the black woman” (Ibid.: 2 472).

It is worth mentioning the contributions of Soares (2008), who developed the “Zilda Syndrome,” a theoretical-methodological tool for studying the representations of black women in Brazilian media and cinema. This tool refers to the character Zilda (a maid played by actress Thalma de Freitas in the soap opera *Laços de família*, aired by Rede Globo between 2000 and 2001), who

remains throughout the story taking care of her mistress Helen (Vera Fischer) and her family. In addition, such syndrome has other symptoms, such as the absence of affective bonds; the maintenance of relationships characterized by strong erotic/sensual appeal, and the irresistible attraction to white men rather than black men. These characteristics make up the interrelationships between cinema and the national imaginary from two representations of black women (as a sexual object and as a maid), which indicate, according to the author, a tendency of imprisonment of these characters, in consonance with black women, in a territory of subordination that is also present in the career of precursor black actresses, such as Ruth de Souza and Léa Garcia, and also younger actresses such as Taís Araújo and Camila Pitanga.

The study *A cara do cinema nacional: gênero e cor dos atores, diretores e roteiristas dos filmes brasileiros (2002-2012)* (Candido; Campos; Feres Jr., 2014), developed by the Group of Multidisciplinary Studies of Affirmative Action (GEMAA) of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) points out that, of the total of the main cast of the highest grossing films in this period, the black participation (blacks and browns) was 14% of actors and only 4% of actresses, which confirms the invisibility of black women in the national cinematography in acting, and also in the production, since they are completely absent as directors and scriptwriters.

Although such scenarios of scarcity are still predominant, some signs of change have emerged in recent years, especially in short films, a format which has been used by several black filmmakers from different regions of Brazil in the construction of a Black Cinema in the Feminine, a conception of cinema in which black women assume the leading role in the creation of narratives and thereby they weave strategies of belonging and affection (Oliveira, 2016; Souza, 2013, 2016, 2017). Some of these productions have gained prominence in national and international festivals, such as *Kbela* (Yasmin Thayná, 2016), which discusses the current aesthetic standard by addressing the experience of being a woman and becoming black, and it does so using references from the literature, visual arts and black cinema, as it was inspired by the movie *Alma no Olho* (Zózimo Bulbul, 1974); and the short film *O dia de Jerusa* (Viviane Ferreira, 2014), which, starring Léa Garcia, presents a reflection on loneliness in old age, and *O tempo dos orixás* (Eliciana Nascimento, 2014), a story about a seven-year-old girl's experience (Lili) in her relation with ancestry and religiosity of African origin. These last two productions were selected for the short film show at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival in France.

The production of these and several other young black directors has also been featured in many discussion spaces, such as shows and events. In

2016, the Second Brazilian Black Cinema Seminar is worth mentioning, held by students of the Cinema and Audiovisual Studies program of the Federal University of Recôncavo da Bahia (UFRB), in Cachoeira (Bahia, Brazil), a city that also hosted the *Mostra com Mulheres* during the CachoeiraDoc Festival, which presented the programs *Adélia Sampaio* and *For a black cinema in the feminine*, which later on, in a compact version, also constituted the show *Semana convida CachoeiraDoc – Com mulheres* in the schedule of the 8<sup>th</sup> Week of Directors, in Rio de Janeiro; and the 16<sup>th</sup> *Goiânia Mostra Curtas – Special Show: Contemporary Brazil Black Cinema*, which highlighted the black woman as an audiovisual director and the representation of the periphery from the perspective of black filmmakers.

In 2017, these themes were also the focus of three events: 1) the exhibition “Black Directors in Brazilian Cinema,” in which 46 long, medium, and short films of fiction and documentaries were shown at CAIXA Cultural Brasília, with curatorship by Kênia Freitas and Paulo Ricardo de Almeida; 2) The “1st National Encounter of Empowered Women: Black Women in Audiovisuals” (one of the activities of the *Empoderadas*, a project designed by filmmaker Renata Martins), which, in São Paulo, in July and August of the same year, presented a show of 31 films, a seminar and lectures with black professionals (actresses, directors, editors and researchers); and 3) “I Meeting of Black Filmmakers and Producers/1st Competitive Black Film Show Adélia Sampaio,” held at the University of Brasília under the coordination of Edileuza Penha de Souza.

