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Vitor Henrique de Souza

***“WHAT’S A FAGGOT?”: IMAGES OF VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY QUEER
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Vitor Henrique de Souza

“What’s A Faggot?”: Images Of Violence In Contemporary Queer Cinema

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Orientador(a): Prof.(a) Dra. Anelise Reich Corseuil

Coorientador(a): Prof.(a) Dr. José Soares Gatti Júnior

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Vitor Henrique de Souza

“What’s A Faggot?”: Images Of Violence In Contemporary Queer Cinema

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Prof^a. Dr^a. Anelise Reich Corseuil
(Orientadora e Presidente) – Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

Prof. Dr. José Soares Gatti Junior
(Coorientador) – Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

Prof^a. Dr^a. Alessandra Soares Brandão
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

Prof. Dr. Raphael Albuquerque de Boer
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande

Prof^a. Dr^a. Miriam Pillar Grossi
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

Certificamos que esta é a versão original e final do trabalho de conclusão que foi julgado adequado para obtenção do título de Doutor em Inglês – Estudos Literários e Culturais.

Coordenação do Programa de Pós-Graduação

Prof^a. Dr^a. Anelise Reich Corseuil
Orientadora

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Kashka from Baghdad
Lives in sin, they say
With another man
But no one knows who

Old friends never call there
Some wonder if life's
Inside at all
If there's life inside at all

But we know the lady who rents the room
She catches them calling a la lune

At night
They're seen
Laughing
Loving
They know
The way
To be
Happy

They never go for walks
Maybe it's because
The Moon's not bright enough
There's light in love, you see

Kate Bush, *Kashka from Baghdad*

ABSTRACT

The present study examines the representation and construction of anti-queer violence in six contemporary queer films: *Praia do Futuro*, *Carol*, *Moonlight*, *Una Mujer Fantástica*, *Yo, Imposible*, and *The Power of the Dog*. The primary objective is to analyze how these films either reinforce or subvert prevailing assumptions surrounding the depiction of anti-queer violence on screen. The theoretical framework draws on the multidimensional nature of violence – including verbal, emotional, and physical forms – as well as violence shaped by gender, class, race, and sexuality. Additionally, the study engages with the production cycles of queer cinema globally, aiming to provide a simplified overview of how anti-queer violence is reproduced and sustained in film. The findings suggest that queer cinema has evolved in its portrayal of anti-queer violence, shifting from reductive representations toward more nuanced and critical narratives. In doing so, queer cinema has contributed to a broader cultural discourse on violence, identity, and resistance.

Key-words: queer cinema, anti-queer violence, violence, representation, identity.

RESUMO

Introdução

O presente trabalho investiga a representação e a construção de violência anti-queer em seis filmes contemporâneos: *Praia do Futuro* (2014), *Carol* (2015), *Moonlight* (2016), *Una Mujer Fantástica* (2017), *Yo, Imposible* (2018) e *The Power of the Dog* (2021). Produzidos em contextos sociopolíticos distintos, esses filmes oferecem um panorama amplo sobre como a violência direcionada a sujeitos queer é construída e ressignificada no cinema recente. Partindo da compreensão de que a violência anti-queer se manifesta em múltiplas dimensões, que vão da agressão física às formas simbólicas e institucionais, este estudo busca observar como tais camadas se articulam nas obras analisadas. O cinema, entendido como dispositivo cultural e político, desempenha papel central na formação de imaginários sociais e na consolidação de discursos sobre gênero e sexualidade. Nesse sentido, investigar como a violência anti-queer é representada na tela é fundamental para compreender tanto os avanços quanto as limitações das narrativas queer contemporâneas.

Objetivos

O objetivo geral da pesquisa é identificar de que maneira os filmes selecionados mantêm ou subvertem suposições relacionadas à representação da violência anti-queer no cinema. A investigação busca examinar as diversas modalidades de violência presentes nas narrativas: verbal, emocional, física, institucional e simbólica. Pretende ainda analisar como gênero, classe, raça e sexualidade se entrecruzam na conformação dessas violências, permitindo uma leitura interseccional das experiências queer retratadas. Além disso, objetiva mapear tendências dos ciclos de produção do cinema queer contemporâneo e refletir sobre como esses contextos influenciam as representações de violência e resistência na tela.

Metodologia

A pesquisa adota uma abordagem qualitativa, fundamentada na análise fílmica e na revisão bibliográfica sobre estudos queer, violência e cinema. Inicialmente, realizou-se a seleção dos filmes a partir de sua relevância para o debate contemporâneo sobre identidades queer e experiências de violência. Em seguida, procedeu-se à análise narrativa e estética das obras, considerando elementos como construção de personagens,

organização do enredo, estratégias de *mise-en-scène*, uso do som e da imagem, e recursos simbólicos que contribuem para a construção de sentidos. A metodologia inclui também uma leitura interseccional, apoiada em teorias que articulam gênero, sexualidade, raça e classe para compreender a complexidade das violências representadas. Complementarmente, a consulta à bibliografia especializada sobre cinema queer e seus ciclos de produção permite relacionar as representações observadas com os contextos socioculturais que moldam o campo cinematográfico contemporâneo.

Resultados e Discussão

A análise evidencia que o cinema queer contemporâneo tem avançado significativamente na forma como representa a violência anti-queer. Os filmes estudados se afastam de abordagens simplistas ou unidimensionais, oferecendo retratos complexos que situam a violência em contextos mais amplos de opressão, desigualdade e resistência. A violência física aparece, mas muitas vezes está entrelaçada a formas mais sutis de opressão, como exclusão social, silenciamento, repressão emocional, transfobia institucional e estigmatização. A perspectiva interseccional revela que a violência raramente opera isolada da raça, da classe ou do gênero. *Moonlight*, por exemplo, demonstra como masculinidades racializadas moldam a forma como a violência anti-queer é vivida e representada. Já *Una Mujer Fantástica* evidencia a violência institucional enfrentada por pessoas trans, enquanto *The Power of the Dog* articula repressão emocional e violência simbólica no contexto da masculinidade hegemônica. Esses filmes tensionam discursos tradicionais ao atribuírem complexidade aos personagens queer, afastando-se de estereótipos de vitimização absoluta ou de narrativas patologizantes. Além disso, os ciclos contemporâneos de produção do cinema queer, influenciados por maior circulação internacional, maior espaço em festivais e políticas culturais mais abertas à diversidade, contribuem para a ampliação das perspectivas representadas na tela. Assim, as obras analisadas não apenas expõem a violência, mas também a problematizam, sugerindo caminhos de resistência, agência e reconfiguração identitária.

Considerações Finais

Os resultados demonstram que o cinema queer desempenha papel relevante na construção de discursos sobre violência, identidade e resistência. Ao abordar a violência anti-queer de maneira crítica e multifacetada, os filmes analisados contribuem para

deslocar paradigmas tradicionais e promover novas formas de representação das experiências queer. Conclui-se que a produção cinematográfica queer contemporânea atua como espaço de reflexão e contestação, no qual a violência deixa de ser apenas um dispositivo narrativo e passa a ser enfrentada como fenômeno complexo e estruturante das vivências queer. Tal abordagem fortalece debates culturais mais amplos, promovendo maior conscientização sobre questões de direitos humanos, inclusão e diversidade, e ampliando o potencial transformador do cinema enquanto ferramenta política e estética.

Palavras-chave: cinema queer, violência anti-queer, violência, representação, identidade.

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INTRODUCTION: QUEER FILMS, QUEER LIVES

Growing up as a shy, gay boy from a small town in Brazil, I never needed to watch a film to understand the complexity of the forms of violence intrinsically linked to the experience of being queer. From an early age, I witnessed firsthand various types of abuse—both psychological and physical—that shaped my childhood, adolescence, and even adult life. However, it was during the later stages of my life that my perspectives began to broaden, allowing me to recognize the many different forms that anti-queer violence can take.

The acknowledgment of queer existences as part of a plural spectrum—encompassing diverse gender and sexual identities, cultures, and social backgrounds—came with the striking realization of other forms of violence that I, as a cisgender, white, gay man, had not fully understood or experienced. It was not only through lived experiences but also through the films I watched and the fictional queer characters I encountered that I began to process my responses and reactions to violence against queer individuals—individuals whose lives are so often associated with various forms of suffering.

Queer films—a concept I will elaborate on further below—presented me with contrasting queer realities that, for the most part, were not far removed from what I could observe in the real world. More importantly, a few of these films offered glimpses of alternative, safer realities, where being queer did not necessarily equate to enduring violence. At the same time, I often felt discomfort as a queer spectator engaging with many of these narratives. While they mirrored the violence I was experiencing myself, they also extended it into more intense and distressing forms, leading me to question whether I actually appreciated queer cinema and what it had to offer.

I still vividly recall the sense of horror I felt as a teenager watching *Brokeback Mountain* (2005, directed by Ang Lee) or *Dream Boy* (2008, directed by James Bolton), where the protagonists undergo turbulent and painful journeys of self-discovery, culminating in violent and tragic endings. From these films, I came to associate queer existence either with living a secretive, hidden life or with meeting a brutal, premature death. While I cannot generalize this discomfort to all queer films, the questions that arose from those experiences—and that continue to shape much of this research—

remain deeply relevant: Why are these violent acts so prevalent on screen? Do they serve a purpose beyond simply depicting or exploiting queer suffering? And more broadly, why is queer existence so often portrayed as inherently tied to suffering in cinematic narratives?

Perhaps looking at the exponential rate of reported cases of violence towards only the Brazilian queer people (a total of 291 registered deaths in 2024, according to the most recent report¹), for instance, would help to illustrate the interest in the prolific production of queer films portraying violence nowadays. At a similar pace, cinematic productions worldwide have been keen in the making of a multiple range of films that investigate the sundry ways of what it means to be queer on the silver screen. Additionally, there is a tangible effort in telling these stories from the perspective of a variety of contexts and nationalities, which would make for the high amount of productions. However, the constant presence of violence in such narratives, as well as its causes and consequences, has always been something that intrigued me as a queer spectator. The more I questioned why violence and its multiple forms remain a pivotal topic in queer cinema, the more I became overwhelmed with the amount of productions that somehow continue to equate queer existences to queer suffering.

Bearing this uneasiness in mind, this dissertation aims to analyze contemporary queer films, focusing on how their characters are subjected to various forms of violence. The selected films are *Praia do Futuro* (2014), *Carol* (2015), *Moonlight* (2016), *Una Mujer Fantástica* (2017), *Yo, Imposible* (2018), and *The Power of The Dog* (2021). Each of these films was chosen for its portrayal of different types of violence, ranging from verbal, physical, and psychological abuse to more structural and implicit forms of violence that in various ways threaten, shape, or invalidate the existence of their queer characters. In addition, the films were produced in different countries, including Brazil, the United States, Chile, and Venezuela, and released within a relatively short time span, which allows for a broader, more international perspective on the issues under investigation.

The overall objective of this research is to shed light on how queer individuals have been represented in cinema over time, and more specifically, how contemporary

¹ According to the annual report provided by *Grupo Gay da Bahia* – GGB, the oldest association for the protection of the LGBTQ+ community in Brazil.

queer cinema addresses issues related to violence, both on and off screen. After providing a brief historical overview of queer film production, I will examine how different forms of violence operate within and beyond the cinematic text. This will involve the analysis of selected scenes from the films in the corpus, as well as the reception and public responses to some of these films. These analyses will be developed in dialogue with key thinkers in Gender and Queer Studies, including Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Michel Foucault, among others.

Because queer cinema is the central object of study in this research, it is necessary to begin by defining what the term entails. Rather than treating it as a fixed or monolithic category, which could reduce and oversimplify the range of queer cinematic expressions, I propose to approach it as a fluid and multifaceted concept. Queer cinema encompasses a wide variety of styles and genres, such as melodrama, comedy, or action films, all of which may include queer elements and characters. One-dimensional definitions should therefore give way to more nuanced understandings of what queer people can be or do on screen, allowing for broader and more inclusive forms of representation.

As Ferreira (2015) argues, widely used definitions such as “films that portray queer characters” not only constrain the possible ways of being queer but also fail to account for much of the innovation that has characterized queer cinema in recent years. In his words:

This definition of “Queer Cinema” tied to narrative might have been useful in the process of disengaging from a long history of distorted images of queer characters in film history, and in the affirmation of a community. Nowadays it sounds extremely narrow in the legitimisation of Queer Cinema as a genre. (Ferreira, 2015)

Ferreira also establishes how queer cinema has shifted its overall purposes throughout the years. In the early 1980’s, for example, there was an attempt of showcasing white, middleclass LGBTQ characters as a way to appeal to mainstream audiences, with depictions that established the “victimization” (Ferreira, 2015) of queer characters as a constant and central topic. This structuring, partly due to the AIDS epidemics, also tackled the social and political issues of the period. With Gus Van Sant’s *Mala Noche*, in 1985, queer cinema began to find new directions in terms of

topics that would culminate in the affluence of New Queer Cinema² in the 1990's. The 'subversive logic' of the period regained the sexual desire of queer characters and also marked a return to more experimental narratives, while at the same time reinforcing the standards of representation of the Hays Code³.

What queer cinema does today is present audiences with queer characters who are no longer confined to one-dimensional portrayals. Rather than merely reproducing heteronormative ways of being and existing, or seeking validation from mainstream audiences through themes such as marriage and adoption, these characters often inhabit on-screen worlds that challenge established conventions from the off-screen world. As Ferreira (2015) describes it, queer cinema has become "an expression of freedom," equipped with the tools to disrupt, reframe, and expand the possibilities of what it means to be queer. Furthermore, as Benschoff and Griffin (2019) point out, queer films should be understood as cultural artifacts that reflect and shape our collective understanding of the world, particularly in relation to gender, sexuality, and identity.

Understanding cinema as the medium through which such worlds are imagined and articulated is essential. In *Queer Cinema in the World* (2016), Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt emphasize the importance of cinema in creating possible worlds that are embedded with specific politics and cultural values. They argue that queerness, when explored through cinema, becomes a powerful framework for rethinking what is typically taken for granted in dominant perspectives. Queer cinema, therefore, has the capacity to envision new, less restrictive ways of inhabiting the world. In their words:

Cinema is always involved in world making, and queerness promises to knock off kilter conventional epistemologies. Thinking queerness together with cinema thus has a potential to reconfigure dominant modes of worlding. [...] We argue that queer cinema elaborates new accounts of the world, offering alternatives to embedded capitalist, national, hetero-and homonormative maps; revising the flows and politics of world cinema; and forging dissident scales of affiliation, affection, affect, and form. (Schoonover, Galt, p. 5)

By acknowledging the potentially disruptive character of queer cinema, as well as the strengths that lies in not formulating a conclusive definition to the term, I will be

² Coined by Ruby Rich in 1992, the term refers to the movement of queer-themed filmmaking during the early 1990's.

³ A set of censorship rules for the production of films in the United States from 1934 to 1968. Peter Lev defines it at "a code regulating the moral content of feature films, designed so that Hollywood could police itself and thus avoid or minimize outside censorship (p. 87)."

looking at the ‘possible worlds’ in the films I have selected for this research and how they subvert or perpetuate harmful depictions of violence against queer people. Each of the films chosen for the analysis construes a world of its own and, therefore, explores the topic in a multitude of ways. Brazilian-German 2014’s *Praia do Futuro*, for instance, tells the story of Donato, a lifeguard in Brazil who saves German tourist Konrad from drowning but fails to save his other friend. After developing romantic feelings for each other, they move to Berlin, leaving behind Donato’s work in a seemingly rigid, masculine environment, as well as his younger brother, Ayrton. Experiencing being queer in such clashing contexts, Donato faces the consequences of abandoning his younger brother while watching the blooming of his relationship with Konrad. 2015’s *Carol* depicts a hidden love affair between a divorcing middle-aged woman, Carol, and a young female photographer, Therese, during the early 1950’s in New York City. As they negotiate places to exist as lesbian women, both also struggle to fit within the patterns of marriage and the female roles of their period. 2016’s *Moonlight* unwinds the story of Chiron Harris, from his early years during the U. S. crack epidemic until his adult life as a fully realized gay man. During the chapters of Chiron’s narrative, viewers watch his questionings and struggles while fully accepting who he is a black, gay man, whose standards of masculinity rank higher due to his social position and to his work as a drug dealer. In 2017’s Chilean film *Una Mujer Fantástica*, Marina, a transgender woman in Chile, has to endure severe psychological and physical abuses in order to reclaim her rightful place as a widow after the death of her boyfriend, Orlando, whose family blames Marina for his death. Additionally, Marina is constantly denied of her own humanity and womanhood; she is treated as an unidentified thing, as an aberration that does not possess any human agency or even the right to mourn her deceased boyfriend: “I don’t know what you are. I look at you and see a chimera”, says Orlando’s ex-wife, who fails to see Marina as she actually is: as a woman.

As for 2018’s *Yo, Imposible*, Ariel, a poor seamstress who takes care of her mother as she suffers from cancer, accidentally discovers her intersexuality, which initially is a secret ought to be kept by her mother and her doctor. After undergoing severe and traumatic physical treatments in order to ‘correct’ her condition, Ariel finds solace in accepting herself as an intersex individual and in developing a lesbian relationship with Ana, who is a new employee at Ariel’s work. Finally, 2021’s western

The Power of The Dog, directed by Jane Campion, provides a closer look at the idea of homosexuality as a secret ought to be kept and at how poisonous laws and rigid displays of masculinity can be. Through the stories of Peter, his mother Rose, and the brothers Phil and George in the 1920's, the film's clashing displays of masculinity help to illustrate how suffocating it can be to live by the standards of others, at the same time it flips the dichotomy of aggressor and victim.

Considering such contrasting worlds, the main objective of this research, then, is to analyze the different types of violence inflicted upon queer characters in the aforementioned six contemporary queer films in an attempt to identify and underline the narrative purposes of such violent acts. In order to understand violence and its uses and effects on the selected films, I will also be comparing it to previous production cycles of queer films, which can provide a thorough debate on matters of representation of queer people in cinema. Additionally, I will chronologically organize how violence has been depicted in queer cinema, as well as discuss how forms of violence against queer characters have changed in cinema, both on and off-screen. Finally, my last specific objective is to identify how violence is present in queer contemporary queer cinema and what are the overall purposes of these portrayals. To fulfill such objectives, I intend to answer the following questions throughout this research: what types of violence are present in each film, and how are they depicted on screen? How is violence justified by its agents (characters, environment, social structures)? And do the characters overcome the violent acts they suffer? If yes, does this overcoming lead to change in the way queer people have been represented in cinema?

In attempting to answer these questions, I have chosen to structure this research with an approach that considers violence from the social contexts to a description of how violence against queer people has been portrayed on screen. However, before entering this dissertation's main topics of discussion, I will comment on key words that appear throughout my investigation, such as sexuality, gender, and queer, in the second section of this introduction. In the first proper chapter, my primary focus is to gather examples of the types of violence I will be addressing throughout my analysis. The sources I mention, therefore, mostly relate to how violence against queer people operates in real-life contexts, bringing attention to violence as a process that encompasses a number of forms and is often shaped by intersectional elements. Hence, I will be considering the implications of gender, sexuality, sexual identity, class, and race

during the discussion, which will also help to establish my working definition of the term. As for the second chapter, in which I present a brief historical timeline of the ways in which queer people have been represented in cinema, I will also establish how the forms of violence presented in the first chapter have been present in queer cinema, with examples of production cycles and films that have exploited or subverted the idea of violence against queer characters.

The proper analysis of the films I have selected will be divided in chapters three and four, with the latter concentrating the discussion regarding violence against lesbian, transsexual and intersex characters, and the former focusing on gay narratives that are shaped by ideals of masculinity. Each of these chapters will also draw from the discussions presented in chapters one and two, as much of the violence present in the films mirrors the accounts described in the first chapters. Additionally, the choice of dividing the analysis into two separate chapters is also elucidative of the numerous aspects of violence considered throughout this research, and it also makes possible to properly focus in each of them individually.

Finally, in my final remarks, besides attempting to answer the questions I pose, I also intend to present an overview of queer cinema in the present based on the analysis, as well as the possibilities it offers to think of queer characters and queer representation in the future, at the same time I consider future research topics related to violence in queer cinema. After commenting on what has been done in terms of queer cinema, my goal is to look to other, future worlds, in which much of the discomfort I felt during my childhood and adolescence may perhaps point to a queer cinema that serves queer spectators providing both the possibility of less violent, safer worlds, and the possibility of mirroring our own real world on a brighter note.

As I delve into the wilderness of these other worlds, I intend to investigate whether or not they subvert and challenge the views I have cultivated on violence against queer people in cinema as a queer spectator. These views, as I shall develop further, have proven themselves to be significantly visible in queer cinema as it progressed from its early years. Such depictions of violence have ever since evolved in its content and form, but as new queer worlds are being created, it is necessary to ask how effectively these changes can affect the possibilities of being queer both on screen and off screen.

Sexuality, Power and Knowledge: The Emergence of Identity Categories

Before addressing the core subjects that underpin this research, it is first necessary to clarify how the terms *sexuality*, *gender*, and *queer* will be understood throughout the analysis. In this section and the ones that follow, I will define and categorize these concepts by drawing on a concise theoretical framework that situates them within broader critical discussions. The primary references for this conceptual grounding are the works of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Teresa de Lauretis, whose contributions offer a critical perspective on traditional definitions. Rather than treating these terms as fixed or natural, these authors argue that sexuality and gender are socially constructed categories regulated through power relations. By synthesizing their insights, it becomes possible to approach gender and sexuality not as stable identities, but as fluid and contingent constructs shaped by discursive and institutional forces.

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault poses the hypothesis that, contrary to what we are ought to believe, sexuality has never been properly ‘repressed’. Instead, sexuality has been a significant topic of interest, particularly since the 17th century. Instead of focusing on how sexuality has been repressed, Foucault argues that there was a systematic propagation of discourses on sex and sexuality, showcasing how humanity had always been particularly interested in it. These discourses, as he points out, were often attempts to ‘reform’ people through medical practices, which prompted a debate regarding sexuality and health, eventually growing into regulations of sexual behavior through power and knowledge. For Foucault, then, the real transgression is not sex itself, but the act of talking about it.

One of the central themes in Foucault’s argument is that, through discourse, we are able to construct a narrative around sexuality and, as a consequence, sex is transformed into discourse. These discourses, as he later exemplifies, created mechanisms of control, which he calls *bio-power*. Instead of being regulated through prohibition, sexuality has been, instead, subjected to surveillance and regulation, alongside extensive and significant productions of knowledge regarding it. In this sense, sex becomes a police matter: it had not been taboo, but it was regulated through useful and public discourses. For modern societies, therefore, they do not relegate sex to the shadows; instead, they talk about it tirelessly while exploiting it as a secret.

In the section *The Perverse Implantation*, Foucault poses another hypothesis: that perhaps such discourses are not necessarily good ones. For instance, such discourses favored the heterosexual monogamy as the norm, which fostered scrutiny towards anyone that somehow challenged this norm, such as the male homosexual. For Foucault, once these discourses gained traction, it was time for dissident individuals to step out of the shadows and, while ‘confessing’ their transgressions, they became what the author calls “peripheral sexualities” (p. 39) and, as a result, they were persecuted and deemed a perversion. Specifically commenting on how the homosexual men were overanalyzed, Foucault states:

The 19th century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood (...), a type of life, a life form and a morphology, with and indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. (p. 43)

With the rise of modern science and psychiatry in the 19th century, therefore, a new system of categorization emerged, one that began to treat homosexuality, and any deviation from the traditional heterosexuality, as a ‘type’ of person rather than an act or behavior. Foucault’s concept of the ‘homosexual as a personage’ refers to this shift in which homosexuality was no longer seen as just an occasional act, but as a fundamental and defining characteristic of an individual's identity. This shift, according to Foucault, was part of a larger trend in modernity where society began to classify people based on their sexual behaviors and desires, making sexuality a central feature of the self. Therefore, ‘the homosexual’ emerged as part of broader power-knowledge structures that sought to define, categorize, and control human sexuality. This personage did not exist prior to these historical developments and is a result of modern systems of knowledge and control. In direct correlation to this classification, the advances in Western 19th century society also put forward an entire machinery for producing discourses regarding sexuality, while at the same time formulating the uniform ‘truth of sex’. Sex, therefore, became an object of suspicion for the creators and maintainers of discourse.

Social Constructs of Identity and Gender

Anne Fausto-Sterling, in *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (2000), draws from the complexity of the body's sex to argue that the process of assigning someone as a man or a woman is a strictly social decision. Although one can refer to scientific and medical knowledge to make a decision, our definitions of gender and sex are results of our own beliefs. There is a difficulty for clear definitions due to gender norms. In other words, the expectations and opportunities for boys and girls dictate much of what one may understand of what is a man and a woman. As she puts it: "The more we look for a simple physical basis for "sex," the more it becomes clear that "sex" is not a pure physical category. What bodily signals and functions we define as male or female come already entangled in our ideas about gender." (Fausto-Sterling, p. 5).

Borrowing from and expanding on Foucault's idea of how identity categories, particularly those related to gender and sexuality, are socially constructed and maintained through systems of power, Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, argues that gender is not something a person is, but rather what a person does. She draws on Foucault's ideas to suggest that gender is enacted through repeated performances rather than being a stable or intrinsic identity. For Butler, gender identity is constructed through the repeated enactment of gendered behaviors, which come to be seen as natural or essential through repetition.

Despite acknowledging the biological significance of sex, Butler is much more concerned with the cultural construction of gender, which means that the latter should not be understood as a result of the former. Butler also argues that gender allows individuals to have "multiple interpretations of sex" (p. 8) because of its distinction in relation to sex, and that to assume that a binary notion such as sex/gender does not imply that a construction such as 'men' will only appear in the bodies of assigned males, or that 'women' will only be related to bodies of assigned females. When this distinction is made, the notion of 'gender' already suggests that there are more than two. In Butler's own words:

The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed

status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. (p. 9)

Besides looking at gender as socially constructed, Butler goes further into questioning this construction, asking the reader if there are different possible ways to construct gender. Additionally, she is concerned with the enclosing trait of considering gender as 'socially constructed' as, according to her, it implies a lack of agency for the individual whose body continuously remains under description and analysis (p. 11). She questions the construction of gender through culture by pointing at how even notions of gender seem to be fixed and socially established. In conclusion, despite moving beyond the biological assumption, gender becomes an issue of culture, which ultimately regulates displays of gender. 'Masculine' and 'feminine', then, are culturally-established characteristics and, because of this previous establishment, also carry an expectation in relation to how they are ought to be performed.

Butler extends the controversy surrounding the term 'construction' when she brings the term 'the body' as one that can be constantly perceived a passive recipient for cultural constructions. This passivity is related to how the body functions as the ways or the medium (Butler, p. 12) through which one experiences and relates to cultural meanings. In acknowledging how the body has its mark of existence through the marking of gender, Butler is concerned with ways in which one can recognize the body as more than an inert recipient of cultural constructs but can, instead, have the ability to express its own, immaterial will. In this way, both Foucault and Butler challenge the idea of essential, fixed identities, whether sexual or gendered. For Foucault, sexual identities are constructed through the knowledge systems that define them, while for Butler, gender identities are constructed through repeated performances that create the illusion of stability.

Both thinkers also leave space for resistance and subversion. Foucault, later in *The History of Sexuality*, discusses how power is not absolute and individuals can resist or subvert the mechanisms of power that produce subjectivities. For example, the rise of new sexual identities (like the modern gay identity) can be seen as both a result of disciplinary power and a site of resistance, where marginalized groups challenge

existing norms. Butler, likewise, suggests that the very performativity of gender opens up possibilities for resistance. Because gender is not a fixed identity, but a set of performances, it is possible to subvert and transform the norms through which gender is enacted. For Butler, the ability to ‘fail’ at gender or to perform gender in ways that resist the conventional norms can destabilize the traditional understanding of gender itself.

Queer: The Disruption of Identity

The term ‘queer’ is, by definition, a problematization of fixed ideas and identities. Nowlan (2010) has drawn attention to how queer and queerness challenge the collective perceptions of identities in relation to sexuality and gender, specifically paying attention to how ‘queer’, instead, *refuses* to construct or define any identity. Therefore, a queer critical praxis refers to the troubling and dismantling of fixed notions for pairs such as normal and abnormal, male and female, dominant and subordinate.

Tackling strategies to resist and destabilize the fixed notions of gender and sexuality, Teresa de Lauretis, in *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities* (1991), defines the term ‘queer’ as representative of identities that resist being fixed to specific sexual or gender categories. For the author, ‘queer’ functions as a critical and non-normative identity that disrupts the rigid categorizations that often regulate sexual practices and gender identities. Consequently, ‘queer’ challenges the notion of sexualities and genders as stable and natural identities. Moreover, it allows identities to exist within a space of multiple sexual and gendered experiences that are far from the conventional and regulatory norms.

Similarly to Butler's theory of performativity, De Lauretis' *queer* can be understood as a dynamic, performative identity – one that is not fixed but is always in the process of becoming. As Butler argues, gender identity is constituted through repeated actions and performances, and similarly, queer identity is formed through non-normative expressions that subvert established gender and sexual norms. De Lauretis' concept of queer thus overlaps with Butler's claim that gender is performative: both queer and gendered identities are enacted through repetitive performances that reveal the constructed nature of identity. These performances are not merely expressions of an inner essence, but rather actions shaped by power relations and societal expectations.

Queer, as both a gender and sexual identity, challenges the normative categories of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual by allowing for more fluid and subversive performances of identity. In this sense, De Lauretis echoes Foucault's notion that identities, including sexual and gender identities, are not inherent, but are produced through discourses of power. However, whereas Foucault's focus is on how institutions categorize and define sexuality, De Lauretis focuses on how queer challenges those definitions by providing a framework for resistance.

Discussing her experience as a lesbian woman living in the borders of Mexico and the United States, Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands: La Frontera – The New Mestiza*, addresses the term 'queer' considering how queer individuals are marked by numerous categories of identification, including race, class, and gender. According to her (p.3), everyone who challenges the notions of normalcy (or, as she calls it, '*los atravesados*'), are drawn to live in the borders. Here, 'the borders' are more than just the physical demarcations of territory; they are the sites of resistance created and inhabited by those who transgress the expected normalcy by being gay/lesbian or black/latino.

Particularly considering the experiences of queer people within Latin American communities, Anzaldúa stresses the low tolerance for those who challenge such normalcy. For most cultures, she states, their deviants are often excluded or marginalized. Summarizing what it means to be queer in such contexts, she states: "The queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human." (p. 18). In this sense, the queer mirror to which she refers to reflects not the 'heterosexual's tribe's' ideals of a projected and expected normalcy, but exactly what challenges to dismantle it, thus evoking fear. Being queer, therefore, can be interpreted not only as the ways one individual is presented as opposing to normalcy, but also how one threatens the destruction of this normalcy.

While addressing her own experiences with queerness, Anzaldúa describes how lesbian women of color's rebellion lies on their sexual behavior, since most of their transgression is marked by sexuality and homosexuality. Anzaldúa, then, categorizes being queer as a choice, as a "path of knowledge" (p. 19), in which one continually makes the choice to be distant from the assumed normalcy. Being queer, then, is a process that unravels while one traverses through life and acquires the awareness of

oneself and the surrounding world, while at the same time one is able to assess one's own existence and its presence in the world.

In a 2014 discussion with *The New School*, bell hooks shared her insights on the concept of being queer, expanding the term beyond its conventional association with sexual preference or gender identity. For hooks, queerness is not merely defined by whom one is attracted to or the gender one identifies with, but rather by a deeper, more existential struggle of the self. She suggests that queerness is about finding or creating a community where one can truly belong, even in the face of a world that may not understand or embrace one's queerness. As she puts it: "As the essence of queer, I think of [...] being queer and queer not as being about who you're having sex with – that can be a dimension of it – but queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and it has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live." For hooks, then, queerness is a way of being that goes beyond the physical or sexual aspects. It is a response to the alienation felt by those whose identities and ways of living defy mainstream expectations, and it is about carving out space in a world that may reject or marginalize those who do not conform to expected standards. The essence of queerness, in her view, is rooted in resilience and self-discovery—an ongoing process of creating a life where one can thrive and find solidarity with others who share similar struggles. In this sense, queerness is as much about a radical reimagining of the self and society as it is about the relationships one engages in.

Considering De Lauretis', Anzaldúa's, and hooks' definitions of queer, it becomes possible to infer that the concept of queer and queerness is, unavoidably, bound to be kept open and undefined, as it can still be questioned, reinterpreted, and reassessed through different contexts and lenses. This, instead of meaning that 'queer' should be interpreted as empty of meaning or vague, expands the possibilities of what it means to be queer – what it means to challenge normalcy since, as I will develop on Chapter one, 'normalcy' also depends on the context it is applied. Therefore, for the following chapter, my main focus will be addressing the ways queerness (or, more specifically, defiance of normalcy) can regulate sites of resistance at the same time it propels forms of violence that are physical, structural, psychological, medical, and moral.

CHAPTER I: QUEERING VIOLENCE: THE ROLE OF SEXUALITY, CLASS, RACE, AND GENDER IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF VIOLENT ACTS AGAINST QUEER PEOPLE

When January began, almost at the same time of their vacation – and they had planned, together, who knows, Parati, Ouro Preto, Porto Seguro – they were surprised that morning when the chief of department called them, around noon. It was very hot. Sweaty, the chief was direct. He had received some anonymous letters. He refused to show them. Pale, they heard expressions such as “abnormal and ostensive relationship”, “unashamed aberration, sick behavior”, “deformed psychology”, always signed by An Attentive Guardian of Moral. Saul lowered his senseless eyes, but Raul stood up. He looked very tall when, with one of his hands over the friend’s shoulder and the other one raised daringly through the air, he still could say the word *never*, before the chief, among things such as the-reputation-of-our-company, coldly stated: the two of you are fired.⁴ – Caio Fernando Abreu, *Aqueles Dois*.

In *Carol*, while two women need to hide their romantic and sexual relationship in order to exist as lesbian women within the context of the 1950’s, one of them is blackmailed by her ex-husband, who threatens her with the exposing of her sexuality to court as a way of acquiring their daughter’s custody. In *Yo, Imposible*, as Ariel begins to understand more about her own body and desires, she undergoes forced and severe medical treatment for her intersexuality. These two examples help to illustrate two of the various manners in which queer individuals are often subjected to both mental and physical harm, which configure a violation of their well-being. When considering the different types of violence that the queer characters suffer in the films of the corpus of this research, it becomes evident that what I mean by ‘violence’ throughout this work is

⁴ “Quando janeiro começou, quase na época de tirarem férias - e tinham planejado, juntos, quem sabe Parati, Ouro Preto, Porto Seguro – ficaram surpresos naquela manhã em que o chefe de seção os chamou, perto do meio-dia. Fazia muito calor. Suarento, o chefe foi direto ao assunto. Tinha recebido algumas cartas anônimas. Recusou-se a mostrá-las. Pálidos, ouviram expressões como “relação anormal e ostensiva”, “desavergonhada aberração, comportamento doentio”, “psicologia deformada”, sempre assinadas por Um Atento Guardião da Moral. Saul baixou os olhos desmaiados, mas Raul colocou-se em pé. Parecia muito alto quando, com uma das mãos apoiadas no ombro do amigo e a outra erguendo-se atrevida no ar, conseguiu ainda dizer a palavra nunca, antes que o chefe, entre coisas como a-reputação-de-nossa-firma, declarasse frio: os senhores estão despedidos.” – Caio Fernando Abreu, *Aqueles Dois*, my translation.

not limited to one specific definition. Instead, what I propose is to look at violence as an element that may not only produce physical, material harm, but can also reinforce and reproduce harmful effects on a person's emotional state. An act of violence, therefore, can also operate as a lurking shadow, often suppressing or destroying a person's identity.

Because of the variety through which violence against queer people is constructed, it is worthy to signal the interdisciplinary character of this chapter, as I will be recurring to foundational texts of queer theorists, as well as articles published within the social studies and public health fields. Interdisciplinarity is justified by two main reasons. First, violence tends to primarily operate through social relationships, whereas individual or collective, and is often caused by those in a hierarchically superior social positioning. Additionally, there is also the violence conducted and legitimized by regulatory institutions, such as medicine. The second justification for this approach is based on the displays of violence in the selected films, as they reproduce such examples of violent acts within their fictionalized narratives. Furthermore, the following discussion makes for the theoretical apparatus I will be consulting throughout my analysis in chapters three and four.

To further cement the foundation of this discussion, it is firstly necessary to look at 'violence' as a multidimensional designation. Common-place definitions of the term tend to emphasize the bodily, physical types of it, as if violence could only be limited and defined by the results of its physical materiality. Popularly, then, acts are only considered violent if they pose threats to one's physical integrity. For the purposes of this study, however, it is necessary to widen such perspective on violence to include less tangible, yet equally harmful violent acts that are manifested through other processes, such as structural, psychological, and verbal.

In this chapter, therefore, I discuss the ways in which the term violence has been understood in different sociological contexts. In the first section, I start by addressing violence in more obvious and prominent contexts, such as warfare, police brutality, and fiction, as ways of introducing what can popularly be understood as violence, as well as discussing the apparent arbitrariness to which violence has penetrated western societies in real life and in popular culture. Moreover, through the works of Hannah Arendt and James B. Twitchell, I discuss how the terms *violence*, *force*, and *power*, although often

used interchangeably, possess substantial differences in relation to how they affect individuals' lives and their surroundings. The work of Patricia Hill Collins reinforces these differences, as she addresses the power relations frequently attained to acts of violence while considering the intersections of sexuality, race, and gender. Later, in the following sections, I present a theoretical framework of forms of violence against queer people that are often overlooked due to the tendency of grouping violent acts against queer people as a one-dimensional route, frequently under the umbrella term 'homophobia'. This discussion is presented considering different social contexts as ways of understanding violence and its ramifications in contrasting environments, as I could not possibly equate instances of violence as the same in every setting. The arguments I gather here, besides broadening the ways in which one can understand such dimensions of violence, also elucidate what I mean by 'violence' throughout this research, a term that is directly embedded in and often neglected from notions of sexuality, class, race, and gender.

1.1 Violence, Power, Force: An Overview

When thinking of violence as a broader term, one may have clear perceptions of it and its effects in the world. Violence often operates visually throughout our daily life and is ever present in the shaping of our political and economic spheres, affecting us both directly and indirectly. Collectively, common perceptions of violence often include the materialization of physical harm through various forms, such as beating, kicking, scratching, or killing another human being. Especially within western societies, the presence of violence is easily identified. From watching the newest report of an ongoing war on the other side of the planet to witnessing crimes at gunpoint, violence is all around us.

Fictionalized violence is also frequently apparent in the popular media we consume. It is in the action films, TV shows, and even soap operas we watch. In an almost imperceptible way, violence has been so present in our daily lives that it may not even cause an effect on us, whether we act as spectators of fiction or reality, given the naturalization to which we tend to deal with it. Being embedded in and surrounded by violence in our daily lives, then, has helped to establish a crystallization of the term,

allowing it to be popularly understood as something physical and routinized. Similarly, violence can also operate in the shaping of new realities through the use of force. Within their social interactions, individuals are in a constant relation of power, whereas with a dominant ideological structure or facing perils and changes closer to their own realities. The goal of the following discussion, then, is to explore the links between violence and power, and how each of these terms carries different implications for our collective worldmaking.

Consuming fictional depictions of violence has become a staple in the way we engage with popular media. Several blockbuster films and bestselling novels containing at least some degree of violence are released every year to commercial success, which allows us to question why audiences seem eager to consume often graphic representations of violent acts, to an extent that it becomes almost naturalized in our collective mind. Regarding our relationship with fictionalized violence and its routinized character, James B. Twitchell, in *Preposterous Violence: Fables of Aggression* (1989), has called attention to how violence reaches us repeatedly on a daily basis through the mass media products we encounter. Moreover, Twitchell is particularly concerned with why violence (or, more specifically, gratuitous violence) seems to appeal to numerous audiences. Defining violence as something that primarily causes the violation of a human being, Twitchell also uses the term ‘force’ to describe one of the main characters of it. In his words:

By “violence” I mean more than a force directed against an object [...]. I mean a force directed against a victim, usually a specific human being. The inclusion of some direct object is implied in the verb “violate” as well as in the noun “violation,” which share a common etymology with “violence”. The implication of “violence” is that a force is inflicted on someone for which some violation is the result.” (Twitchell, 1989, p. 3-4)

Twitchell states that there is a fixation with “junk” (p. 6), a term he uses to exemplify the production of mass media products that depict gratuitous and exaggerated violence. According to him, the prominent production of books, films, and music that display the more gruesome aspects of violence raises the question of why these products exist in the first place, and why they do not seem to stop existing anytime soon. Also, Twitchell also emphasizes the historical character of being entertained by violence, whereas through the interpretation of paintings on caves or the act of attending the drive-thru marathons of horror movies during the 1980’s. In the chapter *The*

Ritualization of Violence, the author presents possible explanations for this, stating that “we like to watch violence and we have for a long time” (Twitchell, 1989, p. 23), which can be observed in several examples, noteworthy Christ’s crucifixion. Historically, then, violence has been inherited in people’s popular imagery, often becoming the center of fictionalized narratives. Similarly, one could state the same regarding real-life violence, as it seems to shape many of our relations with the world, as well as being an ever-present object in human history.

