

**“Cinema is what we do”: Rhetorics of Renewal and Adaptation in  
Post-Independence Angolan Cinema (1982-1992)**

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## **“Cinema is what we do”: Rhetorics of Renewal and Adaptation in Post-Independence**

### **Angolan Cinema (1982-1992)**

This thesis examines films made by four Angolan directors between 1982-1992. After 1975, the initial productivity of the early post-independence phase of Angolan cinema was followed by a prolonged crisis that would last until the early 2000s. Characterizations of this period as one of collapse, desolation and stagnation have been taken at face value and have shaped hegemonic perceptions of Angolan cinema from the 1980s and 1990s. Angolan national cinema has undoubtedly experienced major difficulties. The challenges faced by Angolan filmmakers should not be understated. However, this moment of crisis also brought creative renewal and self-examination. Responding to a complex political landscape and adverse cinematic conditions, several Angolan directors began to cultivate a new critical and artistic idiom through their films.

This thesis offers a critical challenge to established narratives of collapse and decline and argues that films made during this important period of Angolan cinema demonstrate a radical expansion of the politically dogmatic national cinema that developed under the first MPLA government. I propose that looking to these films enables us to understand in greater depth the development and legacy of Angola’s militant revolutionary cinema, as well as the distinctive, personal cinematic languages of its pioneering directors. Innovations in form, content and aesthetics made by Angolan filmmakers during this period underline the need to reframe this juncture of crisis and “collapse” as an important moment of creative vision, energy, innovation and resilience in the history of Angolan cinema.

Through close analysis of films directed by Asdrúbal Rebelo, Orlando Fortunato, Ruy Duarte de Carvalho and Mariano Bartolomeu, I focus on the themes of adaptation and dialogue to examine the rhetorical and aesthetic strategies of Angolan directors active during the 1980s and early 1990s. This thesis is the first substantial study on the development of Angolan cinema during these two decades.

## **“Cinema is what we do”: Rhetorics of Renewal and Adaptation in Post-Independence**

### **Angolan Cinema (1982-1992)**

This thesis examines films made by four Angolan directors between 1982-1992. After 1975, the initial productivity of the early post-independence phase of Angolan cinema was followed by a prolonged period of crisis that would last until the end of the civil war in 2002. The Angolan critic, playwright and journalist José Mena Abrantes has identified three stages to what he considers to be a decline in Angolan filmmaking: the “retreat” (1982-1985); the “waiting room” (1985-1988); and, finally, “the collapse” (1988-2000).

This rhetoric of retreat, collapse and stagnation has indeed been taken at face value and has shaped hegemonic perceptions of Angolan cinema from this period. Angolan national cinema has undoubtedly experienced major difficulties. The challenges faced by Angolan filmmakers should not be understated. However, this moment of crisis also brought creative renewal and self-examination. Responding to the complex political landscape and adverse cinematic conditions of the 1980s and 1990s, several Angolan directors began to cultivate a new critical and artistic idiom through their films.

The central claim of this thesis is that films made during this important period of Angolan cinema demonstrate a radical expansion of the early national cinema that emerged in Angola during the initial phase of post-independence filmmaking. I propose that looking to films produced during the 1980s and the early 1990s enables us to understand in greater depth the development and legacy of Angola’s militant revolutionary cinema, as well as the distinctive, personal cinematic languages of its pioneering directors. Innovations in form, content and

aesthetics made by Angolan filmmakers during this period underline the need to reframe this juncture of so-called “retreat” and “collapse” as an important moment of creative vision, energy, innovation and resilience in the history of Angolan cinema, in doing so broadening the definition of revolutionary in relation to filmmaking in Angola.

The development of cinema in Angola is inextricably connected to the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), the revolutionary nationalist movement which took control of the Angolan state after independence in 1975. Filmmaking in Angola during the early post-independence period was entirely subsidised and controlled by the MPLA. As the movement fought to retain power, cinema was an important tool in furthering the party’s political aims. In line with the MPLA’s Marxist-Leninist ideology, filmmakers were expected to produce films that garnered support for the movement by reaffirming the vanguard-party’s role in developing the newly independent nation, as well as the centrality of the MPLA in winning Angola’s colonial war.

From the outset, the MPLA’s narrow and politically dogmatic cinematic project generated tensions between the state and the nation’s pioneering directors. Angolan filmmakers’ frustrations at a lack of artistic freedom were compounded by mounting disillusionment at the evolution of the party after independence and the perceived failure of the MPLA to live up to the utopian rhetoric and promises of revolution. By the early 1980s, beyond the censorship and violent brutality enacted by the increasingly authoritarian one-party regime, a lack of funding and resources further curtailed the possibility of free creative cinematic expression in Angola. Many filmmakers chose to leave Angola at this time. Others ceased filmmaking entirely.

In this thesis, I explore how those Angolan directors who remained active during this period – both within and outside the nation – responded to these challenges through their films. To do this, I identify a number of common themes, developments and concerns which go some way towards characterizing Angolan cinema in different terms from those of “retreat” or “collapse”. At the same time, I put in critical analytical context the political and aesthetic preoccupations underpinning these rhetorics.

First, I focus on the notion of “adaptation” through each of the films. Following Robert Stam’s theory of “dialogical adaptation”, which suggests that the practice of adaptation extends to many different responses to an original text, including readings, allusions, critiques and reinterpretations, each of the films in this thesis can be considered an adaptation. By closely examining the transformations and adaptive interventions made by the directors into their various sources, I trace the rhetorical and aesthetic strategies of these films: the ways in which they critique the MPLA, unsettle the movement’s foundational narratives, and demonstrate a continued social commitment to the development of the Angolan nation.

The fundamental dialogism of adaptations makes this form uniquely placed to respond to the situation faced by Angolan filmmakers during these challenging years, in which approaches to filmmaking in Angola would be reevaluated and expanded. Beyond dialogues between characters, I engage with Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism to suggest where these films reject the monologic model of the MPLA at a structural level. I argue that Bakhtin’s work is pertinent in the context of post-independence Angolan cultural production given the influence

of Soviet socialist realism on the MPLA's advancement of Angolan national cinema during the early post-independence period.

In my discussion of each film, I pay close attention to form, content and aesthetics. This is to address the striking lack of close formal analysis of Angolan cinema. Charting the stylistic development of these directors also reveals the different ways in which each one moved away from the documentary forms that had dominated early post-independence Angolan cinema.

My study of these films draws on archival work carried out in Angola, Portugal and Spain, close cinematic analysis of the films and engagement with critical theory. This thesis is the first substantial study on the development of Angolan cinema during the 1980s and 1990s and the first dedicated comparative analysis of adaptation in Angolan cinema. It offers a forceful critical challenge to the established scholarly narrative of collapse and decline and posits a process of self-adaptation amongst the directors themselves.

The thesis is divided into four chapters, each focussing on one director and presenting a close reading of their film(s) from this period. In Chapter One, I explore Asdrúbal Rebelo's film *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* (1986). Rebelo was one of the pioneers of Angola's early post-independence cinema. Despite this, his films remain relatively unknown outside Angola. *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* takes the resilience of Angolan artists as its subject. The film presents a more ambivalent engagement with revolutionary nationalist Angolan literature than earlier Angolan films, adapting and reappropriating texts to allude to specific challenges experienced by artists and directors in the years that followed independence, as well as to interrogate the dominant socio-political narratives of the MPLA. In the face of adversity, Rebelo remains

optimistic about the future of art and filmmaking in Angola. I argue that this optimism is concomitant with his development of a more personal filmmaking style. I present a reading of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* as an essayistic film, which adapts the essay film form to respond to the conditions confronted by Angolan directors during this time.

Chapter Two considers Orlando Fortunato's films *Memória de um Dia* (1982) and *Comboio da Canhoca* (2004). *Comboio da Canhoca* was filmed in the late 1980s, but the director experienced severe delays releasing the film due to challenges posed by the ongoing civil war and crisis in national film production. In this chapter, I reframe *Comboio da Canhoca* as a product of the 1980s, interrogating where the film speaks to the cinematic and political context of its conception. Both of Fortunato's films are historical adaptations, taking real events from the final decades of Portuguese colonial rule as their sources. I suggest that Fortunato's fictionalised interpretations of these historical sources not only denounce colonization, but also level critiques at the MPLA. Through the two films, the director subtly exposes the party's appropriation of historical narratives to serve its political aims and draws attention to the mounting violence and repression experienced in Angola under MPLA rule. The moments of dialogue and discord that emerge within the films' narratives, as well as between the adaptations and their historical sources, point to Fortunato's wider unease with the lack of open dialogue and debate within Angolan society. Amid the challenging conditions of the 1980s, if the films ostensibly expose the violence and hatred of the colonial oppressor, they are also implicitly concerned with where colonial history and structures might be repeated or replicated by Angola's post-colonial ruling elites.

Towards the end of the 1980s, Angolan filmmakers also began to adapt literary works from outside Angola, marking a shift away from the exclusive focus on national literature and

history found in early post-independence nationalist cinema. In Chapter Three, I turn to one of Angola's best-known filmmakers, the director, writer and anthropologist Ruy Duarte de Carvalho. Duarte de Carvalho was one of the most prolific filmmakers working in Angola during the early post-independence period, producing over twenty documentaries for Angolan television between 1975-1985. During this time, he became increasingly outspoken in his criticism of the MPLA's vision for a modern Angolan nation. His most critically acclaimed film, *Nelisita* (1982), directly challenges the party's urban-centric outlook and disregard for Angola's rural populations. The film is an adaptation of the traditional folk tales of the Mumuhuila people of Huila, an ethno-linguistic group belonging to the Nyaneka-Humbe of south-west Angola, which was produced in collaboration with the Mumuhuila and draws on Duarte de Carvalho's ethnographic fieldwork in the region. In this chapter, I turn to Duarte de Carvalho's final film, *Moia ou o Recado das Ilhas* (1989). Shot in Cape Verde, *Moia ou o Recado das Ilhas* follows a young Angolan woman, the eponymous Moia, as she rediscovers her Cape Verdean heritage. I suggest that *Moia ou o Recado das Ilhas* builds on the practices of ethnography and adaptation underpinning *Nelisita* to move towards a critical form of autoethnographic film, laying bare the attitudes and behaviours of the MPLA elites through a profoundly dialogic and idiosyncratic web of intertextual reference and engagement.

Finally, Chapter Four analyses three short films by the director Mariano Bartolomeu. Unlike the previous three directors, Bartolomeu did not participate in the earliest phase of Angolan national filmmaking. Born in 1967, the director came of age after independence, starting his career in cinema in the early 1980s. Each of the films I analyse in this chapter was made by Bartolomeu during his time studying at the Escuela Internacional de Cinema y Televisión (EICTV) in Cuba, a radically utopian film school committed to the theory and practice of internationalist, revolutionary, socialist solidarity. I suggest that the singular circumstances of

Bartolomeu's formal cinematic training at EICTV provide a productive point of comparison between his early short films and the trajectory of earlier Angolan directors, whose filmmaking practices originated in the similarly utopic and revolutionary rhetoric and ideals of post-independence Angola. Where the early pioneers of Angolan national cinema attempted to reconcile their commitment to revolutionary art with their growing disappointment at the realities of the MPLA's post-independence national project, Bartolomeu's adaptations reveal a similar struggle amid the global and national historical shifts of the late 1980s and early 1990s. An exploration of Bartolomeu's films thus offers a different perspective on both the rhetoric of collapse and the legacies of revolutionary militant cinema in an Angolan context. I present a reading of Bartolomeu's films which traces where the director's adaptations reveal an evolving concern with ethics and a rejection of imposed or external moral and ideological frameworks.

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## Introduction

### “Cinema é o que nós fazemos”: Re-reading Angolan Cinema from “Retreat” to “Collapse”

After Angola’s independence from Portugal, the writer José Luandino Vieira – one of Angola’s most significant literary and cultural figures – was appointed director of the nation’s new state broadcaster, Televisão Popular de Angola (TPA). As Director of TPA, he would oversee the development of Angolan national cinema and television under the newly formed government of the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) – the revolutionary independence movement which took control in Luanda after independence in 1975, and which remains in power to this day. In 1979, Luandino Vieira became Director of the Instituto Angolano de Cinema (IAC), newly created by the MPLA. He remained in this position until 1984, presiding over almost the entirety of the first decade of post-independence filmmaking in Angola.

In a 2011 interview with Tatiana Levin, Luandino Vieira reflected on his experience as Director of TPA and the IAC. In his account, he stressed the urgency of developing Angola’s cinema – an “arte indústria cinematográfica” – after independence.<sup>1</sup> This process was not without its challenges. He noted:

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<sup>1</sup> Tatiana Levin, ‘Dos Filmes dos Pioneiros aos “Realizadores da Poeira”: Que cinema angolano?’, interview with Luandino Vieira, 2011, in *Angola, O Nascimento de Uma Nação (Vol. 3): O Cinema da Independência*, ed. by Maria do Carmo Piçarra and Jorge António (Guerra & Paz, 2015), p. 95.

A gente queria fazer tudo naquela altura. Queria ter logo tudo. Mesmo assim, ainda tive a paciência de ir buscar os técnicos em Paris. Não era uma brincadeira e se calhar foi esse o mal. Aliás era essa a crítica fundamental do Ruy e do Ole: 'Pensaram nas estruturas em vez de nos dar esse dinheiro e a gente fazer o cinema. Cinema é o que nós fazemos'. Eu disse: 'Tá bem. Para ti é e para o Ole evidentemente que é a realização pessoal, mas eu não estou a fazer o cinema para o Ole, Ruy, Asdrúbal, Xuxo, Gouveia. Isto é para o nascimento do cinema angolano. A nossa literatura começou no século 19 ou no século 17, não sei muito bem. E o cinema há de começar".<sup>2</sup>

Luandino Vieira's testimony reveals a fundamental tension at the heart of the early development of Angola's national cinema. Practically from the outset, there was conflict between the artistic visions and energies of pioneering Angolan filmmakers such as Ruy Duarte de Carvalho and António Ole – both of whom are mentioned by name in Luandino Vieira's interview – and the version of Angolan national cinema that the MPLA party-state was attempting to establish during the early post-independence period. Luandino Vieira's statement seems to set up a dichotomy between these two visions of Angolan cinema, even going so far as to imply that commitment to the development of Angola's national cinema could not be reconciled with the individual artistic visions of the nation's early filmmakers, at least during this initial period. But are these two artistic impulses mutually exclusive? How did the MPLA's vision for Angolan national cinema differ from that of its most prominent post-independence directors?

The story of cinema in Angola is inextricable from the MPLA. After the end of Portuguese colonial rule, the party controlled virtually all filmmaking in the country and continues to

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<sup>2</sup> Levin, 'Dos Filmes dos Pioneiros', interview with Luandino Vieira, 2011, p. 96.

hold a material and ideological monopoly over most cinematic production in Angola. Even before independence, the MPLA's links to the first anti-colonial films about Angola are well documented. The French-Guadeloupean filmmaker Sarah Maldoror, whose films *Monangambée* (1971) and *Sambizanga* (1972) depict the liberation struggle in Angola, was married to Mário Pinto de Andrade, one of the co-founders of the party. After independence, the MPLA recognised the strategic importance of art and culture to the establishment of its new regime. As Dorothée Boulanger explains, following the events of November 1975, when the MPLA seized power in Luanda and gained control of the Portuguese colonial government's abandoned state architecture, "the construction and promotion of an Angolan national culture would not be the endeavour of a few rebellious individuals, but a state initiative, thus consecrating the institutionalization of culture".<sup>3</sup> Cinema would become a vital tool in the party's effort to promote and cement a notion of national identity and belonging that aligned with its socialist vision for postcolonial Angola.

Initially, post-independence media production under the MPLA in Angola was heavily focussed on television. After the departure of the Portuguese, the party quickly established Televisão Popular de Angola in what had previously been Televisão Portuguesa de Angola. The former, TPA, became the sole producer of television and film in the country. Within it, there were various semi-independent cinema-focussed groups, such as Angola – Ano Zero and Promocine, a cooperative group operating in Luanda. Inheriting practically no cinematic infrastructure from the colonial regime, early MPLA-affiliated filmmakers were supported with training and resources from international allies, including groups from Cuba, France and the Soviet Union. From 1978, the Laboratório Nacional de Cinema (LNC) became a stand-

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<sup>3</sup> Dorothée Boulanger, *Fiction as History: Resistance and Complicities in Angolan Postcolonial Literature* (Legenda, 2022), p. 24.

alone body, having previously been the department for cinema within TPA, marking a greater focus on national film production.

Film and television produced during the early years of independence were intended to inform and educate the Angolan population, in line with the MPLA's Marxist-Leninist ideology and nationalist project. During this time, cinematic and televisual production was overseen not only by Luandino Vieira, in his capacity as Director of TPA, but also by the MPLA's Departamento de Informação e Propaganda (DIP). Documentaries commissioned by the state were to relay stories of the liberation struggle, profile key figures from the independence movement – particularly the then-president, Agostinho Neto – and create records of Angolan culture. Television newsreels and public information films, intended for internal consumption, documented national reconstruction, agriculture and industry, following the lives of workers from across the nation.

By 1979, the MPLA had created the IAC, which was followed by the Cinemateca Nacional in 1981. However, from the end of the 1970s onwards, the early momentum in cinematic training and production began to falter. At the turn of the decade, as the playwright and journalist José Mena Abrantes has outlined in his important studies of Angolan filmmaking, films continued to demonstrate improved quality, care and attention.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, the number of films being released in Angola began falling, due to challenges posed by the ongoing civil war and a lack of funding and resources from the state. Between 1982 and 1985, of ten films planned by the LNC, only three were completed.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> José Mena Abrantes, *Para uma História do Cinema Angolano* (FIC, 2008), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 30.

In November 1985 – ten years after independence – the IAC published *10 Anos Cinema Angolano: Filmografia 1975-1985 (Filmografia)*. Performatively providing a record of all 234 films released in Angola in the first decade of national filmmaking, the document was officially intended to celebrate and promote the work of Angolan filmmakers during the early post-independence era. However, while not referenced explicitly, the decrease in national film production towards the end of this ten-year period is clear to see. The *Filmografia* contains other subtle allusions to the nature of the challenges that had emerged through the first decade of post-independence filmmaking. In the introduction, the organisers of the survey stated their hopes that the document would encourage more filmmakers in Angola to engage in creative cinematic work, revealing both an anxiety over the decrease in national film production and perhaps also a veiled recognition of Angolan directors' qualms with the MPLA's stifling and limited cinematic project. Additionally, the reference to various challenges experienced in compiling the *Filmografia*, through a note that the record likely contains omissions and errors, hints at the wider infrastructural difficulties faced by those working in Angolan film production during this time.<sup>6</sup>

The following year, in 1986, Abrantes published *O Cinema Angolano: Um Passado a Merecer Melhor Presente*. Charting the trajectory of filmmaking in Angola from the first Portuguese colonial productions onwards and appealing directly for a reinvigoration of Angola's cinematic industry, Abrantes's text provides a more incisive and critical narrative on the crisis facing Angolan filmmaking. The text outlines a number of practical challenges experienced by Angolan filmmakers, offering further explanations for the decrease in national

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<sup>6</sup> Instituto Angolano de Cinema, *10 Anos Cinema Angolano: Filmografia 1975-1985* (Cinemateca Nacional, 1985).

film production. This includes the paralysis of the national film laboratory (LNC), which had been forced to evacuate its premises in 1985 and was yet to be rehomed due to a financial crisis sparked by the global fall in oil prices, as well as the lack of cinematic training available to younger generations.<sup>7</sup>

Abrantes is implicitly critical of the state's failures to support national post-independence filmmaking, stating that “fica sempre no final o sabor amargo da constatação de que muito mais e melhor poderia ser feito”.<sup>8</sup> He praises the efforts of individual filmmakers during this time, whose works represent for him the promise of potential cinematic recuperation. Overall, however, his evaluation of the trajectory of Angolan national cinema is relatively negative. He suggests, referring to a broader African context, that Angola had experienced some of the greatest difficulties in developing its own unique national cinematography, with “características expressivas originais”. In his assessment, beyond the practical and systemic challenges exposed through the text, the “imagem desfocada” of Angolan national cinema also required decisive rectification at this juncture.<sup>9</sup> This statement is laden with ambiguity. Whose image?

