Exploring images of otherness through cinema. Analysis of counter-visualities in Portuguese films

ISABEL MACEDO, LUIZA LINS, TIAGO VIEIRA DA SILVA & ROSA CABECINHAS
Communication and Society Research Centre, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

In the contemporary context, where cultural flows intensify, studies on images of otherness can play an important role in reflecting on imaginary dimensions of social representations, as well as in contesting the multiple axes of exclusion. Cinema can be a privileged arena for such studies, as it is situated between the plural universes of media and art, reflecting and often anticipating the trends of its time. In this paper, we analyse the role of cinema as a space for the construction, reproduction, and (re)construction of social representations of identity and migratory experiences. We performed an exploratory analysis of all publicly funded film production in Portugal from 2018 to 2022. In the 359 film synopses analysed, the absence of important terms such as "racism" or "social discrimination" stands out, even in films that address displacement experiences and inclusion difficulties. However, we identified counter-hegemonic images and narratives among the productions, especially considering identity representations. Three films were selected for in-depth analysis: *Fruit of Thy Womb*, by Fábio Silva (2021); *Bustarenga*, by Ana Maria Gomes (2019) and *Nha Sunhu*, by José Magro (2021). In the analyses, we discussed the "language of images" and how the productions portray issues such as intercultural and intergenerational dialogue, gender stereotypes and racism, considering factors such as distance, angle, and gaze. We highlight the importance of greater visibility for films like these, capable of expanding

Correspondence should be addressed to: isabel.macedo@ics.uminho.pt

the discussion of important social issues and combating the asymmetric circulation of stories and memories, a crucial factor for social change.

Interpretations of the past in audiovisual texts have increased, giving rise to the need to analyse a context filled with visual representations of history. With a language of its own, cinema is situated between the plural universes of media and art. Thus, cinematographic discourse has a double potential in analysing different social dynamics and contexts. Works of art emerge and acquire meaning as a social product that reflects not only its production conditions but also a process of social and psychological elaboration of lived reality – a symbolic reality (Ullan, 1995). In a text on the imaginary dimension of social representations, Jodelet (2014) highlights the vast field of exploration to analyse the connections between imaginary dimensions and social representation constructions. In literature, writers reflect the trends of thinking, ideologies and sensibilities of their epoch and contribute to composing the mood of the time (Rigney, 2019). We argue that filmmakers do the same. Especially in the contemporary context, where cultural flows intensify, in-depth studies on images of otherness through cinema can play an important role in exploring and discussing social representations as the sets of meanings shared by individuals about different social objects. These meanings help individuals understand the world, facilitate communication and participate in the process of identity construction (Moscovici, 1961/2004).

As with other works of art, cinema can be a privileged space for conveying imaginaries and contesting multiple axes of exclusion. Themes such as the effects of colonialism in present lives, social inequalities, racism and gender issues are recurrent in recent films. In this paper, we aim to analyse and discuss the role of cinema as a space of construction, reproduction and (re)construction of social representations concerning identity and migration experiences.

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND OTHERNESS

As systems of interpretation that guide our relationship with the world, it is important to consider that social representations are constructed, maintained, and transformed in and through language and communication. Thus, words and other attributes linked to the senses, such as images, deserve attention because they act in the construction and transformation of representations (Marková, 2017). For Jodelet (2014), analysing images of otherness as they

appear in literary narratives, cinema, and other cultural and artistic practices is a field of investigation of great relevance and still insufficiently developed by researchers in social representations. But what exactly are we referring to when we talk about otherness?

Images of otherness imply an awareness of difference, of the existence of another, be it an individual or a group, with whom we establish relationships and counterpoints. The understanding of the other in its otherness is a very old and fundamental issue in the life of groups and communities (Jovchelovitch, 1998). Attributing positive values to oneself or one's group depends on the comparison with the other groups because relations do not take place in a social vacuum. "A group is not an island, just as an individual is not an island" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 24). At the intergroup level, the relations established between ingroups and outgroups, and between dominant and marginalized group, have historically produced contexts of segregation and exclusion, as certain stereotypes provide the privileged group an explanation for its position (Cabecinhas, 2007; Deschamps et al., 2005). Gender stereotypes, such as the attribution of more communal traits to women (attentive, caring, affectionate, emotional) and more agent attributes to men (assertive, competitive, controlling, independent), are still obstacles that prevent women from gaining positions of power in the social structure, as they act in maintaining a social image of women as especially suited to a domestic role, or everything related to care restricted mainly to the private world and not to the public sphere (Amâncio, 1989; Connor, et al., 2017). Gender, as a relational category, enables reflection on how intersections with other discursively constructed identities such as racial, class and sexual modalities also impact the social reality of women (Butler, 2011).

In the same direction, other stereotypes, such as the idea of "savagery" or racial and cultural inferiority attributed to formerly colonised peoples, have justified relations of subalternization and violence worldwide (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). For a long-time, propagated myths and stereotypes legitimated colonialism and erased the social and cultural realities of the people formerly colonised (Licata et al., 2018). In the Portuguese context, where we locate this research, the issue of otherness and social representations can be considered concerning the colonial past. Portuguese history is still marked by the centrality of the 'Discoveries' and maritime expansion (Cabecinhas, 2019). The rhetoric of a different, less violent, colonialism was perpetuated, sustained by the idea of the ability of the Portuguese for harmonious relations with other people (Valentim & Heleno, 2018). This idea persists in public memory and has concrete implications in the lives of people who occupy a place of otherness in Portugal (Cabecinhas, 2007; Macedo et al., 2023). Thus, giving visibility to other narratives

and unravelling memories of violence is essential because the reiteration of hegemonic narratives can paralyse any process of social change (Pereira et al., 2019; Macedo, 2016).

Jovchelovitch (1998) discusses how the issue of otherness is usually approached in a negative way, related to conflicts. However, it is fundamental to discuss the issue in a positive sense, since the production of meaning, language and identities would not exist without the recognition of the other. The author argues that in all forms of dictatorship, there was the omnipotence of a colonial gaze, sure of itself and the imposed truth. To this colonial perspective, the other does not exist and, with its symbolic disappearance, communities are destroyed, human rights are threatened, and social knowledge becomes a threat. This recognition of otherness as a foundational element, or of the active resistance of the other, is fundamental in the face of the atrocities of our time.

