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# In the name of ‘cinema action’ and Third World: The intervention of foreign film-makers in Mozambican cinema in the 1970s and 1980s

## ABSTRACT

*In this article we propose a rereading of experiments in ideological and aesthetic engagement conducted by European and Latin-American film-makers in a bid to establish a post-colonial cinema in Mozambique. In order to do this we shall begin by locating this cinematographic ‘Third Worldism’ within the global context of ideas, utopias, and militant idealism that configured the ethics and aesthetics of the ‘cinema-action’ in vogue during the 1960s and 1970s. Next, we will discuss the vicissitudes and certain disenchantments that marked the participation of these European and Latin-American film-makers in this Mozambican adventure, hoping, by so doing, to evince the limits and contradictions of anti-colonialism and Third Worldism within the cinematographic field in general.*

## KEYWORDS

African  
cinema  
anti-colonialist  
Mozambican cinema  
cinema action  
third cinema

1. The 'pedagogia duvidosa da mediação representativa/' 'dubious pedagogy of representative mediation' and the 'pedagogia da imediatidade ética/' 'pedagogy of ethical immediacy' (Rancière 2008: 62).
2. Cf. Guy Gauthier, 'Militantisme et cinéma : de la pratique à la théorie/' 'Activism and cinema: from practice to theory', *CinémAction* (no. 110, 2004, p. 20).
3. Guy Gauthier, 2004, p.20. Why Barthélémy Armengual also distinguishes two categories of political cinema: a "cinema of outrage" and a "civic theater" that seeks to "mobilize the consciences of the immediate problems of social and political reality.
4. Today we see a new form of engagement in which the celebrity of a given artist can serve to rally public and government opinion to a cause or issue. The near-impassioned involvement of George Clooney with regards to Darfur is a case in point. In addition to producing and directing films dealing with the rebellion in this Sudanese region, the actor also strove to denounce in the media what he called a new 'genocide', in the hope that public opinion, once roused, would pressure the international community to act. Cf. documentary film *Sand and Sorrow* (Paul Freeman, 2007), produced by George Clooney.
5. Cf. Guy Gauthier, 'Le cinéma militant reprend du travail/' 'The militant cinema retakes work', *CinémAction* (nº. 110, 2004, p.18-20).

## THE 1960s AND 1970s: CONTEXT OF THIRD WORLDIST ENGAGEMENT AND 'CINEMA ACTION'

The 'Third Worldist' concerns that started to appear in the history of cinema in the 1960s and 1970s were sometimes expressed in both theory and practice. In response to the clamour for the emergence of new national cinema industries at the time, some foreign film-makers became involved in the incipient cinema experiments underway in countries embroiled in a struggle against colonization and imperialism. It was from these that the concept of engaged cinema (akin to engaged literature) began to derive. Sartrean engagement, as we know, presupposed a stance on the part of the writer, but also of the artists and intellectual, toward various types of cause and contemporary problem. It was a position-taking that transcended frontiers, in which this commitment to the just cause culminated in a kind of universal engagement. If there is a humanism in this it stems from the fact that the writer and artists in general feel engaged, above all, in the world around them, and of which they are a part, and, as a result, they feel responsible for 'human freedom'. All artistic activity and production takes the socio-cultural and socio-political reality as its background and object of transformation. In addition to being a form of ideological struggle, engaged art can also be considered a means towards knowledge and freedom.

To what extent does the act of filming repeat and re-enact part of this engagement of literature and the arts? Some film-makers strive to record and transform the socio-cultural reality in which they evolve. These desires built into the act of filming can find completion in the will to act upon the viewer's perception and consciousness. It is in this ethical posture that we find the definition and the paradoxes of political art and the 'pedagogical aesthetics'<sup>1</sup> that govern and determine actions and reflections upon the political dimension of art in general. For Jacques Rancière, no matter how well-intentioned they may be, artistic experiments always 'instrumentalize' the viewer by purporting to teach him or her how best to see images and representations (or, indeed, save the viewer from image isolation or bombardment). This is also the logic at work in the so-called 'militant films'. Guy Gauthier, for example, not only turned militant cinema into a sort of sub-genre of political cinema, but also defined it as a "spontaneous practice, and sometimes a disorderly one, that was, in the beginning, inspired by a revolt against everything that was wrong in the world"<sup>2</sup>. Even if militant cinema works mostly in the political field, its themes and causes overflow it and spill into an array of socio-cultural issues. As such, the situation of injustice creates an 'itch for permanent intervention'<sup>3</sup> that results in either a concrete action or the production of 'militant' films.

