

Pedro Costa and Black Cinema

ARTICLE

Paulo Morais-Alexandreⁱ 

Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema, Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal
CIEBA - FBAUL, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal

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Abstract

The aim is to establish a starting point for a very specific analysis of the work of director Pedro Costa, in the context of a cinema in which minorities and the oppressed, particularly black people, are central, and where aesthetics are clearly worked on, but unequivocally with clear values of their own.

Keywords: Cinema, Black Cinema, Pedro Costa, Oprimido, Lisbon Film School, Cape Verde.

Pedro Costa e o filme negro

Resumo

O estudo propõe-se a estabelecer um ponto de partida para uma análise muito específica da obra do realizador Pedro Costa, no âmbito de um cinema onde as minorias e os oprimidos, nomeadamente os negros, são eixos centrais, inequivocamente com valores próprios claros.

Palavras-chave: Cinema, Filme Negro, Pedro Costa, Oprimido, Escola de Cinema de Lisboa, Cabo Verde

Two human corpses appeared outside:
One was a slave and the other was a master!...
My ear, from both, heard him feast,
And when he had finished this dismal meal,
Licking his lip, he strode out.
More trembling than leaf and colder than marble,
When the dawn whitened, I came down from the tree,
I wished to cover with a little of the pious soil,
These bones of our brother exhumed before my eyes.
Vain desires! vain efforts! of these hideous skeletons
The tiger had left the frames complete,
And gnawed both bodies from head to toe,
Removed the skin and made them alike.
Overcoming my horror, let's see, I said to myself,
Where did God place the supreme boundary between them?
By what separate organ, by what bundle of nerves,
Nature made them similar and diverse?

Where does the great distance between their fates come from?
Why does one obey, the other command?
At leisure I plunged into this human mystery:
From the soles of our feet to the fingers of our hands,
In vain I compared membrane by membrane,
They were the same days piercing the walls of the skull;
Same bones, same senses, all the same, all equal!
I said to myself; and the tiger feasts on them,
And the worm of sepulchre and decay,
With the same contempt makes its food!
What's the difference between them? In fear:
The more cowardly of the two is the lesser being!
Cowards? will it be us? and will you still fear
The one a worm dissects and a jackal devours?
Then stretch out your hands and walk on your knees,
Brutes and worms are more men than you!
Or if from the heart of the whites God made you fibers,
Conquer today the sky of free men!
The weapon is in your hand, make your fate your own.
(Lamartine, 1850, pp. 207-208)

1 Introduction

This study should be considered, first of all, as a prologue to the analyses carried out by the author of this text in "Stereotypes in the creation of a dramaturgy for the costume of black people, and not only, in Cinema" (Morais-Alexandre, 2019) and also in the approach "Black Cinema as a destabilizer of "prevailing values"" (Morais-Alexandre, 2020), where it was expressly stated:

[...] there is a pedagogical role that art must play, namely to awaken consciences, to destabilize them, making them question and criticize the "prevailing values" so often taken as good and sufficient, so that it is then possible to establish new realities, often contrary to the dominant powers. It is in this context that Black Cinema arises, as an awakening of consciences, in some cases well rested. (Ibidem, p. 46)

Therefore, it is important to develop and possibly direct this research, explaining exactly these values, in this case, in relation to the construction of cinematographies of the

oppressed, in particular, of the black man and the way in which he, but not only, is presented.

In this way, a starting point is launched for a more developed study of how this is done today, in a very specific universe that stems from the production of what is known as the Lisbon Film School, which can be translated into English as Lisbon Film School and, in particular, in its most interesting representatives such as directors Pedro Costa, João Canijo, João Salavisa, Leonor Teles, Ico Costa, the common denominator being that any of these directors graduated from the Lisbon Polytechnic Institute's School of Theater and Cinema (Morais-Alexandre, 2018, pp. 537-528).

Some researchers, such as Bárbara Barroso and Daniel Ribas (2008, p. 139-150) or João Maria Mendes (2017) choose the broader term "Portuguese School", although we prefer the more refined definition of "Lisbon Film School", in the same line of thought that motivated the Harvard Film Archive, in 2012, to program a cycle it called The school of Reis: The films and legacy of António Reis and Margarida Cordeiro (Guest, 2012), considering that it is here, in this director/teacher and in this School, that lies the root of a common way of making cinema, currently of worldwide relevance.

