

**DE PERNAS PRO AR:
A Revolution Confined
to the Bedroom**

DE PERNAS PRO AR: uma
revolução confinada ao quarto

DE PERNAS PRO AR: una
revolución confinada al dormitorio

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ABSTRACT

This article is an in-depth analysis of the cinematic elements of an immensely popular *Globochanchada*, *De Pernas para o Ar* (Roberto Santucci, 2011), in the light of feminist theories and Mikhail Bakhtin's theorisation on the carnivalesque. The article aims at investigating the ways in which an emerging outcry for popular representation is used to co-opt socially progressive — including feminist — demands. The analysis reveals that, while the film may contain transgressive elements relative to women's sexuality, it nevertheless relies on the same oppressive practices to which feminism has historically been opposed.

KEYWORDS: Gender; the carnivalesque; comedy; Brazilian cinema; *Globochanchada*.

RESUMO

Este artigo é uma análise detalhada dos elementos cinemáticos de uma *Globochanchada* imensamente popular, *De Pernas para o Ar* (Roberto Santucci, 2011), à luz da teoria feminista e da teorização de Mikhail Bakhtin acerca do

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carnavalesco. O artigo tem como objetivo investigar o modo pelo qual uma crescente demanda por representação popular é utilizada para cooptar demandas socialmente progressistas – incluindo as feministas. A análise revela que, enquanto o filme contém elementos transgressivos relacionados à sexualidade das mulheres, ele no entanto faz uso das mesmas práticas opressoras às quais o feminismo historicamente se opõe.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Gênero; carnavalesco; comédia; cinema brasileiro; Globochanchada.

RESUMEN

Este artículo es un análisis detallado de los elementos cinematográficos de una Globochanchada inmensamente popular, *De Pernas para o Ar* (Roberto Santucci, 2011), a la luz de la teoría feminista y la teoría de Mikhail Bakhtin acerca lo carnavalesco. El artículo tiene como objetivo investigar la forma en que se utiliza una demanda creciente de representación popular para cooptar a las demandas sociales progressistas - incluyendo las feministas. El análisis revela que mientras que la película contiene elementos transgresores relacionados con la sexualidad de las mujeres, no obstante, hace uso de las mismas prácticas de opresión a las que el feminismo históricamente se opone.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Género; carnavalesco; comedia; cine brasileiro; *Globochanchada*.

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The last decade of the 20th century witnessed the dismantling process of the Brazilian industry, which culminated in President Fernando Collor de Mello's shutdown of cinema incentives and crucial funding bodies such as Embrafilme (NAGIB, 2003, p. 5-8.). Brazilian cinema reemerged in what came to be known as the *Retomada* ('revival') in the mid-1990s. It is against this backdrop that, in 1998, the Globo conglomerate, the second largest multimedia network in the world, formed its film division, Globo Filmes.

By 2007, Globo Filmes had co-produced and/or distributed all of the national top 20 grossing films since the *Retomada* (DONOGHUE, 2011, p. 56). This represents a shift in the production of popular cinema in Brazil, moving from an almost artisanal mode of production towards more refined and highly professionalised production involving partnerships with international bodies. Also distinctive is the fact that the Globo conglomerate constitutes a monopoly in the Brazilian media due to its clear conservative political agenda. Indeed, Globo has been defined as "an economic, political and ideological institution" (SINCLAIR ET AL apud DONOGHUE, 2011, p. 55).

In 2009, during a debate at the fourth Mostra de Cinema de Ouro Preto, director Guilherme de Almeida Prado coined the term *Globochanchada* to refer to the comedies produced by Globo Filmes (ALPENDRE, 2009, n.p). The term, which remains untheorised, clearly situates this body of films within the carnivalesque tradition of Brazilian cinema, following on from the *chanchada* and the *pornochanchada* cycles. While the carnivalesque cinematic lineage continues with the *Globochanchada*, there are also crucial differences and shifts in comparison to the previous decades.

Whereas *chanchada* directors parodied the polished films produced by Hollywood and *pornochanchada* directors embraced the national cinema's technical constraints in a rebellious stance of *avacalhão*, the *Globochanchada* reaches the same glossy standards of Hollywood movies, and partly due to the

giant Globo's own technical know-how (derived from their telenovela production), partly due to partnerships with US production companies such as Total Entertainment and Twentieth Century Fox.

The success of the *Globochanchadas* roughly coincides with the political, social and symbolic changes since the beginning of President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva's mandate in 2003, later followed by Dilma Rousseff's government in 2012. The end of the military dictatorship in 1984 was followed by the *processo de abertura*, which crucially did not equate to redemocratisation in terms of representation. With the Lula government, the first left-leaning mandate since the beginning of the authoritarian regime in 1964, effective social changes began to take place as a number of measures aiming at wealth distribution and historical retribution for minorities have been implemented. As a consequence of this increased awareness and tackling of social and racial issues, this was perhaps the first time since the development of mass media in Brazil that minorities such as indigenous peoples, women and people of colour were effectively seen and heard.³ These unprecedented symbolic changes, an index of a climax in the process of redemocratisation, have shaped, more or less subtly depending on the film, the way movies represent reality. The *Globochanchada*, inherently connected with the conservative agenda of the Globo conglomerate, reacts to these changes in the form of backlash, often with an overt promotion of traditional institutions such as the family.

