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TRANS JOY MATTERS: ANALYZING TRANS REPRESENTATION IN BRAZILIAN CINEMA THROUGH THE LENS OF MARCELO GOMES' *PALOMA*

A alegria trans importa: análise da representação trans no cinema brasileiro pelas lentes de Paloma*, de Marcelo Gomes*

La alegría trans importa: analizando la representación trans en el cine brasileño a través de la lente de *Paloma*, de Marcelo Gomes

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Abstract: In this article, I explore how Marcelo Gomes' film Paloma (2022) disrupts essentialized constructions of identity by focusing on joyful and communal relationships. I analyze the ways in which the director challenges cultural practices that contribute to the invisibility of black transgender women in cinematic representations. This analysis draws on José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification to examine how the main character negotiates with the majority culture, creating alternative possibilities for queer liberation that challenge the limits of the typically accepted freedom for queer individuals.

Keywords: Trans Joy; Brazilian Cinema; Paloma; representation; transgender.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa como o filme *Paloma* (2022), de Marcelo Gomes, rompe construções essenciais de identidade ao focar em relações alegres e comunitárias. Estudam-se as formas como o diretor desafia as práticas culturais que contribuem para a invisibilidade das mulheres transexuais negras nas representações cinematográficas. Esta análise baseia-se no conceito de desidentificação de José Esteban Muñoz para examinar como a personagem principal negocia com a cultura maioritária, criando possibilidades alternativas para a libertação *queer* que desafiam os limites da liberdade tipicamente aceite para indivíduos *queer*.

Palavras-chave: Alegria trans; cinema brasileiro; Paloma; representação; transgênero.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza como la película Paloma (2022), de Marcelo Gomes, rompe con construcciones esenciales de la identidad al centrarse en relaciones alegres y comunitarias. Se estudian las formas en las que el director desafía las prácticas culturales que contribuyen a la invisibilidad de las mujeres transexuales negras en las representaciones cinematográficas. Este análisis se basa en el concepto de desidentificación de José Esteban Muñoz para examinar como el personaje principal negocia con la cultura mayoritaria, creando posibilidades alternativas de liberación queer que desafían los límites de la libertad típicamente aceptada para individuos queer.

Palabras clave: Alegría trans; cine brasileño; Paloma; representación; transgénero.

1. Introduction

Joy is an important and present element in the lives of all human beings. Although all people experience pleasure and joy at some point in their lives, such experiences are generally perceived as unique to certain social groups. In the collective imagination fueled by a vast media repertoire, scenes of joy are predominantly associated with middle or upper class individuals, those without special needs, and those living normative lives within a patriarchal family system. For other groups, expectations of lives marked by suffering, discrimination, and violence are projected.

Among the various visual dialogues in cinema, few have been as consistent as scenes depicting the suffering of working-class characters or those in poverty (Hamburger, 2007, pp. 118-122). Within this imaginative realm, the rural Northeastern Brazilian environment stands out as a privileged space for narratives of deprivation and oppression (Mooney, 2020, pp. 17-20). The hegemony of the gaze in constructing marginalized social groups also extends to the transgender community, where we witness amplified discourses focusing on a few possible experiences, nearly all characterized by profound social exclusion and violence[1].

In the specific case of Brazilian cinema, since its inception, the transgender character has been used as a comic device within the narrative where trans bodies remain trapped in a heteronormative cultural framework, defined by an otherness that positions them as incomprehensible categories of sub-humanity, evoking both repulsion and fascination (Martins, 2017, p. 49). Even in the few sensitive constructions, trans protagonism appears marked by the predictable outcome of violent death, naturalizing experiences that end up invisibilizing complex lives. Although assaults of a transphobic nature are something present in the lives of many trans people in the world and particularly pronounced in Brazil, a country that sadly boasts the highest number of murders related to trans people globally, it is not the only possible story for trans people. Likewise, the continuous reproduction of challenges

1 In this article, we use the terms transgender and trans interchangeably, understanding both as "umbrella" terms used to designate the diverse identities of people who adopt a gender that does not correspond to their biological sex. This umbrella can include transsexuals, travestis, non-binary, non-conforming, crossdr.

and aggressions against those who question gender norms and expectations does not contribute to the advancement of trans people's rights. On the contrary, such repetitions end up naturalizing this same violence, suggesting that being trans is very painful, very difficult or totally impossible.

