

## Representations of gender and race in the cinematic culture of the movie 'gone with the wind' (1939)

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### Abstract

This work is anchored in observation studies of cinematographic art as a "cultural pedagogy" thus acquiring a specific meaning which is part of the act of educating globally with the aspiration of a narrative that is relatable to everyone. The objective of this work is to understand how the different relationships of the subjects regarding gender and race in the cinematic culture of the movie *Gone with the Wind* (1939) are represented. Through ethnographic analysis it is possible to observe dynamics of gender, sexuality, race, unveiling the plots of specific discourses representatives of the power structures. An approach that captures the contexts of texts and images presented by the media revealing social spaces of television (RIAL, 2005). Thus, through the characters of a motion picture we can observe relationships of gender, race, power, culture, and social distributions that identify the place of man and woman in a particular society.

**Keywords:** Gender and race relationships. Educational Culture. Cinema.

## Representações de gênero e raça na cultura cinematográfica do filme *E O Vento Levou* (1939)

### Resumo

Este trabalho está aportado nos estudos de observação da arte cinematográfica como uma "pedagogia cultural" adquirindo assim um significado específico o qual insere-se no ato de educar globalmente com a aspiração de uma narrativa que fale a todos. O objetivo deste trabalho é compreender como são representadas as distintas relações dos sujeitos a respeito de gênero e raça na cultura cinematográfica do filme *E o vento levou* (1939). Através da análise etnográfica é possível observar dinâmicas de gênero, sexualidade, raça, desvendando as tramas de discursos específicos representantes das estruturas de poder. Abordagem a qual capta os contextos de textos e imagens apresentadas pela mídia "revelando espaços sociais da televisão" (RIAL, 2005). Destarte, através dos personagens de um filme podemos observar relações de gênero, raça, poder, cultura e distribuições sociais que identificam o lugar do homem e da mulher em uma determinada sociedade.



**Palavras-chave:** Relações de gênero e raça. Cultura Educacional. Cinema.

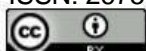
## 1 INTRODUCTION

2 For this research, a reading was made between the advertisements of the cinema section of the newspaper A União and the film analysis of the feature film E o vento levou (1939) as an object of investigation through the qualitative look of the research in History of Education.

Although the newspaper A União (the primary source of this research) does not belong to the pedagogical press or address issues totally focused on the educational field, this analysis is based on the premise that a public space such as the cinema acts in driving the formation of subjects and the construction of subjectivities, beyond the school environment. According to Eric Hobsbawm (2009), cinema was more important than other arts because it made few demands on the illiterate public. Thus, unlike the press, which interests more the elites, "cinema was almost from the beginning an international mass vehicle". The objective of this paper, therefore, is to understand how the distinct relations of subjects regarding gender and race are represented in the cinematic culture of the film Gone with the Wind (1939).

In choosing to use cinema as a tool to reflect society, we use the concept of Screen Ethnography, one of the approaches employed in Anthropology studies. Approach which captures the contexts of texts and images presented by the media "revealing social spaces of television" (RIAL, 2005, p.120).

According to Rial (2005, p.120) screen ethnography "[...] is a methodology that transports to the study of the media text procedures proper of anthropological research, such as the long immersion of the researcher in the field, systematic observation, field notebook register and others proper of film criticism". In terms of methodology, this work is developed by the historical approaches that, for Michel de Certeau (2008), articulates theoretically and methodologically with the place of insertion of its producer. Thus, "All historical research is articulated with a place of socio-



economic, political and cultural production. It is, therefore, subject to impositions, linked to privileges, rooted in a particularity." (CERTEAU, 2008, p. 66).

Understanding this definition, we will focus on a historical approach through studies about Cinema, gender and racial-ethnic relations, using the concept of educational culture (PINHEIRO, 2009) correlated to the educational process in Paraíba.

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## 1.1 The language of film in historical narrative

Observing cinema as a field that integrates itself to an educational instance, it is valid to highlight the power of filmic narrative in the symbolic construction of what it is to be a man/woman; a black man/black woman in the pre- and post-war of secession in the United States. The junction of race and gender worked here becomes validated because, according to Kilomba (2020), race and gender are inseparable, thus gender directly impacts the construction of race and the experience of racism (KOLOMBA, 2020). Cinema became one of the most significant cultural forms in the process of human formation in the first decades of the 20th century (LOURO, 2015). Having observed this formative expression in the context of a cultural pedagogy, we are faced with a question regarding the film industry: how are the distinct relations of the subjects regarding gender and race represented in the film culture of *Gone with the Wind* (1939)?

In order to answer this question we analyzed the feature film nominated in thirteen categories at the 1940 Academy Awards, winning eight, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Actress (Leigh) and Best Supporting Actress (Hattie McDaniel), the first black woman to win an Oscar. In the United States, released on December 15, 1939, *Gone with the Wind* was rated positively by many film critics, in that its production and screenplay were exceptional, although some reviews pointed out that the film did not have enough drama and was undoubtedly too long.

