

**Evoking the *Kuxa Kenema*¹: Reconstructing
History and Memory
Through *Cinema Novo* in Mozambican Cinema**

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E amamentados a chumbo quente das espingardas os
embriões de Mueda remexem-se nas placentas da Mãe-
Terra e MOCAMBIQUE NASCE!

(Escritoem 1960, naterceiranoite deposeda
chacinadeMueda)²

We are the conscious builders of History and Progress,
We are the destroyers of imperialism, We are the people.

FRELIMO³

The issue of managing proper representation of the "Other" remains at the forefront of postcolonial discourse and criticism. In the case of Third World film and specifically film of the Lusophone world, the importance of constructing a cinematic expression and discourse that provides a truthful reconstruction of history feeds this call for proper representation of the "Other" and restores a collective memory. One finds evidence of this need for reconstructing history and collective memory in the hopes of cultivating a national identity/consciousness by looking at the acknowledgement given to Afro-Lusophone culture in the *Cinema Novo* movement in Brazil and the creation of the *Instituto Nacional de Cinema (INC)* in Mozambique in 1975. In this paper I will utilize the *Cinema Novo* movement in Brazil as a point of entry in examining the development of an Afro-Lusophone national consciousness through the reconstruction of history and collective memory. More importantly, I will discuss the relationship between the drive behind the construction of *Cinema Novo* and the beginning of the *INC* in Mozambique. The main and most notable link between these two cinematic milestones is that of the mere presence and innovative artistic drive of Rui Guerra. Guerra was born in Mozambique and moved to Brazil as a child only to return in exile in the early 1970's, founding the *Instituto Nacional de Cinema (INC)* in 1975. Guerra's interest in the reconstruction of history and collective memory

through means of popular cinematic expression can be seen through one of the most celebrated films of *Cinema Novo*, *Os Fuzis* (The Guns). As well, the first feature film made through the *INC* (by Rui Guerra) was *Mueda: memoria e massacre* (Mueda: Memorial and Massacre) and proves to be an integral part of the development of Mozambican national consciousness while uniquely demonstrating the dynamics of symbolic cultural interaction and its marriage with folklore, myth, memory, and history.

Official History vs. Popular Memory

In Teshome Gabriel's article, "Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory: Towards a Third Aesthetic," he discusses the difference between an "official history," which "tends to arrest the future by means of the past" claiming a "center which continuously marginalized other" and "[inhibiting] people from constructing their own history or histories" with that of "popular memory" which "considers the past as a political issue, ordering the past not only as reference point but also as a theme of struggle"(53-54). Therefore, Gabriel suggests *popular memory* functions to erase the construction of the "center" as well as the "margins" from the paradigm instigated from *official history*. Moreover, the significance of *popular memory* lies in its function to include those marginalized (in bondage) from being participants in the truthful representations of their history and culture which allows a multivoiced narrative to arise and create a new means of *Being* within the constructs of national identity.

This concept of *official history* vs. *popular memory* is complemented by Colin Gardner's essay entitled, "On Nomads, Rhizomes, and Speed: Toward an Ontology of Smooth Space in 'Third' Cinema." In this essay, Gardner begins with a theorization of affirmation ontology concerned with *Being* in its multiple manifestations. He, then, moves to theorizing the nomadic impulse of the ontological movement of *third* cinema itself, utilizing the ontological theories of Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and Homi Bhaba's thoughts on a *third space* in his essay, "The Commitment to Theory." Gardner then incorporates Teshome Gabriel's idea of connecting the nomadic and the ruin, expressing film as a nomadic discursive space where the construction of narrative meaning is building of discourse from dead fragments.