Therefore, accessing these multiple visions of our time is also an act of memory activism. Gutman and Wüstenberg (2023) note that "memory activists may organise as formal civic movements or organisations, but they may also act as individuals or small groups, and they may act ad hoc to achieve mnemonic change" (p. 9). Rather than seeing memory as the main outcome of activism, the authors consider practices of remembering as the goal and means of memory activism. By engaging with other stories, memory activisms are understood as a crucial way of transforming society. The strategic discussion of the past through images and narratives of otherness in a variety of contexts, such as cinema, is a powerful way to combat the asymmetrical circulation of stories and the forgetting or erasure of some people (Cabecinhas, 2022; Gutman & Wüstenberg, 2023).

THE MIGRATORY CONTEXT AND THE POWER OF MOVING IMAGES

The various waves of migration *to* and *within* Europe, national policies of 'ethnic' exclusion, and the afterlives of colonialism, as well as the economic discrepancy between Europe and its 'Others', are closely linked to the development of European cinema (Berghahn & Sternberg, 2010). Access to various local and transnational channels, different media types and the displacement of unprecedented numbers of people, challenge our notions of national culture and identity, national cinema and genre, authorial vision, and film reception (Naficy, 2001). Several studies have analysed the role of cinema in constructing national identity and the part of cinema made by migrants as a counter-hegemonic instrument, deconstructing unique versions of the past and the present (D'Lugo, 2012; Giusto, 2011; Tassi Teixeira, 2014).

Cinema, as mass entertainment, highlighted its power to communicate and project powerful images and ideas. Over the last decades, European cinema has been transformed because of the increased visibility of filmmakers with a migratory background and a growing interest in the dynamics of multiculturalism (Naficy, 2001). Representations of migrant experiences and intercultural relations have assumed a prominent position in cinema.

Citizens of former colonising countries have inherited social representations of their colonial past, which often portrayed colonialism as a positive endeavor that supposedly brought them progress and civilisation (Mbembe, 2015). These representations have been objectified in monuments, buildings, street names and films. They were, and sometimes still are, transmitted in schools through textbooks, literature and films, and even through everyday consumer objects (Cabecinhas et al., 2018; Leone et al., 2022; Macedo et al., 2023). On the other hand, European residents, and citizens with an immigrant background struggle for social recognition of their status as citizens deserving equal rights and social respect within European societies (Pereira et al., 2019). They associate these colonial continuities with the persistent racism and discrimination they permanently face (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Today, many of the people who occupy a place of otherness in Portuguese society are immigrants from the current former colonies and their descendants, many of whom are Portuguese. Immigration from the former colonies, or Portuguese-speaking African countries, began in the mid-1960s and increased in the period immediately preceding and following the independence of these countries. Recently, Portugal has also become a destination country for Brazilians. These minority categories have been the target of discrimination, who are often associated with problems such as crime, unemployment and drugs (Vala, et al. 2015).

These stereotypical representations were and are still transmitted through film, notwithstanding cinema's gradual role in re-framing, re-interpreting, and transforming these images and narratives. Contemporary filmmakers, some with immigrant backgrounds, actively challenge colonial representations and enduring colonial power through innovative creations (Pereira et al., 2019). Visual representations produced by those with migrant backgrounds can offer counternarratives to dominant discourses entailing stereotypical and stigmatizing images of alterity. More complex, nuanced, and humanizing images and narratives conveying agency can deepen understanding of current experiences and how the past affects their identities. Subjects' agency is often obscured within media narratives, reducing migrants into a homogenous mass (van Huis, 2021). Some artists actively counter these narratives by showing

alternative images, using diverse strategies channeled through social media and art, including installation art, photography, and film, conveying their personal experiences.

In Portugal, where the far-right party is gaining more space in the public sphere, anti-immigrant discourses assume many forms and languages, entailing extreme "othering", constraining, and dehumanizing effects. They are expressed in repetitive language and behavioral repertoires, articulated by politicians, and conveyed in the media, affecting the life of migrants and Portuguese citizens with migrant backgrounds. These discourses are rooted in colonial thought that determines who does and doesn't belong in Europe (van Huis, 2021).

In contemporary "visual culture" (Mirzoeff, 2011), acts of resistance are inevitably verbally or textually conveyed and visually through media and film. However, these acts of resistance are subjected to power relations. Flores et al. (2022) argued that "whenever someone tells our story for us, we are held hostage to what they will say (for better or worse)" (p. 11). So, it is central to consider the power structures in the world. How the stories are told, who tells them, when they are told and how many are told depends very much on power: "Power is the ability to tell someone else's story and make it your definitive story" (Adichie, 2009, p. 16). The same happens when someone produces a visual image of us. The camera can configure "unequal relations between those who see and those who are seen. However, the camera can also be a means of emancipation" (Flores et al., 2022, p. 11).

In recent years, we have witnessed an intensification of discourses of racial hatred in the public sphere and the erection of walls in several European countries (Cabecinhas & Macedo, 2019). On top of that, several reception studies have confirmed that negative stereotypes about African immigrants and their descendants persist in Portuguese society, suggesting that the colonial past still influences young people's representations and social identities (Macedo et. al, 2023; Pereira et al., 2019).

PORTUGUESE CINEMA: CONTEXT AND DYNAMICS

Throughout history, works of art have constituted such a means of making familiar the unfamiliar. The concept of social representation applied in the sphere of artistic creations enables us to understand how art is socially rooted and inseparably linked to historical and cultural circumstances (Ullan, 1995). Researching cinema also implies considering its meaning and power, the contexts of production, and the dynamics of the time – social, cultural, historical, and political (Awad, 2020). Situating images within their context constitutes an important task

to know how "our visual culture and how images can reconstruct discourse in the public sphere (Bakhtin 1992)" (Awad, 2020, p. 29). This section will briefly contextualize Portuguese cinema and its main social, political, and economic transformations to focus on current film production and its modes of production and distribution, particularly of short films.

Portuguese policies for cinema should be considered in close connection with the country's contemporary history. Several transformations over the last half century have been decisive in the development of the field of culture in Portugal. On the one hand, the revolution in April 1974 ended 48 years of dictatorship, leading to a process of democratization and end of the Colonial War. On the other hand, the accession in 1986 to the European Union (E.U., then European Economic Community) resulted in a significant effort to reach European socio-economic standards. In 1995, following E.U. policies, the autonomy of culture was recognized, and a Ministry of Culture was created. However, its existence was marked by discontinuities (Garcia et al., 2018).

