

## THE FILM *ILHA DA COVA DA MOURA*, THE MEDIA AND THE PERMANENCE OF RACISM IN SOCIETY

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### ABSTRACT

Beyond school, political discourse, and cultural products, the media play a central role in young people's learning process and in the (re)construction of reciprocal representations'. Television, social media, and cinema are pivotal in the diffusion and reification of certain social representations. In this article the narrative of the film *Ilha da Cova da Moura* (Island of Cova da Moura) by Rui Simões (2010) will be explored, comparing the characters' testimonies with the outcomes of the interview with the director. This film explores three central themes: (a) the importance of membership and collective mobilisation in the neighbourhood; (b) the idea of belonging to and agency in the community; and (c) prejudice and racial discrimination experienced by inhabitants of the neighbourhood. In this film, the director aims to deconstruct stereotypes attached to the neighbourhood. We argue that this and other films can be important tools for multidimensional and multicultural media literacy. It is important to create spaces during the children's and young people's educational process where commonplaces about racism can be discussed and contested. The arts, specifically cinema, play a key role in this process.

### KEYWORDS

racism, media, cinema, *Ilha da Cova da Moura*

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## O FILME *ILHA DA COVA DA MOURA*, OS MÉDIA E A PERMANÊNCIA DOS RACISMOS NA SOCIEDADE

### RESUMO

Para além da escola, do discurso político e dos produtos culturais, os média têm um papel central no processo de aprendizagem dos jovens e na (re)construção de representações recíprocas. A televisão, os média sociais e o cinema são centrais na difusão e reificação de determinadas representações sociais. Neste artigo, exploramos a narrativa do filme *Ilha da Cova da Moura* de Rui Simões (2010), cruzando os testemunhos das personagens com os resultados da entrevista ao realizador. Este filme explora três temas centrais: (a) a importância do associativismo e da mobilização coletiva no bairro; (b) a ideia de pertença e a agência na comunidade; e (c) o preconceito e discriminação racial vivenciados por habitantes do bairro. A intenção do realizador com este filme é desconstruir os estereótipos associados ao bairro. Argumentamos que este e outros filmes podem constituir instrumentos importantes para uma literacia mediática multidimensional e multicultural. Importa criar espaços, ao longo do processo educativo de crianças e jovens, nos quais os lugares comuns do racismo possam ser discutidos e contestados. Neste contexto, as artes, e especificamente o cinema, têm um papel primordial.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

racismos, média, cinema, *Ilha da Cova da Moura*

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

This paper proposes a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the narrative of the film *Ilha da Cova da Moura* (Island of Cova da Moura), by Rui Simões (2010), by comparing this data with the outcomes of the interview with the director held in Lisbon in 2013. Our premise is that cinema can generate possibilities for contesting and debating stereotypical representations of reality, playing an important role in transforming racist and xenophobic imaginaries.

*Ilha da Cova da Moura* (2010) develops from a perspective that seeks to understand the positive side of the neighbourhood. It shows us life in Cova da Moura through a series of glimpses into the day-to-day life of the people of this community. The director follows the daily life of the neighbourhood's residents, interviewing young people and adults, women and men, and showing different realities of this place. He portrays scenes from day and night, parties and work, the street and the house, showing the inhabitants' representations of the relationships within and outside the neighbourhood and their experiences of racism.

After completing his secondary education, Rui Simões, the documentary's director, left the country in 1966, avoiding military service and mobilisation to the colonial war, with which he did not agree. He settled in Paris and then in Brussels, where he attended the École Ouvrière Supérieure and a History course at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. In 1970 he was a student in the Cinema and Television Direction course at the Institut des Arts de Diffusion (Brussels). He made his first film at this institute, still working as a scene photographer in big film productions and as a projectionist in a cinema. He returned to Portugal after the Carnation Revolution. He worked for the company Animatógrafo of António da Cunha Telles as production director. He took on pedagogic functions in training courses in various institutions. He is responsible for the production company Realficção (Lisbon), where he also develops audiovisual and multimedia pedagogical activities.

In an in-person interview (Lisbon, 2013), the director states that the motivation for making this documentary stemmed from his feeling that there was a great injustice in the way the press treated the Cova da Moura neighbourhood. He argues that Cova da Moura is one example of many. The author suggests that there are many "Covas da Moura" in our country and worldwide. In his opinion, the way the press represented the neighbourhood, constantly associated with violence and drug trafficking, was unfair. As Rui Simões recalls:

one day there was a story about the famous dragnet on a beach near here, in Carcavelos, which was on the front pages of the newspapers, in magazines everywhere, that a group of Blacks from Cova da Moura had robbed

the whole beach, that's it! And a while later, it was proven to be false. It was false news, this is scandalous, and I was shocked.