A lifestyle-based consumerist culture finds its echo in films that are intrinsically driven by and focused on the individual. Against this backdrop, social demands that have been historically mobilised around the collective, such

³ The results of these policies in terms of representation are palpable. The 2012 elections broke a historic record in numbers of elected female mayors (see FRAYSSINET, 2012). Additionally, in the 2010 census, for the first time in Brazilian history, more than 50% of the population officially self-declared black or brown (in Brazil, the criterion for race is self-identification), which is also a historic record, making Brazil for the first time a majoritarily black country (IBGE, 2011). Finally, in April 2013 over 300 indigenous people occupied the chamber of deputies to protest against detrimental measures regarding the demarcation of indigenous territories (COSTA, 2013).

as feminism, are relocated towards the individual and sexuality acquires a central role. In popular cinema, sexuality has always been employed to elaborate on gender-related anxieties of the changing times. Consumerism and identity become closer than ever in the *Globochanchada*, a telling example of which is the remarkable number of characters in the *Globochanchadas* playing advertising executives.⁴ Similar to a trend recognised in the US, sexuality and the self have become so inextricably linked that “[s]exuality, in all its guises, has become a kind of lightning rod for this generation’s hopes and discontents (and democratic vision) in the same way that civil rights and Vietnam galvanised [a previous] generation in the 1960s” (HENRY, 2004, p. 75). As will be discussed in this article, this relocation can acquire reactionary tones and serve to demobilise, delegitimise and neutralise progressive demands.

***Globochanchada* and Feminism**

De Pernas pro Ar (Roberto Santucci, 2011) was Brazil’s top grossing film in its year of release with more than 3.5 million spectators. The success resulted in a sequel, *De Pernas pro Ar 2*, which repeated the formula and took over 6 million spectators to the cinemas in 2012. Both films star Ingrid Guimarães and both revolve around her character’s quest to achieve a good work-life balance.

In *De Pernas pro Ar*, Ingrid Guimarães’ character, Alice, is a successful advertising executive whose obsessive commitment to her work has led to a crisis in her marriage. As her husband João (Bruno Garcia) repeats throughout the movie, her perceived selfishness has resulted in estrangement from him and their son. Comedy’s commonplace of mistaken identities is used to generate comic confusion as she picks up a package intended for her neighbour Marcela

⁴ Examples are Alice herself in *De Pernas pro Ar*, Cláudio in *Se Eu Fosse Você* (Daniel Filho, 2006) and Pedro in the TV spin-off series of *A Mulher Invisível* (Cláudio Torres, 2009), to name just a few.

(Maria Paula), a situation which ends with Alice delivering a box of vibrators to an important client, who was expecting a different kind of toy. Due to this incident, Alice is dismissed from her job and her career, like her personal life, hits a hurdle.

Alice and Marcela's friendship develops and Alice becomes a partner in Marcela's sex shop business, launching a marketing campaign that helps the company take off. Fearing João's reaction, Alice keeps her new business venture a secret until he accidentally discovers it, resulting in a new crisis in their marriage. A time ellipsis takes the audience six months forward, when Alice and João are separated and Alice is a high-profile businesswoman. The climax of the film consists of Alice running out of a distinguished business ceremony, at which she has been awarded the most important prize, to be reunited with her family, thus normatively reasserting monogamous heterosexual marriage as the preferred lifestyle. The final scene of the film shows Alice hiding from her family to answer Marcela's business call, signalling that Alice has not given up on her ambitions.

Popular cinema in Brazil has always been willing to capitalise on female sexuality, but whereas "[t]he representation of working women almost inevitably involves an invocation of sexuality/sexual performance" (TASKER, 1998, p. 6) by incorporating the sex shop business, *De Pernas pro Ar* presents an unusual configuration of "the conflation of women's bodies, sexuality and work" (TASKER, 1998, p. 5). The film also takes elements from the buddy movie in a recent development of the genre that features the still rare female-female duo (BUCHANAN, 2013: n.p.).

Ingrid Guimarães is famously known for her television comic pairing with Heloísa Perissé in the TV Globo series *Sob Nova Direção*, which lasted four years, and featured the two as best friends running a bar together. As in North-American television (HENRY, 2004, p. 67), it is rare to see representations of female solidarity and female community in Brazilian cinema and television. *De*

Pernas pro Ar is therefore a notable example, together with other recent films such as *Divã* (José Alvarenga Júnior, 2009), *Muita Calma Nessa Hora* (Felipe Joffily, 2010) and *Avassaladoras* (Mara Mourão, 2002).

Like most popular films, *De Pernas pro Ar* is reactive, profit-oriented and pragmatic, and it exemplifies well popular cinema's dual facet: its swift reaction to contemporary issues and its power in effectively shaping reality. According to research by ABEME (Associação Brasileira das Empresas do Mercado Erótico e Sensual), in the year the film was released there was a 42% increase in the number of sex shop sales representatives (COLDIBELI, 2013: n.p). This is not to say that the film has created this specific economic and cultural phenomenon, but rather that it has savvily channelled an already-existing tendency — it is loosely based on the real story of businesswoman Érica Rambalde (OLIVETTE, 2012: n.p) — and escalated it through its naturalisation and popularisation. Similar to the mechanisms of advertising depicted in the movie, the film capitalised on a trend and legitimised it by making it accessible — and sexy — to millions of spectators.

It is not only on the surface — the plotline revolving around the sex shop business — that *De Pernas pro Ar* captures the *zeitgeist* of gender changes in contemporary Brazil. The film elaborates on the sexual division of labour, which is a prominent agenda item of SPM (Secretaria de Políticas para Mulheres), a governmental organ specifically created in 2003 to advise the Presidency on women-related policies. Women as entrepreneurs are also a topic of weight in contemporary Brazil, considering it is one of the few — if not the only — fields in which real gender parity has been achieved.⁵ In 2004, Sebrae (Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas) launched the *Prêmio Mulher de Negócios*, of which the award ceremony in *De Pernas pro Ar* and the woman

⁵ According to a 2010 report by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, women amount to more than 49% of Brazilian entrepreneurs (PORTAL BRASIL: MULHERES DO BRASIL).

on the cover of a business magazine that Alice reads could be seen as echoes.⁶ By focusing on a woman's search for professional success, *De Pernas pro Ar* is an illustrative case study to investigate how ideas around feminism and women's emancipation are articulated in popular film in contemporary Brazil.