On the matter of how we become accustomed to violence in our real, daily life, Hannah Arendt, in her noteworthy book *On Violence* (1970), conducts a thorough investigation regarding violence and its assumed nature, more specifically on western societies after the 1950’s. By analyzing violence and its effects through the contexts of warfare, social movements, and politics, she states how the role of violence throughout human history and in politics has been “taken for granted” (Arendt, 1970, p. 8), since it is hardly analyzed considering the apparent arbitrariness of it. Growing habituated to it, individuals tend to look at violence as omnipresent and continuous, almost necessary for the overall development of the world. While paying detailed attention to terms such as violence, power, force, and strength, Arendt develops her arguments through the analysis of students’ demands causing political havoc within United Statesian university campuses during the 1960’s amidst the rise of racial and sexual liberation movements. She addresses how authority figures, such as the government, can resist violence (and, in this case, violence perpetrated by the students) by making use of the power they possess as organizations. Arendt is considerably critic of the use of violence by the students’ movements, particularly highlighting their failure in disrupting such power organizations. This criticism serves as a pivotal example for the conclusions she unravels later on, as well as for her understanding of violence and power and the opposition of these terms.

Primarily concerned with how violence takes shape in the daily life, Arendt observes the specific context of acts of violence from university students and warfare to broaden interpretations of violence that remain recurrent in the present day. Her primary argument is that violence is often used by those who do not possess significant power in social organizations. Arendt uses the student’s manifestations as an example of how violence can be a helpful tool to exercise control or will upon others, although temporarily, since, according to her, violence can never create power; it can, however,

help to maintain it. She states that all political and social institutions can only become endangered if the people who hold power are no longer working together. In her words: “All political institutions are manifestations and materializations of power; they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them.” (Arendt, 1970, p. 41)

The idea that violence and power are the same is, according to Arendt, incorrect. The author is critical of previous interpretations of violence, especially the ones that enable violence as indispensable for the creation and maintaining of a powerful social organization. She specifies that violence is of significant importance in serving power, but can never be one of its foundations. Instead, power is, according to Arendt, the ability to “act in concert” (1970, p. 44), meaning that it reinforces the notion of individuals working together, as power cannot exist by itself. Therefore, power belongs to and is retained by a group, and it remains as long as this particular group continues to be in synchrony. This, as Arendt concludes, reinforces the notion that there is no ‘powerful person’ but, instead, a person who is invested with power by a larger group of people. Because of this, Arendt emphasizes that one of the clear distinctions between power and violence is that, while power can only exist with a larger group of people, violence can be perpetrated by only one person.

Though power is defined by Arendt as dependent on numbers, *strength*, she states, can be individual, as it is inherent to the character of a person or object. As for *force*, Arendt reserves it to the realm of the natural forces or “force of circumstances” (1970, p. 45), which can be understood as the actions of social movements. *Authority*, another term Arendt emphasizes, is defined by its irrefutable recognition by those who obey. Finally, the author distinguishes *violence* among the previous highlighted terms as instrumental. Violence allows a smaller number of people to resist submission, meaning that minority groups, for instance, can be able to oppose the power of influential groups through acts of violence. As she puts it: “Violence can always destroy power; from the barrel of a weapon develops the most effective command, resulting in the most instantaneous and perfect obedience. What can never come out of it is power.” (Arendt, 1970, p. 53)

The instrumentality of violence is also evident in how contemporary western societies use it as means of maintaining its power. This issue, as I shall develop further,

brings to the discussion the notions of governmental violence that does not necessarily retain characteristic and commonplace definitions of violence. Instead, it is possible to understand the role of violence in the maintenance of power through less explicit actions, such as the medicalization of bodies considered to be dissident and the approval of laws that withdraw indispensable rights of minority groups. Although Arendt's primary concern is not related to this type of violence since the author is more interested in physical, material violence, the notion of acknowledging violence as an instrument for the preserving of power can be expanded when considering the effects of less visible violence upon marginalized groups of people.

As strongly advocating for peaceful resolutions of conflicts is one of her main arguments throughout the book, Arendt offers an analysis of violent acts attempting to understand the dynamics of violence as a way of improving the human condition. While analyzing political thought, even though violence exists as the extreme end of power, Arendt states that a government that is solely based on violence has never existed. It is power, instead, that functions as the basis for any governmental institution. Since violence is instrumental, it opens room for justification and, therefore, it does not function as the essence or foundation of organizations. On this logic, Arendt concludes that there should be instead another tradition, one that configures an alternative articulation between violence and power and that it reinforces their opposition, although they often act together.

Looking at power and violence as dissimilar may account for a better understanding of both terms, although, as Arendt postulates, it is still not enough. Instead, comprehending violence and power as opposites allows us to perceive how and when violence operates, mostly when power is threatened. Consequently, for Arendt, violence is defined by its quality of opposing powerful organizations, since it often appears when such organizations are at risk. Additionally, power can never come out of violence. As she puts it:

Politically speaking, it is insufficient to say that power and violence are not the same. Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance. This implies that it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as nonviolence; to speak of nonviolent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it. (Arendt, 1970, p. 56)

Considering Arendt's position on the relation between violence and power, it is possible to conclude that the mere existence of violence relies on the acknowledgment of a favored social group that retains the powerful means to define specific contexts, situations, and actions as violent. It implies, moreover, that what constitute 'violence' to powerful organizations are the actions that jeopardize their power. More than simply analyzing the violence perpetrated by powerful organizations, it is also necessary to look at how mere existences may configure a violation to a hegemonic power in western societies, which enable their own violation through the hands of those who help to maintain such power. This clash can be exemplified, for instance, by how diverse identities are often scrutinized for not conforming to standards of race, gender, and sexuality, notions that habitually enable the configuration of violent acts against these identities.

This issue is brought forward by Patricia Hill Collins in *The Tie that Binds: Race, Gender and US Violence* (1998), where she analyzes African-American women's experiences with violence within the context of the United States. Collins sheds light on how considering social minority groups' experiences with violence can reveal the multidimensional relations that shape and legitimate violent acts. She states that, in order to consider violence, it is also necessary to reflect on social groups bearing authority positions that enable the maintenance of the violations of less favored social groups.

The hierarchical character of violence is exemplified by Collins as the author mentions authoritative institutions, such as the government and religion, which are bound to legitimize violence in specific contexts in which their own moral standards are considered in the process. According to Collins (1999, p. 922), the act of killing another human being, for instance, can be justified (or even encouraged) by its agents when in view of American soldiers during war. However, the death of policemen by the hands of civilians is considered a punishable act. These contrasting and extreme examples illustrate how, even though in both cases there are fatal victims, hierarchical power relations are the defining factor to consider an act 'violent' in relation to the interests of socially powerful groups.

From this discussion, Collins expands her argument by focusing on other types of violence, ones that are so rooted in the social spheres that they are often overlooked

as proper violations. She considers the political climate of the United States in relation to the treatment of African-American women and other minority groups, in which they are constantly stereotyped in negative light. Additionally, she comments on notions of violence through speech and how they are mainly disregarded in discussions and definitions of violence. According to the author, speech must be considered as a powerful tool for the maintenance of systemic violence, as it is shaped by several processes that trespass people's lives in many different spheres. In her own words:

[...] speech broadly defined contributes to the violence they experience, yet remains outside the definition of violence. The words, ideas and images conveyed through the media, curricula and everyday social practices create an interpretive climate for systemic violence. (Collins, 198, p. 923)

Collins also points at how hate speech is constantly detached from definitions of violence because it is traditionally perceived within the dichotomy of action/speech, meaning that the “hate speech of men against women, of whites against people of colour, of adults against children, of heterosexuals against gays and lesbians” (Collins, 1998, p. 923) will most likely not retain any visibility as violence because it does not produce any physical harm. However, the scholar mentions the need to consider the effects of verbal and systemic violence as equally (and even sometimes more) violent than physical abuse. She uses the examples of rape to support this argument: although the physicality of the act can be measured and understood as violence, the verbal violence that is often used to humiliate rape victims and deny them from any sense of worth should also be considered as a form of violation.

Collins moves on to discuss violence as a routinized action, meaning that several types of violence, especially the ones committed against social minority groups, tend to be present in minor interactions throughout the everyday life of these individuals, whereas in the private or the public sphere. Because of this naturalization, less visible forms of violence become difficult to spot, which causes them to remain seen and reproduced as non-violent acts. As the author puts it: “Hidden in plain sight, the routinization of violence in the workplace, government, media, streets and other social institutions remains so prevalent and racially and gender encoded that most people have difficulty in identifying routinized violence as violence at all.” (Collins, 1998, p. 924)

From the very specific context of analyzing black women and their experiences with violence in the United States, Collins provides an overview of how violence operates in a number of social and political scopes. From the most traditional examples to less identifiable ones, violence often operates silently, yet effectively, in the lives of less powerful social groups, and is often enhanced when individuals are part of more than one social minority. Because of that, emerges the urgency of looking at violence not as a multidimensional force, but instead as one that is shaped, regulated, and maintained by intersectional factors.

Bearing in mind this necessity of considering violence in its own intersectionality, and since my primary concern in this research is strictly related to acts of violence against queer people and its representations in cinema, for this research's working definition of violence I will also incorporate the elements that condemn, oppress, punish, or threaten the (physical and mental) well-being and existences of the queer characters from the analyzed films. In the following sections, I gather what I consider to be pivotal examples of how violence can operate against queer individuals in real-life contexts. Each of the following examples, besides strengthening this work's definition of violence, will also be mentioned throughout my filmic analysis as I investigate the speech and interpersonal relations of the characters, as well as the *mise-en-scène*, the soundtrack, and the films' narratives.

Often characterized as one clear-cut action, what constitutes violence is, instead, an interwoven web of multiple markers. Specifically considering anti-queer violence, these markers are commonly related to notions of sexuality and gender. However, in order to comprehend the intricate and persistent character of violence against queer people, addressing only such notions can be a rather limiting perspective when analyzing the innumerable social and political contexts in which queer people inhabit. Instead, it is necessary to look at the underbelly of how other social markers, such as class and race, operate in concert with anti-queer violence, which provides a better understanding of how queer people are subjected to acts of violence that are not strictly limited to their sexualities or expressions of gender but are, occasionally, derivative of other types of violence.

1.2 Visuality, Sexuality, and Homophobia: Out of The Closet

While discussing anti-queer violence within an interdisciplinary and intersectional context, definitions of what constitute a violent act against queer people should also include less visible and material examples, ones that paint a better picture of the systemic and rather silent anti-queer violence. Hence, as a starting point to think of violence as a broader term, and one that is not strictly linked to physical violations, I will be looking at one's sexuality as the primary cause of less explicit acts of violence.

Much of the violence inflicted upon queer people is related to their private or public displays of sexuality, as they tend to constantly shape and articulate an individual's interpersonal relations. For instance, the act of 'coming out (of the closet)' as gay or lesbian can signify, on the one hand, a liberation of a set of norms that favor heterosexuality and dismisses homosexuality. However, on the other hand, it can also create a new set of tools that still enable a hierarchy between heterosexuality and homosexuality. In the former case, coming out of the closet, or even being forcibly 'outed' by others, is symptomatic of a silent, yet still tangible violation towards a queer person's sexuality, since, as I shall develop further, being 'inside' of the closet can, occasionally, signify the possibility of a safer environment. Such instances are crucial for the understanding of how sexuality, when deemed visible, becomes the reasoning through which violent acts are legitimated.

Although commonly understood as a positive act in the life of queer individuals, to 'come out of the closet' can also reestablish patterns of systemic oppression that can be as harmful for gays and lesbians as beneficial for the maintenance of heterosexual hegemonic power. Discussing the image of the closet as a regulatory system for queer people, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her trailblazing book *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), states that, besides reinforcing contradictory values on dichotomies such as public and private, homosexual and heterosexual, knowledge and ignorance, the symbolism of the closet also helps to organize homosexual lives in ways that favor the heterosexual matrix. By shedding light on discussions regarding homosexuality ranging from literature to the legal system, Sedgwick asks the reader to re-access homosexual life as something that should not equate a direct 'other' to heterosexuality. Instead, it should be understood as non-equivalent.

One of the ways through which the closet works as a violent agent of oppression is the repetitiveness of the proper act of coming out. When dealing with homosexuality as something secretive, for instance, it already establishes the existence of both an inside and an outside of the closet and, therefore, the need to come out of it. However, queer individuals often face environments in which they are obliged to come out. Sedgwick also highlights how gays and lesbians need to continuously come out of their closets throughout their lives, even years apart from their realization as queer individuals, in a process that, depending on the context they are inserted in, can represent the foundation of the ways this individual experiences violence. The author emphasizes that coming out requires an interlaced support net that is not available for many queer individuals, which can make being inside of the closet the safest option. In her own words:

The gay closet is not a feature only of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however courageous and forthright habit, however fortunate in the support of their immediate communities, in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence. (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 68)

Sedgwick exemplifies her argument by commenting on the legal unfolding of Joe Acanfora, a North American eighth grade teacher, and his lawsuit against the Board of Education. Acanfora, who had his position removed when the school discovered he was gay, sued the institution, but was denied of his rights when the federal district court acknowledged that Acanfora spoke out about his situation to important media vehicles, which “brought undue attention to himself and his sexuality.” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 69) She points out that it was not Acanfora’s homosexuality per-se that prevented him from retaining his job; instead, it was his outing and his calling of the media that assisted the court’s decision of not granting his job. Once he was publicly ‘out of the closet’ and his sexuality recognized, he lost his contract. Emphasizing the contradictions surrounding the symbolism of the closet, Sedgwick bluntly summarizes it as “the defining structure for gay oppression in this century.” (1990, p. 71)

Corroborating Sedgwick’s discussion,’ Ki Namaste, in the article *The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality* (1994), draws from poststructuralist and queer theory thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida

and Michel Foucault, to establish that homosexuality and heterosexuality should be seen as mutually dependent but, at the same time, antagonistic. According to Namaste, queer theory, when supported by poststructuralist thinking, is much more interested in looking at the borders of sexuality and gender instead of simply creating categories such as gay or lesbian.

Namaste is also harshly critic of the symbolism of the closet. According to the author, it reinforces a “paradox” (1994, p. 224): with the rise of the civil rights and liberation movements, the closet regulates the visibility of people’s sexuality while others remain hidden and silenced. This argument supports Sedgwick’s position that the closet, while delimiting public and private spaces, also reestablishes the centrality of heterosexuality in the debate: people who are ‘inside’ of the closet exist because of the existence of those who are ‘outside’, and the latter exists in opposition to heterosexuality.

Namaste suggests that the inside/outside model can be too focused on preexisting binary notions of gender and sexuality, which fails to consider other types of non-heterosexual identities, such as bisexuals and transgenders. The scholar asks the reader to consider other sites of resistance to heterosexual hegemony, since categorizations such as ‘homosexual’ should not be the only ones; instead, Namaste proposes a critical model that also considers what lies within the borders of strict definitions, as ways of denying oppositional and derivative approaches. As the author phrases it: “[...] perhaps the most effective sites of resistance are those created by people who refuse both options. A critical sexual politics, in other words, struggles to move beyond the confines of an inside/outside model.” (Namaste, 1994, p. 230)

To think of ‘the closet’ as a device that systematically prescribes a queer individual’s display of sexuality is to acknowledge the violence inherited in it. The need of creation of places to safely exist as a gay man or a lesbian woman, for instance, are strategies of survival that are not present in the lives of heterosexual individuals, and neither is the need to constantly declare one’s own heterosexuality, simply because being heterosexual is already the expected standard. The notion of ‘homosexuality’ as a secret that is ought to be hidden, and also the effort it takes to ‘reveal the secret’ on several occasions in a queer person’s life, is symptomatic of the maintenance of a heterosexual hegemony that continues to push queer people to the marginalized

shadows, allowing their invisibility and forcing them to build their own 'closets' as safe spaces to exist.

Sedgwick's acknowledgement of homosexuality as non-equivalent and non-opposite to heterosexuality, besides bringing queer people to the center of the debate, also establishes a parallel with Adrienne Rich, as the former requests the possibility of looking at lesbian existences as non-dependent of heterosexual models. Concerned with lesbian invisibility as another form of systemic violence within both the fields of sexuality and feminism, Rich, in her paramount text *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980), addresses the issue by recounting how little attention has been paid to lesbian existences within the feminist literary tradition. Recollecting milestone books by feminist authors, Rich describes how the postulation of romantic, sexual, and social relationships between men and women have been considered to be obligatory or required by such theorists, who often insist that any defiance of it threatens the political status quo. Calling out the violent aspects of heterosexuality as an institution that reinforces the "male right of physical, economical, and emotional access" (Rich, 1980, p. 647) to women, the author proposes a larger understanding of what it means to be and exist as a lesbian, one that enables women to exist outside biased heterosexual assumptions, such as the common belief that women are economically and emotionally dependent of men.

By criticizing authors who deem heterosexuality as intrinsically natural to women, Rich is concerned with acknowledging lesbian existences as equally valid. She challenges the notion of heterosexuality defended by former heterosexual feminist authors by showing how heterosexuality is mainly an institution forced upon worldwide societies and cultures. This imposing is often justified by how these societies tend to designate women a subservient social position. Rich is, therefore, asking heterosexual feminist writers to look at heterosexuality as another regulatory and political organization that is also detrimental to all women. As Rich phrases it:

The assumption that "most women are innately heterosexual" stands as a theoretical and political stumbling block for many women. It remains a tenable assumption, partly because lesbian existence has been written out of history or catalogued under disease; partly because it has been treated as exceptional rather than intrinsic; partly because to acknowledge that for women heterosexuality may not be a "preference" at all but something that has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force, is an immense step to take if you consider yourself freely and "innately"

heterosexual. Yet the failure to examine heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including both physical violence and false consciousness. To take the step of questioning heterosexuality as a "preference" or "choice" for women-and to do the intellectual and emotional work that follows-will call for a special quality of courage in heterosexually identified feminists but I think the rewards will be great: a freeing-up of thinking, the exploring of new paths, the shattering of another great silence, new clarity in personal relationships. (1980, p. 648)

While showing the reader how to question heterosexuality as intrinsically natural, Rich highlights ways in which women have to endure experiences, such as sexual harassment in the workplace, that manage to keep the myth of compulsory heterosexuality alive. According to her, the erasure of lesbian women in various social and academic spheres has perpetrated derogatory, yet still current beliefs, such as the stigmatization of lesbians as diseased or unhappy women. Therefore, she proposes not only the use of the term "lesbian existences" (Rich, 1980, p. 649) instead of the clinical term 'lesbianism', but also that lesbians are considered separately from male homosexuals. This distinction is crucial for the understanding of lesbian existences as worthy; when separating lesbians from gay men, Rich is reinforcing her argument that lesbians are not deviant from a heterosexual/male belief system that assumes heterosexuality, or relationships between men and women, as natural. Moreover, she advocates for the creation of a linguistic term that counterpoints what has previously been given to lesbians as their only ways of existing, such as dependent on heterosexuality or clinically ill. Consequently, to deal with lesbian existences as a derivative version of male homosexuality would mean to exclude and deny the female experience, excluding lesbian history and the experiences it holds.

Rich also stresses how heterosexuality should be looked at as historically built by men as an ideological process that furthers the need of men. Although this construction has been imposed upon women, Rich insists that "everywhere women have resisted it, often at the cost of physical torture, imprisonment, psychosurgery, social ostracism, and extreme poverty" (1980, p. 653). This also makes possible to establish the violent features of an imposed, compulsory heterosexuality; whereas women are denied their existences as lesbians or punished for accepting it, their subjectivities are violated.

Considering the ways compulsory heterosexuality is harmful for lesbian women, as Rich describes forms of punishment for those who have resisted it, it is possible to

consider the incidence of corrective rape of lesbian women as ways of ‘fixing’ their sexuality as another extreme consequence of such resistance. Emphasizing the gender-based aspects of this type of violation, Bianca Chetto Santos and others, in the article *Corrective Rape in Latin America: Analyzing Sexual Violence against LGBTQI People*⁵, focus their analysis within the context of sexual violence in Latin America, documenting the last fifty years of political and social measurements that punish this type of violence against the Latin American queer population, especially in Brazil, which has recently enhanced the penalties for corrective sexual violence.

In their article, the authors also discuss the complexity and plurality of violence against queer people as something that cannot be examined without considering the heteronormative standards that are often imposed upon queer individuals, which forcibly condense queer people to adequate themselves to expected behaviors of sexuality and gender. Additionally, the authors point at how this type of violation often repels any bodily and behavioral characteristic that manages to subvert essentialist and binary notions of sexuality and gender, deeming suspicious, or dangerous to public moral, all expression of sexuality and identity. One of the ways through this repulsion is validated is the corrective rape. In the authors’ words:

Among several aggressions against the LGBTQI population, it is recurrent the practice of “corrective” acts. Generally, they are used with the purpose of “fixing” sexual orientations, gender identities, bodies considered dissonant or even the way they express gender. All this is in consonance and is vividly related to the social imposition of cisheteronormativity. Such violent acts reach, exceedingly, lesbian and bisexual women, intersex individuals and trans men. (Santos et al, p. 241)⁶

The authors move on to analyze how Brazil has been tackling the issue within the legal system, with enhanced penalties for rapists. However, as recent data shows, approximately six lesbian women are raped daily in Brazil⁷, which shows the urgency of not only the recognition of lesbian existences but also the reinforcement of a legal system that deem this women the possibility of existing. The lack of legal and social support is, according to the scholars, another type of violence that legitimate queer

⁵ *Estupro Corretivo na América Latina: Analisando a Violência Sexual contra Pessoas LGBTQI*. My translation.

⁶ “Dentre as diversas agressões praticadas contra LGBTQIs, é recorrente a prática de atos ditos “corretivos”. Em geral, são utilizados com o objetivo de “consertar” a orientação sexual, a identidade de gênero, corpos vistos como dissonantes ou mesmo a maneira a maneira como expressam o gênero. Tudo isso está em consonância e se relaciona nitidamente com a imposição social da cisheteronormatividade. Tais violências atingem, sobremaneira, mulheres lésbicas e bissexuais, pessoas Intersex e homens trans.” My translation.

⁷ According to a 2019’s news report by *Gênero e Número*.

suffering and state violence. They also draw attention to how other characteristics, such as race and class, also play a substantial role in the way queer people have been treated by the state (p. 242). Black and indigenous queer people, for instance, may face more adversities when facing gender and sexuality-based oppressions.

Much of the violence explored above is related to the notion of visibility, there is, if lesbian women's or gay men's sexuality is visible to others. The closet, as a visual regulator of one's sexuality, is a significant example of how homophobia-related often appears when homosexuality becomes visible. This notion of visibility of homosexuality, more specifically of lesbian women, is brought forward by Gail Mason in *The Spectacle of Violence: Homophobia, Gender and Knowledge* (2002), in which the author details Australian lesbian women's experiences with homophobia-related violence through an empirical research. Drawing from Foucault and feminist theories, as well as Arendt's notions of violence and power, Mason is concerned with how violence becomes validated through a visual level, ascribing it a notion of spectacle that is also responsible for our shaping and understanding of other subjects. As she puts it:

“[...] the nexus between violence and power is an instrumental one; that is, violence is an instrument of power. I suggest that we might think of instrumentality as a question of knowledge, of the capacity of violence to shape the ways we see, and thereby come to know, certain things. In this way, the act of violence itself is a spectacle. This is not so much because violence is something that we observe, but, more, because violence is a mechanism through which we distinguish and observe other things. In other words, violence is more than a practice that acts upon individual subjects to inflict harm and injury. It is, metaphorically speaking, also a way of looking at these subjects.” (Mason, p. 11)

Rooted in Foucault's appropriation of Bentham's panopticon, Mason reinforces how humans become particular types of individuals depending on how they are visible within systems of organization (2002, p. 14). This visibility, therefore, operates in favor of the control of individuals, as Foucault defines the panopticon as a symbol of power. Commenting on this, Mason underpins that humans live in a state of constant surveillance, which is stretched when considering homosexuality. She derives her argument from Foucault's *History of Sexuality* by corroborating how, by rendering homosexuality visible through discourses of medicine and science, it clashed with the previous “normality” (Mason, 2002, p. 23) of heterosexuality. The result of this, as the author phrases, is that gay men and lesbian women become more inclined to monitor and confine their nonconformist sexual preferences and lifestyles, ascribing it as mostly

private. When visible, or public, homosexuality still retains negative consequences when compared to heterosexuality, homophobic-related violence being the primary one.

Predominantly concerned with how violence operates against lesbians, Mason also reflects upon how lesbian sexuality is considered as disordered through a series of linguistic repertoires that condition heterosexuality as the primary mode of sexual subjectivity. Noting a lack of scientific feminist theories related to lesbian sexuality, the author questions whether or not acts of violence against lesbians should be interpreted through the same lenses of gendered-violence, since it is also mostly perpetrated by men. The author states that, instead of reducing homophobic-related violence against lesbians to matters of misogyny, or equating it to violence against gay men, it is necessary to employ an approach that considers how misogyny and homophobia act together against lesbian women. Much of this conclusion is drawn from how linguistic terms used to oppress lesbian women are deeply rooted in notions of heterosexuality and femininity.

Commenting on the reports of the interviews she conducted with lesbian women, Mason addresses the frequent use of the term 'dirt', or 'dirty lesbian', as present in the hostilities these women experienced, whether on the street, at work, or at home. Additionally, in many of the accounts, this verbal abuse is often followed by a physical assault. The term is representative of the characterization of lesbian sexuality as a dirty sexuality. Mason compares it to Judeo-Christian belief systems of marriage and procreation and, since homosexuality deviates from this expected order, the common belief of it as unclean can be understood as a means to establish regimes of sexual order. The author also stresses that naming homosexuality dirty also alludes to it as in need of cleaning, pushing it to a margin that hides its dirt from the 'clean' center of heterosexuality. Deeming homosexuality unclean also reinforces a sense of revulsion that ensures its erasure from social and political spheres (Mason, 2002, p. 45). Moreover, Mason phrases how the term 'dirty lesbian' is suggestive of the 'unnaturalness' of homosexuality in women, which establishes a significant link with Rich's notion of compulsory heterosexuality. In the author's words:

Quite simply, acts of violence emerge from, and reproduce, established associations between lesbianism, dirt, and physical pollution. Dirty bodies and dirty sexual acts induce a sense of disgust. This disgust manifests in a fear of contamination, a fear that one may be polluted through close proximity to the source of this dirt. These negative associations are dependent upon assumptions about appropriate and desirable expressions of sexuality and gender. In evoking these connections, acts of violence are able to gesture towards

the supposedly irregular nature of homosexuality in women. (Mason, 2002, p. 46-47)

The common belief of women's lack of interest in man as a characteristic that needs remedy, a reflex of compulsory heterosexuality, is brought forward by Mason when she addresses 'butch', another common term used to inflict violence in lesbian women. Because of the dependency of gender on compulsory heterosexuality, and since heterosexuality is often understood as the organizer of gender, there is a cultural expectation that individuals' sexual preferences should be defined by their own sexed body. Considering the role of heterosexuality in the common understanding of gender, Mason points at how homosexuality "mocks" (2002, p. 51) the expectations and obligations of heterosexuality while, at the same time, dismantling norms of gender. The 'butch lesbian', therefore, is historically associated with ideas of masculinity. It also reinforces that women who enact or behave in a way typically understood as masculine are supposed to be recognized as valueless and undesirable. Consequently, the term 'butch' can also be expanded to heterosexual women who do not perform femininity in their expected terms. Mason also stresses how negatively using 'butch' to describe a lesbian is representative of their disruption of gender norms, as well as of a masculinization that "appears to mirror the desire to feminise her" (2002, p. 52), which is exemplified by extreme acts such as corrective rape.

Mason moves on to analyze these previous discussions through the notion of visibility, circling back to the beginning of her book. According to her, in the chapter *Body Maps*, gay men and lesbian women often employ specific techniques to create a safe environment that positions them away from contexts of violence. Echoing Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*, the author mentions how the classification of sexualities has rendered them as visible, making for the recognition of ourselves and others, which prompts the need for "curtailing, confessing and regulating our own behavior so as to confirm to the expectations attached to these particular subject positions" (Mason, 2002, p. 80). However, as she stresses later on, despite all sexual subjects being inclined to monitor their behavior in order to 'hide' their sexualities, the sexual desires of gay men and lesbian women, as well as others who deviate from the benchmark of heterosexuality (such as non-monogamous individuals and sex workers), are more often scrutinized because of the historical privileging of the heterosexual marriage institution and monogamous heterosexual desire. When homosexuality becomes visible, it also

attains threats related to legal and personal well-beings, as well as discrimination, violence, and personal rejection.

Mason also discusses Sedgwick's theory of the closet as something that permeates the lives of gay men and lesbian women, frequently dictating how they should behave in public contexts, establishing patterns of behavior that 'hide' or 'minimize' the perception of their sexualities in the workplace, within their families, or friendships. Nonetheless, Mason is also particularly critic of what the closet encompasses as a regulator of visibility, since it often operates in concert with a queer person's identity and corporeality. Variables such as class, gender, and ethnicity, therefore, play a vital role in ascribing how visible about their sexuality one can be. Mason stresses how upper class queer people, for instance, have more options to choose where they live, work, and spend their time, summarizing that it is easier to exist as a queer individual in areas that are 'gay-friendly'. Moreover, the author raises noteworthy concerns regarding the different encounters with violence when considering queer people of color or lesbian women, because their accounts of anti-queer violence often include intersections with other subjectivities. The notion of visibility, as she summarizes, is not only the result of homosexuality as an "isolated identity" (Mason, 2002, p. 88) but also the product of refractions of such subjectivities.

Considering these other subjectivities in the construction of anti-queer violence, in the following sections I intend to discuss other ways in which violence against queer people operates. In doing so, I consider the different possibilities of what it means to be queer according to one's social and personal context. Instead of grouping acts of anti-queer violence as simply 'homophobia', my main goal is to consider how markers such as class, race, and gender also establish patterns of queer oppression, often emphasizing the ways in which queer people experience violence. However, considering such markers is not enough to discuss anti-queer violence as a broader term. As I further discuss, the experiences of queer individuals, although similar when considering the contexts of violence, are diverse when taking into account what it means to be queer in different places of the world. The experience of violence of a black, gay man in Brazil, for instance, is significantly distant from a white, upper class, gay man in the United States, as well as the experiences of transgender women in Latin America in comparison to European transgender women. Notions of gender and sexuality, therefore, are culturally bent and constructed according to the place queer people inhabit.

1.3 Class and Place: The Politics of Anti-Queer Violence

While addressing issues related to sexuality/gender-based violence, it is unsustainable to think of being queer without taking into account the social and political surroundings of queer individuals, which makes class and nationality other significant markers when discussing anti-queer violence. Since much of what has been discussed above primarily deals with being queer in North American/European contexts, as well as middle-class, white individuals, it bears the questions of what it means to be queer in less white, less economically favored contexts, as well as what are the experiences of queer people with violence in these places. The crucial differences between these realities, besides expanding the working definition of violence in this research, helps to propose a discussion that considers the environment and its different political struggles in the shaping of diverse queer realities and existences, ones that undergo similar, but overall distinct experiences with violence. Consequently, to ignore the class struggles and the political climate of Latin America in the experiences of gay, lesbian, and transgender Latin Americans, for instance, means to erase noteworthy layers of oppression that shape their queer subjectivities, as well as the ways they encounter and overcome violence.

Class and nationality are not traits that define sexualities. However, they bear central significance in the way sexualities exist in the world. Because of that, in this section I propose to look at the construction of violence in different social and economic contexts, mainly in Latin American countries, to illustrate how urban, structural, and political violence operate hand in hand in the shaping of queer experiences. The examples gathered here, therefore, enhance the theoretical framework for the analysis of the films in chapters three and four, as issues of urban violence and class differences are pivotal elements in the lives of the characters in the films, simultaneously reinforcing the anti-queer violence they face.

Showcasing the importance of identity and place in the construction and the experience of violence, Tina Hilgers and Laura Macdonald, in the introduction of *Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean* (2017), detail how violence has shaped the overall history of Latin Americans as well as their perceptions of safety. Besides the high statistics of homicide in the region, as well as aggressions related to gender, age, and race, the authors demonstrate in detail how the emergence of Latin American countries from violent dictatorships in the 20th century has had an impact in the population's perception of violence. The process of democratization, they note, mark

only one of the historical processes of political and economic violence of the region. The colonization of the Americas and the resulting extermination of native groups, as well as the exploitation of the populations through the elite, has led Latin Americans to struggle in matters of urban housing, services, job, and education (Hilgers and Macdonald, 2017, p. 8) Because of that, the authors propose to look at violence as a term that also includes intersections of social and political configurations of power, as well as economic characteristics and local and national history, which exemplifies the distinctions of violence in different places.

One of the arguments made by the authors is that, despite the democratization of Latin American countries, much of the violence present during the previous dictatorships still prevails mainly through the frequent force of police brutality in the region. The scholars make the distinction that, although authoritarian governments made use of violence to exert power, the current democratic governments create institutions that “will allow for rule without violent coercion, but—mired in social, political, and economic problems—they often recur to it to maintain order” (Hilgers and Macdonald, 2017, p. 10). As a result, violence, in current Latin American democracies, is a culmination of cultural, economic, and political forces, allowing high rates of inequality and a lack of opportunity for socioeconomic advances, particularly in the lower class youth, which accounts for a significant parcel of rates of criminalization. This is more apparent when considering the establishment of drug gangs and their subversion of forces of order.

The authors point to the mesh of factors that contribute to the proliferation of organized crime and police brutality, mainly addressing social vulnerabilities as the main one. According to them, the exploitation throughout the region, primarily based on race and social status, has helped to relegate entire populations to coexist economically and institutionally marginalized. Moreover, because this type of violence is recurrent, little attention is paid to less material violence, such as gendered crimes or anti-queer violence. In the authors’ words:

Poverty cuts across the cleavages of race, ethnicity, and gender. Among the upper classes and state officials, many mistrust the poor, viewing them as irrational and unpredictable; as a force of latent danger to order and stability that must be contained. As much as the rights of the poor are increasingly protected through the law and they are the target of any number of participatory decision-making projects and antipoverty strategies, they are simultaneously excluded from

society through the practical criminalization of their status. [...] The system of generalized exclusion also renders the poor, and other subaltern groups and identities, particularly vulnerable to the criminal and quasi-state actors responsible for much of the direct contemporary violence. (Hilgers and Macdonald, 2017, p. 11-12)

As one of the results of this dynamic, the authors state, police brutality and corruption appear recurrently. Because of the established links between police forces and power holders (namely politicians and members of judiciary), as well as criminal groups such as drug traffickers, poor communities often face severe police repression, being increasingly stigmatized while rates of impunity rise within police forces (Hilgers and Macdonald, 2017, p. 18).

Much of the violence present in Latin America, the authors suggest, is a result of the “transnational flows of arms, drugs, and migrants, and by national and subnational histories, political institutions, economic structures, and cultures” (Hilgers and Macdonald, 2017, p. 22). However, they also draw close attention to how violence works on closer levels, such as in neighborhoods and cities. By analyzing smaller structures, the authors mention, it is possible to perceive how citizens often partake in strategies of policing, decision-making, and surveillance. Moreover, the question of identity emerges. Identity shapes the realities of individuals who are inserted in transnational contingencies, and the authors recall, for instance, the experiences of the poor, black populations in Brazil in relation to homicide rates. According to them, there is a disproportional rate when considering the rates of “unemployment, low wages, incarceration, and police repression, and the death rates are significant higher for them than for whites” (Hilgers and Macdonald, 2017, p. 23) The issue of class, in this case, enlists services such as health care and public transportation as more accessible for upper, whiter classes, especially in larger, urbanized cities, where the poor population struggle to have access to the basics.

Another example of considering identities within these contexts of violence is violence against women. Hilgers and Macdonald (2017, p. 24) describe how the common beliefs about the inferiority of women in Latin America, culturally referred to as *machismo*, come from the practices of violent, militarized dictatorships, which often regarded the role of women as secondary. This culturally-accepted discourse has continued during the processes of democratization, and it prevails among current practices. The gender biases of judicial, public, and police spheres deem women’s

testimonies and reports of rape, for instance, as unimportant or untrue. Nonetheless, as the authors report, Latin America experiences a high rate of femicide since the 1990's.

Group intersections, such as class and place, help to shape our individual intersections and experiences. When addressing the social and political context of Latin America, as well as its history of violent dictatorships, a few questions emerge: how does this affect Latin American queer populations? What does it mean to be gay, lesbian, or transgender in Latin American countries? Moreover, what are the possible strategies of survival and resistance for queer individuals in these countries? In a place often facing police brutality, financial inequality, and precarious basic services, is there room to think of LGBT issues and anti-queer violence? These questions have crossed my mind during this research, and in what follows I intend to answer some of them.

LGBT-related issues have gained much attention and traction since the 1990's, as reported by Javier Corrales and Mario Pecheny in *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America: A Reader of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Rights* (2010). For instance, Ecuador included the protection against sexual orientation in the constitution of 1998, Chile decriminalized same-sex intercourse in 1999, and Rio de Janeiro's state banned discrimination based on sexual orientation in 2000. However, as the authors mention, there is still an astonishing level of homophobia in the region, a reflex perhaps rooted in the Latin American cultural *machismo*. As a consequence, the legal advances related to the queer population seem remarkable, especially considering public discourse supporting the suppression of democratic basic rights for the queer population (Corrales and Pecheny, 2010, p. 11).

Queer people in Latin America frequently first experience violence within their own houses. The authors point at how there is significant evidence that anti-queer discrimination in their own households is rising, as many queer individuals feel marginalized by their families. Moreover, when compared to other regions, queer Latin-Americans, especially the LGB population, are less likely to leave their houses due to issues related to low incomes and few job opportunities, which makes young queer people unable to afford living on their own and, as a result, they experience a delayed sense of autonomy. Additionally, because Latin American families are often composed of members outside a queer person's nuclear family (such as grandparents), queer youths also deal with the older generation's homophobia. This enables an inhibition of queer people's "behaviors, identities, and expression, potentially causing more trauma among LGBT youths in Latin American than in other democracies" (Corrales and

Pecheny, 2010, p. 15). Additionally, the authors suggest that Latin American families are most likely to enable the creation of multiple, open closets (p. 17), where a heterosexual married life can coexist with a closeted, hidden homosexual life. There is more tolerance in these families, for instance, when dealing with homosexuality as something to be kept as private, as long as the expected heterosexual duties (such as marriage and procreation) are still fulfilled.

Class differences emerge when taking into account the homeless queer population in Latin America. Although these individuals are away from household anti-queer violence, the authors note at the other problems they face while living on the street, such as poverty, crime, and abandonment issues. Noteworthy, the scholars point out that there are “significantly more transgender expressions in the lower strata of society” (Corrales and Pecheny, 2010, p. 16), as transgender individuals find it easier to leave their houses than lesbian women or gay men. Middle-class LGB people, in contrast, are most likely to leave their families, whereas there are not many transgender individuals within this economic class.

The class issue is also poignant for the expansion of queer rights. Compared to richer countries, there is a smaller interest in the subject in countries that economically struggle to achieve the basics. Corrales and Pecheny (2010, p. 18) mention how there is a tendency for general populations in Latin America to care more about issues related to unemployment, low incomes, and lack of job security than to the democratic rights of queer people. Consequently, since the economic problems of the region take the center of conversations, queer-related issues become secondary for the majority of the population. Because of that, the authors note that, for them to become ‘relevant’ for other spheres of the population, they need to go through moments of ‘national shock’. As examples, they recount the commissions that document the abuses against LGBT individuals during the Latin American dictatorships, as well as the lack of preparation of governments to deal with the AIDS epidemic in the 1980’s. Although many of the advances in terms of public healthcare and protection emerged during the period, the authors note the ineffectiveness of alluding to major issues in order to get attention to queer people. In their words:

One problem with horror as a propellant of rights is that it is not a sustainable resource. After an initial shock, societies and individuals can learn to live with otherwise horrific conditions. Shock can easily transition into complacency and indifference. This is what has

happened with the AIDS epidemic. Now that the epidemic has become more contained – and thus, less shocking – interest in addressing the plight of the LGBT community may have waned in many countries, and may remain low until another shock shakes public opinion. (Corrales and Pecheny, 2010, p. 20).

Class struggles, therefore, pose a pivotal obstacle for the propelling of queer rights in Latin America. Queer issues are hardly ever the topic of discussion when compared to more material issues, which are deemed more urgent due to the region's economically-based problems. Still, there are other obstacles that make queer issues a glossed over subject, such as the role of organized religions and the seclusion of queer individuals within political parties. The authors detail these obstacles by describing how Christian churches in Latin America still strongly consider homosexuality as immoral and sinful, shaping public and legal spheres through political lobbying against legislation and blocking agendas. Moreover, the authors draw attention to how LGBT movements in Latin America lack substantial political allies, given how parties of the right are averse to their causes, while many parties of the left still have been less sympathetic to such movements in an attempt to avoid issues considered to be polarizing. Another reason for that is the historically male-oriented, *macho* perspective of left governments, which focused primarily on social class issues while prosecuting and expulsing LGBT citizens, such as in the Cuban administration throughout the 1960's and the 1970's.

Being queer in Latin America involves dealing with the region's often turbulent political climate and its constant class struggles. Although progress has been noticeable in recent years, the authors state that, for future development of queer issues, the quality of Latin American democracies should increase concomitantly. The effects of poverty and political conflicts on queer people have proven to be sometimes even harder to overcome than sexuality-based violence, which goes to attest how queer identities are deeper and more complex than mere sexual preference. Bearing in mind the construction of plural queer identities, and given that race is often cited among class and nationality as defining factors for how a queer person experiences violence, the following section will focus primarily on how race shapes queer experiences differently from the often white realities presented in previous sections, thus expanding this research's scope of anti-queer violence and queer identities.

