

Women, Cities and Harassment: Representativeness in Brazilian Documentary Cinema

Mujeres, Ciudades y Acoso: Representatividad en el Cine Documental Brasileño

Mulheres, Cidades e Assédio: Representatividade no Cinema Documentário Brasileiro

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Abstract: This article aims to analyze technical and aesthetic strategies to represent the actions and experiences of women in Brazilian urban centers, having as an object of study the documentary film *Chega de Fiu Fiu* (2018). We base our analysis on a theoretical framework composed of reflections on Brazilian documentary cinema and contemporary feminist theory, particularly the issue of harassment. The work invites reflection on the constant cases of harassment suffered by women in public spaces and the right of female bodies to cities, focusing on the experiences of its three protagonists. The methodology used is that of film analysis, and the objective is also to expose cinematic action as containing narrative potential for the debate on gender issues.

Keywords: Cinema, Documentary film, feminist theory, cities, *Chega de Fiu Fiu*.

Resumen: El artículo tiene como objetivo analizar estrategias técnicas y estéticas para representar las acciones y experiencias de las mujeres en los centros urbanos brasileños, teniendo como objeto de estudio el largometraje documental *Chega de Fiu Fiu* (2018). Se apoya en un marco teórico compuesto por reflexiones sobre el cine documental brasileño y la teoría feminista contemporánea, en particular la cuestión del acoso. La obra propone reflexiones sobre los constantes casos de acoso que sufren las mujeres en los espacios públicos y el derecho de los cuerpos femeninos a las ciudades, centrándose en las experiencias de sus tres protagonistas. La metodología utilizada es la del análisis fílmico y también se plantea como objetivo exponer la acción del cine como potencial narrativo para el debate sobre cuestiones de género.

Palabras clave: Cine, Documental, Teoría feminista, Ciudades, *Chega de Fiu Fiu*.

Resumo: O artigo tem como objetivo analisar estratégias técnicas e estéticas para representar as ações e experiências de mulheres nos centros urbanos brasileiros, tendo como objeto de estudo

o documentário *Chega de Fiu Fiu* (2018). Baseia-se em um referencial teórico composto por reflexões sobre o cinema documentário brasileiro e a teoria feminista contemporânea, particularmente a questão do assédio. A obra propõe reflexões sobre os constantes casos de assédio sofridos por mulheres em espaços públicos e o direito dos corpos femininos às cidades, tendo como foco as vivências das três protagonistas. A metodologia utilizada será a da análise fílmica, e o objetivo é também expor a ação do cinema como potencial narrativo para o debate sobre questões de gênero.

Palavras-chave: Cinema, Documentário, teoria feminista, cidades, *Chega de Fiu Fiu*.

Women and Harassment in Public Spaces

“You're beautiful”, “Come with daddy”, “You're hot”, “I'll eat you out”. These kinds of sentences, which cause us embarrassment as researchers, made us think more than once about their inclusion in this text. Women hear them daily in the streets and public spaces in Brazilian cities. For many people, they may sound like something usual, normalized, or even a compliment; but they are, in fact, acts of harassment. Due to the patriarchal culture in which we are inserted and the sexist practices that sustain this culture, the understanding of harassment is often detached from what it actually embodies: an abusive conduct manifested through words, behavior, acts, gestures, or writings that bring harm to a person's personality, dignity, physical or psychological integrity. Harassment is consequently an act of violence, which has as a consequence the exclusion from social interaction, as it is usually practiced in streets or public spaces: “97% of women have experienced harassment in public and private transportation in Brazil. The Think Olga institution, on a recent journey into this topic, found that the place where women are most afraid is at bus stops” (Nações Unidas Brasil, 2020).

Harassment against women in public spaces is an issue that needs to be addressed based on an understanding of gender violence, a problem that is embedded in Brazilian patriarchal culture and, in fact, in Western culture. It is directly related to power relations between men and women that are constituted in an asymmetrical way, generating violent actions against the latter; and, ultimately, promoting and driving a certain expulsion of women from public environments, as a kind of message, an implicit interdiction so that they do not frequent or occupy these territories (Klanovicz and Rossignolli, 2022).