In this context, we believe that Pedro Costa's production is, at various levels, very representative of a style that deserves specific study, especially because of the very interesting way in which this director, through his films, breaks down various barriers, leading researchers to question and change values and analyses that they would have taken for granted.

2 Towards a renewed reading of the concept of Black Cinema

The origin of this text stems from something that can be considered a paradigm shift in relation to the concept that is conventionally referred to as "Black Cinema", which has recently broadened and become wider[- See in this regard the good overview of the evolution of the concept carried out under the heading of "Black cinema is what?" in the

article by Maurício Rodrigues Pinto; Letícia Xavier de Lemos Capanema - "Black cinema, black women: representation and representativeness in the audiovisual of Mato Grosso" (2022, pp. 40-45)]. The pioneering research work of Celso Luiz Prudente and the publications derived from this research have been central to this change. Contrary to previous, more limited views, this researcher proposes a much broader definition. Thus, Black Cinema should be understood as:

[...] the cinema of all minorities: the Jew, the woman, the homosexual, the child, the disabled, the African, the Iberian, the Asian and the Amerindian; in short, of all the bioexistential possibilities that were foreign to the Euroheteronormativity that referenced Eurocolonization. (Prudente, n.d., p. 23)

This statement clearly clashes with what has been assessed as indisputable, in terms of defining Black Cinema, which is listed in the "Dogma Feijoada" (Dogma Feijoada launches polemics, 2000, s.p.) that lists various principles that have been followed, as if they were biblical commandments.

Given that not even the Holy Commandments are respected, we welcome Celso Luiz Prudente's heterodox and much more inclusive vision. This researcher has been systematizing the issue in various studies, which highlight this discussion in a broader way, since he opens up his analysis to much more comprehensive issues (Prudente, 2005; 2014; 2018; 2021; s.d.), to which gender issues will not be unrelated, as seen in the aforementioned text, so he basically extended the concept to all the oppressed, but went much further. He also established a dialectic in which, as a counterpoint, the oppressor emerges, what he calls "[...] the horizontality of the image of the Ibero-Asian-Afro-Amerindian, in the face of the reification of the verticality of the Euro-hetero-male-authoritarian imaginary hegemony and its Euro-heteronormativity." (Prudente, n.d., p. 23)

It is in this sense, and not by chance, or mistake, that the film *Roma Acans*, by Leonor Teles (2021), a documentary about the Roma community, produced by the Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema, was included in the programme of the 15th International Black Film Festival organized by professors Celso Luiz Prudente and Rogério de Almeida at the Faculty of Education of the University of São Paulo. (PRUDENTE, 2019).

Celso Luiz Prudente's proposal can be linked to what Tommy L. Lott suggested in "A no-theory theory of contemporary black cinema" when he recommended that, instead of a "[...] biologically essentialist view of black cinema [...]", the criteria could be much broader, and that there doesn't necessarily have to be a black director and, even less so, that the film should be dedicated to consumption by the black community (1999, pp. 139-150).¹.

Nevertheless, it was on the basis of the "Dogma Feijoada" (Dogma Feijoada launches polemics, 2000) that many researchers have worked and continue to work, ignoring or disagreeing with the latest theoretical developments and it has been in this same way that historical analysis has been carried out and most of the reflections that deal with this cinematographic genre have been produced.

Naturally, when studies on this subject began in Portugal, it's not surprising that practically all the questions were adapted to the country, without any major changes. One of the pioneers of this research is Professor Michelle Sales, a Brazilian citizen, who has studied and disseminated this filmography with undeniable merit, bringing the experience of her native country, where these matters have been researched and published for a longer period of time and who, perhaps for this very reason, follows the aforementioned rules more scrupulously.

Curiously, this researcher somehow "affiliates" Portuguese black cinema with two works, since she considers that this genre is "[...] established in the historiography of Portuguese cinema through the screening of films such as Casa de Lava (1994), by Pedro Costa, and also Zona J (1998), by Leonel Vieira" (Sales, 2020, p. 11), although she believes that:

[...] it burst into Portuguese cinema late, or rather from the 2000s onwards, when, from the second or third generation of Portuguese Afro-descendants living in Portugal - most of them with European schooling - a new cinematographic production began to be produced. (Ibidem, pp. 11-12)

¹ - Veja-se ainda a este respeito o importante estudo de Dan Flory – *Philosophy, black film, film noir*. (2008, pp. 16-17), onde as propostas de Lott são escalpelizadas.

Cite the important work *A terceira margem do cinema português* (The third margin of Portuguese cinema), which the aforementioned researcher organized and which is undoubtedly central to future studies on Black Cinema in Portugal (Ibidem).