Abrantes concludes his text with an essentially pessimistic appeal for the immediate re-discussion and resolution of the issues facing Angolan national cinema. Only this, he claims, will open a path of “hope” and enable a return to the past productivity of the early post-independence phase of Angolan filmmaking.<sup>10</sup> The implication is that the onus of addressing

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<sup>7</sup> José Mena Abrantes, *O Cinema Angolano: Um Passado a Merecer Melhor Presente* (IAC, 1986), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Abrantes, *O Cinema Angolano*, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

these issues lies with the state. However, Abrantes's ambiguous contention of a "blurred" or "unfocused" image of Angolan national cinema could also indicate a wavering on the part of the nation's filmmakers, possibly inferring a lack of direction or vision from within as well as from above. What does the author's entreaty to "reawaken" the glorious past of national filmmaking reveal about the biases he brings to these assessments and value judgements? What is it, exactly, that Abrantes hoped to return to? The writer's proximity to the MPLA should be noted here. Besides a prolific career as a theatre director, Abrantes was a co-founder of Angola's state press agency (ANGOP). At the time of the text's publication, he was the head of Information and Dissemination at the Cinemateca Nacional, by whom the volume was published. He has since taken up several prominent governmental and institutional roles in Angola.<sup>11</sup>

In 2002, with José de Matos-Cruz, Abrantes published an updated version of his study, entitled *Cinema em Angola*. In 2008, over two decades after his initial publication, Abrantes then published a third edition of this earlier work, entitled *Para uma História do Cinema Angolano*. In these later editions, produced outside of any official role within Angola's cinema sector, Abrantes's position is illuminated as he becomes more openly critical of the state's role in the development of Angola's national cinema. He denounces "incapacidade burocrática" and the incompetence and sloppiness of those in charge of the nation's filmmaking structures and institutions.<sup>12</sup> He alludes to the ongoing tensions between the state and Angolan directors referenced by Luandino Vieira, directly suggesting that it was the MPLA's need to control everything that stifled the dreams and activity of the nation's

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<sup>11</sup> 'Mena Abrantes destaca qualidade de obras cénicas em Angola', ANGOP, 30 August 2024 <<https://angop.ao/noticias/lazer-cultura/mena-abrantes-destaca-qualidade-das-obras-cenicas-em-angola/>> [accessed on 6 October 2024].

<sup>12</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 39.

filmmakers.<sup>13</sup> With de Matos-Cruz, he even calls for accountability from those who, “no remanso dos gabinetes e das ideias fossilizadas”, did not dare to nurture or cherish the dynamism of Angola’s burgeoning cinematic sector in the decades that followed independence.<sup>14</sup> Here, Abrantes is clear in his conviction that any decrease in national film production did not result solely from disillusionment or lack of enthusiasm on the part of Angola’s directors, but stemmed from a systemic and institutional lack of care and support for Angolan cinema that worsened over time. His earlier appeal for a “return” is thus revealed to refer to the early dynamism and momentum of post-independence Angolan filmmaking, rather than being a reassertion of the limited and narrow cinematic vision of the MPLA.

In the two updated versions of his study, Abrantes continues his account of the development of Angolan national cinema up to each volume’s respective year of publication. In the decade and a half that had passed, he notes that the practical challenges facing Angolan cinema worsened dramatically, thwarting the possibility of the cinematic revitalization he had called for in his first edition. In both subsequent texts, he settles on a reading of this period, from 1982 to the end of the twentieth century, as one of gradual collapse and decline.

Abrantes identifies three stages to this decline. First, from 1982 to 1985, “o recuo” [“the retreat”]. During this time, while films were still being produced and released in Angola, the output of the LNC and TPA began steadily to decrease.<sup>15</sup> Second, Abrantes characterises the period from 1985 to 1988 as “um compasso de espera” [“a waiting room”] for Angolan filmmaking. By the mid-1980s, the need to improve conditions for national filmmaking and

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<sup>13</sup> José Mena Abrantes and José de Matos-Cruz, *Cinema em Angola* (Edições Chá de Caxinde, 2002), p. 54.

<sup>14</sup> Abrantes and de Matos-Cruz, *Cinema em Angola*, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 30.

develop a more robust cinematic infrastructure in Angola was widely recognised, and there was hope that the situation might be rectified. However, in 1984, plans to develop a single unit for film production in Angola, consolidating the IAC, the LNC and the Cinemateca Nacional, failed due to the ongoing financial crisis. While some filmmakers remained active during this “waiting” period, persistent issues with state interference, bureaucracy, production and distribution resulted in fewer films being produced and fewer Angolan audiences getting to see them.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, following this second stage, Abrantes describes an almost complete stagnation in national film production, compounded by a lack of cinematic infrastructure, minimal promotion and distribution of films, and a lack of care with existing material.<sup>17</sup> He characterises this period of Angolan filmmaking, from 1988 to the beginning of the new millennium, as “o colapso” [“the collapse”]. During this time, many filmmakers left the country in search of better working conditions abroad – whether this was the financial resources or production facilities to continue making films, or the freedom to develop their own aesthetics and filmmaking styles outside of the control of the one-party-state.

Abrantes notes the efforts, dedication, talent and enthusiasm of those involved in Angolan cinema in these challenging circumstances. Despite this, however, he describes the landscape of Angolan cinema during this period as desolate.<sup>18</sup> His descriptions of the total collapse and marasmus of Angolan cinematic production from the mid-1980s onwards imply a condition

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<sup>16</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

of utter diminishment, decimation and even inaction.<sup>19</sup> While Abrantes's studies do provide a record of the limited selection of films released by Angolan directors during this period, there is no sustained acknowledgement or suggestion that any new or dynamic forms emerged during this time. The imagery and language employed by Abrantes is likely designed to emphasise the severity of the challenges facing filmmakers and to condemn the state's idleness in addressing a situation that he had himself witnessed from the inside. However, his harsh critiques of the state risk obscuring the nature of the development of Angolan filmmaking through this period.

Abrantes argues that only in the early 2000s did Angolan cinema begin to show signs of a resurgence, marking the end of the so-called "collapse" and signalling new hope for Angolan filmmaking after decades of conflict, which been ongoing in the nation since the beginning of the anti-colonial war in 1961 and only ceased fully with the end of the civil war in 2002. Three Angolan feature films were released in 2004, *O Herói* (dir. Zézé Gamboa), *Na Cidade Vazia* (dir. Maria João Ganga), and *Comboio da Canhoca* (dir. Orlando Fortunato), seemingly marking a new dawn for Angolan cinema. Both Gamboa and Ganga's films received international acclaim, with *O Herói* winning the Best Foreign Feature Award at Sundance Festival in 2005. Strikingly, Abrantes notes that the Minister for Culture at this time, Boaventura Cardoso, had stressed the urgent need for those involved in Angolan national cinema to "sair da letargia" and join forces in a common front to revitalise the country's cinematic industry.<sup>20</sup> While the accusation of lethargy might have been directed towards the state, Cardoso's appeal again implies a lack of activity and energy during the previous decades.

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<sup>19</sup> Abrantes and de Matos-Cruz, *Cinema em Angola*, p. 54.

<sup>20</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 49.

Other critics have reiterated Abrantes's rhetoric of desolation and collapse, ossifying a pessimistic reading of Angolan cinema from the 1980s and 1990s. Again, much of this has been framed as an appeal for greater investment in the future of Angolan filmmaking, emphasizing the difficulties experienced in the development of a national cinema. Writing in 2001, for example, the historian Marissa Moorman describes the abounding evidence of "cinematic desuetude" in Luanda.<sup>21</sup> A decade later, Mark Sabine writes that Angolan cinema was "gradually snuffed out" in the final decades of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> In line with Abrantes, Fernando Arenas states that "film production in Angola collapsed into a state of stagnation around 1982", which did not come to an end until the "renaissance" of Angolan cinema in 2004.<sup>23</sup> Levin locates the end of Angola's pioneering early national cinema in 1985, at which point Angolan filmmaking entered a period of "lenta agonia".<sup>24</sup>

While the challenges faced by Angolan filmmakers through the 1980s and 1990s should not be understated, cinematic activity was still taking place at this time. Undeniably, the quantity of films produced and released in Angola during this period was drastically reduced.

However, in the face of adversity, a small group of Angolan directors – both seasoned filmmakers who had been prolific during the early post-independence years, as well as emerging directors – would continue to direct and release films, both inside and outside the nation.

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<sup>21</sup> Marissa Moorman, 'Of Westerns, Women and War: Re-situating Angolan Cinema and the Nation', *Research in African Literatures*, 32.3 (2001), pp.103-132 (p.103), doi:10.2979/RAL.2001.32.3.103.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Sabine, 'Rebuilding the Angolan Body Politic: Global and Local Projections of Identity and Protest in O Herói/The Hero (Zéze Gamboa, 2004)', *Journal of African Cinemas*, 3:2 (2011), pp. 201-109 (p. 201).

<sup>23</sup> Fernando Arenas, 'The Renaissance of Angolan Cinema', *Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies*, 15/16 (2006), pp. 203-214 (p. 205).

<sup>24</sup> Levin, 'Dos Filmes dos Pioneiros', p. 96.

I propose that looking to the films made between the so-called “retreat” and the early years of “collapse” – from the early 1980s to the early 1990s – can help us to understand better the development and legacy of Angola’s militant revolutionary cinema, and its pioneering directors. The films made during this critically overlooked period demonstrate a radical expansion of the cinema that emerged during the initial phase of post-independence filmmaking in Angola. In the following chapters, I analyse films made by four directors during this period, each of which moves beyond the militant documentary form that dominated the first years of Angolan national cinema.

Films made during this time respond to major historical shifts at both a national and global level. The gradual ideological transition of the MPLA through the 1980s, and the party’s official abandonment of its Marxist-Leninist socialist ideology in 1989, steadily removed the expectation that Angolan filmmakers would make cinema that contributed directly to Angola’s socialist revolution. Beyond Angola, the late 1980s and early 1990s would see the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, events that would consolidate the primacy of Western liberal democracy and free-market capitalism at the advent of the new millennium. During this time, however, directors in Angola would still have to contend with heavy state involvement, and the repression and censorship of their films. I cover this in more detail in the following sections.

For many of Angola’s directors, artists and writers, the national and global turmoil of the final two decades of the twentieth century generated feelings of great disillusionment.

Disappointment, anger and frustration with and from within the MPLA, however, did not

unilaterally equate to the renunciation of the revolutionary socialist values that had shaped the early political and cinematic careers of the nation's filmmakers. Despite the challenges faced, directors active during this period demonstrate a continued concern with the development of the independent Angolan nation and its national cinema. However, with some distance from the utopian promises of independence, the filmmakers analysed in this thesis adjusted their socially committed film practices to level greater criticism at the Angolan state, as well as to expand this commitment beyond national borders. In doing this, the directors engage in the pursuit of new and individual forms, content and aesthetics, capable of adequately responding to the complexity and challenges of this historical moment.

During this period, Luandino Vieira's recollection of Ruy Duarte de Carvalho and António Ole's early criticisms of the state's cinematic mechanisms – “cinema é o que nós fazemos” – becomes all the more significant. The state-led national cinematic project of Angola's early post-independence had stalled. The fate, survival and legacy of Angola's revolutionary national cinema lay in the hands of its directors. In this light, I reconceive too readily accepted notions of “retreat” and the “collapse” as moments of energy and struggle, which reveal the evolution of these directors' revolutionary cinematic activity and commitment.

### **Cinema in Angola before 1975: from *Cine Colonial* to Anti-Colonial Cinema**

In the following section, I provide a brief overview of the history and development of cinema in Angola before 1975. The birth of cinema at the end of the nineteenth century and explosion in moving-image production at the turn of the twentieth century coincided with the consolidation and intensification of colonial regimes across the African continent. Portugal – like France, Britain, and other European countries with imperial presence in Africa – quickly

realised the possible utility of cinema as a tool with which to fortify its position in its African colonies, using film to transmit propaganda about the colonial regime. The first film made in Angola, *O Caminho-de-ferro de Benguela* (1913), directed by the Portuguese Artur Pereira, showcased Portuguese colonial efficiency and economic successes in the colony.<sup>25</sup> From the 1920s to the 1940s, a large quantity of newsreel documentary films was produced by the regime in Angola, to be screened in both the colony and the metropole. From the 1940s onwards, Portuguese directors also began to produce narrative films in Angola. These films functioned to much the same end. The first Portuguese fiction film produced in Angola, *O Feitiço do Império* (1940), directed by António Lopes Ribeiro, is based heavily in Lusotropicalist myths of Portuguese exceptionalism and *mestiçagem*, following a Portuguese colonialist who travels through Africa to find his ancestral race.

Unlike Britain and France, however, Portugal never developed a sustainable cinematic infrastructure in any of its African colonies, neither establishing extensive production facilities nor training Africans in film production.<sup>26</sup> As a small, peripheral nation perched at the edge of Europe, Portugal's own economic underdevelopment and insecurity meant that its African colonies were subjected to a comparatively impoverished, if no less violent and oppressive, colonial regime. This dismal legacy would, to varying extents, continue to impede the development of national cinemas in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe after independence.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Alexandre Ramos, 'Portuguese and Belgian Colonial Cinema: The Filmography of Two Small Big Countries in Africa', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 60:239 (2020), pp. 563-592 (p. 565), doi:10.4000/etudesafriaines.31643.

<sup>26</sup> Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics & Culture* (Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> Claire Andrade-Watkins, 'Portuguese African Cinema: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives: 1969 to 1993', *Research in African Literatures*, 26:3 (1995), pp. 134-150.

Cinema played a significant role in colonial life for many living in urban centres across Angola. Watching films was a pastime enjoyed by various social classes. In Luanda, as Moorman outlines, there were numerous cinemas catering to the white and *assimilado* colonial elites in the capital's affluent downtown area, while a steadily growing number of cinemas on the poorer outskirts of the city screened films to black Angolan audiences.<sup>28</sup> After the beginning of independence wars across Portugal's colonies, the regime began to promote cinema-going more heavily to African audiences as part of a wider programme of measures designed to appease colonial subjects and minimise potential revolutionary and anti-colonial activity.<sup>29</sup> Colonial-era cinemas catering to non-*assimilado* audiences, such as the Cine Colonial (or "Clô Clô"), typically screened popular Hollywood action movies, such as Westerns, along with Asian kung-fu films, aimed to entertain and placate the masses, as well as to encourage identification with an imperialist perspective.

During the 1950s, various cultural groups, formed by Angola's urban social elites, began to organise *cine clubes*, meeting to watch and debate films in cities including Huambo, Luanda, Benguela and Lobito. Various studies have highlighted the important role played by these clubs in both Angola's anti-colonial cultural resistance and in the development of a later tradition of revolutionary, militant cinema.<sup>30</sup> Films would be selected on the basis of both artistic merit and politics, with clubs tending towards works with "uma determinada carga ideológica", such as Italian neorealism, and often screening films which had been censored by the Portuguese authorities.<sup>31</sup> Some of the elite cultural groups that organized *cine clubes*

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<sup>28</sup> Moorman, 'Of Westerns, Women and War', p. 104.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>30</sup> Maria do Carmo Piçarra, 'Angola: (Re-)Imaginar o Nascimento de uma Nação no Cinema Militante', *Journal of Lusophone Studies*, 3:1 (2018), pp. 168-194.

<sup>31</sup> Michel Laban, 'Encontro com Antero Abreu', in Laban, *Angola: Encontros com Escritores*, Vol 1 (Fundação Eng. De António de Almeida, 1991), pp. 233-282 (p.257).

even began making efforts to develop an Angolan cinema created by Angolans. In Huambo, the *cine clube* produced a series of 8mm films, attempting to record the city's suburban life in a social realist mode.<sup>32</sup> Through the 1960s, a number of articles were published by *cineclubistas*, discussing the challenges and possibilities of creating an Angolan national cinema.

The war for independence made gatherings and activities like the *cine clubes* increasingly risky. Some *cine clube* members would go on to become involved with the nationalist struggle, with many central MPLA figures emerging from the elite cultural scene that fostered these clandestine cinematic gatherings. After the start of the war of independence, the leaders of the main nationalist independence movements went into exile outside of Angola. The MPLA based its first major headquarters in Léopoldville, the Congolese capital. From here, the leaders of the movement would begin to put into action some of the ideas formulated and debated in the *cine clubes*. Fernando Arenas notes that during the armed struggle of the 1960s and 1970s, cinema was used by the MPLA as “a strategic weapon in order to document, educate and disseminate information about the war”, as well as to garner international support for the revolutionary cause.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike the other nationalist movements, it was only the MPLA, backed by Cuba and the Soviet Union, who had the resources to use cinema as an arm of their militant independence struggle.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, it remained incredibly challenging for the MPLA to produce their own anti-colonial cinema during the war. Filmmakers and reporters from the international

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<sup>32</sup> Piçarra, ‘Angola: (Re-)Imaginar o Nascimento de uma Nação’, p. 172.

<sup>33</sup> Arenas, ‘The Renaissance of Angolan Cinema’, p. 203.

<sup>34</sup> Piçarra, ‘Angola: (Re-)Imaginar o Nascimento de uma Nação’, p. 177.

community supported the Angolan nationalist cause by producing footage and information films, mostly to be screened abroad. The MPLA would also screen films to its own members and recruits as part of a wider cultural education programme designed to promote the victories of the liberation movement and foster revolutionary commitment.<sup>35</sup>

The most famous anti-colonial film about Angola is undoubtedly Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (1972). While not directed by an Angolan – Maldoror was born in France to a Guadeloupean father and a French mother – and shot in the Congo due to the impossibility of shooting in Angola, the film is considered a foundational work in the history of Angolan cinema. Adapting Luandino Vieira's *A Vida Verdadeira de Domingos Xavier* (1961), *Sambizanga* tells the story of Domingos, a revolutionary arrested by the Portuguese colonial authorities, and his wife, Maria, who searches for her husband, unaware that he has been tortured and killed in prison.

*Sambizanga* exposes the violent conditions of Portuguese colonial rule. The film, which was the first feature film directed by a woman in Africa, is also remarkable – and still practically unique in the context of Angolan filmmaking – in that it privileges a woman's perspective on Angola's struggle for independence. Maldoror has suggested her film was primarily concerned with documenting a female experience of revolution and was not intended as a nationalist film. She claimed to be “against all forms of nationalisms”.<sup>36</sup> However, building on Vieira's revolutionary text, *Sambizanga* can easily be understood as a tool for political engagement and instruction, promoting the MPLA's nationalist cause. Employing a

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<sup>35</sup> Diawara, *African Cinema*, p. 89.

<sup>36</sup> Alexie Tcheuyap, *Postnationalist African Cinemas* (University of Manchester, 2011), p. 15.