In the case of *Cinema Novo* and the construction of the *INC*, these dead fragments are the empty truths and misrepresentations that existed from the cinematic expression before each movement's birth. What becomes suspect here is the nature of the narrative as an agent of *official history*. Yet, when nomadic aesthetics are put into motion, one finds nomadism within the cinematic narrative; for the stagnation of the *narrative* is transformed into the *cultural narrative*, and the *cultural narrative* fuels *popular memory*. Teshome Gabriel explains in his essay, "Ruin and the Other: Towards a Language of Memory" that,

Narrative takes events separated in time and space and strives to make them continuous. Cultural narratives are essentially attempts to preserve and restore. Narratives and historiographies are about the past that is no longer there; that perhaps never were there. Narratives, then, always rely on the suppression of Otherness. (217)

What both *Cinema Novo* and the *INC* set out to achieve was the decentering of an *official history* and the implementation of *popular memory* through cinematic expression, evoking a *Kuxa Kenema* (rebirth of image). And, in doing so, *popular memory* directs towards a nomadic way of filming and reading that allows for a continuous becoming of *Being* which also vehemently fights back against the oppressive nature that governed the constant erasure of history, culture, and identity of the *Other*. The implementation of a new mode of cinematic expression in both respective regions put into motion (with rhizomic effects) the acquisition of language and image as memory—*popular memory*—over the harmfully stagnant misrepresentation that *official history* had projected and embraced.

Cinema Novo: Creating a New Brazilian Identity

Cinema Novo was a revolutionary movement of cultural transformation that allowed for a reanalysis and reconstruction of a cinematic Brazilian reality and national identity. This movement spans out beyond cinematic expression, including theater, literature, and popular music of the era. As Carlos Diegues explains in Randal Johnson's book, *Brazilian Cinema*, "*Cinema Novo* is only part of a larger process transforming Brazilian society and reaching, at long

last the cinema" (65). The beginnings of *Cinema Novo* during the early 1960's proved to set in motion a movement which audaciously and defiantly explored beyond the cinematic aesthetic of the Vargas era and allowed for a closer in-depth examination into the historical, political, and cultural aspects of Brazilian life and the Brazilian national consciousness. In doing so, representations of Afro-Brazilian culture and identity were explored and interwoven into the search for a new and more truthful representation of the Brazilian identity.

It is important to note that *Cinema Novo* occurred in three phases. The first phase (and the most important phase in regards to our discussion) can be traced from 1960 to 1964.⁴ Within this phase, animosity towards the dominant existence of Hollywood film and aesthetics grew among filmmakers. Through models of filmmaking like that of Italian Neo-Realism and French New Wave, the films made during this phase dealt heavily with the problems and realities among the marginalized people of rural and urban communities.

The *official history* from Brazilian cinematic expression, up until *Cinema Novo*, erased the rural communities from existence. The histories, cultures, and memories of this region had not been properly represented. This first phase of *Cinema Novo* catalyzed a new interest and dedication in looking at the rural communities, especially those in the Northeastern region of Brazil, which proved to allow the marginalized histories, perspectives, and voices of a region to begin to gain representation. The dynamics of the first phase initiated the development of a *popular memory* in the Northeast, which provided a nomadic-like effect throughout the rest of Brazil. This greatly shaped the Brazilian consciousness because no more could moviegoers (generally upper-middle to upper class) deny the existence, sentiments, and issues within the marginalized communities. The histories, filled with harsh realities and injustices of the marginalized, would inevitably become apart of the national consciousness.

Brazilian cinema, before this phase, was constructed for the rich in that these films projected happy, beautiful rich people with luxurious houses and automobiles. This, in a sense, was a good part of the *official history*. This first phase of *Cinema Novo*, dedicated to decentering this *official history*, found filmmakers filming the marginalized majority where they lived. So, the films of the urban communities took place in the *favelas* (slums) that existed