From Eisenstein to Griffith, not to mention documentary film-makers from Joris Ivens to Michael Moore, we can see that cinema's commitment to the 'just causes' has accompanied the various different phases in the history of cinema. This evolution oscillates between periods of recrudescence and crisis.<sup>4</sup> New causes keep arising while forms of militant cinema keep changing, even if the principle remains the same: cinema in the service of social transformation.<sup>5</sup>

It was during the 1960s and 1970s, a historical period in which the ideology of a cinema of intervention was at its strongest, that various aesthetic experiments spread throughout Europe and America with the aim of conciliating theory and action. From France came the term 'CinémAction', used to

designate what Guy Hennebelle, one of its creators, successively defined as a state of spirit, a program, an identity, and

an informal movement made up of film-makers, critics, agitators and professors who situated themselves within the dynamic and spirit of a cinema of intervention (formerly known as militant cinema) to promote a cinema – unlike cinephilia – that maintains direct contact with life and action.

(Hennebelle 1979: 6)

On the level of ideas, the 'CinémAction'<sup>6</sup> movement was akin to Bela Balazs' concept<sup>7</sup> of cinema, and, on the other hand, could also claim affiliation with Solano and Getino's Argentine manifesto 'for a third cinema'. From the perspective of cinema action, action should be the natural consequence of theoretical formulations on the social functions of cinema. Cinema action should be developed in parts of the world where intervention in the field of social praxis is fundamental. According to Hennebelle, intervention cinema consists at once in a concept and methodology that makes it possible to resist the allure of 'cinephilia'. As such, what it strives to accentuate is 'information, analysis, theory and action in a clear and transparent style'.<sup>8</sup> Militant or interventionist cinema therefore postulates and attributes a pedagogical mission for and to cinema. The spectrum of action includes the organization of screenings/debates for a select audience with a view to reinvigorating and prolonging the 'anti-imperialist' effects of certain films.

Many of these cinema-action ideas found fertile soil in the Third World. Most Third World nations, engaged in the struggle for independence, attracted all manner of participative sympathy. Support for emancipation movements intensified with the end of the Second World War; first on the purely ideological level, when the communists did not hesitate to break with the colonial logic prevalent throughout nineteenth and twentieth century Europe. On the literary and artistic levels, support for the nationalist demands of the colonies was much more clearly expressed. Post-colonial French cinema, as conceived by Eades,<sup>9</sup> reveals, as I see it, part of this commitment of the film-makers of the day with the colonial reality. For the author, unlike the films produced and funded by colonial Imperial France, post-colonial French cinema consisted of a corpus of no more than 50 films whose only common denominator was a questioning of imperialist expansionism. These are films that pose an ideological counter-discourse. The 'oppositionist discourse' of some works dealing with the French colonial presence in Algeria or Indochina diverged from the official historical line insofar as it focused on the rudderless and 'imminent and confirmed end of colonialism'. It was through this post-colonial cinema that many film-makers rallied behind the cause of decolonization and declared their faith, through fictional narrative, in the sacrosanct principle of self-determination for all peoples.

It was in the name of this principle of socially and ideologically engaged cinema that many foreign film-makers in the 1960s and 1970s spread across the globe (Africa, the Caribbean, Latin-America) to make anti-colonial films in nations where national cinematographic utopias were burgeoning. In some cases, there was even a kind of conjunction or communion among individual and nationalist utopias. In other situations, all manner of difficulties quickly revealed the limits of intervention cinema. For example, the experiments of Gillo Pontecorvo and the Russian Mikhail Kalatazov (in different contexts)

6. There is also a quarterly magazine of the same name, still published today, that deals with world cinema in all its thematic and stylistic diversity, albeit with a less political and ideological tone.
7. For Bela Balazs, cinema is an imaginary world superposed upon the real world and which transforms it, modifying the perception we have of our universe.
8. Guy Hennebelle. Le pourquoi et le comment/The why and the how. *CinémAction*, n°8, 1979, p. 6.
9. Caroline Eades, 'Le cinéma post-colonial français'/'The French post-colonial cinema' (Paris: ed. Cerf-corlet. 2006).

10. A level at which, according to Ferro, the film-maker intervenes and places himself, consciously or otherwise, 'in the service of a cause, of an ideology, either explicitly or without openly addressing the issues', in Marc Ferro, *Cinema e história/ Cinema and history* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992, p. 14).