The Female Body and the Grotesque

The name of *De Pernas pro Ar* protagonist, Alice, could be unrelated to Lewis Carroll's eminent character, were it not for the clocks ticking in the opening sequence and her relationship with a rabbit — taken to a much more intimate level than in Carroll's book. The parallel is not overtly developed in the movie, but the association is relevant to the extent that it sets the plot in the domain of fantasy.



Figure 1: As in Carroll's story, after taking a magic pill Alice finds her (orgasmic) wonderland

Source: *De Pernas para o Ar* footage

Unlike Carroll's classic, the fantasy world presented in *De Pernas Pro Ar* is not nonsensical but carnivalesque. The film's carnivalesque stance is announced from its title; in Bakhtinian fashion, spectators are promised a world upside-

⁶ The woman on the cover is Mariza Leão, producer of the film.

down and are led to believe, due to the romantic comedies' focus on gender roles, that the promised subversion is of that nature. However, instead of subversion, the carnivalesque in this case seems to reveal an incredulity at the idea of a world where women are workaholics *and* have orgasms. Placing it in the realm of fantasy offsets the potential subversiveness of a mainly female cast and of addressing the topics of workingwomen and women's sexual pleasure.



Figures 2 and 3: The upside-down world where scantily-dressed men are chased by women

Source: *De Pernas para o Ar* footage



Figures 4 and 5: The combination of various cinematic techniques (handheld camera and mismatched angles in the shot-reverse shot sequence) in a relatively short sequence creates a hallucinatory wonderland of colourful sex toys

Source: *De Pernas para o Ar* footage

Furthermore, the film is clearly focused on the material body, which is central to the carnivalesque — in the conflict between body and mind, in carnival as well as in comedy the body has the upper hand. In a carnivalesque oxymoron, the otherwise controlling Alice is rendered out of control after taking

ecstasy.



Figure 6: The lighting, distorted sound and uneven framing of the character advance Alice's altered mental state and her body out of control

Source: *De Pernas para o Ar* footage

After inadvertently taking the drug, Alice succeeds in giving herself an orgasm for the first time in her life. The film affirms what Matthew Bevis calls a "long-standing comic law: the body will finally come good (or, at least, come through), provided one doesn't overthink things" (BEVIS, 2013, p. 31). Allowing her body to take control marks the turning point in Alice's journey, leading to a personal transformation that is equally marked on her body:



Figures 7 and 8: Alice before (left) and after (right) – from control freak to body in control

Source: *De Pernas para o Ar* footage

The drug-induced dance and the masturbation scene (presented metaphorically as a roller-coaster ride) are not the only instances where Alice's

body prevails; a relatively long sequence shows her watching her son's football game wearing music-activated vibrating underwear. The comic effect derives from Alice's inability to control the sensation and effectively having an orgasm (conventionally an intimate, private act) in a public space, thus confounding the public/private binary. In the sequences where Alice's body takes control, the film departs from the notion of the individualised ego and is approximated to the aesthetic of the grotesque. In Bakhtin's line of reasoning:

In grotesque realism, therefore, the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all people. [...] We repeat: the body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character; this is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualized. The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable (BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 19).

The scenes where Alice's body becomes "grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable" are not only the funniest of the film but also the most transgressive, as they challenge the social constraints of modesty and reservation imposed on the female body. Considering that "[i]n the context of comic performance, the female body is already at issue, out of place" (TASKER, 1998, p. 168), allowing Alice's body to reign freely not only connects it to its earthly qualities (clearly expressed under the sign of the orgasm), but also links the movie to the carnivalesque tradition in Brazilian comedies, a form of "the ancestral body of the people" (BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 29).

These passages are the closest to the Bakhtinian mystical carnivalesque utopia, where Alice becomes "a representative of 'the grotesque body of the people' rather than a rounded personage" (STAM, 1989, p. 135). In other words, these are the instances where the "cosmic, social, and bodily elements" become an "indivisible whole" (BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 19). The fact that, in all other case studies analysed here, the depiction of the body out of control has been

restricted to male characters adds to the transgressiveness of Ingrid Guimarães' performance.

While there are no black characters in the movie, at the erotic fair a black woman is quickly seen wearing a crown; as part of a doubly marginalised group, only in the context of the carnivalesque can a black woman be seen as empowered. The figure of the sexy dancer in a crowd also resembles that of the "Globeleza", indicating that the representation of black women continue to be restricted to the representation of their sexuality. The only instance where people of colour appear in the film, and still with no dialogue or character development, the sequence is perhaps a superficial attempt to include ethnic minorities, presumably with the intention of expanding the pool of identifiable viewers.

The virtual lack of characters of colour forwards a view that "femininity is a raced and classed concept" (TASKER, 1998, p. 5) and, like in North American television, "representations of feminism are almost exclusively filtered through white, middle-class, heterosexual, female characters" (BONNIE DOW apud HENRY, 2004: 69). Such a filter not only creates a "racially, sexually, and economically privileged version of feminism, that, for the [...] public, has come to represent feminism in toto" (BONNIE DOW apud HENRY, 2004, p. 69-70), but also supports the fallacy that women's oppression at its most primary levels (domestic and sexual violence, rape culture etc, that is, at the level of basic human rights) are no longer issues in contemporary society.



Figure 9: The carnivalesque crowning of an otherwise disenfranchised minority

Source: *De Pernas para o Ar* footage

Perhaps the most carnivalesque of all characters in this film, Alice's mother Marion (Denise Weinberg) is also a sexualised older woman,⁷ whose body encapsulates the cosmic nature of the carnivalesque. As Bakhtin argues, the figure of the laughing old hag is "a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth" (BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 25-26).