1.4 Racism and Hypersexualization: The Intersection of Race

The diverse degrees to which queer people of color experience violence and prejudice create the necessity of an analysis that considers the effects of not only being queer, but also the effects of racism. As a white, gay man, I could never experience the entwined forms of homophobia and racism that black gay/queer men endure. Hence, in bringing the following discussions to this research, I intend to strengthen the present theoretical chapter bearing in mind the analysis of the film *Moonlight* (2016) in chapter three, while I provide a critique of whiteness within spheres of the queer academic community. The privileging of whiteness for queer people has for long been responsible for a prevalent level of seclusion and separation, turning white queer people as agents of violence against queer people of color both inside and outside academic life.

As it shall be addressed further, the consequences of this exclusionary violence has led to an almost complete erasure of black queerness in both the real-life and academic contexts, as well as in terms or representation in products of mainstream popular culture, such as films. When discussing these issues from my own perspective, instead of simply meeting academic whiteness' theoretical "fetishization" (Reed, p. 49) with black queerness, as if it should only be present in the discussion as means of 'filling a gap' and satisfying an institutionalized need for varied representation and a diversity in scope, I intend to closely and attentively look at the repercussions of what it means to be a queer person of color in its multitude of possibilities.

While discussing the relation between gender and race, Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) has signaled to the consequences of not addressing racism in other types of discrimination. According to her, it is more efficient to tackle discrimination when people who are already marginalized are repositioned to the center of the discussion, since others can also benefit from it. In her words: "If their efforts instead began with addressing the needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged and with restructuring and remaking the world where necessary, then others who are singularly disadvantaged would also benefit." (Crenshaw, p. 167)

Addressing such consequences for gay men, Doug Meyer, in *Violence against Queer People: Race, Class, Gender, and the Persistence of Anti-LGBT Discrimination* (2015), conducts several studies and interviews with victims of anti-queer violence in the United States. While considering the testimonies gathered in his interviews and also drawing from his own personal experiences as a white, gay man, Meyer recollects a

theoretical background to look at the underbelly of anti-queer violence and how it is frequently shaped by more than just one type of oppression, mainly race discrimination.

According to Meyer, to look at anti-queer violence as merely ‘homophobia’ is to ignore that much of what constitutes it is related to other forms of inequality. When looking at homophobia as a primary focus, research neglects the experiences of those who are not, for instance, gay, white men, which retains the marginalization of other queer individuals who face violence in relation to their skin color. Meyer proposes to move beyond homophobia to discuss anti-queer violence as a multiple and intersectional term. In the chapter *More than Homophobia: The Race, Class, and Gender Dynamics of Anti-LGBT Violence*, for instance, the author establishes the negative outcomes, both for queer people and black people, of the persistence of relating homosexuality with whiteness. Meyer (2015, p. 26) demonstrates how this historically common correlation has led to the construction of an ‘authentic’ black identity as one that is primarily and essentially heterosexual. This construction has caused black people, especially black men, to reproduce substantial masculine stereotypes in order to avoid associations with homosexuality.

The effects of these constructions, as the author elaborates, made possible the common associations of homosexuality and white men as the only ‘acceptable’ homosexuality. As a double-edged sword, at the same time it reinforces homosexuality (within black heterosexual communities) as something that belongs exclusively to whiteness, reinforcing their own structural racism and expectations of a heterosexual black man, it also enables white homosexuality as the only representation of a respectable homosexuality in mainstream culture and society, hence the requirement of the recognition and visibility of black homosexuality. When the existences of black gay men are validated, it becomes possible to address the interlaced systems of oppression they are bound to as we analyze the types of violence they are subjected to in their lives. In Meyer’s own words:

[...] LGBT people of color confront pressures to keep their sexuality or gender identity hidden because of notions that they should represent their racial groups in a positive way. White LGBT people, in contrast, do not face these pressures due to their racial identity. By examining forms of anti-queer violence exclusively through the lens of homophobia, research would miss these racial differences, as Black LGBT people’s violent experiences could be collapsed with those of white gay men. (p. 27)

Although Meyer stresses the importance of tackling the different forms of oppression that are present in the lives of social minority groups, he also argues that it should not mean that these oppressions are set to be ranked in what he calls an “Olympics of oppression” (Meyer, 2015, p. 30). According to him, the major problem in ranking inequalities is that it invariably tones down certain aspects of individuals’ lives. Homophobia, for instance, in the case of black gay men, who suffer violence in relation to their skin color and sexuality, when considered ‘worse’ or more significant than racism, would imply an erasure of something that is assured to structure their lives’ experiences. At the same time, when considering racism as more harmful than homophobia, it erases the role of sexuality in the construction of their subjectivities.

In the following chapter, *“I’m making Black People Look Bad”: The Racial Implications of Anti-Queer Violence*, Meyer continues to analyze race as a crucial determinant when dealing with issues related to violence against queer people. As he showcases testimonies of black gay men and black lesbian women, primarily in the United States, Meyer emphasizes the sense of shame many black queer people feel in relation to their sexuality. Moreover, a sense of betrayal to their own race can also be identified, which is something exclusive only to queer people of color.

The author proposes, then, looking at whiteness as “an invisible social status” (Meyer, 2015, p. 45), which prevents white people to worry about their own representation within a racialized community or context. However, because queer people of color do not possess such privilege, they often pay extra attention to their actions within the same contexts, as ways of disabling other forms of violence besides racism. Therefore, homosexuality adds another layer of oppression for black people, turning black queer individuals into targets of violence both within and without black communities. Queer people of color are prone to suffer from racism within the queer community itself, at the same time they more frequently face homophobia within heterosexual contexts.

Furthermore, Meyer points at the paradox the correlation of homosexuality with whiteness creates, since it strengthens a link between a sexuality considered ‘deviant’ and a fully realized and represented racial identity. The intersecting of racism and homophobia, then, puts white people’s homosexuality on display, which allows the creation of harmful stereotypes of white gay men and lesbian women. Such views on white homosexuality, besides still widely spread, have enabled whiteness to be the

common structure through which homosexuality is normally comprehended, viewed, and considered. As Meyer reflects upon the majority of queer people in the media being white and what are the effects of this kind of ‘representation’ for black queer people, he views queer people of color as a mere addendum within the discussion of violence against queer people.

One of the reasons why homosexuality has been linked exclusively to whiteness, Meyer states, is because of the historically constructed and maintained hypersexualization of people of color. There is a tendency to equate black men, for instance, as “excessively masculine and overly sexual” (Meyer, 2015, p. 49). As for black women’s sexual stereotypes, Meyer states that one of the most common attributions is to deem them as uncontrollably sexual, which would equate having more children for the sole purpose of collecting welfare money. All these stereotypes, as I shall develop more thoroughly in chapter two, have also crossed multimedia production and popular culture, being heavily depicted in queer films.

The association between homosexuality and whiteness is also equally harmful when reflecting upon the erasure of black queer experiences, both in the social and in the representational spheres, as a result of preconceived views of black people as primarily oversexualized and heterosexual. Imbedded in structural racism, such views contribute to homosexuality being overlooked as a characteristic of people of color, which enables a false association that black people can only produce unwarranted displays of heterosexuality. Consequently, the oversexualization of people of color also becomes the cause of the invisibility of black queerness. In Meyer’s words:

By depicting people of color as excessively heterosexual, these stereotypes distance them from homosexuality in the popular imagination of many Americans. Racist ideas, then, that sexualize people of color help to produce the whitening of homosexuality; without institutional racism, homosexuality would most likely not be linked with whiteness. [...] That is, without taking into consideration LGBT people of color’s experiences, Black people are implicitly constructed as heterosexual and LGBT people are implicitly viewed as white, thereby reinforcing the association of homosexuality with whiteness. (2015, p. 49)

The tangible correlation between queer people of color and sexuality, especially in the case of young black men, is symptomatic of a social construct that has praised

and encouraged masculine heterosexual desire as a way of reaffirming notions of masculinity and virility. The consequences of reinforcing masculine roles, such as prolific sexual life and the repulsion of any characteristic considered as feminine, have also reflected in the lives of queer men in general, who are often confronted with idealized views of ‘positive’ examples of how gay men should act.

Meyer’s work, while discussing noteworthy issues related to the intersections of homosexuality and racism, as well as issues of class and gender in further chapters, provides useful background to think of what it means to be a gay black queer person and what the levels of oppression attained to these identities are. Topics such as the public understanding of homosexuality as strictly white, as well as the oversexualization of black people’s bodies, are recurrent in the discussion of homophobia-related violence against black men. However, because his research is predominantly focused on the context of the United States, it becomes necessary to think of black queer existences in different social contexts, despite the possible similarities in terms of acts of oppression. Hence, this discussion will move forward in detailing experiences of gay black men in Brazil in an attempt to expand the previous notions of the encounters between racism in homophobia.

Mapping and analyzing the juncture between racism and homophobia in Brazil is a challenging task, mainly because of the lack of scientific and academic production on this matter. Pedro Ivo details this difficulty in his book *Narrativas Afrobixas* (2020), drawing closer attention to the lack of production on the matter from black gay men. While conducting and analyzing interviews with other black scholars and students within the context of a Brazilian student’s movement, Ivo details the difficulty black scholars face when attempting to acquire consciousness regarding their political and sexual identities due to a pre-established white hierarchy of knowledge, particularly in terms such as homosexuality. Ivo establishes that this “western hegemony⁸” (2020, p. 31) has since helped to delimit academic discourse, primarily paying attention to white authors from the fields of sexuality, gender, and social sciences. Consequently, as the author exemplifies through the interviews he conducts, there has been an “erasure of black people’s capacity to produce knowledge, due to the lack of representation and social acknowledgement of the contribution of this part of the population to these

⁸ “hegemonia ocidental”, my translation.

means, just as the existence and contribution of the black gay men are disregarded within academic space.”⁹ (Ivo, 2020, p. 34)

Analyzing the reports from his interviews, Ivo discusses how racism plays a significantly larger role than homophobia in gay black men’s lives in Brazil, mainly because it is not possible to make their race invisible, although it is not about establishing ‘hierarchies’ of sexuality and race. Instead, the accounts described by Ivo plead for the creation of sites of resistance that include multicultural interactions and the occupation of spaces that have historically been delegated to white individuals, as well as revising universities’ curriculums in order to include more black queer authors. Describing oneself as black in Brazil, more specifically within an academic environment, for instance, “would assume the rescue of one’s own blackness, in other words, a cultural and aesthetic identification, among other elements, without losing sight of this identification provided by this conception of the term.”¹⁰ (Ivo, 2020, p. 125) Focusing on the acknowledgement of the participants as ‘black faggots’ (*negros bixas*’, as they refer to themselves), Ivo sheds light on the importance of their educational and personal experiences in the construction of their own identity. Moreover, this acknowledgement also enables black gay men to identify patterns of oppression within their interpersonal relations.

Mirroring the issues presented in Meyer’s work, such as the hypersexualization of black men’s bodies and the belief that homosexuality is expressively white, assessing the reports present in Ivo’s work makes it possible to identify how these patterns operate within the spheres of romantic relationships, sexuality, and class within the Brazilian context as well. Several participants refer to the denial of their black characteristics as means to experience a romantic, homoerotic relationship since they are commonly associated with sex. This “animalization” (Ivo, 2020, p. 133) of the black queer body which the author refers to installs a paradox that assembles homosexuality to the construction of a new masculinity at the same time that the objectification of black gay men’s bodies strengthens racist practices. Moreover, Ivo concludes that it is

⁹ [...] apagamento da capacidade de pessoas negras de produzir conhecimento, devido à falta de representatividade e reconhecimento social da contribuição dessa parcela da população para esse fim, assim como é desconsiderada a existência ou a contribuição do negro gay nesse espaço acadêmico.” My translation.

¹⁰ “[...] pressuporia o resgate de sua negritude, ou seja, uma identificação cultural, estética, dentre outros elementos, sem perder de vista a pluralidade dessa identificação proporcionada pela concepção do termo.” My translation.

easier for black gay men to have significant support nets within big urban centers in comparison to those who live in small, more secluded towns.

Côrtes and others (2019) also stipulate the role of class in the possibility of safer spaces for black queer people, especially Brazilian gay men. In their article, the authors mention the categorization of “non-place” (p. 24) to describe how these men often feel in relation to environments such as school and family. They call attention to the intersection of sexuality, race, and class in the construction of the constant exclusion of black gay men in Brazil, overlapping these markers to identify the various forms of abuse these men may endure throughout their lives, which includes derogatory language coming from family members and classmates, physical harm, and harassment. Much of this violence, the authors conclude, forces black young gay men to attempt to hide their own sexuality, renegading it as a defective trait, as well as reinforcing masculine behaviors. Moreover, one of the participants in this study claims that these attempts are a direct result from the common assumption that black, lower class men are not allowed to be gay.

As the discussions above suggest, the overlapping of sexuality, class, and race prompts strong displays of masculinity one of the strategies of existence for black gay men when they are inserted within contexts of oppression and violence. Because of that, as ways of broadening the forms of violence addressed so far, in the following section I will consider how masculinities also operate in the construction of anti-queer violence, delimiting and suppressing gay men’s sexuality and often contributing to the propagation of a harmful heterosexual matrix, one that refuses and condemns femininity.

1.5 Rejecting Femininity: The Gay Masculinities

In what follows, I intend to discuss how displays of masculinity can also be understood as agents of violence for gay men, since these beliefs are often linked with the criticism of individuals who perform more feminine traits in favor of a masculine display of sexuality. The consequences of it, as I develop further, vary from the shaming of gender expressions to psychological trauma in the lives of adult gay men, who are often forced to perform more masculine traits in order to whether be more accepted as queer individuals or even completely hide their own sexuality.

Much of what has been associated to stereotypical views of gay men has deeper roots in media representation of them as effeminate, in an oversimplification that equates gender to sexual orientation. Moreover, filmic masculine representations, especially the early ones, as discussed by Ross (2011), are often aligned with real-world situations in which masculine-oriented speeches and actions are deemed as the standard to be followed. These views raise questions regarding the construction of masculinity in social practices and how it has shifted throughout time.

Attempting to answer some of these questions, Peter Nardi, as the editor of the book *Gay Masculinities* (2000), provides insightful commentary on how, despite the addition of newer terms and the realization of the differences between sexuality and gender, gay men continue to be ‘categorized’ in relation to how they perform gender and masculinity. In his introduction, as Nardi gathers historical data from the beginning of the 20th century to more contemporary examples, he shows how heterosexuality and homosexuality have been characterized in degrees of ‘normalcy’, with negative stereotypes of effeminate gay men being reproduced in postcards, cartoons, stamps, and cinema.

The representation of gay men according to their displays of masculinity culminated in terms of classification, such as ‘faggot’ and ‘fairy’ (for effeminate men) and ‘trade’ (for more masculine men). As Nardi describes it, even though such terms were initially used by heterosexuals, they were soon adopted inside the gay subculture. The result of this, he observes, is that notions of masculinity, which often perpetrate gender-based hierarchical categorizations, were now being displayed by gay men as well, which established a paradoxical behavior in a community that longed for sexual liberation.

The recurrent praise of more masculine-looking gay men contributed to a clash in the political realms of homosexuality, as effeminate gay men were thought to “ruin” (Nardi, 2000, p. 5) the fights and struggles for equal rights. In the urge of becoming the images of the sailors and policemen from the idealized manhood presented in fiction and media, gay men failed to resolve their own inadequacy in the views of heterosexual standards. Nardi specifically pinpoints the 1970’s, a period after the Stonewall riots¹¹, as

¹¹Responding to police brutality against queer people, the Stonewall riots were a series of protests by queer people that took place in the morning of June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighborhood, in New York City.

a point of rupture between those who were frontrunners in the gay movement to those who merely enjoyed of their own privileged displays of gender and masculinity.

Nardi concludes his introduction by eliciting the necessity of, in modern times, acknowledging diversity and differences in the establishment of ideas of gender that move beyond terms such as ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. He poses the use of the term ‘masculinities’, in plural form, so that it becomes possible to understand how people enact masculinity in multiple forms and contexts. This term, as he explains, broadens the notions of what it means to be a gay man, since it encompasses not only the sexual preference, but also other social demarcating characteristics, such as race and class. Consequently, the idea of ‘gay masculinities’ establishes a plurality within gay men, as well as the different struggles they may face. In the author’s words:

Working under the assumption that gay men display a type of masculinity different from heterosexual men already points to a plurality of masculinities. Yet, to automatically assume that all gay men contest, modify, or challenge heterosexual masculinity—or for that matter, that they all enact the same masculinity roles—does not take us beyond monolithic concepts of gender. It does not adequately reflect the reality that gay men are as diverse as all other groups of humans and do not act, think, believe, and feel alike. Class and racial differences alone challenge any possibility of a unifying masculinity among gay men.” (Nardi, 2000, p. 7)

Nardi’s urge for the recognition of gay masculinities and their pluralities manages to tackle gay men’s socialization in their spheres of sex, relationships, friendships, and every other aspect of their daily life. By identifying the factors that contribute for derogatory and/or stereotypical displays of masculinity, it becomes possible to address how these displays have been contributing for negative effects in the quality of life of gay men, who become more restrained in their own sexuality, suffering from psychological pressures in relation to their own appearance and ways of showing affection. Societal conceptions of masculinity, both within and outside gay communities, become regulatory agents that directly act upon and control gay men’s well-being.

Edwards (2006) has defined masculinity as largely fictional, calling into question how it has been in a ‘crisis’ precisely because of its construction, whereas Kimmel (1997) has noted how it should be constantly “proved” (p. 61) in order to not

be questioned. When it comes to masculinities for gay men, Francisco J. Sánchez and others (2009) have shown how masculinity plays a role in the construction of fear and repulsion for effeminate gay men, which causes them to perform more masculine traits. By reinforcing how masculinity is a socially constructed characteristic, they stipulate how dominant societal groups are more likely to determine the expected behavior for any gender at the same time they can dictate the marginalization of the ones who do not attend such expectations.

The authors argue that masculinity plays a pivotal role in the interpersonal relationships of gay men, who often seek more masculine men as friends and/or romantic partners. Although some may prefer less masculine characteristics, the general desire for stronger displays of masculinity prompts the authors to ask how gay men tend to commonly define masculinity and femininity. In attempting to answer this question, they accept scholars' proposals, such as Nardi's (2000), that gay men tend to consider masculinity as a characteristic related to physical appearance and sexual adventurism. As the authors support Nardi's definition of 'masculinities' as a healthier, broader term to be used in correlation to gay men, they demonstrate, through the analysis of responses of 2,859 gay men to questions related to their relation to masculine/female characteristics, the harmful effects of masculinity for them. These effects include "[...] feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, and inferiority" (Sánchez et. al, 2009, p. 75), as well as lower self-esteem, which culminates in greater levels of depression and anxiety among gay men. Additionally, the study emphasizes how attempting to conform to masculine ideas propel gay men to be more inclined to body dissatisfaction if they do not meet the standards of masculine ideals.

Other harmful effects of masculine ideals in gay men's relationships are related to their emotional expression. Sánchez and others (2009) identify that many gay men find it difficult to openly communicate with partners and friends, and that others tend to project traditional heterosexual gender roles, such as the 'husband' and the 'wife', in their romantic relationships (p. 80). The authors show how these traditional expectations are often the result of their own expected masculinity and gender norms, and such expectations create a negative attitude towards their own sexuality. In addition to this dissatisfaction, it is possible to argue how internalized homophobia is another common effect of the praise for masculinity and the critique of femininity. Similarly, Mirandé (1997), Cantú (2000), Vigoya (2003) and Girman (2004) investigated the Latin gender

roles and the persistence of stereotyped gender roles that foster the region's *machismo* by reaffirming that women are characterized by their submissiveness, whereas men are defined by their bodily aggression and sexual dominance. The authors mention how this views also states that Latino men's sexuality is, therefore, defined not by the gender of their partners, but instead by their assigned roles as *activo* or *pasivo* ('active' or 'passive'; 'dominant' or 'submissive'). Balderston (1997) has also noted the prominence of established masculine roles in Latin American communities, urging for a more plural perspective of what constitutes gender, one that allows different expressions of masculinity. When it comes to the representation of Latin men in media and cinema, Subero (2014) has noted the two most common tropes of this representation: the animalistic, overly sexual man; and the carnivalized, exaggerated and effeminate one.

Internalized homophobia is intrinsically linked with masculinity, as Jack Thepsourinthone and others suggest in *The Relationship between Masculinity and Internalized Homophobia amongst Australian Gay Men* (2000), a study conducted with 489 gay men in Australia. The authors propose that gay men frequently feel the need to act in overly-masculine manners (what the authors refer to as 'straight-acting') by reinforcing homophobic patterns towards gay men who feel comfortable displaying more feminine characteristics. According to the scholars, gay men are inserted in a heteronormative system that tends to reward traditional masculine behaviors at the same time it stigmatizes feminine/effeminate behavior. The results of the study also show how gay men tend to perform hyper-masculinity as ways of compensating their own feelings of inferiority. Moreover, there is a strong dismissal, within gay communities, of more effeminate men inserted in gay interpersonal relations. As the authors put it:

[...] feminine men often receive more negative attitudes, social and romantic rejection, victimization, and harassment from others, as compared to masculine men. [...] Considering the notion that homosexuality is synonymous to femininity, it is no surprise that gay men experience a sense of inferiority/negativity regarding their own sexuality and aim to compensate by adopting (what they perceive to be) the opposite—masculinity. (Thepsourinthone et al, 2009, p. 8)

Both aforementioned studies, despite tackling gay experiences in two different contexts, signal how masculinity is an ever-present characteristic in gay men's relationships with themselves and with others. Furthermore, it is possible to identify

how an aversion for femininity, or any display of feminine characteristics, also appears in the building of a hegemonic masculinity, which helps to reestablish a hierarchical organization that puts femininity in a place of inferiority. This notion also applies to gender and its common association with sex, categories used to distinguish ‘men’ and ‘women’. When it comes to sexuality, there is, a specific gender’s sexual preference, heterosexuality becomes the expected norm. Nonetheless, as the following section will demonstrate, aversion to femininity is also strictly related to violence against transgender women, who are often ostracized for presenting themselves as female.

1.6 Gendered Bodies: Transexuality and the Persistence of Violence

The conflation between gender and sexuality and its privileging of masculinity and heterosexuality over femininity and other sexualities is elevated when bearing in mind the experiences and existences of trans women, who are often perceived as men performing femininity. The common tendency, as Judith Butler phrases in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2006), is the compulsory behavior of equating the biological sex to gender. Since trans women have their sexes assigned male at birth, their gender expression as female is often the catalyst for acts of violence from several agents. Their display of femininity is harassed since it does not match their assigned sex. This concern becomes more urgent when we consider, for instance, how social organizations (i. e. the legal system and medicine) often deal with queer bodies, stripping them from any agency when it comes to their own choices of performing gender. Subsequently, I bring examples of how the trans body has been marginalized and repeatedly medicalized for not corresponding to idealizations of the binary logic of sex/gender.

Trans people’s experiences with violence have only recently been debated in the academic environment, partly because of the high amount of forms these people encounter violence in their lives. The abundance of violent acts against trans and intersex individuals, especially trans women, create a sense of constant fear and hyper-vigilance, as demonstrated by Barbara Perry and D. Ryan Dyck in their article “*I Don’t Know Where it is Safe*”: *Trans Women’s Experiences of Violence* (2013), in which the authors have conducted a series of interviews with trans women in Canada. The lack of

a sense of safety confirmed in the testimonies demonstrates how violence against this minority group affects trans women despite their different social and economic positions, although the authors recognize that intersectionality shapes trans' experiences differently.

Following Butler's perspective on gender and sex, with specific emphasis on how gender performativity has a vital significance in the making of the subject, the authors also agree that gender reinforces the hierarchically superior position of masculinity, deeming femininity as inferior. As a result, they are particularly interested in investigating how trans women challenge this normative positioning, since they embody, through their existences, a threat for the complete erasure of such norms. Furthermore, when it comes to expressions of sexual desire, trans women also blur the lines of a compulsory heterosexuality, since their sexual preferences may or may not include men. As the authors phrase it:

Trans people are often those for whom the norms may be unlivable; who attempt to "do" the norms differently; or who reject the norms altogether. They challenge the ontology of gender and sex as norms, and, in so doing, render the norms of sexual desire unintelligible. [...] To transgress norms of sex and gender is not only to challenge the privileges and marginality that are maintained by these normative hierarchies; it is to fundamentally unsettle the veracity of the bounded categories the norms themselves are understood to hierarchize. Trans women challenge the privileged status of masculinity and male sex; in the act of transition, they threaten the elimination of these norms entirely. (Perry and Dyck, 2013, p. 52)

Because trans women challenge such idealistic norms of gender and sexuality, the authors point at their dehumanization as a consequence of this subversion. Since they are constantly defined in opposition to what they are not, and in opposition to normative expectations of gender, trans women are considered 'abject' and, therefore, their dehumanization is justified and legitimized by violent acts. The trans women interviewed in Perry and Dyck's study allude to their experiences of violence as multidimensional, since they encounter violence in numerous aspects in their lives.

The first aspect, and one that is common in trans women's early life, is linguistic violence. Language, a basic characteristic of human life, is used to define what humans

experience and also the culture surrounding us. Trans women often face moments in which language does not seem to suffice for a definition of what they are; they are often confronted with labels that do not fully describe their experiences and lives, which lead them to pathological treatments and the use of derogatory terms for their own identification (Perry and Dyck, 2013, p. 53). Moreover, there is the propensity of cishetero individuals to not know how to address trans people, referring to them as ‘things’ or aberrations. These linguistic markers emphasize their dehumanization; since they are stripped of being acknowledged as women, trans women are also perceived as non-human for the lack of linguistic terms that can fully encompass and validate their existences.

Linguistic violence, which encapsulates verbal abuse, can also signal the threat and the validation of physical violence. Many trans women mention their fear of being in public spaces because they are constantly aware of the possibility of assault. Perry and Dyck mention how this threat is signaling of the regulation of public spaces and the maintenance of the distinction of ‘real’ men and women (2013, p. 55). The interviewees mention their constant vigilant posture in public places, especially in public washrooms, a space which is primarily gender-marked. There is a persistent fear of being ‘discovered’ as a trans individual when frequenting such environments.

Violence against trans women is not relegated to public spaces. Families and relatives, in some cases, are also responsible for not providing a safe, inclusionary environment, with many testimonies showcasing levels of psychological and physical abuse. Additionally, the legal system, with trans-exclusionary legislation and the frequent failure in providing protective measurements, reinforces trans women’s lack of support throughout their lives. Perry and Dyck (2013) conclude that this abandonment in all social strata reflects negatively in trans women’s ability to trust other people (p. 58), as they are constantly facing rejection in their interpersonal and social relations.

The lack of humanized medical support for trans/intersex individuals mentioned by Perry and Dyck is brought to the center of the debate in William J. Spurlin’s *Queer Theory and Biomedical Practice: The Biomedicalization of Sexuality/The Cultural Politics of Biomedicine* (2018), in which the author investigates the role of medicine and medical interventions in sexuality and gender. From a multidisciplinary field, Spurlin establishes how social markers such as sexuality, race, and gender have always

been accounted for in the regulation and practice of medical knowledge. From a Foucauldian perspective, Spurlin (2018) describes the normative posture of biomedicine as able to prescribe and “[...] dictate the standards for physical and moral relations of the individual and the broader social world in which he or she lived” (p. 8), as well as regularize and medicalize in correlation to social ideas and conventions of adequacy of ‘normality’ over health, ever since the nineteenth century. By recollecting historical landmarks related to the evolution of medical opinion on homosexuality and transexuality, Spurlin observes how medicine has also served the maintenance of heteronormative gender norms. Dreger (1998) also observes that, during the late 20th century, a significant portion of the medical community continued to grapple with defining the characteristics that assigned individuals to the categories of male, female, or hermaphrodite. She argues that researchers increasingly moved beyond solely anatomical analysis, incorporating behaviors and desires as critical factors in their conclusions.

One of the results of the medical approach of pathologizing homosexuality and gender dysphoria is the ongoing discrimination of these minority groups in other social spheres, since medicine appears to validate a discourse that puts queer individuals as ‘abnormal’. When considering transgender/intersex children, for instance, the medical initiative of ‘correcting’ gender dysphoria through harsh procedures such as conversion therapy and genital cosmetic surgeries can have significant and everlasting impacts in the young transgender and intersex populations. As Spurlin (2018) phrases it:

[...] these instantiations of homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny in the clinical literature, past and ongoing, have not only been condoned biomedically and clinically but continue to provoke social condemnation, discrimination, the incitement to violence, and the bullying of children who cross-gender identify, with higher rates of suicide among them, in addition to various form of social exclusion, actual or imagined, against nonconforming children and gender and sexual dissidents more broadly, while continuing to undermine erotic autonomy and gender expression as fundamental human rights. (p. 11-12)

Spurlin’s arguments shed light on how, historically, medical knowledge has considered the queer body as a diseased body that needs fixing. Moreover, the often violent treatments prescribed for queer bodies have perpetuated the stigma in relation to

queer individuals, who tend to forcibly adequate themselves within a system that has privileged the cishetero standards. In conclusion, queer bodies can be understood as often mistreated dissidents, which carry markers of violence throughout their existences. Moreover, queer bodies pose threats to what is an established set of beliefs regarding sexuality and gender. Once the heterosexual and cisgender matrixes are challenged, the responses to these subversions are often violent. In Latin America, as noted by Pierce (2020), the concept of ‘monsterring’ is used by contemporary trans and travesti activists as a form of resistance to normative gender and sexual identities. By intentionally marking ‘deviant’ bodies as monstrous, they reject state recognition and highlight the limitations of legal and social acceptance in protecting gender-variant individuals.

In the discussions developed above, I collected examples that illustrate how queer people are subjected to violence in their daily life besides the common definitions of violence as only physical assault. For queer people, violence operates on deeper, more convoluted levels, frequently intersecting with other forms of violence and oppression. On this regard, Silva (2018) establishes the difficulties of separating these traits in filmic analysis given the prolific production of contemporary queer films that tend to display intersectional approaches, Markers of gender and race, for instance, strengthen the existing disparities between queer individuals and the way they experience violence, as well as enabling the maintenance of different forms of oppression in varied contexts. Because violence has a persistent presence in the lives of queer people, it is worth noting its often invisible dynamics in order to better understand its results and impacts on this population and, consequently, how it is represented in cinema. Although sites of resistance have been created by and within queer communities, it seems that violence remains intrinsically attached to queer lives regardless of their efforts to subvert it.

In the next chapter, I propose to look at how cinema has transported/portrayed and represented not only the aforementioned examples of violence, but also queer people’s ways of resisting it. Moreover, I intend to analyze and identify how queer cinema can sometimes enable the creation of new forms of violence for queer people both on and off-screen, as well as the ways in which it has managed to subvert such

violence, as a foundation for my analysis on chapters three and four. To do so, I will be applying an intersectional theoretical framework that considers both the displays of violence on screen and the issues related to the characters' identity, such as class, gender, race, and sexuality.

CHAPTER II: FROM THE SOCIAL CONTEXT THE TO THE SCREEN: QUEER CINEMA AND ITS REPRESENTATIONS OF VIOLENCE

“There are so many ways of being despicable it quite makes one’s head spin. But the way to be really despicable is to be contemptuous of other people’s pain.”

— James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*.

Although I could not possibly have recollected all the forms and nuances in which queer people endure violence, in the previous chapter I presented a more thorough definition of what I mean by anti-queer violence, an interdisciplinary, multidimensional term that encompasses intersectional features of queer people’s lives and experiences. These elements, such as sexuality, class, race, and gender, shape queer people’s perception of violence and establish how their encounters with it are often the result of more than one site of oppression. In this chapter, therefore, I intend to investigate how these forms of violence have been translated to and represented in cinema. Moreover, I will also be addressing how cinema itself can become a compelling means in the creation and establishment of violent acts against queer people, both on and off-screen, as well as a powerful tool for the subversion and overcoming of violence.

The first section of this chapter is dedicated to explore notions of representation and what it means to represent others. Moreover, I will present how cinema can be understood as a powerful creator of meaning and discourse as I investigate how it represents social realities through ideological constructions. These constructions, which illustrate how dominant classes may perpetuate hegemonic ideas and beliefs in their cultural productions, will serve as a theoretical framework for the following section, in which I present a succinct genealogy of queer cinema in the world, as well as how queer people have been represented in such films. The overall aim of this discussion is to bridge a gap between what has been done in queer cinema in relation to violence and representation as opposed to the more contemporary films presented in chapters three and four.

2.1 The Troubles of Representation: Representational Art and Ideological Constructions in Cinema

My first aware contact with queer cinema happened during the first years of my adolescence, when I watched a screening of *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) in a free TV network on a late Monday night. I say ‘aware contact’ because only years later I could identify the queerness in many films I grew up watching and loving, such as *Elvira, Mistress of the Dark* (1988), in which a sexually liberated witch is persecuted by religious townspeople, even being almost burned at the stake for defying the small town’s morals, and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994). When I first watched *Brokeback Mountain*, I was aware that it was ‘a gay movie’ just as I was aware that I was gay myself. The on-screen relationship between Ennis and Jack sparked joy and curiosity in me, even if aspects of their hiding romance still resonated with me as odd. However, it was Jack’s violent death at the end, as well as the snarky remarks concerning the movie’s display of homosexuality I would hear the next morning at school, that made me question if it did more to me than simply scare me. To 13 year-old me, there were two evident messages in Ennis and Jack’s story: gay men were supposed to hide their homosexuality; once ‘revealed’, violence would come as a result, mostly in the form of death.

As I started to watch more gay films at the time, many of them would only corroborate this first impression. Combined with the violence I was witnessing and experiencing on my own, it seemed to me that queer films (or ‘gay films’, as I would refer to them as a teenager) could only ‘represent’ two major topics: violence or heteronormative, far-from-my-reality romance. Even years later, I would still maintain the belief that queer films only represented dreaded, violent aspects of queer realities. However, as I will argue in this chapter, many queer films have attempted (and succeeded) to subvert the trope of equalizing queerness with explicit violence, although, as the previous chapter suggested, violence is ever-present in queer people’s lives. How a film *represents* this violence, then, has become my primary focus on this entire research.

Since the corpus of this research is composed of cinematic works that somehow represent real-life expressions of violence, it bears significance to address ‘representation’ and what it means to represent queer existences. More than that, it is

worthy to ask the following questions: who is being represented? How and to whom are these people and existences being represented? Are there ‘good’ or ‘bad’ representations, and do these representations challenge or retain troubling assumptions in relation to those who are represented? The problematic of ‘representation’ and, more specifically, representation in cinema, will serve as a starting point to this chapter, followed by a discussion of how queerness has been depicted in cinema. The purpose of this approach is to elaborate a critical theoretical apparatus that can serve to elucidate the filmic analysis in chapters three and four, as I examine the representation of anti-queer violence in more recent films.

Describing the complexities of ‘to represent’, Raymond Williams, in *Keywords* (1976), establishes how both ‘representative’ and ‘to represent’ are terms that have gone through several changes since their first uses in the fourteenth century. Initially used as a synonym of ‘to symbolize’ or ‘to stand for (something or someone)’, it had long been reproduced in political and legal conjectures. However, more modern takes on the meaning of representation have also included its developments in art and literature. Calling it “the process of presenting to the eye or the mind” (p. 208), Williams points at how representation began to be understood as the description of characters in situations in literature during the eighteenth century, and later it became related to notions of realism and naturalism in works of art in general. During the twentieth century, the idea of representational art, carrying the sense of accurate reproduction of real-life characteristics, had already significantly contrasted with its political use, making it difficult to assess the overlaps of ‘representation’ in political, artistic and cultural productions nowadays.

While discussing cultural practices of representation and its use in cultural studies as fundamental in the making of meaning, Stuart Hall, in the first chapter of *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), stipulates that representation involves the exchange of meaning between members of a culture by any sort of language, such as signs and images. According to him, cultures give meaning to things by the use we make of it, as well as by what we think of it and how we represent it. These meanings are constructed through our own interpretations of objects, events and people, and our integration with them defines how we create meaning in our interactions. Hall directly describes representation as “[...] using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to

other people.” (p. 150), although he clarifies that modern concepts of representation can become more challenging to define.

Reinforcing Williams’ definition of representation as seeing with the ‘eye of the mind’, Hall poses that we create meaning through a mental process that involves our own mental repertoire of images of objects, as well as more complex and abstract ideas, such as events and feelings. This process creates what he calls a “conceptual map” (Hall, p. 18) which is built through our associations with what we perceive in the world and what we have in our mind to know and describe the ‘real’ object. Hall specifies that, although each person possesses a different referential repertoire, we can still communicate because we share the same culture of meanings. This, combined with our shared language (and by ‘language’ Hall also means visual language), makes it possible for us to decode words, sounds, and images. In Hall’s own words:

Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events. (p. 17)

Hall further argues that the meaning is not fixed unto the object; it is, instead, the result of social and cultural conventions that shape our collective perceptions of this object, in a process that he calls *translatability*. These conventions, as they are specific to a society and its historical moments, acknowledge that ‘meaning’ is merely a product embedded in culture and history, and that it is not intrinsic to things themselves. Through language, and because we are inserted within a culture that is constantly making sense of what is around us, we are able to see how the same ideas are translated to different languages and how they refer to and represent the world.

By clarifying ‘meaning’ as the result of language and signs, Hall asks if it is possible to reach the ‘true’ meaning of an image/object as he specifies that there are three approaches to grasp meaning and knowledge. The first one, the reflective approach, recognizes that ‘meaning’ is already embedded in the object, the person, the idea or event, and language therefore is the means through which it reflects its true meaning. The second approach, named ‘intentional’, consists of the author/speaker imposing meaning into the world and its events through language. However, Hall points

at this approach's flaw, as it is impossible for us to know and to represent the meaning of everything in existence. Therefore, the third approach, and the one to which Hall pays more attention throughout his analysis, is called the constructionist approach. In the constructionist's perception, we construct meaning through representational systems, such as language, as we engage with 'meaning' as something that is historically and culturally unfixed. Since this approach allows a negotiation and interpretation of 'real' objects and events, Hall argues that it becomes possible for the same objects to acquire new meanings and interpretations. Bearing in mind this fluidity, Hall considers the *reader* (or spectator, as I shall address further) as significant in the construction of meaning as the *writer* (p. 33).

Hall draws from the Saussurian perspective that signs, when organized by language, produce meaning and are used as reference to events in the real world. He also establishes a link with Roland Barthes's argument that it is possible to read/interpret popular cultural events. He exemplifies semiotic by asking the reader to consider the use and meaning of 'clothes'; on the one hand, it can signify a piece of fabric that covers our body. On the other hand, clothes can possess different meanings depending on the context they are worn: a suit can signify a level of formality for an evening dinner in a restaurant, for instance. Hall demonstrates how representation is in a constant movement between the linguistic sign, the signifier (the suit), and the signified (the formality of the event).

Because of the linguistic characteristic embedded in the process of making meaning, Hall also draws from the Foucauldian notion of *discourse* as a powerful maker of meaning. Discourse, therefore, is not only a linguistic concept but is, instead, a correlation between language and practice for the production of knowledge. Hall is particularly interested in the production of discourse in social practices and how they call for meaning. As a powerful tool, discourse can also serve to regulate hegemonic social practices at the same time it dictates social conducts and readings/interpretations of specific topics. Hall summarizes Foucault's definition of discourse as a practice that is imperative for the production of our knowledge. In his words:

It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and translated about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as a discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable

and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out' limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it. (p. 44)

In this sense, concepts such as 'homosexuality' or 'violence' can only possess meaning in discourses about them. Hall also points out that, for Foucault, discourse produces different forms of knowledge and practices that are severely different from previous historical periods, in accordance to hegemonic ideas constructed by current institutions of power, such as governmental laws, health systems, or religions.

The cinematic discourse, when considered as a cultural practice, can also function as a producer of knowledge. David Bordwell, in *Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures* (1986), has stated that narrative cinema can be studied and perceived as representation, as how "it refers to or signifies a world or body of ideas" (p. 17). As he summarizes it, the structures and procedures present in classical Hollywood productions demonstrate how the same patterns of narrative have appeared in productions from other contexts as well, reproducing not only a standard for filmic narrative but also hegemonic ideological ideals.

Bordwell points out that classical Hollywood cinema usually possesses a narrative structure similar to previous art forms, such as the novels and short stories from the nineteenth century: they are usually centered on psychologically-defined characters, who are the subjects of plots focused on the resolution of a problem. Common established elements also include the presence of a deadline (usually a time limit for the solving of the conflict) and a heterosexual romance. The romantic aspect of the plot is commonly linked to other spheres of the characters' life, such as work, war, or a quest. Additionally, the narrative possesses a clear structure in the demarcation of its scenes, the place the story takes place (the setting), and the action of the characters. The ending of the narrative, mirroring the traditional ending of short stories, mostly poses a desired effect, a logical conclusion that ties together the strings of the narrative. Summarizing classical narration and its processes, Bordwell states:

More generally, classical narration reveals its discretion by posing as an *editorial* intelligence that selects certain stretches of time for full-scale treatment (the scenes), pares down others a little, presents others in highly compressed fashion (the montage sequences), and simply scissors out events that are inconsequential. (p. 23)

Bordwell pays specific attention to describing the role of the camera as an “invisible observer” (p. 24), which functions as the eye through which we observe and consume information in a film. In this process, Bordwell states, the viewer possesses an active role in the construction of meaning, instead of simply attempting to decode narrative structures. The classical narration of films makes it possible for the structuring and transmission of information, while the spectator is encouraged to build meaning from the action. The spectator, therefore, also constructs the film.