in militant cinema became famous in the history of world cinema both for the anecdotal aspect and real aesthetic impact of their filmic adventures in countries struggling for liberation. Pontecorvo not only created the best film on the de-colonial wars in Africa but also paved the way for a genuinely Algerian cinema. The vicissitudes of the production of Mikhail Kalatazov's *Soy Cuba/I am Cuba* (1964) represent the most emblematic case of anti-imperialist involvement of a foreign film-maker in another country. Kalatazov went to this Caribbean island in the throes of revolution with the intention of not only composing a visual poem to the glory of triumphant Cuban communism, but of preparing a portrait of the social hardships that justified the political transformation. Upon disembarking on Cuba with a production team worthy of a blockbuster, the Soviet director, thanks to his virtuosity and technical prowess, managed to seal, cinematographically-speaking, a certain fraternity between the Caribbean island and the communist superpower of the 1960s. It was the first Soviet/Cuban co-production, but also a decisive step towards the emergence of a national revolutionary cinema. Two decades later, it was Cuba's turn to house one of the biggest cinematic and audiovisual hubs then in formation, thus buttressing the concept of south-south cooperation in cinematic fare. Despite the incomprehension that beset the production and reception of this monumental hymn to Cuba, Kalatazov went down in cinema history for the formal and aesthetic boldness of his work and for the idealism and naivety that cemented his ideological engagement in a different cultural reality.

Part of the cultural history of post-colonial Mozambique is strongly related to this principle of universal engagement of the foreign film-makers (Europeans, but also Brazilians) that participated in the process of creating cinema in this lusophone African nation. After a gruelling struggle for decolonization against Salazar's Portugal, this young African country finally regained its sovereignty in 1975. That same year, the government established the first National Cinema Institute (INC), whose mission was to be political, cultural and artistic in nature. We might say that, at this juncture in Mozambique, there began a process similar to that which Marco Ferro identifies as the 'third level of stratification of knowledge of the past',<sup>10</sup> and cinema was the main agent of this historical rewriting. The film-maker, like a historian, was invited not only to reassess and rewrite the official history, but also to portray the post-colonial reality. As in Vietnam, Cuba and most of Latin America, cinema was tested by the last African nations still struggling against Portuguese colonialism (Angola and Mozambique) as a weapon of liberation and as a mechanism for the symbolic creation of the nation. Attempts were made to apply Lenin's famous phrase – 'cinema is the most important of the arts' – to its fullest consequence.

### WHEN CINEMA WAS BORN ALONGSIDE NATIONHOOD IN MOZAMBIQUE

A decade later than the rest of African cinema, Mozambican film emerged within a context of decolonization and a war against its neighbours (former Rhodesia and South Africa). This historical context of anti-imperialist struggle opened the almost natural path towards the political use of cinema while laying the groundwork for a new form of cooperation with the rest of the world. The War of Independence had led to a total loss of contact with the ex-colonial power, leaving the political authorities of this fledgling lusophone African nation with no other option than cooperation with other nations, often

on the grounds of ideological affinity. As such, the first technical and logistical support came from cooperation with Cuba and the former Soviet Union.

It is important to underscore the particularity of Mozambican cinema within the African context. In addition to being a cinema whose dawning coincided with the utopia of nation-building, Mozambican cinema stands out from other national African cinema industries insofar as it gained a cultural foothold without any intervention from Portugal, its former colonizer. As is known, the cinematographies of French West Africa (the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Burkina Faso) were born of, and remained tributaries to, post-colonial cultural cooperation with France. The first film-makers and technicians cut their teeth on the current affairs films produced during the colonial period. The right to look, demanded and exercised later by African film-makers, was born, in a sense, under the control and tutelage of the colonial power.<sup>11</sup> Some of the paradoxes in African post-colonial cinema lie in this ambiguous relationship with the former colonizers, which Elisabeth Lequeret so aptly describes as:

a constant and never denied relationship with the old colonial power. The choice of language, the places where the film-makers learned their trade, production assistance: numerous, strong and almost incestuous are the ties that bind African film directors to France.

(Lequeret 2003: 8–9)

Mozambican and Angolan cinema, on the contrary, surged and consolidated in adversity and alterity towards the ex-colonizer. To a degree, this allowed them to study their histories from a more anti-colonial than post-colonial perspective.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the governments of francophone African nations that relinquished cinema in favour of public, state-owned television, FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front) was already planning a cinema policy in the middle of the War of Independence. Among the concerns of the Mozambican leadership during and after the war was to germinate a project to endow the new nation with a form of expression that could translate the ideas of the revolution and reach the rural and small-town populations. Later, help from France, Cuba and the former USSR would complement the endogenous efforts of FRELIMO, but instead of an independent cinema, as was common in the rest of the recently-emancipated African nations, FRELIMO opted openly for a state-run and ideologically biased industry. Under such conditions, the film-maker was reduced to a mere producer of political images. The interest in cinema stirred within the political sphere of Mozambique, resulted in the creation of the National Institute of Cinema (INC), which embarked upon the production of one of the longest film diaries in the history of African cinema: *Kuxa Kanema: o nascimento do cinema/Kuxa Kanema: the birth of cinema* (Margarida Cardoso, 2004).