Figures 10 and 11: The framing emphasises the sexual innuendo between Marion and her much younger personal trainer

Source: *De Pernas para o Ar* footage

In addition to these elements that are restricted to characters and images, in broader narrative terms the carnivalesque emphasis on the collective

⁷ In *De Pernas pro Ar 2*, the subversiveness of Marion's sexuality disappears completely.

is sustained by intermittent communal celebrations (e.g. women-only parties, disco parties and an erotic fair). These, however, are transitory and contained in comparison to the historical focus on the community that has been observed in the previous decades and contemporary Brazilian popular cinema indeed seems to move towards a more Hollywood-influenced focus on the individual.



Figure 12: The erotic fair in *De Pernas pro Ar*

Source: *De Pernas para o Ar* footage

Feminism Reduced to Individualism and Choices

Brazilian comedies have always featured remarkable — if relatively few — female comedians. Movies centered on female protagonists have been popular, with examples such as the *chanchada* *Garotas e Samba* (Carlos Manga, 1957) and films starring Dercy Gonçalves. If the *chanchadas* tended to centre on stock characters (such as the maid, the spinster, the gold-digger and the shrew), contemporary Brazilian comedies move to more individualised characters, following the tradition of the Hollywood romantic comedies strictly. In stark contrast with the previous cycles of Brazilian cinema that champion the community over the individual, this is a significant shift promoted by the *Globochanchadas*.

On the surface, *De Pernas pro Ar* appears to promote an inversion of gender roles. Alice's womanhood is questioned as she lacks maternal instinct, employs a maid to do the housework and, when a male character sighs "eu não entendo as mulheres," her retort is "eu também não." This distancing from a

collective gender identity is telling as it emphasises Alice as an individual, not aligned to any feminist discourse despite the fact that her quest for financial success and sexual liberation are closely related to feminism. João, in his turn, is feminised, as he constantly complains that he is not heard, that Alice can only think of work and sex and demands her to spend more time with him and their son. This apparent inversion, however, is not profound.

In line with the carnivalesque tradition, traits of stock characters are still present, but this phase notably constitutes a shift in relation to previous decades as audiences are now provided with more psychological development and films tend to focus on one or two protagonists as opposed to multiple couples. By focusing on one female protagonist⁸ and her trajectory to find a work-life balance, *De Pernas pro Ar*, in line with similar narratives produced in the US such as *Sex and the City*, “lacks a larger political agenda but rather is focused on the effects of individual choices on individual lives” (HENRY, 2004, p. 72).

Although feminism is never mentioned in the film, it is implied that it positions itself in the so-called post-feminist framework.⁹ Even among those

⁸ Paradoxically, although the film focuses on Alice’s trajectory, spectators are never provided with any in-depth version of Alice’s motivations and desires, partly because she does not seem to know them herself. In *De Pernas pro Ar 2* (Roberto Santucci, 2012), spectators are provided with background information on her motivations, as Marion shows João a video of Alice as a child already planning to be a successful businesswoman. This information is not given by Alice and once again she seems to need others to define her and justify her actions. Alice’s complete lack of self-awareness reinforces her association with masculinity — as being in touch with one’s feelings is perceived as a feminine characteristic — and ultimately serves to position women as lacking and inept.

⁹ The term ‘post-feminism,’ however inconsistently and ill-defined, generally implicates that feminism has been superseded and “tacitly assume[s] and promote[s] a liberal notion of the formal equality of men and women, whose viewpoints are structurally accorded equal weight” (MODLESKI, 1991, p. 6). Brooks argues that postfeminism “does not assume that either patriarchal or modernist discourses have been replaced or superseded” and equates it with postcolonialism in its “continuous engagement with the effects of colonial occupation” (BROOKS, 2002, p. 1-2). The problem with this comparison is that there is a fundamental difference between colonialism, a practice of power that no longer exists in the same terms as it once did. As Faludi argues, citing Brenda Polan, “Post-feminism is the backlash. Any movement or philosophy which defines itself as post whatever came before is bound to be reactive. In most cases it is also reactionary” (FALUDI, 1993, p. 15).

who reject the term 'post-feminism' and consider themselves third-wave feminists, there is an observable focus on individualism in this new phase of the movement.¹⁰ Feminism, or rather women's emancipation, therefore "becomes reduced to one issue: choice" (HENRY, 2004, p. 71). Along these lines, *De Pernas pro Ar* does not present any concrete instance of gender discrimination as the female protagonist gets a promotion and succeeds in her own business, proving that she is as capable and talented as her male counterparts (if not more), and consequently implies that the outcome of the film is dependent on her choices alone.¹¹

Furthermore, in displacing oppression from outside (society) to within (the self), the film promotes the self-regulation of female sexuality while subtly co-opting women into the denial of gender inequality: anything can go under the mantra of 'a woman's choice.' A stretch in this line of reasoning is observed in *Bruna Surfistinha* (Marcus Baldini, 2011), where prostitution is glamourised as a personal choice and means of empowerment.¹² As Tania Modleski argues, while these films may contain transgressive elements relative to women's sexuality, they nevertheless rely on the same oppressive practices to which feminism has historically been opposed, such as the objectification of women's

¹⁰ Astrid Henry explains that "third wavers have steered clear of prescribing a particular feminist agenda and instead have chosen to stress individuality and individual definitions of feminism. This is paralleled in the preferred writing genre of third wavers — the autobiographical essay, a form which shares little with the group manifestos of a previous generation" (HENRY, 2004: 71).