Although the narrative structure of a classical Hollywood film is usually fixed and the Hollywood narrative may be considered “the product of a series of particular schemata, hypotheses, and inferences” (p. 28), Bordwell reinforces that the spectator should not be considered as a passive agent. Spectators possess their own norms and world views (or, as Hall mentions, their own conceptual map), as well as the preparation to recognize believable exposition and motifs. Consequently, in negotiating meaning with the film and its action, spectators are able to pose hypotheses and to judge whereas they are valid or not as the narrative must be developed in a way that manages to retain the spectator’s interest.

Bordwell concludes his argument by describing how ideological processes are embedded in the making of a classical Hollywood narrative. These processes are implied in the goal-oriented structure of the stories, the recurrent presence of heterosexual romance, and the temporal coherence. They are representative of the social and historical contexts of production, reception, and spectatorship and, as a result, films work “with, or with and against, ideological and economic protocols” (Bordwell, p. 32). The significance of films relies, hence, in the spectator’s processes of construction of meaning.

Specifically analyzing the ideological processes involved in filmmaking and how the spectator constructs meaning, Bill Nichols, in *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media* (1981), defines the function of ‘images’ as representative of *something else*. This representation, which he refers to as “symbolization” (Nichols, p. 1), is crucial in the processes of intercommunication and in the making of meaning. Ideology, hence, emerges as the result of such processes, embedded with a persuasive role that establishes to us, as spectators, the places and realities in which we are bound to be and exist. In Nichols’ words:

Ideology is how the existing ensemble of social relations represents itself to individuals; it is the image a society gives itself in

order to perpetuate itself. [...] Ideology uses the fabrication of images and the processes of representation to persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be and that the place provided for us is the place we ought to have. (p. 1)

Although Nichols understands images (and films) as the means through which ideological constructions are made, he also does not consider the viewer as a passive receptor of it. Instead, spectators might be able to recognize the elements that represent the needs and views of dominant classes within cultural productions as a way of understanding their own places in the process of intercommunication. Moreover, despite describing ideology as an ‘imaginary relationship’ (Nichols, p. 3) because it retains aspects of world views and representations, Nichols states that to be able to identify ideological processes in institutions of social representation, such as in cinema, enables spectators to have a better sense of themselves in relation to the material, ‘real’ world around them.

Nichols establishes that the *signs* of cinema, such as the apparatus used for the production and consumption of cinema, as well as lighting, composition, color, and linear perspective are also representative of codes used in the regulation of human perspective. These codes, Nichols states, can also work as “traps” (p. 5) for unwary, inattentive spectators, as the images they produce are presenting specific views and ideas. Films, therefore, present ideological views and the way we interact with them is representative of how we interact with ourselves, both considering what we are and what we aspire to become. Nichols argues that what we project ourselves to be is closely linked to the views we receive: “If these views secure the interests of groups from which we are excluded, then our investments in our “own” projects are investments in servitude.” (p. 5) Cinema, then, possesses the tools for us to assess what we wish to refuse.

To understand cinema as a form of communication that intersects with categories such as art, discourse and entertainment, according to Nichols, is to identify and read the codes that transform the film into a text that can be read, referred to, and interpreted. These codes, comprised of the verbal discourse of the characters but also of the editing, lighting, styling and setting, are responsible for the feeling of recognition ever so present in representational art. However, as Nichols poses it, the realms of the image and of the physical world should be seen separately; although they share

analogous visual similarities, the image is not a “transparent window” (Nichols, p. 21) of the real world, neither should the real world be treated idealistically because its features are translated onto image. A film is not reality, and therefore it should be treated as a *cultural* manifestation, not a natural one. This means that films and images in general are constructed and organized by other human beings, which implies that they belong to culture just as any other social products.

During the process of interpreting a film, Nichols states that the principle of ‘recognition’ emerges, as spectators are able to reconfirm their way of seeing the world. Recognition, consequently, acts as a force that shapes the information we grasp from film and transform it into meaning. Nichols establishes that, by recognizing the familiar, real world in realistic images (such as films), spectators can also subvert their own expectations of this recognition, which is made possible through works of art. In his own words: “Art generally depends on both confirmation and transgression of expectations, an oscillation between credulity and skepticism or recognition and deception through which the artwork plays itself out.” (Nichols, p. 39)

In what follows, I intend to discuss how films have confirmed and/or transgressed displays of anti-queer violence in their processes of representation throughout time, both in the Hollywood/European and the Latin American and Brazilian contexts. The ideological processes behind their productions, as well as the changes that have led the transformations in relation to what and who are represented, helped to shape common associations to queer people and anti-queer violence, both on and off screen. The choice of dividing this discussion in Hollywood/Europe, Latin America, and Brazil is due to the substantial differences regarding each context of production, as they are mostly related to their ongoing social perceptions of queerness from the periods.

2.2 Stereotypically Violent? Anti-Queer Violence in Classical Hollywood/European Cinema

Despite the continuous and prominent reproduction of images of violence against queer characters, violence against queer people in cinema has not been limited to its more explicit representations of physical abuse. Hollywood and European films have repeatedly portrayed queer suffering in a broad range, whether through the

depiction of isolated queer characters that are deprived from their sexuality, or even through the complete erasure of characters' queerness. More than that, critics have pointed that queer people have often been represented as stereotyped characters whose presence relies on the purpose of entertaining heterosexual audiences. Considering cinema as a medium through which is possible to refer to what we see in the world, these other types of representation have also contributed to the realization that, for queer people, violence may be perceived as inherent to their existences, real or fictional.

Bearing in mind the previous discussion regarding representation and the construction of ideological images in cinema, in this section I propose to analyze the production of selected queer films in different contexts, considering how the representation of queer people has changed according to the ongoing perception of queerness from each period. I will be considering how Hollywood has portrayed queer people, as well as the portrayal of queer characters in European cinema. The purpose of this investigation is to identify how political and social contexts have been intertwined in the choices made to represent queer people on screen, as well as how cinematic depictions have shaped common beliefs associated with queer people.

Prior to the establishment of the Hays Code, in the early 20th century, as noted by Varachia (2018), the representation of queerness in cinema was scarce and often relied on stereotypes that highlighted the connotation of homosexuality as gender inversion, such as the pansy, effeminate men that emulated exaggerated female traits as comic relief, making use of high-pitched voices and affected mannerisms, as well as the mannish woman, which were typically depicted wearing men's clothes. Verachia stipulates that, although with its limitations, the pre-Code era was a fruitful period for queer representation in cinema, with queer filmmakers and stars, such as Marlene Dietrich, gaining notoriety as the studios grew more ambitious with productions that were did not rely too much on the aforementioned stereotypes, such as 1930's *Morocco* and 1933's *Queen Cristina*. Nonetheless, many of the queer films of the period still attained its characters to heterosexual relationships.

While mapping the portrayal of homosexuality in cinema from its early days to the 1960's, when the Gay Right's movement became stronger and the Code weakened, Vito Russo, in his book *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1981), investigates the common choices made to represent queer characters in popular films

and how they would be depicted on screen. Many of the early representations, however, strongly relied on the more rigid censorship laws following the foundation of the Hays Code. According to Russo, several of these choices have perpetrated stereotypical images as queer characters would most likely be assigned satirical, comic roles. Additionally, a constant erasure of queer characters and narratives was also common, as ways of propagating and maintaining hegemonic standards of heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships, which more firmly aligned with the classical narrative cinema of the period. Queer characters would, therefore, be conditioned to reproduce the preconceived idea of what homosexuals were and how they should be seen off-screen.

Such limiting representation left almost no room to explore queer desire or queer relationships as worthy of storytelling. The author points out that this take on queerness, especially homosexuality, significantly reflected the ongoing views on homosexuality at the time. According to him, homosexual/queer relationships were subjects assigned only to the private spheres on individuals' lives and, therefore, Hollywood productions would emphasize that by completely erasing or merely suggesting the existence of gay desire, assigning it to a hidden, secretive realm. In his words: "As expressed on screen, America was a dream land that had no room for the existence of homosexuals. Laws were made against depicting such things onscreen. And when the fact of our existence became unavoidable, we were reflected, onscreen and off, as dirty secrets." (Russo, p. 6) The idea of homosexuality as a 'dirty secret' was even reinforced by the public outing of Hollywood stars of the period, who had their sexuality put on blast through gossip tabloids.

Erasure of desire was not the only trait attributed to queer characters in classic Hollywood films. Russo states that there was a significant effort in depicting female traits as signs of weakness in queer characters. Drawing attention to the archetype of the 'sissy', an extravagant and comic representation of an effeminate man that was prominent in films such as *Some Like It Hot* (1959), Russo points out to how, on the one hand, femaleness was used in cinema to articulate comic situations in order to ridicule women. On the other hand, more masculine traits would be praised even in characters recognized to be queer, such as Katherine Hepburn's character in *Sylvia Scarlett* (1935). The correlation Russo makes here is that feminine behavior would equate inferiority and that, in order to be a 'real' man, male characters could not display characteristics that

were commonly attributed to women, such as sensitivity, gentleness, nurturance, and attraction to men. This association is present through the frequent stereotyped roles of the period, which reinforces standards of gender and sexuality, mining any possibility of men performing what are conditioned to be ‘female’ traits. Representation, in this sense, can be interpreted as a restrictive regulatory practice, since it reinforces traits of masculinity.

While Russo’s comments regarding this particular type of representation remain



Figure 1: Ending scene of *Some Like It Hot*, with Osgood on the left and Jerry/Daphne on the right.

valid when considering the period of production of such films, a more current analysis can encounter sites of resistance within these films that precisely ridicule standard heterosexual notions of relationships. In the ending scene of *Some Like It Hot*, for instance, while Jack

Lemmon’s character Jerry/Daphne admits to Osgood that he is, in fact, a man, in an attempt to excuse himself from the promise of marrying him, Osgood replies “Well, nobody’s perfect!” This simple, short scene summarizes an understanding of queer existences as complex and intricate, contrary to what Russo has acknowledged.

Russo does not restrain his analysis of the production of queer films in the North American, Hollywood context. Instead, he expands his enquiry to investigate what common choices were made to depict queer characters in European cinema, signaling that, although there was an increasing number of productions that explored homosexuality as just another natural, normal aspect of human life, there was also the perpetrated idea of equalizing queerness to a violent death. Even though these films presented a less restricted view on sexuality, they also reinforced a pattern that would be replicated in Hollywood production through several years: queer characters, mostly gay men, were bound to die at the end of the film, frequently in a violent, dramatic manner, such as suicide. Commenting on the European queer films of the period, Russo states:

And so the very first gay man to be presented on film ended in the obligatory suicide that would mark the fate of screen gays for years to come. [...] the images of blackmail presaged the fates of American screen characters who would suffer for their sexuality in like manner when the U.S. cinema reached a similar starting point almost fifty years later. (p. 20)

In addition to the death of queer characters in film, even the views on gender and sexuality underwent significant changes. When considering the portrayal of masculinity and masculine traits, for instance, even though most European queer films did not reinforce such standards, the politics of representation began to change after the rise and establishment of Nazism. Rigid laws were created in Germany to completely erase queer characters and queer relations on screen, and the stereotyped, comic roles were the only ones allowed to the public. Queer people could not exist in cinema without being ridiculed and, as Russo mentions, it marked a note-worthy shift in the way European society viewed queer people. In his words: “To the public, these characters were homosexual. To gays they represented a pattern of oppression similar to the one suffered by blacks, long typified onscreen as simpletons and domestics. (Russo, p. 29) The allusion Russo makes here, reinforced by the social turmoil of the period, helps to exemplify how there were few options to choose from when depicting queer characters. Whereas being violently killed off at the end of the films or having their personalities used as comic relief for heterosexual audiences, it seemed that queer people could not find ways of existing both off and on screen.

The lack of possibilities to tell stories with queer characters, especially during the severe censorship of the period, led to the directors and studios’ creative choice of symbolically depicting queerness through the images of mythical, supernatural beings. Barbara Mennel addresses this choice in the first chapter of her book *Schoolgirls, Vampires and Gay Cowboys* (2012), drawing attention to how German cinema would metaphorically and allegorically deal with queer desire in expressionist films during the Weimar Republic. According to her, the open interpretations regarding sexuality in monster films, such as F. W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922), heartily resembled the need for coded language when addressing homosexuality in society. Homosexuality (and queerness in general), seen as something “outside of the norm” (MENNEL, p. 23), found its ways of existing through secretive and double lives, and cinema made sure to embody this on screen.

Mennel compares how the monster, in horror films, personifies the ‘other’ and the outsider, characteristics linked to queer individuals who often conceal their gender and sexual expressions in order to coexist among cishetero standards. Taking *Nosferatu* as an example, the author points out how the character of Count Orlok “makes advances towards [the male character] Hutter” (Mennel, p. 24) and later finds his ending in the

arms of a woman, which could be representative of a possible bisexuality of the vampire. Additionally, the several shadows, often present in expressionist films, would help to emphasize the notion of living in the margins that is linked both to the Count's vampirism and to queer individuals during the period. As Mennel stresses it:

In this film *Nosferatu* exudes an eroticism that is non-normative, nonprocreative, bisexual and lethal. Typical for the horror film, the monster lives outside of social norms and kinship relations. His transience contrasts him to the rootedness of the Germans, localised in Bremen, and can also be read as an anti-semitic portrayal of Eastern European immigrants. To those who do not feel they have a place in wholesome heterosexuality, the film offers a belonging to an undefined queerness. (p. 24-25).

Mennel's argument corroborates Russo's acknowledgement that there was an ongoing interest in placing homosexual relationships and queerness within the realms of the mythical because, when they are validated, they threaten 'traditional', heterosexual values such as family living. In this sense, when looking at the figure of the sissy or the monstrous, Russo exemplifies how homosexuality is linked with the horrors and dread of living as a queer individual, who often negotiates ways of existing 'in the shadows', as "an outlaw" (p. 34). This process of turning queer individuals into mythical or monstrous, thus, can be interpreted as an on-screen violation that, alongside with stereotyped representations, fail to display queerness within its own process of world making. However, although Russo's criticism remains valid from a genealogical and historic perspective, it also bears relevance to acknowledge how filmmakers found strategies to navigate the difficulties of the periods.



Figure 2: Count Orlok gazes at Hutter in *Nosferatu*.

Looking at later cinematic displays of queerness and homosexuality in Hollywood, Steven Paul Davies, in his book *Out at The Movies: A History of Gay Cinema* (2016), correspondingly acknowledges how, despite being featured

in films since the beginning of cinema, Hollywood has transformed queerness into a caricature to be laughed at. Moreover, in the periods between the 1950's and the 1970's, the representation of gay characters as emotionally unstable also became prominent. These depictions had everlasting effects on the way queer people were socially considered. In Davies' words: "These images of tormented individuals left a lasting

legacy, as they not only told straight people what to think about gay people but also gay people what to think about themselves.” (p. 13)



Figure 3: Dr. Frank-N-Furter and the couple Brad and Janet meet for the first time in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

Defining the pre-1960's Hollywood period as putting homosexuality 'in the closet', into a secretive realm, Davies mentions, in agreement with Russo, how queer characters were mostly used as comic relief. Moreover, he

addresses how the censorship laws were not definitive in the banning of homosexuality in cinema; instead, directors would find strategies to suggest and imply homosexuality to more attentive audiences. He draws particular attention to Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), in which the leading characters' alleged homosexuality was also in line with the period's current belief that homosexuals were ruthless killers/villains, which would remain another solid representation until the end of the 1960's.

A turning point for the way cinema interpreted and represented queer existences, as Davies states (p. 65), was the rise of women's, civil rights, black power and gay movement that would shape the late 1960's and early 1970's periods. According to him, the Stonewall riot that took place on the night of June 27th, 1969 was crucial for the shift in the media coverage and acknowledgement of a gay community and the issues it faced. With insignificant public repercussions at first, major newspapers and magazines began to publish interviews with people who were present during the rally, which helped to spread in-depth stories of those who sought queer visibility and respect. Davies points that this ramification was responsible for how Hollywood and European cinema reflected queer individuals in subsequent productions, at the same time it aimed at reproducing more 'positive', life-like portrayals that were more aligned with the changing perceptions of the gay community. The author mentions the 1970 film *Boys in the Band*, directed by William Friedkin, as the precursor of this new representation. Based upon a play of the same title, Friedkin's film depicts a dinner/birthday party in Manhattan, while host Michael receives a group of gay friends. As the night progresses, their stories, relationships and traumas emerge, presenting a layered and complex representation of middle-class, gay men.

Though some of the queer films of the period would still retain the more tragic portrayals of queer lives, directors such as Bob Fosse (*Cabaret*, 1972) and John Schlesinger (*Sunday Bloody Sunday*, 1971) would pose a new perspective on homosexuality, in which it began to be represented as a valid lifestyle. Davies also states that the 1970's were crucial for the construction of a lighthearted queer cinema, with films such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), in which the presence of a bisexual transvestite as the main character subverts the typical monster film. According to Davies, *Rocky Horror's* slow impact on straight audiences made it possible for them to be more "accepting" (p. 69) towards queer lifestyles. This can be exemplified by the contrasts that emerge when the heterosexual couple Brad (Barry Bostwick) and Janet (Susan Sarandon) first meet Dr. Frank-N-Furter (Tim Curry) and his companions. As the film progresses, Brad and Janet not only become more understanding of Dr. Frank-N-Furter household, but also engage in activities that, prior to this understanding, would be seen as immoral and indecent by the couple.

Similarly, it is worth noting how John Waters' films starring drag queen Divine would present even campier¹² portrayals of queer people. Notably, in 1972's *Pink Flamingos*, while its plot revolves around the dispute between Divine and delinquents the Marbles for the title of 'filthiest person alive', previous clichés regarding anti-queer violence are drastically subverted. Throughout the film, violence is perpetrated by the majority of the queer characters, who do not shy away from their quest of depicting filth and causing turmoil. Heterosexual conventions are almost inexistent, as even the Marbles are portrayed as queer outsiders.

Despite recognizing the period as a fertile and promising time in relation to how queer people were represented, particularly in Hollywood productions, Davies remains critical of how gay and lesbian relationships began to be commonly used as a device for "cheap laughs" (p. 70) for straight audiences. He states that, along with the aforementioned films, a new batch of productions such as *Norman... Is*



Figure 4: Divine (left) during the Marbles' trial in *Pink Flamingos*.

¹² For Susan Sontag (1964), 'camp' refers to an aesthetic emphasized by exaggeration, irony, and what she refers to as 'bad taste', through a sensibility that involves the love for what is considered to be tacky or extravagant.

That You? (1976) and *A Different Story* (1978) would correspond the expectations of straight audiences who would feel more comfortable *laughing* at queer lifestyles than understanding them. Davies' understanding of the queer cinema produced prior to the 1980's bear similarities with the criticism of early productions featuring queer character; although their narratives became more visible and prominent as a consequence of the social and political struggles, he often perceives a return of queer characters to the comic relief position, with new stereotypes created and maintained during this cycle of exploitative comedies.

While Davies' criticism towards such films helps to illustrate the ongoing changes of queer cinema of the period, it is still possible to trace signals of transgression and subversion in the films he comments, especially in the independent ones. *Rocky Horror* and *Pink Flamingos*, for instance, besides their overly exaggerated comedic tones, still manage to go against the grain of a standardized view of both queerness and cisheterosexuality. Their characters and their plots display unconventional queer narratives that, despite being far from what was considered to be "acceptable" queer stories at the time, remain established as significant landmarks in queer filmmaking.



Figure 5: Figure 5: Detective Steve Burns (Al Pacino) goes undercover in *Cruising*.

Deviating from the previous camp and extravagant imagery, the early 1980's films had a tangible focus in showcasing queer relationships in a more serious tone, as well as emphasizing the nightclubbing lifestyle of gay men, which some still found it to be detrimental. Notably, *Cruising* (1980), directed by William Friedkin, combines the leather gay nightclubbing subculture with a murder mystery, presenting an investigation of a serial killer who only targets gay men. Ultimately a moralistic tale in which gay existence is permeated by violence, crime, and death, the queerness of the film can also be understood as a contagious disease; Steve Burns (Al Pacino), the police investigator who goes undercover and enters the leather subculture as he joins the nightclubs to look for suspects, visually 'becomes' queer as the film progresses. Moreover, the constantly changing identity of the killer throughout the film signals to how queerness disregards traditional representations of male identity.

Still tackling the heavier tone of the 1980's productions, Davies mentions how the upcoming AIDS epidemic would cement another ultimate "backlash" (p. 95) against homosexuals, and this would invariably reflect on the films produced at the time. Discussing early responses to the epidemic's outburst both in the United States and in the United Kingdom, as well as its consequences in relation to how the gay community was socially perceived, Davies states:

The spread of AIDS across the United States brought about widespread public panic and fear back in the UK, much of which, thanks to British tabloid newspapers, was directed at gays as perceived carriers of the virus. Thatcher's government did little to allay fears or educate people about the reality of the disease, preferring instead to vote in the now-repealed Section 28, which prohibited local councils from promoting materials on homosexuality. This only served to inhibit the teaching of safer sex among young gay men, those with the highest death rate from AIDS infection. (p. 96)

Davies mentions the emergence of the 'AIDS cinema' as one of the results of the association made between gay men and AIDS in the mid-1980's. These films were primarily concentrated in portraying white and middle-class gay men amidst the dramas of coming to accept the new, terminal disease. Films such as *An Early Frost* (1985) and *As Is* (1986), Davies states, were heavy dramas with "teary-eyed scenes" (p. 96), which promoted and foregrounded the dying martyr imagery of AIDS victims with skinny, pale bodies that gay people have long fought to dismantle. Moreover, these images remained recurrent in more recent films, a choice that demonstrates how the stereotype of equalizing gay men to AIDS have crossed the filmic realm to perpetuate general public opinion.

Another prolific production cycles, the indie American and British films of the time were responsible for more fully developed representations of queer stories, ones that did not focus on the bigotry surrounding the AIDS epidemic. Davies pays specific attention to openly gay director Gus Van Sant, at the time a newcomer to indie circuits, and his film *Mala Noche* (1986), which featured a gay love story between a liquor-store clerk and a Mexican immigrant, as an example of more thought-provoking films that presented fully developed narratives that did not aim to please straight audiences. Davies' praise for *Mala Noche* is noteworthy considering the film's take on queer



Figure 6: Walt (Tim Streeter) on top of Johnny's (Doug Cooney) car, teasingly, in *Mala Noche*.

desire, specifically discussing the openly gay sexuality of the protagonist, Walt Curtis (Tim Streeter), who is nonchalant in making advances towards Mexican and heterosexual Johnny (Doug Cooney). Moreover, it bears significance to acknowledge the film's unclear boundaries for its

main relationships, which are intertwined by race, language and social status, thus making *Mala Noche* a standout in comparison to its big and contemporary Hollywood productions. This approach can also be identified in British films, such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Maurice* (1987), which propelled gay characters in cinema to become complex individual with interesting storylines that did not have to meet heterosexual expectations of what queer people could or should be.

While Davies is often critical of queer representation in the movies, he acknowledges that real improvement has been made as times and society became more progressive. Moreover, he establishes how queer narratives in cinema were closely linked with queer stories and advances in real life, and one had impacted the other on multiple occasions. He specifically highlights a handful of films, such as *Philadelphia* (1993) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), as having positive impacts for a shifting mentality of what queer people could be, in spite of the still recurrent tropes and stereotypes revolving around violence.

Also highly praising *Mala Noche* as an example of how gay representations in cinema could have the potential to “capture life as lived, off-screen, if only filmmakers would dare” (Rich, p. 8), B. Ruby Rich, in her milestone book *New Queer Cinema* (2013), compiles the emergence of indie queer films, mainly in the United States and in Britain, in several festival circuits. Coining the term ‘new queer cinema’ to refer to the period from the mid 1980’s up to 1991, Rich incorporates queer films (primarily made by queer filmmakers) that challenged ideas of sexuality and identity. With the affluence of queer theory and the gay liberation movement that started two decades earlier, the characters of the new queer cinema productions were often presented as social outcasts, portraying the dismantling of social and sexual norms. Despite the previous recurrent efforts to make queer representation in Hollywood as palatable as possible at the time,

new queer cinema's filmmakers shifted these perceptions in order to create new on-screen possibilities. In Rich's words:

Against the odds and the forces arraigned against them, filmmakers were creating a new queer film and video vernacular. A generation poured its heart and soul, shock and anger into modes of representation capable of spinning new styles out of old and new genres out of those that had worn out. Before the nqc emerged, lots of people would die, some that made films, some that acted in them, some that watched them. (p. 13)

As some of the remarkable films of the period, Rich emphasizes Gus Van Sant's indie film *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), which quickly became a box office success. Starring River Phoenix and Keanu Reeves, the film also received largely positive reviews from critics, who praised the film's focus on taboo topics such as drug use. Moreover, Todd Haynes' *Poison* (1991), Derek Jarman's *Edward II* (1991), and Laurie Lynd's *RSVP* (1991) are among other films Rich mentions. According to her, they all present openly gay or lesbian characters at the same time they represent unconventional displays of sexuality and queer relationships that did not attempt to mirror heterosexual standards.

Although Rich comments on the similarities between the films of the period and what made it so fertile in terms of queer representation, she stresses that they should not be considered as sharing the same aesthetics, vocabulary, and imagery. She acknowledges that the films of the New Queer Cinema share "traces of appropriation, pastiche, and irony, as well as a reworking of history with social constructionism very much in mind." (Rich, p. 18) Consequently, they serve as a distinguished movement that did not aim at settling for traditional, normative approaches, establishing a new and excessive queer cinema.

Reflecting on the time shortly after the exposure of the New Queer Cinema and in a world that still understood AIDS as a 'gay disease', Davies states that, previously considered as a health crisis, AIDS became a social crisis. As a response, Hollywood soon attempted to deal with the issue with the mainstream release of *Philadelphia* in 1993, a box office hit with displays of "homo-ignorance" (Davies, p. 122) that attracted negative criticism due to the cutting of scenes showcasing affection between the characters of Tom Hanks and Antonio Banderas in the theatrical release. Nevertheless,

Philadelphia marked the beginning of productions about the AIDS epidemic with a more realistic tone.

Davies mentions the happier, lighter tone in films from the second half of the 1990's as a response to the gloomy previous period. *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), for instance, marks a brief but fruitful period that put drag as the center of the narrative both in Hollywood and European films. In Europe, German's *Regular Guys* (1996) and French *Driven* (1996) began to explore the complexities of gay relationships and, concomitantly, several implicit lesbian films were also produced, partly in response to the success of Ridley Scott's successful film *Thelma & Louise* (1991). Davies states that such films "left the sexuality of their female protagonists unmarked, available for lesbian appropriation" (p. 127).



Figure 7: Megan (Natasha Lyonne) and Graham (Clea Duvall) performing house chores (and flirting) while wearing pink in *But I'm a Cheerleader*.

Another example that could potentially fall into Davies's category of light-hearted films is 1999's *But I'm a Cheerleader*, directed by Jamie Babbit. Megan Bloomfield (Natasha Lyonne), a seventeen-year-old high school senior, is sent to a conversion therapy treatment for being perceived as a lesbian by her parents. Fully satirical, the film plays with the clichés attributed to 'looking gay', since Megan's parents are convinced that she is a lesbian because of her interest in vegetarianism. During her period in the camp, Megan is forced to perform stereotypical gender-oriented house tasks, such as cleaning, in an attempt of 'curing' her lesbianism. The films' unrealistic, cartoon-like visuals are also representative of such standards: the exaggerated presence of the colors blue and pink, with their association to male and female, respectively, are strongly used to represent the treatment, at the same time the film makes fun of gender roles.

As Megan befriends and meets several boys and girls who are equally forced to undergo the treatment, she falls in love with Graham (Clea DuVall). Having accepted her own lesbianism, Megan leaves the camp to live with two gay friends. At the end of the film, Megan performs a cheer to declare her love for Graham, and they both flee from the camp's graduation. Having played with such defined gendered roles, the film

succeeds in depicting a lesbian story that manages to balance serious themes, such as conversion therapy, with a high-spirited, gleeful conclusion, with its protagonist fully embracing her lesbianism.

Commenting on transgender cinema in the late 20th century, Judith Halberstam, in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005), addresses how films such as *The Crying Game* (1992) and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) also deepened on the main characters' gendered dilemmas of attempting to create a life that distances itself from the traditional heterosexual matrix. However, although these characters are able to navigate their narratives while succeeding to do so, their tragic endings are reminders that transgendered bodies are often punished for such deviations. As Halberstam phrases it, these films often relied on "the successful solicitation of affect" (p. 77), meaning that they construct a relationship with the viewer through an early empathy, sympathy, or revulsion, which give audiences what the author calls a 'transgender gaze'. However, this gaze is not maintained until the film's ending; in *Boys Don't Cry*, for instance, Brandon (Hilary Swank) is considered to be a lesbian woman, not a transgender man.

With the end of the 1990's and the arrival of the early 2000's, a wave of gay romantic comedies emerged as a progression of the 'feel-good' drag films. Davies mentions that the high-volume of these productions (partly due to the success of queer TV shows such as *Will & Grace*), despite being significant of a "widespread acceptance of homosexuality" (p. 128), was also harmful to queer storytelling when comparing it to the early 1990's period. The major problem with films such as *Trick* (1999) and *Under One Roof* (2002), according to Davies, is that they relied too much on comedic gay romance and stereotypes. They mainly depicted gay men as muscular, athletic young men, in a reshaping of ideals of masculinity that can be understood as a probable response to the widespread of 'the body with AIDS' imagery that permeated popular culture until the 1990's. In attempting to distance gay characters from this detrimental collective view, Hollywood productions manufactured another one that, for many gay audiences, was just as harmful and inaccurate.



Figure 8: Ennis (Heath Ledger) stares at Jack's (Jake Gyllenhaal) shirts and postcard at the end of *Brokeback Mountain*.

Besides depicting gay romance in comic films, this period also aimed at emulating the heterosexual rom-coms that, according to Davies, were equally shallow. Davies states that, for many gay filmmakers of that time, having gay characters portrayed in typical romantic situations would suffice for general audiences, meaning that the narrative and

interesting plots would not necessarily matter. However, the prominence of the same type of cast – white, muscular, middle-class gay men – and poor storytelling contributed to superficial representations of a community that is formed by much more than that. In his own words: “The problem with these ‘screwball comedies’ and ‘gay date movies’ is that they’re all too cute and sugary, annoyingly trashy, with trite stories.” (p. 130)

Despite the prolific number of comedic/romantic gay films during the early 2000’s, indie films such as *The Fluffer* (2001) and *Happy Birthday* (2002), as well as European films, paved the way for a resurgence of more serious depiction of queerness in Hollywood. Notably, Ang Lee’s western *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) gathered positive criticism from film critics and audiences, despite its tragic ending. Other films, including *Rent* (2005) and *Infamous* (2006), as well as *Transamerica* (2005) and its portrayal of the challenges of a transgender woman wanting to do a male-to-female surgery amidst discovering she has a son, were critically well-received. Davies, however, pays particular attention to *Brokeback Mountain* and how it was a film that “proved a defining film in gay cinema history” (p. 174). The film, besides becoming a cultural phenomenon, caused conversations all around the world, which included articles in newspapers and magazines, as well as parodies in popular television talk shows. However, Davies also asks of how a gay movie could become so popular, yet Hollywood was still “not ready to come out of the closet” (p. 175), meaning that, despite the success of the film, none of the main actors were actually gay in real life.

While revisiting *Brokeback Mountain* and the tragic love affair between cowboys Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal), the 1963’s Wyoming setting strikes as even more harshly oppressive for gay men. Even though Jack is violently killed at the end of the film for being gay, the taboo subjects tackled

within its narrative, such as displays of masculinity, gay desire, marital roles, and the secrecy of homosexuality as a way of existing in such repressive environment, makes *Brokeback Mountain* a notable representative of narratives with intricate, fully-developed queer characters, which would be echoed in subsequent films, such as *God's Own Country* (2017) and *The Power of The Dog* (2021), to be analyzed in Chapter 4. The former, directed by Francis Lee, even depicts an initially hidden love affair between farmer Johnny (Josh O'Connor) and Romanian migrant worker Gheorghe (Alec Secăreanu), amidst displays of masculinity and male societal roles. As the film progresses and Johnny comes to terms with his desire for Gheorghe, they remain together in Johnny's family house, creating their own, safe environment as an unorthodox family. Similarly to *Brokeback Mountain*, Lee's film thrives in depicting a tumultuous, layered and multifaceted gay story, with characters that have to navigate their queerness amongst overly masculine environments.

Davies cites other films, particularly *Milk* (2008), have laid the foundations for the development of a queer cinema more concerned with plural realities and representations in the following decade. As the public's interest for these stories grew in a similar pace that social advances made it possible for queer people to reclaim their places on the silver screen, filmmakers have slowly but significantly detached their narratives from heterosexual expectations and its standards of relationships, romance, and representation, as well as acknowledging that queer representation should not be labeled as 'good' or 'bad' but, instead, diverse. Despite the violent aspects that have previously shaped the representation of queer people in films, Davies optimistically summarizes the future possibilities for queer cinema as a constant positive progress. In his own words:

Four decades on from the legalization of homosexuality, there's certainly cause for celebration over what's been achieved in the representation of gay life on screen. And the argument was never just about 'positive images' but images of all kinds. The [queer] community had been sorely underrepresented in Hollywood, decade after decade, but the taboo has slowly faded and films now more accurately portray our diverse society. (Davies, p. 206)

Although Davies' and other critics' views on queer representation in Hollywood/European cinema is mostly negative, many of the aforementioned films

have also been praised and rediscovered as substantial examples of a diverse portrayal of queer narratives. On the one hand, the inherent problems one may find, particularly the ones related to stereotypical representations, often appear as results of the times of production, which have not stopped filmmakers to embrace queerness on screen, especially in the independent circuits. On the other hand, exclusively comedic portrayals of queer characters, as well as films that only exploit queer suffering, have been as detrimental and violent as anti-queer violence outside of the screen in its limiting, often dehumanizing, depiction.

As queer cinema has developed and evolved in Hollywood and in Europe, Latin America has also been heavily contributing to a queer cinema that encompasses diversity of stories and the exploration of different social contexts. In what follows, I attempt to discuss the steps leading to this broadening of perspectives as I recollect how queer cinema has often been linked to displays of violence in Latin America as well, and how Latin American filmmakers have also managed to subvert many of these idealized displays.

2.3 Violence and *Maricóns*: Queer Cinema In Latin America

Having recollected significant landmarks and production cycles for queer cinema in the Hollywood/European contexts, in this section I will attempt to trace a similar genealogy but within the context of Latin America. As previously mentioned in chapter one, anti-queer violence operates differently accordingly to each place and its historical context. Similarly, while discussing the context of production and matters of representation of queer people in Latin American cinema, enough differences emerge in order to justify looking at Latin American queer cinema as separate and different from Hollywood/European queer cinema.

Besides the language factor, the topics presented in many of the films to be discussed in this section, such as the use of queer people as comic relief, the notion of the closet, and overall violence and its on-screen subversion, appear in meaningfully diverse ways. As a result, discussing them alongside the films from the previous section would mean to ignore their own particularities as films that represent queer people from clearly different social and historical contexts. Moreover, as I shall address further, the mere use of the term ‘queer films’ becomes controversial, given not only the linguistic implication, but also the contextual use of the word ‘queer’. These differences and

particularities will be explored considering critical works from David William Foster, Vinodh Venkatesh, and others, as well as examples of films that illustrate the progression of queer films in Latin America.

The production of Latin American queer films, as they are referred to more recently, was first established during the 1970's and 1980's. Previously, as mentioned by Vek Lewis in *Crossing Sex and Gender in Latin America* (2010), films would only suggest the existence of homosexual characters. Earlier periods of the Latin American queer cinema were also notable for their depictions of negative stereotypes and the recurrence of punishments for queer characters on screen. B. Ruby Rich (2013) states that the political climate of the time, with coups and the establishment of dictatorships throughout the Latin American territories, threatened the development and distribution of openly queer films. Despite many filmmakers attempting to maintain queer films in production, the vast majority of these films attained a "heteromasculinistic" (Rich, p. 142) perspective. Even with this problematic, Rich emphasizes the period as packed with portrayals of gay, lesbian and transgender characters, although not so positive ones.

Notwithstanding the political challenges of the period and the previous history of stereotypical, violent depictions, Rich stresses that there was a constant interest in depicting queer characters and their subjectivities. The effort to embrace difference in cinema, although restricted to very few films of the time, made it possible to represent more layered narratives that also reflected the plurality of Latin America as a continent. Since each country possesses their own visions on queerness, the result was a Latin American Queer Cinema that slowly began to distance itself from Anglophile practices and representations, which enabled a dialogue about the same topics between cinematic discourses from different social and political contexts.

In the introduction of his book *New Maricón Cinema: Outing Latin American Film* (2016), Vinodh Venkatesh describes his reaction while watching 2010's Chilean film *Qué Pena Tu Vida*. According to him, the displays of homosexuality and gender present in the film greatly differ from the usual earlier queer representations in Latin American cinema, which tended to be significantly scarcer. Making a parallel to Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* and the depiction of queer characters in Hollywood films, Venkatesh suggests that it is not that Latin American cinema did not portray queer people; it is that it only represented queer people through stereotypes. He specifically

mentions that these stereotypes usually revolved around notions and norms of masculinity. As Venkatesh puts it:

First, like early Hollywood, which presented homosexuals as suggestions or sideshows, Latin American cinema followed a similar trajectory. [...] Latin American depictions of difference have originated in the planting of stereotypes that were countertypical to the iconic male, a body that was coded for discourse of normativity, modernity, and nation-building. (p. 5)

Venkatesh, reinforcing Rich's arguments, states that early Latin American queer productions positioned sexual and gender differences distant from the spectators, as sexuality was not central to the narrative or a significant element for the character. Instead, queerness was conditioned to the margins. Because of that, Venkatesh defends the use of the term 'maricón cinema' as more elucidative of the representation of queer people in Latin American cinema because, according to him (p. 6), it is not a mere description of sexual practices; instead, 'maricón cinema' functions as a political designator of power. It emphasizes differences in Latin America, and it affirms the nonnormative differences in relation to sexualities and aesthetics. Throughout his book, the author demonstrates these differences and how maricón cinema has evolved to what he calls 'New Maricón Cinema', in which he pays specific attention to the role of the spectator in thoroughly engaging with more recent maricón films. More than simply reading the images on screen, Venkatesh argues that viewers now have the ability to process their nonlinguistic sensations and reactions.

Although Venkatesh's use of the term 'maricón cinema' is contextually justifiable, the term may often read as gender-limited, as it mostly refers to gay men. Because of that, and as means of standardization, I will maintain the use of the term 'queer cinema' throughout this research. Moreover, the differences between production contexts, as well as the differences revolving queerness throughout the world, are going to be emphasized and pointed out throughout my analysis. Nonetheless, similarly to Venkatesh, I will be addressing Brazilian queer cinema as a separate discussion, as I agree with the author that, besides linguistic differences, the social and political contexts of Brazil greatly differ from other countries of Latin America. Hence, although authors such as Rich and Foster tend to include Brazilian queer films when constructing a Latin American genealogy of queer films, I will pay attention to this in the following section.

Venkatesh points at the recent affluence in the production of Latin American queer films following the region's advances in queer rights and legislation. However, prior to this, there were various films that heavily invested in the satirical and violent representations, as well as representations of male homosexuality portraying displays of masculinity. Addressing David William Foster's genealogy of films in *Queer Issues in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2003), Venkatesh agrees that films such as Arturo Ripstein's *El Lugar Sin Límites* (1978) and Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's *Doña Herlinda Y Su Hijo* (1985) inaugurate a series of films that relegate homosexuality to



Figure 9: La Manuela (Roberto Cobo) dances with Pancho (Gonzalo Vega) in *El Lugar Sin Límites*.

hidden places without questioning structures such as heteronormativity. The former, while describing the struggles of fictional town El Olivo, focuses on La Manuela, a transvestite who owns and works on a brothel, and her relationship with Pancho, the son of a local peon. Throughout the film, the dynamics of the brothel and its other residents are also explored. The latter shows the relationship between a bachelor doctor, Rodolfo, and music student Ramón, while Rodolfo's mother arranges a girlfriend and a wedding for him.

Foster (2003) analyzes Ripstein's film considering the space of the brothel as a "regulated realm for the enforcement of heteronormativity and along with it other controlling structures of patriarchy, such as social hierarchy of men and the rigid disjunction among men as sexually served by women" (p. 24). Moreover, the author establishes the presence of homoeroticism throughout the film, particularly in the homosociality of the male characters who attend the brothel, in the lesbian relationship of many of the brothel's workers, and in the presence of male prostitutes in the brothel. The author acknowledges the film's depiction of La Manuela as a cross-dressed man; however, Foster points out the queering issues related to gender and sexuality depictions, since La Manuela is regarded as a woman by herself and the other workers of the brothel, except for La Japonesita, who still refers to her as 'father'.