Thus, this Black Cinema in the Feminine reflects the plurality of audiovisual productions undertaken by black filmmakers, in its diversity of formats, languages and filmic practices as well as forms of representation of black women’s narratives and experiences; and it also resignifies the history of Brazilian cinema, especially by recognizing the pioneering role of Adélia Sampaio, the first Brazilian black filmmaker, who began her career in the 1970s by working at DIFILM – a distributor linked to the *Cinema Novo* movement; she was in charge of the production, script and/or direction of dozens of short films, documentaries and the feature film *Amor maldito* (1984), the first lesbian-themed movie of the national cinema; currently at the age of 74, Adélia is still working on film production.

### Context 2 – Film reception studies

In the context of the 1970s and 1980s, especially given the new perspectives pointed by cultural studies, reception research started being developed. The publication, in 1973, of Stuart Hall’s essay “Encoding and decoding in television

discourse” was central to this field of research that was beginning to emerge. In this paper, the theorist thinks the communication process in its entirety, as a continuous circuit with different but interrelated times (production, circulation, distribution, consumption), which also implies a new approach to messages, considering the possibilities of interpretation that viewers can make of the texts, contents and narratives conveyed by the media from their social, political, historical and cultural contexts.

Cultural studies in the 1970s not only liberated reflection on the reception of the media from the reductionist model of the effects<sup>5</sup> but, analyzing the production and reception of message within a semiotic framework inspired by Marxism, they finally framed reception as a complex practice of social construction of meaning. The Gramscian concept of hegemony is used in the coding/decoding model (Hall) to examine the concrete ways in which the meanings of the media can be negotiated or even subverted by specific audiences. (Lopes and Borelli, Resende, 2002: 28)

Hall (2003) points out three hypothetical positions to think about the process of reception, of decoding the television message: the hegemonic dominant position, also called preferential reading, designates an interpretation of the message according to the objectives of the coders; the negotiated position, which combines elements of adaptation and opposition, that is, a reading crossed by contradictions, which recognizes the legitimacy of hegemonic discourses but, on a more restricted level, develops its own perceptions and rules; the oppositional position, which consists in interpreting the message in a way that is contrary to the codification, resignifying it, recasting it from alternative references.

Although his model expresses an understanding of the production of meaning(s) as a result of a relationship between production and reception, as being susceptible to different forms of interpretation and processing, Hall (2003: 396), in warning that “every society or culture tends [...] to impose its classifications of the social, cultural and political world,” states that such classifications “constitute a dominant social order, although this is neither univocal nor indisputable.”

Therefore, the theorist reinforces that the dominant meanings conveyed by the mass media prioritize a pattern of preferential readings, but, to the detriment of a deterministic view, he states: “I wish to bet on a notion of power and structuring at the time of encoding which, however, does not erase all other possible meanings” (Ibid.: 366); thus, the interpretations of the audiences<sup>6</sup> shift between the three types of position, hegemonic-dominant, negotiated and oppositional. Considering these aspects, Escosteguy (2009: 11) points out that

<sup>5</sup> The authors refer to the tradition of studying effects, a theoretical model proposed by Harold Lasswell, Paul Lazarsfeld, Kurt Lewin and Carl Hovland in the late 1940s. Under a functionalist perspective, the model conceives communication only as message transmission and centers on its effects (that can be measured) rather than on the meanings produced by the receivers.

<sup>6</sup> We adopt the specific correspondence between the terms *reception studies* and *audience studies* proposed by Escosteguy & Jacks (2005), who question the absence of a common terminology for this area of research. Given the limits and potential of each of the terms, the authors opt for a specific equivalence between the two, noting that this falls within the framework of academic research, that is, it does not consider the marketing research of audiences as an object of study, and, mainly, it is in line with the Latin American research of audiences, which, as mentioned, from the 1990s will become the predominant framework of reception studies in Brazil. Such equivalence is also used by Mascarello (2005) to refer to spectatoriality studies in the field of film studies in Brazil.