It would also be pertinent to mention the seminal International Film Festival in Cova da Moura, organized by the *Nêga Filmes & Produções Collective*, in partnership with the *Moinho da Juventude Cultural Association* as part of the *Kova M Festival: Africa and its Diasporas*, which, unfortunately, has not been held in recent years.

In view of the emerging influence of Black Cinema, which can even be defined as a genre, it can be seen that, when the object of study is to analyze the fiction work of the director in question, based on crossing the works with some of the requirements postulated in this type of cinema, the result can be quite surprising. In fact, in this respect, Pedro Costa's monumental work is renewed, since it can now be confronted with new values and, at the same time, new readings of the filmic proposals will be allowed.

3 Pedro Costa and Black Cinema

The aim of this analysis was based on the simple question: can Pedro Costa's work fit into a definition of Black Cinema? To find a valid answer, it is important to invoke the "Bible" established by "Dogma Feijoada" (*Dogma Feijoada launches controversy*, 2000), which is very linear and concise in the seven "ingredients" necessary to consider a work as part of this genre of Cinema:

1. The film must be directed by a black Brazilian director;
2. The protagonist must be black;
3. The theme of the film must be related to black Brazilian culture;
4. The film must have a feasible schedule. Emerging films;
6. Stereotypical black characters (or not) are forbidden;
7. The script should focus on ordinary black Brazilians. Superheroes or bandits should be avoided. (*Dogma Feijoada launches controversy*, 2000, s.p.)

At first glance, there is an impossible parameter to meet: the color of Costa's skin and, obviously, the theme or argument, related to the Brazilian nationality of black culture. Nevertheless, all the elements that allow for the inclusion of other operators in this vast universe can and should be brought to the fore, rather than a mere exclusion based on skin color, or the nationality of the theme, argument or citizen.

In this respect, it is important to agree with Mory Marcia de Oliveira Lobo who, in "O Cinema Negro como arte de afirmação frente a um possível mal-estar na educação contemporânea" (Black Cinema as an art of affirmation in the face of a possible malaise in contemporary education), gives a clear opening to the broadening of the group.:

In the possibility of a political and social critique that Cinema Novo was directing, it is important to note that, since Afro-Brazilians appear in expressive numbers in the minority classes, Cinema Negro was born with all its revolutionary charge of fighting racism already in the symbolic field, in which alienating transference oppression already determined, as Prudente says, this class struggle as an image struggle. Thus, the struggle of image that even today is configured within a possible post-modern malaise that persists as a structural and behavioral trait in Afro-Brazilians, so that their racial identity is in a fragmented process of non-recognition and belonging to their African matrix. Black Cinema as an art of minority affirmation [...] (LOBO, 2015, p. 1631.)

Celso Luiz Prudente has published several studies along these lines, broadening Black Cinema to a cinema of the oppressed, clearly stating in "The image of positive affirmation of the Ibero-Asian-Afro-American in the pedagogical dimension of Black Cinema", as a broader community, with the common denominator of having been/being the target of oppression, thus allowing "[...] the approximation of identities with non-Eurocentric cultures [...]" (PRUDENTE). the identity of non-Eurocentric cultures [... which was] thus established by the horizontality of the image of the Ibero-Asian-African-American [...]" (PRUDENTE, 2021, p. 11), as opposed to an image of the Black Cinema in the pedagogical dimension of Black Cinema. 11) as a counterpoint to a dominant group, those that Sartre scalped in his Reflections on Racism (1960) and which Prudente refers to as the "[...] Euro-hetero-male-authoritarian [...]" (2021, p. 11).

This has objectively been Pedro Costa's universe since his earliest works, the universe of Ventura, Vitalina Varela and even Vanda's own universe, so it is considered

that a direct link can be established between Pedro Costa's filmography and Cinema Negro. Quoting Celso Prudente once again and obligatorily, Pedro Costa's work clearly has:

[...] an image of positive affirmation of Africanness. [...] This is how the image of positive affirmation of Afro-descendants as a minority was constructed, which took place in the process of inclusive contemporaneity, teaching society how they are and how they should be treated. This behavior was essential for understanding the pedagogical dimension of black cinema. (n.d., pp. 7 and 13).

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From this point on, it becomes very easy to establish relationships between the postulates of "Dogma Feijoada" (Dogma Feijoada launches polemic, 2000) and the work of Pedro Costa.