Following the 2008 financial crisis, Portugal was subject to a severe external financial 'assistance' programme (Santos & Miranda, 2022) and to cuts in investment programmes and infrastructures, meaning a significant decrease in support to cultural projects (Alexander & Bowler, 2014). Despite the increase of funds invested in culture in the last years, the expansion and improvement of the network of more traditional facilities (libraries, museums, cine), an overall increase in assistance to cultural facilities, and a rapid transition to digital culture, Portuguese film production continues to be substantially dependent on subsidies, a phenomenon that has caused constant demands for significant improvement in the modes of production.

Since the 1990s, as new authors arose in the context of feature films, a new generation of filmmakers working on short films drew the public's and critics' attention. Seabra (2000) designated this generation as the "Short Generations", a movement that spread throughout the years in the Vila do Conde Short Film Festival, which functioned as screening and evaluation space for short films in Portugal. This explosion of short films directly affected the diversification of support policies for cinema, which began at the beginning of the 1990s (when specific support for short films was created). However, the decisive period for the exponential growth in the production of short films only occurred at the end of the decade, with a significant increase in public support (Ribas & Cunha, 2020). This massive support for this format provided a window of opportunity for experimentation and the emergence of new values that had, thus, the possibility of being shown.

Short films have played an important role in the development of modern cinema because many filmmakers rely on short films to showcase their work. In recent decades, there has been a resurgence of short films, with numerous examples available online, on platforms like Youtube, Filmin and Vimeo, either as projects of students of cinematographic arts or as individual projects or cine-clubs, without neglecting festivals that include significant competitions of short films.

If, as mentioned above, Portuguese policies for cinema should be considered in close connection with the country's contemporary history, the same can be said regarding the main subjects of films. The research related to migrations and intercultural relations through the study of moving images illustrates the role of cinema in the way social and cultural representations of society are conveyed. The interest in research related to migrations, modes of representation of migrants and ethnic minorities, and the visibility of expressions of racism in Portuguese society has been growing since the 1990s (Pereira et al., 2019), highlighting the relevance of artistic creation in the processes of production of counter-visual perspectives. This study is part of this line of research, particularly interested in images of otherness in Portuguese films. In the following sections, we analyse the role of cinema as a space for the construction, reproduction, and (re)construction of social representations of identity and migratory experiences.

METHOD

Data collection

We conducted an exploratory analysis of publicly funded film production in Portugal from 2018 to 2022. All the film synopses (359) of productions financed by Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual (I.C.A.) in this period were collected, composing a *corpus* to analyze their main themes. We collected all the synopses from the I.C.A. catalogues, published every year by the institution, and available online. The treatment of this material was carried out with the support of the software Iramuteq (*Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires*) (Ratinaud, 2009). In this paper, we chose to use the word cloud, a simple lexical analysis. We produce a graphic representation in which each word has a size proportional to its frequency, allowing the quick identification of keywords in the textual set under analysis. This allowed a prior analysis for subsequent selection of films for in-depth analysis.

This previous analysis enabled us to identify the main thematic clusters. Words such as "travel", "leave", "place", "country", gave us quicker access to films that address experiences of displacement and migration. From this corpus, three films were selected for an in-depth analysis based on the following criteria: 1) to be characterized as a short film that addresses the issue of migration and otherness; 2) films selected or awarded in national and international film festivals; 3) films that function as counter-visualities, that help to question hegemonic views of otherness. Considering the space available in a scientific article, we have selected three of the films that meet these criteria – *Fruit of Thy Wom, Bustarenga* and *Nha Sunhu* – and a particular scene that addresses the main topic, for an in-depth analysis.

In the corpus from this preliminary analysis, there were other potentially relevant films to analyse, but we opted for a selection of three films, as they highlight a diversity of themes about otherness. These three films are very distinct, aesthetically and in how they construct visions of migrant experiences. The directors' point of view, the dynamics of power relations that the camera captures, and the way social actors are visually represented impose an in-depth and multimodal approach.

Data analysis

In this analysis of the films, three dimensions are considered: social distance (i), relation (ii) and interaction (iii) between depicted people and the viewer. In all three cases, the relation is, of course, symbolic and imaginary: we are made to see the people represented as though they are strangers or friends, as though they are "below" us or "above" us, as though they are in interaction with us, or not (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 138). Our fundamental interest is analysing how people are depicted, considering the "language of images" or, more precisely, the study of the visual representation of social actors, and how the productions portray issues such as intercultural and intergenerational dialogue, gender stereotypes and racism. According to Van Leeuwen (2008), this visual analysis needs to consider three key factors: distance, angle, and gaze. The differential use of distance is a strategy in the construction of images. People shown in a "long shot" from a distance are shown as "others", and people depicted in a "close-up" are established as "one of us". The angle (from above or below or at eye level) can express two aspects of the social relationship: power and involvement. The gaze represents the dimension of social interaction. When they look at us, the image articulates a visual "you"; we interact,

not just observe. There is a symbolic demand as if the people represented want something from us.

The visual analysis is complemented by exploring the film narrative templates (Wertsch, 2021). Acknowledging the importance of narratives as basic means for making sense of human action, memory, and identity (Wertsch, 2021), we crossed film narratives, and external materials (e. g., interviews with the directors), with aspects such as distance, angle, and gaze. To further these analyses, we turn to Awad's (2020) perspective about "the social life of images" (p. 28) by situating the short films in their spatial and temporal context, identifying the social actors involved, and analysing the political dynamics of the films through their presence in film festivals, exploring its potential "symbolic power to influence the public discourse" (p. 28).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The selected films. Narratives and images

In this section, we identified the keywords in the synopsis related to migration experiences as well as the absences, introduced the films and their directors, and briefly looked at the posters of the films and the means behind these images.

In the word cloud that produces a graphical representation of keywords in the synopsis (Figure 1) is possible to observe the recurrence of words such as family, friend, mother, and father, which indicate the presence and importance of "every day" themes, emphasizing interpersonal relationships (e. g., friendship, love). In addition to the themes of everyday life, several productions addressed cinema and art in general, with references to productions such as documentaries, characters, artists, or literature. In addition to these keywords, we also highlight some significant absences. Terms such as "migrations", "social discrimination", and "racism" did not appear in these synopses, even in films that address experiences of displacement and difficulties of inclusion in the Portuguese context. These absences may be related to the fact that synopses are the presentation of the film to the audience, and directors or producers have chosen to leave out fractious societal issues from these narratives. Although, words such as "place", "journey", "travel", "land", and "country", as well as others, are part of the synopses of films that deal with experiences of migration and displacement.

