REVISTA DE CULTURA VISUAL
e-ISSN 2184-1284

No. 18 | 2026

Racialised Cinemas: Black, Indigenous, and Peripheral Perspectives Beyond Strategic Essentialism

Cinemas Racializados: Negro, Indígena e Periférico Para Além do Essencialismo Estratégico

https://doi.org/10.21814/vista.7481
e026017

Michelle Sales

© Authors

Vista, No. 18, 2026, e026020
https://doi.org/10.21814/vista.7481

Racialised Cinemas: Black, Indigenous, and Peripheral Perspectives Beyond Strategic Essentialism

Michelle Sales
Departamento de Artes Visuais, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Abstract

This article introduces "racialised cinemas" as an analytical method for examining contemporary audiovisual experiences. Drawing on the works of Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, Isael and Sueli Maxakali, Welket Bungué, and Ana Pi, it thoroughly examines the limitations of "representation" and "self-representation", which have traditionally informed debates on Black cinema, Indigenous cinema, and dissident visualities. Engaging with Gloria Anzaldúa, Achille Mbembe, Denetem Touam Bona, and other scholars in decolonial and Afrodiasporic thought, the article contends that these artistic practices generate forms of imagery that go beyond the logic of counter-visuality (Mirzoeff, 2016), which is often understood as mere opposition to the hegemonic gaze. Racialised cinemas are conceptualised as aesthetic practices characterised by opacity, flight, ancestry, and multiplicity of identity, articulating poetics that contest modern-colonial regimes of visuality, authorship, and representation. By occupying borderlands between visual arts and cinema and fostering collective, non-essentialist forms of subjectivation, these works indicate alternative approaches to producing, conceptualising, and experiencing moving images in the 21st century.

Keywords

racialised cinemas, Black cinema, Indigenous cinema, Afrodiasporic, self-representation

Cinemas Racializados: Negro, Indígena e Periférico Para Além do Essencialismo Estratégico

Resumo

Este artigo propõe a categoria "cinemas racializados" como ferramenta analítica para pensar experiências audiovisuais contemporâneas. A partir das obras de Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, Isael e Sueli Maxakali, Welket Bungué e Ana Pi, o texto examina os limites das noções de "representação" e "autorrepresentação" que tradicionalmente orientaram os debates sobre cinema negro, cinema indígena e visualidades dissidentes. Em diálogo com Gloria Anzaldúa, Achille Mbembe, Denetem Touam Bona e outros autores do pensamento decolonial e afrodiaspórico, argumenta-se que esses processos artísticos produzem formas de imagem que excedem a lógica da contravisualidade (Mirzoeff, 2016), entendida como simples oposição ao olhar hegemônico. Os cinemas racializados são compreendidos, assim, como práticas estéticas marcadas pela opacidade, pela fuga, pela ancestralidade e pela multiplicidade identitária, articulando poéticas que desafiam os regimes moderno-coloniais de visualidade, autoria e representação. Ao habitar zonas de fronteira entre artes visuais e cinema e elaborar formas coletivas e não essencialistas de subjetivação, essas obras apontam para outras maneiras de produzir, pensar e experienciar as imagens em movimento no século XXI.

Palavras-chave

cinemas racializados, cinema negro, cinema indígena, afrodiaspórico, autorrepresentação

Preamble

Before proceeding, it is essential to acknowledge the body of theoretical work and collaborative effort underpinning this essay. In an earlier text co-authored with Jorge Cabrera, we examined the work of artists Yonamine, Grada Kilomba, Jota Mombaça, and Daniela Ortiz (Sales & Cabrera, 2020), thereby mapping the terrain upon which the present article builds. In the thematic issue *Decolonial Speculative Aesthetics* (Sales & Assumpção, 2019), we curated artistic perspectives and academic research informed by postcolonial and decolonial debates in the arts. From 2018 to 2025, the Postcolonial and Peripheral Cinemas working group's activities at conferences in Brazil and Portugal have been instrumental in laying the foundation for examining representation in *racialised cinemas*. This essay is thus part of an ongoing, collective research trajectory.

Introduction: Saluting the Forest, Challenging the Canon

"Though it's dark, still I sing, because the morning will come!", inspired by the Amazonian poet Thiago de Mello, served as the guiding theme for the "34th São Paulo Biennial" and functions here as an opening gesture: a tribute to the poet, the Amazon, the knowledge of the forest, and the peoples who resist, persevere, and survive to protect it.

From this standpoint, the present article examines contemporary subjectivities and how decolonial thought has influenced the production of moving images by racialised subjects. The analysis focuses on how Black, Afrodiasporic, and Indigenous artists have challenged regimes of visuality inherited from colonial modernity, not only by claiming presence in spaces of representation, but also by effecting changes within the apparatuses that have historically structured the representation of these bodies.

As a starting point, this essay introduces the work of Denilson Baniwa, an Indigenous artist. His performance *Pajé-Onça Hacking the 33rd São Paulo Biennial* (2018) illuminates a central issue for this essay: the problematic dynamics of representation and the fissures that direct, embodied engagement with images can create within regimes of visibility. Although Baniwa's work is not directly part of Brazilian audiovisual production, it provides a primary impetus for the reflection developed here, as it makes explicit the tensions between the inclusion and exclusion of racialised bodies in contemporary institutional circuits.

By entering — and invading — the São Paulo Biennial, Baniwa intervenes directly in the hegemonic regimes of representation of the Indigenous body displayed there. Taking on the figure of a *pajé-onça* (jaguar shaman), the artist moves through the exhibition spaces, greeting the Indigenous images, portraits and representations featured in the exhibition, many of them produced by non-Indigenous artists and, in several cases, associated with narratives of disappearance, exoticisation or death. His action shifts the historically assigned position of the Indigenous subject, who ceases to occupy the place of an object of representation and assumes that of an agent who challenges the images and discourses through which they have been constituted.