Although rarely documented, moments of joy and pleasure are more frequent in the lives of trans people than predicted by the cisgender imagination. This is evident in the research carried out by Stef M. Shuster and Laurel Westbrook in which 40 American trans people from socioeconomic classes and diverse identities were interviewed. With the exception of one participant, all emphasized the satisfaction achieved after gender transition. Contrary to prejudices, the research revealed that adopting a marginalized identity improved the quality of life for the interviewees, "boosting self-confidence, body positivity, and a sense of peace". Recognizing oneself within the trans identity also facilitated the formation of close friendships (2022, p. 1). Throughout their research, Shuster and Westbrook tried to address what they called "joy deficit" in sociological scholarship on transgender people, providing nuance to the understanding of the lived experiences of marginalized individuals that is absent from much sociological research[2]. In the specific case of Brazil, there is a noticeable effort to include other perspectives in research, allowing for a more comprehensive portrayal of the lives depicted. A recent example is the book *Minoritarian Liberalism: A Travesti Life in a Brazilian Favela*, in which the author, Moisés Lino e Silva, elaborates on the freedoms transgender people experience in Rocinha, the largest favela in Rio de Janeiro, and reports on its astonishingly queer-friendly nature[3].

2 Sherry Ortner (2016) and Lucia Cantero (2017) referred to the focus on inequality and suffering of the poor as "dark anthropology," which erases the creative ways marginalized people resist structures of domination in their everyday lives.

3 Travestis are individuals who were assigned male at birth but identify with and express their gender in ways that align with elements of femininity. They may not necessarily identify strictly as female or male and may instead see themselves as part of a broader spectrum of gender, sometimes referred to as a third gender. The term travesti, widely used in Brazil and consolidated in the Portuguese language, predates the concept of transsexual and still carries a strong stigma (Jesus, 2012, p. 16). Not all travestis are sex workers, but there is still a strong association between them and this activity in Brazilian society. Recently, the term travesti has been questioned, discussed, and reclaimed. Those who question the validity of the term point out that the word travesti indicates the activity of "travestir-se," which translates as wearing clothes of the opposite sex, a definition that would fit better with crossdresser and transformers,

Although these efforts are still incipient in audiovisual media, glimpses of interviews with trans individuals reveal statements pointing to more complex experiences that destabilize preconceived narratives of a life guided solely by suffering and violence. For example, recurring statements express joy found through transgender identity, such as the one from anthropologist Dan Kaio, who states:

> We cannot forget the pain of being trans, but even stronger, there is the pleasure of being who we are. Of belonging, of deconstructing to build, of being. And this pleasure in being is a form of happiness (Cabral and Mouhamad, 2023, translated by me).

Testimonies of happiness are also present in the experiences of forming families, especially regarding parenthood in trans couples, as seen in Luiza Valentim's testimony about the pregnancy and birth of her son Hael:

> His birth was the greatest emotion of my life. The pregnancy was amazing; we enjoyed every second together. We spent the weekends by the river, enjoying, the belly growing... I miss it. (Alves and Araujo, 2022, p. 521, translated by me).

The challenge of representing situations of violence without ignoring the experiences of joy and freedom of transgender individuals, as expressed by Dan Kaio and Luiza Valentim, demands new cinematic approaches. Since the year 2000, propelled by activist demands and legislative advancements leading to increased rights for the LGBTQIA+ community, Brazilian cinema has also incorporated new narratives that break with rigid norms of gender and sexuality. This shift also positions itself critically in relation to capitalism, colonialism, and conventional standards of viability for dissident characters from Hollywood (Kroll, 2022, p. 2).