“deliberately didactic revolutionary aesthetic”, political messages pertaining to the struggle for independence are often communicated slowly and carefully to the viewer through the film, even where this breaks with the natural flow of dialogue or action, such as when a comrade reads aloud a revolutionary leaflet in its entirety.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, Maldoror’s connection to the MPLA through her husband, Mário Pinto de Andrade, has made *Sambizanga* a film firmly associated with furthering the aims of the movement, setting the standard for Angola’s post-independence cinema.

### **Post-Independence Angolan Cinema: Socialism and Censorship under the MPLA**

Following independence, the MPLA established itself as a Marxist-Leninist vanguard workers’ party under the leadership of Angola’s first president, Agostinho Neto. After taking control of Luanda in 1975, the movement began its first cinematic activities alongside heavy investment in state television production. Early post-independence television and film aimed to foster and promote a sense of national identity and revolutionary socialist commitment, in line with the moral and ideological framework of the party. Abrantes notes that under the newly formed MPLA government, initial cinematic activity and training in Angola accelerated “num clima de grandes esperanças e de entusiasmo criador”.<sup>38</sup>

From 1975 until the early 1980s, exclusively documentary films were produced in Angola. During this early post-independence period, many documentaries took as their central theme an investigation of the working conditions of Angolans across the nation. 1975 saw the release of a ten-part documentary series produced by TPA, *Sou Angolano – Trabalho com*

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<sup>37</sup> Frank N. Ukadike, ‘Reclaiming Images of Women in Films from Africa and the Black Diaspora’, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies*, 15:1 (1994), pp. 102-122 (p. 110), doi:10.2307/3346615.

<sup>38</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p.12.

*Força*, which followed groups ranging from peasant labourers to marble workers, fishermen to bakers, textile workers to train operators. Other topics for documentary films, programmes and newsreels included military and revolutionary activity during the liberation struggle, national celebrations taking place after independence, such as Luanda's first carnival, and profiles of celebrated Angolan revolutionaries, artists and poets, particularly President Neto.

Films almost invariably reaffirmed the role played by the MPLA in winning Angola's independence, as well as the vanguard party's central position in developing the newly independent nation. For Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, the MPLA had – and continues to have – “a visceral belief in its own legitimacy to guide Angola into the modern world”.<sup>39</sup> As Phillip Rothwell has pointed out, the party's vision for the Angolan nation was shaped by a decidedly urban, cosmopolitan leadership, a significant number of whom had forged their revolutionary consciousnesses in Europe and knew relatively little of the vast and diverse nation they attempted to govern.<sup>40</sup> As I have noted, and as my analysis of films from 1980s and early 1990s will show, the expectation placed on filmmakers to align with the MPLA's nationalist project and narrow field of vision was at the heart of the tensions that began to arise between the state and the nation's directors during this time.

The roots of the MPLA can be traced back to a Luanda-based, cosmopolitan, Creole elite, which developed in the colony through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and reached the height of its influence in the nineteenth century. During this period, according to Jacopo

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<sup>39</sup> Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land: Angola since the Civil War* (Hurst & Company, 2015), p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> Phillip Rothwell, *Pepetela and the MPLA: The Ethical Evolution of a Revolutionary Writer* (Legenda, 2019), p. 12.

Corrado, “Angolan society was characterized by the presence of a semiurbanised, commercial and administrative elite of Portuguese-speaking Creole families – white, black, some of mixed race”, who were concentrated in Angola’s coastal cities, primarily Luanda. Besides their wealth, “their European-influenced culture and habits clearly distinguished them from the broad native population of black peasants and farmworkers”.<sup>41</sup>

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the status of Angola’s Creole elites began to decline as Portuguese presence and repression in the colony increased.<sup>42</sup> The colonial regime introduced the legal category of “assimilado” [“assimilated”], to differentiate between Angolans that had reached a certain colonial standard of ‘Europeanization’, and the “indígenas” [“natives”], who made up the majority of Angola’s population. Alongside white settlers, the *assimilados* were able to attend colonial schools, and were not obliged to complete forced labour like the *indígenas*. However, despite their relative privilege, *assimilados* were still treated as second-class citizens. To receive *assimilado* status, Angola’s well-to-do native elites were subjected to a series of humiliating tests, which included assessment of their use of Western cutlery, and the requirement for perfect mastery of the Portuguese language.<sup>43</sup>

The colonial regime’s formalization of cultural assimilation policies drew ire from Angola’s privileged elites, who “excoriated the Portuguese colonial authorities who treated them like

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<sup>41</sup> Jacopo Corrado, *The Creole Elite and the Rise of Angolan Proto-nationalism: 1870-1920* (Cambria Press, 2008), p.xi.

<sup>42</sup> Malyn Newitt, ‘Angola in Historical Context’, in *Angola: The Weight of History*, ed. by Patrick Chabal and Nuno Vidal, pp. 19-92, (p. 51).

<sup>43</sup> Kiluanji Kia Henda, ‘The Black Man in the White Suit: A Letter from Cape Town’, in *Kabbo ka Muwala - The Girl’s Basket: Migration and Mobility in Contemporary Art in Southern and Eastern Africa*, ed. by Raphael Chikukwa, Katharina Hoffmann, Ingmar Lähnemann, Katrin Peters-Klaphake and Lydia Potts (Revolver Publishing, 2016), pp. 74-79 (p. 75).

native subjects rather than Portuguese citizens”.<sup>44</sup> It was in these conditions that some of the earliest literary expressions of Angolan nationalism and national identity emerged. However, as Fernando Andresen Guimarães has noted, these nascent nationalist protests developed mostly from the self-interest of this relatively privileged elite, who sought mainly “to advance the lot of the *assimilado* within colonial society”, and at times were even supportive of colonial rule.<sup>45</sup> Early publications by this group retained a prejudice against rural black African populations in Angola, “reasserted the group’s sense of superiority” and highlighted the *assimilados*’ cultural affinity with and connections to Europe.<sup>46</sup>

Through the 1940s and 1950s, these early writings became important points of reference for the clandestine anti-colonial groups that began to organise politically to expel the Portuguese from Angola. As Malyn Newitt notes, these groups, which primarily consisted of educated, urban Angolan colonial subjects, including white settlers and *assimilados*, would eventually form the bedrock of the MPLA.<sup>47</sup> The “Generation of 1948” – a group of early nationalist Angolan writers and intellectuals – began to question the influence of the colonizer on their education and understanding of Angola, and how it was that “assimilated Angolans knew all about Portugal’s geography and culture, but nothing about their own country”.<sup>48</sup> Led by Viriato da Cruz, who would go on to become one of the founding members of the MPLA, the 1948 *Vamos Descobrir Angola* [“Let’s Discover Angola”] movement would initiate a process of “re-Africanization”, as the group recognised their status as part of a colonial elite and

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<sup>44</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Fernando Andresen Guimarães, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War: Foreign Intervention and Domestic Political Conflict* (Macmillan, 2001), p. 36.

<sup>46</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Newitt, ‘Angola in Historical Context’, p. 52.

<sup>48</sup> Raquel Ribeiro, ‘Angola: A Nation in Pieces in José Eduardo Agualusa’s *Estação das chuvas*’, *Journal of Lusophone Studies*, 1:1 (2016), pp. 57-72 (p. 64), doi:10.21471/jls.v1i1.43.

sought to address this by searching for their African cultural roots.<sup>49</sup> As Patrick Chabal has noted, “the concerns of this generation of Angolan intellectuals were similar to the concerns of Africans elsewhere: creating a national literature grounded in African material and expressed in an African voice”.<sup>50</sup> The central aim of the poetry and thought that emerged from this group was “to redeem Africa, Africans and African culture”, by “embracing the African heritage and emphasizing the African qualities which can provide the foundations for an independent future”.<sup>51</sup>

Another important locus in the development of the MPLA was the Casa dos Estudantes do Império (CEI) in Lisbon. Created by the Portuguese Estado Novo, the CEI was intended to support students from Portugal’s African colonies to complete university studies in the imperial metropolis, and to underline the New State’s benevolence and commitment to the development of its overseas territories. Unwittingly, in establishing the CEI, the Portuguese regime nurtured a hotbed of covert anti-colonial activity, in which the future leaders of Lusophone Africa’s various independence movements honed their revolutionary ideas and combined efforts in their joint struggle against Portuguese colonial rule. Many of those that would go on to form part of the MPLA’s early leadership studied here between the 1940s and 1950s.

The literary journal *Mensagem*, founded by students at the CEI and published by African students and writers in Lisbon between 1946 and 1964, became a site for articulating these

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<sup>49</sup> Phyllis Peres, ‘Women, Bodies, and Nation in Angolan Poetry of the 1950s’, *Research in African Literatures*, 38:1 (2007), pp. 35-45 (p. 36), doi:10.2979/RAL.2007.38.1.35.

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Chabal, ‘Aspects of Angolan Literature: Luandino Vieira and Agostinho Neto’, *African Literatures and Cultures*, 8:1 (1995), pp. 19-42 (p. 38), doi:10.1080/09544169508717785.

<sup>51</sup> Chabal, ‘Aspects of Angolan Literature’, p. 38.

anti-colonial expressions and ideas. As Alexandra Reza has noted, “adopting and adapting ideas of negritude” was an important strand of work produced by writers associated with *Mensagem*.<sup>52</sup> Angolan students writing for the journal – including Agostinho Neto – would be influenced by, and in turn influence, constantly evolving theories and articulations of pan-African and black solidarity, which recognised and sought to reclaim the shared histories and cultures of the black world, engaging in a shared struggle against the global forces of racism, imperialism and colonization.

The MPLA would later be founded as a class-based, rather than a race-based, nationalist liberation movement, which called for solidarity between all those who had been oppressed by colonialism in the fight for Angolan independence. In itself, this did not necessarily imply a rupture with the outlook fostered by the CEI. As Abiola Irele suggests, negritude was less of an expression of a “Negro essence” than a historically specific “social and cultural movement closely related to African nationalism”.<sup>53</sup> Beyond the specific ideas proposed by negritude’s founders, particularly Leopold Senghor, there were many other iterations and versions of negritude, including those subscribed to by MPLA figures such as Neto, that “sought to affirm global solidarity-in-struggle and to lobby for the abolition of current class structures”.<sup>54</sup>

After independence, however, the MPLA steered away from discussions of race entirely. Under Neto, the MPLA actively avoided race-based rhetoric, “implicitly discouraged the

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<sup>52</sup> Alexandra Reza, *Anticolonial Form: Literary Journals at the End of Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2024), p. 131.

<sup>53</sup> Abiola Irele, ‘Negritude or Black Cultural Nationalism’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 3.3 (1965), pp. 321-348 (p. 322), doi:10.1017/S0022278X00006157.

<sup>54</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 9.

post-independence discussion of race as a factor of determining economic privilege”, and presented a “post-racial” vision for the newly independent nation, based in universal, multiracial values.<sup>55</sup> The prevalence of lighter-skinned *assimilados* and the descendants of white settlers within the MPLA leadership continued to draw intense and sustained criticism from competing nationalist movements in Angola, particularly UNITA and the FNLA, both of which had established much of their supporter bases along ethnic lines and openly accused the MPLA of “seeking to perpetuate white domination in Angola”.<sup>56</sup> As Rothwell explains, the MPLA “justified this racial discrepancy through its nature as a vanguard party, dealing with the legacies of colonialism”, arguing that “the educated under colonialism tended to be whiter-looking so the burden would fall on those among them who were MPLA supporters to direct the nation”.<sup>57</sup> The party claimed that the MPLA was a movement that would fight for, represent and embrace all Angolans, regardless of race or class. This vision of cultural unity, however, was contingent on the unilateral acceptance of the MPLA vanguard’s hegemonic vision for what the Angolan nation should be.

Culture was an important tool in furthering the MPLA’s political aims and garnering support for the vanguard party after the movement seized control of the state at independence. In this context, cinema was viewed primarily as an educational undertaking. Films were a means of instructing the masses, disseminating party ideology and establishing standards for a revolutionary commitment to the nation, reaffirming the authority of the party vanguard and advancing the development of postcolonial Angola according to its narrow vision.

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<sup>55</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 40.

<sup>57</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 10.

In this context, Soviet socialist realism became an important reference for the MPLA in overseeing national artistic production after 1975. Socialist realism, which developed in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s and became the official method of artistic production under Stalin, depicted an optimistic and idealised vision of life under socialism, and cemented the role of the state in achieving socialist revolution. Socialist realist art purported to represent the historical reality of socialist development in the Soviet Union. However, these were conditional realities. This is to say that in Soviet socialist realist art, according to a statute of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934, “the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism”.<sup>58</sup> If the working masses were both the subject and object of socialist realist art, the guardians of their transformation were those in power. As Boris Groys points out, socialist realism “was not created by the masses but was formulated in their name by well-educated and experienced elites”.<sup>59</sup> Soviet socialist realist images were unambiguously supportive of the state. For Czeslaw Milosz, socialist realism “is based on the glorification of the state by the writer and artist, whose task it is to portray the power of the state as the greatest good”.<sup>60</sup>

The influence of Soviet socialist realism is unsurprising not only given the MPLA’s political aims, but also its connection to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had long been involved in training filmmakers from the African continent, including Sarah Maldoror, who – along with other prominent African directors, such as Ousmane Sembène and Souleymane Cissé – had received a bursary to undertake cinematic training at the Gerasimov Institute of

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<sup>58</sup> Abram Tertz, *The Trial Begins & On Socialist Realism*, trans. by Max Hayward and George Dennis (Vintage Books, 1960), p. 148.

<sup>59</sup> Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. by Charles Rougle (Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> Abram Tertz, *The Trial Begins & On Socialist Realism*, p. 134.

Cinematography, in Moscow, during the 1960s. From the early 1960s to 1974, the MPLA, along with other revolutionary anticolonial independence movements across Portugal's African colonies such as FRELIMO in Mozambique and PAIGC in Guinea Bissau, sent hundreds of their members to receive education and training in the Soviet Union.<sup>61</sup> After independence, the Soviet Union continued to provide extensive aid to Angola. In this context, aesthetic affinities and dialogue would remain between Soviet and Lusophone African cinemas and visual cultures.

Soviet socialist realism thus became an important reference for the MPLA in overseeing national artistic production after 1975. However, while the hallmarks of the Soviet socialist realist style can be found in many examples of post-independence art and cinema in Angola, socialist realist aesthetics were never fully imposed or officially enforced by the MPLA as an artistic doctrine on a broad scale.<sup>62</sup> As Lindiwe Dovey has noted, historically African filmmakers enjoyed more freedom to express themselves than their Soviet counterparts.<sup>63</sup> Despite this, it remained challenging for Angolan cultural producers to express viewpoints, either formally or at the level of content, which did not toe the party line or present a similarly uncritical and optimistic view of the MPLA's post-independence national project. At this time, cinematic production was entirely funded and controlled by the state.

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<sup>61</sup> Constantin Katsakioris, 'Students from Portuguese Africa in the Soviet Union, 1960–74: Anti-colonialism, Education, and the Socialist Alliance', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 56:1 (2020), pp. 142-165 (p. 150), doi:10.1177/0022009419893739.

<sup>62</sup> Nadine Siegert, "'No caminho das Estrelas': How Socialism Created a Framework for the Emergence of Postindependence Modern Art in Angola", *African Arts*, 54:3 (2021), pp. 38-49 (p. 39), doi:10.1162/afar\_a\_00598.

<sup>63</sup> Lindiwe Dovey, 'Listening between the Images: African Filmmakers' Take on the Soviet Union, Soviet Filmmakers' Take on Africa', in *The Oxford Handbook of Communist Visual Cultures*, ed. by Aga Skrodzka, Katarzyna Marciniak, and Xiaoning Lu (Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 364-384 (p. 367).

After independence, the MPLA became increasingly repressive and intolerant of dissent within its ranks. The civil conflict that had erupted following Portugal's departure from Angola in 1975, in which competing nationalist movements fought for control of the state, threatened the MPLA's attempts to consolidate its position as Angola's ruling party. Such conditions led to mounting paranoia amongst the party leadership that internal divisions within the MPLA's supporter base would jeopardise the movement's grip on power. The party's repression of dissenting voices reached its zenith in the events that followed the 27<sup>th</sup> May 1977, when two dissident senior members of the party, Nito Alves and José van Dunem, allegedly orchestrated an attempted coup against the party leaders. After killing Alves and van Dunem, along with other senior party members accused of dissent and disloyalty, the MPLA leadership oversaw a violent purging of the party's membership in which thousands were killed.<sup>64</sup> As Dorothee Boulanger notes, after the events of 1977, the MPLA "imposed an orthodox single-party dictatorship that punished contestation and dissent with the utmost severity".<sup>65</sup>

The MPLA's paranoid and violent suppression of dissent was underscored by the government's tenuous legitimacy across much of the country. While the MPLA set up their seat of power in Luanda and attempted to govern from within the state infrastructure left behind by the Portuguese, their influence and power did not extend unilaterally across the nation. Soares de Oliveira has notes that the UNITA rebel movement, the MPLA's main political opposition, essentially "ran its own society" in rural areas of the country, behaving "like a state" and engaging in "statist rituals".<sup>66</sup> In this context, state-produced films were to

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<sup>64</sup> Lara Pawson, *In the Name of the People: Angola's Forgotten Massacre* (I. B. Tauris & Co., 2014), p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*, p. 12.

present an image of the MPLA's strength and power, leaving no space for creeping doubts about the movement's sovereignty, its post-independence national project, or its ever more repressive tactics and violent impositions of authority.

To this end, official censorship was carried out by the MPLA across all areas of cultural production in Angola. Officially, the party asserted it would “reject outright films which transmit racist, colonialist and imperialist concepts”, as well as films “which promote the decadent values of the bourgeoisie”, in line with its Marxist-Leninist socialist ideology.<sup>67</sup> In practice, censorship extended to all works which did not suit the specific aims of the party, or which challenged the movement's foundational narratives. Luísa d'Almeida, director of the Cinemateca Nacional between 1979-1980, suggests that censorship by the MPLA's Comissão de Controle de Cinema was relatively lenient, noting that the censorship undertaken by this body “felizmente estava na mão de cinéfilos”.<sup>68</sup> It is possible that the legacy of the *cine clubes* might well have resulted in greater open-mindedness. However, challenges to the vanguard party's authority would not be tolerated.

In this context, Angolan cultural producers working under the tyranny of the MPLA leadership tended to self-censor, out of fear for the consequences of challenging the state, and what this might mean for them or for their families. Additionally, as Boulanger has noted, in some cases self-censorship stemmed from a fear that critiques of the movement “would be

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<sup>67</sup> Conferência Africana de Cooperação Cinematográfica, *Documentos da Conferência Africana de Cooperação Cinematográfica, Maputo, de 21-24 Fevereiro 1977* (Conferência Africana de Cooperação Cinematográfica, 1977), p. 75.