As later proven, the people running along the beach were startled by police intervention. The “dragnet”, which never existed, was somehow created by police, media and political institutions' discourses (Varela, 2021), thus demonstrating the role of these structures in the reification of racism.

The director was not familiar with the neighbourhood, so he tried to learn about it and understand what was going on. He also wanted to know why the “press goes after fake news, fuels on newspaper headlines, accuses, is racist, becomes racist, and attacks a community in a certain way!” (R. Simões, in-person interview, Lisbon, 2013). With this goal in mind, Rui Simões asked to be introduced to the neighbourhood community and decided to make a documentary about the people living there. As stated in the synopsis of the film *Ilha da Cova da Moura* (2010), the director tries to explore the violence and insecurity so often connoted to the place and the reasons for the persistence of these perceptions. By analysing the day-to-day life of its residents, the director thus sets out to study Cape Verdean culture in its various manifestations and how social exclusion is perpetuated from generation to generation.

Almost simultaneously, Rui Simões directed *Kolá San Jon É Festa di Kau Berdi* (Kola Saint John Is a Cape Verde's Festivity; 2011), with the Cova da Moura neighbourhood inhabitants, most of whom are Cape Verdeans it is a film about a traditional festival from their native islands, a ritual typical of June festivities. This documentary accompanies a group of the neighbourhood's residents on a trip to Cape Verde to celebrate the Saint John festivities.

## 2. RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND THE MEDIA

Racism has transformed considerably over time. There is a great distance between its classical expressions, which claim to be based on science, and its contemporary forms, which increasingly refer to the idea of difference and incompatibility between cultures (Wieviorka, 2002). Racism is to characterise a group of human beings by “natural attributes, in turn, associated with intellectual and moral characteristics that are valid for each individual within that group, and, from there on, to eventually establish practices of underestimation and exclusion” (Wieviorka, 2002, p. 11). In fact, “all cultures build categories to know, classify and think the ‘Other’” (Casa-Nova, 2008, p. 150), but that is not the problem. “The problem lies in the construction of categories to demean that ‘Other’” (Casa-Nova, 2008, p. 150).

According to Brah (1996), in Europe, we do not deal with just one but several racisms. There are multiple racisms, based on skin colour, towards groups defined as non-White. Meanwhile, the concept of immigrant has become the quintessential term for “race”. Being an immigrant is the primary trait that allows classifying individuals in a racist typology (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, p. 32).

Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) and Pettigrew et al. (1998) discriminate between blatant and subtle racism. The authors provide a multidimensional model of blatant and subtle prejudice. Blatant prejudice is “hot, closed and direct” (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995, p. 58) and has two components: threat and rejection and opposition to intimate contact with the outgroup. Subtle prejudice, which is “cool, distant and indirect” (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995, p. 58), has three components: the defence of traditional values, the exaggeration of cultural differences and the denial of positive emotional responses. Based on a study of 4,000 respondents from four western European countries, the authors categorised participants using their scores on blatant and subtle racism measures. They found greater adherence to subtle racism than to blatant racism, which may be related to the fact that blatant racism is perceived as anti-normative but not subtle racism.

Although condemned by legal and social norms, blatant and subtle racism persist in our societies. Much of everyday discriminatory behaviour, whether at the institutional or inter-individual level, is marked by more veiled and sophisticated forms of racism, often unnoticeable, which apparently do not breach the anti-racist norm. The fact that racial hierarchies have legally disappeared from the public discourse does not mean that racism is over. Cultural differences are emphasised since the argument of inequality and racial hierarchies is currently counter-normative (Cabecinhas, 2008).

Notwithstanding the differences that may exist among theories of racism, they all agree that the new expressions of racism are disguised and indirect and characterised by the intention of not hurting the norm of equality and not threatening the self-concept of the social actors as equal persons (Lima & Vala, 2004). That is not to say that the more traditional and open forms of racism have ceased to exist or have lost significance. In a formally anti-racist society, new forms of expressing racism persist and seek to coexist with the anti-racist norm. These “new expressions of racism, more veiled and hypocritical, are as or more damaging and harmful as the more open and blatant expressions since, being more difficult to identify, they are also more difficult to combat” (Lima & Vala, 2004, p. 408).