Figure 1. Word cloud of publicly funded film synopses from 2018 to 2022 in Portugal

As already mentioned, the three films – *Fruit of Thy Wom, Bustarenga* and *Nha Sunhu* – are very distinct aesthetically, in the visions of migrant experiences they conveyed, and in the dynamics of power relations that the camera captures. All three films have been recognized nationally and internationally at leading film festivals[1]. *Fruit of Thy Womb/Fruto do vosso ventre* (2021) is a film about an Afro-descendent director's journey to understand his family, his parent's relation, the traditional cultural values and their impact on his mum's health. The director sees footage of his childhood and adolescence before his birth for the first time and begins an investigation into his parents. Fábio Silva, born in Lisbon (1992), is descendent of Cape-Verdean migrants. *Fruit of Thy Womb* presents a poster (Figure 2) focusing on the

---

[1] *Fruit of Thy Womb* had, in June 2023, 1362 spectators, was selected in 16 film festivals, had 18 exhibitions and received 7 awards. *Bustarenga* had 2848 spectators, was selected for 35 film festivals and 38 exhibitions, receiving 7 awards, and *Nha Sunhu* had 2185 spectators, was selected for 35 film festivals and 36 exhibitions, and was a candidate for a nomination in the category "European Short Film" at the European Film Award 2021. Concerning funding, *Bustarenga* was financed by I.C.A., the Portuguese governmental funding institute for cinema and audiovisual and Wild Stream, France. I.C.A. financed *Nha Sunhu*, and *Fruit of Thy Womb* consisted of an end-of-course project of the director for the Master's degree in cinema and appears in I.C.A.'s 2022 catalogue as an award-winning film.

director's memory, the spaces and photographs of his childhood and the questions left unanswered by his experiences during this period.

Figure 2. *Fruit of Thy Womb* Poster

In *Bustarenga* (2019), a Portuguese-French director is searching for Prince Charming in her family village in the interior of Portugal. The film shows her relationship with the people of the village, the social pressures and the places of still hegemonic masculinity. In this documentary film, the director wanted to play with the spirit of a traditional village, whose cultural heritage is now compromised by the clash of values of our contemporary urban societies. *Bustarenga's* poster (Figure 3) also presents clues to what is discussed in the film: the white horse, alone in the middle of the forest, constitutes a metaphor for the question that the director insistently asks the older women of her summer holiday village. She asks about Prince Charming and realizes that the concerns of those women ignore or are unaware of this social construction. Masculinity, present in the film by the voices of few men, comes to the fore, as does the hard work of the village women.
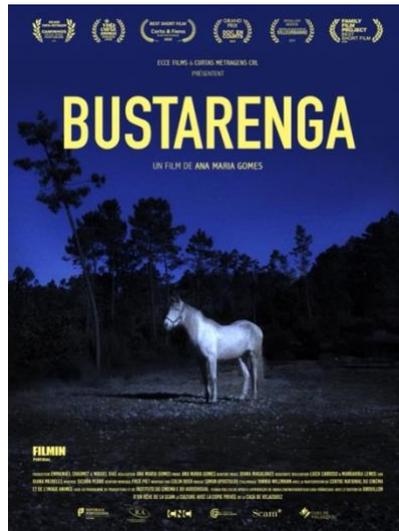
Figure 3. *Bustarenga* Poster

Nha Sunhu (2021) (which means "my dream" in Creole) portrays the daily life of Issa, a Bissau-Guinean footballer who plays in Portugal, exposing the voices and representation of the others behind the camera. The face of Issa, a Guinean footballer working in Portugal, is what we see on the *Nha Sunhu* poster (Figure 4). Showing the face of the protagonist on the poster seems an obvious choice for a film designed as a documentary; however, looking at his face, we wonder what his look and apparent tension mean. While the first two films are documentaries, *Nha Sunhu* is a faux-documentary that discusses the difficulties that immigrants, such as Issa, who do not have their citizen status socially recognized face in their daily lives in Portugal.

Figure 4. *Nha Sunhu*

Counter-visualities in these Portuguese short films

Bustarenga

As a descendant of migrants, Ana Maria Gomes, the director of *Bustarenga,* grew up in France but has spent every summer since childhood in a small village named as the film. This place has remained very traditional in its thinking and way of life. Far from the city, the director considers it like an island that rarely sees strangers. She mentions the social pressure she had to undergo during the summer when she was a child – her movements were checked, her clothing was regulated, and her visits were controlled. Ana Maria Gomes story allows her to be in-between this world. The villagers consider the director one of them because they share the same roots. However, she believes herself to be "in the middle".

Her 94-year-old grandmother is unfamiliar with the concept of Prince Charming. When the director talks to her about it, she asks to define that concept, which brings her back to a down-to-earth world that undoes all its supernatural aura. The camera can play an active role in constructing personal identities, since it is capable of disrupting reality: this is a quality that the director is trying to explore, which is why the camera is used to promote her interaction with the characters (Silva, 2020), also enhancing the spectator's relation with the characters.

Most of the shots in this film are of women, and they are full, medium shoots and close-ups. Some close-up showing hands, generational differences, women in the village, at work, their personal stories, achievements, and disappointments. Often, these women are depicted in a "close-up", established as "one of us". The angle (from below) empowers the represented women, filmed working in the fields (Figure 5), looking after the animals, or in the house. But also taking care of themselves, their hair, painting their nails. They discuss relationships and separation, questioning the constructed idea of 'prince charming' and 'everlasting love'. In this sense, the director uses the social representation of "Prince Charming" as a social object of shared meaning that facilitates communication (Moscovici, 1961/2004) to promote a discussion about gender issues situated in this eminently feminine context.

The women are filmed several times from below, "to look up at someone means that the someone has symbolic power over the viewer, whether as an authority, a role model, or something else" (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 139). On the other hand, men, except in two cases – filmed at eye level, as individuals, which signals equality – are mostly depicted as a group, with long shots, for example, at the village party. At other times we hear male voices participating

in the conversations, but the camera focuses on the woman, and her voice and perspective take the main stage.