Black protagonist

Pedro Costa chooses African citizens as the protagonists of most of his films, and many of them become absolutely emblematic and become intertwined with his cinema, especially Ventura and Vitalina Varela, but not only that, we should also mention Leão, Lento, José Alberto, Bete, among many others.

Themes related to black culture

Most of Pedro Costa's works are inescapably linked to themes related to black culture, more particularly Cape Verdean culture, in its various aspects, from language to music and even food, often invoking collective memory itself, but also the enjoyment of this same culture "indoors", for example on the island of Santiago and the island of Fogo, or also "out of doors", representing the very particular diaspora of a people in Portuguese territory, where these migrants came to settle forming various communities, whose characteristics and experiences they try to preserve and which are evidenced in their films, such as in *Juventude em marcha* (2006), *Vitalina Varela* (2019) or others.

In this respect, the transition, also cultural, that takes place between *No quarto de Vanda* (Costa, 2000), shot in the Fontainhas neighborhood, and the following film

Juventude em marcha (2006), with the community already resettled in the Boba couple, with all the consequences, also cultural, that this entails, namely in terms of loss of identity, is very important². Thus, in addition to the first trauma, that of migration out of necessity, there is a second, the experience of an aseptic neighborhood, which not only says nothing to the community, but also uproots it with all the catastrophic consequences that come with it, specifically the loss of cultural reference and, in the end, even the promotion of violence³.

Urgent films, with feasible timelines

A relevant issue is the indication regarding production, the fourth question, "The film must have a feasible schedule. Films-urgent" (Dogma Feijoada launches controversy), in which black cinema has a clear common denominator with the production method of the films of the "Lisbon Film School" where there is, as João Maria Mendes says "[...] a tradition of low budgets, fragile production conditions [...]". In addition, and certainly also as a common denominator, the "[...] project development methodology emphasizes improvised solutions and adaptability to adverse surprises resulting from these factors" (2017, p. 7).

Pedro Costa fulfills this requirement, mainly by reducing the size of the team, which is reduced to the minimum possible[- Pedro Costa is particularly critical of the "inflationist" model: "I think that nowadays, the world of art, of culture, lives a lot from inflation. I saw it when I was making the other films: I'd look around and see dozens of people questioning

² - "[...] what happened when we moved from Fontainhas to the Casal da Boba social housing estate. The Cape Verdean women, most of whom are cleaners, spent a lifetime cleaning bourgeois apartments in Lisbon. When they were finally given the "decent" houses they had longed for, they immediately started decorating them, for better or worse, in the style of the condominiums they had been cleaning for years. And their small salaries were eaten up by the exuberant and extravagant furniture, the sophisticated appliances, the little luxuries that they had seen live and in color and that they also wanted for themselves. I can't and don't want to blame them, but the tragedy is there, on the now empty plates..." (Henriques, n.d.).

³ - Pedro Costa knows this and notes it: "Today is different. Before, there was almost no family, it was a community, in fact. Today, in Amadora, in the Casal da Boba neighborhood, which is where they are, everything is very separate. The doors are locked, the people are separated. It's very sad and very violent, especially for the younger ones. I saw them born between 1998 and 2000 and today they are extremely violent, showing no mercy. And this isn't because they're bad. It's all our fault." (Poiães e Silva, 2010, p. 41).

what they were really doing. But really, what was the point? They were harmful to the project and this inflation was going to be added to other budget inflations and I was very afraid that this inflation would be joined by an aesthetic or artistic one. Eventually, we have a progressive spiral." (Ibidem, p. 42).], which from shoot to shoot is still more contained, despite the visibility of Pedro Costa's work, validated by the selection and awards at the most important festivals worldwide, allowing him renewed financial capacity, but as the director himself says: "It's me, two or three of my friends who do the sound - the technical team - and the Bairro actors" (Poiães e Silva, 2010, p. 43). In fact, Pedro Costa is wary of very complex and expensive productions, as he told António Guerreiro in an interview, in which he complained about various aspects of conventional productions, namely the urgency caused by costs, the search for profitability or the "bureaucratic hell" (Guerreiro, 2021, s.p.).

When it comes to scheduling, Pedro Costa has a very particular approach, as he has a peculiar relationship with the pressure he is under to meet a shooting schedule, which he refers to in several interviews. Nevertheless, this director's production model is the opposite of "[...] the dominant paradigm in which his only eccentricity lies in the time he has to shoot" (Araújo, 2016, p. 122).