Common to all these more veiled forms of expressing racism is their ability to translate into violent expressions (Lima & Vala, 2004). As the media have recently informed us, some of these manifestations have generated a set of anti-racist social movements of global impact.

Some recent studies have corroborated previous research and highlighted the impacts of racism on immigration policies. Ramos et al. (2019) show that people are more willing to admit that some cultures are much better than others rather than acknowledging that some groups are born smarter and fitter to work than others. In more than half of all countries surveyed, including Portugal, 30% or more than 30% of respondents believe in the natural superiority of some human groups.

Although fighting racial discrimination is considered a priority by several international and national entities, 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 imaginary and social identities (Macedo, 2017; Pereira et al., 2019). While in the European context, there have been constant reports of blatant racism relating, for example, to security forces' intervention, recently this debate has become increasingly relevant in Portugal. However, the complaints of several anti-racist associations and organisations are longstanding (Maeso, 2021). The classification of neighbourhoods "is closely related to the representation of African descendent/Black and Roma/Gypsy youth as 'naturally averse to authority'" (Maeso, 2021, p. 121). These representations, conveyed by the media, in particular, are generally based on the criminalisation of the Black population (Varela, 2021).

### 3. ALTO DA COVA DA MOURA IN THE MEDIA

Alto da Cova da Moura neighbourhood is located on the outskirts of Lisbon, approximately 15 km from the capital, with easy access to public transport. It is part of the parishes of Buraca and Damaia in the municipality of Amadora (Beja-Horta, 2008). The formation and consolidation of Alto da Cova da Moura neighbourhood can be divided into four distinct stages. The first one dates from the 1940s to 1974 and corresponds to the beginning of the neighbourhood's formation. The second stage covers the period between 1974 and 1977. This stage represents the beginning of a new development process characterised by flows of Portuguese immigrants and repatriates from the former colonies and the emergence of new construction and urban development processes in the neighbourhood. The accounts documenting its origin and development by Cape Verdeans, Portuguese, Santomeans, Angolans and Guineans from the former colonies and the Portuguese rural inland reveal a colonial context extending beyond the independence of African countries (Jorge & Carolino, 2019).

The third period runs from 1977 to 1989 and coincides with the first population boom, leading to the consolidation of the neighbourhood. Also, during this stage, popular migrant organisations were created. Finally, the last phase begins in 1989 and stretches to the present. During this period, there was great acceleration of new flows of immigrants, many of them in irregular situations, and the construction of "dominant official representations" about the neighbourhood as an "urban problem" (Beja-Horta, 2008, p. 184). As Beja-Horta (2008) states, "the residents, like the native population living in the neighbourhood, activated social networks of friendship and solidarity. They reproduced and reconfigured new cultural practices" (p. 202), struggling with social and political problems of their native country and with hard work to improve their living conditions in the host country.

Alto da Cova da Moura neighbourhood extends over 18 hectares with 1,617 houses and about 6,000 inhabitants, mostly Cape Verdeans and their descendants and Portuguese who returned from the former colonies, Angolans, Guineans, Santomeans, Mozambicans, Brazilians and people from eastern European countries. 45% are less than 25 years old. (*Ilha da Cova da Moura*, 01:17:43)

Over time, the actors have developed various strategies to ensure the right to remain in one area of the city that is increasingly more central and, therefore, desirable from the real estate point of view, where they have developed their own forms of relationship, identification and belonging (Jorge & Carolino, 2019).

Anti-racist organisations in Portugal have been denouncing police brutality, violence, and harassment by extreme right-wing and neo-Nazi organisations since the late 1980s (Maeso, 2021). In today's societies, the different media are important contexts for the production, reproduction and transformation of ideologies. They produce representations of the world, images, and frameworks for understanding the world around us.

The media's symbolic construction of peripheral neighbourhoods, official discourses and public opinion, in general, has conveyed a negative and stigmatising image of these places and their residents (Beja-Horta, 2008). Cova da Moura is one of the most stigmatised neighbourhoods in Portugal. "A false imaginary associates it with 'drugs' and 'weapons', with 'criminals' and 'young delinquents', resulting from a labelling process built by the media and political institutions" (Raposo & Varela, 2016, p. 5). These discourses are co-responsible for creating an imaginary of transgression, incivility and anomie about these territories being racially connoted places (Raposo & Varela, 2016).