**Figure 5.** Women at work (*Bustarenga*, 2019)

The director is asked about her love life, her age, and the clothes she wears. In response to the director's recurring question about the prince charming, one of the women replies laughing, "if you find a prince charming, keep him" (*Bustarenga*, 2019). In the long shot that follows this conversation, we see a white horse and a man standing next to it. Representations of the traditional roles of women and men are recurrent in the speeches. For example, "the male is the one who asks the female. He is the one who has to make the first move. The woman never goes to the man" (woman 1, *Bustarenga*, 2019). Contrasting the discourses and perceptions of men and women, Gomes superimposes ideas such as "It's the way you are treated. The way he talks. All of that, instead of being a little bit, no, it increases" (woman 2, *Bustarenga*, 2019), with an exacerbated masculinity "I would like to have a mate, it's true, it's true, it has heating in the bed, she makes food..." (man, *Bustarenga*, 2019). These representations refer to a social image of women as especially suited to a domestic role (Connor et al., 2017).

Nha Shu

Nha Shu, by José Magro, is a faux-documentary that seeks a spectator who will resist the impostures of some of its discursive actions, who will distrust the narration and interrogate the rhetorical subterfuges believed by those spectators who are carried along with the rush of the dramatic action. Through the artifices of the documentary genre, *Nha Sunhu* begins with an interview. Talking to a few filmmakers we never see, Issa answers directly to the camera and tells the experience of a Guinean-Bissau footballer trying to succeed in Portugal. He talks of dreams and opportunities, disrespect, disillusions, and violations of religious values. The scenes

are disrupted by the intrusion of the director's voices behind the camera, which constantly cuts Issa off. This film focuses on the protagonist, played by Joãozinho da Costa.

In *Nha Sunhu*, the camera remains static for most of the film, ignoring Issa's movements, both in the constructed interview and when he runs on the football pitch at night. Issa is often represented from a long distance: in the café, during the interview, in his room and in the football field. The interaction between Issa and other characters in the film is almost non-existent. He only speaks on the football pitch with what we think is a fellow immigrant footballer like him. The spaces represented are closed. We see the character between walls, referring to repression and lack of freedom. There are walls even on the football pitch, and the camera remains in the same place when Issa runs around the pitch. In Figure 6 Issa leaves the frame, and the camera remains fixed.
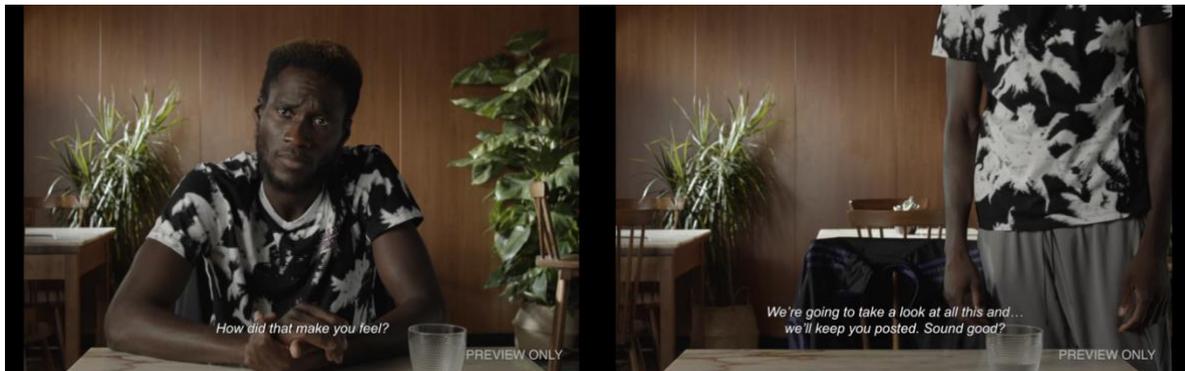
Figure 6. Issa interview (*Nha Sunhu*, 2021)

Issa looks at us and addresses us directly (Figure 6). The picture articulates a symbolic demand. Issa seems to want something from us. His facial expressions and gestures show how he is deeply uncomfortable with the questions asked and with the constant interruptions. In these images, we don't see Issa's gaze, but a person represented as an object for our scrutiny (Van Leeuwen, 2008). This form of representation of the racialized "other", as if a metaphor for the stereotypical modes of representation we see in Portuguese society, is exacerbated by the narrative, in which direct questions, often with a yes or no answer and which seek to explore feelings and affections, are constant: "what's your story? What was your life like back in Guinea? How did it make you feel?" and "Do you feel that today that expectation that dream has not been fulfilled?" (*Nha Sunhu*, 2021).

These are examples of constructed and staged questions that provoke discomfort in audiences and make them reflect on what is being shown, and what images and discourses are these that cause indignation. Thus, acknowledging the importance of narratives as a means for

making sense of human action, memory, and identity (Wertsch, 2021), is essential in film analysis. An example of the power of the director, the narrative, and the use of the camera is when he addresses Issa after a long silence, in which the protagonist talks to his family on the phone, saying, "I thought we could film something else now.... Something to show your moments of loneliness. Something that shows loneliness" (*Nha Sunhu*, 2021). Exploring feelings, such as loneliness, sadness, and longing, constitutes a form of performance that simultaneously draws the audience's attention and, at the same time, causes immense discomfort due to the exploration of the feelings of the person represented.

Football is removed to the periphery of his film, and all the shots are composed so that the ball is never seen. Subverting the expectations of a documentary approach, the narrative turns the focus back to the director, questioning his role: who is telling the story, and how is the story being told? In its intentions note, the director adds that a documentary film is a powerful tool for portraying the world. Still, it is based on an intrinsically unbalanced relationship: holding the camera also means having power over how the other is represented. The director calls our attention to this unstable relationship, which requires continuously questioning the media production perspective.

Films like *Nha Sunhu* can challenge prevailing regimes of power and hegemonic visualities, playing a central role in questioning memories, imaginaries and knowledge, as they can contribute to deconstructing widely disseminated stereotypes (Pereira et al., 2019), as well as questioning hegemonic representations of history. Although representations of history have their core elements anchored as part of shared knowledge, making it difficult to challenge them, they are not rigid or homogeneous. Thus, under certain conditions, the construction of alternative and often contradictory representations is possible (Jovchelovitch, 2012).