Stereotypical (or not) black characters are banned

In Pedro Costa's films, starting with the main characters, such as Ventura or Vitalina Varela, but also Leão, Bete or Tito Furtado, the characters are never stereotyped, and all the examples mentioned above can be used once again, or even because of their unusual behavior, which reveals so much about them, but marks a certain "atonality" in the action, such as the emblematic but unexpected moment when Pango sweeps a house that

is already in the process of being demolished, a remarkable sequence from *No quarto da Vanda* (Costa, 2000).⁴.

It's worth highlighting the way in which the director himself considers two of his most emblematic characters, Vitalina Varela and Ventura, and the relationship that is established between them. They are representatives of all the people who suffer the same dramatic situation, which is terrible but not exceptional, quite the opposite, and who, at the same time, have absolutely unique characteristics, be it a capacity for resilience or even a telluric wisdom, which make them far from any stereotype, acting in their own way.

Vitalina Varela is not a ghost. She is a 50-year-old Cape Verdean woman who has still not managed to obtain a residence permit in this hypocritical and ungrateful country. She still hasn't gotten the miserable compensation or pension she is owed for all the highways and Colombos her late husband helped build. Vitalina is all the women who are or have been in that situation. Who were left behind, who were forgotten, who were left waiting. All the women who didn't make it. The terrible thing is that we all know they'll never make it. Vitalina is a force from the past that haunts Ventura's present. And he's also realized that this woman is going to fight him in the exhumation of what comes from the confines of memory. It's very interesting to see how he resists this. There is a very strong tension in the shots where they are together. Ventura, who is already a broken man, breaks down even more because she only brings him the moments that were left unlived, the letters that weren't sent, the letters that weren't received. Everything that was missing. Vitalina is all the women I saw one day on Fogo Island. Someone who comes to tell us about a time of shame and unfulfilled promises. I think Vitalina is time. She is the letter. The youth and the dream of young lovers separated. She is the voice of a faithful woman in this time of shame, betrayal and death (Costa, 2015, n.p.).

⁴ - See Daniel Ribeiro Duarte's doctoral thesis - Aesthetic and political community in Pedro Costa's cinema (2018, p. 8)..

A script that favors black people [...] common

Pedro Costa's arguments usually focus on ordinary citizens, such as a security guard at the Gulbenkian Foundation, a municipal employee, a heroin addict, or Nhurro in the first (Costa, 2000) or second versions (Costa, 2006), a mere unemployed bricklayer, like so many others in "Tarrafal" (Costa, 2007b) or, in collective terms, the inhabitants of Bairro das Fontainhas, Casal da Boba or even the village of Chã das Caldeiras on the island of Fogo (Costa, 1994).

João Maria Mendes says that this interest in more than ordinary characters, "[...] living on the bangs of society (poor immigrants, the unemployed, small-time drug dealers, inactive young people and outcasts) consigned to the condition of zombies and barely subsisting between life and death" (2017, p. 64), shows an openness to political radicalization, even stating that "Pedro Costa would open the field to another type of radical cinema, both from the point of view of aesthetic choices and from the political point of view" (Ibidem). This is indeed a personal statement, but he wasn't the first to make it, although he clearly sees it in a different way, since its roots can be found in neorealism and, in Portugal, in its greatest "masters", António Reis, Paulo Rocha and Alberto Seixas Santos, who in films such as Jaime (Reis, 1974), Trás-os-Montes (Reis and Cordeiro, 1976), A lei da terra (Nordlund and Santos, 1977), Verdes anos (Rocha, 1963) or Mudar de vida (Rocha, 1966), had already done so and it is no coincidence that the last two films mentioned were restored under the coordination of Pedro Costa himself.⁵

There is a remarkable, distinctive and differentiating aspect to the filmic treatment of these ordinary people, which is worth mentioning: the lyricism that many find in Pedro Costa, which Bénard da Costa talks about (2009, p. 19), so unusual when he treats his actor-characters, like so many others, with very serious weaknesses, but to whom the

⁵ - «Of course, I worked according to my sensibility. And I never wanted to put aside my first impressions, which were very strong, and the memories of my first viewing of the film [Mudar de Vida]" (Lisboa, 2019, p. 154.)

camera and, above all, the lighting, gives an unusual strength, a charm and a sudden beauty. In this sense, Junichiro Tanizaki's essay *O elogio da sombra* (The praise of the shadow) necessarily comes to mind. When analyzing the Nô theater, he discusses the magnificent way in which, through the treatment of light and above all the creation of shadow areas, something that he considers can only be seen on stage, but which in Pedro Costa's works, highlights and allows a glimpse of the beauty of those who walk on the stage or, in this case, inhabit the films (Tanizaki, 1999, pp. 42-43).