<sup>68</sup> Leandro Santos Bulhões de Jesus, ‘Imagens em Angola, imagens da memória: cinemas, marcas e descobertas (tempos das lutas anticoloniais, tempos das independências)’, interview with Luísa d'Almeida (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidade de Brasília, 2013), p. 247.

instrumentalised by forces hostile to the MPLA”.<sup>69</sup> The filmmaker and artist António Ole describes realising his own self-censorship following the violence he had been exposed to in Angola; “sem pensar, comecei a observar-me e a ver que estava a auto-censurar-me”.<sup>70</sup> The director Zézé Gamboa has also testified to the limited possibilities of expression and the challenges of censorship experienced by Angolan directors working during the early post-independence period, as well as the tendency towards self-censorship:

Esses cineastas eram cineastas que se autocensuravam porque, não nos esqueçamos, estavam inseridos numa revolução que não lhes permitia nem lhes dava a liberdade para darem o salto para fazerem o que quisessem. Porque aquilo era completamente subvencionado – pela televisão, no início; e depois, mais tarde, pelo Laboratório de Cinema e por fim pelo Instituto Angolano de Cinema (IAC). Havia sempre ali a autocensura que os próprios cineastas faziam, [...] do ponto de vista da criação, havia sempre ali muitas limitações [...] A realidade é que eles estavam condicionados, eles não podiam filmar o que quisessem. Ou seja, eles tinham de fazer, falar de temas que eram temas que convinhavam ao partido. Não brinquemos com coisas sérias, quer dizer, o regime era um regime autoritário. Portanto eles não falavam do que queriam, como queriam.<sup>71</sup>

By the early 1980s, the early optimism and momentum of early post-independence filmmaking in Angola began to waver. Luandino Vieira – by then Director of the IAC – attempted to revitalise Angola’s cinematic industry through measures such as a cinematic treaty with Portugal, making a number of appeals for more support for national film production.<sup>72</sup> It is notable that these appeals explicitly stated that Angolan filmmakers would

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<sup>69</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 88.

<sup>70</sup> José António Fernandes Dias, “Introdução”, interview with António Ole, in *António Ole* (Banco Espírito Santo, 2007), pp. 6-18 (p. 10).

<sup>71</sup> Levin, ‘Dos Filmes dos Pioneiros’, interview with Zézé Gamboa, 2011, p. 95.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Luandino Vieira em Portugal: Cinema angolano tem de progredir’, *Jornal de Angola*, 20 November 1982 [accessed 20 July 2022].

be able to pursue their desired forms of cinematic expression. In an article published in the Portuguese newspaper *O Diário* in 1981, Luandino Vieira is quoted offering the following assurance regarding his relationship with filmmakers: “estou sempre junto dos realizadores, leio os guiões, mas não interfiro”.<sup>73</sup>

It is possible to trace moments in which filmmakers resisted the criteria imposed on them by the MPLA, whether subtly or more explicitly. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, numerous critics have noted that Ruy Duarte de Carvalho (along with António Ole) defied convention by explicitly challenging tenets of the MPLA’s national project and developing his own stylistic imprint.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, at least by the middle of the 1980s, filmmakers such as Orlando Fortunato and Asdrúbal Rebelo, who had been active during the early post-independence period, were beginning to experiment with alternative themes, forms and aesthetics in their works. Following Agostinho Neto’s death in 1979, José Eduardo dos Santos became leader of the MPLA and president of Angola, gradually initiating a process of transition that would see the party abandon its socialist ideology in favour of a full adoption of free-market capitalism by the end of the 1980s. For a new generation of Angolan filmmakers, including Mariano Bartolomeu, film became a space to explore, respond to and critique the “moral and ideological void” that the movement’s transformation left in its wake.<sup>75</sup> In this thesis, I analyse films by each of the above-mentioned filmmakers.

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<sup>73</sup> ‘Luandino Vieira em Lisboa para assinar acordo de cooperação cinematográfica’, *O Diário*, 29 October 1981 [accessed 20 July 2022].

<sup>74</sup> Moorman, “Of Westerns, Women and War”, p. 113.

<sup>75</sup> Tony Hodges, *Angola: Anatomy of an Oil-State* (James Currey Press, 2004), p. 11.

Despite the assurances and promises of those attempting to revitalise national cinema in the mid-1980s, censorship and ideological imposition remained major obstacles for filmmakers through the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>76</sup> Challenges during this period of crisis also included finances, bureaucracy and a lack of infrastructure. In the following section, I suggest how filmmakers that remained active during this time reckoned with these conditions through their films.

### **After António Ole: Re-reading cinema from “o recuo” to “o colapso”**

One of the most significant and active filmmakers of the early post-independence period was António Ole. Perhaps best known as one of Angola’s foremost artists, Ole’s career was already established when, after the end of the war of independence, he applied for a job in the newly created TPA. There, Ole directed a number of documentaries for Angolan television, including *Resistência Popular em Benguela* (1975), *Aprender para melhor servir* (1977), and *Ferrovários (Caminho de Ferro de Luanda-Malanje)* (1975), part of *Sou Angolano, Trabalho com Força*. He was also responsible for an uninterrupted 12-hour TPA broadcast on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1975, recording the events which took place on the day that Angola officially became independent from Portugal. Nadine Siegert suggests that Ole’s work during this time generally “observed socialist realist principles”.<sup>77</sup>

In 1978, Ole completed his first documentary film, *Carnaval da Vitória*, telling the story of Angola’s first carnival after independence. The film had been commissioned by the MPLA but faced delays after the events of 27<sup>th</sup> May 1977. The violence that took place in the

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<sup>76</sup> Carolin Overhoff Ferreira, ‘O drama da descolonização em imagens em movimento - a propôs do “nascimento” dos cinemas luso-africanos’, *Estudos Linguísticos e Literários*, 53:1 (2016), pp. 177-221 (p. 193).

<sup>77</sup> Siegert, “No caminho das Estrelas”, p. 45.

aftermath of the supposed coup led Ole to leave Angola and take up a research grant in Portugal; “a violência extrema, os recolhidos obrigatórios, tudo isso acabou por criar em mim uma situação de esgotamento. Apetecia-me ficar longe de toda aquela violência, para respirar um bocado”.<sup>78</sup>

Returning to Luanda after four months in Portugal to complete *Carnaval da Vitória*, Ole recounted his concerns regarding censorship; “eu perguntava-me se teria liberdade para me expressar, mas até aí não tinha havido problemas desse género...”.<sup>79</sup> These concerns were not unfounded. Ole’s second documentary, *O Ritmo de N’Gola Ritmos* (1978), was censored upon its completion, and remained unreleased for eleven years. Its focus on the musical group *N’Gola Ritmos*, who helped to politicize Luanda’s black urban poor and inspire popular uprising in the city’s *musseques* under Portuguese colonial rule, was unpopular with some MPLA figures, who feared that Ole’s film might undermine the party’s founding narratives and its official version of Angola’s road to independence, which centred the MPLA’s role in mobilizing anti-colonial activity, or even inspire popular resistance to the party’s vanguard leadership.

Ole subsequently released two further films, *No Caminho das Estrelas* (1980), and his final film *Conceição Tchiambola: Um Dia, Uma Vida* (1982), a documentary produced in collaboration with UNICEF. At the time of making these films, Ole described feeling increasingly worn down by the challenging conditions in Angola. He was not alone. Other members of the so-called “geração queimada” [“burnt out generation”] – made up of artists,

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<sup>78</sup> Dias, “Introdução”, p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

intellectuals and other cultural and political figures connected to the MPLA – were also becoming exhausted and disillusioned with the realities of the party’s national project, as well as the ongoing civil conflict, with many choosing to leave Angola during this time.

It was not long before Ole followed suit, leaving Luanda first for a Visiting Studentship at UCLA, before gaining a place at the American Film Institute in Louisiana to undertake film training. While in the United States, Ole began work on several film projects, but these were not completed. After completing his degree, he returned to Angola, where – in stark contrast to the possibilities presented across the Atlantic – the situation for filmmakers had further deteriorated; “quando chego a Angola, aquilo que já era a pequena estrutura do cinema angolano tinha ido por água abaixo”.<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, Ole’s desire for creative freedom led him back to his art career. He returned to painting, as well as photography and sculpture, moving away from the socialist realist style he had previously engaged with through these media towards a less figurative practice which continues to the present day.

Ole’s abandonment of filmmaking coincided with the wider decrease in Angolan cinematic production, in the years between what Abrantes termed “o recuo” and “o colapso”. But how did the situation facing filmmakers during this period affect directors who did continue making films? Beyond concerns over censorship, and the challenging material conditions of the 1980s and 1990s, how did Angolan filmmakers reckon with their disillusionment at the realities of the MPLA’s post-independence project through their films? Where do we continue to hear the dissenting and critical voices noted by Luandino Vieira? How did these directors

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<sup>80</sup> Dias, “Introdução”, p. 11.

develop in their pursuit of individual artistic visions and freedoms, while still demonstrating their commitment to the postcolonial Angolan nation?

In my analysis, I identify a number of common themes, developments and concerns which I believe go some way towards characterizing Angolan cinema from this period. I use these overarching ideas to shape my readings of films made by four Angolan directors between 1982 and 1992.

First, I follow the notion of “adaptation” through each of the works. In the field of Film Studies, the term adaptation – and what counts as an adaptation – has been intensely debated. Here, I begin with Robert Stam’s seminal chapter ‘Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation’. Stam rejects the limiting and moralising metric of “fidelity” to an original text, most often a literary text, as the “exclusive methodological principle” in the analysis and classification of an adaptation.<sup>81</sup> Rather, he suggests that the term adaptation can extend to all kinds of dialogical responses to any originary text – “to readings, critiques, interpretations, and rewritings of prior material”.<sup>82</sup> Following Stam’s definition, all the films analysed in this thesis can be considered adaptations.

Alexie Tcheuyap suggests that “the theory and practice of adaptations in Africa has hardly ever been concerned with the unending mainstream debate about fidelity and betrayal” that

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<sup>81</sup> Robert Stam, ‘Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation’, in *Film Adaptation*, ed. by James Naremore (Rutgers University Press, 2000), pp. 54-76 (p. 55).

<sup>82</sup> Stam, ‘Beyond Fidelity’, p. 76.

has traditionally dominated Western discussions of adaptation.<sup>83</sup> Sada Niang, whose research has examined the evolution of adaptation practices in the early nationalist cinemas of West Africa, notes an initial “uneasiness between literature and African cinema” amongst the first generation of West African filmmakers.<sup>84</sup> For Niang, value judgements based in questions of fidelity – which, ironically, can be traced in an Anglophone context to Victorian standards of morality and prudishness embedded in the colonial logic of empire, a paradigm identified by Stam – were reproduced within the strict ideological frameworks and Manichean aesthetics of early, revolutionary nationalist African cinemas.<sup>85</sup> In this context, the possibility of adaptation as a “space for innovation, artistic freedom, and creative autonomy” – a space in which different readings of an original text could freely proliferate – was limited by the political demands of post-independence nationalist projects.<sup>86</sup>

In 1974, the Pan African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI) hosted a seminar to discuss the adaptation of both written and oral literature in African cinema, seeking to address the reticence of directors to engage with literature and foster the production of more film adaptations in Africa.<sup>87</sup> Niang argues that the process of adapting oral literature, which had been more widely adopted in a West African context in the first decade of postcolonial filmmaking, had lent itself to greater tendency towards “appropriation, re-interpretation, re-focusing, and ‘re-outillage’”.<sup>88</sup> Into the 1970s, the adaptation of written literature in West African cinemas would also evolve into a more expansive and open-ended practice of artistic

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<sup>83</sup> Alexie Tcheuyap, ‘African Cinema and the Politics of Adaptation’, *Post Script*, 23:3 (2004), pp. 36-49 (p. 43).

<sup>84</sup> Sada Niang, *Nationalist African Cinema: Legacy and Transformations*, (Lexington Books, 2014), p. 106.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>87</sup> Nancy J. Schmidt, ‘African Literature on Film’, *Research in African Literatures*, 13:4 (1982), pp. 518-531.

<sup>88</sup> Niang, *Nationalist African Cinema*, p. 107.

creation and reappropriation, less concerned with faithfulness and purity and more firmly positioned within broader cultural and political discourses.

These developments precede the birth of Angolan national cinema. However, a similar trajectory might be identified in an Angolan context. There is an established tradition of literary engagement in Angolan cinema. Even before independence, Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (1972) is an adaptation of Luandino Vieira's *A vida verdadeira de Domingos Xavier* (1961), while her *Monangambée* (1968) adapts his short story *O fato completo de Lucas Matesso* (1962). Vieira's revolutionary works condemn the atrocities of Portuguese colonial rule and were catalysts in gaining support and momentum for the liberation movement at both a national and international level. Maldoror's adaptations generally remain faithful to these specific political aims. After 1975, the life and works of Angola's revolutionary literary figures, particularly Agostinho Neto, were celebrated in films such as Ruy Duarte de Carvalho's *Geração 50* (1975). Filmmakers' use of literary quotations and allusions during this period was expected to foster a collective sense of national identity and culture, remaining faithful to the revolutionary ideals of the source materials.

After the initial optimism and fervour of independence, however, and in the context of growing disillusionment with and distrust of those in power, I suggest that Angolan filmmakers began to use adaptation as a means by which to challenge and question the MPLA's post-independence national project. For reasons explored in more detail through this thesis, adaptations were uniquely placed to respond to the situation faced by Angolan filmmakers during the 1980s and 1990s. An investigation of the prevalence and evolution of

this practice provides a productive and multifaceted lens through which to analyse the development of Angolan cinema, and the concerns of Angolan directors, through this period.

Formally, the structure of the adaptation is significant in this context. According to Julia Kristeva's notion of "intertextuality", all texts can be considered as "an intersection of textual surfaces".<sup>89</sup> The text, for Kristeva, is always an "intertext", "a mosaic of quotations".<sup>90</sup> Her concept of intertextuality frames all writing as "a dynamic site in which relational processes and practices are the focus of analysis instead of static structures and products".<sup>91</sup> Words and texts are never fixed in their meaning or position, but regenerate endlessly within an infinite matrix of human communication. Following this concept, as Stam notes, film adaptations are "caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation and transmutation".<sup>92</sup>

But if all texts – filmic or otherwise – can be considered intertexts, made up of other, intersecting texts, what distinguishes an adaptation? One point of differentiation is that adaptations explicitly indicate the co-presence of more than one text. Cinematic adaptations constitute an overt and self-conscious response not only to a specific original text, but also to their own intertextual dialogism. The transformation and interpretation of the source material becomes the object of the audience's scrutiny, even where the filmmaker tries to conceal this through "faithfulness" to the original text. In Angola, in the case of early post-independence filmmakers' engagement with the nation's revolutionary nationalist literature, the "grammar"

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<sup>89</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 36.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>91</sup> María Jesús Martínez Alfaro, 'Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept', *Atlantis*, 18:1/2 (1996), pp. 268-285 (p. 268).

<sup>92</sup> Stam, 'Beyond Fidelity', p. 66.

of these transformations, as Stam puts it, was informed and controlled by ideological and aesthetic frameworks imposed by the MPLA.<sup>93</sup> As I have noted, cinema from this early period was didactic and instructional, in line with the party's vision for the nation. If these early Angolan film adaptations explicitly referenced the presence of an exterior, antecedent text, this was not *intended* to imply the dynamic, shifting and proliferating meanings of these two intertexts, but to reassert a static interpretation of the original text – that of the MPLA. The voice speaking through both texts was to be heard as one.

The MPLA's intolerance towards differing political opinions was one of the main causes of the disillusionment felt by many intellectuals, writers and artists in Angola. After independence, dialogue, in the sense of a free and open exchange of political or cultural views, was severely curtailed by the MPLA's increasingly oppressive and authoritarian one-party regime. Responding to this context, filmmakers who continued producing films through the 1980s and early 1990s began to exploit the fundamentally dialogical characteristics of adaptation to create cinematic works which, in various ways, allowed for more difference, dialogue and debate, while still – mostly – operating within the hostile limits of MPLA censorship. In this sense, I am also concerned with “adaptation” as a broader theme, to denote the exceptionally challenging circumstances faced by Angolan directors in the final decades of the twentieth century. During this time, directors who were able to continue their filmmaking practice were forced to adapt quickly and creatively not only to adverse filmmaking conditions in Angola and the end of the early phase of post-independence national cinema, but also the ongoing and increasingly violent civil war, and to drastically shifting national and global socio-political contexts.

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<sup>93</sup> Stam, 'Beyond Fidelity', p. 68.

The second focus of this thesis, the wider role and significance of dialogue in Angola, is informed by the transformations and adaptive interventions made by the filmmakers in their dialogical engagement with preexisting source materials. In my analysis of the films, I engage with the concept of dialogism advanced by Mikhail Bakhtin. The term “dialogism” was originally utilized by Bakhtin to denote the discursive qualities of a text. For Bakhtin, successful dialogism hinges on a plurality and “genuine polyphony of fully valid voices”.<sup>94</sup> The notion of dialogism is oppositional to monologism. Micheal Gardiner defines monologism as a “condition wherein the matrix of values, signifying practices, and creative impulses which constitute the living reality of language and socio-cultural life are subordinated to the hegemony of a single, unified consciousness or perspective”.<sup>95</sup> He suggests that, in Bakhtin’s thinking, “any cultural forces or expressive mode that does not admit another view, or seeks to artificially bond an official meaning to an utterance, would be considered monologic”.<sup>96</sup> Rather than affirming and advancing a single, monologic ideology or point of view, dialogical texts respect their characters as fully realised subjects, “with equal rights and each with its own world”.<sup>97</sup> As voices and perspectives remain independent and unmerged, successful dialogic texts remain open-ended, leaving room for a range of different social and ideological positions, even where these might be “clashing and contradictory”.<sup>98</sup> As Martin Flanagan explains, “dialogism is not a way of rendering all statements into a cosy

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<sup>94</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> Micheal Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique: M. M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology* (Taylor & Francis Group, 1992), p. 26.

<sup>96</sup> Martin Flanagan, *Bakhtin and the Movies: New Ways of Understanding Hollywood Film* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> Flanagan, *Bakhtin and the Movies*, p. 6.

consensus, a way of levelling differences”; rather, it ensures a democratic relationality between differing ideological positions and lived realities.<sup>99</sup>

Writing in the context of Stalinism and the formation of the Soviet Union, Bakhtin’s theories have been described as “a point-by-point inversion of categories used in the thirties to describe Socialist Realism”.<sup>100</sup> In this sense, while I am wary of framing Angolan cinema through a European theoretical framework, I argue that Bakhtin’s work is pertinent in the context of post-independence Angolan cultural production. As noted, after 1975, the MPLA conceived of cinema as a means of advancing the party’s Marxist-Leninist ideology, employing techniques and styles originating in Soviet socialist realism. It can thus be constructive to consider Angolan cultural production through both a post-colonial and a post-socialist lens.

Bakhtinian theory has heavily influenced adaptation studies. Stam’s “dialogical adaptation” draws on Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism. Dennis Cutchins also argues in favour of a more expansive, Bakhtinian way of thinking about adaptation. For Cutchins, “adaptation is primarily not a *kind of text*, but a *way of looking at texts*”.<sup>101</sup> He suggests that the lens of “dialogic thought” enables us to probe more specifically and effectively why we might perceive some texts as adaptations, or as more radically adaptive, and others merely as operating within a fundamentally indeterminate web of human thought, language and cultural production. Here, intent is critical. For Cutchins, “although suggesting that

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<sup>99</sup> Flanagan, *Bakhtin and the Movies*, p. 6.

<sup>100</sup> Michael Holquist, ‘Prologue’, in *Rabelais and his World*, Mikhail Bakhtin, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. xiii-xxiii (p. xvii).

<sup>101</sup> Dennis Cutchins, ‘Bakhtin, Intertextuality, and Adaptation’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas Leitch (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 71-86 (p. 80).

something is an adaptation does not rule out either the intentional or unintentional interplay of texts in general (intertextuality), it does indicate that at least some of the interplay is by design and with a specific predecessor text (adaptation)".<sup>102</sup> Ultimately, he claims, "we recognise adaptations as those texts that share significant boundaries with specific antecedent texts", and strive to understand "the ways in which interrelated texts work together or against each other at those boundaries". In this thesis, I approach adaptation from this perspective.