In these asymmetrical power relations between genders, there are practices of domination and subordination over female bodies that materialize in constraints, attempts to affect dignity, and intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating and/or destabilizing actions. Thus, our objective in this text is to reflect on this culture of harassment, based on the analysis of technical and aesthetic strategies that represent actions and experiences of women in Brazilian urban centers, and having as object of study the documentary *Chega de Fiu Fiu* (2018).

From the violence that generates fear, to the fear that produces exclusion, harassment contributes to a smaller occupation of public spaces by women, often due to fear of walking at night in the dark or suffering sexual violence in public transportation. In the practice of harassment, there is an unspoken message between the lines: "This space is not meant for you, go back to the domestic environment." This feeling of non-belonging is both physical and symbolic - How many Brazilian capital city streets are named after women? How many statues pay homage to them and their achievements? We understand that this exclusion of women from the visual composition of cities is another component of sexism, as such practices seek to cage women in household spaces and in the exclusive role of caring for the family, excluding their possibility of participation in daily public life.

In her book *Los cautiverios de las mujeres*, anthropologist Marcela Lagarde (2014) points out what she perceives and classifies as captivity, that is, a theoretical category that expresses the functioning and recognition of the ways of being a woman in various cultures. Despite our achievements so far, our lives in the contemporary world are still conditioned to patriarchal hegemony, whether we are mothers, wives, religious, prostitutes, prisoners or mad. Based on these symbolic references to social and cultural stereotypes that synthesize paradigmatic gender norms, the author builds her analysis not only of women's cloisters but also of the ways in which women survive situations of oppression; further showing a division between the public and the private, where the latter is considered inferior.

In this dichotomy between public and private spaces, men occupy leadership positions and spheres of power, which allows them to move through streets; while women are responsible for household tasks and child rearing. In turn, it has historically constituted, as Margareth Rago (2001) points out, "the fear of the feminine and the misogynistic reaction, provoked by the idea of women's freedom to belong, to move around, and to occupy spaces".

Along these lines, the theoretical foundation that we adopted throughout this article starts from the perception of patriarchy as an excluding sociocultural structure that constructs daily practices in order to favor its perpetuation and, consequently, the unequal relations between genders- often established from situations of physical and/or symbolic violence against women. In the fight to end these inequalities and discriminations, feminism is built as an ethical commitment and a social movement that aims to highlight the multiple ways in which these practices, which we commonly call sexism, intertwine and reinforce each other: through laws, customs, the symbolic universe, institutions, conceptual categories, economic organization, media messages, audiovisual content (Rago, 2001). Therefore, feminism is the fight for universal human rights that permeates the representativeness and belonging spheres.

Territory, Documentary Cinema, and Power Relations

"The territory is the place where all actions, passions, powers, strengths, and weaknesses lead to, that is, where history is fulfilled by the manifestations of its existence" (Santos, 2009, p. 8).

The notions of territory- especially from the reflections around the triad: territory, territoriality, and re/deterritorialization- have gained visibility and volume in contemporary academic debates, thus, contributing to the construction of knowledge in the most diverse areas; most notably, in the fields of humanities and art, given its theoretical and methodological potential. This provides a more complex understanding of the meaning of territory as well as a broader understanding of the action of occupying a given place, in addition to the construction of territorial subjectivities and the resignification of certain spaces, especially symbolic ones.

Therefore, the territory can be comprehended as parts or divisions of a certain space, which is constituted *a priori*, as a form of materiality, or a kind of primary material preexistent to human action, knowledge, or practice. It is in the territory that power relations are constructed and become evident. It is also where power constitutes meshes on the surfaces of the territorial system to delimit operative fields (Raffestin, 1993). Among the possibilities of these fields, documentary cinema is considered a space for experiences, a primary material, and the/a starting point for the reflection on female participation and representation on the screen and behind the scenes, in order to demonstrate the power relations that are at play in this scenario of making narratives with sounds and images.