Superheroes or villains will be avoided

A crucial aspect will be the intersection with this parameter of the seventh and final question of the "Dogma Feijoada": "Superheroes or bandits should be avoided" (Dogma Feijoada launches polemic, 2000, s.p.). Now, at this point there seems to be a new contradiction, since there is a very particular heroism in the protagonists of Pedro Costa's films, be it Vanda⁶, Ventura⁷, Vitalina⁸ among others.

All of these figures have an immeasurable honorability, something that could be called a "verticality" that persists in suffering, which gives them a dignity almost similar to that found in the films starring John Wayne and directed by John Ford or Howard Hawks, and which João César Monteiro glossed over so well in *Le bassin de John Wayne* (1997).

Glauber Rocha had indeed warned against heroes. In this context, it's not a question of deconstructing the hero archetype, with greater or lesser comicality, as Spike Lee did in *BlacKkKlansman* (2018), but of giving the characters in general, and the protagonists in particular, absolute dignity. This aspect, which is also a particular aesthetic in Pedro Costa's work, deserves, indeed it is imperative, that it is also scaled in terms of

⁶ - Ventura appears in three feature films by Pedro Costa - *Juventude em marcha* (2006), *Cavalo dinheiro* (2014); *Vitalina Varela* (2019).

⁷ - Vanda, Vanda Duarte, appeared in three feature films by Pedro Costa - *Ossos* (1997); *No quarto de Vanda* (2000); *Juventude em marcha*, (2006).

⁸ - Vitalina, Vitalina Varela, appears in two feature films by Pedro Costa - *Cavalo Dinheiro* (2014); *Vitalina Varela*, (2019).

Black Cinema and confronted with various other parameters expressed in "Dogma feijoada" (2000, sp.), not least because, as Nelson Araújo rightly pointed out: "There are no bad guys or good guys in Pedro Costa's cinema, there are human beings doomed to oblivion, and the director does not fantasize about immaculate heroes in the face of the social circumstances that surround them" (Araújo, 2016, p. 119).

Then there are other perspectives that are not insignificant, which are not exactly absent from the requirements established in "Dogma Feijoada" (2000, s.p.), but which are improved and autonomized by Celso Prudente, something he defines as "[...] the socio-cultural aspects of black people [...]" (Prudente, 2005, p. 69) and which are also decisive in establishing the definition of Black Cinema.

These aspects are poverty, music and the diaspora and, in these three particular prisms, Pedro Costa's approach and approach to the Cape Verdean community is absolutely exemplary, particularly in films such as *Casa de lava* (1994), *Juventude em marcha* (2006), *Cavalo dinheiro* (2014) or *Vitalina Varela* (2019), but also in the short films "Tarrafal" (2007b), *Caça ao coelho com pau* (2007a) or *O nosso homem* (2010), in which the director so often portrays migrants who arrive in Portugal from Cape Verde, having left their memories behind, but never losing their culture or their music, only to live in a particularly difficult situation, a kind of "limbo", as Ana Cristina Pereira so aptly describes it:

For a long time, these children of Cape Verde (and their descendants) have lost hope and the will to return to the islands that are no longer theirs, which doesn't mean that they feel Portuguese or that they are accepted as Portuguese. They live in a kind of limbo, no longer sampajudos (S. Vicente) or badius (Santiago) but obviously not alfacinhas (Lisbon) either. They have as a safe, unique and impartial place this language that they call Creole (without knowing that they disregard it) and which, also being hybrid, allows them to unite and resist. Resistance also comes at the cost of the "positive side" of exclusion. They are mostly unemployed workers and if in the past they worked from sun up to sun down to make ends meet, today they have all the time in the world. A "privilege"

that stems from the disappearance of work and with it the figure of the worker (Pereira, 2014, p. 820).

Poverty

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Poverty, which has its cinematic roots in Italian Neorealism, is reclaimed by Brazilian Cinema Novo, from which Cinema Negro derives:

The image of poverty and the image of the poor are represented, preponderantly, by the figure of the black man in Cinema Novo, a position with which black youth identified, as they saw their reality discussed in the cinema [...] (Prudente, 2005, p. 69).