The performance also takes place within one of the most emblematic spaces of artistic legitimation in Brazil, an institution historically responsible for consolidating specific canons of national art. By performing a ritual gesture within this institution, Baniwa reveals the symbolic violence embedded in processes of visibility that, while including certain bodies as images, frequently exclude their actual presence as subjects who produce knowledge and artistic forms. This critical operation highlights the ambivalence of colonial representation: a mode that renders the other visible only to maintain distance, framing, and control.

Historically, Indigenous bodies have been repeatedly represented by anthropology, art history, and Western visual culture as exotic, primitive figures or as belonging to a distant past. In contrast, Baniwa's work invokes the living, contemporary, and insurgent Indigenous body. Rather than simply demanding representativeness, his intervention interrogates the very structures that organise representation, creating a rupture with the vocabularies, temporalities, and sensibilities inherited from modern-colonial thought.

This same issue runs through the work of other contemporary Indigenous artists, whose practices likewise offer a forceful critique of colonial apparatuses of visibility and hegemonic forms of constructing alterity. At the intersection of the visual arts and cinema — if, indeed, we can still keep stable boundaries between these domains — the work of filmmakers Isael and Sueli Maxakali also stands out. Their images destabilise Western conventions of representation by mobilising alternative cosmologies, temporalities and modes of relating humans, spirits and territory, as we shall see later.

Similarly, the works of Welket Bungué, Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, and Ana Pi interrogate how racialised bodies have historically been framed by colonial apparatuses of the gaze. It is important to emphasise that grouping these artists within a single *corpus* is not intended to erase the specificities of Black, Afrodiasporic, and Indigenous experiences. Rather, the aim is to explore plausible points of convergence between trajectories defined by racialisation and the need to devise forms of existence and expression that transcend dominant grammars of representation.

In this respect, we propose the notion of "racialised cinemas" as a category of thought that brings together works produced in different contexts and artistic languages. Although some of these works are not traditionally classified as "cinema" — as with the video performances of Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro and Ana Pi — they share a common concern: inventing sensory forms that challenge how racialised bodies have historically been represented.

Rather than merely claiming visibility, these works interrogate the apparatuses that structure contemporary visibility. Their practices often shift the focus from narrative to sensory, performative, ritual, non-figurative, and post-narrative experiences that challenge modern models of representation. These artistic practices not only generate new images but also transform the regimes of knowledge and power that have historically determined who may appear, how they may appear, and under what conditions they may be recognised.

What, Then, Is the Problem With Representation?

Representation becomes central to debate when the so-called "peripheries" begin to occupy decision-making positions regarding the types of images produced. This gradual yet uneven shift in power has often occurred in an anachronistic and inconsistent manner globally, from the 1950s to the present. It is directly related to the various ways Western and colonial power has been structured and diminished worldwide, particularly in controlling and circulating images.

Following the crisis precipitated by the end of the Second World War, the outbreak of numerous conflicts in Africa, the continent's struggle for decolonisation, and the shift of the cultural centre from Europe to the United States, the field of images underwent a disruptive transformation. According to Stuart Hall (2003), this transformation was linked to the emergence of a Black popular culture: a set of cultural practices that began to contest the meanings of modernity from the perspective of the African diaspora.

The issue of representation arises not only because historically subalternised groups begin to produce images, but also because the Eurocentric monopoly on representation is fundamentally challenged. For centuries, coloniality established a visual regime in which Europe assumed the role of the universal subject of knowledge, while colonised peoples were positioned as objects of observation, classification, and interpretation. Within this framework, the racialised other was persistently constructed as different, exotic, backward, or absent. The crisis of this model did not immediately dismantle its underlying structures. Instead, broader access to cultural production generated new disputes over self-representation and the right to construct one's own images. Consequently, the focus shifts from colonial control of representation to the political, institutional, and aesthetic conditions that enable self-representation.

This distinction is significant because images function not only at the symbolic level but also actively contribute to the construction of the social world. By consolidating specific visual repertoires, narratives, and frameworks of recognition, images influence institutions, public policies, economic practices, and social relations. Their power resides in the ability to naturalise hierarchies, presenting them as self-evident aspects of reality.

However, this power is unevenly distributed: certain images possess significantly greater political weight because they impact groups historically subjected to systematic processes of racialisation, exclusion, and violence. In this context, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994/2006), drawing on Albert Memmi, note that colonised subjects are often perceived as representatives of a homogeneous totality. While individuals from dominant groups are recognised for their individuality, racialised subjects are frequently transformed into allegories representing entire communities. As the authors state:

> since what Memmi calls the "mark of the plural" projects colonised people as "all the same", any negative behaviour by any member of the oppressed community is instantly generalised as typical, as pointing to a perpetual

> backsliding toward some presumed negative essence. Representations thus become allegorical; within hegemonic discourse every subaltern performer/role is seen as synecdochically summing up a vast but putatively homogeneous community. (Shohat & Stam, 1994/2006, p. 269)

From this perspective, the stereotype is not simply an inaccurate or simplified representation. It functions as a technology of power. By reducing entire groups to fixed and repetitive images, Shohat and Stam (1994/2006) argue that an excess of symbolic value is attributed to oppressed subjects. These bodies remain perpetually open to interpretation, carrying meanings that surpass individual experiences and reinforce broader structures of domination.

Therefore, the problem of representation extends beyond the content of images and must also be understood as an institutional issue. As Shohat and Stam (1994/2006) emphasise, it is essential to consider not only who produces images, but also who controls their circulation, which narratives achieve public legitimacy, and which economic and political mechanisms structure the media and cultural industries. In summary, representation is inseparable from the power relations that shape its production.