Not far from the cinematographic world, Paraíba premiered the feature *E o vento levou* on October 25, 1941 in an ad in the newspaper *A União*. Like the slogans, the ad showed that the film was in special session: in Avant - Première at 7:15 pm, at the Rex



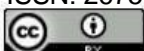
cinema in the Paraíba capital, for the price of 6\$600 - Est. 5\$500. In certain respects, Hobsbawm (2009) states that the impact of the avant-garde for commercial cinema begins to show that modernism would leave a daily mark on social living. What the newspapers show is an assiduous audience participating in film culture through the ways of acting, dressing, and thinking.

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Focusing on Education and Culture as concepts belonging to an educational practice, it is valid to observe that there are many remnants of the educational daily life manifesting itself in cultural situations. In this sense, we rely on the concept of Educational Culture developed by Pinheiro (2009) "however, nothing prevents that the permanences, based on tradition, which can be processed inside the school can also be reached in the extra-institutional school dimension". As Pinheiro (2009) suggests, thus contributing to an educational culture. Jointly, in the theoretical and methodological approach of this work, we will make specific use of the concept of educational culture. This is not restricted only to those who make a regular education, but to those who make "education while social practice or as historical-philosophical reflection" Pinheiro (2009) being constituted from several historical and sociocultural factors.

## 1.2 The place of gender and race in the filmic scene of 'Gone with the Wind.'

To the sound of the theme song (Gone With the Wind), the feature film begins by introducing the names of the main actors - white actors, who remain in a prominent position throughout the plot, for example, Clark Gable (Rhett Butler), Vivien Leigh (Scarlett O'hara), Leslie Howard (Ashley Wilkes), Olivia de Havilland (Melanie Hamilton). The name of the black actors, such as Hattie McDaniel, Oscar winner for best supporting actress, Oscar Polk (Pork) and Butterfly Mc Queen (Prissy) appear at the end of the opening credits with the title of "house staff" which we can analyze as a way for the black subject to develop domestic work which would not be for the whites. Projecting what Morisson (1992 apud KILOMBA, 2020.) expresses as "dissimilarity", it is through the exploitation of the other that whiteness constructs an identity to call itself different from





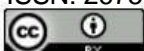
the "Other". Making the black identity believe in the process of denying itself, "What a disappointment, to be forced to look at ourselves as if we were in their place. That you are trapped in this colonial order" (KILOMBA, 2020).

The way we are seen and represented clearly influences the way we see ourselves. If cinema creates overdetermined images about people, gender, and sexuality in a negative way, this is how these people and the viewers themselves, who are not overdetermined, are seen. The linguistic message that is available in the film's opening sign reveals the presence of the dark atmosphere of everyday experiences of racism and fascination with hierarchization in which slavery is posed as the representation of privilege.

According to Kilomba (2020) "[...] we become the mental representation of what the white subject does not want to look like" (KILOMBA, 2020). However, it is noteworthy to note some tactics acquired, possibly, by the actress Hattie McDaniel herself who circumvented some aspects of submission while playing Mammy. It is also possible that Hattie McDaniel's response was a tactic to make herself heard and remain within that society. Since for Certeau the cunning of consumers of different ways of doing, makes it possible for these actors to become "agents of tactics" for companies of control, being part of that everyday life. In this way, states Certeau (2014, p.45), "the tactic has for place only that of the other. Tactics originate from different ways of doing in everyday life, they are deviant arts that oppose strategies.

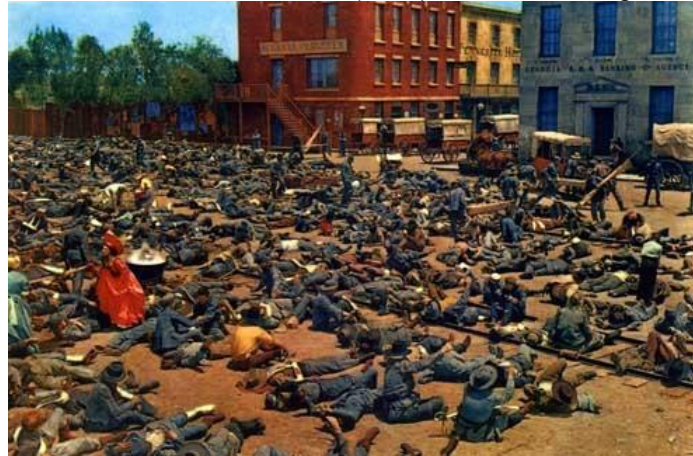
According to Luce Giard (2014), "a multiplicity of knowledge and methods is summoned, applied according to varied procedures, chosen according to the difference of the practices considered" (GIARD, 2014, p. 19). This phenomenon is corroborated by the thought of Lélia Gonzalez when she discusses the relationship of the black mother. Lélia Gonzalez shows us the character of resistance developed by the "black mother" (GONZALES, 2014), through acts of negotiation, which ensured the survival of these women and their families.