Beyond the relationship between territory and power relations, we also emphasize another contribution to the understanding of the concept proposed by Haesbaert (2007), which points to three aspects: political, economic, and symbolic-cultural. These aspects examine power relations, including the institutionalized ones, and consist of approaching territory as a delimited and controlled space, with emphasis on the political power of the state and the resources for economic relations, in addition to the focus on the clash of social classes and the capital-labor relationship. In particular, the symbolic-cultural aspect is the one that “prioritizes the symbolic and more subjective dimension in which territory is seen, above all, as a product of symbolic appropriation/valuation of a group in relation to its lived space” (Haesbaert, 2007). From this perspective, how have women appropriated this physical and symbolic territory? Which narratives are prioritized from the logic of the relations of power instituted in the cinematographic territory? How has the re-signification of spaces and territories been constituted from the experiences of women in *Chega de fii fii* (Kamanchek and Fraza#o, 2018)?

Chega de Fii Fii: Audiovisual and Confronting Harassment

We started with the documentary *Chega de fii fii* to propose a reflection on documentary cinema and its narrative potential, in order to contribute to the debate, both thematic and aesthetic, regarding harassment suffered by women in Brazilian urban spaces. The genre choice for the discussion of the theme is a strategy since the documentary, a minority and marginal form of cinema, establishes a more direct, close and immediate relation with the world we live in than the so-called “fiction” form of cinema.

The film begins with statements given by women who were victims of harassment in public places. At some point, there are so many statements that they start to overlap with one another, becoming indistinguishable, causing

discomfort to the viewer and showing that harassment is not an individual issue, but a collective one, that is, the voice of one is the voice of all women who suffer or have suffered this type of violence.

While the feminine voices narrate harassment situations, the film presents images that materialize the statements with scenes from cities, buildings, squares, and streets viewed from above. The statement of each harassment situation starts with the register of the date, city, street, or metro station where the harassment has occurred. For each date and geographical indication, the aerial image exchange marks a new location. The look from above promotes visual distance from the fact in contrast to the exploration of the geography of cities, making it clear that the issue does not touch specific environments, but permeates the entire urban space. The scenic aerial tour depicts the beauty of the cities, and the cuts with sudden, intermittent camera movements promote contrast with the torment of the harassment victims.

Another important narrative resource is the hidden camera in the film director's glasses. As she walks through the streets, the device captures various looks and even audio of the harassment directed at her. At 6 minutes into the film, the characters begin to be presented: we can only hear their voices, talking about the fears faced while walking deserted streets.

At 7 minutes we see the faces of the characters. They narrate their experiences while moving through the city, marked by the understanding that the public urban space is not receptive to the presence and permanence of women, especially pedestrians and cyclists.

The characters have distinct characteristics and experiences in the city, which enriches the narrative. The first one to be presented is Rosa Luz, 20 years old, a resident of Brasília, and a visual artist, who uses art and her own body to express her identity. Rosa is a trans woman who, for a long time, had conflicts with her identity. She shares that from the moment her transition occurred, society started to see her appearance differently, to see her as a woman. She also reports the objectification of her body and the insecurities that this change has brought into her daily life.

The second character is Raquel Gomes dos Santos, 29 years old, living in Salvador, black, lesbian, and fat. In her opening line, Raquel shares that she had to lose weight because she didn't feel comfortable catching buses and knowing that she would be stuck at the turnstile because of her size.

The third is Teresa Chaves, 33 years old, a history teacher. Teresa experiences the city on her bicycle. She exposes the issues she faces in choosing this means of transportation, besides showing how she feels about being a woman cyclist. In this first presentation moment, the film editing is done with the characters' off-screen statements, illustrated by images of them in the cities. Detailed shots and handheld cameras build a relationship of proximity and uneasiness with what is being dealt with.