The cinema documentary *Kuxa Kanema*<sup>13</sup> not only represented the concretization of popular cinema in the sense of 'capturing the image of the people on screen, and delivering those images back to the people', but also symbolized the political will to transform cinema into a weapon of ideological struggle, and a mechanism for the symbolic creation of the nascent Mozambican nation. While the National Institute of Cinema, created in 1975, the year independence was won, took charge of the production and filming of current affairs films, mobile units<sup>14</sup> roamed the countryside taking to the people the images of the new socialist nation. As such, in the history of Mozambique, *Kuxa Kanema* ('the birth of cinema' in the local tongue) represents a point of intersection

11. Cf. Elisabeth Lequeret (2003).
12. Even in a country like Algeria, where the first filmic experiments supported by the FLN portrayed the decolonization wars in a nationalist tone, relations with France were not wholly broken, at least not on the cultural plane. The film *Le Vent des Aurès/ The wind of Aurès* (Mohamed Lakhdar Hamina, 1967) was the first African film to win the Palme d'Or at Cannes, in 1967.
13. *Kuxa Kanema* or 'birth of cinema' is considered by many historians of African cinema to be one of the first concrete cultural actions of the Mozambican government, only a year after independence was won. The documentary film made by the film-maker Margarida Cardoso in 2004 can be seen as testimony to this cinematographic adventure, but also as a film-memoir of that utopian period and an attempt to recover part of the history of the construction of the Mozambican nation.
14. Cars donated by the Soviet corporation.

15. Jean-Michel Frodon (1998: 12).
16. Oudart and Terres (1979: 54–59).

that always existed between the machinery of cinema and the mystifications that created the nation. If there is, as J. M. Frodon says, some form of 'natural community between nation and cinema',<sup>15</sup> it is because nation and cinema exist and could only exist thanks to the same mechanism: projection.

So if there was a period in African history when the issue of the intertwinement of 'nation and cinema' proved crucial, it was during the 1970s, in the former Portuguese colonies. For FRELIMO, cinema served both nationalist ends and helped resolve the everyday problems of the population (education and awareness campaigns in the areas of education, health and hygiene). It was during this political and cultural context of a Mozambique still in test phase, that Jean Rouch and his French team arrived in Maputo to take part in this process of training the population in the use of Super-8 technology, so that it could take a starring role in the creation of the mythology of the Mozambican nation then under construction.

### THE INVOLVEMENT OF JEAN ROUCH AND GODARD IN MOZAMBICAN CINEMA

Generally, when a utilitarian concept of cinematographic art does not come built into some governmental or nationalist project, it arises as a backdrop to the work of film-makers who, individually or as part of a collective, attempt to architect a revolutionary cinema poetic capable of transforming the political and social reality. Artists and intellectuals from other horizons who harboured convictions as to the potential reach of film became directly involved in efforts to create a cinema that could reflect the concerns of the Mozambican people. Their contributions were varied and amounted, at the time, to a kind of communion of the dreams and utopias of film-makers from the north and the south. It is worth remembering that the 1970s were marked by the ideological war between two hegemonic blocks and their respective satellites across the globe. Southern Africa, Angola and Mozambique proved not only the theatre of the last Wars of Independence, but also fertile ground for the application of anti-colonialist and Third Worldist concepts of cinema. Technical support from Cuba and the former USSR was of great help to FRELIMO in inculcating a cinematographic culture that could churn out revolutionary propaganda of a Marxist persuasion. Belief in the emancipative power and values of the moving image in the Third World saw the paths of Jean Rouch and Godard cross with a certain juncture of the history of African cinema. When they arrived in Mozambique, these two French film-makers had a very clear goal: to help this fledgling lusophone nation to establish a lasting cinema industry.

In 1979, the respected magazine *Cahiers du Cinema*<sup>16</sup> published an interview with four members of the Comité du Film Ethnographique from the Film Department at Université de Paris X, in which they recounted at length their experience in producing and making films in super-8 among the population of Mozambique. The organizers underscored the complex socio-political context of constant mutation in which film was considered 'a vehicle for information and an important ideological tool'. As such, the experiments with super-8 in the nascent Mozambican republic served as a valuable test of the real potential of this new technology that made it possible to explore the political, economic and aesthetic dimensions of cinema. Mozambique was perfect for that experiment, insofar as it was 'virgin' territory in which everything was under construction. In 1977, Jean Rouch had already made first contact with the Mozambican authorities by visiting the University of Maputo, where he

