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“There is No God”: Critique of Colonization in *Isle of Flowers*

The impact of colonialist discourse has created a vast distance between the First and Third World. There are already economic, social and physical distances that continue to grow because of the way we abject other countries in our entertainment. This is mainly because of the feeling of utopia we obtain while watching First World entertainment. The utopian feelings that first cinema/entertainment exemplifies abjects the people living in the third world. Though Richard Dyer predominately describes utopia in terms of musical genres, he still applies these ideas to entertainment in general because of the capitalistic values stitched into the narratives and visions that First entertainment offers its spectators. We can then infer, because of the relationship between capitalism and colonialism, that first cinema's counterpart, third cinema, can make attempts at countering western ideology by maintaining a post – colonial framework.

To understand the ways in which Third Cinema counters Western ideology, one must know the strategies First Cinema uses to interact with the spectator. Dyer explains, "[T]he categories of the sensibility point to gaps or inadequacies in capitalism, but only those gaps or inadequacies that capitalism proposes itself to deal with" (474). With that being said, First Cinema provides a feeling of 'utopia' by filling the gaps or inadequacies we have in life by replacing feelings of scarcity, dreariness, and exhaustion with abundance, excitement, and energy. First Cinema embodies these feelings through goal-oriented narratives in which the protagonist achieves their goals. The spectator begins to feel utopia because of heavy lighting,

music, and large shots. These elements paint the picture of this utopia-like world and invite the spectator to participate. Since the camera acts as our eyes, we are briefly placed in this world that attempts to solve issues through these strategies. However this world ignores that capitalism can enforce division among classes and races, and seeks to maintain an imbalanced power structure. Once capitalism stops interacting with the issues it proposes to solve, we have no resolutions to the complications we face and First Cinema can shift or manipulate people's attention to the material needs of certain people (Dyer 474). Relating to post-colonial theory, First World cinema, media, and entertainment continues to enforce colonialist ideology to those who spectate and supports the issues that capitalism creates. It is vital to understand that colonialism and capitalism come hand in hand; colonialist thinking stems from the monetarial value of resources around the world. This desire of capital fuels the colonist to obtain resources by any means, even at the risk of endangering the indigenous people. Though Dyer's text doesn't explicitly make this argument, connections can be drawn.

Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's studies parallel Dyer's argument surrounding the dangers of the Western industry's techniques. Their readings align with Dyer's claims about the bourgeoisie approach to issues in society and the solutions being met through capitalism. They state, "[F]ilms succeeded in bearing witness to the decay of bourgeois values and testifying to social injustice...films only dealt with effect, never with cause (Solanas and Getino 925)." Though all three recognize this issue of imposing Western ideology and the dangers associated with Hollywood and First Cinema, only Solanas and Getino describe ways to counter Western ideologies through Third Cinema. Solanas and Getino begin by describing First Cinema and the 'ideological fire', that Dyer explains, trails behind First World entertainment . They state, "Imperialism and capitalism, veil everything behind a screen of

images and appearances. The *image of reality* is more important than reality itself (920)." They are expressing that spectators are made blind by the First Cinema, blind in a sense that they can't see past the finance capital mindset and their sense of reality is distilled. Not only is the spectator harmed but also those made abject by the First Cinema are also negatively affected because they aren't seen by the First World. First Cinema contains Western ideology that attaches to us, but it is to the point where we become reliant on these feelings that First Cinema implicates. Therefore, we unintentionally separate ourselves from the worldviews of other societies not closely associated with the First World or Western civilization. In a sense, First Cinema creates these social barriers and places distance between citizens of First and Third World countries. This allows for negating stereotypes to develop because no interaction and no real connections can take place between these worlds.

However, Third Cinema counters this by presenting the Third World on its own terms through the creation of a collective identity in order to criticize the structures that keep us from uniting with one another. Solanas and Getino follow up by quoting Marx, '[I]t is not sufficient to interpret the world; it is now a question of transforming it (931).' They argue that Third Cinema does this because 'third' world production techniques vary from the First World. Hollywood has much money to spend on film technology; therefore it can afford expensive materials that allow them to portray the First World through glamorous *mise-en-scène* and non-representational signs. Third Cinema doesn't have the surplus of money that the First cinema does and can't use the same distribution techniques that First cinema practices, therefore Third cinema has to rethink, or transform, the way it uses *mise-én-scene*, colors, framing, cuts and other film elements to illustrate ideologies separate from the First Cinema.