“the incorporation of the space of reception as a place where the meanings acquire social value and political effectiveness” is where the validity of the coding/decoding model still resides today, since

But it is in the *discursive* form that the circulation of the product takes place, as well as its distribution to different audiences. Once accomplished, the discourse must then be translated – transformed, again – into social practices if the circuit is to be both completed and effective. If no “meaning” is taken, there can be no “consumption”. (Hall, 2003: 388)

Also noting the critical importance and especially the vitality of this proposal by Hall, other Brazilian researchers highlight some of its limitations. Sifuentes (2014a) and Hamburger (2010) point out that, by considering in a predetermined way that the texts are hegemonic and placing the diversity of meanings only in reception, such a model does not consider alternative interpretations or even counter-hegemonic representations of encoders. Even as a minority, it is possible to see examples of alternative discourses in hegemonic productions, such as, for example, in Brazilian soap operas, say these authors.

Hall himself (2003), in an interview in 1989, recognizes that encoding is a contradictory space as opposed to the exclusively dominant character, as described in the model, and provides a point of view about the media institutions: “The model described in the article really makes them appear fairly homogeneous in their ideological character, but they are not. The model is not sufficiently attentive to it” (Ibid.: 368). In order to overcome this failure, Ronsini (2012) proposes a reformulation of the model by considering the hegemonic in a more fluid perspective, that is, not as synonymous with dominant, but as a category that aggregates dominant and negotiated decoding.

This proposal configures a way of improving the encoding/decoding model. By discussing its limits, Hall (2003: 356) argues that “if it is of any use, for today or later, it is by what it suggests. It suggests an approach, opens up new questions, maps the terrain. But it is a model that has to be worked, developed and changed.” Also in this interview, the theorist points out that, given the lack of resources, he did not develop empirical studies of his model.

According to Sifuentes (2014a, 2014b), this was carried out by David Morley and Charlotte Brunson, who, in 1978, first applied Hall’s model in the project *Everyday television*, but still using a textualist approach. To Morley, this seemed limited, unable to contemplate the polysemy of the messages, leading the researcher to publish, in 1980, *The nationwide audience*, one of the first empirical studies on the reception of television programs nationwide for different

audiences. This was followed by other qualitative reception studies, which combined the methodologies of analysis of the television product (messages) and its reception by viewers, through in-depth interviews. This pioneering study by Morley follows Hall's reflections to explore the following assumptions:

a) the same event may be encoded in more than one way; b) a message always contains more than one potential "reading." Messages propose and prefer certain readings in place of others, but may never be completely closed in one reading: they continue to be polysemic; c) understanding the message is a problematic practice, however transparent and "natural" it may seem. Messages encoded in a way can always be read in a different way. (Morley, 1996 apud Sifuentes, 2014b: 85)

Due to the paradigm shift that Hall's proposal features (the abandonment of a stimulus-response model toward an interpretive framework), Alasuutari (1999) argues that the essay "Encoding and decoding" and its innovations are the first phase of reception studies in research in mass communication; the second phase of this panorama, in the 1980s context, refers to empirical studies of reception that indicated the formation of a new methodological matrix, ethnography of the audience; the third phase, which began in the late 1990s and still in progress, since it is not a consolidated trend, is characterized by questioning and problematizing the premises of ethnographic studies and, under such critical and self-reflection perspective, aims to deepen the understanding of media culture as an element of everyday life.

In the Brazilian study, Hall's model and its empirical application, linked to the contributions of Latin American authors, has been a theoretical framework widely used in studies conducted by the research group *Mídia, recepção e consumo cultural*, of the Federal University of Santa Maria, focusing mainly on television reception, especially the soap opera, to discuss representations and mediations of gender and social class.

According to Ronsini (2012: 18)

the approach to reception with an emphasis on Stuart Hall's methodological model is an unprecedented work in Brazil and is inspired by the recent evaluation by Sujeong Kim (2004) and David Morley (2006) regarding the vitality of the model for a comparative examination of audience's interpretation.

According to the author, such revisions of the coding/decoding model were decisive for her to choose to use this method in developing her study of television reception, comprising the analysis of soap opera and an empirical investigation



of appropriations and readings of 48 young people from different social classes, about the representations of poverty and inequality on such television show. In this study, this author draws up a theoretical methodological model that combines Hall's reformulation of the model (and its revisions) with the Latin American interdisciplinary perspective of mediations:

A function of cultural analysis by means of mediations is the understanding of the hegemonic processes not strictly derived from the political power of the dominant sectors or from the synchronism of the account with lived time, but of the texture of the different diachronic ways of experiencing time and space. The specific analysis of reception looks at the power of the production sphere working at the time of the circulation of the products generated by it, asks about the circuit of meaning based on appropriation of consumption and reaches the degree of generality based on small-scale observations that are theoretically reassembled in an inclusive interpretative analysis. (Ronsini, 2012: 18)