proposed the idea of creating workshops that would enable Mozambicans to film their own reality. The later work by Jaques d'Arthuys and team was therefore part of a new form of cultural cooperation that the Mozambican government wanted to nurture with whoever was willing to help. In addition to the quickfire courses in film reading administered to groups selected from various socio-professional strata, what the workshop organizers really wanted to stress was practical training. This resulted in numerous short films produced on the basis of improvisation on general interest themes and subjects (a school on the outskirts of Maputo, an old colonial penitentiary transformed into a school/orphanage, a hospital environment, etc.). If this Super-8 experiment in Mozambique resembles the practice of militant or intervention cinema it is because it involved a modality of exhibition/reception. The films, produced by small groups, were then screened with a view to evoking an initial reaction from the participants and sparking debates that led to reflections of an aesthetic, but also political and social order. As J. d'Arthuys recognized, sometimes the content of these impassioned discussions left the French team a little disoriented. The pedagogical dimension basically consisted in putting familiarity with cinematographic language ahead of all ideological considerations. In the evaluation of J. Rouch himself, the super-8 experiment in Mozambique revealed itself to be the 'most beautiful school of cinema' in Africa in virtue of the spontaneity and direct and active involvement of the local population:

in the morning, people would shoot in a village. They would reveal the footage, make a provisional super-8 reel and project it on a 2 x 1-meter screen that same afternoon in the very village where they had shot earlier that morning.<sup>17</sup>

The ethnographical nature of this experiment derives from the themes and everyday issues broached in documentary form: 'they were small stories built around their activities and they were the rough draft of a new cinema'<sup>18</sup>. From this pedagogical and experimental practice came the germ of a new form of documentary cinema that to this day secures Mozambique's place in African film.

This was precisely the crux of the divergences and frustrations that peppered these experiments. While Rouch and Godard advocated the capacitation of the population in film techniques so that they could give rise to a cinema by the people, for the people, the FRELIMO government – with the creation of such structures as the INC, the centre for communications studies (charged with developing campaigns to propagate information on health, education and farming techniques) – seemed more interested in nurturing a state-run cinema produced by professionals. Even using this infrastructure as a base, the French organizers recognized that their collaboration would occur in parallel with the cinematographic activities of the INC, the main agent of Mozambican cinema and the institute responsible for the production of the weekly *Kuxa Kenama* film diary.

### GODARD'S FRUSTRATED EXPERIMENT

In the end, Godard, like Jean Rouch, ended up confronting the paradox of the responsibility of the engaged writer as announced by Sartre: the defense of liberty oscillates between the acceptance of ends and the rejection of certain means. The film-maker, like the writer, when engaged in a cause and

17. In an interview J. Rouch gave to the e-zine KINOK.COM. Available in : [http://www.arkepix.com/kinok/Jean%20ROUCH/rouch\\_interview.html](http://www.arkepix.com/kinok/Jean%20ROUCH/rouch_interview.html) 30 July 2009.
18. Jean Rouch, interview in an electronic review: [http://www.arkepix.com/kinok/Jean%20ROUCH/rouch\\_interview.html](http://www.arkepix.com/kinok/Jean%20ROUCH/rouch_interview.html) 30 July 2009.

19. According to the historians of that period in Mozambican cinema, what Godard had in mind upon arrival in Maputo was to make a documentary with the prophetic title: 'Images pour la renaissance d' une nation'/'Images for the renaissance of a nation', in a clear allusion to Griffith's epic on the American war of secession.
20. Luís Carlos Patraquim, then a young writer and animator for the cine-club, tells how it fell to him to meet Godard after the latter had spent ages waiting in vain at his hotel in Maputo for some contact from an INC director, a minister, or some Mozambican film-maker (Luís Carlos Patraquim 2000. Available in: <http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=1254>).
21. This event occupies an important place in the FRELIMO mindset as a means of justifying the armed anti-colonial struggle. Cf. the book "Datas e Documentos da História da Frelimo"/"Dates and documents of the history of FRELIMO", 1975, 2nd edition, by Alberto Joaquim Chipande.

fight for freedom, feels in the skin the dilemma of choosing the right means towards his chosen ends. In the case of the popular cinema that FRELIMO intended to implement, some of the means envisaged by Godard<sup>19</sup> and Rouch clashed head on with some of the Mozambican party's proposals. One way or another, this super-8 foray beneath the African sun, like all other Third Worldist adventures in the arts, ended up a mix of dream, error and frustration caused by divergences between personal utopias and cultural policies at a given time in a nation's history. Even though a nation then under construction, Mozambique already had, back in the days of the guerilla war, its own masterminds of cultural and artistic projects. With independence, all that remained was to apply these new ideas, even if necessarily with the help of foreign nations. Inevitably, there was a certain clash between the visions from the inside and the outside, as is clearly illustrated by the anecdote recounted by Carlos Patraquim about Godard's arrival in Maputo and the delay in his being received by the Mozambican authorities.<sup>20</sup>