This mediatisation of urban spaces such as Alto da Cova da Moura, relating them to deviant behaviour, profoundly impacts the processes of exclusion of this population. The neighbourhood is often reduced to a stereotypical imaginary construction that becomes hegemonic and is widespread and amplified by the media. Its inhabitants, especially young people, are perceived as potentially threatening the prevailing social order. Stereotypes consist of mental images interposing in the form of biases between the individual and reality. They are generalised and exaggerated images that neglect the variability of the members of other groups, denying their individuality (Cabecinhas, 2002, 2004; Lippmann, 1922/1961).

On the other hand, its inhabitants see the neighbourhood as a place where casualness, sociability, hospitality, and being outside predominate and are associated with an experience of something considered an African or Cape Verdean way (Santos, 2014).

In a study developed by Carmo (2018), the author states that

most (54%) respondents claim to have been victims of discrimination for living in Alto da Cova da Moura, wherein searching for employment (71%), the relationship with the police (68%) and going to commercial establishments (56%) are the most referred discriminatory contexts. Equally relevant is that "poverty and unemployment" were considered the neighbourhood's main challenges by 88% of the respondents, with 58% referring to housing conditions, 40% to stigmatisation and image, and 39% to insecurity and criminality. (p. 591)

Local associations have played a central role in claiming the right to the regularisation of the land situation, the rehabilitation of the neighbourhood, the provision of social services, the need for a security policy and the construction of a positive image of the

community (Beja-Horta, 2008). The collective actions implemented by the associative movement of Cova da Moura are anchored in reinforcing the socio-spatial identity and the ability to develop joint strategies of mobilisation and claim. For example, in February 2015, young people from this neighbourhood were the target of police violence, and several representations were published in the national and international press. This event prompted Cova da Moura residents to organise a mobilisation against police violence and racism, which counted on the solidarity of other neighbourhoods and broad civil society sectors (Raposo & Varela, 2016).

For decades, the racialisation of these neighbourhoods has been supported by images of transgression and marginality disseminated by the media, influencing society's representations of their residents. According to Raposo and Varela (2016), this imagery was supported by countless newspaper and television news "through the equation poverty-blackness-violence-neighbourhoods and produced a caricatured interpretation of these territories" (p. 10), which urgently needs to be deconstructed and contested. The media have a fundamental role in constructing violent events and conflicts and in stigmatising spaces and their populations residing in them. The media participate in the "co-construction of conflicts and violent events, amplifying them and providing visibility to the perpetrators" (Malheiros et al., 2007, p. 36). Besides amplifying a violent phenomenon, the media can deform it, for example, through how images are captured, the choice of interviewees to include in the piece and how the collected testimonies are selected and delivered. Even when there is a concern to give a positive image of immigrants, in doing so, journalists and filmmakers play with stereotypes and concepts naturalised in common sense. Sometimes they try to deconstruct them, and other times they get involved in the stereotypes they convey, even without realising it (Costa, 2010). This article approaches racism as a social phenomenon, rooted in societies and their collective memory, often learned and reproduced in an unconscious or naturalised way.

#### 4. ANALYSIS<sup>1</sup>

The documentary *Ilha da Cova da Moura* (2010) explores three central themes: (a) the work developed by Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude (Youth Mill Cultural Association) and the support it has been giving to the neighbourhood community; (b) the idea of belonging to the neighbourhood and the agency associated with investment, freedom and identification with the community's cultural and social aspects; and (c) testimonies about the violence, prejudice and discrimination experienced by neighbourhood residents.

##### 4.1. MOINHO DA JUVENTUDE, MEMBERSHIP AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SOCIAL SPACE

As far as residents' organisations are concerned, Moinho da Juventude and Clube Social e Desportivo da Cova da Moura (Social and Sports Club of Cova da Moura) are

<sup>1</sup> An initial analysis of this film can be found in Macedo (2017).

regarded as central associations in the community. They offer legal and cultural services, and economic and social support, mainly to vulnerable families. Moinho da Juventude provides meals for children whose parents arrive late from work and, in many cases, have two jobs. These associations offer spaces for socialising, social organisation, re-interpretation of traditions and mediation between the country of origin and the host country (Casimiro, 2014). This association had, over time, a vital role in the process of socialization, strengthening cultural bonds, affirming identity, solidarity and mutual aid practices. That and other organisations provide privileged spaces for social and political mobilisation to defend the interests of their members.

