

Tahani Rached's

# Haiti-Québec

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* (Alanis 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 staffer at the NFB, will, in all likelihood, receive no such censorial sanction, and so 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 were forced to leave Haiti. And, as a consequence it is a film of omissions and folkloric condescension.

Rached takes us from one interview to another without accessing anyone who has a particularly informed or historical view of the problems Haitians face in Montreal. To be sure, one appreciates that the film actually interviews 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 determinations 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 régime 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-régime's henchmen. But these and other facts were excluded from the film's discourse. There are no particulars 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. Sugarcane 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 to look at a complex situation with a liberal gaze.

*Haiti-Québec* moves from one sentimental interview to another, opening with a Haitian taxi driver who is sending a tape-recording of his voice to someone in Haiti. We cut back and forth to him 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 multicultural 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 strictures. 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 opining. *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 •

**HAITI, QUEBEC** d. Tahani Rached **research** Bernadette Maugile, Tahani Rached **cam.** Jacques Leduc, Jean-Pierre Lachapelle **assist. cam.** Serge Lafortune, René Daigle **sd.** Claude Beaugrand, Thierry Morlas **light** Roger Martin **prod. man** Michel Dandavino **2nd unit cam.** Alain Dostie **assist. to 2nd unit cam** Michel Paulin **2nd unit sd** Marcel Fraser **songs int. by** Sylvanie Narcisse **sd for songs** Yves Gendron **film ed.** Babalou Hamelin **assist. film. ed** Louise Blais **narr.** Deny Leferrière **sd. ed** Claude Langlois **assist. sd. ed** Miriam Soirier **sd. mic** Hans Peter Strobl **sd. mix. trainee** Shelley Craig **p.** Roger Frappier **admin.** Monique Létourneau **assist. admin.** Louise Cousineau. A National Film Board of Canada production. **Colour** 16mm **running time**

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