¹¹ A 2013 virtual debate promoted by *The Economist* discussed the motion 'This house believes a woman's place is at work.' The debate was followed by a poll in which the majority of users (53%) voted against the motion; a woman's place is wherever she wants, those who opposed the motion argued. What was not taken into account is that the liberal argument of freedom of choice ignores asymmetrical power relations, unequal opportunities and soft forms of domination, such as tradition, social pressure and the inculcation of a deep-seated sexist culture. In both *De Pernas pro Ar* and *De Pernas pro Ar 2* (Roberto Santucci, 2012), Alice is apparently free to choose as she wishes, but the narrative of the film functions to pose only one choice as the correct one, which, of course, defeats the very concept of 'choice.'

¹² Other real-life cases of this so-called empowerment through sexuality include that of middle/upper-class women who claim to have chosen prostitution as a career (see TURIONI, 2013), and 'pussy power,' which is based on the liberal ideal of free choice (for a critique of the concept of pussy power, see MARIA JÚLIA, 2013).

bodies:

Where commercial movies seek to package and commodify marginalised groups and experiences it is [...] both a territorial claim and a recognition of sorts. The contemporary articulation of 'strong women' in terms of an aggressive sexuality involves a particular kind of objectification and display, one that also picks up on mainstream 'post-feminist' discourses (TASKER, 1998, p. 12).

On the surface, it is Alice's initiative to behave more maternally and to reunite with her husband, but the narrative as a whole operates as a moral tale favouring traditional gender roles, promoting the fundamental value of the family in a clear display of the cultural ambivalence regarding female sexual agency.¹³ Following Hollywood's model of initial scenario-crisis-reestablishment of the status quo, the protagonist's story is a transformational journey that aims at correcting the anomaly that is an ambitious woman. In order to achieve that, the film mobilises subtle mechanisms of control that, combined, offer a clear depiction of the glass ceiling in operation — invisible and incommensurable elements such as work-life balance and social pressure in the form of guilt, public shaming and ostracism — that prevent women from reaching the top of the professional ladder.

The ending is ambivalent in relation to Alice; whereas it could be argued that she escapes punishment (as she ends the film in a position of professional success *and* familial happiness), there is great emphasis on the idea that a successful career comes to women at great personal cost.

Whereas sitcoms can sometimes offer a redefinition of the family (e.g. *Sex and the City* and *Friends*, see HENRY, 2004, p. 67), *De Pernas pro Ar* restates the traditional family unit. Unlike *Sex and the City*, *De Pernas pro Ar* is only

¹³ In relation to *Sex and the City*, Astrid Henry explains that "[t]o dismiss, as many have done, *Sex and the City's* main characters as gay men in drag is to miss the larger — and potentially more threatening — point [...]. Such, often hostile, reactions all reveal the continuing cultural ambivalence about female sexual agency. If such agency can be written off as 'gay' — or even as 'male' — there is little need to face the larger social changes represented by women's growing sexual assertiveness" (HENRY, 2004, p. 80).

partly based on female friendship and solidarity. Although most of the film focuses on the relationship between Alice and Marcela and, to a lesser extent, Alice and her mother, the ending foregrounds the nuclear family as the preferred arrangement with no matching alternative. The shift is evident in *De Pernas pro Ar 2*, where Alice and Marcela's friendship is transformed into competition for the attention of Ricardo (played by Eriberto Leão). Already in *De Pernas pro Ar*, we see Marcela, who at first appears to be single and satisfied, later embrace the idea that success equates to children and husband, and the role of a housewife.

Finally, the climactic ending scene consists of Alice's realisation that even the highest professional achievement — a largely successful and profitable business and the prize of entrepreneur of the year — pales in comparison to familial harmony. The actions that follow her epiphany are revealing, as she denies herself the recognition of her success by sending her mother as a proxy to receive the prize. The cross cutting between Marion and Alice gradually gives way to the sequence of Alice's journey to reunite with her husband and son, with her mother's voice-over spelling out the importance of family. Alice's literal travelling symbolises the end of her metaphorical journey of self-realisation as mother and wife. Most dramatically, at the end Alice puts her own life at risk by jumping in the water to reach her husband's sail boat, despite not being able to swim. The driven, powerful, ambitious woman is taken back to the traditional role of the damsel in distress as she needs her husband to rescue her and save her life, as she yields, "não vivo sem você."

A business phone call disturbs the family harmony presented in the last scene and, although her family voice their support, the tone is not of encouragement but rather resentful resignation, reinforcing the double standard according to which ambition is seen as positive in men and negative in women. The film's epilogue shows Alice contacting Marcela to help her close a new business deal. Not as much a subversion as the announcement of a sequel,

the ending nonetheless signals the Protean nature of the carnivalesque and the relative permissiveness necessary to maintain the status quo. Alice has not given up, but she is neither emancipated nor entirely free, torn between the demands of career and family and constantly blamed for her falling short of perfection.

The Binaries of Femininity Relocated

While the carnivalesque scenes depicting Alice's body out of control may confound the divide between public and private spaces, the binaries of femininity are still presented, albeit in new, revamped form. A revolution confined to the bedroom is not, after all, a revolution.

The pillar on which both *De Pernas pro Ar* and *De Pernas pro Ar 2* comfortably rest is one of the most fundamental of patriarchy: the sexual division of labour. As part of a conscious effort to make *De Pernas pro Ar 2* available to a wider audience, the sexual content of the film was toned down, resulting in the new rating being lowered to 12 years old (from 16 for the original film).¹⁴ Significantly, this change makes *De Pernas pro Ar 2* lose its most transgressive carnivalesque elements in relation to the first film.