The issue of the inversion of gender and sexuality is brought forward by Severo Sarduy in *Escrita Sobre um Corpo*. The author mentions how the concept is recurrent throughout the film: it is present in the way La Manuela dresses herself and relates to

others and how she performs her sexuality, as well as in Pancho's role, whose involvement with La Manuela causes her death at the end of the film. The film's play with gender inversion is also present in a scene where La Manuela engages in intercourse with La Japonesa as the result of a challenge; although identifying as a woman, La Manuela plays a 'passive' role. While seducing Pancho prior to her death, she exerts an 'active' role. Such inversions, as noted by Sarduy, attain to the film "[...] a space of conversions, of transformations and disguises: a space of language." (p. 48)

Regarding Pancho killing La Manuela at the end of the film, Foster concludes that it reinforces a poignant affirmation of his masculinity. More than a punishment for La Manuela's assumption that Pancho would find her to be a valid sexual partner, Pancho's killing of La Manuela underlines his erasure of any trace that he would find La Manuela desirable. Likewise, it represents the homosocial bonding between Pancho and his friends, who view La Manuela as a gay man, a *maricón*. By killing La Manuela, Pancho establishes that certain desires and affections should not be acknowledged to exist. While commenting on the film's creation of an expected effect in depicting a punishment for an insinuation that Pancho may be 'less of a man', Foster states that it symbolically reproduces real-life situations of violence. In his words: "The rigid gender binary and queer transgressions, along with fatal violence because of the transgressions and in order to maintain appearances, would seem to be integral parts of the world as it is supposed to be." (Foster, 2003, p. 30)

De la Mora (1993), Del Rio (2003) and De Castro Jr (2004) have also discussed the film's displays of masculinity and gender stereotype, signaling to how La Manuela's character dismantles them. At the same time, the film reaffirms a male ideal, as proposed by Venkatesh, borrowing from Foster's arguments, who describes how the film's framing of male body parts (Pancho's arms while he is driving, as well as La Manuela's observation of the male clients of the brothel) enhances a compulsory nature of heterosexuality. While La Manuela's gender configurations and inversions signal to topics that would be more thoroughly addressed only in more recent films, allowing a sexual and gender minority to be truly seen in comparison to previous stereotypical *joto* films, Ripstein's film still presents the desire for the muscled/masculine, heterosexual male as one of the focus of its narrative. Therefore, Venkatesh perceives *El Lugar Sin Límites* as a film of transition, signaling that other discussions would be better tackled in subsequent films as the author points to a "boom in homosexual-themed cinema"

(Venkatesh, p. 39) following Ripstein's, particularly considering *Doña Herlinda Y Su Hijo*.



Figure 10: Rodolfo (Marco Treviño) and Ramón (Arturo Meza) in a moment of secret intimacy in *Doña Herlinda Y Su Hijo*.

Hermosillo's film presents matriarch Doña Herlinda as the mediator of her son Rodolfo's relationships. At the same time she delves into heterosexual expectations by approving young student Olga as a suitable wife for her son, she represents no suppression to her son's homosexual relationship with music student Ramón. Foster (2003, p. 86) observes Doña Herlinda as effectively queering the pre-established Mexican/Latin expectations of marriage and reproduction, as the film also establishes a deviation from the previous tragic homosexual films. The author even points at the film's subversion of Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, since *Doña Herlinda* does not deal with homosexuality as a dark, dirty secret; instead, it presents Rodolfo's mother negotiating the social spaces for his homosexuality by asking Ramón to live with them at the same time she makes arrangements for Rodolfo and Olga's wedding. Commenting on Doña Herlinda's role as representative of Mexican's domestic life, Foster states:

Sexual intimacy is a private matter, which is why Mexican law and Latin American law in general have been historically less concerned with the nature of acts than with their distribution between public and private realms [...]. Transgression involves not the acts themselves but making private acts public, which is why the public display of heterosexual eroticism is as vigorously defended as homosexual display. (2003, p. 91)

Although Doña Herlinda defies traditional Mexican and Catholic conventions, by creating a safe place for Rodolfo and Ramón's homosexuality she privileges the private domain of her home. Moreover, Foster comments on the possible problems arising from considering the film an example of 'gay liberation', since homosexuality is still relegated to secrecy. He states that the film is utopian in the sense that "no one is victimized" (p. 92), while not necessarily revolutionizing society's heterosexual structures but, still, fulfilling and acknowledging personal needs that deviate from such structures.

Commenting on Foster's analysis of *Doña Herlinda Y Su Hijo*, Venkatesh also addresses the subversion of the closet at the same time he acknowledges Hermosillo's success in removing homosexuality from marginalized spaces, such as the brothel, as presented in *El Lugar Sin Límites*. According to him, *Doña Herlinda* is notable for locating homoeroticism outside of 'obscene' places, placing it within the urban, in places such as streets and houses. With Ramón entering Doña Herlinda's house, for instance, one can argue that Hermosillo's film showcases the negotiations for the acceptance of difference within specific conditions, at the same time it removes homosexual desire from an overly sexual, stereotypical site, as noted by Rodríguez (2005), who comments on the film's distinction between public and private displays of homosexuality.

Other films, such as Francisco Lombardi's *No Se Lo Digas a Nadie* (1998), helped to cement a movement in Maricón Cinema that significantly changed the role of the audience in such productions. The viewer is now invited to a self-reflection of the films' narratives, not having only a voyeuristic perspective. The audience becomes "[...] integral as an intimate member of the multiple valences of power that keep the caress and its corresponding desire limited to the realm of the unseen." (Venkatesh, p. 49) Moreover, in this transition to films of New Maricón Cinema, the spectator is explicitly included within the images and is allowed to ethically position him/herself in relation to the issues presented, moving beyond from mere identification.

The issue of not necessarily aiming for audience's identification is brought forward in later Maricón Cinema films that strongly tackle social issues as their overall theme, although displaying homosexuality in often naturalized manners. In Barbet Schroeder's *La Virgen de Los Sicarios* (2000), for instance, Fernando and Alexis/Wilmar's relationship, although openly homoerotic, operates more substantially as a denouncer of the drug-related violence present in Medellín than it is the primary focus of the narrative. The city violence, strongly opposing the religiousness of the region, is depicted through the teenagers working between prostitution and *guerrillas*. Through this dichotomy, the film presents spectators the possibility of also analyzing the characters' private sphere, which includes their sexuality.

Ramos (2003) discusses the film's representation of violence attained to a representation of a heteronormative sexuality by pointing at Fernando and his positioning as a 'superior' homosexual, who often makes use of derogatory, homophobic slurs, such as '*mariposas*' (butterflies, or fairies), to describe authoritative

and political figures. However, when he addresses his own sexuality and his attraction for men, he shows pride of his romantic achievements. Moreover, Alexis and Wilmar occupy positions strictly related to the figure of the ‘*macho*’, as merciless killers who proudly hold to their guns, but at the same time show no conflicts regarding their sexual preference. These contrasts, emphasized within an urban context such as Medellín, allow questioning and the breaking of conventions regarding the strictly heterosexual standards attributed to such environment, although, as Venkatesh puts it, the film ‘[...] does not engage in any sustained intervention about the role or existence of sexual difference, instead focusing heavily on how gang violence has decimated the protagonist’s once cherished home.’ (2003, p. 51)



Figure 11: one of the intellectual exchanges between Diego (Jorge Perugorria) and David (Vladimir Cruz) in *Fresa Y Chocolate*.

Similarly, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío’s *Fresa y Chocolate* (1994) heavily focuses on the repression of the 1970’s Cuban political and cultural contexts. The intellectual and almost

fraternal relationship between homosexual Diego and heterosexual Communist Party member David is developed amidst their

arguments regarding the legacy and importance of the revolution, which is ultimately the crucial aspect of the film. To one extent, Venkatesh even considers *Fresa y Chocolate* a step back in relation to homosexual representation since, according to him, the film presents a set of clichés both in style and in language that are reminiscent of *joto* films. Moreover, the author is critic of Diego’s portrayal as a “libidinous, almost perverse *loca*” (Venkatesh, p. 52), as well as the film’s emphasis on heterosexual sex on a particular scene in which David has sex with Diego’s neighbor, Nancy. However, despite this reinforcement of new stereotypes, it is worthy to signal the film’s success in establishing a homosexual portrayal that is, at the same time, humanizing and layered, showcasing Diego as a conflicting yet reassured individual. More than that, the development of his friendship with David throughout the film, despite his platonic desires, captures a non-violent approach to the hetero/gay dichotomy.

Venkatesh critically summarizes the Maricón Cinema films as lacking significant relationships between spectator and characters, since the main queer characters are often visually present, but rarely engaging in a deeper connection with the

audience. He also criticizes the productions' undeveloped queerness in favor of other issues, being social violence and the role of democracy recurrent ones, which were already heavily discussed in non-Maricón films of the period. However, despite this criticism, it is worthy to signal that many of the films he mentions depict queer characters that do not conceal their queerness; on the contrary, they manage to exist as queer individuals regardless of violent and truculent environment they inhabit. When considering their contexts of production and their placement within mid and late 20th century, therefore, this early wave of queer films in Latin America may not have represented queer characters as layered and complex as more recent ones, but it has certainly tackled them as plural and diverse.

Still commenting on these early examples of the genre, Venkatesh discusses how these films, even with their limitations, have brought attention to heavy topics, such as the prejudices and anti-queer violence, to wider audiences, allowing non-queer spectators to witness such realities for the first time. Nonetheless, the author compares and elucidates the first years of the 21st century as a period in which Latin American productions shifted their aesthetics to address queer issues attempting to break with the previous tradition, in a movement he calls *New Maricón Cinema*.

Differently from the previous films from Maricón Cinema, New Maricón Cinema is, according to Venkatesh, much more concerned with displaying narratives with sexual and gender difference not only as a subtopic within a broader theme, but as a focal point. Additionally, there is an effort in allowing an empathetic engagement from the audience as the narratives revolve around the characters' relationships and troubles. Crucially, there is also the presence of nonurban spaces, excluding the audience from the heteronormative aspect of the city. While analyzing films such as *XXY* (2007), *Contracorriente* (2009), *El Ultimo Verano de La Boyita* (2009), and *El Niño Pez* (2009), Venkatesh establishes how the nonurban space creates the possibility of approximating sexual and gender differences to audiences in an affective manner. In the author's words:

These films, then, permit and perform an "outing" of Latin American cinema from the Maricón closet and from the spatial contract of heteronormativity that the urban propagates. They out difference from clichéd and politically flawed exercises to a productive and fecund terrain where Latin American gendered bodies enter into a broader dialogue with global movements and an ethically engaged audience, where difference is not merely symptomatically

viewed but also allowed to enter into personal and political action. [...] These films often project a critical understanding of the relationship between the camera and queerness and forward, through various technical and narrative devices, an alternative that in effect creates a categorization of the New. (Venkatesh, 2016, p. 61)

Considering Venkatesh's characterization of the New Maricón Cinema, this shift from the previous narratives to more dynamic portrayals opens up the potential for cultural productions that challenges dominant ideologies and the perception of queer bodies. Through their innovative technical and narrative strategies, these films not only critique the historical relationship between cinema and queerness but also offer a new vision that moves beyond the symptomatic, pushing for a more ethical and politically engaged exploration of difference. Such works, by moving into the terrain of the 'New,' disrupt previously-established notions and create a space where difference is both recognized and celebrated, ultimately transforming both personal and collective understandings of identity.

In dialogue with Ruby Rich's New Queer Cinema, Venkatesh postulates that New Maricón Cinema's most notorious difference in relation to previous films from Maricón Cinema is its use of the camera and how it bluntly focuses on queer bodies and desires, instead of focusing on a heteronormative ideal. As one of the effects of this framing, audiences now are explicitly cued to pay attention to the character's queerness. Additionally, the emphasis in relocating such characters and their narratives from the urban to nonurban spaces allows gender and sexuality to be treated outside hegemonic sociopolitical conventions. Javier Fuentes-León's *Contracorriente*, for instance, portrays the romantic relationship between Miguel, a married, closeted gay (or bisexual) man, and foreigner photographer Santiago, in a seashore Peruvian, seemingly secluded village.

The villagers display an evident sense of community, arraying their own set of rituals and customs, such as the tradition of drowning dead bodies in the sea instead of burying them. After Miguel and Santiago's relationship becomes public and Santiago dies accidentally by drowning, the plot of the film revolves around Miguel attempting to claim the rights to drown Santiago's body following the village's customs, among the exasperation of the villagers and his wife, Mariela, who had just gave birth to their first child. Turning to fantastic realism to emphasize Miguel's grief, the film develops its gay protagonists further by making Santiago visit Miguel as a troubled ghost who is stuck in

the earthly realm, until Santiago finally manages to perform the village's religious ritual.



Figure 12: one of the many private, yet public to spectators, embraces between Miguel (Cristian Mercado) and Santiago (Manolo Cardona) in *Contracorriente*.

Commenting on how *Contracorriente* drifts away from conventions of the urban space, Dorian Lugo Bertrán (2014) points at Miguel's refusal to abandon his village's customs, in a clear attempt of not becoming a part of universal values displayed in films set in large cities. Moreover, Miguel resignifies his own traditional culture when he succeeds in paying his respects to Santiago in the village's

traditions. For Bertrán, this action, which works as a queering of expectations, is one of the central issues of the film because, although Miguel chooses to stay with his wife while honoring the memory of Santiago, he begins to question the village's ideas related to holiness. The author also briefly comments on critics' comparisons between *Contracorriente* and *Brokeback Mountain*, especially concerning the presence of a gay couple who are married to women and secretive displays of homosexuality. For Bertrán, Lee's film presents homosexuality "as exception, without everydayness"¹³ (p. 673), whereas in Fuentes León's film, there is an emphasis on the characters' community and their notions of religion and holiness, which marks a shift from traditional romantic coming out stories.

Venkatesh (p. 72) describes how *Contracorriente* queers the heteronormative spaces by depicting Miguel and Santiago's first embrace in an abandoned house, symbolizing a domestic life that is distant from spaces such as gay bars and the brothel. Additionally to this argument, it is worthy to acknowledge how the film subverts traditionally masculine, heterosocial spaces, such as the fishing boat, while simultaneously encouraging the viewer to be a part of these places. Although the characters hide their homosexuality from others in the village, the film offers viewers an intimate glimpse of Santiago and Miguel's intimacy by framing their sexual relations through close and steady shots, capturing fragments of homosexual love and desire. This aesthetic is a crucial difference in relation to early Maricón Films, as it allows the

¹³ "[...] la homosexualidad como excepción, sin cotidianidad." My translation.

spectator to fully capture the film's queerness and empathetically engage with its narrative.

Similarly, Lucía Puenzo's *XXY* and *El Niño Pez* locate their main queer protagonists outside of big cities. *XXY*, set in a Uruguayan fishing village, depicts the story of Alex and her/his family as they leave the urban center of Buenos Aires to escape the harassment Alex suffers from being an intersex individual. As Calafell (2014) postulates, the film also presents the idea of the body as an external source of resistance, since Alex's experiences are significantly marked by her/his relationship with her/his body. In *El Niño Pez*, Puenzo unravels the romantic relationship between Lala, the daughter of a successful judge, and Ailin, the family's maid, as they run away to Ailin's hometown in Paraguay. Both films also present heavy aquatic imagery, working as symbolism for queerness/otherness throughout their narratives, as well as the focus on fragmented body parts.

Punte (2012), while addressing *El Niño Pez*, tackles several types of gender violence using De Lauretis' work as a theoretical framework. Comparing Puenzo's film to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, the author signals how Lala seeks an alternative for a world that is heavily focused on the most prominent male figure of her life, her father. Lala's projection, therefore, is one that frees her and allows her to finally accomplish her own goals. Commenting on the same film, Brandão and Lira (2012) also establish how the main characters' escape is metaphorical of their persistence through life's turbulences, as they envision a lake house as a refuge and motivation for their movement throughout the film.

While discussing *XXY*, the film's contrasts between marine imagery and cutting motions in the opening montage should be considered. Alex's refusal to continue to take hormonal corticoids is signaled in the film's metallic title card, as the letter 'Y' looks like a cut 'X', which implies both the artificiality of medical treatments and Alex's refusal to continue them. Moreover, the frequent scenes with the presence of cuts (Alex's cutting motion at the beginning, as well as Alex's mother preparing dinner later on) creates an ambiguity that, according to Venkatesh (p. 115), alludes to the bodily cut Ramiro, the family's doctor who is a guest at their house, aims to perform in Alex in order to 'normalize' her/his body.



Figure 13: Alex's body in full display as he/she floats in water in *XXY*.

Another ambiguity in the film is related to how the film focuses more on the relation between intersexed and sexed bodies than on Alex's body and its differences from sexed bodies. The

character of Álvaro, Ramiro's son, is representative of what happens to sexed bodies, as well as to fixed sexual categories, when they get in touch with intersexed bodies. The affinity and later sexual relationship between Alex and Álvaro does not particularly highlight the differences of intersexed bodies but, instead, showcases how fixed/sexed bodies react in relation to intersexed bodies. The film even plays with the spectator's expectation by never fully showing Alex's body; besides her/his breasts, Alex's body and its particularities are left to the viewer's imagination. Instead, the film showcases Alex's concerns and wishes related to her/his own body, as she/he decides not to undergo physical and hormonal treatment.

Alex's choice is accentuated when she/he penetrates Álvaro when they have sex, in a visual inversion that emphasizes how Alex has come to terms with her/his difference. Commenting on this, Venkatesh states that [...] we never see her difference but are allowed to intimately feel it by her vicariously penetrating Álvaro, in a gesture that displaces both us and the subjects in the image." (p. 124) In this sense, for Venkatesh, *XXY* represents queerness beyond Alex's intersexuality and can, instead, be understood as a coming of sexuality/gender, as Álvaro's homosexuality is also one of the main points of the narrative.

Although the author makes a solid point while tackling the issues related to the gender and sexuality self-discovery of two characters, one of the arguments Venkatesh leaves out of his analysis is the role of medicine in the organization of bodies, which is a recurrent theme throughout *XXY*. Lourdes Estrada-López tackles this issue in *Deconstrucción Sexual e Intersexualidad en XXY de Lucía Puenzo* (2014) as she explores how Alex's refusal to position her/himself within pre-established categories of gender and sexuality, especially when they are legitimized by medicine, creates a site of resistance for dissident bodies, while at the same time shattering the common associations between intersexuality and the monstrous. For Estrada-López (p. 6), the choice of not entirely showing Alex's body suggests a step away from looking at

intersexed bodies as abnormal. Additionally, the author points at the film's representations of the violence present in biomedical discourse, which is often used to forcefully adequate queer bodies within a pattern of normalcy, in parallel to the physical violence Alex experiences in one particular moment of the film. In the author's words:

This incapability of understanding the intersexual body is the origin of the double violence, objective and subjective, exerted against these individuals. On the one hand, the lack of acknowledgement of them as persons turns them into clinical subjects of analysis. On the other hand, this same unintelligibility turn them into objects of a subject violence present in Puenzo's work not only in the group of boys who attack Alex, but also in Ramiro's desire to normalize the protagonist's body¹⁴. (Estrada-López, 2014, p. 18)

In this sense, the film's open ending, in which Alex acquires the autonomy to live as an intersex individual, strengthens a discourse that moves intersexuality beyond medical practices. By refusing pre-assigned gendered categories and interrupting the hormonal treatments, Alex understands her/his individuality and acknowledges it as her/his own identity on their own terms, allowing her mother, her father, and even Álvaro to do the same.

Puenzo's following film, *El Niño Pez* (2009), is another example of the 'New' Maricón Cinema proposed by Venkatesh as it reinforces how spectators are now much more inclined to emphasize with queer characters and their narratives. In the film, which is presented in a non-chronological order that mixes water imagery and flashbacks, Lala (Inés Efron), the daughter of a prominent judge in Argentina, plans to leave the city with her love interest, the family's maid, Ailín (Mariela Vitale). Both embark on a journey to Ailín's small hometown in Paraguay, and as the narrative progresses and their relationship blossom, the magical-realist elements of the film emerge through Ailín's childhood story. Having been raped by her own father and having her baby drowned in a lake, Ailín often suggests that her child is the mythical

¹⁴ "Esta incapacidad de entender el cuerpo intersexual es el origen de la doble violencia objetiva y subjetiva ejercida contra estos individuos. Por un lado, la falta de reconocimiento como personas los convierte en sujetos clínicos de análisis. Paralelamente, esta misma ininteligibilidad los hace objetos de una violencia subjetiva presente en la obra de Puenzo no sólo en el grupo de muchachos que agreden a Alex, sino también en el deseo de Ramiro de normalizar el cuerpo del/la protagonista." My translation.

Mitay Pyra, or Fish Child, an entity that drags the bodies of the drowned to the bottom of the lake.

Venkatesh compares the importance of the aquatic elements presented in both Puenzo's films, as well as in *Contracorriente*, establishing how the water imagery can function as a visual device for uncertainty and the feeling of not belonging. Moreover, this notion is addressed in the settings of the New Maricón Cinema; instead of depicting queer narratives in large urban centers, such as Buenos Aires, the more recent queer films in Latin America are mostly set in peripheral or rural regions. This "outing" (p. 131), as Venkatesh calls, is a motif that includes both the outing of queer sexualities and identities, which become the focal point in the films, as well as the outing of spaces. Queer characters, now, move to (co)exist in their fully realized queerness, often escaping from the oppression present in urban spaces. Commenting on the meanings of the outing of Lala and Ailín, Venkatesh states:

We see this deliberation come to life in a later scene where the two female leads plan their escape from the patriarchal stranglehold imposed by the judge. In a dimly lit image, they are shown kissing passionately on the floor, their heads and roving lips backgrounded by a road map that clearly indicates the borders of Paraguay and Brazil. While ephemeral, the image is potent in situating or overlaying the eroticism of the narrative onto a real referent of outing, suggesting that their lesbian desire can truly be liberated only away from the urban/Buenos Aires. (p. 131-132)

Similarly to Alex in *XXY*, Lala and Ailín acknowledge and accept their queerness outside of an urban setting. By moving away from the city, these characters are able to unshackle their sexual desires and/or gender identities from a repressive entity (medicine, family), while simultaneously also finding comfort in non-conforming relationships. This movement, recurrently present in New Maricón films, reinforces the need to escape regulatory and standardizing practices of sexuality, displaying the point of view of queer characters who refuse to settle for the norms of the 'big cities'. As a result, more recent queer Latin American films have brought queer characters back to large, urban spaces, in an attempt to explore queerness without necessarily delving into identity politics. Venkatesh describes how the Argentinian film *Plan B* (2009), directed by Marco Berger, relocates queer characters in an urban space (Buenos Aires) as a way of "naturalizing same sex desire" (p. 154) through the story of a man who develops a

relationship with his ex-girlfriend's boyfriend, without ever recurring to terms such as 'gay' or 'maricón'. According to the author, such strategy puts queerness, specifically gay relationships, within a context of daily life practice.

More than just 'normalizing' queerness for Latin American audiences, however, New Maricón Cinema emerges as an affective and reshaping instrument to aid queer, dissident bodies and subjectivities to be the focal point of conversation and discourse. Moreover, it propels a reorientation of what is commonly (and often stereotypically) understood as queerness, especially when taking into account the social and political contexts of Latin America, as described in the previous chapter. Similarly, recent queer cinema in Brazil often works through a similar objective, amidst the challenges of production and distribution of such films. In the following section, therefore, I gather noteworthy examples of how Brazilian queer cinema has maintained and created harmful views of queerness, as well as provoked and dismantled constructs related to gender and sexuality, often taking into account the various violent aspects of what it means to be queer in such a violent country for queer people.

2.4 “*Bichas Loucas*” and the Opposition to Norms: The Challenges Of Brazilian Queer Cinema

If Spanish-speaking Latin-America and its correspondent queer cinema have flourished amidst truculent and derogatory views of sexuality and gender, queer cinema and its criticism in Brazil have faced particularly knotty challenges in order to attain perspectives that move away from harmful depictions of Brazilian queer people. From the exploitation and exportation of the image of carnivalized, clown-like gay men, to censorship, and the slow but sturdy portrayal of intricate queer characters, Brazilian queer cinema has found its feet amongst the equally slow advances of queer movements in the country. The first official Brazilian group of lesbian and gay activism, *Somos – Grupo de Afirmação Homossexual*, for instance, was created nine years after the Stonewall rallies in the United States.

As a result, critic and academic production dealing with queerness in Brazilian cinema also moved at a slow pace. The first study of lesbian and gay representation in Brazil, *A Personagem Homossexual no Cinema Brasileiro* (The Homosexual Character in Brazilian Cinema), by Antônio do Nascimento Moreno, was originally published in 1996. Evoking Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* both in the extension of the work, which encompassed all Brazilian films that featured homosexual and transgender

characters until its publication, and in the harsh criticism of such productions, Moreno's research remains a pioneering accomplishment for the development of discourse surrounding Brazilian queer cinema. Despite its evident deficiencies, as I shall address further, it sheds light on early examples of queer representation, thoroughly cataloguing productions from the 1920's to early 1990's.

João Silvério Trevisan (2018) has also critically analyzed the portrayal of gay characters in Brazilian cinema, particularly in the context of the post-1970s era, marked by the proliferation of *pornochanchadas*. He observes that these characters were often incorporated into films primarily to elicit mockery, frequently targeting heterosexual audiences, in parallel to Moreno's critique. Trevisan further harshly criticizes the treatment of homoerotic themes by director Glauber Rocha. He argues that Rocha, while often making disparaging remarks about homosexuality, simultaneously portrayed homosexuals as inferior. This critique stands in contrast to Rocha's more complex narrative in *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (1963), where he presents a nuanced exploration of masculinity through the relationship between a religious man and an outlaw.

Moreno starts his account by stating that, until the early 1960's, much like in real life, gay, lesbian and transgender characters in films were deemed taboo, with only implicit examples that suggested homosexuality. Films such as *O Cortiço* (1945), directed by Luiz de Barros, vaguely introduced the topic through minor, almost invisible characters. 1949's *Carnaval de Fogo* introduces the male transvestite as a recurrent theme of the decade, boosted by the presence of musical numbers that would appear in Carnival parades. Moreno (1996, p. 5) comments on how the public laughed at such portrayals usually unaware that they could potentially represent gay men. It was only in the late 1960's and 1970's, with the popularity of *pornochanchadas*, that Brazilian cinema began to explore homosexuality more explicitly, though not without its snags.

Recounting the homosexual representation in films of the period, Moreno (1996) harshly criticizes the frequent choices of depicting gay men as overly feminine, with stereotypical hand gestures and costumes. According to him, this portrayal contributed to the maintenance of a negative view of homosexuals, who were deemed dangerous and perverse. He relies on moralistic and negative views of representations of effeminate men, often reinforcing his own sanitized view of what male homosexuals should look like and act. Besides grouping such portrayals as invariably negative,

Moreno disregards the actual existence of such individuals. When describing the role of cinema in the way people perceived homosexuality in real life, he bluntly states:

A way of expression that denigrate the role of the homosexual in society because, by creating and then making the public believe that such characters are the same as in real life, what stays is the image of a ridiculous, weak being, with no legal status within society. [...] Therefore, the dissident individual, with characteristics from both poles, is simply put to the margins.¹⁵
(Moreno, 1996, p. 6.)

From the 125 films that Moreno analyzes, the first one to introduce a homosexual character, as well as the stereotypical traces that would permeate early productions, is Luiz de Barros' *Augusto Anibal Quer Casar* (1923), now considered a lost film. With the plot revolving around a male protagonist that, while looking for the perfect wife, ends up marrying a transvestite, the film inaugurates, according to Moreno, an easy comedic device that would be replicated throughout the 1960's and 1970's. However, the film should not be entirely regarded as a 'negative' portrayal since, besides being released in 1923, the presence of a transvestite is hardly an example of invisibility. On the contrary, when analyzing it against the grain, having a male protagonist marrying a transvestite at the end of the film is disruptive enough to completely discredit it as a mere mockery.

Despite the affluence of social movements during the 1960's, not many films delved into homosexuality as a central theme, even with the *Cinema Novo* ('New Cinema') movement, in which the political oppression of the time was the main focus. However, Moreno (1996, p. 19) cites 1964's *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, directed by Glauber Rocha, in which the female characters Dadá and Rosa dramatically kiss before Corisco's death, as an explicit transgressive example amidst turbulent social times. Additionally, Trigueirinho Neto's backlash for 1960's implicit, but evident homosexual relationship between an artist and his sponsor in *Bahia de Todos os Santos* is another evidence of the subject's off-limits status. Following the release of the film, a newspaper from Bahia published a cartoon in which the director, dressed in Carmen Miranda's clothes, is stoned by an outraged population. For Moreno, the incident

¹⁵ "Um modo de expressão que denigre o papel do homossexual na sociedade, pois, ao criar e depois fazer crer o público que aqueles personagens são os mesmos da vida real, o que fica é a imagem de um ser ridículo, fraco, sem nenhum estatuto legal dentro da sociedade. [...] Então, o indivíduo variante, com características dos dois pólos é simplesmente posto à margem." Minha tradução.

marked a significant shift in relation to production and spectatorship of queer films in Brazil.

Other films of the 1960's decade include *O Beijo* (1963), directed by Flávio Tambellini. The first adaptation of Nelson Rodrigues' play *O Beijo no Asfalto*, it unfolds the repercussion of a man after he kisses a man who, after being hit by a car, agonizes before dying on the street. The film is keen in representing how homophobia can even affect heterosexual men who do not clearly perform a masculine, heterosexual role.

Moreno pays significant attention to Carlos Hugo Christensen's *O Menino e o Vento* (1966) as an example of dealing with homosexuality as the main issue. As a young engineer spends his vacation in a small town and bonds with another man, who eventually disappears, the subject of homosexuality is discussed through the portrayal of the 'morals' of a small, Brazilian town. Praising the film's usage of fantastic realism and flashbacks for the creation of what he considers to be a prime Brazilian production, the author states how *O Menino e o Vento* remains worthy of investigation and praise, especially amongst other productions of the same decade and the social and public commentaries regarding homosexuality. It bears significance to add to Moreno's commentary that



Figure 14: Milton Gonçalves as Rainha Diaba (Devil Queen).

During the 1970's, with the establishment of laws that increased the screening of Brazilian productions, as well as the creation of Embrafilme¹⁶, there was a fertile incline in films of diverse genres, predominantly comedies and *pornochanchadas*, but with a constant presence of underground films,

commonly referred to as 'Boca de Lixo'. Moreno particularly refers to this period as significant in the creation of a homosexual character model that would still be present in subsequent decades, one that, in movies such as *Estranho Triângulo* (1970) and *Uma Verdadeira História de Amor* (1971), deflagrated the social prejudice against

¹⁶ Founded in 1969 and closed in 1990, Embrafilme (Empresa Brasileira de Filmes S.A.) was a prolific Brazilian film producer and distributor. Linked to the Brazilian Ministry of Culture, its purpose was to foster the production of Brazilian films, releasing over 200 films in its period of activity.

homosexuality. Even if the ending of some of these films, as in the case of the latter, still catered to heterosexual audiences in a return to ‘normalcy’, they still exuded complexity for queer individuals, often linking them to pertinent social commentaries in relation to social classes, race inequality, and drug use. This is the case of Antônio Carlos Fontoura’s *A Rainha Diaba* (1974). Milton Gonçalves plays Rainha Diaba (Devil Queen), a chief of organized crime inspired by João Francisco dos Santos/Madame Satã, one of the most recognized characters of Rio de Janeiro’s nightlife in the early 20th century, who would later serve as inspiration for Karim Aïnouz 2002’s film.

Until half of the 1980’s, Moreno states, there was still a significant amount of productions that tackled the theme. However, with the collapse of Embrafilme, which culminated in the lack of “[...] a future cinematographic political perspective” (Moreno, 1995, p. 44), the challenges for Brazilian filmmakers substantially grew. Still, even traversing such uncertainties, over forty productions dealing with homosexuality and transsexuality were made during the decade, with many of them being underground, independent films or explicit pornographic movies.



Figure 15: Figure 15: The final scene of *O Beijo no Asfalto*.

Amongst the productions mentioned by Moreno, Arnaldo Jabor’s *Eu Te Amo* (1980) tells the story of a man who slowly, but certainly falls in love with a transvestite after many failed love affairs. The second

adaptation of Nelson Rodrigues’ play, Bruno Barreto’s *O Beijo no Asfalto* (1980) pushes the discussion concerning homophobia even further by outing the closeted homosexual desire of the protagonist’s father-in-law, who, enraged by jealousy, fatally shoots him at the end of the film. Similarly dealing with societal prejudices that escalate into public scrutiny and legal battles, Adélia Sampaio’s 1983 *Amor Maldito* is about the intimate relationship between two women and how one of them is harassed and attacked by the families and the population after the other commits suicide. In Hector Babenco’s *O Beijo da Mulher Aranha* (1985), two inmates share the same cell in an unknown prison in Latin America. One, a gay man, and the other, a

political activist, both represent threats to the State as they engage in initially shallow, but later deep conversations about their lives.

Another highlight in Moreno's study, although the author refers to the main character as homosexual, Sérgio Toledo's *Vera* (1987) poignantly and bluntly addresses the trials of the transsexual man Bauer. Intercalating flashbacks with present events, the film presents a succession of harassments the character of Bauer/Vera must endure to establish, reaffirm and maintain his position as a man within an environment that constantly reinforces his inadequacies and female characteristics. For Moreno, the film is "dramatic and poetic" (1995, p. 58) in the depiction of Bauer's attempts of defending himself from this environment and in his pursuit of people to communicate.

Since the beginning of the film, Bauer draws people's attention due to his male clothes. When he is hired to work in a library, one of the employees questions him if he is 'in the right environment' which, much like the film's title, is a constant reminder of how others still perceive Bauer as Vera, as a woman. After starting a relationship with Clara, other provocations succeed, which forces Bauer to adopt a more 'masculine' behavior as a way of being understood and seen as a man, which includes stereotypically displays of masculinity, such as possession, jealousy, and physical violence. In this sense, Muffo and Marchi (2015) agree that Bauer is forced to convince not only others, but also himself, that he is a man, since "[...] the character also do not believe that he fully belongs to the masculine universe, once he believes that he needs the operation to validate the [feeling of] "being a real man", turning his legitimacy, once again, dependent on factors external to him" ¹⁷ (p. 12). This constant disproof exemplifies how this almost forty year-old film rightfully captures such prominent feature in transgender people's lives.

Since Moreno's research was published in 1996, he does not account for *Cinema da Retomada*¹⁸, which started in 1995, hence only categorizing two productions during the first half of the 1990's decade, both with soft pornographic undertones. As he comments on them and moves on to his analysis of selected films in his study, his

¹⁷ "[...] a personagem também não acredita pertencer plenamente ao universo masculino, uma vez que acredita que precisa da operação para validar o "ser homem de verdade", tornando sua legitimidade, mais uma vez, dependente de fatores externos a ele." Minha tradução.

¹⁸ "*Cinema da Retomada*" was a revival of Brazilian filmmaking from 1995 to 2002, following a major crisis after Embrafilme's closure in 1990. With new tax incentives and the creation of Ancine (Agência Nacional do Cinema), film production resumed, improving in quality and diversity.

conclusions regarding the overall representation of homo/transsexuality in Brazilian films are strictly negative. He is particularly harsh when it comes to the creation, exportation, and maintenance of what he considers to be negative stereotypes, which, according to him, help to cement a derogatory image of homosexuals for audiences. Besides his criticism of feminine stereotypes for comedic purposes, the author expresses his discontent for the lack of a humanized approach in such representations, often relegating the characters to degrading situations. In his words:

[...] the social portrait of the homosexual made by Brazilian cinema is, at least, drastic. Because, from the analyzed films, few worried in giving them a humanistic treatment or saw the homosexual as a being who has the right of sexual choice [sic]. In conclusion, the qualities attributed to the homosexual, in a condensed way, would be a politically alienated subject; existing in all social classes, with predisposition in lower middle-class, where, generally, they have a precarious job; of aggressive behavior and that frequently uses an exaggerated feminine gestural, which is extended to the taste in clothing; and that, in the interpersonal relationships, shows tendency to loneliness and is incapable of a monogamous relationship because makes use of multiple, usually paid partners, to have company. It is a cruel model. But it is the view that deduces and that, spectacularly, exists upon the subject. It is expressed in the Brazilian films that can be seen and compared with the daily life of Brazilian society.¹⁹

Aiming for Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* in its cataloguing ambition, Moreno's work, despite being groundbreaking in the construction of an early queer genealogy in Brazilian cinema, presents views of gender and sexuality that were historically and culturally evident in their times of publication. The search for a 'positive' or 'good' representation, one that is distant from the negative and comedic stereotypes and the 'dehumanization' that both authors suggest, is objectively centered on the gay and lesbian liberation movements that tended to hierarchically favor these identities in accordance to notions of gender and social class. Moreover, while reading Moreno's

¹⁹ “[...] conclui-se que o retrato social do homossexual feito pelo cinema brasileiro é, no mínimo, drástico. Pois, dos filmes analisados, poucos se preocupam em dar um tratamento humanístico ou viram o homossexual como um ser que tem direito de escolha sexual. Resumindo, as qualidades atribuídas às personagens homossexuais nos filmes brasileiros analisados, o retrato social do homossexual, em forma condensada, seria a de um sujeito alienado politicamente; existente em todas as classes sociais, com preponderância na classe média baixa, onde, geralmente, tem um sub-emprego; de comportamento agressivo e que usa, frequentemente, um gesto feminino exacerbado, o que se estende ao gosto pelo vestuário; e que, nos relacionamentos interpessoais, mostra tendência a solidão e é incapaz de uma relação monogâmica pois utiliza-se de vários parceiros, geralmente pagos, para ter companhia. É um modelo cruel. Mas é a visão que se depreende e que, espetacularmente, existe sobre o assunto. Está expressa nos filmes brasileiros que podem ser vistos e comparada com o cotidiano da sociedade brasileira.” My translation.

research bearing in mind the advances made in relation to queer theory and its overlaying with other social and cultural studies, his choices to illustrate negative and dehumanizing depictions of homo/transsexuality in Brazilian cinema seem arbitrary, while, at the same time, personally reinforcing how such traits are negative.

Commenting on Moreno's work, Luiz Francisco Buarque de Lacerda Júnior (2015) details how the author accentuates the hegemonic model of male homosexuals that prevailed until the end of the 1980's, which highlighted masculine-presenting gay men who could still be perceived as heterosexual. This model, the author points, usually followed a white, middle-class, monogamous standard, at the same time it rejected the figure of the *bicha*, or 'faggot', which exuded more feminine characteristics. Moreover, by stating that such representations are *constructed* by cinema, it implies the false notion that they did not exist prior to this construction. In the author's words:

Therefore, both the lack of contextualization to judge the entire Brazilian cinematography before 1990, and the posture of adhesion to the strategy of distancing from the hierarchical model and, especially, from the figure of the faggot, can explain the fact that Moreno has elected certain characteristics – the connection with marginality, the absence of heteronormative conjugalities and, especially, the masculine effeminacy – as defining elements of a negative representation. [...] Besides, in another moment, both the lack of contextualization and the notion of an entirely manipulable spectator lead Moreno to mistakenly accuse cinema not only of disseminate, but being itself the origin of “negative” representations, ignoring the fact that the carnivalization and affectation traditional to the figure of the faggot are prior to cinema itself.²⁰ (Lacerda Júnior, 2015, p. 24-25).

Although acknowledging the relevance and pioneering character of Moreno's work, Lacerda Júnior also praises and highlights the changes in the history of queer filmmaking in Brazil, especially when considering the numerous approaches that have come to light after Moreno's corpus. Moreover, the author compliments the subsequent productions made by queer filmmakers, which have brought into the discussion themes and realities that were previously not portrayed. While expanding Moreno's corpus by discussing productions up until the early 2010's, Lacerda Júnior provides a thorough

²⁰ “Assim, tanto a falta de contextualização para julgar toda a cinematografia brasileira de antes de 1990, quanto uma postura de adesão à estratégia de distanciamento do modelo hierárquico e, especialmente, da figura da bicha, podem explicar o fato de Moreno ter eleito certas características – a ligação com a marginalia, a ausência de conjugalidades heteronormativas e, especialmente, a efeminação masculina – como elementos definidores de uma representação negativa. [...] Além disso, em outro momento, tanto na contextualização quanto a noção de um espectador inteiramente manipulável levam Moreno a equivocadamente acusar o cinema de não só disseminar, mas de ser ele próprio origem das representações “negativas”, ignorando o fato da carnavalização e afetação próprias à figura da bicha serem anteriores ao próprio cinema.” My translation.

commentary regarding the disparity of opposite identities, often marked by social indicators such as class and race.

Instead of analyzing the first productions of queer cinema in Brazil as inherently negative, Lacerda Júnior puts into question the early displays of effeminacy and transexuality in contrast to hegemonic views of sexuality and gender, and asks if real-life individuals who identified with what was visible on the screen were also perceiving themselves as inferior. Moreover, by comparing the *chanchadas* with the carnival celebrations, the author emphasizes how these real-life characters could also be seen on screen within their own lifestyles.

O Beijo and *O Menino e o Vento* are also significantly discussed in Lacerda Júnior's research. He considers the films as highlights in tackling homophobia during a period in which the topic was rarely considered as worthy of attention, as well as emphasizing its use as a dramatic resource, since homophobia is not the conduit for the films' narratives; instead, the *identification* of the characters as homosexuals is what unfolds the violence they endure. More than that, it is possible to observe how both films contribute to the realization that homophobia not only affects homosexual men, but also helps to discipline the behavior heterosexual men.