Studies by Jesús Martín-Barbero and other theorists, such as Néstor García Canclini and Guillermo Orozco Gómez, are part of the Latin American strand of cultural studies, which, in line with the view of culture as a sphere of multiple and different conflicts and power disputes (advocated in the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, England), also developed, in the 1970s and 1980s, a specific point of view about the processes that involve the connections between communication and culture, and which explores the various angles of the subjects' experience and their relations with the media, recognizing the importance of daily life as a privileged place where the receptors express themselves.

From the traditions (of critical research of the pioneers of cultural studies) and from the theoretical renovations undertaken by Latin American authors, what should be retained, according to Lopes (2014), is the cultural and political criticism, according to whom reception practices are inseparable from power relations, because they are "an integrated part of cultural practices that articulate both subjective and objective processes, of both micro- (the immediate environment controlled by the subject) and macro-character (the social structure that escapes this control)" (Ibid.: 67).

The scope of reception is shown, thus, as a key sphere to understand and rethink the communication process, seen in a dialogic perspective between spectator and narrative, therefore an environment that opens up to several tracks, windows and cracks. Reception goes well beyond the time to watch the movie, soap opera or other social mediatic cultural product, as it covers the rich range of social uses, forms of consumption and the diversity of everyday practices, in

which the spectator makes sense of audiovisual narratives, completes, negotiates and even resignifies such messages.

Reception is thus a complex multidimensional context, in which people live their daily lives and at the same time inscribe themselves in structural and historical power relations that go beyond their everyday activities. This is the set of assumptions that informs a comprehensive theory of reception studies. The social production and reproduction of meaning involved in these cultural processes are not just a matter of meaning, but also, and above all, a matter of power. (Ibid.: 67)

The incorporation of this Latin American component of cultural studies, i.e., the theoretical and methodological contributions of the abovementioned authors in the development of Brazilian research of communication, begins in the 1990s (Jacks et al., 2011). From this period until 1999, studies on practices of media reception show television as the vehicle that aggregates the greatest amount of research, the importance of cultural identity, and family and teacher activities in the processes of reception, as pointed by Escosteguy and Jacks (2005). These authors also emphasize that, although women were regarded as respondents in the polls, gender relations were not necessarily problematized, since this category was only used for sexual distinction.

Some of these aspects have undergone few changes, as shown by a recent survey over the 2000-2009 period. According to Jacks (2014: 11-12), “the presence of reception research is still too shy” in graduate programs in the communications field, since, of a total of 5,715 studies (4,249 master’s theses and 1,466 doctoral dissertations), only 209 (49 dissertations and 160 theses) have empirically addressed media reception practices. In these studies, television reception is the process that has the greatest number of works focusing on women.

According to John and Costa (2014), in the 2000s, there were 15 papers with female respondents discussing the reception from the perspective of gender relations, and of these, only 10 have done so as a central aspect; and, when compared with the previous decade, when only seven papers were identified, it means that there was an increase. However, due to the increase in the number of research papers developed in graduate programs in communication, it is a relative growth.

Thus, it is noteworthy that, if the amount of research and studies that address gender relations and/or women has not even been reconfigured, the integrated analysis of gender and race<sup>7</sup> (and more specifically, about black women) is not present in such survey. However, this absence is mentioned by the authors.

<sup>7</sup> The racial category linked to interracial relationships or considered in the study of ethnic/racial identity of the black population is studied by only four works, three on television reception and one on media reception in general (1- *As representações das relações raciais na telenovela brasileira-Brasil e Angola: caminhos que cruzam pelas narrativas da ficção* (USP, Tese, 2008) and 2- *Louca Paixão: Questões raciais na telenovela sob o olhar receptor* (USP, Dissertação, 2002), by Luciene Cecília Barbosa; 3- *Telejornal e Identidade Étnica: midiaticização e mediação na recepção do Jornal do Almoço por afro-brasileiros, austríacos e letos*, Fabiana Iser (Unisinos, Dissertação, 2005); and 4- *Olhares negros: estudo da percepção crítica de afro-descendentes sobre a imprensa e outros meios de comunicação*, by Ricardo Alexino Ferreira (USP, Tese, 2001).