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non-identitarian but functional terms associated with "pleasure and momentary fun." Critics of the application of the word travesti also comment that "many people considered travestis have a transsexual identity" (Jesus, 2012, p. 18). Artist and activist Lilyth Ester Grove, who identifies as both a trans woman and a travesti, highlights how the term travesti has been redefined to encompass a political stance of non-conformity in response to a heteronormative society that has historically sought to control and marginalize their bodies and existence. This reframing empowers travestis to assert their identities on their own terms and challenge societal norms ("Jewish Trans Brazil: Identity, Activism & Music," 2020, 00:02:45 - 00:04:35).

It is within this new cinematic movement, one that allows trans protagonism in several narratives beyond those guided by identity issues, that I will situate the feature film *Paloma* (2022), directed by Marcelo Gomes. Specifically, I am interested in investigating how this film breaks with essentialized constructions of identity by focusing on joyful and communal relationships. This analysis draws on José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification to examine how the main character negotiates with the majority culture, creating alternative possibilities for queer liberation that challenge the limits of normally accepted freedom for queer individuals.

I argue that by including light-hearted moments in the narrative, the film breaks with Manichaean constructions where marginalized individuals are perceived as passive recipients of oppression and injustice. Instead, I intend to demonstrate that the film, by incorporating joy and pleasure alongside a myriad of emotions and challenges faced by the main character, shifts a paradigm to highlight acts of resistance that "encourage dreams, laugh, and imagination" (Gonzalez, 2014, p. 51); it shows that trans lives are worth living, and this story also needs to be told.

2. Building Subjectivities Through the Valuation of Joy and Pleasure

When considering the rise of trans characters in audiovisual productions and their potential impact on rights advocacy, Richard Mocarski points out effects that are "both positive, due to increased public understanding, and problematic, due to the often stereotypical and narrow representations available" (2019, p. 423). According to the researcher, trans representations still have a negative aspect as they often reinforce stereotypes constructed from a cisgender perspective, communicating imprecise and totalizing versions of trans identities (2019, p. 423). *Paloma* breaks away from these essentialized constructions by introducing scenes of joy and pleasure throughout the film. This is achieved from the first scene, with the director's decision to gradually reveal the protagonist's body within a space of pleasure, as Paloma (Kika Sena) and Zé (Ridson Reis), her partner, have sex. The camera's movement establishes an intimate closeness with the characters, creating an empathic connection between the viewer and the protagonist. More than a voyeuristic exercise, we become accomplices in a moment of intimacy and affection between the couple.

Joy is also present in the following scene, where a cut leads to an extreme close-up of Paloma's face, capturing the pleasant sensation of her enjoying a long shower (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Paloma*. Directed by Marcelo Gomes, written by Gustavo Campos, Marcelo Gomes and Armando Praça, Performace by Kika Sena



Font: Memento Films, Gullane, Misti Filmes, Ukbar Filmes, Rec Produtores e Carnaval Filmes, 2022

The camera then slowly descends to show her chest and the foam spreading over her body. In contrast to the first scene, the lighting now doesn't attempt to conceal parts of her body. Instead, with a more realistic and revealing texture, the image refers to a mundane yet pleasurable activity. When the protagonist turns off the shower, the precise cut propels us into the next scene, where the lens widens to unveil a long shot, revealing her entire body, including her penis. The abrupt shift in framing provides a new visual contrast, transforming intrigue into clarity. Yet, the natural way in which she covers herself with a towel imbues the scene again with a mundane tone, akin to a shampoo commercial.