The sequel is considerably more conservative in terms of female sexuality while maintaining the overall traditional framework regarding the domestic division of labour. *De Pernas pro Ar 2* furthers the premise of the original movie that if a woman fails to achieve the unattainable ideal of mastering the triple burden of caring for her home, children and career perfectly and effortlessly — all while maintaining her health and beauty (an ideal that the film construes as possible and personified by a character aptly named Vitória) —, the problem lies in her ambition to foster a career, not in juggling the three with no support from a partner. The film indeed seems to make a conscious effort to reinforce the perception that home and children are the domain of women, e.g. when

¹⁴ Still employing the strategy of the *chanchadas* to make 'family' comedies also attractive to

Alice falls sick, it is her (female) friend who picks up her son at school, as if little did it matter which woman did the job, as long as it was a woman, while the husband innocently echoes Alice's shaming.

The critique of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001) regarding the restrictive ways in which female liberation is shown also applies to *De Pernas pro Ar*.

while the success of professional women is trumpeted and while women's social independence is celebrated in a blaze of consumerism, intimate heterosexual relationships remain unconstructed, and people have no means of transforming their personal life to match their professional life (WHELEHAN, 2002, p. 42-43).

Like *Bridget*, although Alice's professional success is celebrated with shopping sprees (particularly salient in *De Pernas pro Ar 2*, with a long shopping sequence in Times Square), her personal life does not match her professional accomplishment, as the latter constitutes the main site of conflict throughout the film.

In addition to the equation between social independence and consumerism, the liberating aspect of the female empowerment shown in the film can also be questioned. Despite the fact that the three main female characters in *De Pernas pro Ar* (Alice, Marion and Marcela) are sexually liberated women — and the film is, in many ways, about Alice's path to sexual satisfaction —, there is no profound subversion in relation to female sexuality. There is nothing new about showing liberating images of women, as long as they are restricting women's sexuality to the bedroom while men are allowed to talk openly about sex and womanising; what is notable is that the message is still widely distilled in contemporary popular film. Even if one accepts the reduction of liberation to sexual liberation, which is only one of the demands of feminism,

men, female characters display a considerable amount of bare skin and tight clothes.

sexual freedom in the film is portrayed fundamentally in relation to men, not self-satisfaction.

The dichotomy public/private is sustained under other guises as well. Alice's marketing strategy is a good metaphor for the film as a whole: home delivery ensures that women's desire continues to be private, as female sexual activity is seen as positive insofar as it does not disturb societal norms of decorum. As a male character in the film explains, "mulher que se mete nisso aqui [the very public erotic fair] é tudo vagabunda." Following the rationale according to which a 'good' woman is a "dama na rua e vagabunda na cama," the film does not deconstruct the opposition public/private and virgin/whore but merely relocates them. The strategy of assigning different spheres where each code of conduct is permissible — generally to the benefit of men — does not differ from women's magazines' articles on 'how to please your man.' As feminist activist Maria Júlia, writing for the *Marcha Mundial das Mulheres*, puts it, the relocation of the binaries of femininity is not a new idea, but one which is

trazida de tempos em tempos com mais força pela mídia — um dos principais meios através do qual se realiza o backlash contra as feministas. Para barrar conquistas e neutralizar nosso discurso, propagandeia-se um outro, com apelo na sociedade e de fácil degustação: para libertar-se basta afirmar-se enquanto livre. Não é preciso romper com nenhum padrão, pois atendendo ao que já está aí é o bastante. E, para isso, basta procurar ter a maior quantidade de prazer sexual possível.

In *De Pernas pro Ar*, and particularly in *De Pernas pro Ar 2*, modes of conduct that are disturbing to the divide between private kinkiness vs. public demureness are neutralised to conform to the traditional framework.¹⁵ A consequence of the reinstatement of this new divide — essentially a sugar-coated version of the old binaries of private/public and virgin/whore — is the naturalisation of misogynistic practices such as slut shaming. Indeed, Alice faces

¹⁵ For example, Marcela's various male visitors, initially taken to be boyfriends, are revealed to be gay friends, and she ends the film pregnant and settling for a life as a housewife.

punishment every time she takes sex outside the private sphere: she is fired for the vibrator incident and humiliated when her husband finds her presenting a number at the erotic fair.

In a symptomatic sequence, Alice, accidentally trapped in a strap-on dildo, makes her way from a customer's house to her own home, embarrassed and highly apologetic. The scene is followed by a row with her husband, to whom the sight of her with a plastic penis is unbearable. The potential subversion contained in the image of a phallic woman is neutralised by Alice's passive attitude in the face of João's aggressive reaction.¹⁶ The scene is a clear illustration that still, "[t]he world polices women — even now in this so-called post-feminist era — into silence about sex, socially constructed modesty, and self-regulating repression of behavior and fantasy" (JOHNSON apud HENRY, 2004: 82).



Figure 13: A graphic illustration of the phallic woman

Source: *De Pernas para o Ar* footage

Not only in relation to sexuality are women confined to the private

¹⁶ João's reaction to the penis attached to Alice's body reverberates a range of anxieties, from the hint of homophobia ("Não vem por trás!") to the fear that women might not need men. The contrast with the *Sex and the City* episode (Season 1, Episode 9: 'The Turtle and the Hare' aired on 2 August 1998), where Charlotte also discovers a rabbit vibrator is telling: in the North American sitcom, the possibility of making men redundant is clearly posed whereas Alice's sexual satisfaction is always strongly related to (private) marital life, from her motivation to pursue it to the end to which it serves.

domain in *De Pernas pro Ar* as all professional settings appear averse to female professionals. Alice is literally the only woman in the room when training her team, when presenting a new product to the client and among the award winners, who are all white middle-aged men. It is likely that the mise-en-scène is staged to make the protagonist stand out, but it nonetheless sets up Alice as the exception, reaffirming and naturalising the corporate world as a male-dominated sphere. Although on the surface supportive of female emancipation, the scenario establishes the public sphere as a man's business, where the exceptional woman who infiltrates it suffers considerable personal loss. The fact that Alice's former (male) boss receives an award surrounded by his family suggests that, whether or not it might be true that it is lonely at the top, just how lonely seems to depend on one's gender.