### BRAZILIANS IN MOZAMBIKAN CINEMA

It was also in that historical context marked by the anti-colonialism of intercultural fraternity that some Brazilian film-makers and theatre people became involved in the drive to create a Mozambican cinema. The most emblematic case of this transnational engagement is that of Ruy Guerra. The confusion that surrounds the cultural identity and nationality of this important exponent of Cinema Novo was itself a distinctive characteristic of his career as the film-maker for all causes. Ruy Guerra is the typical citizen of the world; his life and activity as a film-maker and critic unfolded in three different countries (Mozambique, Portugal and Brazil). When he left Brazil to return to Mozambique during the 1970s – after making the film *Os fuzis/The guns* (1964) – his goal was to help reorganize mobile cinema. He started directing INC activities in 1978 and, following in the footsteps of another great Mozambican film-maker, Fernando Almeida e Silva – who had recorded some footage of the transition period and Mozambican independence –, Ruy Guerra chose an event from the colonial past as the subject of his film *Mueda – Memória e massacre/Mueda – Memory and carnage* (1978). The film revisited the massacre carried out by Portuguese troops in Mueda on 16 June 1960, after a local revolt demanding self-determination. For FRELIMO, the event was proof that independence would only be won through 'violent revolution' and armed struggle. Every people that aspires to freedom has its great tragedies and martyrs that serve as a point of reference in the collective imagination. They possess a strong symbolic charge in the emergence of a national consciousness. If many historians see something in common between the Mueda massacre and the mutiny on the Encouraçado Potemkin, it is because both events involved high death tolls among innocent civilians and ended up triggering revolution. Ruy Guerra was certainly aware of the emotional and symbolic charge of this colonial fact. Whether influenced or not by Soviet cinema, he decided, like Eisenstein, to explore the event cinematographically in terms of the Mozambican collective unconscious. The Mueda massacre, like the butchery on the steps of Odessa, is a tragedy, and as such it should be the object of a political and ideological recovery,<sup>21</sup> taking its place in the generative cinematographic mythology of the nation.

From the titles and themes of his films, we can see that Ruy Guerra, like another major name in Mozambican cinema, Fernando Almeida, strove to



speak of the post-colonial present and future by revisiting the anti-colonial struggle in Mozambique. This dual commitment to the memory of the colonial past and the utopias of the present is clearly discernable in the work of many African film-makers after independence. Their films are militant insofar as their memory is selective and events strategically revisited. The cinematic figuration they make of the past should serve to unsettle consciences.<sup>22</sup> So if there was a form of political engagement in the activities of Ruy Guerra in Mozambican cinema, it was due to his work as a film-maker and as a director of the INC. He collaborated with Fernando Silva, who Luís Carlos Patraquim considered the 'source and soul' of the first series of *Kuxa Kanema*. The result of this collaboration was the inauguration of a 'new poetic and specific thematic for Mozambican cinema' (Patraquim, 2000), and the fruits of the endeavour would attract the sympathies and militant enthusiasm of film-makers from Africa and around the world.

22. Ruy Guerra's first feature-film on Mozambican soil, *Mueda – Memória e massacre/Mueda – Memory and carnage*, divides opinions: some see it as a cinematographic manipulation of the historical fact by FRELIMO, while others see it as a piece of historical testimony.

### LICÍNIO AZEVEDO: THE MOST MOZAMBICAN OF ALL BRAZILIAN FILM-MAKERS

If Ruy Guerra is customarily seen as the most Brazilian Mozambican film-maker, Licínio Azevedo is undoubtedly the most Mozambican and African Brazilian film-maker. Licínio's African adventure began and ended with Mozambique, when he went to make an action film (inconcluded). The motivations that led this journalist from the Brazilian south to Maputo exceed mere investigative journalism to become something closer to militant cinema. The project involved gathering first-hand testimony for a documentary on the war against Portuguese colonization (though the film was never finished). This Brazilian's commitment to Mozambique became as literary as it was cinematographic. When Licínio's fieldwork did not convert into films (fictional or documentary), it did into books. His films and novels, to this day, explore the theme of the two wars (decolonization and civil war) that marked the recent history of Mozambique. His more recent documentaries (in the style of direct cinema) approach the theme of the civil war from the angle of the damage it caused and the wounds it left. His most expressive films in this sense are the documentaries *Night Lodgers* (2007) and *A árvore de nossos antepassados/The tree of our ancestors* (1994). Filmed with the raw realism typical of social documentaries, these two films focus on the words and deeds of the common people. The judgment of the fratricidal civil war that freed them from FRELIMO and RENAMO runs like a watermark and guiding narrative thread throughout these accounts. In *Night Lodgers*, the spectator and camera accompany the footsteps and voices of two ex-members of staff at the former Grand Hotel, a symbol of luxury during colonial times, as they wander among the rooms, now occupied by homeless squatters. In addition to the thoughts of the two ex-hotel staffers, we also hear from the building's new occupiers. In one of the rooms, a young man mentions the civil war as being one of the reasons that pushed him to leave the countryside for the city. In *A árvore dos nossos antepassados/The tree of our ancestors*, the protagonists are a family of refugees from a Mozambican border-town whose return from forced exile in Tanzania is accompanied by the camera. Over the course of this family's long walk home and their confessions before the camera, the theme that caused their exile – the civil war that devastated Mozambique, leaving it debilitated for nearly twenty years – is quickly supplanted by the theme of return, of the appeal of ancestry and one's native homeland. These issues reappear in