there and focused completely on the life and problems therein. Within the rural areas, there was an all-consuming concentration on poverty, drought, agrarian concerns, and the cultures of the Blacks and Indians in these regions. Glauber Rocha refers to this first phase of cinematic expression as "An Aesthetic of Hunger," epitomizing the desperation and deprivation those of the Northeast had to contend with on a day-to-day basis to survive. Rocha comments that within this first phase, "*Cinema Novo* [had] narrated, described, poeticized, discussed, analyzed, and stimulated the themes of hunger: characters eating dirt and roots, characters stealing to eat, characters fleeing to eat" (68). As mentioned before, this in-your-face kind of realistic cinematic expression effected the national consciousness of those moviegoers (and, of course, the government) who were now bombarded with language and images which created a nomadic cultural narrative that could no longer be ignored and held in bondage in the periphery, evoking *popular memory* to take place.

One of the most celebrated films of *Cinema Novo* is Rui Guerra's *Os Fuzis* (The Guns). *Os Fuzis* has been hailed as the most explosive political film of *Cinema Novo*. As a film within this first phase, it is not surprising to see how Guerra delves into the problems confronting the rural communities of the Northeast: starvation, violence, religious alienation, and exploitation. *Os Fuzis* deals aggressively with the oppression of peasants by landowners (backed by the government), showing how all become victims of the system.

Os Fuzis accounts how five soldiers are brought to a Northeastern town of starving peasants to protect the harvest of a wealthy landowner that is to be trucked into the city. In the town, we witness the alienation of the marginalized peasants on many levels: religious, economic, and political. The sense of alienation, deprivation, and devastation is powerful and continuous throughout the film.

Os Fuzis speaks volumes about Guerra's definition of popular cinema and its function in society. Guerra's commitment to a popular cinema is well delineated and demonstrated through the construction of the plot, themes within the plot, and cinematic aesthetic of *Os Fuzis*. As Randal Johnson comments in "Brazilian Cinema,"

For Guerra a popular cinema must not only deal with

popular themes, but must create a political relationship with the people; it must reach the potentially revolutionary classes; the urban proletariat and rural masses. (49)

Hence, *Os Fuzis* undoubtedly creates a *popular* cinematic discourse that reaches the most oppressed segments of Brazilian population, reconstructing their place in a stagnant Brazilian history and national consciousness while catalyzing *popular memory*. This *popular memory* then allowed for a cultural production (or cultural narrative) to take place and develop in a rhizomatic-like manner.

The aesthetics used in *Os Fuzis* can be observed as nomadic in nature—the liberation of movement. The film is (as many films within *Cinema Novo* were) greatly influenced by two foreign models: Italian Neo-Realism and French New Wave. Within the Italian Neo-Realism model, we find the adaptation of using non-actors and location shooting. Within this model, the work of the bumpy, free, handheld camera clearly demonstrated the liberation of language and images. There were no limitations to this particular mode of cinematic expression—no MGM-like techniques, equipment, or trained actors and entertainers. The objective was the uncovering of truth of history to initiate the strong-held continuity of a *popular memory*. Where Italian Neo-Realism liberated the use of location and “actors,” French New Wave liberated the means of production strategy. Films were independently produced and based on the talent of specific *auteurs*. Directors now saw filmmaking as a political praxis, a contribution to the struggle against neo-colonialism.

These techniques are clearly seen in Guerra's film. In *Os Fuzis* there is an interweaving of documentary throughout the film. The documentary sequences record the physical suffering of the drought-plagued Northeast through the voices and images of the marginalized, creating not only a powerful *popular cinema* whose means of expression evokes political sentiments and responses but also a *popular memory*. This plays into the idea of the nomadic impulse of ontological movement of a *third* cinema, which is making history through *popular memory*. Interestingly, we find the same type of technique and use of aesthetics transplanted into Mozambican cinema and the *INC* by Rui Guerra. Guerra went into exile in Mozambique in 1969, the year after the *Coupe* within the *Coupe* of 1968 in Brazil. In November 1975, five months after

Mozambique became independent, Rui Guerra created the *Instituto Nacional de Cinema (INC)* in Mozambique.