As a theoretical framework, adaptation and dialogism also necessarily raise the question of influence in an African context. As Lindiwe Dovey and others have noted, many celebrated African filmmakers have rejected or expressed anxiety over conjecture and claims by academics – mostly from the Global North – that their work has been influenced by dominant European or North American cinemas, in the context of "paternalistic and patronizing accounts of African political and artistic prowess as always having already been inspired by some non-African source".<sup>103</sup> In the Angolan films I explore through this thesis, directors engage in an intentional process of adaptation, interpretation and reappropriation of source texts from various international contexts. My focus is on the active transformations and interventions made by Angolan directors producing adaptations during this period, rather than the influence of other cultural producers on their artistic decisions. In the words of Linda Hutcheon, these works are "second without being secondary".<sup>104</sup> As Sada Niang notes, "an adapted film establishes intertextual relations with its source, but is not dependent on it for success".<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Cutchins, 'Bakhtin, Intertextuality, and Adaptation', p. 80.

<sup>103</sup> Dovey, 'Listening between the Images', p. 367.

<sup>104</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Routledge, 2013), p. 9.

<sup>105</sup> Niang, *Nationalist African Cinema*, p. 114.

Equally, influence can flow in both directions. Jørgen Bruhn argues that “any rewriting or adaptation of a text is always influencing the original work”, citing the case of Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Homer’s *Odyssey* as one example of an adaptation that has permanently altered the cultural significance and understanding of its literary predecessor.<sup>106</sup> For Cutchins, “no one who has seen the Sharks and the Jets rumble can ever look at the Capulets and the Montagues fencing in the street the same way again”.<sup>107</sup> Within an infinite intertextual web, as both Kristeva and Bakhtin suggest, meaning is always being shifted and renegotiated. The films I analyse through this thesis present new readings and new interpretations that can influence and expand our understanding of their various sources. The wider significance of Angolan cinema, generally overlooked in Lusophone African and African film studies to date, is emphasized.

How this intertextual interplay is received, however, clearly varies depending on the audience’s familiarity with the literary source texts. Linda Hutcheon offers a useful distinction between “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences.<sup>108</sup> The “knowing audience” is familiar with the original source text, and thus is aware of the adaptation’s “enriching, palimpsestic doubleness”.<sup>109</sup> The “unknowing audience”, on the other hand, is not familiar with the work that the film adapts and experiences the film as they would any other film. Here, I do not assume that all audiences of these films would be familiar with, or even recognise, the films’ source texts. Clearly, this is not the case. Equally, I do not suggest that

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<sup>106</sup> Jørgen Bruhn, ‘Dialogizing Adaptation Studies: From One-Way Transport to a Dialogic Two-Way Process’, *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. by Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 69-88 (p. 69).

<sup>107</sup> Cutchins, ‘Bakhtin, Intertextuality, and Adaptation’, p. 75.

<sup>108</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 120.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

these films' success or effectiveness necessarily relies on a viewer's knowledge of the literary source material, or that the directors demand this. However, as I hope to show, it is striking that so much of these films' richness and depth seems to rest on a "knowing" audience's awareness of source material that is often not explicitly announced until the credits, if at all. Who are these directors speaking to through their adaptations?

In some cases, the subtlety and "knowability" of these directors' adaptive interventions can be read in relation to the wider *cultura do medo* created under the MPLA, revealing the impact of the party's violence, repression and censorship on Angolan artistic production at this time.<sup>110</sup> Adaptations were possibly a means of making more implicit, veiled critiques – apparent to those in the "know" – rather than explicitly criticising the regime. Additionally, during the 1980s and 1990s, as national cinematic production slowed in Angola, so did cinema-going. A lack of promotion, distribution and screenings of films during this period meant that far fewer people had access to films.<sup>111</sup> It has been challenging to find contemporary critical reviews or information about screenings and audience reception of these films. However, as the following chapters demonstrate, many of the films I explore in this thesis can be read to turn inwards, specifically interrogating and reflecting on the MPLA's post-independence project. I suggest that the directors generally intended to speak most directly to the specific social, cultural and political circles in which they operated. While this is no guarantee the films would have been met with a "knowing" audience, the specific transformational grammar of these adaptations would have been more legible – and thus doubly confronting – to these viewers.

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<sup>110</sup> Pawson, *In the Name of the People*, p. 3.

<sup>111</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 39.

In the limited number of studies and discussions of Angolan cinema that exist, there is generally a lack of close readings and formal analysis of Angolan films. Much of the scholarship provides an overview of the development of Angolan film production, without dedicating extensive time or attention to the form, content or aesthetics of the films themselves. More detailed criticism has focussed overwhelmingly on pre-independence revolutionary filmmaking (most notably the films of Sarah Maldoror), early post-independence filmmaking and post-Civil War films, particularly two of the narrative feature films released in 2004 and contemporary filmmaking by the Luanda-based production company Geração 80.<sup>112</sup> Strikingly little has been written about the films covered in this thesis. In many cases, I have not been able to find any secondary material or criticism about the films I analyse. Here, I attempt to address the dearth of close analysis of Angolan films, and the lack of research that has been carried out on Angolan filmmaking during the 1980s and 1990s, by presenting close readings of each of these films.

In Chapter One, I explore Asdrúbal Rebelo's film *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* (1986). Rebelo was one of the pioneers of Angola's early post-independence cinema. In his interview with Levin, Luandino Vieira names "Asdrúbal" as a central director of this initial phase. Despite this, Rebelo's films remain relatively unknown outside of Angola. *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* takes the resilience of Angolan artists as its subject. The film presents a more ambivalent engagement with revolutionary nationalist Angolan literature than earlier Angolan films, adapting and reappropriating these texts to allude to specific challenges experienced by artists and directors in the years that followed independence, and to interrogate the dominant socio-political

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<sup>112</sup> Carmem Lucia Tindó Secco, 'Apocalipses e catástrofes: o lugar da distopia em narrativas contemporâneas da literatura e do cinema angolanos', *Gragoatá*, 26:55 (2021), pp. 664-688, doi:10.22409/gragoata.v26i55.47011.

narratives of the MPLA at this time. In the face of adversity, Rebelo remains optimistic about the future of art and filmmaking in Angola. The film's title is testament to this optimism: "Stand Up. Fly. Let's Go!". I argue that the director's hopeful outlook is concomitant with his development of a more personal filmmaking style and present a reading of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* as an essayistic film, which adapts the essay film form to respond to the conditions confronted by Angolan directors during this time.

Chapter Two considers Orlando Fortunato's films *Memória de um Dia* (1982) and *Comboio da Canhoca* (2004). *Comboio da Canhoca* was filmed in the late 1980s, but the director experienced severe delays releasing the film due to challenges posed by the ongoing civil war and crisis in national film production. In this chapter, I reframe *Comboio da Canhoca* as a product of the 1980s, interrogating where this film speaks to the cinematic and political context of its conception. Both Fortunato's films are historical adaptations, taking real events from the final decades of Portuguese colonial rule as their sources. I suggest that Fortunato's fictionalised interpretations of these historical sources not only denounce colonization, but also level critiques at the MPLA. Through the two films, the director subtly exposes the party's appropriation of historical narratives to serve its political aims and draws attention to the mounting violence and repression experienced by Angolans under MPLA rule. The moments of dialogue and discord that emerge within the films' narratives, as well as between the adaptations and their historical sources, point to Fortunato's wider unease with the lack of open dialogue and debate within Angolan society. Amid the challenging conditions of the 1980s, if the films ostensibly expose the violence and hatred of the colonial oppressor, they are also implicitly concerned with where colonial history and structures might be repeated or replicated by Angola's postcolonial ruling elites.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Angolan filmmakers also began to adapt literary works from outside of Angola, marking a shift away from the exclusive focus on national literature and history found in early post-independence nationalist cinema. In Chapter Three, I turn to one of Angola's best-known filmmakers, the director, writer and anthropologist Ruy Duarte de Carvalho. Duarte de Carvalho was one of the most prolific filmmakers working in Angola during the early post-independence period, producing over twenty documentaries for Angolan television between 1975-1985. At TPA, Duarte de Carvalho became increasingly outspoken in his criticism of the MPLA's vision for a modern Angolan nation. His most critically acclaimed film, *Nelisita* (1982), directly challenged the party's urban-centric outlook and disregard for Angola's rural populations. The film is an adaptation of the traditional folk tales of the Mumuhuila people of Huila, an ethno-linguistic group belonging to the Nyaneka-Humbe of south-west Angola, which was produced in collaboration with the Mumuhuila and draws on Duarte de Carvalho's ethnographic fieldwork in the region. In this chapter, I turn to Duarte de Carvalho's final film, *Moia ou o Recado das Ilhas* (1989). Shot in Cape Verde, *Moia ou o Recado das Ilhas* follows a young Angolan woman, the eponymous Moia, as she rediscovers her Cape Verdean heritage. I suggest that *Moia ou o Recado das Ilhas* builds on the practices of ethnography and adaptation underpinning *Nelisita* to move towards a critical form of autoethnographic film, which lays bare the attitudes and behaviours of the MPLA elites through a profoundly dialogic and idiosyncratic web of intertextual reference and engagement.

Finally, Chapter Four analyses three short films by the director Mariano Bartolomeu. Unlike the previous three directors, Bartolomeu did not participate in the earliest phase of Angolan national filmmaking. Born in 1967, the director came of age after independence, starting his career in cinema in the early 1980s. Each of the films I analyse in this chapter was made by

Bartolomeu during his time at the Escuela Internacional de Cinema y Televisión in Cuba (EICTV), where he studied cinema between 1989 and 1991. Created in 1986 by the Foundation for New Latin American Cinema, EICTV was – and remains – a radically utopian film school, committed to theories and practices of Third Worldism and revolutionary, anti-imperial, socialist solidarity across the Global South.<sup>113</sup> I suggest that the singular circumstances of Bartolomeu’s formal cinematic training at EICTV provide a productive point of comparison between his early short films and the trajectory of earlier Angolan directors, whose filmmaking practices originated in the similarly utopian and revolutionary rhetoric and ideals of post-independence Angola. Where the early pioneers of Angolan national cinema attempted to reconcile their commitment to revolutionary art with their growing disappointment at the realities of the MPLA’s post-independence national project, Bartolomeu’s adaptations reveal a similar struggle amid the major global and national political shifts of the late 1980s and early 1990s. An exploration of Bartolomeu’s films thus offers a different perspective on the so-called “collapse” and legacies of revolutionary militant cinema in an Angolan context. In this chapter, I present a reading of Bartolomeu’s films which traces where the director’s adaptations reveal an evolving concern with ethics, and a rejection of imposed or external moral and ideological frameworks.

As Stam notes, adaptations can take an “activist stance” towards their sources.<sup>114</sup> The concept of “writing back”, theorized by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin as the process by which postcolonial writers engage in intertextual discourse to undermine the hegemonic cultural domination of the imperial centre, often through a subversive reinterpretation of the colonizer’s canonical literary texts, has become an essential point of reference in postcolonial

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<sup>113</sup> Scott Mackenzie, *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology* (University of California Press, 2014), p. 309.

<sup>114</sup> Stam, ‘Beyond Fidelity’, p. 64.

cultural theory.<sup>115</sup> In terms of cinema, Melissa Thackway has referred to a comparable strategy of “shooting back”, by which directors seek to address and unsettle preexisting colonial images of the colonized nation and peoples, which often perpetuate harmful narratives and stereotypes.<sup>116</sup> The filmmakers analysed in this thesis continue to expand a process of “shooting back” to the former colonizer, challenging imperial representations of Angola and demonstrating an enduring revolutionary commitment to the nation’s liberation from colonial and neo-colonial power structures.

Uniting all the films in this thesis is a clear concern with the MPLA’s attitude towards race. In different ways, each filmmaker addresses issues of racial justice, both national and global, in a break with the early MPLA leadership’s avoidance of racially informed rhetoric, and the party’s disavowal of race as a determinant factor of privilege in Angola. In doing so, the directors use their films to interrogate the complex landscape of power and decolonization in Angola. Their engagement with and adaptations of explicitly race-based theories and movements – such as negritude and pan-Africanist thought – reveal common anxieties and criticisms around where the development of Angolan national culture under the MPLA reproduced colonial structures and European values and make evident these directors’ unwavering commitment to their revolutionary roots. In doing so, the films also reveal supranational concerns, complicating overly nationalist readings of post-independence Angolan cinema, and of African cinema and cultural production more broadly.

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<sup>115</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (Routledge, 2002).

<sup>116</sup> Melissa Thackway, *Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspectives in Sub-Saharan Francophone African Film* (James Currey, 2003).

Additionally, each of the films demonstrates a formal departure from the documentary cinema that characterised the early post-independence period of Angolan filmmaking. Adaptation is one element of this formal innovation. Beyond this, the directors' formal developments during this period – Rebelo's essayistic film form, Fortunato's fictional historical adaptations, Duarte de Carvalho's autoethnographic fiction, and Bartolomeu's short fiction films – underline the need to reframe this juncture of “retreat” and “collapse” as an important moment of creative vision, energy, innovation and resilience in the history of Angolan cinema. Faced with the harsh conditions that contributed to the steady decrease in Angolan filmmaking, the efforts of these directors to expand the scope of Angolan film form, particularly in terms of their fiction films, arguably finds its legacy in the feature-length fiction films that have been released in Angola since independence.

In his influential text *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics*, Manthia Diawara identifies a new wave of popular African cinema, arising in various African contexts through the 1990s, in which African filmmakers began to move away from earlier nationalist and revolutionary forms of militant cinema. Diawara explains that “where previously the issue had been how to use film to contribute to the enlightenment of the people in the nation-building project, now we are concerned with cinematic form, new ways of framing, individualism, and how to bring a mythical and magical dimension to the African story on screen”.<sup>117</sup> He suggests that these filmmakers were no longer interested “in applying an oppositional language to what is known as dominant American and European cinemas, but are more concerned with taking their place in the arena of world cinemas”.<sup>118</sup> While I do not suggest that the films discussed in this thesis necessarily form part of Diawara's “New

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<sup>117</sup> Manthia Diawara, *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (Munich: Prestel, 2010), p. 99.

<sup>118</sup> Diawara, *African Film*, p. 94.

African Cinema Wave”, the emergence of new cinematic forms in Angolan cinema during the 1980s and 1990s can perhaps be understood as a precursor to these later developments – which, as Diawara points out, will also take place in an Angolan context. In creating their own styles “not in oppositional terms”, but by adapting, appropriating and reimagining elements of Angola’s revolutionary cinematic traditions, the directors discussed here combine their enduring social commitment with new aesthetics, forms and ways of framing. Again, these developments complicate understandings of both national and nationalist cinema in an Angolan and African context.

The films covered in these chapters do not tell the whole story. Several other films were made in Angola, or by Angolan directors, during the 1980s and 1990s, leaving terrain to dialogue fruitfully with the analysis I put forward in this thesis. A notable absence from this thesis are the early films of Zézé Gamboa. Gamboa is undoubtedly best known for his feature film *O Herói*, released in 2004 to international acclaim. Prior to this, Gamboa had been a part of the early development of Angolan cinema, working as a news producer at TPA after independence. He left Angola in 1980, moving to Paris, where he trained a sound engineer, then to Belgium, and finally to Lisbon. While in Europe, Gamboa began directing his own films. During the 1990s, he released two documentaries, *Mopiopio: Souffle de Angola* (1991) and *Dissidência* (1998), and two short films, *Burned by Blue* (1998) and *O Desassossego de Pessoa* (1999). Gamboa’s output during the 1990s is thus relatively high. However, I have not included his documentaries in this thesis, choosing to focus on the four aforementioned filmmakers who moved away from the documentary cinema of the early post-independence period in pursuit of new cinematic forms and aesthetics. Despite this, Gamboa’s documentaries are thematically relevant to many of the questions I pose in this thesis. I come back to these films briefly in my conclusion.

Gamboa's second short film, *O Desassossego de Pessoa*, is also relevant to my focus on adaptation in Angolan cinema from the 1980s and 1990s, adapting a text by the Portuguese modernist poet Fernando Pessoa. In order to devote sufficient attention to the four directors covered in the following chapters, this short film has not been included. I was unable to access *Burned by Blue*, Gamboa's first short film.

To date, the pioneering female filmmakers of Angola's early post-independence period have received little to no attention. In 1984, Denise Salazar became the first Angolan woman to direct a feature film with her documentary *Marabu*, following the Cameroonian musician Manu Dibango's visit to Angola in 1981. Even earlier, in 1978, Virgínia Silva directed the first animated Angolan films, a series of three documentaries entitled *Os Meninos*, which included the films *A Visita*, *A Escola* and *Café*. While the gender imbalance of male to female directors in Angola has always been stark, compared with early post-independence phase of Angolan filmmaking, the number of female directors active during the 1980s and 1990s is even lower. Within Angola, not one film directed by a woman was released between Denise Salazar's *Marabu* and Maria João Ganga's *Na Cidade Vazia* (2004) – a gap of twenty years.

All the nationalist independence movements in Angola – including the MPLA - actively encouraged women to join and participate in the liberation movement, and women played key political and military roles in Angola's independence struggle. While women's emancipation and liberation was presented as an integral part of the MPLA's anticolonial struggle, Angolan women experienced discrimination and violence while participating in the armed resistance.<sup>119</sup> After independence, women's contributions to national liberation were

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<sup>119</sup> Margarida Paredes, *Combater duas vezes: Mulheres na luta armada em Angola* (Verso da História, 2015).

downplayed and erased in dominant political narratives. This was manifest within the MPLA.<sup>120</sup> While men were considered the heroes of the liberation struggle, Angolan women were expected to conform to the party's strict moral codes and return to traditional gender roles, such as domestic labour, raising children and caring for the family. As Angolan filmmaking entered the crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, these conditions were thus doubly challenging for female directors. Through this thesis, I highlight instances in which the directors, consciously or otherwise, uphold or unsettle the gender dynamics of the MPLA after independence, considering where criticisms of the MPLA intersect with, and are complicated by, gender politics. However, further work on the contributions and representation of women in the male-dominated arena of Angolan revolutionary and post-revolutionary cinema is needed.<sup>121</sup>

The Angolan director Pocas Pascoal is best known for her feature film *Alda e Maria: Por Aqui Tudo Bem* (2012), which follows the story of two sisters fleeing Angola for Lisbon in the 1980s. Pascoal directed and released two films outside Angola during the late 1990s and early 2000s, making her a rare example of an Angolan female director active during this period. The first of these films, a short documentary film entitled *Pour Nous*, was released in 1998, and the second, a documentary entitled *Memórias de Infância*, was released in 2000. I have not included an analysis of these films in this thesis. This is partly due to the fact that Pascoal's output in the years preceding and during the years of so-called "collapse" is

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<sup>120</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 31.

<sup>121</sup> Dorothée Boulanger traces the parallel erasure and exclusion of women's perspectives and agency in Angolan literature after independence through her sustained examination of gender in post-colonial Angolan novels, and provides an overview of scholarship focussing on gender politics in Lusophone African literature. See Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p.14-15.

relatively much smaller than other directors discussed in this thesis, and partly due to difficulties I experienced accessing copies of the films.