The director's decision to gradually reveal the protagonist's body within a space of pleasure, culminating in full frontal nudity, is relevant because it breaks early in the film with the practice of constructing trans women as symbols of deceit. In fact, the exposure of the genitals of a trans woman

is not something new in cinema, and often happens forcibly at the end of the film to the amazement of a transphobic audience. The same trope is repeated in both Brazilian and North American cinema: trans women deceiving their partners by posing as cisgender women, only to be unmasked and publicly stripped, eliciting disgust from those around them (Moreno 1995, p. 10; Lekitsch 2011, p. 20). These extremely violent scenes construct and normalize the trans body as something unintelligible, perpetuating the perception of being abject. This outcome, framed as either a comical or tragic grand finale, has become one of the examples of audiovisual violence to which trans viewers have been exposed through cinema crafted from a white and cis male perspective. This construction was already present in the first-known Brazilian film with a trans character, *Augusto Anildo quer se casar*, directed by Luiz Barros and released in 1923. Despite not featuring nude scenes, the trans character deceives Augusto, whom she manages to marry, only to reveal herself as a farce at the end of the film.

Paloma innovates by breaking with the tradition of representing trans bodies in cinema as a lie to be unmasked. In *Paloma*, the eponymous character is not constructed as a surprise and shock device; on the contrary, everything about the character is genuine. Displaying her nude body in such an everyday activity as bathing disarms the voyeuristic gaze and deconstructs myths, especially those suggesting physical dysphoria or mandatory discomfort in the constitution of transgender identities and bodies.

The portrayal of pleasure, complicity, and affection between the protagonist and her partner establishes, from the outset, an alternative gaze regime on trans identity. Thus, *Paloma* goes beyond identity disputes, allowing the emergence of a spectrum of narratives beyond those centered on gender transition, family conflicts, and the wide range of symbolic and physical violence. The protagonist herself seems to avoid gender differentiation issues, preferring to focus on more immediate dilemmas, such as her desire to marry Zé in the church, obtaining the blessing of a priest. The plot was inspired by a real 2008 event, in which Paloma, a trans woman, married her partner José Ricardo in Saloá, Pernambuco. In a newspaper article published about the event, we see a photo of the couple: Paloma dressed as a bride next to her partner, in a suit and tie (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Paloma*. Directed by Marcelo Gomes, written by Gustavo Campos, Marcelo Gomes and Armando Praça, Performace by Kika Sena



Font: Memento Films, Gullane, Misti Filmes, Ukbar Filmes, Rec Produtores e Carnaval Filmes, 2022

In the article we read that the union had the blessing of a priest and a great feast, which generated criticism from a local evangelical pastor ("Transexual se casa", 2009). This event, fourteen years before the film's release, suggests that reality may present itself as more singular and diverse than the traditional narratives created by cinema about trans lives.

The desire to tell stories different from those that populate the imagination of cisgender people is also seen through the representation of motherhood in *Paloma*. Rarely present in cultural products, the positive experiences of parenthood among trans individuals can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and possibilities of trans lives. In the film, the protagonist finds joy in motherhood, considering it something precious, in her words: "the best gift that God has given me." Notably, the film emphasizes that Paloma's main challenge in motherhood is not related to her trans identity but rather to the lack

of support for working mothers, specifically the absence of accessible and quality childcare. The scene capturing Paloma's effort to leave her daughter Jenifer (Anita de Souza Macedo) with Maria (Samya de Lavor)—whom we later discover is also Jennifer's biological mother—very early in the morning to go to work is relevant. In this scene, the camera skillfully captures the journey of Paloma and her daughter at the break of dawn. The camera smoothly follows their movement with a continuous tracking shot that immerses us in their world. As they progress down the street, the camera gradually zooms out to encompass the entirety of the mother's body and the stairs of the pink house she is about to ascend. As the mother enters the house, Jenifer's caregiver informs Paloma that her own mother had a stroke, so she will not be able to watch the girl. The scene cuts back to Paloma, who is now walking the streets, with the camera emphasizing her face, which now bears a heavy, worrisome expression. She is still cradling her sleeping daughter as they continue their journey, now in daylight. The scene transitions once more as we see the mother entering what appears to be a bar. There, she interacts with her transgender friends, seeking someone to look after her daughter while she goes to work. By this point, the sun has risen, and we observe Paloma rushing through a papaya plantation as she hurries to secure her work position. After what appears to be the conclusion of her shift, we see her approach her manager. The camera highlights the manager's objects of economic status, focusing on his iPad and glistening golden watch as he nears Paloma. It is noteworthy how his face remains out of sight, positioned on a platform above, while Paloma stands below. She looks up to him, anticipating a confrontation. He questions her lateness and her difficulty finding care for her daughter, using the condescending phrase "we've never hired people like you, and yet you still arrive late." The camera reveals the manager only from the waist down, showing his belt, jeans, and leather boots, while positioning Paloma below him (Figure 3).

