

FERNANDO MEIRELLES'S *THE CONSTANT GARDENER* AT THE CROSSROADS OF HEGEMONIC AND COUNTER-HEGEMONIC GLOBALIZATION¹

ADRIANA MARTINS

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John Le Carré's novel *The Constant Gardener* (2001) is a good illustration of how cultural artifacts have contributed to the reflection on the processes of globalization, their contradictions and their impact on various societies. By addressing the ongoing exploitation of former African colonized people by international interests in a post-colonial time, the novelist, despite rendering the complex machinations among multinationals, Britain and underdeveloped states visible, acknowledges having adopted the perspective of the so-called First World, clearly placing the narrative focus on characters connoted with political and economic power. In other words, despite denouncing the inequalities brought by globalization, namely to African countries and to Kenya in particular, Le Carré's novel stresses the features of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls "dominant or hegemonic globalization"². According to the Portuguese sociologist (Santos, "Processes" 2) this type of globalization is a source of political and social conflicts, and translates the interests of the "Washington consensus"³. In synthetic terms this neoliberal consensus rests on the primacy of a neoliberal economy, a weak state, a liberal democracy and the rule of law and of the judicial system. This type of

¹ This essay is a slightly adapted version of the paper presented at the 32nd APEAA Annual Conference at the University of Coimbra in May 2011.

² See the interview given by Le Carré in the dvd extras of *The Constant Gardener* (2005). Inquired about his opinion on Meirelles's adaptation of his novel to the movies, the novelist stresses the novelty brought by Meirelles's shift of perspective, since the Brazilian director retold the plot placing the focus of attention on the Third World.

³ The Washington consensus was subscribed by the central states of the world system in Washington in the middle of the 1980's. See Santos ("Processes" 2).

globalization is supported, among other aspects, by the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of multinationals that, to a great extent, dictate the rules of the markets, bringing on considerable inequalities to periphery and semi-periphery countries.

In this essay, my interest lies on Fernando Meirelles's 2005 filmic remediation of Le Carré's novel. Inspired by Bolter and Grusin (*Remediation*), who understand remediation as "the double logic according to which media (particularly but not exclusively digital media) refashion prior media forms" (Grusin, "Premediation" 17), my aim is to show *how* Meirelles transforms Le Carré's representation of multifold conflicts into a vehement reflection on the complexity of the phenomenon of globalization and of its political, economic and cultural impact on the Global South. I claim that Meirelles's criticism of globalization is more incisive than Le Carré's due to two main aspects.

The first aspect is the attention the filmmaker pays to Africans' daily life and to the micro-space of Kibera, a huge slum where thousands and thousands of Kenyans live under appalling conditions. If the literary description of Kibera only occupies a few lines in Le Carré's novel, Meirelles, despite having originally planned to shoot the film in South Africa, decided to film in Kibera and to use its inhabitants as movie extras after visiting the place. The second aspect is closely related to the first one and has to do with the understanding of the film itself as a cultural product of globalization that reflects the "world of flows" we live in (Appadurai, *Modernity*)⁴. In other words, the focus Meirelles puts on Africa both in thematic and cinematic terms and the wide circulation of the film call the spectators' attention to the world of disjunctive flows that "produces problems that manifest themselves in intensely local forms but have contexts that are anything but local" (Appadurai, "Grassroots" 6). The film, thus, shot in different parts of the world, with a multicultural crew and cast, on the one hand, reflects the way of making cinema in a globalized era and the impact that an Academy awarded film may have in terms of the dissemination of a certain message. On the other hand, the overwhelming power of pharmaceuticals in Kenya and in Africa in general as far as the testing of drugs in human guinea pigs is concerned is a local problem that results from the increasing political and economic politics of profit and influence of multinationals, a problem that raises serious ethical concerns. The filmic remediation of Le Carré's novel, by addressing the contradictions of globalization and by openly discussing its evils,

⁴ *Apud* Appadurai ("Grassroots" 5).

constitutes, thus, a cultural artifact that encapsulates the emancipatory potential of the role of imagination in the era of globalization (Appadurai, "Grassroots" 6). This emancipatory potential informs what Sousa Santos calls "the counter-hegemonic globalization" and what Appadurai ("Grassroots") refers to as "grassroots globalization" or "globalization from below".