23. Besides becoming an independent film-maker, Licínio decided to create his own production company, Ebanó Multimédia.
24. Name of an itinerant movie.

the documentary *Mãos de barro/Argile hands* (2003), which portrays the life of a ceramicist who fought during the War of Independence, Reinata Sadimba, and her return to the Mueda plateau, the land of the famous ebony sculptors.

All of Licínio's films are constructed as social films that privilege the viewpoint of the population concerning its own reality (the fight for survival of cistern-making women in the documentary *A guerra da Água/The war of the Water* [1995]), as well as those of the civil war victims and the refugees it created. As such, these are works that represent a clear leaning in the filmography of Licínio Azevedo that distances him from the aesthetic of nationalist cinema. What predominates in his work is an aesthetic concern with a type of cinema that is more socially than ideologically engaged; a cinema that examines the destiny of simple people and that explores the relationships between history, memory, African tradition, and the everyday difficulties of the peasant and urban populations. This shift may signify a certain post-colonial disenchantment on the part of the film-maker and an end to the great nationalist utopias that came with the first years of Mozambican independence. Yet it also indicates a certain pragmatism and lucidity in the way Licínio came to manage his career<sup>23</sup> from the 1990s onwards in Mozambique.

This change of posture, which can be observed in almost all of the film-makers who participated in the fledgling efforts to create a Mozambican cinema, denotes the end of an era marked by utopias of ideological engagement. With the fire that destroyed what was left of the INC archive in 1987, it is as if the whole memory of a prodigious decade in Mozambican cinema was erased. For Luís Carlos Patraquim, the main explanation for this disenchantment on the part of the film-makers lies in the fact that the post-independence situation in Mozambique and other African nations was badly handled, politically-speaking. It was, in effect, a post-colonial context in which cinema became the poor cousin of cultural policy. The 'emergence of television in the 80s and the vicissitudes of politics, the economy and war killed off the dream of the creation and continuity of a national cinematography' (Patraquim 2002). The context that took shape at the end of the 1980s, couched in the disillusionment of Mozambican film-makers, gave rise to a new phase of experimentation in new models of production, including video. It is as if history were repeating itself inside-out. After the militant experiment with super-8 conducted by Jean Rouch and his team, it was now the turn of the NGOs, international agencies, and private interests to determine production demands, far removed from the themes of the INC and *Kuxa Kanema*<sup>24</sup>.

### THE LIMITS OF CINEMA ACTION AND MILITANT ENGAGEMENT ON FOREIGN SOIL

Like Licínio Azevedo, another Brazilian, José Celso Correa Martinez, more linked to theatre than film, also had brief contact with Mozambican cinema. It was a sporadic experience, short but intense. He and his team arrived in Mozambique with the idea of creating a revolutionary cinematographic circuit. The project belonged to the purest tradition of cinema action or intervention cinema. Here in Brazil, the iconoclastic dramatist had already formalized this kind of political intervention through art in his 'workshop theatre' project, created in the late 1950s. The concept of 'cinemaction' was something of a result of the subversive power of theatre in the cinema field. After Brazil, Mozambique was ripe experimental terrain for this aesthetic policy.

Much has been written about José Celso's African experience, but the best account is given in the São Paulo dramatist's own memoir, in which he detailed the trials and tribulations that marked his engagement in the incipient Mozambican cinema during the 1970s. Like most of the artists that waged the May '68 revolution across the globe, Zé Celso conceived of the arts of theatre and cinema as means toward demystification. As such, not only could the transformative power of 'workshop theatre' be transferred to the cinematic field, but the screen and stage were considered laboratories for complementary experimentations. In his controversial plays and films, Celso Martinez assumes the position of an engaged artist in the Sartrean sense. The defense of liberty has neither border nor nationality. All causes during that turbulent moment in the history of Africa and Portugal permeated his works<sup>25</sup>. In his post-colonial, Third Worldist undertaking, with authorization and free rein granted by FRELIMO, he produced *25* (1975), a film-tribute in the form of an ode to the Mozambican Revolution:

25. He made the film documentary *O Parto/ The Birth* (1974), on the Carnation Revolution that brought down the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal.