The solipsistic shift presented in both *De Pernas pro Ar* and *De Pernas pro Ar 2* indirectly cements the idea that gender difference — and consequently gender inequality — is the result of individual choices, not systemic and structural discrimination. The emphasis on individual freedom therefore demobilises collective organisation and action. *De Pernas pro Ar* is in many ways the (re)construction of an oppressive and unattainable ideal of 'having it all.' As it so well illustrates, 'having it all' becomes a new form of entrapment and a means of domesticating women and taking them back to their 'proper' place, which is still strongly linked to the private sphere. *De Pernas pro Ar 2* advances this statement by showing the mechanism through which women's freedom is shaped and limited by a lifestyle culture based on consumable signs of happiness and accomplishment.

Double Standards for Male and Female Sexuality

The film is strongly anchored to the double standards in relation to sexuality as it promotes a model of masculinity that frames men as irrational sex-driven animals and ambitious women as frigid shrews. The marriage crisis

used as a plot trigger is a warning against the dangers of taking one's man for granted, based on the untroubled premise that, in the words of Marion, "um homem procura fora o que não tem em casa." While some degree of sexual emancipation has been observed since the *chanchadas*, in the *porno-chanchadas* fear of female adultery becomes a recurrent source of humour, particularly exploiting the pathetic comicality of the cuckold (*cornô*).

In *De Pernas pro Ar*, there seems to be a return to the model of the *chanchadas* as it is male adultery that takes centre stage, but now humour does not originate from the husband's tricks to cheat on his wife, but from the misunderstanding (in Alice's assumption that her husband is cheating on her) leading to her humiliation. Several scenes in the movie reinforce men's uncontrollable sexual urge, including the TV programme that claims that male macaws are unable to be faithful and the opening scene consisting of a montage of quick shots showing João's hands trying to grab Alice's body in bed while she repeatedly evades his attempts. The notion of men as naturally polygamous, more promiscuous and having more sexual desire than women is a relatively recent development in the history of sexuality, as women were once considered purely driven by urges, "even greater 'slaves to lust... worse than beasts'" (MOTTIER, 2008, p. 19).

The fact that João remains faithful although the threat of unfaithfulness is sustained throughout the film conveniently prevents João from being blamed while the idea of men as sexual predators is unquestioned and repeatedly used as a narrative driving device. The counterposition of João's 'feminine' demands in parallel to the other (female) characters' obsession that he is cheating on Alice perpetuates the 'seed-spreading' model of masculinity at the same time that it redeems men in the figure of João.

Despite the fact that men as 'seed spreaders' is historically and socially situated, contemporary Brazilian comedies seem to make a rather conscious effort to promote it as a universal given. For example, another *Globochanchada*,

the also very successful *Qualquer Gato Vira-Lata* (Tomas Portella, 2010), spells out what *De Pernas Pro Ar* suggests. The edifying tone of the message is emphasised by the setting, a university lecture:

Female student (extra): Então o senhor afirma que a grande responsável pelo desastre das relações amorosas é a mulher, é isso?

Male professor (Malvino Salvador): Isso, a mulher podia salvar a relação com o homem se ela voltasse a obedecer as leis da natureza.

Student: O senhor é muito machista, professor, isso sim.

Professor: O biólogo não tem direito a opinião pessoal. Darwin nunca foi revogado. A exemplo de seus ancestrais selvagens, enquanto o macho pode fazer centenas de filhos por ano, a fêmea só pode fazer um. Um. [...] O homem precisa perpetuar o seu código genético pelo mais vasto território que encontrar, se possível, por toda a superfície do planeta.

Student: Então na sua opinião, professor, a gente tem que ficar aqui chupando o dedo enquanto vocês saem por aí, comendo deus e todo o mundo?

Professor: Os homens foram programados para isso. Mocinha, há hoje em dia milhões de homens inseguros, desamparados, as mulheres atacam, elas marcam pesado, elas telefonam demais. Elas não são românticas. [...] Briguem com a natureza, não comigo. É a biologia evolucionista quem diz.

The last words of the male professor, whose authority is underscored by visual and linguistic elements,¹⁷ dismiss the female students' contestation by appropriating the scientific discourse ("é a biologia evolucionista que diz"). The appropriation of the scientific discourse to legitimise male philandering is revelatory of a rather self-conscious effort to normalise man's 'natural right to polygamy' as some feminist activists have put it, a pattern which is observed overtly since the *chanchadas*.

A rather different picture is painted in relation to the female character and sexuality. Although the film plot revolves around Alice's discovery of her sexuality, it is still inserted within a heteronormative framework and it is the

¹⁷ The mise-en-scène places him on a higher level in the lecture theatre while the female students are on the same level as the rest of the class; the students use linguistic markers of reverence, such as 'professor' and 'senhor,' while he uses the condescending diminutive 'mocinha,' adding to the infantilisation of the female students against his untroubled authority.

break-up with João that precipitates her quest for sexual self-fulfilment.¹⁸ In both *De Pernas pro Ar* and *De Pernas pro Ar 2*, the transgression of approaching the topic of female orgasm is a superficial varnish, serving to satisfy the modern-spirited while continuing to promote — now with a shinier varnish — the pillars of gender inequality. Female sexuality in these films also functions as a policing force contributing to the medicalisation of women's bodies and minds and it is telling that having an orgasm was precisely one of the treatments given to the hysterics.¹⁹