With a view to discussing the counter-hegemonic value of the filmic remediation of Le Carré's novel as far as globalization is concerned, it is important to examine some of the issues raised by the movie's three different dimensions: (i) the didactic-epistemological, (ii) the ideological, and (iii) the ontological. Despite being interrelated, all the devised dimensions can be analyzed separately, which considerably widens the range of meanings produced by Meirelles's film.

The didactic-epistemological dimension is closely related to a plot that apparently tries to solve the murder of a European young woman in Kenya, but that, in fact, is about the complexities of globalization and the tension between its hegemonic and counter-hegemonic components. This dimension acquires a particular importance in the film due to the aforementioned privilege Meirelles gives to shooting in Kenya and the focus on the relevance of the role played by NGOs, as it is illustrated, on the one hand, by Tessa and Arnold's intervention in the micro-space of Kibera and on their attempt to reveal the international conspiracy underlying the testing of Dypraxa and, on the other hand, by their recourse to Hyppo, a European NGO that controls the pharmaceuticals' actions. By trying to instruct on how hegemonic globalization operates in order to respond to a net of international and local interests and how a counter-hegemonic force emerges, this dimension highlights the crucial role played by globalized media, since Justin depends on computers and on Tessa's informatic registers and on contacts with diverse parts of the world through the internet to reconstitute his wife's steps before her violent death. The confrontation between good and negative aspects of globalization is particularly striking due to Meirelles's peculiar style of shooting, which rests on the skillful rapid movements of the camera in time and space and on the overlapping of extreme long shots with close-ups, through which the comfortable daily lives of Europeans with interests in Africa and Africans' struggle for survival are compared. Within the framework of this dimension, I would like to call the attention to a particular moment that is also privileged in the film. It has to do with the impact of a performance that addresses the issue of AIDS in Kibera. The play is a good example of how a local answer can respond to a global problem, for the play addresses

the stigmatization of all those who have a relative with AIDS, didactically instructing Kibera inhabitants to deal with the disease.

The ideological dimension addresses the tensions between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic globalization by focusing on the political commitment of governments with hidden economic concerns, fact that has obvious ethical implications. The involvement of representatives of the British government, apart from responding to some officers' individual interests, was related to the opening of a plant in Europe and the creation of a representative number of new jobs that otherwise would be created somewhere else. Once more, Meirelles's focus on African life and on the affective relationship Tessa and Justin established with Africans, contrary to the behavior adopted by other British citizens, contributes to transforming the film into a powerful medium to denounce and to resist the evils of hegemonic globalization. The scenes in the hospital after Tessa loses her baby are particularly touching, for the spectator sees Tessa feeding a black baby. Furthermore, more than grieving her loss, Tessa was worried about Wanda's condition. Wanda was the baby's mother and she was dying as a result of Dypraxa. Tessa's sense of justice is stressed once more when she asks her husband to take Wanda's brother, mother and baby to their village by car and Justin refuses. However, when Justin realizes the dimension of the conspiracy discovered by Tessa and Arnold, he does not hesitate to decide on giving his own life to defend the interests of those in need, paying, thus, a kind of tribute to his late wife. His crusade against all the attempts to prevent him from denouncing the mortal side effects of Dypraxa derives not only from a painful process of self-learning about the inequalities perpetrated by his own government under the umbrella of agencies of international aid, but mainly from his need to feel "at home" again. According to one of his statements when his death is already imminent, Tessa represented *home* to him, what explains why he seemed to see her and to talk to her in decisive moments of the narrative when he was on the verge of giving up. In fact, his death would not only be an effective and impressive way of breaking off the chain of international interests, of dethroning all those who concentrated political and economic power in their hands, but also the final move towards reuniting to his beloved wife.