If the 1980's represented a shift in relation to how Brazilian queer cinema started to depict homo and transexuality as the focal point in the films' narratives, the 1990's and early 2000's brought forward identity-centered discussions that helped to cement much of the hegemonic view of the gay identity. Many short films of the period, for instance, tackled the discovery of the main character's homosexuality and how he navigates through his homoerotic desires and the acceptance or rejection of family and friends. Lacerda Júnior enlists 2000's *Sargento Garcia*, 2002's *A Vida Íntima de Cícero e Clóvis*, amongst others, as examples of short films that completely distance themselves from the figure of the '*bicha louca*', or 'faggot', from previous decades, one that had been deemed negative for many critics. The hegemonic 'gay identity' in cinema, therefore, comes as a result of self-representation by queer filmmakers who were predominantly white and middleclass men, whose films precisely depicted similar main character.

Moreover, it bears significance to acknowledge the impact of the AIDS epidemic in the creation of this standardized, 'positive' view of homosexuality, which favors the

representation of heteronormative, monogamous relationships, with clear emphasis on the construction of an image that catered to such ideals. This ‘positive’, heteronormative approach to queer/gay relationships prevailed during the making of several long films of the 2000’s and early 2010’s, which heavily contrasts with the representations in productions from the early decades of Brazilian queer film. The gritty, often exaggerated portrayal of secondary homosexual characters gave room to the ‘clean’, often romance-oriented narratives that permeated the period, with few, yet significant exceptions.

Lacerda Júnior mentions how Sandra Werneck’s *Amores Possíveis* (2001) encapsulates the romantic approach while making homosexual and heterosexual relationships as equivalents. The main character, Carlos (Murilo Benício), undergoes a journey of personal discovery through his relationships with Júlia and Pedro. His relationships both with a woman and with a man are treated equally in the film. Similarly, Aluizio Abranches’ *Do Começo ao Fim* (2009), although presenting an incestuous relationship between half-brothers Francisco (João Gabriel Vasconcellos) and Tomaz (Rafael Cardoso), fully encompasses a traditional, even sometimes conservative, romantic relationship between two white, upper-class men. Commenting



Figure 16: Leonardo returns home with the company of Gabriel in *Hoje Eu Quero Voltar Sozinho*.

on both films, Lacerda Júnior (p. 141) categorically summarizes them as representations that are deemed more ‘acceptable’ for general audiences specifically because of what these gay characters represent: whiteness, upper-classes, and a heteronormative system of relationships.

Another example that fits this more ‘tolerable’, safe representation is Daniel Ribeiro’s *Hoje Eu Quero Voltar Sozinho* (2014), in which the main storyline revolves around the sexual and romantic discovery between two teenage boys, Leonardo (Ghilherme Lobo), who is constantly bullied at school for being blind, and Gabriel (Fábio Audi), the new student. Their relationship and intimacy are slowly built throughout the film and amongst close inspection and protection of Leonardo’s best friend, Giovana (Thess Amorim). Although their relationship sparks some commentary

amongst the bullies in school, the film never fully addresses the main characters' homosexuality (or bisexuality); instead, it focuses on the two boys' experience with the discovery and understanding of the first love. Although much can be said regarding this approach, as a way of 'normalizing' queer desire and love, a strong case can be made in opposition to this choice, especially when taking into account that their relationship seems more 'acceptable' precisely because of their skin tone and because it repeats the heterosexual, expected matrix of relationship.

Fagundes and Lisbôa Filho (2021) accurately question this favoring of a hegemonic and standardized homosexual representation by comparing Daniel Ribeiro's film with Hilton Lacerda's *Tatuagem* (2013). Set between two Northeast cities in 1978, the film follows the story of Clécio (Iranthir Silva), the leader of the theater company/cabaret named Chão de Estrelas ('Floor of Stars'), who meets the 18 year-old soldier Arlindo (Jesuíta Barbosa). Within the context of the Brazilian military dictatorship, both develop a romantic and sexual relationship that contrasts with the truculent and oppressive environment they inhabit. Moreover, the space of the theater company can be seen as a microcosm of dissident and non-conforming bodies, with numerous people of color and lower class, working people as the members of the troupe, which are substantially distant from the homogeneous representations presented in many films of the period.

In many senses, *Tatuagem* is a polar opposite of *Hoje Eu Quero Voltar Sozinho*, not only in the matter of representation as extended to less palatable and acceptable realities, but also in its blunt depictions of homosexuality and homosexual love and desire, even amongst such a repressive moment in time as the Brazilian dictatorship, as depicted in *Tatuagem*. The film never shies away from fully addressing the topic, whereas in its discourse (with the main characters referring to and naming their own sexuality) or in its imagery, which encompasses more explicit sex scenes. Commenting on this opposition, Fagundes and Lisbôa Filho (p. 24) state that, although both films work around the premise of developing a romantic relationship, their differences in context, style, and approach to representation partly justify the significantly bigger box office success of *Hoje Eu Quero Voltar Sozinho*, which catered to more hegemonic audiences. However, the immense popularity of the film, both within and outside of Brazil, even when it was only a short film, demonstrates its relevance amongst different audiences. Its focus on the characters' self-discovery, lightheartedly portraying delicate topics such as homophobia and ableism, is a much needed addition to the context of

Brazilian queer films. Moreover, as noted by Marconi (2020), Brazilian queer cinema is representative of the resistance not only to gender norms, but also to standardized portrayals of race and class, which are steady markers that exemplify Brazil's multiplicity of subjects.

Namely one of the first films to challenge the politics of hegemonic and standardized representation of the last decades, Karim Aïnouz's *Madame Satã* (2002) remains a landmark in the creation of disruptive and challenging Brazilian queer figures. A retelling of the real-life story of João Francisco dos Santos, a black and poor man born in Pernambuco, Recife, who lived in the Lapa region in Rio de Janeiro during the 1920's and 1970's, the film accentuates and highlights the main character's ambiguities as an audacious transvestite who often resists both the police authorities and his own gender conformity through his on-stage persona, as noted by Shaw (2007), Leu (2010), Alós (2014), Welsh (2021), and Guaraná (2022), who compliment the film's challenging of gender and representations of class and race.



Figure 17: The dichotomies in *Madame Satã*: João Francisco do Santos captured by the police at the beginning of Aïnouz's film and its stage persona *Madame Satã*.

The opening scene of the film, which shows a close-up of João Francisco's bruised face, is shown alongside a narration of his charges of bad behavior, violence, lack of intelligence, poverty, and pederasty. Contrary to most portrayals of gay characters of the time, this opening, more than setting the tone for the film's distancing of a sanitized homosexual stereotype, nominates João Francisco (Lázaro Ramos) as the face for the insubordination of race, class, and gender that the films propels. Particularly on the issue of transexuality, Aïnouz's film finds most of its strengths in the contradictions of its main character, whose performances of gender are often characterized for its extreme opposites. On the one hand, João Francisco, the violent, truculent family man, whose work as Laurita's (Marcélia Cartaxo) pimp and father of their young girl inputs fear and

admiration amongst others. On the other hand, *Madame Satã* (*Madame Satan*), the feminine, sophisticated persona with unabashedly over-the-top stage numbers.

One could argue that *Madame Satã* merely encompasses the stereotypes related to the effeminate marginal that permeated the early decades of Brazilian queer cinema. However, as the film breaks conventions related to gender and identity and dismantles fixed notions of family life and household roles, it gives the character of João Francisco/Madame Satã the necessary narrative agency that puts this character away from the comedic and stereotyped homosexual figure. It constantly makes the spectator question the main character's gender and sexuality at the same time it presents a raw and direct approach to marginalized communities, races, and social classes, which were so often neglected by many other subsequent films that favored white and middle-class narratives. Moreover, the film plays with assumed conventions and stereotypes to the point that its main character becomes almost impossible to classify as man or woman, good or bad, gay or bisexual, criminal or innocent. These dichotomies work together to secure *Madame Satã* as a milestone in queer cinema history among productions that opted for clear-cut classifications.

Since first watching *Brokeback Mountain* at the age of 13, my views on queer cinema have considerably changed, not because queer films have stopped depicting violence, but because the role and the construction of violence in queer films have also changed. In this chapter, I attempted to recollect a concise genealogy of queer cinema to illustrate how the real-life changes and advances regarding queer rights and movements have contributed to more diverse and less stereotyped, hegemonic representations of queerness. Since I could not possibly have gathered films from every social and geographic context, there is still much left to be said about other queer films and, consequently, other queer realities. My choices during this chapter, therefore, aim to serve as a basis for the analysis of the six films of my corpus, which are linked to the productions of Hollywood, Europe, Latin America, and Brazil. Moreover, the topics I addressed during this chapter, such as views on masculinity, stereotypes, transgender identities, class, and race, are also evident in the production and context of the films of my corpus.

Bearing in mind the discussions of the first and the second chapter, this research is now going to move forward to the filmic analysis of the selected films of the corpus. The following chapter will be focusing on *Carol*, *Una Mujer Fantástica*, and *Yo, Imposible*, while chapter number four focuses on *Praia do Futuro*, *Moonlight*, and *The Power of the Dog*. This division is justified by thematic similarities amongst the analyzed films, such as female expectations, escapism, and portrayals of masculinity.

CHAPTER III: “*I DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE*”: ESCAPISM, TRANSEXUALITY AND IDENTITY IN *CAROL*, *UNA MUJER FANTASTICA* AND *YO, IMPOSIBLE*

Sonia: [to Marina] Sorry if it's crude and blunt of me to say this, but I really think that this is just perversion. Sorry, but... When I look at you, I don't know what I'm seeing. A chimera, that's what I see.

- Una Mujer Fantastica

In the previous chapter, my goal was to trace a simplified genealogy of queer cinema in different contexts as a way of laying a foundation for the discussions and analysis regarding the more recent films I have selected for my corpus. From that, it was possible to identify some characteristics that have started to emerge within current queer cinema, including a detaching from the stereotyped, one-dimensional approach to queer characters, the realization and inclusion of queerness in less white, less socioeconomically favored contexts, and the presence of both heteronormative and transgressive modes of relationships. Because of such characteristics, I have chosen to group the films with main female characters in the present chapter, leaving the films with male characters for Chapter 4, as a way of grouping not only their gender-specific insubordinations, but also the similarities to which each of these characters encounter a way to exist as a fully realized queer individual. In *Carol*, *Una Mujer Fantastica* and *Yo, Imposible*, for instance, there is a recurrent sense of escapism and the understanding of one’s own identity, in which the main characters create safe spaces, fight for their right to exist, and come to terms with their own identities, respectively.

In what follows, then, I intend to analyze each film individually, taking into account their narratives, *mise-en-scène*, and soundtracks in order to identify the types of violence the main characters encounter. Moreover, I will specifically comment on how these characters overcome violence, and how such violence serves (or not) a purpose that is relevant to their own narrative. Each analysis will be supported by the discussions presented in chapters one and two, as well as images from specific scenes that illustrate my arguments.

3.1 Lesbian Existence and Safe Spaces: The Case of *Carol*



Figure 18: Figure 18: The poster for *Carol*, with the main characters looking at each other.

In many ways, the poster for 2015's *Carol* stylistically conveys the film's recurrent motif of looking, as well as the characters' relationship development. In their respective scenes, the two characters gaze at each other while the blurred and granulated extras walk around them. The film's title, *Carol*, is positioned dividing the two scenes and a saying that reads "Some people / change your life forever". It is Carol, then, that is understood to be the focal point of the narrative and, as the poster and title card suggest, the one responsible for changing Therese's life. Much like the gaze they exchange in the poster, the looks they give each other (and the viewer) during the film, as well as how

they are looked by others throughout the story, dictate their relationship as lesbian women who negotiate places to exist as such. Moreover, the action of 'being looked at' by others is what makes *Carol* worthy of an analysis that considers the construction of violence through the act of hiding from one's view. It is not their lesbian existences, per se, that causes the violence they suffer. Instead, it is the discovery and further exploitation of their relationship that fosters negative consequences for their well-beings and other spheres of their lives.

Directed by Todd Haynes, the film follows the story of Carol Aird (Cate Blanchett), a divorcing middle-aged woman who, while Christmas shopping in 1952, meets the aspiring photographer Therese Belivet (Rooney Mara) when she is working at the counter in a department store in New York. Carol, who decides to buy her daughter a model train set as a gift, leaves her pair of gloves at Therese's counter. Therese manages to mail the gloves with the model train set, and is thanked by Carol, who calls her and invites her to have lunch. In this first interaction, the realization of Carol's seduction techniques is displayed by her dominant gaze upon Therese, who, shyly and naively, may not have noticed that Carol leaves her gloves on the store's counter on purpose. Carol's dominance is accentuated when she leaves the department store and, briefly turning around, comments on how she likes Therese's Santa hat, leaving her with a look of curiosity and interest. In this particular scene, Carol's direct looks, used as a tool of seduction, counterparts with Therese's awe of submission, and also marks the beginning of the dynamic of their relationship.

At this point, the film works and functions as a typical melodrama, in which Carol's seductive actions are highly emphasized. There is no negative connotation regarding Carol and Therese's mutual interest, which goes against the film's setting of an early 1950's New York City, in which women were expected, amongst other things, to find fulfillment in a life with a male partner. Therefore, the film subverts the classical notions of a melodrama by placing two women as its main romantic relationship, even if, as it is showed later, such relationship undergoes secrecy and the creation of safe places in order to navigate the social constructs of the period.

As they meet for lunch in a poorly lit restaurant, and after Carol lights Therese a cigarette, Carol tells her about her incoming divorce with Harge (Kyle Chandler). Despite Therese's concern, Carol tells her that they are fine, and invites Therese to

spend Sunday on her house, which she accepts. The lighting of this scene, as well as the framing of both characters in opposition, with over-the-shoulder camera, is recurrent throughout the film when they are in public places, except for the department store. They look at each other while their surroundings remain darkly lit or blurry. Contrastingly, in the following scene, as Carol meets Abigail (Sarah Paulson) outside of the restaurant as she goes home, both characters share secrets regarding Carol's newly-found relationship with Therese, as Abigail, Carol's former lover, lightheartedly discusses her love interests. This scene is particularly relevant to Carol's development throughout the film: despite keeping her sexuality private due to the moral and expected standards of the 1950's in the United States, she does not shy away or deny her attraction to women; on the contrary, she openly discusses it with people close to her and, consequently, with the spectators.



Figure 19: Carol and Therese meet for lunch in a poorly-lit restaurant.

Carol's sexuality does not seem to be the reason of her divorce with Harge, either. Instead, the film suggests that there was an agreement between Carol and Harge to maintain their appearances to family and the public, and their divorce is filed because of the failure of their own relationship and their vows to keep such appearances. Throughout the first half of the film, Harge seems unbothered by Carol's sexual preferences, reprimanding her only for what he believes to be a lack of care since, according to him, other people can start commenting on her relationship with Therese. Carol's sexual preference, freely discussed with Abby, Therese, and Harge, is controlled by other people's gaze to her own sexuality and desires. Additionally, there are several

scenes in which Carol and Abby discuss their own present friendship, as well as their former romantic relationship, in environments such as restaurants and lesbian bars. All of these examples help to illustrate how Carol appears to be on pair and confident with her own sexuality, which she never takes as a negative characteristic, although she remains ‘in the closet’ for public appearances. Her sexuality, although well-established, is kept private.

As the climax of the film approaches, Carol invites Therese to take a road trip to visit small cities in the Midwest of the United States as a way of escaping not only the stress and formalities of the holiday festivities with both hers and Harge’s family, but also their lives in New York City. This trip marks a significant development in their relationship: what has been limited to flirtations and suggestive comments becomes a consummated relationship as they kiss and have sex for the first time in a motel during New Year’s Eve. Moreover, it is also prior to this road trip that Carol gives Therese a camera, which symbolically works as a representative of Therese’s own gaze: through the camera lenses, Carol becomes her object of desire. Carol is, as the poster already suggests, the one who ‘changes her life’, as Therese ends her relationship with a man and embarks on this road trip. The camera, while capturing mementos of her newly-found relationship with Carol, registers this new life with pictures.



Figure 20: Therese photographs Carol in one of the stops of their road trip.

Their relationship, uncertain and shy at first, manages to blossom amidst Carol’s divorce and is established, although in secrecy, during their road trip, which marks the

confirmation of their desire and also the escapism from their lives in New York. The film creates a safe environment for the consummation of their relationship – the motel room –, and Carol and Therese have sex for the first time, in a scene that explicitly showcases their intimacy for the viewers. We are positioned in this microcosm with the two characters, aware that, outside of the motel’s walls, their existence as lesbian women, especially given the time period the film is set, could not experience such freedom and expression of desire. The privacy of the scene, which is major for the establishment of their relationship, also entails a sense of peeking through a key-hole: we witness what most of the other characters of the film would find perverse. It is a welcoming invitation to gaze upon a romantic relationship that, outside of the motel room, was often limited to flirtations and suggestions.

The same scene also heavily features the motif of looking. As Carol caresses Therese’s hair in front of a mirror, they both contemplate their reflection in a moment that, more than signaling their escapism from the exterior world, signifies their own acknowledgement of their relationship. They view and recognize themselves as a couple and, consequently, the spectators acknowledge their relationship well. Contrastingly to how they are seen by others outside of the motel room, the scene is emblematic of the authentication of Carol and Therese’s relationship as valid.



Figure 21: Figure 20: Carol and Therese contemplate their reflection in a motel room. As they look at each other, there is also the acknowledgement of themselves as a couple.

Contrasting with the sense of safety established, Carol and Therese’s road trip abruptly ends when they realize they had been followed and spied on by a private

investigator hired by Harge, neutralizing his and Carol's previous agreement. The investigator manages to gather photographs, videos, and audios of Carol and Therese's private relation as evidence to be used in Harge's favor in court, as he, now infuriated with Carol's new relationship, demands for their daughter's custody under the allegation of Carol's 'immorality'. As their first and only sexual encounter is weaponized against Carol, she decides to brusquely end her relationship with Therese, declaring that, although she loves her, she needs to focus on keeping the custody of her daughter.

The espionage to which Carol and Therese are subjected to greatly opposes the previous notions of gaze the film has developed. If, for Therese, the camera is an artifact through which she sees her object of love and desire, and if for viewers the camera showcases their relationship and how they have managed to build a safe, although temporary space for the blossoming and establishment of this relationship, Richard's gaze and photographs dismantle their privacy and intimacy by reestablishing a sense of surveillance and urgency that continues to exist outside of their motel room. The climax of Carol's discovery not only marks the abrupt end of her relationship with Therese, but also threatens Carol's motherhood, a notion intrinsically connected to the roles of women. The violation of their privacy and intimacy simultaneously marks the destruction of their getaway from the 'normalcy' of their lives and reinforces the values attributed to traditional families and relationships by making Carol choose between her lover and her daughter, to which she reluctantly chooses the latter.

Carol's choice of ending her relationship with Therese emphasizes how, for them, a fully realized existence as lesbian women could hardly become a viable option. Although for Carol her sexuality and love interests do not seem to be negative traits, the world outside of the motel rooms still sees it as immoral and condemnable. The violation of their privacy, more than jeopardizing Carol's custody of her daughter, is a reminder that authentically living as lesbian women would often equate to giving up other equally vital aspects of their lives.

Prior to the end of their trip, there is a contrast with their moments alone in the motel rooms, which tend to be in brighter, lit colors. The motel rooms also work as a narrative device that make possible for the two characters to be separated from others,

in a private space and confined to the screen, while at the same time being together, as a couple, in a public, explicit way for spectators. Their exterior interactions are mostly not visible for spectators. This balance between private and public environments is also present when they cross a viaduct on their way to their first stop: as the shadows of the viaduct embrace and darken Carol's car, Therese looks at her in a contemplative manner (figure 18). We, as spectators, can witness this act through the camera, but it is hidden from the world around them, which engulfs them once again as the car leaves the viaduct and the bright light of the day appears again. The car, here, foreshadows the motels later in the film as the microcosm that allows them to experience intimacy.

As their relationship is yet to be consummated, they only appear 'in the shadows', in darkly-lit environments, and the car and motels function as their own closets. These are safe spaces that allow them to be with each other and experience their lesbian existences without being threatened by what is outside their four walls. At the same time, since their actions are visible for spectators (and, later, the private investigator), the film is not trying to hide their relationship for spectator, although it hides it from the other characters. Instead, it allows the main characters to actively remain in the center of their own narratives, resisting the outside world and its conventions, albeit they can never truly escape them.



Figure 22: Therese gazes upon Carol moments before they cross a viaduct.

This play on lesbian invisibility, in which the characters' sexuality is only visible for spectators, is twisted when Harge's espionage is revealed later in the film. What we as viewers see in a private space (Carol and Therese's relationship and acknowledgment of

their own lesbian existences) is brought public diegetically as ways of condemning them and threatening Carol's custody of her daughter, which leaves her desperate. As she later decides to give up Rudy's custody so she can still "live in her own essence", in the court scene, the arguments are significantly emulative of Acanfora's case, as addressed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Carol faces no charge of infidelity or significant crimes. Instead, as she presents herself as secure with her own homosexuality, the court pays noteworthy attention to her lesbian relationship as "immoral" and, therefore, she is considered unworthy of taking care of her daughter. Ultimately, as to avoid further humiliation and to still be able to see her daughter, Carol abdicates of Rudy's custody, but is, allegedly, free to live as she truly is.

While showcasing common archetypes of women in the 1950's, such as the working girl and the housewife, the film also disrupts them by establishing lesbian existences as worthy by not choosing to place it only in the shadows, as a secretive, omitted characteristic for the spectators. Carol and Therese's relationship, when first established to viewers, is not implied; their caresses and kisses are explicit. They exchange compliments, make plans for the future, and lift each other's self-esteem. At the same time, Carol's previous relationship with Abby is also addressed between the two characters; they are, and seem to be, comfortable with being lesbian women. Even Therese, whose feelings for Carol configure the first time she is being attracted to another woman, does not attempt to deny it. She confronts her roommate, a man who has romantic feelings for her, when he implies that loving a person of the same sex is not right. Both Carol and Therese, as they go on their road trip, express their normalcy in being attracted to another woman.

Through technical and stylistic choices, such as lighting and the positioning of the camera, the film suggests how both Carol and Therese are in charge of creating their own safe spaces as lesbian women within a period that threatens their safety, at the same time they attempt to coexist among the world outside of these spaces. While still in New York, prior to their road trip, their conversations are often in darker, poorly backlit places, with the exception of their first meeting in Therese's job. Additionally, the camera never frames them at the same time; instead, they are depicted in oppositional manner, facing each other.

After attending court, Carol changes her mind in a heated argument with Kyle and his lawyer, and decides to give up her daughter's custody in favor of her sexuality; she agrees to have periodic visits with her, but she refuses to live "against her own essence". Having set this agreement with Kyle, Carol invites Therese, who is now working full-time as an established photographer, for dinner, which she refuses. Nevertheless, while Carol is at the table dining with some of her friends, Therese appears in the restaurant. When their eyes meet, they smile, and the film ends with Therese walking towards Carol, as they gaze at each other.

Carol's denouement in the film resembles what Adrienne Rich had established as the ultimate price for resistance. She is forced to 'come out of her closet', one that made her existence as a lesbian possible within her present context, and as she manages to overcome this and publicly acknowledge her sexuality, she gives up her daughter's custody as a consequence. Her resistance as a lesbian, although freeing, carries a violation of another part of her subjectivity as an individual.

While queer cinema has often reinforced various sorts of violence as intrinsically linked with being queer, such as invisibility and stereotyped representations, in present times one of the characteristics of queer cinema is to subvert pre-conceived notions of how queer people can exist. In *Carol*, spectators are invited to enter the sites of resistance created by the main characters while they manage to actively negotiate the creation of these environments. Although there are consequences for Therese and especially Carol for succeeding in the acknowledgment of their sexuality, the film provides a closer, less typified look in queer relationships by establishing its normalcy not in opposition to heterosexuality but, instead, as equally valid. The film's ending, with the two characters gazing at each other in a public, well-lit place, reconfigures the normalcy of their relationship within a context that forces them to look at it as something far from normal and often punishable. The scene is resonant of Ki Namaste's suggestion of encountering forms of resistance 'in the borders', and in fact taking advantage of it. As both characters suggest, these can often be the healthiest places for queer people to occupy, since violence follows both in and out of the shadows.

3.2 Chimeras and Natural Women: The Fantastic Case of *Una Mujer Fantástica*

The many definitions for the word ‘fantastic’ (extraordinary, imaginative, exotic, strange) come into play in how Marina Vidal (Daniela Vega) is perceived by others in Sebastián Lelio’s *Una Mujer Fantástica* (2017). From one of its opening scenes, in which Marina is introduced as a singer in a restaurant, the audience’s eyes are fixed on her, including Orlando’s (Francisco Reyes), Marina’s boyfriend. As she sings Hector Lavoe’s *Periódico de Ayer*, both audiences, on and off the screen, contemplate her artistic talent.

After Marina and Orlando have a celebratory dinner, in which he gifts her with tickets to the Iguazu Falls, the film’s narrative takes a tragic turn when Orlando wakes up in the middle of the night, feeling ill. As Marina takes him to the hospital, he falls in the building’s stairs, leaving him with a bruise on his head. They arrive in the hospital and Orlando is taken by doctors for further examination, leaving Marina alone for a moment. When the doctor returns, he declares that Orlando has passed away. From this moment onwards, Lelio’s film unfolds a turbulent tale of how Marina, a transgender woman, is stripped away not only of her identity as a woman, but also of her right to mourn the passing of a loved one, because of her identity.

Throughout the film, there are several moments in which Marina’s identity as a woman is questioned and even denied. In the hospital, as the doctor is telling her about Orlando’s passing, his response to her introducing herself is asking if her name is a pseudonym. After she calls Orlando’s brother to inform him of his passing, she leaves the hospital, as she is not considered part of Orlando’s family. She is followed by a police officer who escorts her back to the hospital and demands to see her identity, which still shows her male name. The officer, constantly referring to Marina using male pronouns, begins to suspect of her involvement in Orlando’s death due to her leaving the hospital.

The aggressions towards Marina come even from people who were supposed to support her during the investigation of Orlando’s death. Adriana Cortés (Amparo Noguera), one of the detectives assigned to the case, initially doubts that Marina and Orlando were, in fact, a consensual couple, implying that Marina was paid by Orlando as a prostitute. Moreover, she vehemently implies that Orlando’s bruise on his head, caused by his accident on the stairs, was caused after a physical fight between Marina

and Orlando. While the detective states that she is ‘on Marina’s side’, she also makes remarks about having seen ‘everything’ in relation to women like Marina. On the one hand, she does not accuse Marina of murdering Orlando. On the other hand, she suggests that Marina had to defend herself from abuses caused by Orlando.

The film’s emphasis on the several micro aggressions that Marina endures after Orlando’s death is balanced with Marina’s own struggles as she is denied of her own grief. The editing intercalates the scenes of the interrogations with scenes in which Marina seems to look for ways of coping with the loss of her deceased boyfriend by throwing punches in the air and smelling his clothes on a wardrobe. These scenes, which mostly happen inside of their apartment, signal to a domesticity between Marina and Orlando that is never fully acknowledged by the others, as if they having a proper life as a couple is simply impossible. This is amplified when Orlando’s family, his son and his ex-wife, are introduced in the narrative as they demand that Marina returns several of Orlando’s belongings, including Diabla, Orlando’s dog, which is in Marina’s care.

The first time Orlando’s son visits Marina is also filled with provocations and insinuations regarding both Marina’s identity as a woman and her involvement in Orlando’s death. His main objective, which is to kick Marina out of the apartment, is accompanied by remarks and questions about Marina’s physical attributes as he asks “Are you operated? [...] I don’t understand what you are.” To which Marina replies: “I’m just the same as you.” As he once again demands an exact date for Marina to leave the house that she now owns, he violently pushes her to the wall, grabbing her shoulders in a gesture that indicates both curiosity and desire. As their faces come closer, he looks at Marina as he is ready to kiss her. “Incredible. My father was crazy.” he states, letting her go and leaving the apartment, not before her declaring to him: “My name is Marina.”

What follows, then, is the first of many scenes in which we see Marina facing a mirror, a motif that is repeated throughout the film as she is constantly referred to as a thing, as a non-human being, while trying to reaffirm her identity and her innocence, as well as to claim her right to mourn Orlando. After changing clothes and staring at her image in the mirror, she organizes her purse with personal items, such as lipsticks and keys, and comes across a key that has a keychain with the number 181 engraved on it,

which belonged to Orlando. She embarks on the car she needs to return to Orlando's ex-wife and, while going through a car wash and looking at the rearview, has a vision of Orlando gently smiling in the backseat.

The scene works as a reminder not only of who she truly is, but also of how Orlando perceived her. More than that, it helps to establish how Marina is denied from grieving the death of her boyfriend by continuously making Orlando as a present, lurking memory that emphasizes her sense of loneliness and confusion. As she drives to meet Orlando's ex-wife, she listens to and mumbles to Aretha Franklin's song (*You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman*. The lyrics, in which the speaker expresses her gratitude for feeling appreciated by her partner, encapsulates Marina's relationship with Orlando by highlighting how he saw her as a 'natural', real woman, despite the questions and concerns others had. Although it is possible to question what a 'natural woman' means in the contexts of gender, the scene is emblematic in its depiction of Marina's longing for acknowledgment in relation to her identity as a woman. Now that Orlando is gone, her struggle to be seen as a woman, not a thing, is emphasized by the absence of the one person who saw her as such.



Figure 23: Marina contemplates her reflection in the mirror. She sees herself as a woman, and so do the spectators.

The following scene has Marina meeting Orlando's ex-wife, Sonia (Aline Küppenheim), in a parking lot as she returns Orlando's car. The dialogue between the two characters exposes Sonia's concerns and disappointments regarding the end of her marriage, as she recalls how happy and 'normal' they were. As she apologetically cries, she expresses her disdain in relation to Marina and Orlando's relationship, referring to it as a 'perversion'. Moreover, echoing Bruno's discourse, she states: "When I look at

you, I don't know what I'm seeing. A chimera, that's what I see. Sorry", to what Marina replies: "There's nothing to forgive. You are normal."

This interaction, as well as Marina's physical examination later in the film, explicitly depicts the constant inquisitiveness surrounding a transgender person's genitals. Much like Ariel's in *Yo, Imposible*, Marina's genitalia is constantly under close scrutiny and debate. By referring to her as a chimera, Sonia emphasizes the view of transsexual individuals as otherworldly, as monstrous, as, indeed, fantastic, as something that defies explanation and that, by ultimately deviating from the established 'normalcy' of the body, is perverse. When addressing Marina as a chimera, a mythological creature that resembles a female monster with multiple animal body parts and, therefore, inhuman, Sonia fails to see Marina not only as a woman, but also as a human being. The following degradations to which Marina is exposed to continue to reinforce this in-humanization.

After returning Orlando's car, Marina is banned from going to his funeral by Sonia, who claims that this moment should take place amongst family. Moreover, she states how difficult and embarrassing it would be to explain Marina's presence to the other family members, who would also fail to understand what Marina is. In this scene, which once again highlights the difficulties to Marina in properly mourn Orlando's death, Sonia, for the first time, refers to Marina using 'Daniel', her male name. The shock in Marina's face, accentuated by a close-up, reinforces another violation to her integrity and humanity. By being denied of her name once again, Marina is left powerless and unable to say goodbye to her boyfriend.

The violations perpetrated by the medical and legal systems, often intertwined when it comes to transgender individuals, come together when Marina is coerced to have her body examined as the only possible way to free her from the police charges. Detective Sonia, still convinced that Marina was physically abused by Orlando, takes her to a medical examiner to take pictures of her naked body as ways of closing the case or taking it further. While Marina undresses behind a folding screen, she overhears the doctor and Sonia discussing the correct form to address Marina. The doctor expresses curiosity over whether to call Marina by her male name or not, as well as in relation to her body. He seems uncomfortable, as if now knowing how to act in Marina's presence, especially when she begins to remove her garment in front of the camera. When asked

to leave the room, Sonia decides to stay, and both she and the doctor gaze at Marina's genitalia as she removes the garment. The doctor gives Marina instructions, such as to raise or lower her legs, to which she uncomfortably obeys.

The raw and harsh atmosphere of the scene, with all the eyes focused on Marina's



Figure 24: Marina's body is closely inspected.

genitalia except for the viewers', conveys a sense of humiliation and degradation while at the same time it fulfills the curiosity regarding Marina's anatomical condition, previously brought forward by many characters, such as Bruno, Orlando's son. Overexposed, Marina undergoes a close and unnecessary inspection in relation to what has ultimately dispossessed her of her rights in relation to Orlando – her body. Although she is free of charges, since there are no bruises on her body, she is not able to escape the scrutiny regarding her identity as a transgender woman, once again reduced to a bizarre, almost animalistic medical case.

Following her medical evaluation, Marina visits her singing professor, who, despite acknowledging that he is unable to 'give her love', treats her with decency and affection. As she sings and he plays the piano, the scene changes to one that has Marina walking on a sidewalk amidst a windy weather. As the wind gets stronger, her singing voice reaches higher and more challenging notes. She bends on the wind with an expression of pain, making an effort to stand still as dry leaves move past her. Her talent as a singer, then, as well as her relation to music (as seen in the car scene in which she mumbles to *(You Make Me Feel) Like a Natural Woman*), is what seems to take her out of her reality, even if momentarily. The play on the word 'fantastic', previously used to refer to her body as incomprehensible, is accentuated throughout the film's musical

moments, in which Marina's aptitude for music seems to set her apart of the film's diegesis, attributing her a whimsical, almost magical characteristic.

This is accentuated by her visions of Orlando, and most specifically during a moment in which she enters a music club following the most aggressive and physical violation she suffers. After collecting her belongings from Orlando's apartment and realizing that their dog, Diabla, was taken away, she crashes into Orlando's funeral to Sonia's and the family's exasperation, and is quickly kicked out. As she walks on the street, she is approached by Bruno, who is in a car with some of his friends. They refer to her using male pronouns and words such as 'faggot' and 'monster'. They leave the car and start chasing Marina, grabbing her by the hair and throwing her into the car. As she tries to resist, pleading for the memory of Orlando, Bruno's friends begin to tape her head with duct tape, going around it for many times, until her face appears deformed due to the placements of the tape, which now covers her eyes and twists her lips.



Figure 25: Marina sees the reflection of her distorted, monstrous face.

After being thrown in an alley by one of Bruno's friends, Marina contemplates her reflection on the window of a car. Circling back to the first time she sees her reflection in the film, in which she is well-dressed and seemingly confident, it is possible to interpret how her reflection now shows her what she has been constantly reminded of being – a chimera, a monster, an aberration. Having her inner emotions suppressed and her body overanalyzed as inconceivable, Marina sees in her reflection how others have seen her following Orlando's death: as something grotesque and inexplicable.

As visually poignant as the scene is, however, the film still manages to subvert how Marina sees herself and, most importantly, how the spectators must see Marina. After leaving the alley, and seemingly disoriented, Marina enters a nightclub in which electronic music is playing. She wanders around and meets a strange man, who she eventually kisses. As the song progresses, the scene transforms into a choreographed dance number in which Marina and the others around her wear shiny, fringed vests. In what is clearly one of Marina's fantasies, she is carried upwards by the dancers, and floats up in the air facing the camera.



Figure 26: Marina confidently faces the camera and, consequently, us.

Marina's relationship with music, highlighted by her singing talent, her job as a singer in a restaurant and by her visit to her professor, is what enhances the duplicity of the word 'fantastic' of the film's title. If, on the one hand, she is perceived by most of the characters as a repugnant and abject being, often reduced to an almost mythical, less than human creature, on the other hand we are able to see her as a glorified and powerful woman. The scene, which is evocative of an epiphany in Marina's journey, also reestablishes her character as valuable and worthy of appreciation, even if inserted within such violent and oppressive contexts.

After leaving the nightclub and sleeping at a friend's house, Marina discovers the place in which Orlando's memorial will take place. She has her nails done in a salon and, while walking on the street, sees her reflection on a mirror carried by two construction workers. This time, her reflection is shaky, almost out of focus, until it eventually focuses and shows her, neatly dressed up, as she goes to her work as a waitress. While waiting on tables, she sees costumer's keychain that has the same patterns as one of Orlando's, and decides to ask him where that was from. When he

replies that was from his locker in a sauna called *Finlandia*, she leaves her work with Orlando's key and goes to the sauna in order to find out what he kept in his locker. She opens it and contemplates the inside of the locker in amazement. She leaves the sauna, and the camera focuses on the open locker, which is completely empty. As the scene fades to black, it becomes clear that, similarly to her scene in the nightclub, Marina has started not only to properly say goodbye to Orlando, but also to regain her confidence as a woman, despite being constantly not treated as one.

Much of her confidence regarding her womanhood and her right to mourn Orlando becomes evident when she goes to the funeral home, despite being previously advised by Sonia to not be a part of the ceremony. She arrives at the funeral home, and Bruno, Sonia, and Gabriel, Orlando's brother, pass her while driving home. As Sonia and Bruno shout at Marina, demanding that she leaves and calling her a 'faggot' and referring to her using male pronouns, Gabriel is the only one who refers to her as a woman. The scene emblematically ends as Marina, visually angry, climbs on top of the car and demands to have Diabla back. A full shot displays Marina on the roof of the car as its occupants wait in shock. This inversion in Marina's positioning in relation to the other characters, which have constantly deemed her as inferior, reflects both her overcoming of the violations she has endured so far and her realization that, contrary to what she was led to believe, she is rightfully designated to take care of Diabla. Much more than a pet, Orlando's dog, therefore, is a reminder of the domesticity and the intimacies of their relationship, which Marina is determined to acknowledge as valid.

After this confrontation, Marina enters the funeral home and, in another of her fantasies, sees Orlando, who passionately kisses her and leads her way to the crematorium. She sees Orlando's body, lying outside of the cremation chamber, and touches his hand. She sheds a tear and, as the workers push Orlando's body to the chamber's interior and light the fire, she is finally able to say her goodbyes. Back home, Marina lays naked in bed. A round mirror is positioned between her legs, and Diabla rests by her side. This one single shot, which frames Marina's reflection once more, is reminiscent of her journey throughout the film; instead of being determined by her genitalia or by the eccentric characteristics attributed to her by the other characters, Marina sees herself in the mirror as she truly is, as a woman, this time without any deformity or blur. The placement of the mirror between her legs reinforces that what she sees is more significant to her identity than the speculations regarding her genitalia.

Moreover, besides being a visually evocative of Marina's womanhood, the scene also establishes that Marina and Orlando's relationship was, indeed, worthy of acknowledgement, as Diabla is framed on the left side as a reminder of their romantic life together.



Figure 27: Marina's reflection is shown between her legs, with Diabla resting by her side.

The film concludes with Marina, having recovered her sense of womanhood and rightfully grieved Orlando's passing, getting ready for a performance in a theater, in which she sings to an audience. This time, her 'fantastic' musical talent is witnessed within the film's diegesis by other characters, who watch her at the center of the stage. In parallel with the scenes in which she faces a mirror, the scene seems to suggest that Marina is viewed as a woman not only by herself and Orlando, but now also by others, who contemplate her in awe and admiration for her talent as a singer, and not in curiosity or disdain towards her body. The film's ending, then, portrays Marina as a celebrated and cherished woman, displacing her from the previous situations in which she was regarded as abnormal.

3.2 Bodies, Identities and Medicalization: Analyzing *Yo, Imposible*

The feeling of not belonging and the inability to understand one's own body and desire is often marked by external reminders and factors that, when it comes to gender and sexuality, tend to reinforce both the expected standard to bodies and sex, as well as the dissident body as something to be cured or changed. When it comes to transgender and intersex individuals, as addressed in chapter one, the discourse regarding the 'correction' of non-conforming bodies is often present in the medical field. This discourse, brought forward in Lucía Puenzo's *XXY* (2007), has more recently taken a more graphic and sometimes equally metaphorical route in the Venezuelan drama film *Yo, Imposible* (2018), which serves as the object of analysis of this section.



Figure 28: Ariel is framed by a handycam in the opening of the film.

Directed by Patricia Ortega, *Yo, Imposible* is a colorless, almost lifeless film that tells the personal story of Ariel (Lucía Bedoya), a twenty-year-old who works as a seamstress in a textile factory and who suffers with the feeling of not belonging to two important aspects of her life: the social and the sexual spheres. An introvert, Ariel divides her time between working and taking care of her mother, who is admitted in a hospital due to her aggravated cancer. After having sexual intercourse with her then-boyfriend for the first time, Ariel experiences severe pains and bleeding, which are firstly diagnosed as vaginal stenosis. As a treatment for this diagnosis, she is advised by her doctor, whom she sees since her childhood, to make use of rubber dildos as a way of curing her condition. However, later in the film, Ariel discovers that, instead, she was born an intersex, and that she was subjected to cosmetic surgeries to conform to a female body, hence her discomfort in having penetrative sex. The reveal of the

mutilation of her body causes her to undergo a journey of self-discovery and acceptance.