To further enrich the narrative and the debate, feminist researchers were invited to bring a historical and theoretical background to the film. Among them is the historian Margareth Rago, who says that "women are beginning to circulate more in the public sphere as working women" and that even when talking about the proletariat the thought turns to men, remembering that women have made up about 50% of the Brazilian proletariat since the beginning of the 20th century.

Besides Rago, there is also the participation of the philosopher Djamila Ribeiro, who reflects on the ultra-sexualization of the black female body and the sexual and violent permissiveness to which their bodies are subjected in the context of Brazilian society, markedly racist and sexist. “There is a colonizing gaze on our bodies, knowledge, and productions, and besides refuting this gaze, we need to depart from other points. In general, it is said that women are not thought of in terms of themselves, but in comparison to men. It is as if women stand in opposition, are the other of men, the ones who are not men” (Ribeiro, 2017).

At a certain point in the production, there is the insertion of a conversation circle where only men are present. They have different ages and characteristics. The mediator asks about men’s approaches and women’s harassment; whether they think women like it; to which one of them responds “it depends on the woman”. To “support” his view, he states that there are women who have a certain “class” and do not mind being cat-called; others, on the other hand, dress to attract attention in the street. In contrast, another group member identifies that the problem lies in men’s education, who are taught to look at the female body as an object as if only they had power over that body.

The choice to place this sequence in the film reinforces how sexism is rooted in men’s thoughts and experiences, and how it directly influences their relationships with women. In their discourse, it is possible to notice how the gaze on the woman’s body is related to power as if the female’s body would walk through the city only to please the male gaze.

As a way of reinforcing the seriousness of harassment in public places, there are insertions of lettering with data about violence against women.

The film also makes use of Rosa’s performance archival footage. In the face of her uneasiness against harassment and its accompanying prejudice, Rosa uses her art and her body to incite a debate. She stands on the subway stairs without a blouse and remains motionless. Among the various protests to such acts, Rosa is verbally assaulted, but she is also welcomed and embraced by other women. She reports that she did the performance expecting to be arrested because this way the cops would be legitimizing her body as a woman.

The images of the women who tell about the harassment situations to which they were subjected took place in multiple locations in each of their cities (São Paulo, Salvador, and Brasília). While narrating situations and questioning women’s experiences in public spaces, Rosa walks around Brasília at night, skateboarding through the city streets, or taking a bus. Rosa also speaks in the documentary from her home, while getting ready to go out, and also from other locations, such as an open field and an urban space where we see a skate park in the background.

But were the cities made for women? This question is touched upon throughout the documentary, and both the interviews and the processes and experiences of each of the characters in their respective cities make it clear that women’s experience in urban spaces is crossed by insecurity, by the feeling of not being able to appropriate the city, because even if the public spaces are used by them, respect for women in this territory is still denied.

According to the study *Meu Porto Seguro*, conducted in 2020 by the NGO Think Olga (2020), 86% of women are afraid to go out on the streets, 97% have already suffered harassment on public transportation, 76% feel unsafe at bus

stops: 68% feel unsafe on the way to the bus stop, and 70% find the lighting at the bus stop inadequate. The most common sensations and feelings raised by the survey were: fear, insecurity, embarrassment, and disrespect.

The feeling of fear and insecurity is transmitted throughout the documentary with images of women alone or in almost deserted streets at night. The feeling of insecurity is further portrayed with the positioning of the camera behind the character's backs, suggesting that they are being followed, or accompanied by someone out of their field of vision; a perception which also permeates the entire film.

Images produced by the characters themselves with their cell phones, contribute to the uncomfortable feeling of the situations experienced by them. They have all experienced harassment and one can see the discomfort in their expressions.

About the film's soundtrack, all the songs are performed by women. Among them is the song *Maria de Vila Matilde*, by Elza Soares, which tells the story of a woman who looks for her cell phone to report her partner who assaulted her and says that he will regret raising his hand to her. The soundtrack adds the necessary intensity to the development of the film.