In the Brazilian context, these issues permeate debates on Black cinema, peripheral cinema, and, more recently, Indigenous cinema. Since the 1970s and 1980s, the emergence of racialised filmmakers has shifted the debate from critiquing representation to advocating for self-representation. Nevertheless, in recent decades, it has become evident that the presence of Black, Indigenous, or peripheral subjects behind the camera has not, by itself, resolved the challenges of visual coloniality.

At this juncture, bell hooks's (2004/2019) reflections become particularly significant. The author highlights a structural asymmetry that is often overlooked: White filmmakers are seldom required to justify the racial composition of their works, whereas Black artists are consistently held accountable for the political implications of their representations. The expectation that all work produced by racialised subjects must embody emancipatory politics demonstrates how race continues to operate as a mechanism of surveillance and control.

Therefore, the emergence of Black or Indigenous visuality should not be equated automatically with the creation of decolonial images. Similarly, self-representation alone does not ensure a rupture with hegemonic regimes of representation. The central challenge is to determine how specific aesthetic, narrative, and political practices can effectively disrupt colonial modes of perception and existence.

In the Brazilian context, the transition to the 21st century signalled a more advanced articulation and critique of the regime of racial representation in audiovisual production. Noel Carvalho (2018) notes that, despite increased film production during the "renaissance of Brazilian cinema" (Nagib, 2002) in the 1990s, Black filmmakers remained largely absent from the industry, and Black characters in films were still relegated to secondary, underdeveloped, and stereotypical roles. Within this context, the "dogma

feijoada" (Carvalho, 2018) emerged as a manifesto, launched at the "11th São Paulo International Short Film Festival", advocating for cinema rooted in Black experience.

More recently, curator Tatiana Carvalho da Costa (2020), in discussing various films, identifies "QuilomboCinema" as a practice of resistance rooted in a long history of anti-colonial struggle and flight, and as a filmmaking mode characteristic of Black communities in Brazil. Rather than an identity category, the author suggests that Black cinema should be understood as a set of anti-colonial practices grounded in historical experiences of resistance, flight, community-building, and collective reinvention. "QuilomboCinema" does not represent an essential Black aesthetic, but instead constitutes a form of political and sensory articulation emerging from the historical experiences of Black populations in Brazil. The foundations of the debate on Black cinema are evident in both the "dogma feijoada" (Carvalho, 2018) and "QuilomboCinema" (2021), each repositioning Black experience as the starting point for image production.

This formulation enables the debate to extend beyond the question of who produces images. While authorship remains a crucial issue, especially in contexts of historical exclusion, it is also necessary to consider additional questions: how images are produced, what conditions shape their circulation and legitimisation, and what forms of language are employed.

This essay is situated within this conceptual shift. Instead of focusing on the social backgrounds of filmmakers, the analysis seeks to understand how Black, Indigenous, and Afrodiasporic artists produce images that challenge colonial regimes of representation. Rather than treating self-representation as a final goal, this study proposes to investigate it as a starting point for examining the poetics, sensibilities, and forms of visuality arising from contemporary experiences of racialisation.

Is There Also a Problem With Self-Representation?

Returning to the essay "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?", Stuart Hall (2003) highlights a fundamental issue in contemporary debates on Black cinema, Indigenous cinema, and images produced by racialised subjects: self-representation does not automatically eliminate the problems of representation. On the contrary, it raises new theoretical, political, and aesthetic challenges. For the author, what is commonly referred to as "Black popular culture" constitutes a deeply contradictory space. It is a "site of strategic contestation" (Hall, 2003, p. 341), shaped by ongoing disputes over the meanings of identity, memory and difference. Far from representing a cultural essence preserved over time, diasporic Black cultures are the outcome of historical processes of displacement, violence, translation, mixture and reinvention. In this sense, the diaspora does not produce stable identities, but impure identities in motion. This is one of Hall's central contributions to cultural studies. According to the author, there is no pure Black origin to be recovered, nor any universal Black experience capable of unifying all forms of cultural production across the diaspora. Black identities are constituted through multiple

historical, geographical, linguistic and political intersections. They emerge from connections and disconnections among Africa, the Americas, Europe and the Caribbean, and are continually produced through processes of negotiation, translation and displacement. For this reason, Hall rejects any essentialist conception of Black identity. The cultural repertoires of the diaspora do not derive from a single origin, but from ongoing processes of cultural recombination. They are hybrid formations, produced simultaneously through different temporalities and historical experiences. As the author observes, diasporic Black culture is always marked by internal difference, heterogeneity and incompleteness.

This formulation aligns with Kobena Mercer's (2013) reflections on the need to conceptualise a diasporic aesthetic. According to the author, Black cultural production does not express a fixed identity but instead articulates multiple and often contradictory experiences. The diaspora generates subjects who inhabit borderlands, traverse different symbolic universes, and interpret their experiences through continuous processes of cultural translation.

Nevertheless, the emergence of self-representation introduced a paradox. While it enabled historically silenced subjects to produce their own images, it often confined these images within a framework of perpetual reaction to colonialism. Frequently, works by Black or racialised artists have been interpreted primarily as images of resistance, as if their political function were necessarily limited to countering modern-colonial imagery or denouncing racial oppression.

This expectation generates a new form of overdetermination of difference: the Black artist is positioned as responsible for representing Blackness, their work is interpreted as a direct expression of a predetermined racial identity, and the complexity of aesthetic experience risks reduction to the affirmation of collective identity. Instead of transcending the classifications imposed by coloniality, cultural production may ultimately be subsumed by them once more.