Another non-articulated identity trait was the ethnic issue, although the feminist analysis and reflections have, for decades, shown that even among women there are power relations and differentiations in how gender attributes are appropriate and are imposed from the ethnic condition. *Being a white woman is different from being a black or indigenous women, for example, but this questioning did not permeate none of the work*, which in a certain way reinforces that “essentialist” model of women’s studies, which by the way must not to be taken in the singular, but from the perspective that there are women, in their various facets and singularities (Ibid.: 241, emphasis added).

Still considering the aforementioned survey, regarding the second context of scarcity, film reception studies, Jacks (2014: 17) highlights their absence in the research conducted from 2000 to 2009: “Six are the studies dealing with cinema, and, if they are added to those in which it is studied along with other means [cinema and internet], it rises to seven.”<sup>8</sup> This panorama of scarcity in communication is repeated in film studies, as highlighted by Mascarello (2004, 2005) in pointing out the tiny amount of papers presented at Socine<sup>9</sup> meetings addressing the issue of spectatoriality, none from an empirical perspective.

The analysis of spectatoriality investigates, according to Stam (2003: 257), “the gaps, tensions and the various ways in which text, apparatus, history and discourse build the spectator and the ways the spectator as well molds this encounter.” Thus, the lack of studies on this line of research has resulted, according to Fernando Mascarello (2005), in the lack of knowledge about the Brazilian public, what they think and expect from the national cinema, what place our cinematography occupies in their imagination, how they see the representations of the country in domestic films. The author considers this marginalization of the interest in cinema audiences as a result of three closely related theoretical and political-institutional aspects.

The first is the emphasis given, in theses, dissertations, books, published articles and papers presented at events, to productions of *Cinema Novo* directors (particularly Glauber Rocha, the aesthetic-political reference of this movement and, therefore, still recognized worldwide) or to filmmakers, filmographies and issues that dialogue with its aesthetic universe, i.e., modern cinema, its history and developments on national and international levels. The reference to authors such as Jean-Claude Bernardet and Ismail Xavier helped to institutionalize such study subjects as canonical of the investigation of spectatoriality and the context of film reception, among other issues and methodological approaches.

The second aspect mentioned by Mascarello (2005) is the obsolescence of the cinema theory read and practiced in Brazil, which, according to him, lies

<sup>8</sup> The seven works cited by the author are: *O cinema e o estudante universitário: os limites da recepção* (Sonia Maria A. Paschoal, UNESP, 2003); *Anjos e deuses suburbanos: um estudo de recepção dos filmes Cidade de Deus e Como nascem os anjos* (Luciana de Sá Lazarini, UnB, 2005); *Domésticas – o filme: um estudo de recepção com profissionais do Distrito Federal* (Odinaldo da Costa Silva, UnB, 2007); *Reciclando o “lixo cultural”: uma análise sobre o consumo trash entre os jovens* (Mayka Castellano, UFRJ, 2009); *Hoje tem cinema: a recepção de mostras itinerantes organizadas pelo Cineclubes Lanterna Aurélio* (Dafne Pedrosa da Silva, Unisinos, 2009); *Percepção sonora do cinema, ver com os ouvidos, ouvir com outros sentidos* (Andreson Carvalho, UFF, 2009); and *Cinema e imaginário: fragmentos de lembranças* (Ana Maria Solla, Uniso, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> According to Mascarello (2003, 2004, 2005), an examination of the material gathered in the five anthologies of texts of Socine meetings showed that, out of 290 works, only 8 bring the issue of spectatoriality (none involving conducting an empirical study).

in the textualist determinism of the 1970s. Based on Metz, Althusser, Lacan and Brecht, such strand preaches the deconstruction of mainstream cinema in order to free their passive audiences; it understands the spectator as an abstract entity, who has his readings and pleasures predetermined by the filmic text.