As she attempts to explain and apologize, the camera effectively underscores the power dynamics at play-highlighting a symbolic representation of the manager's perceived god-like white masculinity and the oppressed position of the black and illiterate woman, further emphasizing the intersection of social class, race, and gender in this oppressive system.

Figure 3. *Paloma*. Directed by Marcelo Gomes, written by Gustavo Campos, Marcelo Gomes and Armando Praça, Performace by Kika Sena



Font: Memento Films, Gullane, Misti Filmes, Ukbar Filmes, Rec Produtores e Carnaval Filmes, 2022

In this way, *Paloma* also addresses political concerns, aiming to uncover both local and global structures of oppression from a peripheral viewpoint, following the principles of Third Cinema, and echoing Helen Hok-Sze Leung's "New Queer Cinema and Third Cinema." This form of cinema arises from the "margins and interstices," exposing intricate connections between late capitalism and sexuality while "remaining on the side of the disaffected and disenfranchised" (Leung, 2004, p. 166).

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that these experiences of oppression do not define the character. Paloma will return home, formulate a way to keep her daughter safe while she works and make other plans, such as a trip to the water park with her family on her day off. The scene in which we see Paloma hugging Zé, her daughter between them, while her partner drives a motorcycle on the highway leading to the park is perhaps one of the most joyful in the film. The popular romantic song on the soundtrack and the smile on their faces reveal contentment and well-being. We witness the representation of a family that strolls and takes photos at tourist spots (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Figure 4. *Paloma*. Directed by Marcelo Gomes, written by Gustavo Campos, Marcelo Gomes and Armando Praça, Performace by Kika Sena



Font: Memento Films, Gullane, Misti Filmes, Ukbar Filmes, Rec Produtores e Carnaval Filmes, 2022

Figure 5. *Paloma*. Directed by Marcelo Gomes, written by Gustavo Campos, Marcelo Gomes and Armando Praça, Performace by Kika Sena



Font: Memento Films, Gullane, Misti Filmes, Ukbar Filmes, Rec Produtores e Carnaval Filmes, 2022

The mundaneness of these images is transgressive precisely because it normalizes the leisure of a trans family, contrary to the practice of representing these identities in marginal environments, often subjected to violence, with murder tragically standing out as a frequent outcome. As an alternative, in *Paloma* we see a woman who embodies a state of joy by living the moment intensely.

3. Sorrow and Joy in Paloma: Defying the Cisgender Gaze

Essayist and activist Caelan Conrad defines joy as an intense form of happiness. They explain that for many queer and trans individuals, the most profound joy arises from the feeling of freedom, safety, and the ability to unapologetically be themselves, despite the numerous forces that aim to hinder this. In this context, trans joy is not fundamentally different from the joy experienced by others, but the reasons for its significance are unique, according to Conrad (2022). Still thinking specifically of trans people, Andrew Davis defines trans joy as a "manifestation of the satisfaction that trans people derive from living as their gender, even while facing discrimination for their trans identity" (Davis, 2022, p. 25). Reflecting on the bigotry trans people might face, Conrad would reject the cliche that "being happy is the best revenge", as this implies that anger and grief alone could be a sufficient force for a joyful life for transgender folks. While they acknowledge that transgender people have certainly earned the right to be angry, they would argue that constructing happiness through anger may not be the most effective way to counter the religious zealots. Instead, they believe that the best and healthiest way to live one's life involves not allowing anger to be the core driving force (Conrad, 2022).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Paloma illustrates a joy similar to that desired by Conrad and Davis. While trans joy is often portrayed in the media as a form of resistance to violence, in *Paloma*, it emerges not as a feeling derived from adversity. On the contrary, in *Paloma*, joy manifests as an experience prior to these difficulties. In moments of prejudice, what prevails is not the pursuit of an intense form of happiness as a form of resistance, but rather the clarity of Paloma's desires and the decision not to renounce her dreams. An example of this determination is evident in the scene where a mother prohibits her daughter from playing with Jenifer in