Mateus Araújo Silva begins his article "Pedro Costa and his poetics of poverty" by stating: "From a very early age, Pedro Costa's cinema sought its inspiration and form in the universe of poverty, from which he extracted a unique poetics" (Silva, 2010, p. 111), and tells us about the "[...] dialectic between the filmmaker's desire for fiction and his effective interaction with the poor communities he approached when making his films" (Ibidem, p. 112), something we don't agree with. There is no dialectic, since there is no opposition, but rather a remarkable synthesis that results in the construction of a filmic fiction within existing poor communities.

The poverty that exists in the Fontainhas neighborhood, after it was demolished and which didn't disappear in the transition to Casal da Boba that succeeded it, aggravated by the long-term unemployment that part of the population now faces, and which is limited by the desperation of hunger and homelessness. Evidence of this poverty can be seen in *O quarto de Vanda*, Nhurro's despair when Zita denies him a mere piece of bread, or when Nhurro himself refuses a place to sleep to an acquaintance who is desperate for shelter (Júnior, 2020, p. 285).

Nevertheless, poverty does not appear in Pedro Costa's films as something of a pamphlet, but rather with a certain lyricism, which the director himself assumes: "you should talk more, denounce our difficulties, our problems more". I riposte, saying: "Look, I do that, but in a different way. These aren't political pamphlets, they're artistic things, they're

a bit more hidden" (Poiars e Silva, 2010, p. 41). Reviewing the fabulous sequence from the film *Cavalo dinheiro*, which is accompanied by the song by the Cape Verdean band Os Tubarões - "Alto Cutelo", there is a dramaturgy that reinvents "human bodies", those who are oppressed, those who suffer, but who never lose their dignity, clearly highlighting an engaged Brechtian register⁹, but, at the same time, a work of plastic composition that stands out.

Music

Music, which derives from a common musical root linked to black culture, shows an ancestral Africanity that is undoubtedly intangible heritage, a major asset of blackness, which is why it deserves to be analyzed independently. Celso Prudente says that both music and musical instruments characterize the "[...] traces of the essential knowledge of Africanness" (2005, p. 70).

Music runs throughout Pedro Costa's work. In fact, Cape Verdean musicality is a constant in his films, and at certain levels it becomes almost a "character" that is central to the action, for example in *Ossos* all the sound of Cape Verdean music. Also noteworthy is the inclusion in the soundtrack of absolutely emblematic songs, but not the most obvious ones, such as "Carro Bedjo", by the Cape Verdean group Os Saburas, in *Ossos*, the coladera "Labanta Braço", played by the Cape Verdean group Os Tubarões in the film

⁹ - "In Pedro Costa's latest films, *Cavalo Dinheiro* (2015) and *Vitalina Varlea* (2019), we see hieratic characters declaiming, in an ultra parochial tone, lamentations about a past of harsh migrations and miserable jobs. Eloy Enciso's cinema, following Costa very closely in tones and forms, also sets his characters to declaim their misfortunes, in an emotionally anesthetized register (Arraianos (2015), *Longa Noite* (2019)). Miguel Gómez, Joao Pedro Rodriguez, Albert Serra or Jaime Rosales, among others, also use some of these interpretative keys in their works. Do these acting registers represent a recognizable trend in European auteur cinema of the last decades? We believe we discover in these works a sort of sui generis inheritance from Bertolt Brecht and his conception of distance in acting interpretation, mixed with the practice of the interpreter-automaton expounded by Robert Bresson in his cinematograph and some maxims of Jean Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, who, in a certain way, take up Brecht again. In the face of a "distanced" acting interpretation, emotionally icy, which becomes a tacit working guideline in some of these filmmakers, it is worthwhile to inquire into the Brechtian origin of this register." (Fillol, 2021, p. 234)

Juventude em marcha, heard by Ventura and Lento¹⁰. Finally, see and hear, as further evidence, the aforementioned sequence from Cavalo dinheiro, which is accompanied by the song by the Cape Verdean band Os Tubarões - "Alto Cutelo" (Costa, 2014).

Luiz Fernando Coutinho de Oliveira, in *O som das Fontainhas: uma análise da banda sonora de três filmes de Pedro Costa*, questions whether one of the common denominators of the entire Cape Verdean migrant community, "the former inhabitants of the archipelago", isn't precisely music, and then considers it to be a key element, responsible for triggering dramatic situations¹¹.

Diaspora

Celso Prudente also refers to the diaspora of African peoples.

