

Do Outro Lado do Atlântico (Across the Atlantic)

by André Arruda

“... On both sides of the Atlantic, stories of departures, stays and returns, encounters and mismatches of ideas, spaces, desires and dreams are told”.

This is how the documentary “Do Outro Lado do Atlântico” (Across the Atlantic) is presented textually in the FIDÉ (International Student Documentary Festival) program, which in itself sums up well the spirit and approach of this long documentary directed by Márcio Câmara and Daniele Ellery, which manages to confront cultural, social, political and economic issues by addressing student immigration from the African continent to Brazil (mainly Cape Verde) and the echoes of the experiences of those who built their lives here or who returned.

In almost all of its 90 minutes of duration, the documentary articulates interviews with eloquent characters (always in the talking head format) and manages to create a beautiful student mosaic precisely by selecting African students who attended Brazilian universities. In this way, the project built by the students of UNILAB (University for the International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony) manages to sound didactic in its problems and well decided in its structuring.

Still, despite the solid narrative that leaps from interview to interview in a very tight way, the film suffers a little in terms of pacing. The reason is a simple decision by the filmmakers, who build their approach mainly on the variety of interviewees that are brought together based on the theme, rather than focusing on a single protagonist figure (or a more limited group). This generates an episodic character inherent to the narrative, since every few minutes a new face appears, causing the exercise of empathy to start “from scratch” to each new subject we see on the screen – added to the fact that the characters are rarely repeated only makes each interview block even more “isolated”.

But this is a decision that, despite having the side effect mentioned above, proves to be a hit most of the time, since it allows us to contrast each and every one of those different stories and perceptions about an experience that could, erroneously, be summarized and generalized. Thus, the film becomes rich precisely because of the heterogeneous voices that talk about the same theme (be it friendship or racism, for example), in addition to incredible moments in which “Cachupa” (a typical dish from Cape Verde) is not only cited but has its recipe demonstrated and discussed.

This is perhaps the element that sums up the documentary's approach so well, which focuses on cultural issues such as music, cuisine and everyday relationships (or even marriages) to expand not only the narrations of its interviewees, but also approach more delicate topics.

Counting on a “change of perspective” in the third act, in which we are more “on the other side of the Atlantic” than in the rest of the narrative, even though this documentary may have its rhythm problems due to the choices of its directors, these same choices are what make the proposal to address the “encounters and mismatches of ideas” not only possible but also rich.