the pool, whispering to a nearby friend that these "weird people" should not be allowed to enter the Water Park and that she plans to complain to the establishment's owner. It is interesting to note the ambiguity in the scene that shows prejudice against Paloma and her family, as it is not clear whether "weird people" refers to Paloma's transgender identity or to the fact that she is black and belongs to a lower economic class than the other bathers. Prejudices rooted in the white Brazilian middle class position Paloma and her family in a condition of otherness, in which certain public spaces remain forbidden. However, even in this moment, Paloma remains firm in her right to occupy that space, and doesn't leave the pool, unlike her partner, who is intimidated by the looks and attitude of the bathers.

Paloma's resilience is put to the test again, in what is probably the saddest moment of the film, when her best friend Rikely (Wescla Vasconcellos) is murdered in a public bathroom. In the aftermath of this violent episode, joy is accessed and shared among Paloma and her transgender friends almost as a form of survival in the face of immense pain. It is also in this moment that Paloma shows determination to get married in any way possible: "Now I'm getting married for real," she says to her partner, determined not to annul herself in the pain she feels for the death of her friend.

The scene where Paloma and her friends gather at Rikely's house to remember her and to share pieces of her clothing is relevant in the sense that it illustrates the complex myriad of emotions experienced during collective mourning within the trans community. With each piece of Rikely's clothing, a story is also shared. Sadness, obviously present, is interspersed with graceful memories accompanied by laughter. Together, they celebrate the life of their dear friend, a life which was clearly worth it. This shared grief work is a source of strength for Rikely's trans friends to continue living intensely and fighting for their dreams.

A similar grief work is explored in the feature film *Madalena*, directed by Madiano Marcheti and released in 2021. After Madalena's long absence, her friends realize she was probably murdered. They gather at her house to remember the good times they had together, and to share her clothes and belongings. According to the director, Madalena's friends' grief work was initially constructed in a more somber manner. But after a reading of the screenplay by

trans actress Helena Vieira, who stated that the mourning he had constructed was a cisgender one, he decided to modify it. According to the director:

> There was a very emotional scene where Madalena's friends cried, a sort of let's get revenge. Then she (Helena) said, "this is cis mourning, this is not trans mourning." She told me that she's a trans woman, and she has lost many friends, many of her friends have gone, "and that doesn't mean I didn't suffer for them, and it doesn't mean I didn't cry for them, but I'm here, it's another place, I'm here and I'm living, and my strength comes exactly from that" (Film at Lincoln Center, 2021, my translation).

The tragedy of living in the country that kills the most trans people in the world, where the life expectancy of a trans person does not exceed 35 years, causes the morning experienced by trans people to diverge from the expectation and experience of cisgender people[4]. This can be understood through the concept of *Queer Time*, as coined by Jack Halberstam. The concept emerged primarily towards the close of the twentieth century within gay communities whose possibilities had been severely restricted by the AIDS epidemic. The perpetual dwindling of the future gives rise to a renewed emphasis on the here, the present, the now. In other words, when "the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment...it squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand" (Halberstam, 2005, p. 2).

Illustrating *Queer Time* and Helena Vieira's words, Paloma draws strength from the tragic experience of losing her best friend, and resolves to fight for what she desires. Indeed, the marriage with the blessing of a priest does take place, with Paloma looking beautiful dressed in white, and a grand party that ends up being televised. If, during their honeymoon, Paloma's husband decides to abandon her due to the pressure from his evangelical mother and the transphobic taunts of his friends, it only reveals his unworthiness of Paloma's love and his lack of courage to pursue a life that brings him genuine happiness.