[... it is] possible to suppose that black aesthetics carries an ontological residue, in which the being manifests itself in the search for the principle of family, fragmented in the diaspora. This family, however, must be understood in a broad sense, i.e. a telluric family and not just a biological one (2005, p. 70)

The diaspora, of which the Cape Verdean people are a very special case, both because of its size, since more people live abroad than in the country¹², both for the preservation of culture (Miranda, 2008) and for the safeguarding of the language¹³, which

¹⁰ -On the relevance of this composition for understanding *Juventude em marcha*, see Luiz Fernando Coutinho de Oliveira - *O som das Fontainhas: uma análise da banda sonora de três filmes de Pedro Costa* (2020, pp. 132-142)..

¹¹ - "[...] music is an expressive form of social experience for immigrant Cape Verdeans, and Ventura, exiled from his own home by Clotilde, can use it as an instrument to build a kind of community experience: he gets closer to others, his children, through singing, and, perhaps without knowing it, realizes the intrinsic strength that is preserved within these songs. On the other hand, if Clotilde's singing was the spark that started their relationship in the past, wouldn't Ventura's verses be a way of regaining, not through romance, but through family, the trust and love of Bete, with whom at some point he had a break-up?" (Oliveira, 2020, pp. 141-142)

¹² - «[...] the total size of the diaspora is around 120%, of which more than a third is in Europe." (AFFORD, 2020, n.p.)”.

¹³ - Cape Verdean Creole is spoken in the country, in the diaspora, and is used not only by Cape Verdeans, but also by their descendants, who may no longer have Cape Verdean nationality. In this regard, see the article by João Paulo Madeira - "The Cape Verdean language as an element of identity" (2013, pp. 77-85)..

informs the entire community that began to flock to Portugal in the 1960s, mainly to work in construction, the men, and the women in cleaning (Veiga, 2012, p. 13), and which settled in the area bordering Lisbon and Amadora, in the Damaia region, giving rise to neighborhoods such as 6 de Maio, Estrela d'África, Alto da Cova da Moura, Fontainhas and others (Machado, 1994, pp. 111-134). It's the life of those who are part of this diaspora, the most disadvantaged, those who exist, but so often don't let themselves be seen[- "Many years later, I started thinking about everything Ventura had told me and I went back to the hundreds of photos of the crowds and, above all, that gigantic demonstration on May 1st. I noticed that there were hardly any black faces in the pictures. And I wondered why - there was already a community of Cape Verdean, Guinean, Angolan and São Toméan emigrants in Lisbon - where were they? Confused, lost, worried about the future." (Costa, P., 2015, s.p.)], which is represented in Pedro Costa's films and whose greatest and absolute examples are the films *Juventude em marcha* (2006), *Cavalo dinheiro* (2014) and *Vitalina Varela* (2019).

4 Final considerations

The aim of this work was to outline some clues for an analysis of Pedro Costa's work in terms of Black Cinema. Thus, from everything presented and the evidence produced, it can be said that there is no great difficulty in integrating Pedro Costa into the reality of Black Cinema. In fact, as has been verified, all the references are present, except for the first of the questions, the color of the director's skin, and it is worth highlighting the remarkable reflection in these works of the musical environment so typical of Cape Verdean culture and clearly marked by migration and the creation of a very strong community in the Lisbon metropolitan area.

There is one last detail: through his cinema and the formal beauty of his films, which has been recognized at the most important film festivals in the world, among relevant

selections and with the awarding of the most important prizes, Pedro Costa takes black culture to a new level, without "poeticizing" it or allowing those who watch his films to forget the terrible problems that the Cape Verdean community has to face in the face of the formal beauty of the works, but valuing it in its stance.

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ⁱ Paulo Jorge Morais Alexandre, ORCID: 0000-0002-4128-7242

Universidade de Lisboa, Faculdade de Belas-Artes, Centro de Investigação e de Estudos em Belas-Artes (CIEBA), Largo da Academia Nacional de Belas-Artes, 1249-058 Lisboa, Portugal

Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa, Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema, Avenida Marquês de Pombal, 22 B, 2700-571 Amadora, Portugal

Doutor pela Univ. de Coimbra. Prof. Coord. Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema / Politécnico de Lisboa. Investigador Integrado do Centro de Investigação e de Estudos em Belas-Artes (CIEBA) da Fac. Belas-Artes da Univ. Lisboa. Académico Correspondente da Academia Nacional de Belas-Artes (Portugal).

Contribuição de autoria: Autor

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E-mail: pmorais@estc.ipl.pt



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