Women, Patriarchy, and Urban Experiences

In the opening minutes of the film, we hear a subway passenger's report about the episode of sexual violence she suffered, when a passenger masturbated and ejaculated on her clothes. Despite exposing to everyone present what had happened, nobody was willing to help her, which shows and exemplifies a social behavior in relation to harassment: silencing.

In the almost invisible structure that is patriarchy, the very use of the concept is not widespread, even to demarcate the necessary difference between sexism and patriarchy. While the former is an attitude or conduct, which can be both individual and collective, the latter is linked to a whole social structure evident from everyday actions, such as the responsibility for household chores and child-rearing. In addition to that, there is the wage gap in the labor market, which today in Brazil is around 30%, that is, women receive on average 70% of the wages paid to men to perform the same tasks and functions.

Certainly, constituted since prehistoric times, this system of domination, that values men over women, has become so universal that several of its actions are considered natural, even present in our language: who has never thought or said when seeing a child in an act of rebellion, tantrum or crying: "where is her/his mother?" Why is it not said, "Where is the father?", or when the mother and/or father in an advanced age becomes/become ill, what image is created in the collective imagination associated with the idea of care? The daughter or the son?

These are specific examples of manifestations of the patriarchal system, but it is possible to think of them in several other instances, such as the socioeconomic (unpaid work and economic dependence), cultural (androcentric education-how many books signed by women are there in Brazilian university libraries?), and psychological (lack of expectation of success and limitation of their own interests). All of them are, in essence, actions to curtail women's conduct, with the aim of creating standards, often unique, of behavior, thought, and action for

women. These are demarcations that are as invisible and naturalized as patriarchy itself, but that bring women expressive limitations.

This is what Marcela Lagarde (2014) classifies as *captivity*. The theoretical framework built by Marcela is extremely relevant to feminist studies since it enables the most varied reflections on the conditions and daily lives of women, trapped in so many norms of conduct. What we have presented in this text is captivity as a consequence of exclusion, caused by the practice of harassment in public spaces such as subways, buses, cabs, and traffic itself on the city streets. To reflect on harassment from this perspective is to assume that we are denied rights: the right to belong to the city, be it physically or symbolically, and the right to move through it without fear of what we will find on the next corner. This reflection also contributes to the necessity to resignify naturalized harassment, in order to favor the configuration of new notions and practices of citizenship, public space, and cities.

Final Considerations: Making Narratives Visible

The concept of *invisibility* is central when it comes to women and feminist theory. The recent movement, or the so-called third wave of feminism, demands, as one of its agendas, the visibility and insertion of women in all spaces in which, historically and socially, we suffer some kind of exclusion- the street, the school, the bar, the politics. In this sense, audiovisual production, especially documentary cinema, plays an important social role by bringing to light, through the screen, the reflection on harassment and its consequences in women's experiences.

What do women say and think about their harassment experiences? How to make this issue visible? How can women film directors contribute to the construction of narratives with women, resignifying, not only the occupation of the Brazilian cinematographic territory, but also the female representation on the screen? We believe that the audiovisual allows for a powerful narrative for the construction of this visibility. The type of cinema with women proposed by the directing team of *Chega de fô fô* was an action that contributed both to the inclusion of women in the main functions of film-making, such as screen-writing and directing, as well as to the construction of a narrative about the experiences of women protagonists regarding harassment and traffic through cities, in addition to discussing women's occupation of public environments based on their gender relations.

We live in a society where the apparatus of sounds and images is present in practically all public and private environments, from the television in the living room or in the bedrooms of most homes, to the cell phone being used in public transportation, schools, and hospitals. Whether as a means of information or entertainment, investing in the making of a documentary film about women, whose narrative is focused on their experiences and confrontations with harassment, is a way to expand the debate about this issue and make it reach audiences that certainly haven't stopped to think about it a problem. Especially in the Brazilian context, in which the romanticization of violence against women is forged daily by sexism and racism. We believe that there is much to be done, whether in the academy or outside of it, so that the debate and the confrontation

against harassment gains space, thus providing an opportunity for new forms of occupation of public spaces and with respect and dignity to women's lives.

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