One strong example of Third Cinema is Jorge Furtado's short film *Isle of Flowers* (1989). This montage-documentary style film makes intense social critique on colonialism, capitalism, equality, and history. It's use of montage and juxtaposing imagery points to issues and offers strong evaluations of capitalism, warfare, social relations, and the exploitation of Third World groups. This short film does more than produce statements, but also moves toward, what Stam and Shohat describe as, polycentric multiculturalism, "a rallying cry for a more substantive and reciprocal intercommunalism (47)." What *Isle of Flowers* does is present the marginalized as a part of the larger narrative of historical imbalances, power struggles, and inequality. By including the stories of the marginalized, *Isle of Flowers* makes statements surrounding the part that the First and Third world must play in reconstructing society. Its properties as a Third Cinema production makes it a unique film to study.

*Isle of Flowers* contains many properties of what Solanas and Getino call the 'guerilla film.' They define the guerilla film as follows, "Guerilla filmmaking proletarianizes the film worker and breaks down the intellectual aristocracy that the bourgeoisie grants to its followers. In a word, it *democratizes*. The filmmaker's tie with reality makes him more a part of his people (pg. 933)." *Isle of Flowers* acknowledges the history of Brazil from the perspective of those affected by colonialism, the spread of Roman Catholicism, and capitalism. The film begins with a foreword containing a dark screen and the words "There is no God." This is an explicit critique of the negative effects of Catholicism on the indigenous people of Brazil. The words are an immediate democratization because we are shown the rejection of the power structures associated with religion. The Roman Catholicism Aristocracy is strongly challenged with this image because colonists from Western Europe that carried the bible would exploit these countries in Southern America for profit. By having these historical implications, *Isle of*

*Flowers* demonstrates its awareness of these issues but also maintains its authenticity by sympathizing, identifying and making connections to those made abject by First World representation.

The film begins with a wide shot of a field in which a male, identified as Japanese by the narrator, is farming and also works twelve hours a day. The shot gets closer to the subject and he stops his work to look into the camera. The shot then cuts to pictures of identification cards and diagrams of the human body. The narrator labels him as human, and then defines humans as organisms with highly developed brains and opposing thumbs. While this is heard, a picture of a hand holding the human brain is shown and the opposite hand places a flag onto the brain. The reason behind identifying the subject is to demonstrate the important role that the worker plays in producing for the First World and our attention is immediately shifted to the worker. Solanas and Getino offer us more insight on revolutionary cinematic properties by stating, "revolutionary cinema is not fundamentally one which illustrates, documents, or passively establishes a situation: rather, it attempts to intervene in the situation as an element providing thrust or rectification (931)." The camera 'intervenes' by placing us inside this space in which the narrator constantly defines everything we see. These definitions of 'human' seem to be textbook definitions however the juxtaposition of the image of a human being working twelve hours a day makes us question these meanings. As a spectator we get to see firsthand the issues of 'scarcity' that Dyer points out, but instead of filling this gap with thematic elements, we are taken on this journey through this world and forced to witness these issues. The image of the hand placing a flag upon the human brain provides a critique of colonialist thinking. When thinking about the colonist, we think of a flag as a means of claiming territory. The image of the flag on top of the brain represents the puncturing of colonist philosophy and how rooted it is

inside our minds. These images introduce us to confusions and as the spectator we briefly intervene through the eye of the camera.

Another scene that depicts Stam and Shohat's definition of postcolonial theory occurs while the narrator describes women and children. He states that woman and children are humans with opposable thumbs and no money. In the background we see indigenous women and children searching through the scraps that wasn't good enough for the pigs and taking the items out the perimeter. The scene cuts to a group of indigenous people holding up their index fingers and thumbs. Throughout the film, the narrator refers to the idea that humans have opposable thumbs with highly developed brains. The families of indigenous people acting out that definition shows that they are indeed human, however they are not treated as such. Combining this imagery with other symbols shown in the film arises the question of identity. Stam and Shohat argue, "Postcolonial theory, in so far as it addresses complex, multilayered identities has proliferated in terms having to do with cultural mixing: religious; biological; human-genetic; and linguistic" (41). *Isle of Flowers* explores all these aspects of cultural identity and offers the spectator a new perspective of the Third World. It challenges the preconceived notion of a 'poor' nation, but as a country that faces economic and social struggle due to a variety of factors. One country's history is too complex to place labels on and this short film illustrates that complexity. Postcolonial theory, explored through film, is effective at introducing an audience to this world and gives an insightful look on the convoluted history surrounding it. Therefore making it a powerful counter to the Western ideologies present in First entertainment that keep us from forming relationships with those of the Third World.

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