Guerra's Role in the *Kuxa Kenema* in Mozambican Cinema

When examining Mozambican cinema and Guerra's effect on its development, three points need to be covered first. The first we have already covered - *Cinema Novo* (especially the first phase) and Guerra's role in it. The second point is the aesthetics of a pre-independence Mozambican cinema. The third point is the construction of FRELIMO and its influence on Mozambican history, culture, and national consciousness.

The existence of a pre-independence Mozambican cinema encompassed imperialist propaganda and pornographic films co-produced with South Africa. Films zeroing in on the colonial condition, produced outside Africa, like Robert Van Lierop's *A luta continua* (1971) dealt with many different issues throughout the film, creating a sort of distancing between the social and the individual sentiments and narratives. This would begin to change on a grand scale with the creation of the *Instituto Nacional de Cinema*, in Maputo, Mozambique.

As for the construction of FRELIMO, the beginnings of its construction happened after the Mueda massacre. Before the massacre, MANU (the Mozambican-Makonde Union), a small but steadily growing number of Mozambicans dedicated to mobilizing peasant support and raising their political consciousness, worked towards liberation in a peaceful manner. In 1960, their peaceful demonstration in front of the Portuguese administrative center in Mueda ended in a blood bath. About six hundred people were killed, and immediately thereafter the colonial state formally prohibited all African organizations with more than thirty members. Under the leadership of Dr. Eduardo Mondlane, FRELIMO was born and led the armed struggle for independence.

Some of FRELIMO's objectives were 1) to create a sense of national unity and overcome a long history of ethnic and regional particularism that had been heightened by intense colonial propaganda; 2) to instill a sense of self-confidence and political consciousness among peasants and workers long oppressed by an

autocratic police state; and, 3) to forge a national culture (with which all Mozambicans could identify) while still celebrating the diverse ethnic, linguistic and historical tradition of Mozambican people.⁵ FRELIMO's objectives are important to note when looking at Guerra's founding of the INC and his own objectives of seeing to 1) the decolonization of film distribution; 2) the production of national films and their distribution in Mozambique and outside of the country; and, 3) a cultural production and truthful representation in film of the marginalized population in Mozambique. Here we find a marriage of ideas and commitments, especially when reflecting on Guerra's ideas about the function of *popular cinema* and *popular memory*.

The first manifestation of this commitment happened with *Kuxa Kenema* – a production program which was a regular newsreel producing about a dozen or so documentaries a year. This monthly series was very different from the newsreels of the colonial era because *Kuxa Kenema* analyzed each subject in depth, instead of covering superficially several topics at the same time. *Kuxa Kenema*'s purpose was to create a new kind of cinema that could reflect a truthful history of experiences and sentiments of the marginalized community, while evoking a *popular memory* to develop and move. *Kuxa Kenema* was the first tool developed by the INC that prompted Mozambicans to question the development and role of a Mozambican national identity/consciousness in relation to the cinematic representation of their true history.

By the time Guerra produced the first feature film in Mozambique – *Mueda: memoria e massacre* (1979) – the effectiveness of this form of cinematic expression directly adhered to the before-mentioned objectives set during the liberation struggle and in a newly postcolonial Mozambique. *Mueda* presents a fictional account of the 1960 massacre where the Portuguese army in the village of Mueda killed about six hundred people. This film proves to be effective in the way the population of Mueda reunites to reclaim its freedom and reconstructs the history of the way the villagers of Mueda were slaughtered by the Portuguese army.