1993 saw the release of Jorge António's *Miradouro da Lua*, billed as the first Portuguese-Angolan co-production. António was originally born in Portugal, but was radicalised in Angola during the anticolonial war, and has demonstrated a firm commitment to the development of Angolan cinema since independence. *Miradouro da Lua*, his first feature-length film, follows the story of João, a young Portuguese man who travels to Angola to track down his father. The film has variably been referred to as a Portuguese film and a Luso-Angolan co-production; in Angola, it featured in the both the *Cinemateca Nacional's* cinema cycle *Cinema Nosso: Últimas Produções*, a showcase of Angolan films released during the 1990s, and a cycle titled *Mostra de Cinema Portugues*, which screened António's film alongside Portuguese films such as Manuel de Oliveira's *Francisca* (1981) and Teresa Villaverde's *A Idade Maior* (1991). António has since amassed an extensive body of work in both Portugal and Angola, directing in the latter several documentaries about Angolan culture and history, as well as the 2017 Portuguese-Angolan co-production *A Ilha dos Cães*. For reasons of space, I have not included an analysis of *Miradouro da Lua* in the present study, choosing instead to prioritise a focus on Angolan directors active both within and outside of Angola during the 1980s and 1990s.

Beyond António's film, the MPLA's national cinema cycle *Cinema Nosso: Últimas Produções* featured two other Angolan films produced and released during the 1990s that have not been included in this research. The first, *Caravana* (1990), an Angolan-Cuban co-production directed by the Cuban filmmakers Rogélio Paris and Júlio César Rodriguez, tells

the story of Cuban soldiers guarding a convoy of support vehicles against UNITA forces during Angola's civil conflict. Again, I have not included an extensive analysis of this film in this thesis, which focusses on films produced by Angolan directors. The second, a short documentary film entitled *Meus Irmãos Cokwes* (1991), directed by Manuel Mariano, is described as an ethno-linguistic investigation into the culture of the Cokwé people of Eastern Angola. I was not able to access this film.

Access to films remains a serious issue in the study, and enjoyment, of Angolan cinema. Most films produced during the first decade of Angolan filmmaking are incredibly difficult to access, or entirely unavailable to view.<sup>122</sup> Much material from this period has been lost, or badly preserved. The situation for films from the 1980s and 1990s is marginally better, though I still experienced challenges accessing films from this period. The limited distribution and availability of these films – both in Angola and abroad – precludes many people from seeing them. It is partly this inaccessibility that has reinforced a general characterization of this period of filmmaking as one of decline. Yet while this rhetoric has its place in stressing the neglect and misappropriation of Angola's national cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the myriad challenges faced by Angolan filmmakers during this time, it is vital to interrogate the criteria of success and value that are reified through strategic use of language. I hope that my analysis of these works will generate further debate and discussion about these understudied and underappreciated films, as well as the greater significance and legacy of this overlooked period of Angolan cinema.

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<sup>122</sup> Levin, 'Dos Filmes dos Pioneiros', p. 98.

## Chapter One

### Asdrúbal Rebelo's *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* (1986): Towards an Angolan Essay Film?

#### Introduction

By the middle of the 1980s, it was widely accepted that the prognosis for Angolan national cinema was dire. While efforts had been made to counter the crisis, rapid and drastic intervention was needed to develop Angola's cinematic infrastructure. Despite these challenging conditions, there continued to be some optimism for the future of Angolan filmmaking. Abrantes names two directors who remained active in Angola during the period from 1985 to 1988, which he calls Angolan cinema's "waiting room". Orlando Fortunato – whose films *Memória de um Dia* (1982) and *Comboio da Canhoca* (2004) I discuss in Chapter Two – completed two documentary films, *Herança* and *Festa da Ilha*, both of which were released in 1986. In the same year, Asdrúbal Rebelo released his film *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*. The film reflects on the resilience of artistic and cultural production in Angola, and the possibility for creativity to endure even in difficult circumstances. For Abrantes, "a própria existência do filme, no qual são apresentadas criações de outros artistas nacionais, era, em si, a confirmação da tese otimista que defendia o autor".<sup>1</sup>

The work of Asdrúbal Rebelo remains relatively understudied and deserves more comprehensive consideration. Important cultural figures, including Luandino Vieira and the director Francisco Henriques, count Rebelo amongst the most significant directors of the

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<sup>1</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 36.

early post-independence period, alongside António Ole and Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.<sup>2</sup> Born in Luanda in 1953, Rebelo began his cinematic career after independence, working for TPA under the newly formed MPLA government. In 1977, he received training in Cuba, learning how to direct educational television programmes, before returning to Luanda to direct films.

Many of Rebelo's films focus on children and young people in Angola. His first documentary film as director, *Velhos Tempos, Novos Tempos* (1976), takes the youth of Angola as its subject, asking how children in Angola integrate into their geographical and social environments. The film follows children and young people from various urban and rural settings in Angola, including Xicala, Mazozo and Luaximo, exploring their day-to-day lives.<sup>3</sup> As well as producing educational films about the youth of the country, Rebelo also directed children's programmes for TPA.

In the late 1970s, Rebelo directed three further documentary films: *A Luta Continua* (1977); *Nascidos na Luta, Vivendo na Vitória* (1978); and *O Balão* (1979). His next film, *Filhos da Rua* (1981), was subjected to censorship by the MPLA government. The documentary revealed the desperate conditions experienced by children living on the streets of Luanda, including interviews with the children themselves, and suggested how the issue might be dealt with structurally by the Angolan authorities. According to Rebelo, although not screened publicly in Angola, the film was shown outside of the nation and to a select number

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<sup>2</sup> Levin, 'Dos Filmes dos Pioneiros', interview with Francisco Henriques, 2011, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Abrantes, *O Cinema Angolano*, p. 7.

of organisations working to improve the lives of children in Angola, and measures to address the situation were taken as a result of his work.<sup>4</sup>

Rebello's next film, *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*, was released in 1986. Produced by the LNC, it was the last film completed by the director during Angola's post-independence period. Following the film's release, Rebello completed two television series – entitled *Ilha a Ilha* and *Escrever a Vida* – in Cape Verde in 1990.<sup>5</sup> From 1995 to 1998, he worked in Portugal, producing documentaries for the 1998 Expo in Lisbon. Since returning to Angola, he has directed further documentaries for Angolan television, including a documentary film, *Valeu*, which premiered on TPA in 2014.

The *Filmografia* and Abrantes categorize *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* as a documentary film, in line with Rebello's other productions.<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, I propose a reading of the film as a move towards the essay film form. Bearing witness to the resilience of Angolan arts and culture amidst the challenging conditions of the 1980s, Rebello advances a more personal, subjective point of view through his work. Central to this is the director's adaptation of Angolan revolutionary literature. I suggest that his creative and markedly ambivalent engagement with pre-independence texts reveals an essayistic impulse which treads the fine line of censorship and artistic repression that existed in Angola at this time.

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<sup>4</sup> Francisco Pedro, 'É vergonhoso quando não se faz referência ao autor das imagens', Interview with Asdrúbal Rebello, *Jornal de Angola*, 6 July 2020 <<https://www.jornaldeangola.ao/ao/noticias/asdrubal-rebello-e-vergonhoso-quando-nao-se-faz-referencia-ao-autor-das-imagens/>> [accessed 6 October 2024].

<sup>5</sup> José Mena Abrantes, 'Cinema Angolano: Um Passado com o Futuro Sempre Adiado' in *Angola, O Nascimento de Uma Nação (Vol. 3): O Cinema da Independência*, ed. by Maria do Carmo Piçarra and Jorge António (Guerra & Paz, 2015), pp. 15-46 (p. 27).

<sup>6</sup> Abrantes, *O Cinema Angolano*, p.15.

For Abrantes, writing in the year of the film's release, *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* reveals “um cineasta a caminho de um maior domínio expressivo”.<sup>7</sup> The film displays a level of formal innovation which allows for and encourages a more critical reflection and engagement on the part of the audience, breaking with earlier, more propagandistic models of Angolan documentary cinema informed by tenets of socialist realism, which were intended as didactic and educational. Thus, if the film remains optimistic about the future of artistic and cinematic production in Angola, this implies a move away from the revolutionary cinematic project developed under the MPLA in the years following independence.

### **“Criação Artística em Condições Adversas”: Situating the Essay Film in an Angolan Context**

Countless definitions exist for the essay film. The hybrid nature of the form makes it notoriously hard to categorize. For Nora M. Alter, the essay film is precisely “*not* a genre, as it strives to be beyond formal, conceptual and social constraint”.<sup>8</sup> For Lourdes Monterrubio Ibañez, the essay film can be characterised by its very departure “from the dominant forms of fiction and documentary cinema in order to explore an unknown territory defined by subjectivity, hybridization and reflection”.<sup>9</sup> Laura Rascaroli also identifies both subjectivity and reflectivity as two essential features of the essay film form, noting that essay films invariably advance a personal, critical point of view, but also necessarily reflect on the conditions that have produced this view.<sup>10</sup> In terms of its audience, the essay film encourages

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<sup>7</sup> Abrantes, *O Cinema Angolano*, p.15.

<sup>8</sup> Nora M. Alter, ‘The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film: Farocki’s “Images of the World and the Inscription of War”’, *New German Critique*, 68:68 (1996), pp. 165-192 (p. 171), doi:10.2307/3108669.

<sup>9</sup> Lourdes Monterrubio Ibañez, ‘The Audiovisual Thinking Process in Essay Films’, *Comparative Cinema*, 10:18 (2022), pp. 6-10 (p. 6), doi:10.31009/cc.2022.v10.i18.01.

<sup>10</sup> Laura Rascaroli, ‘The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments’, *Framework*, 49.2 (2008), pp. 24-47 (p. 25), doi:10.1353/frm.0.0019.

a similarly subjective and self-reflexive standpoint through critical reflection and engagement, rather than following a unidirectional model of cinema that simply transfers ideas to the viewer. For the director Jean-Luc Godard, the essay film is, at all levels, “a form that thinks”, rather than a form that imposes ideas or an ideology from above.<sup>11</sup>

In the context of Angola’s early post-independence cinema, directors working under the MPLA government worked to make films that – unlike colonial and imperialist Hollywood productions – did not reduce local audiences “to a passive mass of individuals without a history or personality”, attempting instead to develop a truly revolutionary cinema that was “capable of promoting revolutionary change”.<sup>12</sup> However, with the exception of a few notable and innovative directors, such as Duarte de Carvalho and Ole, whose subversive films were subjected to censorship, the aim of early post-independence documentary films in Angola seems almost always to have been to communicate unequivocally the message and ideology of the MPLA. The “history” and “personality” of audiences was expected to conform to narratives and standards established by the party.

Conversely, Elizabeth Papazian and Caroline Eades have noted the essay film form’s “dialogic, fluid nature”, and “its ability to mediate or communicate among different domains in open-ended dialogue”.<sup>13</sup> This communication can take place between the film and its audience, between the film and other sources, texts or art forms, or metatextually, between the film and itself. Crucially, however, the essay film invites conversation and dialogue in

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<sup>11</sup> Rick Warner, *Godard and the Essay Film: A Form that Thinks* (Northwestern University Press, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Conferência Africana de Cooperação Cinematográfica, *Documentos*, p. 53-54.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Papazian and Caroline Eades, *The Essay Film: Dialogue, Politics, Utopia* (Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 2.

different, diverging directions, putting forward a specific and subjective point of view while renouncing any claim or control over the destination of the dialogue produced.

The pedagogical, political and civic associations of the documentary form were suited to the MPLA's agenda after independence. The rhetorical designation of films as documentaries also helped to shape the reception of these films according to these connotations, underlining a sense of veracity and objectivity to the narratives put forward by these state-backed productions. However, as John Grierson famously stated, documentary has always entailed "the creative treatment of actuality".<sup>14</sup> As Diawara has pointed out, while cinema served an important cultural and educational purpose in Angola after independence, filmmakers clearly still "had to transcend the documentary form, the mere recording and arranging of facts to be exposed" and "make interventions that manipulated the events in order to achieve a greater aesthetic effect on audiences".<sup>15</sup> These sensitive aesthetic innovations and stylistic developments display the skill and talents of many MPLA-affiliated filmmakers working during Angola's early post-independence period, particularly within the constraints of a narrowly defined national cinema informed by socialist realist principles. Yet the gesture behind many of these interventions remained the same, as directors sought to consolidate the party's message communicated through the film. In the case of the essay film, the director seeks instead to advance their personal viewpoint through each of the film's components, with the images, sound, text and cinematography each bearing the imprint of the director's personal voice. Additionally, in the case of the essay film, as Bill Nichols notes, these aesthetic and formal mediations operate more self-reflexively, stemming from "a desire to

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<sup>14</sup> Laura Marcus, 'The Creative Treatment of 'Actuality': John Grierson, Documentary Cinema and 'Fact' in the 1930s', in *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain*, ed. by Kristin Bluemel (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 189-207 (p. 190).

<sup>15</sup> Diawara, *African Cinema*, p. 90.

make the conventions of representation themselves more apparent”, and thus inviting a more critical and reflective response from the audience.<sup>16</sup>

Alter notes that the essay film form has typically been “a medium for protest, resistance, witness, or commentary”.<sup>17</sup> It is relevant that the essay film gained popularity in different revolutionary contexts throughout the twentieth century. It can be linked to various political and cultural revolutions across the world, particularly those associated with Marxist thought. For Brenda Hollweg and Igor Krstić, the essay film must therefore also be understood as a dissident and non-conformist “global counter practice”.<sup>18</sup> Proponents of Third Cinema in Latin America, for example, regarded the essay film as one “of the privileged forms for the realization of a revolutionary, anticolonialist, anticapitalist filmmaking practice”.<sup>19</sup> It is worth remembering here that Rebelo studied filmmaking in Cuba in the late 1970s. In this context, there were various well-established traditions of essay filmmaking and “essayistic radicalism”, most notably in the case of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s 1968 film *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* and the dissident films of Nicolás Guillén Landrián.<sup>20</sup>

Through the entirety of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*, Rebelo continues to engage meaningfully with central tenets of the MPLA’s original revolutionary Marxist ideology. However, as Rascaroli explains, the principal thrust of the essay – be it in literary or cinematic form – has always

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<sup>16</sup> Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> Nora M. Alter, *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* (Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 148.

<sup>18</sup> Brenda Hollweg and Igor Krstić, *World Cinema and the Essay Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Laura Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Laura Rascaroli, ‘The Essay Film and its Global Contexts: Conversations on Forms and Practices’, interview with Susana Barriga, in *World Cinema and the Essay Film*, ed. by Brenda Hollweg and Igor Krstić (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp. 21-35 (p. 35).

been one of transgression.<sup>21</sup> By the time that Rebelo's film was released, the MPLA were no longer the revolutionary agents of change and liberation they had once been. The reality of the party's post-independence project had not lived up to its promises. Rebelo's film is thus doubly transgressive, a work of both globally and nationally situated protest and resistance. The director's essayistic interventions represent a departure from the communicative model of both revolution and revolutionary art advanced by the MPLA's intellectual vanguard, and a move towards a more personal, open-ended and dialogic filmic form situated firmly within a global tradition of dissident counter-practice.

If examples of essay films can be found across the globe, this breadth has not been represented in essay film criticism. The scholarly work around the essay film has overwhelmingly concentrated on filmmakers from Western Europe and North America. Hollweg and Krstić's volume *World Cinema and the Essay Film* (2019) makes an important contribution, exploring the ways in which filmmakers from a variety of global contexts have engaged with the essay film form and essayistic filmmaking practices. However, it is striking that not a single essay included in this collection focusses on African filmmaking. In her examination of the African essay film, Rachel Gabara points out that critics and historians from the Global North "have tended not to recognise reflexivity within African cinema, preferring to read African films as informative ethnographic documents rather than works of art".<sup>22</sup> There are many well-known and highly regarded essay filmmakers working in the global African diaspora. The British Ghanaian director Sir John Akomfrah, for example, is one of the most accomplished and respected contemporary proponents of the form. Although

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<sup>21</sup> Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Rachel Gabara, 'From Ethnography to Essay: Realism, Reflexivity, and African Documentary Film', in *A Companion to African Cinema* (John Wiley & Sons, 2018), pp. 358-378 (p. 368).

more attention is now being paid to essay films from the African continent, Lusophone African filmmakers have generally been absent from these discussions.<sup>23</sup>

Rascaroli also notes that essay films tend to proliferate in times of crisis.<sup>24</sup> As I have noted, the 1980s in Angola was a decade of multiple, converging crises. *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* reflects on these conditions of crisis and adversity. At the point of the film's release, Angola had experienced more than ten years of civil war, itself following Angola's fight for independence and centuries of violent and oppressive colonial rule. Amid this ongoing conflict and a wider financial crisis, the government was dedicating fewer resources to the development of a sustainable national cinema, which resulted in worsening material conditions faced by Angolan directors during this time.

For Angolan artists, writers and filmmakers, there were also limited possibilities for free expression during this period. Following the events surrounding the 27<sup>th</sup> May 1977, the party leadership continued to tighten its grip on power and became increasingly intolerant of dissenting voices. If the question of what could or could not be said explicitly was thereafter never far from the minds of the nation's cultural producers, this was especially true in the case of film, which relied heavily on state funding. For Rascaroli, again, the essay film has typically been a favoured form by artists working under oppressive regimes. She argues that the essay film "is the most direct embodiment of the dream of a cinema of personal and

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<sup>23</sup> Institute of Contemporary Arts, 'In Focus: Rosine Mbakam', n.d., <<https://www.ica.art/films/in-focus-rosine-mbakam#:~:text=In%20Focus:%20Rosine%20Mbakam%20is%20the%20first>>, [accessed 3 October 2024].

<sup>24</sup> Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks*, p. 5.

critical expression, unencumbered by the constraints of systemic production, and better suited to escape the control of all forms of censorship”.<sup>25</sup>

Over a decade after the proclamation of independence, it was clearer than ever that the MPLA’s revolutionary promises of liberation did not align with the reality of life for most Angolans. Considerable changes were also taking place within the MPLA. Following Agostinho Neto’s death in 1979, the new president – José Eduardo dos Santos – took steps to consolidate the party’s gradual move away from its socialist roots. By the time of the release of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*, speculation around an official ideological shift from Marxist-Leninist socialism to free-market capitalism had begun to grow. Many MPLA intellectuals – including many filmmakers who had participated in the revolutionary cinematic project - were frustrated at the nature of the party’s evolution since taking power.

In this context, one dilemma facing artists and intellectuals was whether it was possible to return to the utopian promises of the liberation struggle and early days of independence. As founding beliefs and ideologies were abandoned by the party’s leadership, and in light of the violence suffered across the nation and within their own party, many MPLA-affiliated filmmakers could no longer advocate wholeheartedly and unreservedly for the party’s vision for Angola. In addition to this, the optimism and enthusiasm that had surrounded the artistic strategies employed in the development of Angola’s post-independence national cinema had been dampened by the perceived failure to realise the dream of a liberated and prosperous

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<sup>25</sup> Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks*, p. 5.

socialist nation. For some, there were also feelings of complicity; how had their films unquestioningly contributed to the consolidation of hegemonic power within the MPLA?

Confronted with these crises of conscience and identity, filmmakers were forced to examine and reflect upon their participation in a national cultural and political project in which revolutionary promises of liberation had not materialised. Asdrúbal Rebelo remained optimistic about the future of artistic production in Angola but recognised that art – including filmmaking – in the nation was under serious threat. *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* appears to engage with the essay film form to move away from a didactic model of cinema, towards a more subjective, reflexive and dialogic filmic form, marking a moment of discontinuity with Angola’s early post-independence cinema and laying the foundations for the development of Angolan cinema into and beyond the period designated by Abrantes as “o colapso”.