At a recent visual culture meeting on historical reparations, we showed an excerpt of the staged interview without mentioning that it was a faux-documentary or what the director's intentions were. While viewing the film, the audience's reactions were indignation, shock at the questions posed to Issa, and discomfort at the face of the protagonist, who conveyed tension while responding telegraphically, maintaining a defensive posture in front of what was asked. In this meeting, the conflict within and between representations was evident. Through individuals' interpretation and reinterpretation, social representations can circulate dynamically and constantly changing ways (Ullan, 1995). Conflict and contradictions followed the visualization of the excerpt. Thus, this film is an example of images' power in provoking the audience to debate, question the meanings of images, put their perceptions and representations

on the table, and confront them. The fixed shots, almost ignoring the movements of the protagonist and the distance established by the camera between the protagonist and the audience, communicate a lot about the interpersonal relationships shown. Distance indicates proximity in the relationships we establish. The longer the duration of this representation that indicates the distance between protagonist and audience, the greater the meaning associated with the visualized action (Van Leeuwen, 2008). In other words, Issa, filmed not infrequently in a long shot, is represented as a stranger. Even in the staged interview, there are no close-ups of the protagonist, and the distance between Issa and the director, Issa and the audience, is maintained. These visual codes can turn indirect stigma into blatant stereotypes that reproduce social distance and dehumanise individuals (Howarth, 2011).

Fruit of Your Womb

The director of *Fruit of Your Womb* confronts the camera, introducing himself as a young man of 27, a film student. The director's mother ended her relationship with his father after 40 years and dealing with his several wives. For the director, the man is in a position of power, and there are many cases of Cape Verdean women who are alone taking care of their children. Cape Verde is also a confusing idea for the director. As he mentions in the film, "Africa is for me like this fireplace, a vague idea" (*Fruit of Thy Womb*, 2021). From an identity point of view, Fábio Silva says that for a very long time, he thought of himself as Portuguese and got upset when people said he should research his roots. He was upset "because it didn't have to be an imposition from other people, because I was black, to force me to search for my roots. Many people who are not black and were born in Angola don't tell them that" (Fábio Silva, in Matola, 2021).

This film addresses the director's family relationships, intimacy and identity tensions. Reflecting on his Cape-Verdean roots, which he is only now beginning to question, his father's relationships with other women, the loss of his siblings and the marks this event left on his family, the director takes an aesthetic option that emphasizes proximity, involvement and the overlapping of the present – the spaces and experiences narrated today – and the past – the images on the tapes left by his father. There is a constant confrontation in this film, between us and the other, between how we experience our intimacy and another intimacy established with the unknown, which we seek to understand. It is also a film about a woman with a migratory background living in a patriarchal structure that demeans her. It shows how the intersections

between gender and other discursively constructed identities, such as racial modalities, impact women's social reality (Butler, 2011).

Figure 7. Fábio Silva with is mother (*Fruit of Your Womb*, 2021)

The horizontal angle means symbolic involvement (Van Leeuwen, 2008). The director comes "face to face" with the viewer, sharing his personal story, while his mother encourages him to confront and deal with his father. The director's family intimacy is exposed in this way. In the selected images, we see both in the living room of his childhood home, talking (Figure 7). This sequence reveals a physically fragile mother and a director who confronts his sorrows and memories. He was looking to his father figure in other Cape Verdean men. After getting upset with his father and seeing his mother's health situation, he realised he wanted to make the film (Matola, 2021). We are drawn into the intimacy of the director, who talks about his traumas. His face shows his willingness to confront his memories and, simultaneously, the discomfort that the subject provokes. Engaging the viewer with these images could help people realize that all cultures are complex and diverse and that all cultural generalizations are problematic. In the director's view, cinema can help these often-marginalized communities gain visibility, showing their intimate stories and perspectives. Through objectification (Moscovici, 1988), these images and the meanings they convey can become constitutive elements of social and ideological reality rather than elements of thought, contributing to the transformation of social representations.

In this direction, according to Hakoköngäs and Sakki (2016), image analysis offers new areas of investigation into the social representations of history, which is especially relevant given the constant growth and updating of forms of communication. Thus, the exploration of images through cinema (such as those presented in these films) can broaden the understanding of the rich diversity of the social construction of reality and common sense.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As Awad (2020) argued, to think about the power of the images, we need to consider their material form, intentionality, and affordances. The selected films can enhance the debate on how, in society, different values and practices are reified and prioritized over others, how some representations are marginalized and excluded from mainstream systems of discourse, and how the process of representation can contest and deconstruct social stereotypes. Complex connections between psychological processes, relations of power and the potential for resistance are contained within and invited by films (Howarth, 2011). Throughout history, works of art have constituted such a means of integrating changes and innovations in social thought, making familiar new elements of the social environment. In Portugal, for a long time, propagated myths and stereotypes legitimated colonialism and the idea of the ability of the Portuguese to have harmonious relations with other peoples (Valentim & Heleno, 2018).

The media allows for the proliferation of one version of events over others, which not only reproduces identities representations in society but also reconstructs them. The examined films gave visibility to migrants' other narratives, unravelling family memories, gender relations, and forms of representation that can enable conflict and transformation. The director of *Nha Sunhu* wanted to provoke discomfort and encourage conflict within and between representations among the public, which can lead to social change. As Howarth (2006) argued, a social representation is not a quiet thing, and social representations circulate in dynamic and constantly changing ways. The process by which images such as those analysed in this paper arise, from the selection to the organization of informative elements, acquire meaning and become accessible to our knowledge, our interpretation, is the process of anchoring (Ullan, 1995). By assigning the image of Issa, the women workers, or the intimate images of family traumas to a category and giving it a name, we can integrate it into our socio-cognitive schemata, interpret it, and make it "familiar". This meaning could contribute to orienting behaviour and changing society's attitudes toward immigrants.

Could these films constitute acts of resistance or counter-visuality (Mirzoeff, 2011) in our contemporary culture? Even if we look at them as acts of resistance, the power relations they convey, the imaginaries represented, as well as the role of the camera in depicting individuals require an in-depth reflection. The stories told in these films described unequal relations, the gender trouble (Butler, 2011), and identity issues that characterize the unbalanced dynamics of

our contemporary society. As Awad's (2020) argued, although "images are not living creatures with independent lives, agency, power, or action", they can help to "analyse the agency of social actors, the unequally distributed power among them, and the change processes that become possible through what people do with images" (p. 37).