As with the aesthetics and technique Guerra utilizes in *Os Fuzis*, the two foreign modes are existent in *Mueda*. The most interestingly powerful aesthetic in *Mueda* is the interweaving and dominance of documentary throughout the film. The film, as a re-enactment of the massacre, is constantly interrupted by eyewitness

accounts of the massacre by its survivors. Most of the survivors had no platform to speak about the account until the filming of *Mueda*. This storytelling effect through the eyewitness accounts lends itself to enhancing the mythical quality of the massacre that led to the construction of FRELIMO, the armed struggle, and ultimately independence. Here there is a connection with this history as cultural narrative and the ongoing movement for independence and proper representation. What makes *Mueda* truly a cultural narrative that evokes *popular memory* is how the film is organized around collective instead of individual points of view, blended with interviews and historical footage to become a collective testimony of massacre. Thus, the greater dimension of *popular memory* is given to override the historical treatment of such issues.

The dynamic of the initiation of the cultural narrative through the production of *Mueda* is enhanced through the implementation of folklore and myth in replacing an *official history* which made the voices and histories of the marginalized unrecognizable. The people of *Mueda* gather every year to commemorate the massacre through dance, music, and storytelling. By Guerra filming a reenactment of the event, he too becomes a part of the cultural narrative and becomes instrumental in elevating the massacre to the level of a popular myth that brings people together and reinforces their struggle for independence and proper representation in history. Guerra allows the idea of the nomadic impulse of ontological movement of a *third* cinema who is making history through *popular memory* to thrive.

Questioning Guerra's Role as Facilitator

Guerra's commitment to popular cinema and evoking *popular memory* can-not be denied. Yet, there are questions that arise when examining his role and influence in Mozambican cinema and the *INC*. One interesting question is, "How much does Guerra's push for a nomadic discourse and the nature of that discourse fall upon his own rhetoric of exile, separate from the histories and sentiments of that of the marginalized Mozambicans?" But the most poignant and viable question deals with Guerra as a European construction, armed with the colonial language of Mozambique and European aesthetics for filmmaking: "How can such a construction whose training has been more so in developing intellectual films

through European models truly benefit the development of a Mozambican cinema beyond the novelty of viewing the *INC* as a *new project*?"

Notes

¹ According to Victor Bachy in *Paroramique sur les cinémas sud saharens*, *Kuxa* means "birth" in Runga, a language of Northern Mozambique, and *Kenema* means "image" in Makua, a language of the South.

² The translation to this last stanza of José Craveirinha's poem entitled *Épistola Maconde* (Maconde is the name of the people of Northern Mozambique and Southern Tanzania) reads, "And suckled on the hot lead of the rifles / the embryos of Mueda will stir themselves again in the placentas of Mother Earth / and MOZAMBIQUE IS BORN!" In parentheses there is a note from Craveirinha: "Written in 1960, on the third night after the massacre of Mueda." According to Chris Searle, in *The Sunflower of Hope: Poems from the Mozambican Revolution*, at the end of the original manuscript as these words: "Finished the third night night after the slaughter of Mueda, according to what Zé Parente saw and told" (141-142). From this eyewitness, Craveirinha heard about the Massacre of Mueda – a small town and administrative center in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. On June 16, 1960, the Portuguese army killed six hundred Mozambicans, protesting peacefully for better conditions. This massacre contributed to the decision of FRELIMO to launch the armed struggle in September of 1964.

³ FRELIMO – the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique. A political activist group who led the armed struggle for independence headed by Eduardo Mondlane. This last stanza from the poem entitled, "We are the People," was marked by the author, FRELIMO. This act was not uncommon for those writing poetry who supported FRELIMO and fought during the liberation wars.

⁴ The military overthrew the government in 1964. As with each of the three phases, a change in government propelled by a coup denoted a change in the phases that took place in *Cinema Novo* and the direction it would take thereafter. The second phase is from 1964-

1968 during which there was a *coup* within a *coup* in 1968. The third phase is from 1968-1971 during which there was an extremely harsh and violent practice of military rule—more devastating than within the other two phases.

⁵ For a detailed account of the origins and formation of FRELIMO see Allen and Barbara Issacman's book entitled *Mozambique: From Colonialism to Revolution, 1900-1982*, (Chapter Five: The Struggle for Independence, 1962-1975 pgs. 79-107).

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