In the film, the director's journey through the neighbourhood is guided by a young man of 25 who is an intercultural animator and mediator at Moinho da Juventude. They tour in a car, while the young man mentions that Cova da Moura is like an island in the middle of Damaia, Buraca, and Alfragide. For this young man, the association is the "heart of Cova da Moura" (00:10:09). For decades it has contributed to better living conditions for the community. In this journey, he also mentions that the neighbourhood is formed by "many Cape Verdeans and many returnees" (00:26:04). However, he adds that some people do not live in the neighbourhood, but they come to socialise with them.

The association director mentions that mothers would depart early in the morning to sell fish at the riverside. The children were left alone because they would only come back around 1pm/3pm, and the older ones would look after the younger ones. Currently, the association prepares daily meals for more than 400 people, distributed across Cova da Moura, including family nurseries. She further notes that they have always invested in culture and created a library and a drumming group, the Kola San Jon group, underlining that there has been much work from community members.

Interviews with community members from various generations reflect their involvement and dedication to the neighbourhood.

A lot of people... Actually, I'm not ashamed, but many people are ashamed to say they live in Cova da Moura because they say, but where? in that... where... was found? My husband bought it here from a man who was starting to build a house here, but then he gave up, so we bought the brick he had and so on, and so on... We began! We worked in the morning to eat at night. I worked as a maid. And he was also doing odd jobs so that we could manage. There was no water, nothing, no electricity, everything was done by hand, my children were very young, we all were... That's it... They went to work and built the houses at night, to tell you the truth. In the summer, it was after work, working till you could see. It was very hard, very hard indeed. That's why we love it so much. (00:12:18)

- We loaded the material ourselves when it came in the van. And when people talk about the neighbourhood going down, it makes me very confused, because it was a lot of work, for many years.



A lot of dedication also from our parents and...

- Dedication, and 100% dedication because they went to work during the day and then at night when they got home, we had dinner and did something. (00:14:22)

From its inception, the founding members of the neighbourhood committee challenged the “disabling traits of an identity politics that pinned residents and the community to hegemonic representations of illegality” (Beja-Horta, 2006, p. 275). While lobbying local state agents for better services, they mobilised local labour to promote fundraising campaigns to subsidise the costs of building infrastructure (Beja-Horta, 2006, p. 275).

Mutual help and membership have played a central role in claiming several rights. The collective actions, led by the movements born in the neighbourhood, are anchored in reinforcing socio-spatial identity and the capacity to develop joint mobilisation and intervention strategies (Beja-Horta, 2008). With the valorisation of cultural differences and the social integration of migrant and ethnic communities into Portuguese society as its main objectives, Moinho da Juventude played a central role in this process.

#### 4.2. AGENCY AND BELONGING

Besides the population’s involvement in the neighbourhood’s construction, freedom in cultural and social practices is also highlighted. One of the residents mentions that they cannot cook using firewood, grind corn, or hold parties in the buildings. For this young woman, anyone who comes from Cape Verde to the neighbourhood thinks that they are still in Cape Verde. According to this character, the elderly who visit the quarter say, “it looks like you are in Cape Verde because there are many things, from food to parties to tradition. We have many things here similar to Cape Verde” (01:07:36). For the young girl, “out there” is not the same, and they cannot have music at late hours, they cannot always be having parties, they cannot step on Cape Verdean corn, grill corn in the street, on the coals, they cannot cook over a firewood fire. She believes they should respect it when living “out there”, but she feels more at ease in the neighbourhood (01:07:48).

The characters in the film constantly refer to casualness, sociability, hospitality, and being outside (Santos, 2014). The various testimonies of neighbourhood residents point to the freedom, togetherness and support they feel in their community. Although some could live elsewhere, they say they feel comfortable there and do not see themselves living elsewhere. In one of the testimonies, António, a policeman, says that few people in the neighbourhood know his occupation. He says that many people living in neighbouring areas regret having left Cova da Moura, he still lives there. When questioned about the reasons for still living in the neighbourhood, he asks:

Why should I leave then? I don’t have any problems with my neighbours. I don’t get mad at anyone. If I want to walk barefoot in the street, no one will

wonder why I'm barefoot in the street, so I don't see myself anywhere else.