Movies can produce a very expressive social and educational configuration, both for the bad and the good, implying changes that, in a certain way, require a close look at



society to know how to incorporate or not the wise discourses of these cinematographic productions. In the emblematic scene 1:16:02 we see the heroic birth of the white character Scarlett going to face the horrors of war in search of a doctor to deliver her friend.

Image 1- scene from *Gone with the Wind* (1939) - Scarlett among the war wounded.



This image meets the thinking of whiteness, focusing on the triumph of the white woman who even without her resources and her rightful conditions goes in search of the salvation of her people. It can also be noted the absence of the position of the subalterns in heroic characters, providing an articulation of the status quo for the silencing of black voices, as they silenced Prissy's.

Ultimately, we can observe the process of constitution of the white imaginary, because according to Fanon (apud KILOMBA, 2020) what we call the black soul is a construction of the white man. In other words, it is the white man's fear created by his own neurosis, a frightening fantasy of what black people "are or can be". As an example, we analyze the scene 1:36:30 of when Scarlett returns from Atlanta to the Tara farm and finds the "devoted slaves" still working for their family, without water, food, and other resources, on a farm that has been devastated by the war of secession. To safeguard their supposed purity, the whites seem to be thinking all the time about what would be "the problem of blacks" not knowing what to do with descendants of the African diaspora, but need them to hide the failure of their lives based on patriarchy and colonialism.

Image 2- scene from *Gone with the Wind* (1939) - Pork and Mammy waiting for Scarlett to talk.



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With cold colors, the scene demonstrates that there is nothing more to expect when relating the problems that the war has brought and that in the face of this they remain faithful as many others have left the farm. This reminds us of a criticism made in the documentary *I Am Not Black* written by James Baldwin in which he analyzes a scene from the film *Chained* (1958):

When Sidney jumps off the train, the liberal white people in town were very relieved and happy, but when the black people saw him jump off the train, they shouted, 'Get back on the train asshole!!!' The black man jumps off the train to reassure the whites, to let them know that they are not hated. That although they had made human mistakes, they had done nothing to be hated (*I AM NOT YOUR BLACK*, 2017).

However, the construction process of the white imaginary serves to stigmatize, stagnate, and defame the black figure, and at the same time it needs this figure to be able to alienate these people, who will be forced into their own rejection. Therefore, having remembered this painful sentimental and corporal impact, it is necessary to rethink this colonial structure that still hovers over the cinematographic discourses. And what this article proposes is to criticize, discuss, and reflect in order to educate so that we can no longer use this cruel language. For, as Hall (apud KILOMBA, 2020) states, we should not be concerned with whites in colonialism, but rather with the fact that the black



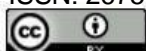
subject is always forced to develop a relationship with himself through the Other and never with his own "I".

## 4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

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In view of the aspects observed, what makes *Gone with the Wind* (1939) chosen as the object of study of this article is the fact that, when we study cinema from a historical perspective, the feature film is always highlighted as a great cinematographic production. Thus, when we observe the film through the screen ethnography methodology it is possible to notice intersectional themes such as gender and race as well as sensitive themes, such as the normality of racism in historical periods. As the objective of this work was to understand how the distinct relations of subjects regarding gender and race are represented in the cinematographic culture of the film *E o vento levou* (1939), this article sought to make an analysis of how these representations were presented and consumed by the public of Paraíba in the mid-twentieth century. In order to criticize the racism veiled for centuries in cultural instances that surround our lives, such as cinema - which acted through a universal language that could speak to all - which in the 1930s and 1940s launched itself as a great educational articulator, we verified through the theoretical discourses of black intellectuals that colonial practices stereotyped gender and race in an obscure way, through the discourse of visualities.

We sought, then, to tension the cinematographic reality in the question of racism as a colonial practice. In the same way, we recognize, through the discourse of black intellectuals, the different experiences, practices, and actions of resistance lived by black people around the world, from the "plantation memories" to the decolonization process. Thus, for Kilomba (2020) the colonial past is brought to the surface, in the sense that it has not been forgotten, nor can we forget it. This process of decolonization refers to the blocking of the obscure practices of colonialism by conquering the autonomy of the subjects that suffered the practices and traumas of colonization.







It is precisely through these representations that we can observe the tendency of hegemonic roles and their production of the maintenance of the colonialism phenomenon, which generates little visibility of the cultural diversity that we have in the world. Although we must gradually approach the same theme, it is possible to observe that some social parameters have been presenting significant changes that correspond to the practice of a more just, coherent, and inclusive society. In light of the above, it is expected that we can achieve some ruptures in the hegemonic fabric through the expansion of the debate about gender and race issues, because the act of decolonizing is given through speech, criticism, reflection, and action, thus making change possible.

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