Ariel's discovery, a secret shared only by her²¹ mother and her doctor, makes her question a series of roles that have been imposed to her since she was born, such as her arranged heterosexual relationships: echoing Adrienne Rich' essay on compulsory heterosexuality, Ariel is repeatedly advised by her mother to marry a man and have children. Instead, after being subjected to a severe and painful treatment, Ariel acknowledges her own body as it is, finding solace in her relationship with Ana (Belkis Avillares), one of her co-workers in the factory. In this sense, *Yo, Imposible* innovates in its depiction of such delicate themes in the Venezuelan context when it decides to tackle the traumas that involve intersex individuals and the imposition of standardized sexual and social conducts over its subjects.

Throughout the film, there are numerous elements and stylistic choices that emphasize Ariel's nonconformity to social norms and how she manages to subvert it, as well as her discomfort throughout her self-discovery. The soundtrack is one element capable of showing the internal/external discomfort in which the characters find themselves. During the opening scene (Figure 28), a sound that resembles sonar introduces the narrative of the film, along with images of the bodies of dolls and a camera strategically positioned for a personal statement when the viewer can see Ariel, for the first time, as she begins to tell her story. When Ariel sits down, a voice over asks her: "What happened?", to which she apathetically responds: "Nothing." The sonar sound, a device that determines the distance of a body through the sound it resonates, is symbolically of Ariel's own angsts, lack of agency and doubts. Throughout the film's narrative, Ariel tries to find out where she belongs to, where to look at, where to fit in, where to 'sound' back. Her response to the question, as well as her look of apathy while facing the camera, help to establish her initial passiveness in dealing with her own situation since, at the beginning of the film, much of her own agency is non-existent. Her doubts surrounding her own body and its discomfort are suppressed by how her mother controls her medical records and her 'secret'. Moreover, the camera is a

²¹ My choice of using female pronouns throughout this section is justified by how Ariel is referred to by others in the film. Since Ariel never specifies if she wishes to be called by different pronouns, it is possible to conclude that her identity is not strictly linked to them.

reminder of Ariel's constant exposure and analysis both in the medical field and in her relationship with her mother.

The *mise-en-scène* in the film works together with the soundtrack to create an uncomfortable, almost unbearable environment, which resembles Ariel's feelings of constant inadequacy and lack of emotions. Ariel's house, as well as the textile factory, is colorless and visibly decayed. Throughout the film, Ariel navigates environments that have many female mannequins and doll body parts, a subtle but recurrent reminder of the expected body standard that Ariel fails to accomplish. Moreover, it is possible to see how Ariel is surrounded by mannequins throughout the movie: from the interiors of the factory she works in, to a stranger carrying a mannequin behind her on the street, these stylistic choices serve the purpose of signaling to the artificiality of surgically-made female body parts, a metaphor that effectively suits Ariel's situation.



Figure 29: Ariel walks on the street with a female mannequin framed behind her.

Ariel's work as a seamstress can also be metaphorically read as her own treatment with the rubber dildos: as she slowly, but efficiently prepares her sewing machine, the camera focuses on the penetrating movement of going through the eye of the needle with thread. This action, although simple, gains another meaning as Ariel teaches Ana the same technique. We, as spectators, begin to witness Ariel's own acceptance and ownership of her body, which is achieved with Ana's help.

The sense of decay is also present in other environments of the film, such as the hospital and her bedroom. In the precarious hospital, Ariel visits her sick mother, who is

dying of cancer in a bed. Combined with the images of her mother's diseased body, the images of other diseased persons in the background point to Ariel's own 'disease'. The medical imagery, heavily emphasized through her mother's and her own appointments, creates a suffocating atmosphere that, combined with the sterile colors and artificial body parts, gives a sense that no life, or hope, can emerge from it.

Furthermore, it bears significance to address Ariel's financial situation. Her work as a seamstress in a seemingly precarious condition, as well as the highlighted poverty and underemployment that surround Ariel, is yet another layer of oppression that forbid her to have access to adequate medical and psychological treatment as a newly-discovered intersex individual. Moreover, the prominent Catholic imagery within her household, working as a reminder of the traditional family values passed on by her mother, constructs an atmosphere that constantly pushes Ariel to the margins and reinforces her sense of not belonging.

As the narrative progresses in the film, there are elements external to its diegesis in the form of real testimonies: in a documentary-style, intersex individuals stand in front of the camera to tell their stories related to their own sexualities and genders, signaling their lack of choice regarding their bodies and the mutilations they had endured. These are people who were born intersex and did not realize it until a certain moment in their lives. Later in the film, Ariel joins the testimonies, mixing fiction with reality, to tell her own story.

As Ariel endures her medical examinations after her first (and painful) sexual experience, the camera focuses on her face, highlighting her expressions of pain and discomfort, while the doctor's face is enclosed in the scene with an expression of concern. There is a lack of dialogue between them, a consequence of keeping Ariel's condition as a secret only shared between the doctor and her mother. The prescribed treatment, which involves the use of a rubber dildo every day for a month as a way of loosening her vaginal opening, causes even more pain and discomfort to Ariel, who bleeds in a bathtub after attempting it for the first time. As a result, Ariel's discomfort goes beyond the confusion and isolation of her mental and social well-being; the physical pain, resulting of her 'treatment', marks another violation of a character who, even if not born intersex, already experiences a life affected by poverty and

underemployment. Ariel's bleeding, then, signals the failure of her social and interpersonal relations, as well as of the medical system.



Figure 30: Ariel bleeds in a bathtub after her “treatment”.

Ariel's fate starts changing when Ana (Belkis Alvilares), a new worker, gets to the textile factory to replace her mother, as her condition becomes worse. As Ariel is assigned to train Ana on how to use the sewing machines, their relationship begins to blossom amidst the judgment and gossip of the factory's employees who, after finding out they have kissed in the factory's bathroom, begin to bully Ana with speculations regarding her sexuality, calling it a 'disease', and deeming Ariel the 'male employee of the month' with a message in the mirror besides a drawing of a penis, hence fostering her confusions regarding her sexuality and gender identity. As Ariel tries to escape the rumors and the bullying, her mother keeps reminding her that she needs to marry her boyfriend and consummate their relationship by giving birth to a baby. At this point,

every sphere of Ariel's life – her work, her family, her relationship – goes against her ability of making her own decisions. The film's title (*Being Impossible*), then, besides being a nod to her confusion in relation to her own body and sexuality, marks her own impossibility of fully existing and acquiring the necessary agency to deal with aspects of her life that were simply chosen and decided by others.

As Ariel and Ana's relationship begins to become more defined and Ariel becomes more accepting of her desires, she eventually experiences sex with Ana, to which she reacts with pleasure. Immediately after, she searches for answers regarding her own past, discovering a file with documents with pictures of her as a baby wearing male clothes, as well as medical records. Taking them to the hospital in which she was born in, she questions what she is and what has been done to her. As a doctor explains her intersexuality, as well as the cosmetic surgeries done to reduce the size of her clitoris, she boldly states: "I would have liked to make that decision."

As the secret is revealed to Ariel, the camera focuses on her expression of anger, with half of her face obscured and out of focus, a duality that encapsulates her newly-found identity. The previous scene, in which Ariel contemplates her reflection in a mirror positioned between her legs right after having sex with Ana, is representative of how Ariel has, throughout her entire life, attempted to be defined by her own terms. As she discovers the involvement of her mother in hiding her intersexuality and making the decision of 'becoming a woman' for her, through the cosmetic surgeries and the pre-arranged marriage and relationships, Ariel runs in anger. Later on, after contemplating the reflection of her naked body in a mirror, Ariel reveals her sexuality to Ana by stating: "I'm a freak of nature." Although she still retains such negative view of herself, Ariel begins, from this point, to not only question what has been imposed to her, but also to accept and own her body and sexuality, not defining them by her genitals. This process, which was marked by the opinions and definitions of others in relation to her, only becomes possible when another nonconforming person – Ana, a lesbian woman – sees her and accepts her as she really is. The scene is also reminiscent of the mirror scenes in *Una Mujer Fantastica* and in *Carol*, as the three scenes convey both acceptance and acknowledgement for the main characters' identities.



Figure 31: Ariel looks at her reflection in a mirror positioned between her legs.

After her discovery, two testimonies narrate their experiences as intersexual individuals. One of them, sitting closely to Ana, addresses the imposed female identity and how her family has thrown away everything that was masculine-related. The second intersex person shares their experience as their face is obstructed by a hand camera. There is a change of focus as the image of their face appears on the camera's monitor, this time blurring their body, which appears out of the hand camera's perspective, as she narrates: "It's hard understanding society and fit in this incomprehensible world full of intolerance. Sometimes I feel trapped in the wrong body as if I'm in a cage. They insist on changing us, on cutting us up." At this point, it is revealed that Ariel is sitting amongst the group, closely listening to the testimonies, with Ana by her side.

The film, however, never fully addresses whereas the testimonies are from real intersex individuals or if they are enacted by actors. To an unadvised audience, they may seem like paid actors, since Ariel and Ana sit amongst them. Moreover, the film does not present a purpose for Ariel being a part of this group, as it appears briefly only at the beginning and at the end of the film. Instead, the testimonies seem to serve the purpose of over explaining what the fictionalized portion of the film already successfully addresses, often drifting from Ariel's own story in order to stress the sufferings and turbulences of intersexuality.

One of the last testimonies Ariel listens to is of a mother describing her difficult relationship with her intersex child, who has passed away. As the mother cries, she states that she would like to ask her daughter for forgiveness one last time – for hiding

her intersexuality and for trying to change her. This scene heavily contrasts with Ariel's relationship with her own mother. The film then cuts to Ariel folding her mother's clothes on an empty hospital bed. There is a montage that intercalates two scenes: Ariel putting her baby boy blue clothes on the ground, and Ariel painting the nails of her dead mother and dressing her up in pink clothes. As she cries, Ariel puts her ear closer to her mother's mouth, but no sound come out of it. As a rite of passage, these two scenes symbolically represent the beginning of Ariel's new life as she leaves her past behind.

In her last testimony, Ariel states: "I... I don't understand anything. I don't know why... why they're putting in or taking things from people. I don't know why." The scene then cuts to Ariel putting her freshly-cut strain of hair inside of a wooden box. Now with short hair, Ariel puts the box besides a picture of her and her mother as a voice over questions her: "And how do you feel? Like a man or like a woman?", to which she replies, facing the hand camera: "I am whatever I want to be." The last scene of the film has Ariel and Ana passionately kissing on a bed. As Ariel smiles, Ana kisses her between her legs and the image fades, as viewers are left with Ariel's moans of pleasure.

Yo, Imposible ends with Ariel finding it possible for her to exist as an intersex individual without confirming to a strict notion of gender, body, or sexuality. Her solace in her relationship with Ana and her agency in relation to her own body, painfully acquired through several violations of her sense of self, finally enable her to feel like belonging to something that does not need to be explained or clinically analyzed. Her sense of self, in acknowledging her own identity, is reflected through her choices: she defines herself, she chooses her own clothes, she wears her hair as she wants to, and she abides by her desire to love another woman. She leaves behind the traumatic and violent experiences she has endured throughout her life, specifically in relation to her body and her sex life, and the film's ending, with her being able to enjoy sex and romance and her newly-acquired agency, signals to an existence that is freed from social, religious, and medical conventions.

While analyzing the stories of Carol, Therese, Ariel, and Marina, their encounters with violence are just as plural as the ways in which they manage to overcome them. For Carol and Therese, after having their relationship relegated to the margins and the

shadows – represented by the darkly-lit environments they occupy earlier in the film –, they are able to create and inhabit safe, brighter places in which they can not only exist as lesbian women, but also develop their romantic and personal subjectivities. After having such places used as object of blackmail, however, the film subverts what could result in Carol's hiding and shaming of her sexuality by making her choose not to hide her desire. Although she is forced to lose her daughter's full custody, her sexuality, equally a part of who she is, is not consigned to hidden spots anymore. Instead, during the last scene of the film, Carol and Therese are likely to be together publicly.

Carol's experience is marked by the psychological violence of surveillance and judgment, particularly from her husband Harge, who uses their child as a weapon in his attempt to control and punish Carol for her sexual identity. This emotional violence is not isolated to their relationship but extends to the societal judgment they both face. Carol is forced into hiding her desires, unable to express her love for Terese without fear of consequences. Her relationship with Terese becomes both a source of liberation and of great risk, highlighting the personal and social violence of living in an era that criminalizes lesbian love.

In *Una Mujer Fantástica*, the violations Marina experiences as a result of being a transgender woman are thoroughly explored to the point that she is stripped from her own humanity. After being banned from her boyfriend's funeral, incapable of properly and publicly saying goodbye to him, she experiences verbal and physical abuses that work together to deem her as subhuman – a chimera, a monstrous anomaly that defies and tarnishes the notions of normalcy protected and maintained by the other characters, who often fail to see her as a woman. She is called a chimera, a perversion, and has her face grotesquely taped as ways of reminding her that she is unnatural and, therefore, she is unable to express and feel human emotions. Through her journey in the film, however, Marina is never convinced of it; instead, her convictions about her womanhood (and her humanity), exemplified by her reflections in the mirrors and her love for Orlando and for music, work against the beliefs regarding her existence. Hence, Marina's journey is not one of self-discovery, like Ariel's, but instead one of reaffirmation.

The violence endured by Ariel in *Being Impossible* is primarily rooted in the familial and societal expectations that constantly remind her that she needs to marry a

man, even if it causes her physical and emotional discomfort, as well as her forced surgical modifications. Ariel's journey is one of self-discovery, particularly concerning her own gender identity. While the film depicts Ariel's interactions with her family and colleagues, her emerging sense of self is often suppressed and controlled in favor of a definition that gives no space for anything that is slightly distant from binary notions of gender. Her experience of violence is at once physical and emotional—her mother's rejection of her intersexuality and coercion into conforming to traditional gender norms, combined with the painful medical treatment she needs to endure to adequate her body to such norms, strip her from any agency she needs for her own understanding of her body.

The emotional and physical violence Ariel experiences is perhaps most palpable in the form of her family's doctor attempts to physically 'fix' her, viewing her condition as something to be corrected rather than embraced and understood. This is compounded by Ariel's own internal struggle with her identity, mirroring the societal struggle she faces as her body becomes the battleground for larger cultural forces at play. The tension between her authentic self and the roles imposed by her family and society creates a psychic violence that shapes Ariel's journey, culminating with anger and, lately, with comfort with an equally marginalized woman.

While the types of violence vary among Carol, Terese, Marina, and Ariel, there are key thematic similarities that underscore their experiences. All four characters navigate their lives as their identities and subjectivities are controlled or scrutinized, often being deemed immoral or unnatural. For Carol and Terese, the violence they endure, strongly rooted in lesbophobia and the expectations for women, forces them to create environments in which they can exist away from such expectations. Carol, while ultimately losing her daughter's custody because of her sexuality, faces the violation of two vital aspects of her life through surveillance and blackmail, while Terese faces her own emotional turmoil amidst the discovery of her desires. In Marina's case, as she is dehumanized and viewed as unworthy of mourn her boyfriend's death, violence is endorsed through the institutional and social rejection of transgender women, while Ariel experiences violence within her family's expectations for her gender and identity and within the medical system.

Ultimately, these narratives expose how anti-queer violence, far from being only physical, can be deeply psychological, emotional, and systemic. Whether through societal rejection, familial coercion, or the internalized violence of navigating identity in hostile environments, the characters of *Carol*, *A Fantastic Woman*, and *Being Impossible* shed light on the enduring struggles of queer individuals for self-expression and resistance in the face of oppression, at the same time they present characters that, more than subverting their own experiences with violence, are able to find solace and happiness amidst their turbulences without giving up their queerness. At the end of these films, instead, these characters acknowledge, embrace, and celebrate their own queerness.

CHAPTER IV: “AM I A FAGGOT?” HOMOSEXUALITY, MASCULINITY, AND RACE IN PRAIA DO FUTURO, MOONLIGHT, AND THE POWER OF THE DOG

There are two types of fear and courage, Speed. I act as if there is no danger. But you know that everything is dangerous in this endless sea.

Praia do Futuro.

In the previous chapter, my main focus was the experiences of the characters in the films considering how they are perceived by others as objects of scrutiny and examination due to their sexuality as lesbian women (Carol and Therese), their transgender identity (Marina), or intersex identity (Ariel), often recurring to the creation of safe places or finding strategies of reaffirmation to exist in such hostile environments. Moreover, their existences frequently clash with regulatory practices of gender and their social class, which determine their possibilities of resisting and thriving.

For the present chapter, I intend to expand the discussion of queer representation in cinema by tackling the elements of masculinity and race for gay men in the films *Praia do Futuro*, *Moonlight*, and *The Power of The Dog*. Similarly to Chapter 3, I will analyze each film individually, considering their on-screen features, as well as extradiegetic elements in the case of *Praia do Futuro*. My goal in grouping these three filmic analyses in the same chapter is to showcase how homophobic violence is regularly present in environments in which the ideal masculine figure is celebrated and envisioned as the ultimate goal for men, regardless of their social class or race.

4.1 “Warned:” *Praia Do Futuro* and the Defiance of Masculine Expectations

The narrative’s abruptness and blunt cuts in Karim Aïnouz’s *Praia do Futuro* (2014), more than signaling the characters’ movement and changes throughout the film, elucidates much of its reception in the Brazilian context since, like the film’s editing suggests, the audience’s expectations regarding the character of Donato (Wagner Moura) were often shattered, giving room to a narrative that posed several questions related to courage, emotional displacement, and manhood. As I shall develop further, by making use of rapid cuts and typical hyper masculine imagery and expectations, the film intentionally departs from traditional film genres, such as melodrama, and is built as a tale of self-awareness and reaffirmation.

Wagner Moura had fostered public notoriety in 2007 as Captain Nascimento in José Padilha’s *Elite Squad*. In *Praia do Futuro* he plays Donato, a lifeguard in Futuro Beach, in Fortaleza, Ceará. His professional and personal life suffers a radical change when he fails to save Heiko, a German tourist, from drowning. Konrad (Clemens Schick), a motocross pilot and the deceased’s best friend, is accompanied by Donato through the bureaucratic procedures to transfer the body to Germany. As Donato and Konrad interact following the incident, they feel a strong sexual connection. That will develop into a romantic relationship, which establishes the film’s themes of migration and displacement. When Donato migrates to Germany to live with Konrad, the romantic relationship between the two men continues to evolve, as Donato confronts the challenges of distance, cultural differences, and the impact of his past on his present self. Later in the film, after his younger brother Ayrton (Jesuíta Barbosa) shows up, Donato is forced to confront the clashing of his newly-found life with his previous one as a lifesaver amidst his feelings and desire for Konrad as well as his broken relationship with his brother.

The often non-linear, abrupt structure of the film’s narrative, accentuated with sudden cuts, as noted by Gatti (2016), helps to emphasize such clashing differences. Moreover, it also serves as a visual tool that constantly breaks the audience’s expectations, at the same time its few, direct dialogues leave much to the interpretation and inferences of spectators. The lack of flashbacks that would fill the gaps regarding Donato’s life prior to meeting Konrad, as well as his qualms with his own sexuality, enhances the audience’s interpretation for his motivations throughout the film, which are rarely justified. Instead, his migration and apparent abandonment of his younger

brother (as well as of his mother) can only be attempted to be justified through the analysis of short and fast cuts of his past and present life, as I will be developing below.

Before tackling the film's analysis, it is noteworthy to bring Moura's portrayal of Captain Nascimento in the box-office hit *Elite Squad* into the discussion, as it also holds a substantial role in the aforementioned audience expectations. Moura's portrayal of Nascimento, a tough and morally complex BOPE (Special Police Operations Battalion) captain, earned him significant public and critic recognition, including a Best Actor award at the 2008 Berlin International Film Festival, solidifying his status as a Brazilian leading actor and cementing his character's truculent persona in Brazilians' collective thinking. In José Padilha's film, Moura's performance was marked by a compelling blend of brute force and psychological depth, capturing the internal and external battles of a man trapped in the violent, corrupt world of Rio de Janeiro's favelas. Such militaristic role was emphasized by a mixture of aggression and power, qualities that were rooted in his character's moral conflicts and his struggle to uphold a code of justice in a broken system.

Contrastingly, whereas Captain Nascimento was authoritarian and hardened by a violent environment, Donato is a reflective and sensitive gay man, grappling with his own desires, emotions, and sense of self. His journey from Fortaleza to Berlin is not one of external conquest, but an inward exploration of love, loss, and identity. Therefore, *Praia do Futuro's* first shattering of expectation is the audience's, which, accustomed to Moura's portrayal of Captain Nascimento, was stunned by realizing that "Captain Nascimento" was engaging in consensual, loveable, and pleasurable gay sex. Gatti (2016) comments on the issue by describing how some movie theater's managers in Brazil stamped the word 'warned' on tickets as a way to alert moviegoers and prevent their exit from cinema rooms, as well as claims for reimbursement. This outrage by the public came from their realization that Moura was playing a homosexual character, and not one that resembled the tough and masculine Captain Nascimento. As the author describes:

What matters is that Moura acts as a gay character submerged in burning sex scenes and that, in some cities of Brazil, when they realized this, some spectators left the movie theater and walked towards the ticket office to demand their money back. According to distinct sources, these spectators were offended by seeing Captain

Nascimento having sex with another man, despite the ‘macho’ he looked like on the screen. Scared by what seemed to be a boycott, some movie theater’s managers were instructed to stamp a seal on the tickets, with the word “warned” (“avisado, in Portuguese), which would mean that the spectator were forewarned about the sex scenes and that they could not demand their money back since they had been warned. (p. 7)²²

This bold reaction towards the film, equally fueled by Brazil’s high standards of masculinity and rooted homophobia, as addressed on Chapter One, seemed to be anticipated by the film’s director, Karim Aïnouz, who categorized the film as a “macho melodrama” in a 2014 interview, as if mocking the public’s expectations, much like his own film does. However, as stated by Gatti, the film also distances itself from the traditional definitions of a melodrama, as it hardly showcases the emotional suffering often attributed to the genre. Moreover, Gatti also stresses the film’s success in depicting male subjectivities through its constant repetition of masculine imagery, with the characters playfully punching one another as a form of affection and hardly ever having expositive dialogues, making use of stern looks and expressions that enable the spectators to imagine and speculate their motivations and actions.

The film is divided in three chapters, each one centered on Donato’s internal conflicts. The first one, titled ‘*O Abraço do Afogado*’ (‘The Drowned Man’s Embrace’), poetically hints at Donato helping Konrad and their subsequent relationship, as well as establishing many of the film’s recurring themes and foreshadowing the later chapters. During a conversation with his younger brother Ayrton (played by Sávio Ygor Ramos in his child phase), Donato asks him: “What would you do if, one day, I disappeared in the sea?”, to which Ayrton replies: “You’re crazy, bro. You’re Aquaman. How can Aquaman disappear in the sea?” This dialogue is emblematic as it foretells Donato’s migration to Germany with Konrad, at the same time it establishes him as a superhero in

²² “Lo que importa es que Moura actúa como un personaje gay sumergido en ardientes escenas de sexo y que, en algunas ciudades de Brasil, cuando se dieron cuenta de eso, algunos espectadores salieron del teatro y marcharon hacia la taquilla para demandar su dinero de vuelta. De acuerdo con distintas fuentes, esos espectadores se ofendieron al ver al Capitán Nascimento haciendo sexo con otro hombre, en que pese lo macho que pareciera en la pantalla. Aterrorizados por lo que les parecía ser un boycott, algunos gerentes de cine fueron instruidos a estampar un sello en el billete, con la palabra “advertido” [“avisado”, em português], lo que significaba que los espectadores habían sido prevenidos sobre las escenas de sexo y que no, ellos no podrían exigir su dinero de vuelta, pues ya estaban advertidos.” My translation.

the eyes of his little brother who, fittingly, has the same name of a Brazilian pilot and national hero, Ayrton Senna.

After having failed to rescue Konrad's friend, Donato discusses the incident with a colleague in a locker room as they both change clothes. This colleague, who refers to Donato as 'macho', ironically points out the bravery it takes to be a motocross pilot, which suggests courage as a masculine virtue. Moreover, the atmosphere of the locker room, which is usually associated to displays of masculinity, is another layer that builds upon the masculine ideals that the film later subverts.

In a hospital room, Donato communicates Konrad of Heiko's drowning and that his body is yet to be found. Quiet, and displaying no apparent reaction, Konrad stands up and undresses in front of Donato, putting on his pants while exchanging a look with him. Later, as they leave the hospital, Donato offers a ride to Konrad, which he politely accepts before asking for a cigarette. As they walk toward the camera, the film abruptly cuts to a scene in which Donato and Konrad have intense intercourse in a car, as Donato is pleurably penetrated by Konrad. This sudden cut, besides purposefully interrupting the pacing of the film and smashing the previously-built images of standards of masculinity, hides from the audience the actions and dialogues that led the characters to the car. It allows the spectators to fill such gaps at the same time we are abruptly relocated to the inside of the vehicle.

A long shot of the car, which is showed parked on the side of a road as other cars pass by, works as a visual reminder that, although both characters do not feel embarrassed by their desires (on the contrary, they seem to be well-resolved with their sexuality), they are still 'on the margin' of what is expected of them as men. As the film later suggests, these expectations of masculinity are particularly high for Donato who, as a lifeguard, is deemed as a hero by his brother and by his colleagues. Inside of the car, however, as he discusses his life with Konrad and listens to him recounting his adventures with Heiko, it is as if they are placed within a parallel and secluded realm in which, contrary to what Donato is expected to perform on his daily life on the beach, he is able to be vulnerable, tender, and sensitive.

They gaze at each other, as a yellowy light cover their undressed bodies, while Donato comments on Konrad's tattoos with a look of admiration. There is an evident

sense of affection, and normalcy, as the characters share an intimate, yet deeply personal experience that is ultimately distant from the ‘macho’ stereotypes. Once again, even though the film does not clearly depict Donato’s experiences with his sexuality previous to this scene, he seems relaxed and calm, which opposes to his posture as a lifeguard and, moreover, far distant from Moura’s portrayal of Captain Nascimento, which elucidates much of the discomfort and outrage experienced by Brazilian conservative, heterosexual spectators who were abruptly positioned inside of the car with Donato and Konrad.



Figure 32: Donato's car parked on the margin of a road.

The film continues to intercalate images of explicit affection with ones that emulate punches, as well as subtle foreshadows of the narrative. Following an intimate moment in which Donato showers in front of Konrad and the beginning of the searches for Heiko’s body, Donato and his brother Ayrton are depicted playing on the beach lightheartedly exchanging punches. When Donato invites his brother to come to the water, Ayrton seems to be afraid of going deeper into the ocean, as if fearing he is going to drown or, more specifically, get separated from his brother. Soon afterward, Konrad passes through them, riding his motorcycle on the sand as they watch him from a distance. The scene is suggestive of the last scene of the film, in which the characters ride their motorcycles on a street in Germany.

The following dialogue, with Ayrton referring to himself as ‘Speed Racer’ and commenting on Konrad’s resemblance to ‘The Ghost Rider’, strengthens the film’s motif of presenting its characters as masculine and brave comic book superheroes. Nonetheless, it is worthy to analyze how the film constantly plays with the idea and depiction of bravery – through Donato’s profession and Konrad’s hobby as a rider –,

often displayed within public, open spaces, with the characters' vulnerability and softness in confined and less crowded places.

The film's second chapter, suitably titled "A Hero Broken in Two" (*Um Herói Partido ao Meio*), takes place in Germany, with Donato discovering this new world by Konrad's side. At the end of the first chapter, however, Donato is depicted on the beach during his training routine with other lifeguards as they exercise and practice what looks like to be defense strategies for physical assaults. The scene is heavily fragmented, with the men's body parts showed up close, highlighting their strong muscles and physiques as they defend punches and attacks. After they perform sit-ups while singing cadences, their movements and exercises are synchronized with the use of a whistle, which gives the scene an evident militaristic atmosphere.

The scene is evocative of two opposing features that are often related to masculinity. On the one hand, it showcases the use of discipline and a rigid routine, as well as the evident muscles, as synonyms of strength. On the other hand, by fragmenting the men's body parts while they closely engage in physical activities, the film attributes an almost erotic undertone to the scene, which is often perceived in homosocial environments and contexts. Moreover, by placing this specific scene prior to Donato's newly-found life in Germany, the film also suggests that his life as a lifeguard and, more than that, his life in general, can often be too rigid for him to feel like he truly belongs to such context. This is even more evident at the end of the scene, when, while all the other lifeguards enter the sea together, Donato watches them from a distance, isolated from the others.



Figure 33: Donato's training routine as a lifeguard. The shot emphasizes the men's muscles and strength.

Although it is not possible to determine if Donato's migration to Germany is also partly justified by his relation to a seemingly rigid environment, since the film never explicitly delves into his relationship with his sexuality and how it is affected by his surroundings, his countenance while walking through the streets of Germany is significantly happier and lighter. At first, his reaction might look like amazement and excitement for this unknown, yet exciting world, as shown in the scene in which he walks with Konrad, asking him how to say 'spring' in German. The scene abruptly cuts to Konrad's apartment, in an intimate scene where they passionately and playfully dance to Christophe's *Aline*, a romantic French ballad about a man who begs for his beloved woman to come back. They both carelessly laugh while dancing and singing, signaling their happiness, and even exchange playful punches, a recurrent movement in the film that, now, is done in a lighter and less contrived context. Following one of these 'punches', the scene then cuts to them ardently kissing, undressing, and having sex.

Another abrupt cut follows, this time showing Donato walking on the street, possibly around Konrad's neighborhood, with a loose smile on his face as he looks up at the sun. He enters a small market and buys groceries, making use of his early knowledge of the German language, as if already habituated to his newly-found reality. Contrastingly enough, these multiple sudden cuts showcase his changing in relation to the previous chapter, in which his posture around the other lifeguards was more stern. Moreover, it bears relevance to notice how his relationship with Konrad, previously restricted to sheltered places, such as the car on the margin of the road and the beach at night, has blossomed to one that is more domestic, sometimes showed in public, day-lit environments. This domestic intimacy is accentuated when Donato gets sick, probably with a cold, and Konrad takes care of him, even spoon-feeding him scrambled eggs, in a scene that, besides following their first serious argument, is characterized by its cozy and humorous atmosphere when Donato, smirking, signals that the eggs are unsalted.

Donato and Konrad's first conflict revolves around Donato's staying in Germany, and is the climax of the film's second chapter. Konrad asks Donato to not leave Germany, to which he angrily replies that he had a previous life, with a brother, a mother, and a job. Konrad replies, in German: "*du bist feige*" ("you're a coward"). In this simple sentence, two things signal to the film's recurring embodiments of masculinity. First, the notion of bravery, which was previously established as and related to masculine displays of courage, such as riding a motorbike and rescuing

people from drowning, is now relegated to having the courage to stay with another man in a foreign country and dealing with the repercussions of this choice, which would imply abandoning his life and family in Brazil. Second, Donato's anger when being called a coward is reflected on how he actually and violently pushes Konrad, suggesting a physical altercation that is significantly distant from the other punches delivered throughout the film.



Figure 34: Donato and Konrad having breakfast.

Following their argument, there is a moment of separation between the two. While Konrad races on his motorbike, Donato dances and drinks in the German nightlife. Walking on the streets, his aspect, once joyous for being in Germany, is now sad; he is, indeed, a 'broken hero', divided between his eagerness to return to Brazil and his willingness to stay in Germany. When he and Konrad finally meet up again on a rooftop, they make peace, have sex in Konrad's apartment, and Konrad accompanies him on the train to the airport. At the last minute, after the train's door closes, Donato remains sat still, making up his mind and deciding to stay in Germany. As they celebrate his decision by dancing on a nightclub engulfed by a red light, a gloomy instrumental guitar riff announces the beginning of the third and final chapter, titled "A Ghost Who Speaks German" (*'Um Fantasma Que Fala Alemão'*). As if a haunting entity, it hints the return of Donato's past life in Brazil in the shape of his younger brother Ayrton.

Now a grown man, Ayrton (Jesuíta Barbosa) arrives in Germany years after the events of the film's second chapter and looks for his brother, who now works as a swimming instructor. Ayrton, covered with a hoodie, enters the same elevator as Donato

and asks him, in German: “*Bruder, hast du mich vermisst?*” (‘Brother, have you missed me?’) Donato, stunned, is then grabbed on the waist and punched several times on the stomach by Ayrton, repeating the recurrent punches of the film but this time in a brute, almost cathartic manner as, amidst Ayrton’s punches, Donato hugs him.

Ayrton’s resentment is evident in a conversation he has with Donato at a pub, where he informs his brother that their mother has died over a year ago, as well as telling him how the beach has changed. In his voice and in his words, there is an evident sense of abandonment and disappointment, as his older brother, who was deemed ‘Aquaman’, a super-hero, has left his family for years without further announcements. His disillusionment and anger is expressed when he states: “You’re a selfish faggot. Who likes to get fucked from behind hidden in this fucking North Pole.” However, his homophobic remarks are much more rooted in his disheartening and rage towards his brother’s abandonment than in his repulsion for Donato’s sexuality.

In one of the last scenes of the film, Donato, Ayrton and Konrad, wearing biker suits, walk together on the sand while the two brothers have a conversation about being on the sea. Donato explains that, where they are, the ocean water moves forward and returns at night, leaving a huge strip of sand exposed. More than signaling their reconciliation, the scene ultimately works as a metaphor for Donato’s welcoming of Ayrton to his own ‘ocean’, his new life and territory. A different ocean, but nonetheless a welcoming and inviting one, as well as ever-changing. Ayrton, who has left his own ‘ocean’ to look for his brother, now sets foot onto Donato’s, getting acquainted with his brother’s vast openness as they slowly and painfully reconcile.

The film’s final scene, in which Donato and Konrad ride a motorbike with Ayrton riding another one right beside them, is juxtaposed by a voiceover of Donato reading what sounds to be an unsent letter to his brother. In this letter, more than explaining why he has not yet come back to Praia do Futuro, Donato shares how he feels in relation to Berlin and how the city makes him feel free. Addressing his brother as Speed Racer, he writes:

From Aquaman to Speed Racer.

I write to tell you I didn’t die. I just returned home. Here, in this subaquatic city, everything makes more sense to me. I don’t have to hide in the sea to feel at peace. Nor do I have to dive to feel free. And when they ask me how it was there, on the outside, I

tell of a boy who thinks he doesn't have courage, but it's the bravest lad I've ever seen. Skinny, when the world is strong. Thin voice, when everyone is buff. Small feet, when everyone is firm. I tell of the boy and I say that he is my brother. That he is me, on the day that I have the courage to accept how much I fear things. Because there are two types of fear and courage, Speed. Mine, which is from someone who pretends that nothing is dangerous. Yours, which is from someone who knows that everything is dangerous in this immense sea.²³ (PRAIA do Futuro. Directed by Karim Aïnouz. 2014.)

Although the film never explicitly delves into any tangible events with violence that Donato may have experienced in Brazil as a result of his relation with his own sexuality, which is never acknowledged by him as an embarrassment or hindrance for his happiness, his letter to Ayrton is exceptionally telling of his relationship with his past environment, heavily marked by displays and expectations of masculinity. By establishing Berlin as a place where he does not need to 'hide to feel at peace', it is possible to trace a parallel to the scene in which he lays with Konrad in his car, secluded from the exterior world, on the margin of a road. In Berlin, he walks with his head high, smiling, and dances with his lover to romantic French music. Moreover, his definitions for courage, which he uses to compare himself to his younger brother, shows traits not commonly attributed to 'macho' men (the thin voice, the slender body, and the small feet), are all used as part of *his* own courage when he acknowledges his own worries.

The last scene of the film, a testament of the two brother's reconciliation, is also reminiscent of Donato's disruption of such worries and fears, as the three characters cross the roads together towards the horizon, establishing the future possibilities for a new family nucleus that, more than crossing the barriers of continents, territories, and languages, has crossed the expectations of what binds a family together and what are the expectations for a man whose life had been unconsciously linked to masculine ideals of courage and masculinity.

²³ "De Aquaman pra Speed Racer. Te escrevo pra dizer que eu não morri. Eu só voltei pra casa. Aqui, nessa cidade subaquática, tudo pra mim faz mais sentido. Eu não preciso me esconder no mar pra me sentir em paz. Nem preciso mergulhar pra me sentir livre. E sempre que me perguntam como era aí, do lado de fora, eu conto de um menino que acha que não tem coragem, mas é o cabra mais corajoso que eu já vi. Magricela, quando todo mundo é forte. Voz fina, quando todo mundo é macho. Pés pequenos, quando todo mundo é firme. Conto do menino e digo que ele é o meu irmão. Que ele sou eu, no dia que eu tiver coragem de aceitar o quanto eu tenho medo das coisas. Porque tem dois tipos de medo e de coragem, Speed. O meu, é de quem finge que nada é perigoso. O seu é de quem sabe que tudo é perigoso nesse mar imenso." My translation.



Figure 35: Donato, Konrad and Ayrton crossing a foggy road towards an unknown future.

4.2 “*In Moonlight, Black Boys Look Blue*”: The Intersection of Race, Sexuality, and Masculinities in *Moonlight*

It is strikingly ironic that Barry Jenkins’ *Moonlight* (2016) has inspired such extensive academic discourse following its unexpected victory for Best Picture at the 2017 Academy Awards. This moment served as a significant and influential showcase for a queer film that not only starred black actors and was directed by a black filmmaker but also addressed critical issues surrounding masculinity and the societal expectations imposed on black men. The moment of disarray in which *La La Land* (2016) was erroneously announced as the winner in the Best Picture category underscores the challenges faced by *Moonlight* as a queer film in receiving the recognition and celebration it merits within the Hollywood context. The misannouncement exposes the systemic barriers and the persistent marginalization that such films encounter, revealing the difficulties in adequately acknowledging and embracing diverse narratives in mainstream cinematic culture.

At first glance, *Moonlight* starts off as a film centered on the United States crack epidemic in Liberty City, Miami, as its very first scene depicts Juan (Mahershala Ali), a drug dealer, discussing the state of his business with one of his partners. However, shortly after, the camera follows a little boy, Chiron (Alex R. Hibbert), being chased by other boys. He hides in a seemingly abandoned building, as the other boys continue to throw rocks against the building’s windows. This transition marks a shift in the film’s themes, establishing Chiron’s journey of acceptance and self-discovery amidst a harsh

environment that, much more than working simply as the narrative's background, is fundamental for its protagonist's growth. As the film progresses through three different phases of Chiron's life (childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood), much of his conflicts still mirror this opening chasing scene, as he attempts to navigate his personal discoveries as a black, gay man within a setting that constantly demands him to present himself differently.

After being found in the building by Juan, who was watching as he ran from the boys, a suspicious Chiron is taken to eat at a diner, refusing to answer any of Juan's questions. It is only in the presence of Juan's girlfriend, Teresa (Janelle Monáe), that he reveals his name, his nickname (Little), and that he lives with his mother (Naomi Harris). Since he refuses to return home, he spends the night at Juan and Teresa's house, being brought back to his mother the following morning. Later, the scene cuts to a group of school boys playing soccer in a field, as Chiron watches them from a distance. As he tries to be a part of the game by approaching the paper ball, some of the boys pull him away from it. He then decides to leave the field, only to be followed by his seemingly only friend, Kevin (Jaden Piner), who asks Chiron: "Why do you let them pick on you, man?", to which he replies, "So? What I gotta do?" "All you gotta do is show them niggas you ain't soft" "But I ain't soft." "I know, I know. But it don't mean nothing if they don't know." They jokingly wrestle on the grass, as if Chiron were displaying his strength. After they stop, Kevin states: "See, Little? I knew you wasn't soft."

This scene, being placed particularly early on the film, is packed with recurring motifs that reappear throughout its narrative during the second and third chapters of the film. Although both Chiron and Kevin are merely playing with how the former is perceived as 'soft' by others, and how he must find ways to not be seen as such, their wrestling denotes the predominant themes of masculinity and masculine performance of the film. By being perceived as 'soft' and 'weak' by other boys, Chiron undergoes a process to become 'tough' and 'strong', which is how he is seen by others at the end of the film.

The issue of masculine perception and performance is brought forward in the following scenes, in which Chiron appears outside of Juan's house, apparently looking for some type of solace. Juan takes Chiron to the beach and teaches him how to float and how to swim, in a scene that, severely contrasting with others in which Chiron interacts with another male figure, displays tenderness, trust, and companionship. It is also significant to acknowledge the presence of two elements that are present in two other noteworthy and turning-point events in the film's other two chapters: the color blue and water, both signaling his sadness and his movement towards change.



Figure 36: Juan teaches Chiron how to swim and float.

One of the turning points of Chiron's journey in this first chapter is the conversation he has with Juan following their swimming lesson. Recounting an early experience with an old woman in his childhood, who commented on how, in moonlight, black boys look blue', Juan uses this anecdote to tell Chiron an advice that unintentionally fits his previous conflict regarding both his 'softness' and the environment that surrounds him: "At some point you gotta decide for yourself who you gon' be. Can't let nobody make that decision for you", Juan states, as Chiron stares at him. The dialogue also serves as a foreshadowing of Chiron's future experiences throughout the film, as they would be marked by his attempt of distancing himself from other people's perception of himself.

Chiron is brought to his house by Juan and finds his mother acting nervous and in the company of a strange man. It is the first glimpse in the film that shows his mother as a drug user, a reality that Chiron despises, and that opposes the apparent normalcy and calm domestic life he experiences with Juan and Teresa. However, shortly after, it is revealed to the viewers that Juan is responsible for supplying crack to Chiron's mother. The following scene, in which Chiron's mother appears against a purple-lit

background as she shouts inaudible words at him, a dramatic instrumental music plays as he melancholically looks at her, fostering his conflicts with his mother and deepening the turmoil he faces. It is a moment that directly clashes with the following scene, in which he sits at the dinner table with Juan and Teresa in an organized, sun-lit home.