In this context, the work of Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro assumes particular significance. Working across video performance, writing, poetry and philosophical enquiry, the artist has produced a body of work that challenges conventional frameworks of racial identity. In the essay "Quando o Sol Aqui Não Mais Brilhar: A Falência da Negritude" (When the Sun No Longer Shines Here: The Failure of Blackness; 2022), Castiel offers a radical reflection on the limits of identity politics when it becomes a fixed destiny for Black subjects.

When Castiel writes that she wishes to "tear apart once and for all the Black racial pride that is the true and irrevocable destiny of our dark lives" (p. 21), she does not reject the historical experience of racialisation. Instead, she interrogates the transformation of Blackness into the exclusive framework through which existence is interpreted. Her critique addresses the tendency to convert historically necessary political identities into permanent ontological essences.

In this regard, Castiel's reflections engage directly with Stuart Hall's work. Both authors identify a problem when the category "Black" is no longer understood as a historical

and political construct but instead functions as an absolute foundation of social experience. Hall (2003) notes that this shift ultimately naturalises what should be historicised, arguing that:

> it is weak because it naturalises and dehistoricises difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological, and genetic. The moment the signifier "Black" is torn from its historical, cultural, and political embedding and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category, we valorise, by inversion, the very ground of the racism we are trying to deconstruct (...) and once it is fixed, we are tempted to use "Black" as sufficient in itself to guarantee the progressive character of the politics we fight under the banner — as if we don't have any other politics to argue about except whether something is Black or not. (p. 345)

Critiquing essentialism does not entail abandoning the politics of difference. Instead, it requires recognising that Black identities are multiple, provisional, and relational. The diaspora generates not a singular form of Blackness, but a multiplicity of Black experiences shaped by gender, sexuality, social class, territory, religion, nationality, and diverse forms of cultural belonging.

This issue carries significant implications for the field of cinema. For decades, debates on Black cinema have appropriately focused on authorship. However, as the presence of Black, Indigenous, and peripheral filmmakers has increased, it has become necessary to shift towards a different dimension of analysis.

The contemporary challenge is not limited to ensuring self-representation; it also involves understanding how these images generate worlds, sensibilities, and regimes of visuality. In other words, the central question concerns not only who speaks, but how they speak; not only who represents, but which forms of representation, perception, and imagination are activated.

At this juncture, the concept of "countervisuality" (Mirzoeff, 2016) becomes pertinent. Rather than merely inverting the poles of colonial representation, countervisuality aims to produce alternative ontologies of the image, new ways of organising the sensible, and distinct forms of visual existence. Within this framework, the assumption of an automatic correspondence between the author's identity and the political character of their work is diminished. Being a Black, Indigenous, or peripheral subject does not, by itself, ensure the emergence of a counterhegemonic visuality.

The decisive question thus shifts: how do specific aesthetic forms displace colonial regimes of perception and create space for experiences that transcend fixed categories of identity? It is precisely at this transition from identity to form, while retaining identity's historical significance, that contemporary debates on self-representation, Black cinema, and diasporic images are situated. This is also where the possibility emerges to conceptualise a *racialised cinema* capable of uniting related images.

Naming the Impossible: Racialised Cinemas as a Category

This essay therefore begins with the need to seek alternative definitions — potentially provisional and insufficient — that can address artistic processes produced by subjects historically shaped by racialisation. The introduction of a category such as "racialised cinemas" is not intended to supplant established notions like "Black cinema", "Indigenous cinema", or "Afrodiasporic cinema". Nor does it aim to dissolve the historical and political differences that define each of these experiences. Instead, it aims to create an analytical tool for examining zones of contact, convergence, intersection, and resonance among productions arising from diverse experiences of coloniality.

The selection of the term "racialised" is deliberate. Unlike identity categories that may imply stable cultural essences, racialisation denotes a historical and political process. It refers to the mechanisms through which certain bodies, territories, and modes of existence have been constructed as forms of difference within modern-colonial logic. Thus, discussing racialised cinemas involves shifting focus from identities themselves to the regimes of power that constitute them and the aesthetic forms that respond to, negotiate with, or evade those regimes.

This perspective aligns with decolonial thought, particularly its critique of modern universalisms and its advocacy for a pluriversal perspective. Instead of positing a single legitimate mode of knowledge production or world representation, pluriversality acknowledges the coexistence of multiple modes of existence, temporalities, and cosmologies. The emergence of Black, Indigenous, Afrodiasporic, and other historically marginalised filmmakers is situated within this expansion of epistemic and sensory horizons that characterises the contemporary field of images.

In this context, the category of "racialised cinemas" seeks to account not only for differences but also for the hybrid, borderland and indeterminate zones that frequently elude conventional identity classifications. Gloria Anzaldúa's reflections (2005) offer an important conceptual framework here. In formulating the figure of *mestiza consciousness*, Anzaldúa neither celebrates a conciliatory form of *mestizaje* (racial and cultural mixing) nor proposes overcoming differences through a harmonious synthesis. On the contrary, her reflection begins with the experience of the border, contradiction and the coexistence of multiple forms of belonging. *Mestiza* consciousness emerges precisely from the ability to inhabit tensions without fully resolving them.

In this sense, we return to the notion of "a *mestiza*", not as an affirmation of the Latin American myth of *mestizaje* — frequently used to erase colonial violence, racial inequalities and the centrality of Black and Indigenous experiences — but as a way of thinking about subjectivities constituted through displacement, intersection and ongoing negotiation. In Anzaldúa (2005), the border is not a space of peaceful synthesis, but a territory of conflict and creation.

From this perspective, racialised cinemas do not correspond to a singular identity or a unified aesthetic. Instead, they constitute a heterogeneous field of practices united by a critical relationship with colonial regimes of visuality, even as they employ markedly different strategies. Some engage in denunciation and counter-visuality; others explore

sensory, cosmological, or performative experiences; and still others explicitly reject the representational expectations associated with racial identity.