Thus, the researcher argues that the theoretical reflection on spectatoriality in Brazilian research did not follow the changes and transformations that have occurred from the 1980s, due to three important movements: the implosion of this modernist-textualist paradigm of the 1970s; its overcoming with cultural studies, which recognize and problematize the spectator's role in the construction of the meanings of films; and the reflections proposed by the opponent of both, the cognitivism of David Bordwell, Noël Carroll and others, a strand founded in the analytic tradition in philosophy and cognitive psychology. These movements

virtually were not yet welcomed in Brazil. The state of the art literature (in translation) available in the country on the spectator theme speaks for itself: the latest fundamental text translated in the area is "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," published by Laura Mulvey in the journal *Screen* in 1975, at the height, so, of the political modernism that is exhausted at the end of that decade. So that the disintegration of the theories of incommunicability, as well as its replacement by the communicability of culturalism and cognitivism are internationally current news that appear to have suffered some kind of censorship, difficult to understand, in film studies in Brazil. (Mascarello, 2003: 8-9)<sup>10</sup>

Because of the influence of cultural studies in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a theoretical and methodological contextualist break from which spectatorialities came to be thought of as heterogeneous and active, able to negotiate with the preset discourses and even produce their own readings. That is the reason why Robert Stam says that "the history of cinema [...] is not just the history of the films and filmmakers, but also the history of the successive meanings that the public has attributed to cinema" (2003: 257). This understanding that messages can be read according to the social and institutional conditions that surround the spectators, and that the meanings are not fixed, became possible, according to Stam, from the reflections proposed by Stuart Hall's model (and subsequent reformulations, such as the one developed by David Morley). Such conception also influenced film studies and configures an incisive opposition to textualist determinism.

The spectator was now understood to be more active and critical, not the passive object of "interpellation," but simultaneously constituting and constituted by it. Against *dispositif* theory, it was argued then that the strong subjective effects

<sup>10</sup> The author argues that this reference to the translation of Mulvey's article cited in a 2003 text is maintained in subsequent publications due to its rhetorical effect, since in recent years the situation of editorial lag in the country has been mitigated with the translation and publication of texts and significant works of film theory, such as the collection *Teoria Contemporânea do Cinema* (divided into two volumes: 1 – Post structuralism and analytic philosophy, and 2 – Documentary and fictional narrative [Ramos, 2005a, 2005b]). Volume 1 brings the text "Reflections on visual pleasure and narrative cinema" inspired by *Duel in the Sun*, by King Vidor (1946), in which the theory reassesses its analytical model based on the conceptual framework of psychoanalysis and adds to the previous argumentation the possibilities for construction/negotiation of meanings undertaken by female spectators. In addition, the texts "Espectatorialidade cinematográfica e a instituição da ficção" by Murray Smith and "Teoria do cinema e espectadorialidade na era do 'pós'" by Robert Stam and Ella Shohat deal with the subject.

produced by narrative cinema were not automatic or irresistible, and that they could not either be separated from the desire, experience and knowledge of historically situated spectators, constituted out of the text and pervaded by a series of power relations as nation, race, class, gender and sexuality (Ibid.: 256).

A local particularization of this textualist perspective constitutes the third aspect accounting for the precariousness of film reception studies in Brazil, as pointed by Mascarello (2005), since in much of the work and research of cinema, priority is given to the analytical to the detriment of the theoretical and empirical, which is justified by the insufficient questioning of the textualist paradigm, as a result of the aforementioned theoretical gap. Therefore, these three aspects are intertwined and result “in the repeated exclusion of the concrete spectator from the analytical horizon, in quantitative (hypertrophy of the area) and qualitative (immanent analysis of the filmic text) terms” (Ibid.: 142).

Although this scenario is bleak, the researcher indicates initiatives that can be considered as evidence of a break, such as the creation of discussion spaces of the reception theme at communication and cinema conferences, such as those of Socine, the Brazilian Congress of Communication Science (Intercom) and the meetings of Compós; the publication of translations of international theoretical texts, such as the book *Introdução à teoria do cinema*, by Stam (2003), and several other texts in the anthology *Teoria contemporânea do cinema* (volumes 1 and 2), edited by Ramos (2005a, 2005b), which attenuate the aforementioned editorial lag; the suggestion of alternatives to be explored in the context of “contextualist studies of film spectatoriality,”<sup>11</sup> for example, ethnographic studies (to understand, from the culturalist ethnographic methodology, the uses and interpretations that audiences make of Brazilian and foreign films) and the historical reception studies (which allow to use historiographical sources to investigate the historical audiences), among other possibilities.

