Filmmakers who intend to articulate the negative aspects of a society from within one of the filmmaking institutions of that particular society run the risk of offering inconsequential interpretations. With this NFB documentary on Montreal’s Haitian community, Tahani Rached has taken no such risks. Haiti-Québec is a film of great compromise.

Now it’s not that the NFB is institutionally incapable of making uncompromising films. Indeed, there are a number of recent NFB films which have earned the distinction of exclusion from the sectarian airwaves of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (and hence from the inner recesses of the Canadian mind). For example, here are some recent films that the CBC has considered unfit for Canadian television: Incident At Restigouche (Alain Obomsawin, Quebec, NFB, 1984) about the conflict between the indigenous people of Quebec and the Quebec Police Force, Abortion: Stories From North

And South (Gail Singer, NFB, 1984), Democracy On Trial: The Morgentaler Affair (Paul Cowan, NFB, 1984) both reasonably uncompromising examples of films exploring the abortion issue and judicial structures.

Haiti-Québec, made by a permanent staff at the NFB, will, in all likelihood, receive no such censorial sanction, and is obliged to gain its credibility without the assistance of state media suppression. Unfortunately it is a film which offers not even the most rudimentary analysis of racism, ethnicity or class formation, never mind explaining why people from Montreal face in Montreal. To be sure, one appreciates that the film actually intertexts blacks and attempts to broach the issue of racism, but the film’s initial positive value soon succumbs to a folkloric, anti-analytical posture as Tahani Rached tactically avoids confrontational issues. By not particularizing the disturbances behind the flight of Haitians, Haiti-Québec offers only oblique, inarticulate, and half-developed references to the repression that prevailed during the Baby Doc regime, a regime on whose human rights record the Quebec government was and is silent. In fact, Quebec is now home for Dr. Roger Lafontant, one of the ex-regime’s henchmen. But these and initial facts were excluded from the film’s discourse. There are no particular given about Quebec investments in Haiti, nor is there any foregrounding of Canadian foreign policy and the Canadian silence on human rights violations in Haiti.

Another film on Haiti, Bitter Cane by Jacques Arcelin (1983), did lay out the complexities faced by the Haitian people. This film provided some impressively developed researched ideas which relate the historical pillage of Haiti by American multinationals. Sugar cane workers were accessed in the film, and tactically added to the theoretical work done by scholar/activists who share the struggle.

Haiti-Québec does little of this back and forth editing between activists and workers; rather, what it does do is look at a complex situation with a liberal gaze.

Haiti-Québec moves from onesentimental interview to another, opening with a Haitian taxi driver who is sending a report of his voice to someone in Haiti. We cut back and forth throughout the film. We see and hear another man singing on a Montreal bus. We see a Haitian writer-worker relating his interpretations of life in Quebec. All of this gives the film an appearance of multi-cultural exotica. If many references are made to racism in the Montreal taxi industry, none are made analytically. The taxi theme is introduced by some utterly predictable interviews with white drivers who say the expected Quebec “apartheid” sorts of things. (No attempt is made to depict the white drivers who are with the Haitians in their fight against racist structures. And we all may have at one time or another suspected that not all white taxi drivers are racists.)

Bitter Cane offered a range of workers opposing. Haiti-Québec does not. It does not even examine the Quebec judicial system’s leniency in fining (under $200) the owners of Taxi de l’est and Taxi Moderne after they fired black drivers. Nor does it show the resistance that Haitians are launching from Quebec.

In one especially stereotypically bad scene, we are shown black teenagers breakdancing across the screen. Pure exotica. Nothing more. Even the Montreal-based Haitians edited into the film do little to expand on the linkage between Haiti and Quebec. The film weaves its way in and out through Haitian life in what can only be termed folklore, the kind of misrepresentation Robert Flaherty might have been guilty of on a bad day or if he had had to work within the ideological constraints of a major oil company. With Haiti-Québec Tahani Rached has managed both a bad day and a film that works within the confines of self-censorship.

Julian Samuel •

HAI TI, QUEB EC d. Tahani Rached

research

Bernadette Muggle, Tahani Rached
cast. Jacques

Leduc, Jean-Pierre

Lachapelle assist. cam. Serge

Lafortune. René Daigle md. Claude Bessagrand, Thierry

Morin light. Roger Martin prod. man. Michel Dan-

devincenzo 2nd unit cam. Alain Dostie assist. to 2nd

unit cam Michel Paulin 2nd unit sd. Marcel Fraser

songs int. by Sylviane Narcisse sd. for songs Yves


Louise Blais narr. Demy Leferrière sd. ed Claude

Langlois assist. ed. Miriam Shtier sd. mic Hans

Peter Strobl sd. mix. trainer Shelley Craig p. Roger

Frappier admin. Monique Letourneau assist. admin.

Louise Consier, A National Film Board of Canada

production. Colour 16mm running time

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