(Cut scenes, António Pedro, 00:01:25)

The images of parties, social gatherings, and support in moments of pain are recurrent in the documentary, for example, in the case of a funeral where several community members get together and share a meal. The participation of the group Kola San Jon and the party organised by the community also promote the integration and involvement of the residents in the neighbourhood's cultural and recreational activities. For the director, this community has created its own island, its own space, like other immigrant communities trying to create networks, unite and help each other in their destination countries.

### 4.3 SOCIAL STEREOTYPES AND RACISM

The third theme addressed by the film concerns violence, prejudice and discrimination. The documentary begins with a news report of clashes between police officers and neighbourhood residents. The images of police cars and officers patrolling the streets of the neighbourhood are constant, as is criticism of police officers. The director's attention to giving a positive image of the neighbourhood's residents is noticeable. However, the recurring images of the police may reinforce certain stereotypes and concepts that are naturalised in common sense. By seeking to break down stereotypes, filmmakers may ultimately become involved in the stereotypes they convey, even without realising it (Costa, 2010).

One of the residents refers that the police invaded his house by mistake. His testimony demonstrates that the agents' negative representations of the neighbourhood's population induce the perception of its inhabitants as a homogeneous body, adopting more automatic attitudes towards the people. That is the outgroup homogeneity effect or the tendency to perceive outgroup members as more similar to one another than the ingroup members (Cabecinhas, 2002). Such an effect contributes to social discrimination and the continuity of representations that are generally based on the criminalisation of the Black population (Varela, 2021). Although more veiled expressions of racism persist in today's society, its ability to transform itself into violent expressions (Lima & Vala, 2004) is visible in the testimonies and experiences of the characters interviewed by Rui Simões.

The filmmaker also interviews a couple of "returnees" from Angola, who had nowhere to live when they returned and built a house there. They say that they used to build shacks in Cova da Moura at that time. The couple talks about the prejudice towards the neighbourhood and how their youngest son suffered from it. They say that Cova da Moura has a "bad reputation" but that it is their home and they would not trade it for a place elsewhere.

The documentary also tells the story of a very young couple. The couple says that her parents did not accept the relationship and point to the prejudice and racism the young man suffered. Besides the phenotype, being from Cova da Moura adds to the discrimination based on social stereotypes, associating this neighbourhood with criminality. In the media, minority groups are frequently related to the problems of urban

crime and violence, unemployment, drug trafficking, the underground economy, insecurity, social costs and, more recently, terrorism (Marques, 2007). The generalisation of prejudices, the systematic discrimination in the various areas of social life, the violence of the language or the residential segregation are, in Marques's (2007) perspective, phenomena of greater extension inscribed in society. The young man points out that "the innocent carry the can for the guilty" (00:29:12). By the end of the film, the young woman has a baby, and you can see the father's happiness and excitement, along with the sadness because the child's maternal grandmother does not want to relate to the new family member.

When we were sure she was pregnant, our first reaction was to tell her. The mother's first reaction, well, I'm not proud to say this, but I will, the thing is, she turns to me and says, "children of monkeys", she won't accept just like that. I don't want her to accept my child. Because the thing is, if she wants to give up her granddaughter, that's her problem. Now the thing is, I won't give up my children. (00:28:25)

"Basically, it's all prejudice of 'he's Black, he's from the Cova da Moura, and he's a bandit, a marginal, and that sort of stuff'" (00:29:04).

In an interview, Simões (in-person interview, Lisbon, 2013) stated that, although the film was built for the viewer, thus seeking to encourage their involvement, the fact that it is a DVD edition affords the director greater freedom. Some images and testimonies are not part of the film, but the director considers them essential for us to understand the reality under analysis. One of the testimonies is that of António, a character already mentioned, who believes that the criminality they are related to is everywhere and that people do not notice it. According to the policeman, the neighbourhood has criminality, but it does not compare "with the camouflaged amount out there" (Cut scenes, António Pedro, 00:02:07).

And that's what I believe happens in my neighbourhood. As my neighbourhood is different, it draws more attention. It has always been and will always be. It's always the little guy who gets the raw deal, and there are no littler guys than us. We are the different ones; we are the ones who live in that neighbourhood, we are from a foreign country, we have a different culture, so we are constantly being watched, that's what happens. (Cut scenes, António Pedro, 00:02:41)

In fact, apart from this young man's testimony, there are several speakers in the documentary who address this racial issue by stating, for example, that "there's no such thing as Black Portuguese" (00:27:12) in the minds of most of the population. The young Black Portuguese are therefore seen as immigrants. These representations, combined with those related to what the media convey about the neighbourhood, deepen the situation of inequality and social discrimination among the younger generations. The "false imaginary" (Raposo & Varela, 2016) built around Cova da Moura, the result of a labelling

process created by the media and other institutions, is co-responsible for transforming this neighbourhood into a racially connoted space (Raposo & Varela, 2016).