Another recent publication can also be considered a relevant contribution to encourage new research. It is the collection *A recepção cinematográfica: teoria e estudos de casos*, edited by Mahomed Bamba (2013), which highlights the heterogeneity of the field formed by reception theories. This is evidenced by reconstruction and revision of analytical protocols in which the reception and cinematographic and audiovisual spectatoriality – in a fragmented manner, according to the author – have been problematized, such as the institution-cinema, historiographical materialism, sociology, the role of cinephilia and film criticism, as well as the prism of gender studies and cultural studies.

This broad and multifaceted overview of analytical models of reception and cinematographic and audiovisual spectatoriality presented by Bamba reiterates

<sup>11</sup> Mascarello (2004) calls “contextualist studies of film spectatoriality” his survey of research that, among other contributions, aggregate the culturalist studies of television reception (conducted primarily in the Anglo-American scene, by authors such as David Morley, Ien Ang and Janice Radway).

this line of inquiry as a territory that is still little explored in Brazilian research in communication and film. But in addition to the theoretical debates, this collection also presents the results of Brazilian empirical studies on reception in festivals, traveling exhibitions organized by Film Societies, among critics, cultural consumption/production of fans, and reception by spectators who attended movie theaters in Belém, in the state of Pará, Brazil, in 1920, that is, it shows different perspectives of interpretation, readings and consumption dynamics of films and film culture.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the contributions of feminist critique (especially Anglo-American) to communication studies, my goal in this study was to discuss some gaps in the Brazilian context: the scarcity of studies on feminism and the intersection of gender and race; and on filmic reception. By pointing out the theoretical and methodological innovations of several feminist studies since the 1970s and their links with cultural studies, it was possible to find a theoretical gap that is still present in Brazil, an aspect which shows the difficulties of studying communication and film under a feminist point of view, as well as adding the contributions of the culturalist approach in the recognition of reception as an instance in which meanings are given to the films.

This confluence of scarcity scenarios in research lines of the crossing of gender and race in film and reception studies of filmic work was found in this literature review that anchors the doctoral dissertation *Mulheres negras e (in)visibilidade: imaginários sobre a intersecção de raça e gênero no cinema brasileiro (1999-2009)* (Silva, 2016), in which, together with the film analysis, a reception survey of one of the production of the *corpus* was held, the film *Bendito fruto* (Sérgio Goldenberg, 2004). This empirical study was developed from the application of Stuart Hall's coding/decoding model with 58 participants divided into three discussion groups (university students, members of an elderly association, and public servants).

From the comedy genre, the film *Bendito fruto* deals with an interracial love triangle experienced by Maria (Zezeh Barbosa), Edgar (Otávio Augusto) and Virgínia (Vera Holtz) and thus plays with elements of Brazilian daily life of interracial and gender relationships. Although this narrative provides, through its black female protagonist, new meanings, for example, the ability to react and subvert the situations of non-recognition, as well as an opportunity to have a happy ending, which indicates innovations, since usually black female characters have little density and are excluded from the images and stories of love, as the white/

fair-skinned model of beauty and femininity still prevails; only some of these meanings are perceived, interpreted and even resignified in discussion groups, from which the recognition of black women still limited to the phenotype, the coping of racism and scarcity of affection stood out. These readings indicate how the slavery and patriarchy that still structure the Brazilian cultural imagery focuses not only on systems of representation, but also on our ways of seeing, as can be seen in this difficulty of seeing black women (in film and daily life) beyond stereotypes.

Nevertheless, discordant meanings also emerge, such as the contradiction between repeating and questioning stereotypes and, especially, the exercise of, from affective identification with other film and television productions, pointing out insubordination memories (like the mention of a scene from the American miniseries *Roots*, shown in Brazil in the 1970s), images of black female pride (which may be of a family member – a mother or grandmother – or actresses such as Taís Araújo and Camila Pitanga), and the understanding of the care that the character Maria has for the home and for her partner, Edgar, as a way and role of black women. This remits to the different historical experience of such subjects, for, if to the middle-class white woman the domestic space can mean submission, to the poor black woman taking care of the home and partner can mean the scope of the role of wife and homemaker, places of power and social recognition that have historically been denied to her.

Such possibilities of interpretation constitute a kind of cultural negotiation, in which the meanings offered by the film and those developed by spectators operate from the filmic experience and their cultural repertoires. Therefore, conducting research on filmic reception allows to analyze the production of meaning in its entirety as well as to investigate how those watching are permeated by social markers such as gender, race and class. ■

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