The proposed category is intended specifically to preserve this heterogeneity. Its value does not reside in establishing a new overarching identity, but in enabling the identification of points of convergence among Black, Indigenous, Afro-European, Afrodiasporic, queer, peripheral, and borderland cinemas without diminishing their constitutive differences.

From this perspective, how might we consider, for example, the points of convergence between the cinema of the Maxakali peoples, the video performances of Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, the films of Welket Bungué and the work of Ana Pi? How might we describe the resonances that run through these works without subsuming them under a single identity category? How might we understand forms of creation that simultaneously affirm specific forms of belonging and elude any stable definition?

These questions gain particular relevance when considering the limitations of strategic essentialism that have shaped debates on representation in recent decades. Categories such as "Black cinema" and "Indigenous cinema" remain politically significant, especially in contexts of structural exclusion and struggles for recognition. Nevertheless, the consolidation of these categories necessitates critical reflection on their limitations to prevent historically produced identities from becoming fixed essences.

The central issue is not whether to abandon these categories, but how to interrogate them. How can notions such as "Black cinema" or "Indigenous cinema" be mobilised without transforming them into closed identities? In what ways can the political significance of self-representation be acknowledged without reducing aesthetic experience to the filmmaker's social background? How might forms of visuality emerging from racialisation be addressed without presuming an automatic correspondence between identity and language? These questions, rather than definitive answers, guide the analyses presented in the following pages.

Images of a Racialised Cinema

A central issue within racialised cinemas is the persistent tension between representation and escape. Although critiques of the modern-colonial visual regime have exposed the historical violence inherent in representing the racialised "other", the advent of self-representation has not entirely resolved this issue. Frequently, subjects who produce their own images remain constrained by the expectation to be legible, representable, and intelligible within pre-existing categories. In response, various contemporary artists have developed poetic strategies that move the image beyond representation, aligning it more closely with experience, ritual, ancestry, and opacity (Glissant et al., 2008).

The video performances of Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro exemplify this movement. At the time of this essay's conception, their work demonstrated a radical rejection of available identity categories, refusing the obligation to conform to expectations associated with Black, Afro-Brazilian, or travesti art. As the artist states:

> what I do are invitations and reminders. Reminders that we can live a different story from this racial and gendered one (...). I am not interested in any of these categories. I am interested in becoming perishable, in remaining perishable and in becoming immeasurable. (Prêmio PIPA, 2020, 00:01:10)

The issue Castiel raises is not denying historical processes of racialisation, but refusing to allow them to constitute the absolute horizon of experience. Their work shifts the discussion from identity to ontological transformation, producing images organised around states of transition, invisible entities, ancestral lineages, spirits and non-linear temporalities. In works such as *A Cambonagem e o Incêndio Inevitável* (Cambonagem and the Inevitable Fire), audiovisual practice approaches ritual, bringing forth a cinema produced by the body-spirit, a cinema in which the image no longer operates merely as a representation of the world, but as a device for establishing relations between worlds.

This dimension aligns with various Indigenous and Afrodiasporic cosmologies that reject modern separations between subject and object, matter and spirit, and human and non-human. As Juliano Gadelha (2022) notes, anti-colonial perspectives frequently conceptualise existence as continuity across diverse forms of life and agency, recognising capacities for action and thought beyond the modern human subject. Accordingly, racialised cinemas challenge not only regimes of representation but also the ontologies that underpin modern-colonial visuality.

A similar approach appears in the work of Isael and Sueli Maxakali and in the cinema made alongside the Tikmũ'ũn people. In *Yãmĩyhex: As Mulheres-Espírito* (*Yãmĩyhex*: The Women-Spirit; 2019), Isael and Sueli Maxakali shift cinema from the regime of representation to that of presence. The spirits do not appear as symbolic figures of an Indigenous cosmology, but as actual agents participating in collective life and in the very fabric of the image. In this context, the film challenges one of the fundamental premises of modern-colonial visuality — the separation between reality and spirituality — and transforms cinema into a space of circulation between different forms of existence. Rather than representing an Indigenous identity, *Yãmĩyhex* makes visible a relational ontology in which humans, spirits, songs and territory constitute a single cosmopolitical community. One of the film's most sophisticated aspects is its use of off-screen space. Much of *Yãmĩyhex*'s impact derives not only from what appears on screen, but also from what the image suggests without fully revealing. Songs, sounds, movements, and gestures consistently indicate presences that extend beyond the frame. This feature recurs in Maxakali cinema and is connected to Tikmũ'ũn cosmology, in which the visible constitutes only one aspect of the relationships that form the world.

Maxakali films function as more than instruments of cultural or ethnographic representation. In these works, the *yãmiy*, or spirit-singers, are not presented as symbols or metaphors of Indigenous cosmology; rather, they actively participate in the image. Cinema thereby becomes a space of circulation between different forms of existence, shifting the boundaries among documentary, performance, ritual, and experience.

The work of Welket Bungué occupies a distinctive place in contemporary Afrodiasporic cinema by shifting the question of identity towards the realms of transit, borders and circulation. Born in Guinea-Bissau and working across Africa, Europe and Latin America, Bungué has developed a filmography marked by migratory experiences, colonial memories and transnational displacements that reject both national fixity and essentialist narratives of origin. His films *Bastien* (2016), *Intervenção Jah* (Jah Intervention; 2019), *Arriaga* (2019), *Mudança* (Upheaval; 2020), and *Calling Cabral* (2022) bring together cinema, performance, orality, and gesture, making the body a living archive in which histories of diaspora, exile, and reinvention are inscribed. In this context, self-representation does not emerge as a simple assertion of identity, but as the production of new forms of enunciation capable of escaping colonial images and hegemonic regimes of visibility. Ancestry, in turn, does not emerge as a return to a stable past, but as an ongoing process of updating and circulating memories across different territories. His works inhabit a borderland space that brings Africa and Europe, memory and the future, belonging and displacement into proximity, configuring what Gloria Anzaldúa (2005) termed "*mestiza* consciousness". At the same time, his fragmentary and poetic narratives claim what Édouard Glissant called the "right to opacity" (Glissant et al., 2018), rejecting the transparency and total intelligibility demanded by the colonial gaze. Rather than representing the African diaspora, Bungué's cinema performs it, transforming the crossing into an aesthetic, political and epistemological principle and producing images that exist precisely through movement between worlds.