If I am now down there and I get angry with a white man in the street, the first thing he says to me is “go to your land”, so I don’t know if I’m really Portuguese. My father has a saying that he says, and we give it a lot of credit: “that there is no such thing as a Black Portuguese”. And I believe that a lot, because if I were Portuguese, they wouldn’t send me back home, would they? As I’m from here. (00:27:02)

The excerpts presented above, which refer to the testimonies of young people living in the neighbourhood, show the value they attach to their social belonging, particularly their belonging to that geographical and sociocultural space. Their social identity is built through comparison with their outgroup, highlighting that their social group does not negatively judge their behaviours.

Although their condemnation by legal and social norms, blatant and subtle racism persists in our societies (Cabecinhas, 2008; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Pettigrew et al., 1998), as we can confirm by the testimonies of the characters in *Ilha da Cova da Moura* (2010). The negative representations of the neighbourhood’s population also influence the perception of its inhabitants as a homogeneous body and not as individuals (Cabecinhas, 2007).

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article tried to discuss the persistence and coexistence of blatant and subtle racism in society (Cabecinhas, 2008). 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 imaginary and social identities (Macedo, 2017; Pereira et al., 2019).

Drawing on the thematic analysis of the film *Ilha da Cova da Moura* (2010) by Rui Simões and cross-referencing this data with the results of an interview with the director, we explored three central themes: reflections on membership, Moinho da Juventude and the construction of the social space; the feeling of agency and belonging to the neighbourhood; and the social stereotypes and expressions of racism experienced by the characters in the film.

Cova da Moura is one of the most stigmatised neighbourhoods in Portugal. However, over time, the residents have developed several strategies to ensure the right to remain in this area of the city. A place where they have been building forms of relationship, identification and belonging (Jorge & Carolino, 2019), seeking to challenge the “false imaginary” that associates it with crime (Raposo & Varela, 2016). This mediatization of Alto da Cova da Moura, relating them to deviant behaviour, profoundly impacts the processes of exclusion of this population. The neighbourhood is often diminished to a stereotypical imaginary construction that becomes hegemonic and is

disseminated and amplified by the media. Local membership has played a central role in deconstructing negative representations about the neighbourhood (Beja-Horta, 2008), claiming several rights and collective actions of mediation, mobilisation, and intervention. Associative mediation may facilitate joint movements, fostering action among individuals with similar interests and needs and seeking solutions to the problems they face in the neighbourhood.

Although the director made this film to deconstruct stereotypes, the recurrence of images of police officers patrolling the neighbourhood may contribute to the reification of stereotypes and concepts naturalised in common sense. As we mentioned initially, although they try to deconstruct stereotypes, the directors may get involved in the stereotypes they convey, even without realising it (Costa, 2010).

The negative representations of the neighbourhood's population also influence the perception of its inhabitants as a homogeneous body and not as individuals (Cabecinhas, 2007). Throughout the film, the testimonies suggest that the characters' social identity is (re)constructed by comparison with their outgroup. The idea that their social group understands and does not judge their behaviour negatively and that its members are somehow interdependent is central in the testimonies of the film.

This and other films can be important tools for multidimensional and multicultural media literacy among diverse users, consumers, producers of all ages, and social and cultural levels. Challenging the way racism shapes thought and action requires not simply reacting to racist assumptions but creating structures and moments where the commonplaces of racism can be discussed and contested. The arts, school, and cinema play a key role in this process.

Although cinema is a communication medium common in the daily lives of young people, there is a gap in research on the part of the film in the process of critical deconstruction of young people's views of themselves and the world. Studies show that young people attach a central role to the cinema in their teaching-learning process (Macedo, 2016; Macedo et al., 2021; Pereira et al., 2019). Films that challenge the prevailing regimes of thought, whether in a classroom context or daily interaction with the media, allow the questioning of memories, imaginaries and knowledge and draw attention to silenced events and injustices, deconstructing stereotypes.

**Translation: Anabela Delgado**

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