His newly-found relationship with them, as well as the sense of safety and domesticity of their house, provides him an environment in which he is able to open up and express how he feels. “I hate her”, Chiron comments on his mother as Juan mentions seeing her the previous night, to which he seems surprised. The scene cements his trust in Juan and Teresa amidst his school bullying and his mother’s drug addiction. He abruptly asks: “What’s a faggot?” With a concerned look on his face, Juan slowly answers: “A faggot is... a word used to make gay people feel bad.” Chiron: “Am I a faggot?” Juan: “No, no. You could be gay, but you ain’t got let nobody call you a faggot.” Juan and Teresa explain that he does not have to know now if he is gay, as he will eventually find out on his own.



Figure 37: Chiron attentively listens to Juan talking about what being gay means.

Chiron’s reaction to Juan’s words portrays a sense of relief he has not previously experienced in any of his interpersonal relations. The film makes sure to express this through the vivid colors of the scene, which takes place by day, opposing to the dirty and poorly-lit house he lives in with his mother, as well as the abandoned building in the beginning of the film. However, the scene, which serves as the closure for the film’s first chapter, ends with Chiron asking Juan if he sells drugs to his mother, which he confirms. By establishing this conflict at the end of the chapter, following a conversation that for once makes Chiron feel safe and cherished, the film circles back to the social scope that engulfs all the characters of its narrative – the US crack epidemic. It is this reality that traverses Chiron’s individuality, defining much of his

social roles as a black, poor boy, whose 'softness' is deemed as weakness amidst his surroundings. Such environment, as it becomes evident in the second chapter of the film, dictates his behaviors, as well as his strategies of surveillance and performance, while trying to make sense of his sexual discoveries.

The second chapter starts with Chiron (now played by Ashton Sanders), now a teenager, once again being bullied by a classmate, who comments on how he is going through "women's problems". The scene then cuts to him watching a group of boys from a distance, echoing the opening scene of the film in which he hid from the boys chasing him. After going home, he finds his mother, clearly aged and in a worse condition, who tells him he needs to look for another place to spend the night since she is having someone over. He sleeps at Teresa's, who comments on Juan in the past, implying that he has passed away. The following morning, as he returns home, his mother appears, visually nervous and with signs of abstinence, and aggressively demands him money, arguing how she is his mother, not Teresa. He reluctantly gives her money and goes to school, where he is once again followed by two bullies who make offensive remarks about his mother, as well as implying that he is gay because of the way he walks and the clothes he wears. He wanders off, walking around subway stations and sleeping on trains, avoiding coming home to his mother.

These two events – his mother's spiraling drug addiction and the persistence of the verbal abuse he endures by his colleagues – culminate in another transformative moment that, much like his swimming lesson with Juan, is depicted with the presence of water and the color blue. Sitting by possibly the same beach he learned how to swim with Juan, Chiron is surprised by Kevin (Jharrel Jerome), who appears out of nowhere and offers to share a joint with him, which he accepts. Their conversation, ranging from smoking, his mother, and the beach, deepens as Chiron comfortably opens up about his desires and fears. As they discuss how the landscape makes them want to cry, Kevin asks: "What you cry about?", to which Chiron replies: "I should have cried too much sometimes I feel like I'm just gonna turn into drops." Kevin: "Just roll into the water, right? Roll out into the water just like all these other muthafuckers around here trying to drown their sorrow." Chiron: "Why you say that?" Kevin: "I'm just listening to you, nigga. Sounds like stuff you wanna do." Chiron: "I wanna do a lot of things that don't make sense."

The blue hues of the scene suggestively mirror the anecdote told by Juan earlier in the film in which he is told that ‘in moonlight black boys look blue’, with ‘blue’ referring both to the scene’s lighting and Chiron’s admitted sadness. Kevin and Chiron’s conversation, marked by a candid and rarely seen openness in Chiron, culminates in their faces approaching and eventually kissing, which is followed by a moment of sexual intimacy. Hence, Chiron’s self-discovery, depicted in the same environment he once bonded with Juan, but now at night, emphasizes his melancholy as he realizes his sexuality ultimately defies the expectations for black men inserted in his reality.



Figure 38: Kevin and Chiron kiss in front of the ocean.

In this sense, the film succeeds in acknowledging and highlighting black, gay relationships as valid. More than that, as Chiron and Juan’s relationship demonstrates earlier in the film, much of the film’s merit also relies on the representation and normalization of affection between black men, whose standards of masculinity are frequently defined by the complete erasure of fondness and care between two men, especially for Juan, whose social role as a well-known drug dealer demands for his constant displays of power and authority. In Chiron’s case, his dislocation from the projected demonstrations of masculinity are noted by others, hence the bullying from his colleagues and even from his mother, who mockingly comments on the way he walks and present himself. By having Chiron opening up with Kevin and kissing him, the film distances Chiron from the stereotypical black, gay man, at the same time it demonstrates the harms imbued in this stereotype when he externalizes his sadness.

Directly working as a counterpoint to Chiron’s self-discovery, Kevin’s journey in the film is also relevant for the depiction of such harms, even though the film is not focused on him. Following the night they kiss on the beach, Chiron watches as Kevin

chats with Terrell (Patrick Decile), Chiron's bully, during lunchtime at school. Terrell talks about a game they used to play in middle school, called 'knocked down, stayed down', which consists in punching another boy in the face until one of them is knocked out. He asks if Kevin would do it with somebody else, which he uncomfortably agrees. Later, in the school patio, Terrell demands that Kevin punches Chiron while other students gather around them, shouting at him to 'hit that faggot'. Chiron, keeping a serious face and not fighting back, receives the punches while Kevin pleads him to stay down. Once he is knocked down on the floor, Terrell and others punch and kick him, leaving his face severely injured.

The scene highlights Kevin, who the night before had kissed Chiron, as being a part of such violent game in order to prove not only his own masculinity, but his disdain for another 'faggot' in front of others. His discomfort in punching Chiron and watching him standing up with a serious face, besides emphasizing his unwillingness to do it, helps to illustrate how he is also affected by the standards of masculinity within their microcosm, since he is forced to hide his own desires and sexuality as a way of not being bullied by others. On the one hand, in accepting to be a part of such violent game, and by doing it in front of the other boys, he proves himself as a man and, consequently, has access to the validation of others who will not call him a faggot. On the other hand, he seems to be aware of his hypocritical behavior as Chiron looks him in the eye, as if reminiscing about the previous night and the exchanges they had. The scene, therefore, is packed with insinuations regarding displays of masculinity and their effects on gay, black men, as well as working as a turning point for the following events of the film and much of the development of the third and final chapter.

After refusing to press charges against the bullies despite being advised to do so by a school counselor, Chiron arrives at school in the next morning and walks to his classroom with a confident and determined look on his face. He grabs a wooden chair and bashes it against Terrell, who immediately falls on the floor, seemingly unconscious. After being restrained by the teacher and by other students, he is taken out of the school by police officers and, as they drive him away, he sternly gazes at Kevin, who watches him from one of the school's entrance. The scene then cuts to a dream sequence of the same moment in which Chiron's mother yells at him in the first chapter, but this time it is possible to hear her screaming 'don't look at me'.

Now an adult man, Chiron (Trevante Rhodes) apprehensively wakes up from this dream and washes his face. Once again, the presence of water and the blue hues symbolize a new transformation for the character, which is reinforced by the opulent way he presents himself now, with gold grills on his teeth, a gold watch on his wrist, and a gold crown sitting on his car's front window pane. Now a prominent drug lord in Atlanta, Georgia, the place he was transferred to after smashing a chair on Terrell, Chiron shares his time between running his business and visiting his mother, who now lives in a nursing home as a recovering drug addict. One night, he receives a phone call from Kevin (André Holland), who now works as a cook. He apologizes for the way he acted years ago, referring back to the 'knocked down, stayed down' game and its consequences for Chiron, and invites Chiron to pay him a visit.



Figure 39: Water and blue once again symbolizing a transformation for Chiron.

Before driving to meet Kevin, Chiron stops at his mother's nursing home. Now aged and sober, she pleads him to stop trafficking drugs and asks him for forgiveness, stating that, although he does not have to love her, she still loves him. They both cry and, enhancing the dramatic charge of the scene, both characters are pictured wearing blue. While Chiron hugs her with tears in his eyes, he seems to have encountered solace in his relationship not only with his mother, but with aspects of his past. As the film later suggests, this marks the beginning of his amends with his childhood self, who, at this point, seems to have been concealed as a way of him escaping what 'Little' had endured and what he represented.

He then drives to Miami, with a scene of a group of people playing on the beach superimposed on him. He arrives at Kevin's restaurant, who fails to recognize him at first glance. Their eyes finally meet, with a close-up of their faces enhancing their surprise. Kevin leaves to prepare him a meal, and the camera heavily focuses on the

food and on Kevin's preparations, such as chopping chives and assembling the plate, in a clear suggestion of comfort and domesticity, which lacked in Chiron's childhood and was later found in his relationship with Juan and Teresa. Kevin serves the food and pours wine for Chiron and for him, starting the conversation by stating that he had a child years ago and spent some time in prison, to Chiron's surprise. Their conversation takes a deeper, more personal turn when Chiron admits that, since being transferred from Liberty City after attacking Terrel, he had turned to pushing drugs, to which Kevin responds with a noticeable disbelief by stating, "That ain't you, Chiron." Chiron: "You don't know me." Kevin: "I don't know you?"

They stare at each other, with their looks implying that Kevin is referring to the night they kissed on the beach. This marks the beginning of both their reconciliation and their acknowledgement of their feelings for each other, which is emphasized by Kevin putting on Barbara Lewis's *Hello Stranger* on the restaurant's jukebox. The song's lyrics ("I'm so glad/You stopped by to say hello to me/Remember that's the way it used to be/Oh, it seems like a mighty long time") function as an unspoken dialogue between Chiron and Kevin who, silently looking at each other as the song plays, are touched by a thin blue light that comes from the restaurant's exterior. More than simply signaling two friends reconnecting after many years, much of the scene's emotional charge lies within its emphasis on the looks their exchange, as if reminiscing on their experiences as teenagers and what followed their kiss on the beach. To Chiron, as he later externalizes, that night marked his first and only romantic experience. As for Kevin, his apologetic expression suggests his remorse in relation to how he acted following that night.

They leave the restaurant and, after passing in front of the beach, they drive to Kevin's house. Once again focusing on domestic life, they begin to talk about how things have changed as Kevin prepares tea. Asking "who is you?", Kevin notes Chiron's different appearance, signaling his new style and attitude. By having Chiron explaining that he started over after being transferred to Atlanta, the film explicitly signals to his toughness in opposition to his early 'softness'; now, Chiron is perceived as threatening, as dangerous. As a result from his experiences that diminished him for not being 'masculine' enough, the present Chiron seems to distance himself from his 'Little' nickname, but is affectionately seen by Kevin, who still sees and cherishes him as his younger self.

When Chiron finally admits that Kevin was the only man (and person) that had ever touched him, they once again gaze at each other. As a tender piano starts to play, the scene then shifts to Chiron resting his head on Kevin's shoulder as he caresses his head. There is a sense of intimacy to the scene, in which two grown men, having endured the consequences of previously suppressing their feelings for each other due to the environment they inhabit, are finally able to put their sufferings and concerns aside. Chiron, having built a new tough persona that repressed his young desires and behaviors, is now vulnerably depicted as he is the one receiving comfort from another man.



Figure 40: Chiron rests his head on Kevin's shoulder.

The film emblematically twists the ideals of masculinities for black men by showing their vulnerabilities and referring to their relationships as worthy to be seen and understood by spectators. In its conclusion, with a shot of little Chiron on the beach turning his head to face the audience while the blue moonlight covers him, it highlights the fulfillment of his journey of self-acceptance and understanding. In a context that continually reminded Chiron of his 'weakness' in all spheres of his existence, with his experiences of violence that are both direct and insidious, having him unashamedly express sensitivity for another man disrupts the expected behavior for black men. Moreover, Chiron's story is a poignant exploration of how identity, particularly a marginalized one, becomes a site of violence, where both internal and external forces shape the individual in destructive ways. His journey underscores how expectations of race and sexuality often intersect to create examples of compounded violence that overlaps physical and emotional abuse.



Figure 41: young Chiron, bathed in moonlight, faces the audience.

4.3 Dynamics of Power and Masculinities in *The Power Of The Dog*

Set against the backdrop of arid Montana in the 1920's and based on Thomas Savage's novel of the same name, Jane Campion's *The Power of the Dog* is the most recent film selected for this corpus, being released after I started working on this dissertation. As I watched the film, I could not help to identify a great number of similarities to the films I had selected so far, especially in relation to its displays of masculinity which, in retrospect, ended up being the conductive wire of most of the present chapter. Moreover, as a Western drama film, its similarities with *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) in terms of setting and narrative progression made it feel like this film should also be included in this research, as a full-circle, since much of my motivation to write it comes from my initial response to Lee's film. The following analysis of Campion's film, then, concludes this chapter and poses more questions to be addressed in my final remarks.

The film opens with a question that, besides establishing the troublesome family dynamics explored during the course of its narrative, accentuates a recurring question in relation to masculinities for gay men: what constitutes a man? "What kind of man would I be if I didn't help my mother? If I did not save her?", Pete Gordon (Kodi Smit-McPhee) asks, in a voiceover as the opening credits roll. Throughout the film, we encounter several types of men, often clashing amongst them, and often finding ways of proving how much of a man they are.

Rancher brothers Phil (Benedict Cumberbatch) and George Burbank (Jesse Plemons) are early examples of different masculine portrayals. Whereas Phil embodies a sturdy, almost pathological form of masculinity, cursing, priding in not taking baths and in manual labor, George appears calm, emotionally stable, and neatly dressed as

they ride their horses towards Rose's (Kirsten Dunst) inn. The scene then cuts to a close-up of Rose's son, Pete, as he delicately and meticulously crafts paper flowers to be used as table decorations for the inn and, as showed later, for the tomb of Pete's father.



Figure 42: Pete crafting paper flowers.

The paper flowers are a main starting point for the dynamics of their relationship throughout the film. Pete, who helps his mother at the inn, is later subjected to several forms of humiliation and mockery by Phil, who despises his effeminate and delicate ways. Phil's association of flowers with femininity and inferiority is evident when, amidst the jokes of women made by the other men who are having lunch at the inn, he grabs a flower from the table and asks: "I wonder what little lady made these." He even mocks Pete's use of a cloth to clean wine drops from the costumers, causing a burst of laughter from the other men on the table. This interaction reveals more about the relationship between Rose and her son, whom she protects and defends from these remarks. As if already used to these remarks, Rose removes the remaining flowers from the table with a look of disdain.

Rose and Pete's relationship also holds a significance importance in the film. Once Rose marries George, Phil's bullying becomes progressively worse and, a result, Rose relies on alcohol to cope with her anger. Although one could argue that she plays a passive role in mediating her son's bullying, it is later revealed that her alcoholism mirrors the one of Pete's father, who committed suicide a few years prior. Moreover, as I shall develop further, Pete's reaction towards his bullying and the mockery he endures

from Phil and others is hardly passive and does not go unnoticed by him, who constantly works in favor of protecting his mother.

As a response to Rose's estrangement, George demonstrates to be gentle and caring towards her, even helping her with her work at the inn. To Phil's dissatisfaction, who implies that Rose is only interested in the Burbank's money, they end up marrying without telling him. Angered and taken by surprise, Phil punches a mare, calling her a 'whore' and a 'bitch'. More than showcasing Phil's violent temper, the scene also emphasizes his disdain for women, as he punches the mare in clear anger towards Rose. Combined with his mockery of female traits and his constant jokes about how women are only worthy for sex, the scene stretches his perception of 'losing' his brother to a strange, unknown woman, as well as to her effeminate son.

As ways of coping with his frustration, Phil walks to the barn and touches Bronco Henry's saddle. Prominently displayed, the saddle is surrounded by heart-shaped spurs and, fixated to the wall, lies a sign that reads 'In loving memory of Bronco Henry – Friend – 1854 – 1904'. Early referred to as a close friend of the Burbanks, Bronco Henry is a central, although absent, figure throughout the film, as well as fundamental for the understanding of Phil's actions and psyche. Their bond is explored through Phil's perspective and, while the film never provides clear answers, it is implied that they shared a deep, possibly romantic relationship, as Phil often refers to Bronco with a sense of admiration. He constantly highlights his skills as a cowboy, in an idolization that is even more affected because of Bronco's death and consequent absence. In direct opposition to his reactions to women and to what is feminine, his relation with Bronco is characterized by adoration; the saddle, adorned and exposed in an honorable place, resembles a shrine both for Phil's memory of Bronco and for their lost relationship. Moreover, his hand gestures are suggestively erotic; there are constant close shots of his hands as he eagerly caresses and polishes Bronco's saddle.



Figure 43: Phil polishing Bronco's saddle.

After polishing the saddle, Phil goes to the woods and enters a bivouac, built by him, to take a bath in a lake. He undresses and smears mud onto his naked body before jumping into the water. The sense of seclusion of the scene, as if spectators are witnessing something that they are not supposed to, is highlighted by how the camera is positioned on top of the water, framing Phil amidst this hidden environment that, later, is entered by accident by Pete, shifting their relationship and adding new layers to Phil and Bronco's relationship. Since we as viewers have access to this private and sheltered aspect of Phil's life, it is as if we are trespassing Phil's inner moral dilemmas; instead of only being the brute cowboy he presents himself as at the exterior world, this sheltered and closed environment produces a hint of what lies underneath his behavior towards other people, as well as anticipating the discovery of a secret regarding his relationship with Bronco, later discovered by Pete.

In preparations for an important visit by their parents and the governor, in which Rose will be introduced as his wife, George alerts Phil that he should take a bath before attending to the table, which causes him to get even more aggressive towards Rose. As Rose practices playing the piano and fails to play the song correctly, he teases her by playing the same song on his banjo. When the night of the dinner arrives and she is unable to play, she is left embarrassed in front of George's parents, humiliated and angry, which underscores Phil's power over her, as he ironically makes remarks about Rose not being able to play the piano while whistling to the song she wanted to play. This incident fosters Rose's alcoholism, which later is noted by others as she gets weaker and sicker after hiding bottles of liquor in her house. When Pete returns from college to

spend his summer vacation with his mother, he is one of the first to notice his mother's condition and how it is caused by Phil's aversion of her. This ultimately leads to his plan of poisoning Phil.

Pete's experience with medicine is a key aspect for the character's development as it fundamentally aids him in his pursue of protecting his mother, thus establishing a different type of power for him that, besides being opposite to Phil's, enables him to overcome Phil's continuous mistreatment of him and of his mother. The film even presents a rupture of the given expectation of Pete's gentle and caring trait when he captures a bunny, which he shows to his mother as ways of cheering her up. When one of their maids decides to take a carrot for the bunny, she goes upstairs and finds Pete dissecting the bunny's corpse, making notes and studying its body parts. The gruesome scene, besides evoking that Pete is not as innocent and/or helpless as Phil (and Rose) suggests, also demonstrates that his knowledge, though not compatible to the masculine displays of it, such as taking care of the cattle, riding horses and pasturing, can still be used and valued for the achievement of his goals. Hence, the film emphasizes a duality of powers, one that is strictly related to brute force and one that relies on intellect and research. As the film progresses following this scene, both types of power clash until its final scene, where Pete triumphs and is able to 'save' his mother from Phil.

The power relations embedded in the film, therefore, are established through Phil. This becomes evident when specifically analyzing the way he mistreats not only Pete, but, even more so, Rose. He constantly criticizes her, unabashedly mocking her alcoholism, besides establishing a relationship that is borderline surveillance. He watches her from a window, for instance, as she desperately tries to find a bottle that contains liquor. Once again, he whistles the same song she attempted to play at the piano, which causes her to undergo a sense that resembles madness. His sadistic behavior, particularly towards Rose, is not completely justified in the film, but it is possible to infer that his evident negative reaction is a result of how she has come between him and his brother, signifying his own loneliness. Furthermore, as she (and Pete) exhibits the qualities he considers unbearable, and after losing Bronco, his cruelty arises from his attempt to appear strong by repressing his vulnerability, which he shields within his shelter. Overall, his unresolved feelings in relation to Bronco seem to be the source of his inner conflicts and frequent isolation, contributing to his maintaining of his masculine stereotypes and the suppression of his desires, especially amongst men

that, although often portrayed in moments of homosociality, such as in the scene in which they bathe at the river, still take pride in their crude displays of masculinity.

His vulnerability and desires come forward, firstly, to the viewers, in a scene where he caresses his body with a scarf that has the initials BH, for 'Bronco Henry'. He covers his face with the scarf, his naked torso bathed in sunlight, and later masturbates using it. The scene, despite evocative of sexual desire, also cements that his relationship with Bronco had been more than admiration and idolatry; it suggests not the confirmation of their romantic relationship, but that Phil had nourished romantic and sexual desires for another man. Later, it is Pete that has the same realization, as he accidentally discovers Phil's bivouac and, inside of it, a box with homoerotic magazines, possibly the property of Bronco. He then exits the bivouac and watches Phil from a distance, as he bathes in a river with Bronco's scarf around his neck. Much like the viewer, Pete witnesses Phil's secret, and is startled when Phil turns around and begins chasing him, yelling at him to get away, as he had just entered Phil's private domain and, consequently, had gained access to a part of Phil that he has hidden from others.



Figure 44: Phil caresses his body using Bronco Henry's scarf.

What makes the scene emblematic are the consequences of Pete's spying. Given how Phil has treated him, the natural expectation would be for Phil to intensify his bullying in response to Pete's wrongdoing. Instead, this moment marks the start of Phil's reconciliation with Pete. Whether it's because he now sees Pete as a victim and recognizes how poorly he has been treated by both Phil and others, or because he wants to keep Pete closer after his secret is exposed, Phil begins to show care and respect for him, even going so far as to teach him how to braid ropes and ride horses. This sudden change is evidenced when, during a scene of what seems to be a moment of relaxation for his men, George, Rose, and the ranch's employees, Pete is shown walking amongst

the men towards a tree to observe a nest of birds. As he walk towards the tree, the other men laugh and utter shouts of ‘faggot’ and ‘pansy’ and burst into laughter. When Pete walks back to his mother, Phil calls him, making sure that he should be addressed as ‘Phil’, and not as ‘Mr. Burbank’, hence strengthening their relationship as less formal and rigid. As Pete carefully listens to him, Phil comments on how he is going to finish his rawhide rope and give it to him as present, so he can be taught how to use it. As Pete smiles and returns to the company of his mother, she stares at Phil irritably, as if she knew he were lying to her son.



Figure 45: Pete walks with his head high while Phil's men utter homophobic remarks.

The scene, more than establishing this newly-started relationship, is also poignant for its demonstration of how Pete deals with the homophobia he endures. As he walks listening to the homophobic remarks of Phil’s men, the camera frames his full body from a distance, alone amongst the other men, his posture erect, with his head high and his step non-hesitant. He does not demonstrate to be upset or angry with the remarks; instead, he plainly ignores them, deciding to focus on his own interests (the birds). This attitude while on the face of oppressive words aimed at ridiculing his effeminate walk not only subverts the idea of possession of power, as the men’s remarks hold no effect on him, but it also establishes Pete as visually superior and as the focus of interest of the scene, as all the other characters directly look at him as he walks around. His unbothered posture, which can signal to him being accustomed to such situations or simply unaffected, resonate in his actions towards the end of the film.

During Pete's first riding lesson, Phil instructs him to sit in Bronco Henry's saddle, claiming that by doing so, Pete will "soak up all the riding know-how you'll ever

need and more." This statement highlights Phil's deep admiration for Bronco, whom he credits with teaching him everything he knows about horsemanship and how to perceive the world differently. Phil challenges Pete to observe the surrounding landscape, asking what he sees—indicating that Bronco would interpret it in a unique manner. To Phil's surprise, Pete answers with an image of a barking dog casting shadows on the hill, mirroring Bronco's own response. This moment is significant, as Pete nearly assumes Bronco's identity in Phil's eyes—riding in his saddle and responding to questions as Bronco would. Furthermore, Phil's demeanor shifts noticeably; though he initially subjects Pete to a challenging riding task without proper preparation, leading to Pete's fall, his reaction is no longer one of mockery. Instead, he becomes more invested in genuinely teaching Pete, signaling a softening of his earlier, more abrasive attitude.

Following his riding lessons, there are several scenes and elements that build up to Pete's methodical killing of Phil. First, he rides towards a dead cow, previously afflicted by anthrax, a dangerous bacterium capable of causing infections in humans and animals, which is referred to at the beginning of the film as a cause for the death of cattle. He then puts on his rubber gloves and delicately cuts stripes of the cow's rawhide. Later, as Phil and Pete move logs of wood to scare a rabbit on their way to a trail, Phil accidentally cuts his hand with a splinter, leaving a substantial wound on his right hand. After Rose sells all the hide from the ranch, Phil, furious, is left with no hide when Pete, offering the strips he had cut earlier, suggests that he should use them to finish his rope. Touched by the gesture, Phil accepts, later bathing the hide in a softener solution, which causes the bacterium to spread from the hide to his open wound, which he refused to treat. The next day, already too pale and hardly able to move, he is taken to a doctor by George, but not without leaving the finished rope to Pete, who watches him from a distance. His infection worsens, and he eventually dies.

Prior to his death, there are several ambiguities in his interactions with Pete. At one moment, following the accident with his hand, Pete opens up about the death of his father, detailing his suicide by hanging and how he had cut the rope and brought him down. He mentions that his father used to say that he was not kind, and that he was too strong, to which Phil disagrees. However, as discussed earlier, Pete's strength lies on his observation skills and his abilities to fulfill his ultimate goal of protecting his mother who, after Phil's death, is able to enjoy her new marriage and treat her alcoholism, since she does not need to endure Phil's constant provocations. It is symptomatic that this

dialogue appears prior to Phil's death; in a way, it exemplifies the film's motif of displays of strength and power since, at the end, Phil is bested by Pete's strategies.

After giving Phil the strips of hide, Phil holds his face closely to him, with tears in his eyes, and makes him a promise that everything is going to be easier for him. While Phil braids the rope, Pete once again touches Bronco's saddle and asks if they were best friends, to which Phil replies that they were more than that. He describes a night in which the two of them hunted in the mountains when the weather changed and Bronco pressed his body on Phil's to keep him alive. Pete asks if they were naked, to which Phil only answers with a smirk. The scene is charged with a sexual undertone, increased when Pete, smoking a cigarette, gently passes the cigarette to Phil's mouth and touches his face, as they both look at each other in silence. A careful analysis of their conversation and physical gestures suggests that the sharing of Phil's secret—his love for Bronco—is no longer taboo between them. Phil appears to accept, even embrace, the admission that his relationship with Bronco transcended mere friendship. However, in light of the film's conclusion, in which Pete orchestrates Phil's death and watches with a quiet triumph as his mother and George return from Phil's funeral, this moment becomes significant not only as an emotional revelation but as a pivotal shift in the power dynamic between the characters. Once a victim of Phil's bullying, Pete now possesses the agency to dismantle Phil's dominance and, in doing so, free his mother from her long-standing torment.



Figure 46: Pete and Phil closely stare at each other in silence.

The film ends with Pete reading Psalm 22, which explains the film's title and much of his relationship with Phil: "Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from

the power of the dog.” This line, in which the speaker pleads to be released from the evilness of an oppressor, highlights Pete’s involvement in Phil’s death as more than an act of revenge for his mother, but as an inversion of power. After reading the psalm, Pete carefully places the poisoned rope under his bed, wearing gloves, as if hiding evidence, and mischievously smiles when certified that his mother is free from Phil. The film, then, plays with the definitions of aggressor and victim up until its last scene, with Pete’s transformation from a shy, effeminate boy into someone who understands and subverts the psychological games Phil used to play. Violence, here, comes as a response to the violations Pete and his mother had endured under Phil’s tyrannical behavior.

After addressing the narratives and transformations of Donato, Chiron, Pete and Phil, the threads of their stories are woven together to form a tapestry that demonstrates the relevance of displays of masculinity for the construction of homophobic violence. Hence, masculinity and its expectations ends up being the link between the three films analyzed in Chapter 4, which, as demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 2, has been a constant source for the creation and maintenance of violence against gay men.

For Donato, the migrant lifeguard in *Praia do Futuro*, his experiences with the expectations of masculinity rely on his environments prior to his departure to Germany. Although the film never delves deeper into what kind of experiences he may have had that makes him perceive his life in Germany as a newly-found freedom, partly because of the film’s frantic editing and partly because of the lack of flashbacks, the emphasis given to stereotyped masculine displays – such as the frequent punches and the almost authoritarian environment he inhabits as a lifeguard – suggests his suffocation in a country that, much like the film’s audience, has demanded him to ‘act tough’ even amidst emotional and psychological turmoil. Part of the negative response to the film due to the audience’s disappointment in seeing ‘Captain Nascimento’ as a gay character mirrors the suppression of Donato’s desires and love interests in public spaces, forcing him to keep them secretive and, consequently, subduing his own identity in favor of his public self. Moreover, the notions of courage developed throughout the film also play with the dichotomies of what it means to be brave and courageous. For Donato, his courage to leave such environment has signified his new beginning, even if it came with his brother’s disappointment.

As for *Moonlight's* Chiron, who, being a black man, his standards of masculinity are even higher and more latent, also forcing him to 'toughen up' as he grows up and mature, leaving behind his 'Little', weak persona as ways of surviving amidst the context of the crack epidemic in Miami. His adult toughness, although effective in maintaining him away from the suffering and bullying he endured as a child, is eventually dismantled once Kevin is able to access Chiron's true self through acts of compassion, care, and intimacy. Throughout the film we see Chiron overcoming his struggles with his sexuality, which is celebrated and embraced at the end. Echoing Juan's display of male bonding at the beginning of the film, Chiron and Kevin's bonding exhibits a reality in which, for gay, black men, being vulnerable and loveable to one another is not a synonym for weakness. On the contrary, it highlights a different type of strength that enables them to queer their own expectations of what a black man can be.

Finally, in *The Power of the Dog*, Phil's internal violence seems to stem from his repressed homosexual desires, which manifest in his mistreatment of others, especially the character of Peter. His cruelty toward Rose and Peter, which includes psychological abuse and the imposition of masculine ideals, seems like a direct response to his inability to confront his own feelings and desires. Phil's violence is not just an exertion of power over others but also a form of self-loathing, as he violently rejects any acknowledgment of his queerness. His inability to express his desires leads him to channel his feelings into an aggressive, domineering personality that seeks to control those around him. Phil's violence is deeply tied to his masculinity, which is shaped by the cultural norms of the American West in the early 20th century. His constant assertion of his masculinity, especially through his physical dominance, is a reaction to the vulnerability he feels due to his suppressed sexual desires. His eventual downfall highlights the tragic consequences of living in a society that punishes vulnerability and non-conformity. Phil's death, ultimately, is symbolic of the destructive power of toxic masculinity and the emotional violence it creates for both the individual and those around him.

In each of these narratives, violence is not simply physical but is deeply emotional and psychological. The trauma these characters experience highlights how identity, especially when it deviates from societal norms, becomes a site of violence.

Whether it is through the rejection of one's love, the suppression of one's sexuality, or the imposition of an aggressive masculine ideal, the violence these characters endure is both a reflection of their internal struggles and the oppressive structures they navigate. These films illustrate the destructive power of societal expectations and the personal cost of living in a world that demands conformity, particularly for those who exist outside the norm.

FINAL REMARKS

When I initially embarked on this research, my primary focus and objectives were somewhat different. Rather than examining the depictions and subversions of violence in queer films, I was originally interested in exploring them as a subgenre of horror. I perceived the images on screen as having the potential to provoke reactions akin to those evoked by the horror genre, such as fear, distress, and physical discomfort. This approach, shaped largely by my personal experiences with queer films during my formative years, was eventually abandoned in favor of a broader and more nuanced direction—one that led me to reassess my relationship with queer cinema. Instead of merely inducing trauma or presenting images of overt violence, queer films and their associated narratives have, in fact, imbued me with a sense of hope—something often absent in the horror genre.

In attempting to define ‘violence’ within this context, I encountered numerous examples that continually expanded the term’s scope. Violence, as a broad concept encompassing physical, emotional, and structural violations, becomes even more complex when examining its intersection with queerness. Thus, the process of defining violence evolved into a recognition that, for queer individuals, it is often informed by other intersecting markers, such as race, class, and gender. The experience of violence for queer people is shaped by their social positioning, and this framework also illuminates the potential for subverting violence.

Given that cinema is central to this research, I also examined how queer cinema—along with audience responses to it—has, at times, perpetuated other forms of violence. Specifically, this includes the portrayal of queer individuals as caricatures created solely to entertain heterosexual audiences. This representation, critiqued by scholars such as Russo and Moreno, underscores cinema’s role in perpetuating harmful stereotypes. However, it has also led to more contemporary interpretations that, contrary to earlier perspectives, position queer cinema as a destabilizing force. In current discussions, early queer cinema can be seen as just as transgressive as more recent films. While much early queer cinema was limited to reductive portrayals of queer characters—often involving violent deaths and degradation as common tropes—there were also instances of provocative and nuanced depictions, even in these early works.

The six films I have selected for the corpus of this research are notable not only for their diverse and contrasting production contexts but also for their explicit and well-defined representations of anti-queer violence. Despite portraying this violence, each film ultimately challenges and complicates these representations, offering a complex and sometimes optimistic vision of queer lives. While these films may not provide the stereotypical “happy ending” for their queer characters, they all succeed in presenting nuanced portrayals of queer existence and resilience. In light of the analyses in Chapters Three and Four, it is worthwhile to return to the questions I posed in my introduction: What types of violence do these films depict? How is this violence justified by those who perpetrate it? Do the central characters manage to overcome the violence they endure?

In *Carol* (2015), directed by Todd Haynes, the struggles of a white, middle-class lesbian woman in 1950s New York are explored in depth. Carol, the title character, embarks on a new romance with Therese, a younger woman, in a society that forces them to keep their love secret. The film situates the audience within these intimate spaces—private locations that serve as queer microcosms—allowing viewers to witness the evolution of Carol and Therese’s relationship. When their love affair is exposed and used as leverage to force Carol to give up custody of her daughter, the violation of two crucial aspects of her identity—her motherhood and her lesbianism—is evident. However, the film resists portraying Carol’s identity as something secretive or invalid. Instead, it offers an intimate look at how lesbian women in the 1950s might resist oppression and find ways to exist authentically. Carol’s reluctant agreement to her ex-husband’s demands—losing full custody of her daughter—signals her acknowledgment of her identity as a lesbian. By the end of the film, the suggestion of a public relationship between Carol and Therese serves as a powerful subversion of the violations they faced when their sexuality was exposed. In this way, *Carol* both acknowledges the violence of its time and offers a form of resistance through its portrayal of resilience and the subversion of societal expectations.

The theme of creating spaces where queer individuals can exist authentically is also central to *Praia do Futuro* (2014), directed by Karim Aïnouz. In this film, Donato, a lifeguard from Brazil, rescues Konrad, a German tourist, and the two embark on a relationship that leads Donato to leave his rigid and oppressive environment in Brazil for Berlin. The film focuses on Donato’s migration, both physical and emotional, as he

moves away from the hypermasculine and hostile space of his hometown. Despite the difficulties of living as a gay man in this environment, the film places greater emphasis on Donato's complex relationship with his younger brother, Ayrton. Ayrton's reaction to Donato's abandonment is poignant, but it highlights the way Donato ultimately finds peace with his sexuality after relocating to Berlin. The film portrays Donato's migration not just as an escape from a homophobic environment but as a journey toward self-acceptance and the creation of a life where he can embrace his queerness without fear.

Moonlight (2016), directed by Barry Jenkins, and *The Power of the Dog* (2021), directed by Jane Campion, also address the impact of hypermasculine societal expectations on gay men. In *Moonlight*, Chiron's personal growth unfolds within the context of a violent neighborhood plagued by drug addiction. As a young boy, Chiron is relentlessly bullied by peers who consider his failure to perform the prescribed masculinity for Black men—especially in the context of a drug-ridden environment—as a weakness. As he grows older, Chiron adopts a hypermasculine persona, becoming a feared drug dealer in an attempt to suppress his own queerness. However, when he finally opens up to Kevin, a man from his past, he reaches a moment of emotional release, finding peace with his identity. The film uses water imagery and blue lighting to signify Chiron's internal journey, first marked by self-destruction and later by self-acceptance. In the final scene, Chiron, as an adult, returns to his childhood self in a powerful visual moment that signifies his acceptance as a Black gay man, reclaiming his identity after years of suppression.

In *The Power of the Dog*, masculinity is embodied by two characters with seemingly opposing attributes. Phil, the ranch owner, represents the archetype of toxic masculinity: domineering, aggressive, and emotionally repressive. Peter, on the other hand, is soft-spoken, introverted, and often ridiculed for his “feminine” interests, such as his love for domestic chores. Their relationship evolves throughout the film as Peter quietly observes Phil's behavior, learning from him while subtly undermining his authority. When it is revealed that Phil had been romantically involved with his former mentor, Bronco Henry, Peter seizes this knowledge to his advantage. By using “feminine” skills that Phil would dismiss, Peter is able to turn the tables, leading to Phil's death and freeing his mother, Rose, from Phil's oppressive influence. The film challenges the binary of aggressor and victim, presenting Phil not only as the perpetrator of violence against others, but also as a victim of the societal pressures that

stifle his true desires, ultimately illustrating the complex nature of violence within rigid gender norms.

Lastly, Sebastián Lelio's *Una Mujer Fantástica* (2017) and Patricia Ortega's *Yo, Imposible* (2018) highlight the various forms of violence faced by transgender and intersex individuals. In Lelio's film, Marina, a transgender woman, is constantly dehumanized and referred to as a "chimera," denied the basic right to grieve the tragic death of her boyfriend. Ostracized by his family, Marina does not embark on a journey to prove her womanhood—she already understands herself as a woman. Instead, her struggle centers on seeking recognition and validation for her relationship with Orlando, asserting its legitimacy in the face of rejection. The film makes poignant use of mirrors to reflect both how Marina perceives herself and how others view her, effectively placing Marina in control of her own narrative. She is not defined by the prejudices of others; rather, she overcomes the challenges imposed on her and reclaims her rightful position as a widow. The film's exploration of the word "fantastic" is also significant, as it shifts in meaning throughout the story: to Orlando's family, she is an anomaly, a "bizarre" presence, while to herself (and to the audience), she is remarkable, embodying strength and resilience in the face of adversity.

In Ortega's *Yo, Imposible* (2018), Ariel experiences violations across multiple dimensions of her life. Initially, the secrecy surrounding her intersex status and the surgical mutilation of her body during infancy represent early forms of physical and psychological violence. As an adult, the prescribed medical treatments intended to "correct" her condition exacerbate her physical pain and discomfort, further compounding her sense of alienation. Throughout the film, Ariel's turbulent process of self-discovery is set against the backdrop of her life as a working-class seamstress, which underscores the systemic lack of both social and medical support for individuals like her. While the film candidly portrays her struggles, it ultimately offers a sense of solace as Ariel embraces her autonomy, asserting that she can define herself on her own terms. In doing so, she opens herself to the possibility of a romantic relationship with another dissident body—a lesbian woman. Though *Yo, Imposible* occasionally falters in its use of documentary-style scenes, which at times feel disconnected from the central narrative, the film nonetheless provides a poignant and realistic portrayal of a marginalized individual. Ariel's journey highlights the intersectional nature of anti-queer violence, reflecting not only the medical and societal rejection she faces due to

her intersex status but also the compounded marginalization resulting from her economic and social position.

When analyzing these six films within the context of both past and contemporary queer cinema, it becomes clear that queer representation has undergone a significant shift, beginning with the early movements of New Queer Cinema and New Maricón Cinema. The narratives of characters such as Carol, Therese, Donato, Konrad, Chiron, Peter, Phil, Marina, and Ariel not only emphasize the portrayal of queer identities as multifaceted and complex but also underscore the necessity of addressing various intersecting forms of oppression that pervade the lived experiences of real queer individuals. These films not only explore how these characters navigate and ultimately overcome systemic, psychological, structural, and physical violence, but they also revitalize queer representation in cinema, reflecting both a nuanced understanding of queerness and a steady progression in queer filmmaking. Rather than simply offering “good” or “bad” representations, queer cinema must seek to challenge and subvert entrenched assumptions about queerness—and, for the purposes of this research, about anti-queer violence. The characters in the films analyzed here defy conventional portrayals of violence by existing within worlds that do not center solely on violent themes. Instead, they inhabit worlds where queerness is intrinsically linked to various forms of violence, yet the films present rich, intricate stories where violence is ultimately overcome and queerness is not only acknowledged but celebrated.

While the scope of this research has been intentionally limited, leaving important areas such as Asian queer cinema and the analysis of other contemporary queer films for future exploration, I hope that the analysis presented here serves as a representative sample, illustrating the evolution of anti-queer violence in cinema. More importantly, this study suggests that these representations may indicate further shifts in the portrayal of queer lives in the future. Ultimately, beyond offering me an opportunity for personal reflection and healing, this research underscores the potential for overcoming anti-queer violence on screen, facilitating the embrace and celebration of queerness in cinematic narratives and allowing us to look forward to embark on future queer worlds.

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