Alice, who is depicted as a self-centred irascible workaholic lacking self-awareness, allows others to define her as Marcela and Marion consistently point out what her problem is. In addition to depriving the protagonist from agency, the overemphasis on what is perceived as her problem places the film in the long-standing tradition of medicalisation of women. Equating a woman's mental well-being to sexual satisfaction — an idea that dates back as far as Ancient Greece²⁰ — and the medicalisation of women's sexual desire, or lack of it, is still widely present in popular culture, in, for example, the association between bad temper and frigidity or pre-menstrual syndrome. The pathologisation of Alice's desire (signified by her ambition) is further underscored in *De Pernas pro Ar 2*, where she is sent to a clinic against her will after an exhaustion-related breakdown.²¹ Alice's hospitalisation is also a

¹⁸ Along similar lines, *Divã* is particularly daring as it approaches a topic which is doubly transgressive — a middle-aged woman's sexuality. The fact that the protagonist is played by charismatic Lília Cabral seems essential to foster the audience's empathy and generate the film's success. Cabral is not the only actor on whose extra-filmic star persona the film capitalises, as supporting actor Reynaldo Gianecchini's real-life relationship with middle-aged TV presenter Marília Gabriela gave him more visibility than his actual artistic talent.

¹⁹ Another eminent chapter in the history of women's pathologisation is Freud's diagnosis of hysteria, whose first treatments involvement genital massages until the achievement of 'hysterical paroxysm,' a technical term for what would today be known as orgasm (MOTTIER, 2008: 35).

²⁰ The Ancient Greek attributed female humour fluctuations to a displacement of their uterus — a condition artfully named 'the wandering womb' (MOTTIER, 2008: 35).

²¹ Outside of comedy, in the Brazilian cinema of the 1970s films of this tradition include *A Dama do Lotação* (Neville de Almeida, 1978), *Bonitinha mas Ordinária* (Braz Chediak, 1981) and *Mulher*

symbolic punishment for transgressing the male-dominated public sphere as well as a suggestion that women might not be as equipped as men to handle the stress inherent to a successful career. Sex is therefore used as a means of regulating gender anomalies, as gender experimentation is generally seen as more taboo than sexual experimentation (HENRY, 2004, p. 82).

Conclusion: Reactionary Pleasure

The analysis of *De Pernas pro Ar* demonstrates that the carnivalesque tradition continues in Brazilian popular cinema, but now restricted to contained scenes of organised chaos, as it were, therefore marking a crucial shift in the promotion of the individual to the detriment of the collective. A clear transition is also observed from the first *De Pernas pro Ar* to *De Pernas pro Ar 2*, as the few embedded carnivalesque motifs, such as the pregnant hag and Marcela's public orgasms, disappear. The female body out of control is the only element that is maintained in the two films, which constitutes the most transgressive scenes in *De Pernas pro Ar 2*.

By revolving around a woman's path to sexual and professional fulfilment *De Pernas pro Ar* not only captures current debates in Brazil but, most importantly, promotes the dislocation of systemic asymmetries to the level of the individual. A product of its time, the centrality of sexuality in *De Pernas pro Ar* is conspicuous of the privilege — a privilege which is strongly classed and raced²² — of defining liberation exclusively in terms of sexual freedom (HENRY, 2004: 70). It is not by chance that the movie has been compared to *Sex and the City*, while to both have the positive or progressive effect of broadening cultural representations of female sexuality (HENRY, 2004, p. 79), equating female emancipation to sexual liberation is a violent reductionism of the struggle for

Objeto (Silvio de Abreu, 1981), all of which present psychologically unstable, sexually voracious women.

²² Focusing on sexual liberation also elides primary oppressive practices such as domestic violence, sexual violence and rape culture.

gender equity. As in previous decades, the film portrays “the traces of feminist struggle elsewhere, even if it is only in the attempt to capitalise on a discernible new audience: the modern women” (TASKER, 1998, p. 12).

The old-fashioned double standard in relation to male and female sexuality is promoted in a modern setting and men continue to be seen as natural womanisers, now with the support of the legitimising discourse of science in the perversely distorted use of biology and genetics. In line with the trend observed in previous decades, masculinity continues to be portrayed as under threat with the feminisation of its male protagonist. Exceptional in *De Pernas pro Ar* is that such a threat is introduced rather bluntly by the character of Alice and her desire to occupy the public sphere. In addition to the menace this poses to patriarchy, *De Pernas pro Ar* is also exceptional in the sense that it offers a depiction of the destabilisation, however ephemeral, of the institution of the family provoked by women’s emancipation.

The application of a traditionally Brazilian formula of humour to a modern topic such as female sexuality results in a profitable package that is alluring to viewers, a fact which is confirmed by the box-office success of the film and its sequel. By providing spectators with a superficially transgressive topic focused on an individual’s journey that leads to Alice’s ‘choice’ to conform to the traditional role of wife and mother, the film promotes the internalisation of traditional social gender ascriptions. Elaine Moraes, expert in erotic literature, puts forward a similar argument in regard to *Fifty Shades of Grey*, “[a]o colocar a simbólica repressão feminina a serviço do desejo, a trilogia transfere as tradicionais imagens da submissão para o obscuro plano da fantasia [...]” (MORAES, 2013: n.p.). *De Pernas pro Ar* then functions to promote one view — a rather traditional one — not only as preferable but also as sexy and modern.

When Tania Modleski asks herself, “[i]t is not altogether clear to me why women, much more so than any other oppressed groups of people, have been so willing to yield the ground on which to make a stand against their

oppression" (1991, p. 15.),²³ her astonishment is valid. However, women's readiness to introject and incorporate sexism and inequality becomes more understandable given the seductive cultural production behind it, which the *Globochanchadas*, and *De Pernas pro Ar* in particular, well illustrate. With an entire industry promoting traditional roles in subtle yet powerful ways, it is hardly surprising that women tend to yield the ground on their own liberation.

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²³ I would argue that, due to the different paths of the civil rights movements in Brazil and the US, in the Brazilian context racial minorities have been equally yielding.

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