As Achille Mbembe (2013/2014) observes, modern Black experience is characterised by the need to reconstruct a fragmented history from scattered traces and incomplete archives. In this context, self-representation not only asserts identity but also creates the conditions for its own invention. Consequently, racialised cinemas often assume erratic, fragmentary, and processual forms. They function as archives in the making, as practices of remembrance and reinvention of worlds. Rather than answering the question "who are we?", these cinemas focus on the possibility of creating new forms of collective existence.

This strategy resonates with what Denetem Touam Bona (2009/2020) calls "marronage". Historically associated with communities of enslaved people who escaped captivity, *marronage* is not merely an act of physical evasion, but an ongoing practice of invention. As the author observes, to flee does not simply mean to escape; it means producing lines of flight capable of interrupting the mechanisms through which power captures and controls. It is an insurgent form of creativity that transforms the very condition of persecution into a source of inventive potential, since Bona's strategy of flight suggests that "to flee is not to be driven away, but, on the contrary, to make reality leak and to set endless variations in motion to halt all forms of capture. Flight is creative flight" (Gadelha, 2022, p. 15). This fugitive creativity is also what is at stake when racialised cinemas reject not only representation, but also representativeness — since, as Gadelha (2022) argues:

> bring Blackness into the White cube of the arts and, the more Black people are present there, the less Blackness we see, or else precisely that Blackness which one seeks to erase becomes visible. Even so, what we encounter is not the Black, but rather the haunting presence of the figurality of the Black. The occupation of a fugitive is always the White person's worst nightmare. (p. 15)

Confronted with the void resulting from the crisis of colonial representation and the limitations of self-representation, racialised cinemas pursue dematerialisation, transcendence, and the immateriality of the cinematic image. They seek collective and post-authorial modes of image production, as well as unstable processes of viewing and capture, including those facilitated by mobile devices and serialised narratives. These works generate forms of communication that do not fully submit to the dominant gaze; their significance resides not only in what is revealed, but also in what remains concealed as mystery.

At this juncture, the concept of flight aligns with what Édouard Glissant termed the "right to opacity" (Glissant et al., 2008). In contrast to the colonial imperative for transparency, classification, and complete intelligibility, opacity affirms the legitimacy of that which cannot be fully translated. Not all elements require disclosure, nor must every image be rendered entirely accessible to the hegemonic gaze.

In this context, contemporary racialised cinemas appear to be shifting from representation toward relation. Rather than merely generating positive images or inverting stereotypes, these works aim to establish alternative forms of sensibility, temporalities, and modes of inhabiting the visible. The central concern extends beyond the subjects depicted to encompass the transformation of the very conditions that enable the image.

Multiple consciousness does not attempt to resolve contradictions; instead, it inhabits them. This consciousness arises from the experiences of individuals situated between diverse languages, cosmologies, geographies, and epistemological frameworks. Consequently, subjectivities formed within the diaspora, peripheral communities, Indigenous territories, and borderland spaces often develop poetic strategies that transcend conventional identity categories. Rather than responding to the centre, these subjectivities generate alternative cartographies of the sensible.

Navigating between ancestry and futurism, memory and invention, visibility and opacity, racialised cinemas cultivate a poetics of flight that does not negate the world but instead generates alternative worlds. Their objective extends beyond representing historically excluded subjects to producing forms of existence that evade the mechanisms of colonial modernity and enable new imaginaries of the sensible.

Accordingly, the central issue is not merely asserting the right to appear, but creating visual modes of existence that elude capture by the colonial gaze. In this regard, the works of Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, Ana Pi, Welket Bungué, and Isael and Sueli Maxakali advocate for alternative relationships among body, memory, ancestry, and image, thereby shifting the field of representation toward a more unstable and complex terrain. As Anzaldúa (2005) writes:

> because I, a *mestiza*, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time, a soul between two worlds, three, four, and my head spins with so many contradictions). I am guided by all the voices speaking to me simultaneously). (p. 704)

To inhabit this *fractured locus* (Anzaldúa, 2005) is to exist at the border, not as a dividing line between stable identities, but as a space of transit, conflict, translation, and creation. From this experience arises what Anzaldúa (2005) terms "*mestiza* consciousness": a perceptual mode capable of sustaining multiple forms of belonging, temporalities, and epistemologies simultaneously, without reducing them to a conciliatory synthesis.