We do acknowledge that a limitation of this study could be the selection of only three films, as other films could be included in our corpus of in-depth analysis. These films could add further data on representations of otherness and will be the subject of further studies. Thus, what people do with these images will be our next step in this research since we aim to discuss these films with young students, focusing our analyses on the reception. For these films to constitute counter-hegemonic discourses with social impact, they need an audience. Films that do not have an audience may provide the most exciting images about migration and identity experiences. Still, they will not affect the reconstruction of imaginaries and the transformation of social representations.

REFERENCES

Adichie, C. N. (2009). *The danger of a single story*. Companhia das Letras.

Alexander, V. D. & Bowler, A. E. (2014). Art at the crossroads: The arts in society and the sociology of art. *Poetics*, *43*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2014.02.003.

Amâncio, L. (1989). Social differentiation between 'dominant' and 'dominated' groups: Toward an integration of social stereotypes and social identity. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 19*(1), 1-10.

Awad, S. H. (2020). The social life of images. *Visual Studies, 35*(1), 28-39. https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2020.1726206

Berghahn, D. & Sternberg, C. (Eds.) (2010). *European Cinema in Motion. Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Butler, J. (2011). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Cabecinhas, R. (2007). *Preto e Branco – A naturalização da discriminação racial*. Campo das Letras.

Cabecinhas, R. (2019). Luso(A)fonias: memórias cruzadas sobre o colonialismo português. *Estudos Ibero-americanos, 45,* 16-25. https://doi.org/10.15448/1980-864X.2019.2.32857

Cabecinhas, R. (2022). Outras histórias. Ativismos mnemónicos, género e interseccionalidades. In M. Ledo-Andión, M. Pérez Pereiro, S. Roca Baamonde & M. Soliña Barreiro González (Eds.), *CO(M)XÉNERO. Cadernos de Comunicación e Xénero, 2* (pp. 15-35). Vía Láctea.

Cabecinhas, R., & Macedo, I. (2019). (Anti)racismo, ciência e educação: teorias, políticas e práticas. *Medi@ções, 7*(2), 16-36. https://doi.org/10.60546/mo.v7i2.242

Cabecinhas, R., Macedo, I., Jamal, C. & Sá, A. (2018). Representations of European colonialism, African resistance and liberation struggles in Mozambican history curricula and textbooks. In K. van Nieuwenhuyse & J. P. Valentim (Eds.), *The colonial pasts in history textbooks. Historical and social psychological perspectives* (pp. 217-237). Information Age Publishing.

Connor, R. A., Glick, P. & Fiske, S. T. (2017). Ambivalent Sexism in the Twenty-First Century. In C. Sibley & F. K. Barlow (Eds.). *The Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Prejudice* (pp. 295-320). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316161579.013

D'Lugo, M. (2012). El cine sobre la inmigración, crónicas de un género anunciado. In M. Cantero; M. L. Van Liew & J. C. S. Fernández (Eds.), *Fotogramas para la multiculturalidad: migraciones y alteridad en el cine español contemporáneo* (pp. 19-32). Tirant lo Blanch.

Deschamps, J-C., Vala, J., Marinho, C., Costa Lopes, R. & Cabecinhas, R. (2005). Intergroup relations, Racism and attribution of natural and cultural traits. *Psicologia Política, 30*, 27-39.

Flores, T. M., de Almeida, F. D. & Tonda, J. (2022). Descolonizar a Visualidade: Olhares, Consciências, Modos de Pensar e Agir. *Revista De Comunicação E Linguagens, 57*, 9-27. https://rcl.fcsh.unl.pt/index.php/rcl/article/view/284

Garcia, J. L., Lopes, J.T., Martinho, T. D., Neves, J. S., Gomes, R. T. & Borges, V. (2018). Mapping cultural policy in Portugal: From incentives to crisis. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *24*(5), 577-593. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1248950

Giusto, S. (2011). La Fabbrica dei Sogni: Italian Cinematography, Collective Memory and National Identity. *Visual Anthropology*, *24*(4), 287-305. https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2011.583564

Gomes, A. M. (2019). *Bustarenga* [Film]. ECCE FILMS; CURTAS METRAGENS CRL.

Gutman, Y. & Wüstenberg, J. (2023). Introduction: The Activist Turn in Memory Studies. In Y. Gutman & J. Wüstenberg (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism* (pp. 5-15). Routledge.

Hakoköngäs, E. & Sakki, I. (2016). Visualized collective memories: Social representations of history in images found in Finnish history textbooks. *Journal of community & applied social psychology*, *26*(6), 496-517.

Howarth, C. (2006). A social representation is not a quiet thing: Exploring the critical potential of social representations theory. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 45,* 65-86.

Howarth, C. (2011). Representations, identity and resistance in communication. In D. Hook, B. Franks & M. W. Bauer (Eds.), *The social psychology of communication*. Palgrave.

Jodelet, D. (2014). The Imaginary Formation of Cultural Otherness. *Papers on Social Representations*, *23*(2), 19-1.

Jovchelovitch, S. (1998). Re(des)cobrindo o outro : para um entendimento da alteridade na teoria das representações sociais. In A. Arruda (Ed.), *Representando a alteridade* (pp. 69-82). Vozes.

Jovchelovitch, S. (2012). Narrative, memory and social representations: A conversation between history and social psychology. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science, 46*, 440–456.

Leone, G., Licata, L., Mastropietro, A., Migliorisi, S. & Sessa, I. (2022). Material traces of a cumbersome past: The case of Italian colonial history. In F. Comunello, F. Martire, & L. Sabetta (Eds.), *What people leave behind (Vol. 7)*, (pp. 205–220). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-11756-5_13

Licata, L., Khan, S., Lastrego, S., Cabecinhas, R., Valentim, P. & Liu, J. (2018). Social representations of colonialism in Africa and in Europe: Structure and relevance for contemporary intergroup relations. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *62*, 68-79. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.05.004

Macedo, I. (2016). Youth and portuguese cinema: the (de)colonization of the imaginary? *Comunicação e Sociedade, 29,* 291–309. https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.29(2016).2421

Macedo, I., Balbé, A. & Cabecinhas, R. (2023). Cultura visual, educação e comunicação intercultural: grupos de discussão com estudantes no ensino secundário português. *Educação Em Foco, 26*(48). https://doi.org/10.36704/eef.v26i48.7145

Magro, J. (Director). (2021). *Nha Sunhu* [Film]. PANTANO Filmes; BAGABAGA.