4 In 2022, 132 trans people were murdered in Brazil. The real number, however, is much higher given the state policy of underreporting LGBTQ+ violence. For the fourteenth year running, Brazil is the country that kills the most trans people, followed by Mexico and the United States (Benevides, 2023, p. 6).

4. Conclusion

Despite the end of the marriage and the violence she faces upon returning to the city after her honeymoon—her house is vandalized, and she is harassed on the streets—Paloma's ending is not necessarily tragic. It is relevant to highlight that the relationship ends on the protagonist's terms: she refuses to live a life in secret and demands the same courage from her partner:

> Paloma: What God has united, no man separates, understood? Now, if you prefer to listen to people there, to others' opinions, instead of standing by your woman, the one who loves you, get lost, you coward.
>
> Zé: I'm a coward indeed.
>
> Paloma: You're damn right. Go to hell. Go to hell, you, your mother, your friends, everything. Go all to the filth of hell. Because that's where people like you belong, who don't accept others' way of being.

This final dialogue between the couple encompasses tensions that have accumulated throughout the film and may, at first glance, seem contradictory. For example, while Paloma does not inhibit herself and rejects transphobic attacks by adopting a counter-discourse of resistance against all those who ignore her humanity—the mother-in-law, her husband's friends, and Zé himself—she also longs for a marriage performed by the Catholic Church, a cis-heteronormative institution that considers her existence sinful. Having her marriage proposal denied by the pope, Paloma goes to meet another priest, one relegated to the margins of the official Catholic church for having a companion and not being celibate. Paloma's religious wedding ceremony updates the concept of *disidentification* postulated by José Esteban Muñoz, as it shows ways in which a marginalized minority navigates intersecting forms of oppression and enacts agency. As Muñoz explains, *disidentification* is related to a movement of reformulating the encoded meaning: "in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 31). Thus, Paloma queers the religious tradition while keeping the values that she wishes to maintain: "What God has united, no man separates."

The end of her relationship with Zé compels Paloma to leave the small and oppressive town where she lives for a larger one with more opportunities, repeating the displacement of many female protagonists in Brazilian cinematography[5]. However, before departing, she bids farewell to her farmer friend, Sebastiana (Ana Marinho), and Maria—also the mother of her daughter Jenifer. These scenes are moving, and it becomes clear how much Paloma is cherished and loved. Despite these challenges, Paloma's conclusion does not involve sacrificing her humanity. It challenges the traditional narrative that depicts transgender individuals as tragic figures with inevitably short lives, lives perceived as radically outside the norm and therefore deemed impossible.

The challenges facing Paloma are unlikely to vanish with the rolling of the credits at the end of the film; however, *Paloma's* open-ended nature enables us to envision improved futures and potential realities. In fact, *Paloma's* ending suggests the beginning of a new phase of life for the protagonist. In the final scene, Paloma asks the driver to take her to Juazeiro do Norte, a city where she has many friends. One of them, in fact, has offered her a position at the beauty salon where she works, which is Paloma's professional dream. This dream, once suspended due to unconditional dedication to the partner with whom she envisioned a life together, now transforms into a new aspiration.

The uncertainty at the film's conclusion not only captures the rich diversity of queer experiences but also resonates with the audience's own aspirations within the queer narrative. It elicits empathy, as we wholeheartedly cheer for Paloma's success, free from the pervasive fear that her journey may be cut short. There is no sense of nostalgia, for we are assured of Paloma's resilience in facing the challenges that may lie ahead. Paloma stands resilient, fortified by the unwavering support of her family and friends as she embarks on this new chapter. Despite the myriad obstacles, she remains fearless, persistently asserting her right to lead a joyous life in the face of adversity and societal expectations.

5 *A hora da estrela* (Suzana Amaral 1977), *Terra estrangeira* (Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas 1995), *O céu de Sueli* (Karim Aïnouz 2006), *Que horas ela volta?* (Anna Muylaert 2015), and *A cidade onde eu envelheço* (Marília Rocha 2020) are examples of films with female protagonists who leave their small hometowns for a larger city with more opportunities.

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