In the case of late Soviet filmmakers, Zoran Samardzija notes the “aesthetic double bind” faced by Eastern European directors who still sought to reject and resist the pervasive forms and aesthetics of Western (Hollywood) cinema – believed to contribute to the dominance of global capitalism by turning its audiences into passive, desiring subjects – at the same time as expressing their own displeasure at “the dissonance of between actually existing communism and the universality of its idealism”.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps at a similar juncture, the challenge faced by Angolan filmmakers during this period was how to create films which exposed and expressed their doubts about the MPLA’s nation-building project, without suddenly abandoning the

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<sup>26</sup> Zoran Samardzija, *Post-Communist Malaise: Cinematic Responses to European Integration* (Rutgers University Press, 2020), p. 22.

principles of the revolutionary movement and the early revolutionary national cinema in which they had participated, all within the confines of censorship and political repression.

Like many films produced in Angola after independence, *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* presents an important record of Angolan culture, engaging with artistic and cultural forms ranging from literature to dance. However, while Rebelo's film is optimistic about the future for Angolan art, this optimism breaks with the unwaveringly and unquestioningly optimistic, purportedly objective portrayal of life under socialism found in earlier Angolan films influenced by Soviet socialist realism. Rather, through the film, an underlying tension can be identified, which gestures towards the insufficiency of an existing model of revolutionary cinema to account for or contain the dissatisfaction felt by filmmakers at the realities of producing art under the MPLA regime. For Phillip Lopate, the literary essay is about trying "to work out some mental knot".<sup>27</sup> *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* does not provide a definitive roadmap out of the adverse conditions that surrounded the film's production and release but asks audiences to accompany its creator on a daring leap into an unknown that proliferates with possibilities. Although the film's title is affirmative, direct and instructive, "Stand Up, Fly, Let's Go", the direction of travel is not entirely predetermined, and it is here that the film's fundamentally transgressive impulse can be identified. Amongst moments of continuity are moments of expansivity and rupture, in which Rebelo can be seen to engage with the essay film form to adapt to the myriad challenges facing Angolan directors in this period.

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<sup>27</sup> Phillip Lopate, 'In Search of the Centaur: The Essay Film', *The Threepenny Review*, 48 (1992), pp. 19-22 (p. 19).

## **From António Ole to Alfred Hitchcock: Following the Birds in *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos***

A central theme in *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* is the interconnectedness of art, revolution and society with nature. In this sense, the film might initially appear to remain aligned with the MPLA's earlier revolutionary rhetoric and aesthetics. The film begins and ends with a quotation, made up of extracts from a speech made to the União dos Escritores Angolanos (UEA) in 1977 by Agostinho Neto –

A vida é uma sucessão e o somatório de factos contraditórios resolúveis ou não, segundo a sua natureza. O povo e o meio ambiente estarão sempre presentes em cada pensamento, em cada palavra ou frase escrita, como a sombra coexiste com a luz, e a folha com a raiz.<sup>28</sup>

As Inocência Mata notes, many of Angola's early revolutionary poets – Neto included – produced works “grounded in cultural imagination that lay in phenomena to do with nature and socioculture (people, the signs of everyday life, the physical and social environment), which were transformed into symbols”.<sup>29</sup> Pre-independence nationalist literary production promoted an ideal harmony between the Angolan subject and their natural surroundings, in a colonized motherland which, “although lacking in human justice, was prodigious in nature”.<sup>30</sup>

After independence, as part of its nation-building project, the MPLA continued to advance an image of harmony between Angola's natural landscape and resources and its own programme

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<sup>28</sup> For the original speech, see Agostinho Neto, ‘Sobre a Literatura’, in Neto, *...Ainda o Meu Sonho... (Discursos sobre a Cultura Nacional)* (Edições 70, 1980), pp. 25-36.

<sup>29</sup> Inocência Mata, ‘Under the Sign of a Projective Nostalgia: Agostinho Neto and Angolan Postcolonial Poetry’, trans. by Vicky Hartnack, *Research in African Literatures*, 38:1 (2007), pp. 54-67 (p. 54), doi:10.1353/ral.2007.0013.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

of modernization and national reconstruction. Examples of this can be found in state-produced post-independence cinema. Leonel Efe's *Reconstrução Nacional na Agricultura*, for example, released in 1982, charts the MPLA's redevelopment and revitalisation of Angola's agricultural sector following the departure of the Portuguese. The film opens with images of ruined agricultural buildings, abandoned by the colonial regime, which are being reclaimed by nature. Efe then shows how the MPLA has successfully reinvigorated Angolan agriculture through party-led directives. After scenes of farmers and workers receiving education and training, the film features a series of high contrast, highly saturated images of bountiful crops beneath clear blue skies, being cultivated by workers using state-of-the-art equipment and machines. The audience is repeatedly and unequivocally reminded, through the voiceover and the images on screen, that the party's highest priority is to resolve "os problemas do povo", and that it is under the guidance of the party vanguard that Angola will thrive. Through the film, images of nature are employed materially, as evidence of the success of the MPLA's programme of national agricultural reconstruction, and symbolically, as a marker of the party's harmonious compatibility with the motherland and, thus, its legitimacy as guardians of the newly independent nation-state.

*Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* begins with a series of similarly idyllic images of Angolan landscapes, including the Miradouro da Lua on the outskirts of Luanda, and shots of the sun setting across a tranquil bay. Within these natural environments, we see people at work; men and boys fish from boats and bring their catch to shore, to be collected by women who carry the fish away and take it to market to be sold. The scenes conform to the socialist realist-informed conventions encouraged by the MPLA in the years following independence. We see "o povo" in direct control of the means of production and working in harmony with the plentiful and abundant natural landscape.

Under the MPLA, Angolan subjects were expected to strive towards their new “nature” as “Marxist New Men”, demonstrating their commitment to the socialist cause in all areas of life. In the voiceover accompanying these images, the narrator posits an inherent connection between nature and culture –

Falar pela natureza é falar com a cultura. Cultura que é essa outra natureza criado pelo povo no meio ambiente.

The implication is that culture – that other “nature” created by the people – must be based in a commitment to the nation, which includes not only the state, but also the naturally wondrous motherland presented here as inextricable from the party itself. In the following scenes, *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* features footage of the MPLA’s educational initiatives. A group of workers, seated in an outdoor classroom, are pictured reading books and reciting text from a blackboard.

Rebello also includes images of murals depicting an idealised view of life under socialism, recalling the socialist realist style to which artists commissioned by the MPLA were expected to adhere in the years following independence. As Siegert has noted, during the early post-independence period, “visual art was not only regarded as an important tool of political propaganda but was considered a powerful instrument for shaping political thought and practice”.<sup>31</sup> Under the vanguard leadership of the MPLA, human nature – culture, art, society

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<sup>31</sup> Siegert, “No caminho das Estrelas”, p. 40.

- and more-than-human nature were to operate in a harmonious and mutually constructive relationship which would result in the development and realisation of a liberated, socialist Angola. Rebelo's use of dissolve transitions through the film, fading between shots of art and shots of Angolan landscapes, further underlines this interconnectedness of nature and culture within the nation as conceived by the MPLA.

After independence, as the party became increasingly authoritarian and repressive, it was increasingly clear that this idealistic vision of the MPLA's revolutionary project was far removed from reality. Through her article, Mata goes on to outline the ways in which, after independence, a new generation of writers working after 1975 "critically assimilates the elements of a founding aesthetic, on the condition that these elements are re-worked according to the historical context, urgently needed to handle the various tensions splintering present-day Angolan society".<sup>32</sup> She identifies "the contamination that has been at work ever since the nationalist struggle between the motherland (the institutional entity) and the land that sustains nature", noting an increasingly "strained dialogue with the founding poets".<sup>33</sup> Alongside this, Mata also notes a greater tendency towards a "pluralization of views", rather than one dominant narrative or ideology.<sup>34</sup> In a similar vein, as his film progresses, Rebelo begins to deviate from earlier, revolutionary filmic and literary representations and appropriations of nature, engaging in a more essayistic practice which instead reveals tensions that unsettle the portrayals of nature and society typically put forward through party-affiliated cultural productions. Here, we can detect a more ambivalent, dialogic approach

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<sup>32</sup> Mata, 'Under the Sign', p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

which leads audiences towards a more critical and open-ended engagement with these themes, and which thus also challenges dominant MPLA semiology and narratives.

An example of this is Rebelo's use of the motif of birds. Birds are an important and recurring symbol throughout *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*. In the film's opening scenes, Rebelo focusses his attention on birds in the bay, zooming in on birds as they fly across the screen. Birds form part of the idealised nature within which revolutionary Angolans strive to build their new nation. Through the film's voiceover, art and culture are related to birds through imagery and metaphors; "pássaro da nossa arte", "esse pássaro real e sonhado", "sentiremos um voo". From its very title, the film sets forth that art is a means of flying, of setting people free. Art has wings and must be allowed to soar.

The sudden and lingering shot of a dead bird, therefore, washed up on the shore, is immediately confronting for the viewer (Fig. 1.1). The image, which appears around halfway through the film, seems to break suddenly with the film's apparent optimism and hopefulness. If birds have been established as a symbol for artistic production, and if we consider the film to have a chronological structure, the image here might refer to the contemporary moment of crisis facing artists and cultural producers in the nation, coming after footage denoting the initial optimism and fervour of independence.

The image of the dead bird is followed by another disturbing scene, in which a young boy – dressed in military uniform and holding a wooden gun – walks along a beach scattered with the bodies of dead children (Fig. 1.2). Through the montage established in this sequence, the nature of the existential threat facing revolutionary art and culture in Angola is

unquestionably connected to the nation's ongoing civil war. The film's voiceover has already referenced the "inimigos" that threaten to suffocate Angolan art, described – like the dead bird – as a "máquina de voar ameaçada".

This sequence further underlines the MPLA propaganda which cast competing nationalist movements and their international allies as enemies to the party's uniquely revolutionary, socialist national project. Undeniably, however, the sequence also betrays the tension between nature and the state described by Mata in her examination of post-independence Angolan poetry. Similarly, in Rebelo's film, a serene and plentiful motherland has been contaminated – even destroyed, in the case of the bird – by social, political and ideological discord.

Between the shot of the dead bird and the shot of the boy walking along the beach is another short shot of a dress, laid out on the shoreline, upon which lies a coiled snake (Fig. 1.3). One possible reference for this shot might be António Jacinto's poem, 'Bailarina Negra'. It could be reasonably suggested that the dress, which appears to be European in style, with embellishments and a flared skirt, might be worn by a dancer.<sup>35</sup> Jacinto's description of his "Black Dancer" employs both the snake and the bird as metaphors:

Serpente cabriolante

na ave-gesto da tua negra mão.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Bailarina" has the connotation of a formally trained dancer.

<sup>36</sup> Gilda Pereira, 'Antonio Jacinto – Bailarina Negra', *Descendências Magazine*, 1 March 2024 <<https://descendencias.pt/antonio-jacinto/>> [accessed on 9 October 2024].



Fig. 1.1. *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* (LNC, 1986), dir. Asdrúbal Rebelo.



Fig. 1.2. *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* (LNC, 1986), dir. Asdrúbal Rebelo.



Fig. 1.3. *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* (LNC, 1986), dir. Asdrúbal Rebelo.

Jacinto, also known by his *nom-de-plume* Orlando Tavora, was one of Angola's foremost revolutionary literary figures. During the 1940s and 1950s he was an active member of the elite intellectual circles and cultural organisations from which Angola's "Generation of 1948" would emerge. As part of this group of nationalist Angolan writers and activists, Jacinto's poetry engaged with the struggle to conceive of and define Angolan culture under colonial rule, contributing to Angola's literary revival and "the poetic mapping of an imagined Angolan nation".<sup>37</sup> In 1961, Jacinto was arrested by the Portuguese authorities for subversive, anti-colonial activity. In 1963, he was imprisoned at Tarrafal, the Portuguese Estado Novo's concentration camp for political prisoners in Cape Verde, where he remained until his release in 1972.<sup>38</sup> Jacinto then joined the MPLA as a guerrilla fighter, and, after independence, became part of Angola's first government as national secretary of culture.<sup>39</sup>

'Bailarina Negra', published in 1961, exemplifies the pre-independence poets' attempts to discover and celebrate Angolan culture at the height of Portuguese colonial rule. In Jacinto's elegy to the "Black Dancer", with her "ritmo negro", "corpo negro" and "olhos negros também", the use of repetition serves to emphasize and uphold the presence of the Black Angolan subject and her culture. Equally, at the beginning of the poem, Jacinto's repetition of "sempre" – "sempre a noite / sempre a indissolúvel noite" – suggests the strength, irrefutability and resoluteness of Angolan culture in the face of Portuguese colonial oppression. Earlier in his film, *Rebela* features multiple scenes of dancers, performing jubilantly in community settings, at the Bengo-Kakuako carnival celebrations, and in a dance studio to camera. Here, however, the dancer is absent; all that is left is the costume, the snake

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<sup>37</sup> Peres, 'Women, Bodies and Nation', p. 36.

<sup>38</sup> Jessica Falconi, 'Jacinto, António', Oxford African American Studies Centre, 30 September 2012 <<https://oxfordaasc-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-49019>> [accessed on 6 October 2024].

<sup>39</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 23.

and the dead bird, which has ceased the movement of the “ave-gesto”. Again, in this sense, this image might point to the existential threat facing Angolan art and culture at this time.

The images of the snake and the bird in *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* might also be considered as evidence of a more fraught relationship with Angola’s founding poets. If, as Mata notes, pre-independence Angolan literature often employed “signs taken out of geography and nature”, which were then “(re)invented socioculturally” as symbols for an emerging Angolan nationalism, here Rebelo revisits these symbols to express dissatisfaction and discontent with the government’s post-independence national project, and perhaps, more specifically, its failures to support Angola’s cultural sectors.<sup>40</sup> If the shots do reference ‘Bailarina Negra’, Rebelo’s sequence may even level a more pointed critique at Jacinto himself, who had been national secretary for culture. However, beyond this specific poem, the symbolic use of nature to depict the absence or death of Angolan culture is a clear negation of the semiologies established through Angola’s pre-independence poetry and, subsequently, by the MPLA after independence. Additionally, all that remains in these shots are the symbols; the human wearer of the dress is absent. In this sense, Rebelo’s choice of image perhaps also uncovers a disappointment at the hollowness and emptiness of rhetoric surrounding culture in Angola, which had been positioned as central to the MPLA’s socio-political project, but now faced decimation due to a lack of institutional support.

This sequence entails a transgressive re-appropriation of the natural symbols central to Angola’s liberationist literary discourse, exemplifying the director’s move towards a more essayistic cinematic practice through the development and advancement of a more subjective,

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<sup>40</sup> Mata, ‘Under the Sign’, p. 54.

personal point of view on the film's subject matter, which departs from dominant party narratives. An additional moment of transgression can also be detected in the ambiguity of these images. If Rebelo reinvents signs from nature, he does not appear to demand from the audience that their interpretation of these symbols aligns with his own (whatever that might be). This can be seen through the absence of a voiceover accompanying these shots, which suggests a loosening of the film's authority over the destination of the images, allowing instead for a more open-ended, fluid dialogue between the visual material and the viewer. This approach runs contrary to the more dogmatic model of filmmaking seen under the MPLA in Angola up until this point, which was preceded by the revolutionary, ideological literary discourse produced by the party's poet-politicians; for A. R. Brás, Jacinto's poetry "seems to suffer from a relatively narrow, and often highly didactic, approach".<sup>41</sup>

After the image of the dead bird appears on screen, the film's voiceover does not resume. From here, the film's soundtrack consists solely of music, and there is no more speech. The choice to end the voiceover at this image might again underscore the nature of the threat facing Angolan art and culture, perhaps suggesting a real possibility, or fear on the part of the director, that artistic creativity in Angola could be irrevocably silenced. Conversely, however, the choice not to continue the voiceover might also signal the director's departure from a more instructive, monologic model of cinema towards a more dialogical and open-ended communication with his audience. By removing the non-diegetic narration accompanying the images, Rebelo more easily opens up the possibility for different interpretations of his film, permitting the viewer to explore readings which are not influenced or predetermined by the film's script. While clearly audiences are always at liberty to interpret a film however they

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<sup>41</sup> A. R. Brás, "The "Contract" in Agostinho Neto's Poetry", *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 11:2 (1982), pp. 82-95 (p. 85).

like, the jolt created by Rebelo at this point in the film – with the shocking image of the dead bird, and the end of the voiceover – perhaps offers the audience a moment of rupture which more brazenly invites the “open-ended” dialogue identified by Papazian and Eades in their analysis of the essay film form, and marks a clearer, if necessarily implicit, transgression of the more moralistic cinematic standards established by the MPLA.<sup>42</sup>

For Noël Burch, essay films are “no longer documentaries in the objective sense, their entire purpose being to set forth thesis and antithesis through the very texture of the film”.<sup>43</sup> Burch calls on André Bazin’s notion of a “horizontal” form of montage, a montage which goes from “ear to eye”, to suggest a way in which the essay film form can present conflicting ideas.<sup>44</sup>

While there is not a voiceover to accompany the sequence beginning with the dead bird, the music that accompanies these shots - of the bird, the snake, and the boy walking down the beach – is notably emotive and cinematic. In this sense, although Rebelo perhaps invites more interpretive possibilities through his lack of voiceover, the jarring and uncomfortable contrast that is created by the use of music through these scenes also leads the viewer to consider more deeply the nature of cinematic representation.

For Nichols, inherent to the essay film is “a desire to make the conventions of representation themselves more apparent”.<sup>45</sup> In the sequence depicting the boy walking along the beach, Rebelo begins with a zoomed in shot of the boy, before zooming out in a sweeping, panning shot to reveal the distressing scene that unfolds around him. There is a self-reflexivity here;

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<sup>42</sup> Papazian and Eades, *The Essay Film*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* (Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 159.

<sup>44</sup> André Bazin, ‘Bazin on Marker (1958)’, in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. by Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 102-108.

<sup>45</sup> Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 33.

the swelling symphonies and the beautiful sunset evoke the cinematic hallmarks of a “happy ending”, which becomes particularly disturbing as it is revealed to the viewer that this is an image of children killed in war. Lulling the audience into a false sense of security, the intention here might be to shock the viewer into a recognition of the dangers of a Hollywood model that reduces its viewers to passive spectators. However, given the nature of the images, it seems more likely that Rebelo is highlighting the discrepancy between images of life under socialism as promoted by the MPLA, and the lived reality of war and conflict – particularly for children – taking place in Angola.

The shot of the dead bird, followed by the staged shots of the snake and the boy walking down the beach strewn with dead children, also marks a clear departure from the purely documentary footage used by Rebelo up to this point in the film. Blending artifice with reality, the sequence represents another example of a move towards the more hybrid essay film form. Of course, the scene would likely have felt all too real for Angolan audiences with first-hand experience of losing children; at the time of the film’s release, the country’s rate of child mortality was among the highest in the world.<sup>46</sup> In this way, as well as suggesting the nature of the threats facing revolutionary art and culture in Angola, these scenes also demonstrate Rebelo’s development of a more personal, subjective viewpoint through the film, signposting an enduring commitment to children across his cinematic oeuvre.

The image of the dead bird directly follows an extended interview with the filmmaker António Ole. The choice of Ole to speak in a film about the “adverse conditions” facing

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<sup>46</sup> Christopher Pycroft, ‘Angola – ‘The Forgotten Tragedy’’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20:2 (1994), pp. 241-262 (p. 242), doi:10.1080/03057079408708398.

artists and filmmakers in Angola is particularly charged, and this interview is perhaps the clearest example of transgression found in Rebelo's film. By the time *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* was released, Ole had ceased filmmaking due to his frustration and disillusionment with what he was able to create in Angola at that time. His documentary film, *O Ritmo do N'gola Ritmos*, was censored by the MPLA in 1978, and only screened publicly eleven years later. Similarly, Rebelo's film *Filhos da Rua* had also been censored for its perceived criticism of the state's treatment of children and young people living on the streets of Luanda.