Ana Pi's film *NoirBLUE* (2018) constitutes a significant contribution to contemporary shifts in the representation of Black images beyond identity-based frameworks. Positioned at the intersection of videodance, audiovisual essay, performance, and installation, the work integrates body, movement, diaspora, and Atlantic memory through a language that rejects linear narratives and didactic explanations. Instead of reconstructing the African diaspora through documents or accounts, Ana Pi employs the body as a site where memory is inscribed. Her gestures, movements, and choreographies serve as traces of transatlantic trajectories that persist in the present. Rather than representing a Black subject, *NoirBLUE* generates a sensory experience of the diaspora. The film relocates the image from the domain of identity to that of relation, circulation, and transformation. Through this movement, its aesthetic and political significance becomes evident. As Jota Mombaça (2020) observes:

> all these elements create an atmosphere and suggest to us that *Noir BLEU* should not be read as a spectacle, but as the performative establishment of another world. "What world?", the reader may ask, yielding to the temptation of transparency. Yet one of the beautiful aspects of Ana Pi's work is precisely its ability to establish a world without making it completely visible. Creating this imaginative force that — in the face of the world as we know it (the world of racial capitalism) and its extractivist apparatuses — rejects visibility as transparency is a form of self-preservation for Black lives and speculative projects. (para. 10)

In this context, points of convergence can be identified among artists as diverse as Isael and Sueli Maxakali, Ana Pi, Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, and Welket Bungué. While their works originate from distinct historical experiences and cultural contexts, they collectively resist reduction to the binary logic of representation. The objective is not merely to invert the colonial image or to produce a positive image in opposition to a negative one, but to transform the very conditions through which difference is perceived and represented.

Anzaldúa (2005) cautions against the limitations inherent in a politics grounded solely in reaction. Remaining on the opposite bank of the river and continually responding to power confines one within the horizon power itself establishes. While counter-discourse has been historically necessary, it risks perpetually orbiting what it seeks to

negate. According to Anzaldúa, the most radical task is to abandon the logic of opposition and to create new forms of existence. The author asserts, every reaction is conditioned by the object to which it responds. Genuine transformation arises when action is possible from alternative frames of reference, thereby establishing new territories of imagination and experience. The objective is not to occupy the opposite bank, but to invent new paths of crossing.

This perspective elucidates why many contemporary artistic processes produced by racialised subjects are no longer primarily organised around denunciation or direct resistance. Although colonial violence persists, these works often redirect their focus toward inventing alternative cosmologies, temporalities, and modes of relating to the world. The central concern has shifted from opposition to creation.

The knowledges of the crossroads (Anzaldúa, 2005) present in these cinemas challenge hegemonic regimes of representation by rejecting the transparency demanded by the colonial gaze. These works do not present themselves as fully decipherable identities or entirely translatable discourses. Instead, they generate zones of ambiguity, silence, multiplicity, and indeterminacy.

At this stage, counter-visuality (Mirzoeff, 2016) evolves from a politics of opposition to one of opacity. As Édouard Glissant argues, the right to opacity also constitutes a right to existence (Glissant et al., 2008). Not all elements require revelation, explanation, or intelligibility according to modern Western codes. Certain forms of knowledge persist precisely because they maintain their zones of shadow, secrets, and excesses.

This may represent one of the most significant contributions of racialised cinemas in the 21st century: not only producing images of historically excluded subjects, but transforming the very conditions of visibility; not only claiming presence, but asserting the right to complexity; not only occupying the frame, but altering the regimes of perception that determine what can be seen, understood, and felt.

Beyond a politics of representation, these works indicate a politics of relation, borders, and opacity: images that exist simultaneously across multiple margins, articulate multiple languages, and resist capture by any definitive identity.

Final Remarks: Beyond Representation

This essay did not seek to exhaust the questions raised by the category of "racialised cinemas". On the contrary, its aim was to open a field of inquiry still taking shape, proposing a conceptual tool capable of bringing together audiovisual practices that, although distinct from one another, share a common challenge to modern-colonial regimes of visuality. The hypothesis guiding this inquiry is that the categories "Black cinema", "Indigenous cinema", "decolonial cinema" and "peripheral cinema" have lost neither their force nor their political relevance, but that contemporary artistic processes produced by racialised subjects frequently exceed the conceptual boundaries within which these categories were constituted.

Throughout these pages, we have observed that the crisis of representation has led not only to the emergence of self-representation, but also to increasingly complex forms of refusal of representational logic itself. In many of the works analysed here, the central question is no longer about occupying a historically denied position of visibility, but about transforming the conditions through which something can become visible. This constitutes a significant paradigm shift. The struggle shifts from the content of the image to the regimes of perception that organise the very experience of looking.

In this context, racialised cinemas appear to operate through a double movement. On the one hand, they remain embedded in historical struggles for recognition and for the redistribution of the means of image production. On the other, they refuse to be reduced to representing fixed identities or stable communities. What emerges from these works is not merely a politics of presence, but a politics of relation, opacity and ontological transformation.

In the films discussed here, the recurrence of spiritual figures, ancestral entities, non-linear temporalities, Indigenous and Afrodiasporic cosmologies, and the centrality of ritual and performative experiences suggest that we are witnessing a more profound shift. Racialised cinemas appear to challenge a fundamental premise of the Western tradition of the image: the separation between representation and presence. In many of these works, the image functions not merely as a mediation between subject and world, but as a site of passage, encounter and actualisation of forces that exceed visible materiality.

For this reason, it may be insufficient to understand these works solely through the classical debates on identity, stereotyping or representation. What is at stake is also an ontological struggle. By incorporating spirits, ancestors, forest entities, the dead, dreams and invisible dimensions of experience, these cinemas call into question the very modern definition of the real. The image ceases to be exclusively a surface of representation and becomes a space where multiple regimes of existence coexist.

This transformation also profoundly affects the notion of "authorship". The Western tradition of cinema has consolidated itself around the figure of the individual author, responsible for a singular vision of the world. However, experiences such as Maxakali cinema, alongside various collective Black, Indigenous and peripheral audiovisual practices, suggest the emergence of post-authorial forms of creation. In these, the image does not belong entirely to an individual but results from complex relationships among community, ancestry, territory, memory, and shared experience. Authorship becomes relational, distributed and often inseparable from the collective processes that make it possible.

At the same time, the growing presence of mobile devices, digital platforms, social media, and serialised formats is radically reconfiguring how these images circulate. Web series, performative video, digital archives, and multiple forms of audiovisual production created for online environments challenge the traditional boundaries between cinema, contemporary art, performance, and digital culture. More than mere technological transformations, these changes alter the regimes of visibility, authorship and reception that have historically organised the cinematic field.