The ontological dimension despite not being so evident in the film is also very relevant in the discussion of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic types of globalization. It is closely related to the didactic-epistemological and ideological dimensions. By leading the spectator to question the very process of filmic (re)mediation, to reflect on the meaning of making

cinema, and, ultimately, on the potential of cultural artifacts to raise citizens' awareness of their civic and civil responsibilities in the age of globalization, the movie calls the spectators' attention to the central role of the imagination and of its "split character" (Appadurai, "Grassroots" 6) in social life to recall Appadurai's premises. Even though Appadurai is particularly concerned about academic imagination and new globalized forms of knowledge on globalization, his reasoning can be applied to Meirelles's film when two aspects are analyzed. The first one is the role of propaganda in people's lives. From her arrival to Africa, Tessa is uneasy with the marketing of Three Bees, since it spreads an ideal of well-being, health and happiness that does not correspond to the reality of African citizens' daily lives. These marketing campaigns epitomize how "modern citizens are disciplined and controlled" without being aware of underlying obscure interests (6). The second aspect is the aforementioned emancipatory potential of social imagination illustrated by the performance on AIDS in Kibera. The play exemplifies a collective local attempt to raise citizens' awareness of AIDS and its effects on social and economic life. It is a local response to a global problem without the constraints imposed by predatory international interests.

In sum, even though Meirelles is loyal to Le Carré's plot, his thematic and cinematic options definitely position his movie at the crossroads of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic globalization. The whole film rests on the gaps left by those who were interested in erasing the presence and intervention of people who had denounced and protested against hegemonic globalization. This is a movie that proposes the building up of a new order through the discussion of deaths: Wanda's (who according to official registers has never existed or used Dypraxa), Tessa's, Arnold's, and, at the end of the film, Justin's. In a certain way, all of them can be seen as a kind of guinea pigs to the phenomenon of globalization. Fortunately, different cultural artifacts do not forget them or silence their voices.

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ABSTRACT: John Le Carré's novel *The Constant Gardener* (2001) focuses on the ongoing exploitation of former African colonized people by international interests in a post-colonial time marked by globalization. Despite the novelist's attempt to render the complex machinations among multinationals, Britain and underdeveloped states visible, his focus is mainly placed on characters connoted with power.

This essay analyzes Fernando Meirelles's 2005 filmic remediation of Le Carré's novel and demonstrates *how* Meirelles transforms Le Carré's representation of multifold conflicts into a reflection on the complexity of the phenomenon of globalization and of its impact on the Global South. I claim that Meirelles transforms his film into a stage on which the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces of globalization (Santos, "The Processes") are confronted and interrogated from an ethical perspective. The latter highlights the relevance of a globalization from below (Appadurai "Grassroots") and cinema's role in denouncing the evils of globalization.

RESUMO: O romance *O Fiel Jardineiro* [*The Constant Gardener*] (2001) de John Le Carré problematiza a exploração por interesses internacionais do povo africano anteriormente colonizado, num tempo pós-colonial marcado pela globalização. Apesar da tentativa do romancista de revelar as complexas maquinações entre as multinacionais, a Grã-Bretanha e os países subdesenvolvidos, a sua atenção concentra-se em personagens que estão claramente conotadas com o poder.

Este ensaio analisa a remediação filmica que Fernando Meirelles fez do romance de Le Carré em 2005 e demonstra *como* Meirelles transforma a representação que Le Carré faz de múltiplos conflitos numa reflexão sobre a complexidade do fenómeno da globalização e do seu impacto no Sul Global.

Defendo que Meirelles transforma o seu filme num palco em que as forças hegemónica e contra-hegemónica da globalização (Santos, “The Processes”) são confrontadas e interrogadas a partir de uma perspectiva ética. Esta última salienta a relevância do que Appadurai denomina “globalization from below” (“Grassroots”) e o papel do cinema na denúncia dos males da globalização.