Marková, I. (2017). A fabricação da teoria de representações sociais. *Cadernos de pesquisa*, *47*(163), 358-375. http://doi.org/10.1590/198053143760

Matola, M. (2021, 29 setembro). Entrevista com Fábio Silva, cineasta português premiado no Play-Doc em Tui (Espanha). https://jornaleagora.pt/entrevista-com-fabio-silva-cineasta-portugues-premiado-no-play-doc-em-tui-espanha/

Mbembe, A. (2015). Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive (spoken texto), contributed by Angela Okune, *Platform for Experimental Collaborative Ethnography.*

Mignolo, W. D. & Walsh, C. E. (2018). *On decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*. Duke University Press.

Mirzoeff, N. (2011). *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*. Duke University Press.

Moscovici, S. (1988). Notes Towards a Description of Social Representations. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 18*, 211-250.

Moscovici, S. (2004). *La psychanalyse, son image et son public [1961].* PUF.

Naficy, H. (2001). *An accented cinema: exilic and diasporic filmmaking*. Princeton University Press.

Pereira, A. C., Macedo, I. & Cabecinhas, R. (2019). Film screening African Lisbon: talking about Li ké terra and Horse Money in classrooms. *Lusophone Journal of Cultural Studies, 6*(1), 115-135. https://doi.org/10.21814/rlec.383

Ratinaud, P. (2009). *IRAMUTEQ:* Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires, 2009. [*Software*].

Ribas, D. & Cunha, P. (2020). Para Uma Breve História do Cinema Português no Século XXI. In D. Ribas & P. Cunha (Eds.), *Um Novo Olhar Sobre o Cinema Português do Século XXI* (pp. 7-26). Curtas Metragens, CRL.

Rigney, A. (2019). Literature and Cultural Memory. In K. Brillenburg Wurth & A. Rigney (Eds.), *The Life of Texts: An Introduction to Literary Studies* (pp. 361-386). Amsterdam University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048551903-013

Santos, H. & Miranda, M. (2022). Disentangling economics and culture in European policies for cinema: what can we learn from Portugal and non-commercial exhibition? *International Journal of Cultural Policy, 29*(6), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2022.2109628

Seabra, A. M. (2000) "Saudações às 'Gerações Curtas'." *Geração Curtas – 10 Anos de Curtas-Metragens Portuguesas (1991-2000)*. Curtas Metragens, CRL.

Silva, F. (Director). (2021). *Fruit of Thy Womb* [Film]. Fábio Silva.

Silva, P. (2020, 11 de outubro). Ana Maria Gomes: "A ação põe à prova a realidade, o que não é o caso do pensamento". *Gerador*. https://gerador.eu/ana-maria-gomes-a-acao-poe-a-prova-a-realidade-o-que-nao-e-o-caso-do-pensamento/

Tajfel, H. (1981) . Comportamento intergrupal e psicologia social da mudança. In A. Barroso et al. (Eds.), *Mudança social e psicologia social* (pp. 13-24). Lisboa: Livros Horizonte.

Tassi Teixeira, R. (2014). Cinema, identidade e memória. A produção da alteridade migratória na cinematografia espanhola desde la aldea maldita, 1930 a princesas. *Chasqui, 125,* 45-50. http://dx.doi.org/10.16921/chasqui.v1i125.41

Ullan, A. M. (1995). Art and reality: The construction of meaning. *Papers on social representations*, 4 (2), 1-14. https://psr.iscte-iul.pt/index.php/PSR/issue/archive.

Vala, J., Brito, R. & Lopes, D. (2015). *Expressões dos racismos em Portugal* (2nd edition). Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.

Valentim, J. P. & Heleno, A. M. (2018). Luso-tropicalism as a social representation in Portuguese society: Variations and anchoring. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *62*, 34-42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.04.013

van Huis, I. (2021). Counter-Images of Migration: (Visual) Memories of Refugee Migration That Resist an Anti-Immigrant Discourse. In L. Passerini, M. Trakilović & G. Proglio (Eds.), *The Mobility of Memory. Migrations and Diasporas across European Borders* (pp. 183-206). Berghahn Books

van Leeuwen, T. (2008). The representation of social actors. In T. van Leeuwen, *Discourse and practice: new tools for critical discourse analysis* (pp. 136-148). Oxford university press.

Wertsch, J. V. (2021). *How nations remember: A narrative approach*. Oxford University
Press.

ISABEL MACEDO is an Assistant Researcher at the Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS), University of Minho. Holds a PhD in Cultural Studies, graduation, and a master's degree in educational sciences. Her current research critically engages intercultural communication and decolonial perspectives to explore the challenges of contemporary migrations and the representations conveyed by cinema. She is Co-PI of the project "Migrations, media and activisms in Portuguese language: decolonising mediascapes and imagining alternative futures" (MediaMigraActs, FCT, 2022-2026). ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4107-3997. Email: isabel.macedo@ics.uminho.pt

LUIZA LINS is a postdoctoral fellow at the Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS), University of Minho. She holds a PhD in Social Psychology from the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB). She completed a PhD internship at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM)/Spain, where she developed research activities with the Department of Social Anthropology and Social Psychology. She has developed research on intergroup relations, social representations, intersectionalities, prejudice and social identities. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6131-9264. Email: luizaalins@gmail.com

TIAGO VIEIRA DA SILVA has a degree in Cinema and Audiovisual and a PhD in Communication Sciences from the University of Minho. He teaches the course Cinema and Audiovisual, at the Artistic School of Porto. He is a researcher at the Centro de Estudos Arnaldo Araújo (CEAA/ESAP) and at the Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS). He has researched and published on cinema (namely Portuguese cinema) and its relationship with identities and memory. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1917-7642. Email: tiagocamposvieira@gmail.com

ROSA CABECINHAS has a degree in Psychology (University of Lisbon), a master's degree in social psychology (University Institute of Lisbon), and a PhD in Psychosociology of Communication and Aggregation in Communication Sciences (University of Minho). She is a professor at the Department of Communication Sciences of the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Minho and a researcher at the Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS). Her main research interests combine intercultural communication, social memory, social representations, social identities, and social discrimination. She is the PI of the project "Migrations, media and activisms in Portuguese language: decolonising mediascapes and imagining alternative futures" (MediaMigraActs, FCT, 2022-2026). ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1491-3420. Email: cabecinhas@ics.uminho.pt