To flee does not mean to disappear, but to invent forms of existence that can escape capture. Racialised cinemas operate precisely within this register. Their images frequently refuse transparency, identity stability and immediate legibility. They produce zones of indeterminacy in which the image remains partially inaccessible, preserving what Édouard Glissant called the "right to opacity" (Glissant et al., 2018).

Perhaps this is precisely where one of their most important contributions to contemporary thinking about the image lies: rather than merely claiming the right to be seen, these cinemas also claim the right not to be fully deciphered. Not only the right to representation, but the right to mystery. Not only the right to visibility, but the right to complexity.

Thus, racialised cinemas do not merely invite us to reconsider how we represent historically marginalised subjects. They call upon us to rethink the very categories through which we understand the image, authorship, identity, memory and the real. More than a body of works, they constitute a field of aesthetic and political experimentation capable of profoundly displacing the epistemological foundations that have sustained the modern tradition of cinema.

Some questions therefore remain open and may guide future research: how does the presence of the body-spirit and ancestral cosmologies reconfigure theories of the image formulated from the perspective of Western modernity? How can we conceive of a film criticism capable of engaging with works that claim opacity as an aesthetic and political strategy? What conceptual tools make it possible to understand collective and post-authorial forms of audiovisual creation? And, finally, how can racialised cinemas contribute to the construction of a theory of the image produced from the experiences of the Black Atlantic, diasporas and Indigenous territories, without reproducing the universalisms that have historically sought to frame them?

Rather than offering definitive answers, these questions point towards a horizon of inquiry. A horizon in which the image ceases to be merely what we see and becomes also what, by resisting capture, continues to elude us.

Machine Translation Post-Editing: Anabela Delgado

References

Anzaldúa, G. (2005). La conciencia de la mestiza: Rumo a uma nova consciência. *Estudos Feministas*, *13*(3), 720–737.

Bona, D. T. (2020). *Cosmopoéticas do refúgio* (M. Duchiade, Trans.). Cultura e Barbárie. (Original work published 2009)

Carvalho, N. dos S. (2018). Dogma feijoada: A invenção do cinema negro brasileiro. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, *33*(96), Article e339612. https://doi.org/10.17666/339612/2018

Costa, T. C. (2020). QuilomboCinema: Ficções, fabulações, fissuras. In *forumdoc.bh.2020: 24º Festival do Filme Documentário e Etnográfico – Fórum de Antropologia e Cinema* (pp. 224–229). Filmes de Quintal.

Gadelha, J. J. B. (2022). O sensível negro: Rotas de fuga para performances. *Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença*, *9*(4), 1–24.

Glissant, É., Costa, K. P., & Groke, H. de T. (2008). Pela opacidade. *Revista Criação & Crítica*, (1), 53–55. https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1984-1124.v0i1p53-55

Hall, S. (2003) *Da diáspora: Identidades e mediações culturais* (A. La Guardia, Trans.). Editora UFMG. (Original work published 2003)

hooks, b. (2019). *Olhares negros: Raça e representação* (V. Silva, Trans.). Elefante. (Original work published 2004)

Mbembe, A. (2014). *Crítica da razão negra* (M. Lança, Trans.). Antígona. (Original work published 2013)

Mercer, K. (2013). *Welcome to the jungle: New positions in Black cultural studies*. Routledge.

Mirzoeff, N. (2016). O direito a olhar. *ETD – Educação Temática Digital*, *18*(4), 745–768. https://doi.org/10.20396/etd.v18i4.8646472

Mombaça, J. (2020). Escuro e não representação. Sobre *Noir Bleu* de Ana Pi. *Revista DR*, (5). https://revistadr.com.br/posts/escuro-e-nao-representacao-sobre-noirblue-de-ana-pi/

Nagib, L. (Ed.). (2002). *O cinema da retomada: Depoimentos de 90 cineastas dos anos 90*. Editora 34.

Prêmio PIPA. (2020, July 21). *PIPA 2021 | Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_8v9rc9nEU&t=119s

Sales, M., & Assumpção, P. (2019). Estéticas especulativas decoloniais. *Revista Vazantes*, *3*(1).

Sales, M., & Cabrera, J. (2020). As práticas artísticas contemporâneas no contexto ibero-americano e o pensamento pós-colonial e decolonial. *Revista Incomum*, *1*(1), 1–24

Shohat, E., & Stam, R. (2006). *Crítica da imagem eurocêntrica: Multiculturalismo e representação* (M. Soares, Trans.). Cosac & Naify. (Original work published 1994)

Biographical Note

Michelle Sales is an independent curator and Associate Professor at the School of Fine Arts of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. She is a researcher at the Graduate Programme in Multimedia Studies at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas. Between 2010 and 2020, she was an integrated researcher at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies of the 20th Century at the University of Coimbra. She coordinates the research network Postcolonial and Peripheral Cinemas, bringing together Brazil and Portugal. Her research brings together cinema, contemporary art, and postcolonial and decolonial thought, with a particular focus on African, Afrodiasporic, and peripheral cinemas, and on the relationships between Brazil, Portugal, and Portuguese-speaking Africa, paying particular attention to forms of self-inscription, memory, territory, and representation.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1589-4003
Email: sales.michelle@eba.ufrj.br

Address: Av. Pedro Calmon, 500 - Cidade Universitária da Universidade Federal do Rio do Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro - RJ, 21941-901, Brazil

Submitted: 05/06/2026 | Reviewed: 12/09/2026 | Accepted: 14/09/2026



Este trabalho encontra-se publicado com a Licença Internacional Creative Commons Atribuição 4.0.