We were in Mozambique filming *25* and from the very beginning we received a lot of support from the Ministry of Information, which provided a Bolex, a tape recorder and Kodak film. When the film was finished (it was completed in Portugal) we returned to Mozambique and, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month, a year after independence, we made the first screening to the staff at the Cinema Institute. It was then shown to the population, and to the directors, who liked it so much they asked us to participate in the institute, in the organization of the institute.

(Martinez 1980: 09)

The aim and goal of José Celso's intervention in Mozambique was to concentrate efforts on the issue of distribution of the films produced locally. Even though well-received by the political authorities, the problems of the Cinemaction film-makers began to arise from divergences in points of view with the other administrators in the apparatus of Mozambican cinema. José Celso attributes these differences to ideological factors. In the book *Cinemação/ Cinemaction* (1980), he places those responsible for Mozambican cinema into two categories. On the one hand there were the Mozambicans who had already been making movies during the war and who were battle-hardened in video techniques. However, after independence, José Celso tells us, 'these guys moved to the war zone in Rhodesia', a Mozambican neighbour that was also embroiled in the struggle for independence. On the other hand, in the capital Maputo, there was a group of film-makers that 'were invited to organize cinema, people who had already been involved in cinema during the colonial period'. In between these two groups were Celso Martinez and his team, willing to make a contribution, in their own way, to the birth of Mozambican cinema. To this end, they strove to base their program upon 'various resolutions of FRELIMO itself, which had more or less established, during the war, a program for the future Mozambican cinema' (Martinez 1980: 10). But as the group in the capital had a very 'western, intellectualized understanding of cinema, within a more sophisticated cinema market', they were less willing to agree with the conceptions of a cinema that, while engaged politically and socially, was based on improvisation and near-amateurism. The difficulties Zé Celso's group faced in finding their place in this dispute among different contributions rushed into Mozambican cinema shows just how hard it can be to reconcile the engagement and idealism of foreign film-makers with the local reality.

26. Cf. the DOCTV CPLP Program, which unites all eight Portuguese-speaking nations. One of the aims of the program is to stimulate cultural and economic exchange between the Lusophonic peoples and to implement public policies for the development of documentary production and televised distribution.

## CONCLUSION

Having made urgency films, some of the participants in the Mozambican adventure moved from militant engagement to a posteriori reflection on these experiences and on what the African forays of foreign film-makers represented symbolically in 1970s Mozambique. In some cases, this examination of conscience takes the form of self-criticism and a critical re-evaluation of political and ideological engagement. The aim of this article was not to make an exhaustive appraisal of those interventions, nor to pass judgment on them. Quite the contrary, in fact. What I have opted to do is consider this discursive production (interviews, diaries, books, personal reflections on the anti-colonial experience) as a work of memory and as raw material for both the historian (hoping to understand the emergence of African cinema through the prism of a place where it is seldom studied) and the theorist (intent on critically revising Third Worldist theses and concepts and those pertaining to 'cinema-action' as applied within the African context).

On the other hand, the Mozambican adventure is an interesting platform from which to observe the way official history and collective and individual memory might diverge, but nonetheless complement each other in what Marc Ferro calls the 'dual function of history', i.e. its 'therapeutic' and 'militant' functions (Ferro 1999: 12). The sundry versions are cross-referenced to reveal innumerable aspects of the cultural and political history of 1970s Mozambique. This historical revision is done by both foreign protagonists and the Mozambicans themselves (cf. the documentary *Kuxa Kanema*).

There is no doubt that the upshot of this foreign participation was positive for Mozambican cinema. From foreign contributions, political and aesthetic ideas and conceptions (sometimes antagonistic), surged a documentary tradition in Mozambique that ended up making the country a reference in terms of the production (modest though it was) of documentary films and a showcase for the genre throughout Africa and in the world through the 'Dockanema Festival'.

Lastly, we might add that the participation of certain Brazilian film-makers in Mozambican cinema during that decade reveals a wealth of learning for the study of the multilateral relations that Brazil has been establishing with Mozambique and other Portuguese-speaking African nations. In the field of cultural and audiovisual cooperation that marks the re-approximation between Brazil and Africa we can discern a mutual respect for the sensibilities and concerns of each people. Proof of this is the freedom extended to Mozambicans, Angolans and others in implementing their respective DocTV<sup>26</sup> projects, even if backed up by Brazilian initiative and expertise.

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