While Ole does not speak openly about the censorship of his film, he makes a reference to the "complicity" he feels with cinema: "não é muito fácil para mim hoje estar deste lado da câmara, há uma complicidade muito grande em relação ao cinema". His statement may simply refer to the fact that he had previously been involved in filmmaking. However, the choice of language here might also be a veiled reference to a deeper sense of complicity at having participated in a national cinematic project which no longer aligned with his views. Beyond this comment, Ole speaks mostly about his painting and artistic practice. Again, while he does not speak candidly about his experiences with filmmaking and censorship, his views are implied by the reasons he provides for his move towards painting; "pintar é essencialmente um exercício de liberdade". During the film's opening scenes, the voiceover refers to nature as a mirror: "a natureza, a terra, nossa imagem espelhou, por ela nos vimos e nos viam". In the montage established through this sequence, Rebelo perhaps uses an image of death in nature – the dead bird – directly after his interview with Ole to reflect the challenging conditions facing artists in the nation, for whom the scope for flight, and thus freedom, has been diminished.

Although they speak little about cinema, Rebelo chooses to accompany the audio of the interview with images of one of Ole's earlier films, *No Caminho das Estrelas*. As Ole speaks, the film's poster – designed by Ole himself – appears on screen. The film traces the life of Agostinho Neto, taking its title from one of the former president's most well-known poems. Again, the director's emphasis on the film's poster through this scene creates a "horizontal montage" that implies a connection between Ole's speech and Angolan cinema, even if he does not speak directly to issues surrounding national cinema during the interview.

Additionally, Rebelo's choice to focus on the imagery created for *No Caminho das Estrelas* perhaps also indicates the director's continued concern with the founding voices and ideologies of revolutionary and liberationist Angolan culture. Throughout this section of the film, shots fade in and out between Ole's paintings and footage of Angolan landscapes. The camera zooms in on the paintings of birds across the poster, reaffirming the director's concern with nature and further recalling the connection between art and culture and the natural environment detailed at the beginning of the film. To have an image of a dead bird as the culmination of this sequence again reflects the party's abandonment of their original revolutionary ideologies and promises, and the emptiness and decay of their ongoing liberationist rhetoric. Here, Rebelo again subverts national symbols to confront the dominant systems of power they represent, namely the party that stifles artistic production and creativity, posing an existential threat to the artistic expression of filmmakers such as himself and Ole.

After the shots of the dead bird, the snake and the boy on the beach, the film returns to more serene scenes of nature. A wading bird forages for food in the shallows, a small crab moves

along the sand at the shoreline, birds are shown flying across the screen. The brief sequence that has just occurred feels like an anomalous interloper as the film appears to revert to an optimistic depiction of life under the MPLA's socialist government. After these three images, however, it seems unlikely that the director is advocating for an unquestioning return to the status quo. Rather, this norm has been troubled by the preceding scenes.

The irruption of the image of the dead bird in Rebelo's film might be compared to the birds in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963). While Hitchcock's films are, categorically, not essay films, and at no point in *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* is there any explicit or implicit suggestion of an engagement with *The Birds*, Hitchcock's film is undoubtedly a defining cinematic reference for birds on screen, and might here – in the spirit of following the birds – further elucidate the essayistic threads of Rebelo's work.

There have been countless readings of the avian threat that confronts the residents of Bodega Bay in *The Birds*.<sup>47</sup> For Slavoj Žižek, Hitchcock's birds are the irruption of the Lacanian Real into the symbolic order. Operating as a material manifestation of the maternal superego, the attacking birds are an embodiment of the possessive and overbearing mother Lydia Brennan's fear that her son, Mitch, will abandon her for his seductive new love interest from the city, Melanie. The birds do what the mother cannot and are, horrifyingly, that which she cannot contain, spilling into the characters' symbolic reality to enact Lydia's monstrous desire to prevent Mitch and Melanie's sexual relationship and destroy her rival. Žižek argues that it is

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<sup>47</sup> See Robin Wood, 'The Birds', in Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (Columbia University Press, 2019), pp. 152-172; Camille Paglia, *The Birds* (British Film Institute, 1998).

no coincidence that the birds are ultimately only assuaged when Lydia finally accepts Melanie as her son's new wife, thus abandoning "her superego role".<sup>48</sup>

At a narrative level, there is no comparable domestic drama in Rebelo's film. However, as in Hitchcock's film, the dead bird in *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* can be read to embody a "discord", or "an unresolved tension in intersubjective relations".<sup>49</sup> For Žižek, Hitchcock's birds "are the incarnation of a fundamental disorder in family relationships – the father is absent, the paternal function (the function of pacifying law, the Name-of-the-Father) is suspended and that vacuum is filled by the "irrational" maternal superego, arbitrary, wicked".<sup>50</sup> In the context of Rebelo's film, the notion of an absent or suspended paternal function would, most obviously, relate to the MPLA. Considering the central concern of the film, namely the conditions facing artists in Angola during this period, the image of the dead bird, along with the images that follow, perhaps emerges as the result of a void created by the loss of a vanguard leadership committed to supporting Angolan culture to thrive. Possibly, it even relates to the death of Neto himself. Equally, at the time that Rebelo was making his film, the MPLA retained a strong and overbearing paternal function in Angola. As the party cemented an authoritarian and paternalistic approach to power, the irruption of the image of the dead bird could also be read as a response to an excess of paternal law, particularly considering the allusions to censorship in the interview with António Ole immediately preceding the image.

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<sup>48</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (MIT Press, 1991), p. 106.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Crucially, for Žižek, Hitchcock's birds do not "signify" or "symbolize"; "they are, rather, the making present in the real, the objectivization, the incarnation of the fact that, on the symbolizing level, something 'has not worked out'".<sup>51</sup> If Angola's founding poets transformed elements of the natural environment into symbols for an emergent Angolan nationalism, Rebelo's abject image here could equally be read to represent the inversion of this process. The symbol of the bird has, in death, been stripped of its symbolic function precisely to "make real" the failure of the MPLA's nationalist project. Here, therefore, the irruption of the image of the dead bird also dismantles the symbolic reality created by the revolutionary fathers of Angola, signalling the "strained dialogue with the founding poets" identified by Mata, and fundamentally unsettling the film's apparently easy transition back to images of nature that conform to the nation's revolutionary and liberationist rhetoric.<sup>52</sup>

Another important distinction to be made between Hitchcock's and Rebelo's films is that the latter's birds do not attack. This is to say that, unlike in *The Birds*, the birds in *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* do not irrupt as a force. Rather, what emerges is precisely the opposite; the bird that bursts uncomfortably into the symbolic order is dead. However, in the dead bird we might still identify the "wickedness" of Hitchcock's birds in that, perhaps, what cannot be contained here is a failed belief in that which has been signified by the birds through Rebelo's film – that is to say, the bird as a symbol for the MPLA's vision for Angolan nationhood. The image of the dead bird, along with the shots of the snake and the child that follow it, begins to reveal moments of "irrationality" - that is, of doubt and thus of moral fallibility - on the part of a director who had previously participated in the formation of this very same symbolic order

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<sup>51</sup> Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 105.

<sup>52</sup> Mata, 'Under the Sign', p. 60.

through his art. Here, that which now disrupts this symbolic order established by the party is the revelation that the promised reality no longer exists.

While in *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* this “wickedness” might not be presented as a force, there is certainly a forcefulness behind Rebelo’s potential admission of disaffection or dissatisfaction with the MPLA’s post-independence national project, particularly in a wider context of censorship and repression in Angola. In framing the film as a move towards the essay film, I have already argued that the sequence of shots beginning with the dead bird can be understood to mark the director’s development of a more subjective, personal and critical viewpoint through this film, and have suggested what these images might reveal about the nature of these views. Considering the work in the light of Žižek’s reading of Hitchcock, if Rebelo’s dead bird and the images that follow it are situated as a manifestation of the subconscious, or of the repressed, this might suggest an uneasiness on the part of the director around advancing these views through his film. Beyond a recognition that a criticism of the party – even if only subtly implied – would be subversive, and an awareness of possible censorship, the presentation of these images as a moment of wickedness, bursting through the fabric of the film, perhaps also points to Rebelo’s internal discomfort concerning his own discontent with the movement he had previously bolstered through his films.

For Žižek, it is Lydia’s acceptance of Mitch and Melanie’s relationship which ceases the irruption of the maternal superego embodied by the birds. In the case of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*, there is no such development. Nature returns to a supposedly harmonious state without a word. But does the director attempt to dispel the wickedness that has surfaced here? Does he succeed? The film appears to go “back to normal” – albeit without the voiceover –

and it certainly seems that Rebelo does have an enduring faith in the optimistic vision for Angolan society with which his film both begins and concludes. However, as in *The Birds*, the “normal” that is returned to here has been irreversibly altered by the director’s interventions during the previous sequence. The lingering question remains of the cost of this utopian vision, and of what must be suppressed for a return to this supposed harmony.

Despite their brevity, these three short shots - of the dead bird, the snake and the boy - invite reflection on the film’s central themes through their various possible interpretations, complicating the idyllic surfaces of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* and the MPLA’s revolutionary project. As Rascaroli notes in her analysis of the essay film, rather than presenting a dialectic that leads to a “logical deduction” at the film’s close, Rebelo’s film demands that his viewer move with him “through fissures” that reveal not fixed conclusions, but worrying and uncomfortable threads of doubt, complicity and humanity.<sup>53</sup> While the birds may not be the central focus of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*, this recurring motif signals a move towards something more essayistic and demonstrates where Rebelo’s film begins to explore themes and concerns that would be further developed by directors through the 1980s and 1990s.

### **Beyond the birds: Subjectivity and lyricism in *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos***

Even where Rebelo’s film appears to align more with previous examples of early post-independence Angolan cinema, there are further indications of a move towards a more essayistic filmmaking practice. I have argued that the director’s choice to end the film’s voiceover signals a moment of transgression and rupture, departing from a more informative

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<sup>53</sup> Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks*, p.13.

model of cinema informed by socialist realism, and inviting the possibility of differing interpretations of the images presented on screen. What of the voiceover itself?

The voiceover has been considered a central and essential feature of the essay film form. In his 1992 article 'In Search of the Centaur: The Essay Film', Phillip Lopate argues that the essay film "must have words", and states that he "cannot accept an utterly pure, silent flow of images as constituting essayistic discourse".<sup>54</sup> In Lopate's configuration of the essay film, these words must "represent a single voice" – that of the director – and, in return, audiences "must feel included in a true conversation" with this voice.<sup>55</sup> His limiting conceptualisation of the essay film form persists in giving greater authority to the word over the image. How else might voices be expressed and heard, particularly in an Angolan context?

Through *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*, the voiceover is narrated by two different voices, neither of which belongs to the director.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, the film includes interviews, allowing for the presence of other voices. António Ole, as well as an unnamed musician, both advance their own personal views in these sections of the film. Rebelo's voiceover repeatedly moves between cited material and the film's original script, without necessarily indicating when these shifts take place. In this way, there is less of a sense of a single, authoritative voice through the film, and more of an assemblage.

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<sup>54</sup> Lopate, 'The Search for the Centaur', p. 19.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> The film is narrated by David Mestre and Orlando Fortunato.

In his analysis of Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Reassemblage: From the Firelight to the Screen* (1983) and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), Lopate identifies a "reshuffling of voices" which does not "consistently" tell us what the director thinks. He cites this as one reason why Trinh's films do not, in his opinion, count as essay films.<sup>57</sup> According to Lopate's criteria, Rebelo's film would likely also not constitute an essay film. Despite disclosing a prevailing and undoubtedly personal sense of optimism for the future of Angolan art and culture, his multi-voiced narration, coupled with the ambiguity of the visual imagery and montage that emerges towards the end of the film, does not offer an entirely unequivocal view of what the director himself has to say.

Other critics are less adamant that the essay film necessarily relies upon the direct audible presence of the director, either through a voiceover or on screen. For Laura Rascaroli, the enunciations of the authorial figure in the essay film can often be sensed indirectly, through "the use of a narrator/spokesperson, or of intertitles, or of musical commentary, camera movements, etc.," and can be considered essayistic interventions so long as they directly address the receiver and evoke a sense of conversation.<sup>58</sup> Equally, the essay film is not just about what its author thinks, but also about creating the conditions for the audience to think with the essay, to make their own connections and draw their own conclusions based on the subject material presented.

Returning to Rascaroli's assertion that the essay film form is fundamentally "transgressive", this external, conversational component of essayistic practice is particularly relevant in

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<sup>57</sup> Lopate, 'The Search for the Centaur', p. 20.

<sup>58</sup> Rascaroli, 'The Essay Film', p. 38.

relation to the development of Angolan national cinema after independence. During the early post-independence phase, the MPLA, inspired by Soviet socialist realism, used film to transmit a universal message about the party and its nationalist project to Angolan audiences. If it is these preexisting conditions that would determine the direction of any Angolan director's transgressive, essayistic thrust, the notion that the viewer must feel included in "conversation" with the film is important. In this context, Lopate's insistence on a "communicative" essay film form, which unambiguously tells the viewer what it thinks at a verbal level through direct address, via a single authorial voice, requires reconsideration.

Equally, however, if *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* appears to avoid revealing exactly "what its author thinks", this might mark a continuation of earlier forms of post-independence Angolan filmmaking, rather than a transgression or diversion from the established standard. It is important to note here that, according to the fact sheet produced by the IAC, the text in *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* is attributed to the UEA.<sup>59</sup> It is unclear from this document whether the entirety of the script was composed and provided to Rebelo by this association of Angolan writers, or if this credit is included to acknowledge the quoted material used throughout the film, which had originally been published by members of the association. However, Rebelo is only credited as the film's director, and is not given a credit for the film's text.<sup>60</sup> It can reasonably be assumed that while Rebelo may have some creative input into and control over the voiceover, he was not the sole author of the film's text.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Luanda, Instituto Angolano do Cinema e do Audiovisual (IACA), *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos, Asdrúbal Rebelo (1986)* [fact sheet].

<sup>60</sup> In comparison, he is given a credit for editing, along with Leonel Efe.

<sup>61</sup> I have not been able to clarify this. It could be inaccurate, and Rebelo may have played a more significant role in writing the voiceover for the film. However, if this is the case, this would be a clearer indication of a move towards the essay film form.

Collaborative authorship is not necessarily a barrier to reading Rebelo's film as an essay film. Lopate includes collaborative authorship by directors and screenwriters in his understanding of the essay film, so long as the film's text is then "then stitched together in such a way as to sound like a single perspective".<sup>62</sup> If this is the case in Rebelo's film, however, the "single perspective" that emerges is one that seems to reproduce MPLA narratives, rather than one which expounds the individual voice of the author.

Again, it is important to consider the specific and challenging conditions facing Angolan filmmakers at the time of the film's production and release, not only in terms of the limited material resources and institutional support available to directors, but also restricted freedom and possibilities of expression. In this context, I do not believe that the use of text provided by the UEA, possibly as a prerequisite to making the film, can be equated to a lack of an essayistic impulse in Rebelo's film. Here, instead, we might ask what essayistic qualities can be identified in Rebelo's adaptation of the voiceover text through the film, and where these interventions foreground his authorial presence, as one aspect of a broader move towards a more essayistic practice. Thinking about the film in this way allows for a consideration of where Rebelo embeds dialogue within his film, presenting a dialogical response to the adapted texts, as well as opening up these dialogical possibilities to his audience.

The voiceover script in *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* almost exclusively uses the first-person plural form, "nós", seemingly avoiding the first person singular and speaking for "o povo" as a collective, singular unit. This clearly draws on the revolutionary rhetoric and socialist ideology that had characterised Angolan national cinema since its inception, advancing the

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<sup>62</sup> Lopate, 'The Search for the Centaur', p. 19.

collective party line of the MPLA rather than offering the essay film's "personal, critical reflection".<sup>63</sup> Additionally, by explicitly implicating the film's audience in the narration, the film could be read here to suppress the open-endedness of the essay form, seeking to impose limits on the spectator's possible interpretations of the material on screen by assuming an ideal state of collective national and cultural unity and demanding a universal and hegemonic engagement by Angolan audiences.

The voiceover only uses the first-person singular once. The first-person pronoun "eu" appears alongside the singular "tú" address when the narrator states, "mas eu estarei junto de ti". Even here, however, there is an implied sense of "togetherness". This "I" is arguably not, as Brian Dillon notes of the essay's "I", entirely "provisional and contained", but rather more universal and expansive, standing in for the "nós", "o povo", of the rest of the film.<sup>64</sup>

The line – "mas eu estarei junto de ti" – is also a quotation, from a poem by the revolutionary Angolan writer Arnaldo Santos. In the film, Santos's poem, 'Poema de esperança', is recited in full by the narrator. Rebelo's treatment of Santos's poem arguably contains essayistic qualities. In her analysis of Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* – the original archetype of the essay form – Claire de Obaldia notes that Montaigne "accumulates a mass of different examples [...] to show that rather than unequivocally confirming one another, their confrontation with each other reveals ambiguities and contradictions".<sup>65</sup> "Weighing" his examples in this way, Montaigne reveals "generally acknowledged Truth" to be "merely

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<sup>63</sup> Rascaroli, 'The Essay Film', p. 35.

<sup>64</sup> Brian Dillon, *Essayism* (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017), p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> Claire de Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism and the Essay* (Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 69.

human opinions”, each emerging from specific circumstances and contexts.<sup>66</sup> In the case of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*, a critical “weighing” or judgement process can be detected through the “horizontal” montage presented at this moment in the film. Over shots of Angolan men, women and children receiving education as part of the MPLA’s Marxist-Leninist programme of national development, repeating the phrase “vamos criar o homem novo” from a blackboard, the narrator concludes the final lines of Santos’s poem in the voiceover –

Mas eu estarei junto de ti...

E será doce ou triste aquele poente...?

Porém, tu me dirás sorrindo:

- Que importa? São tuas as linhas desta mão...<sup>67</sup>

Silvia Brunetta notes that Santos’s poem is characteristic of the “fase utópico-patriótica” of Angolan pre-independence poetry, in that the poetic subject here appears to be already living in a liberated Angola.<sup>68</sup> The use of Santos’s triumphant ‘Poema de esperança’ arguably confirms the film’s positive portrayal of post-independence Angola under the MPLA, suggesting that Santos’s utopian vision – the “poente doce” – has been realised.

An alternative reading, however, suggests that Rebelo’s “horizontal” montage during this scene is more ambiguous. An obvious temporal distance is created here between Santos’s poem, the images of the classroom, and the Angolan audience, who are directly addressed by

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<sup>66</sup> De Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 68.

<sup>67</sup> Arnaldo Santos, ‘Poema de esperança’, in Santos, *Poemas no Tempo* (Edições 70, 1977), p. 26.

<sup>68</sup> Silvia Brunetta, ‘A fase utópico-patriótica da poesia angolana (1965-1985)’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidade de Aveiro, 2014), p.126, <<https://ria.ua.pt/bitstream/10773/13935/1/tese.pdf>> [accessed 3 October 2024].

the narrator. This temporal dislocation removes Santos's liberationist rhetoric from a position of sanctified, universal authority and instead invites a reflection on the question posed by the poetic subject from multiple, specific historical vantagepoints. From this perspective, Rebelo's handling of the material included in the voiceover might be an attempt to open up avenues for a more critical and personal engagement with the film on the part of his audiences, which, in the essayist spirit of Montaigne, turns "the example into an instrument of doubt rather than of conformity".<sup>69</sup> While Rebelo himself might not answer the poetic subject's question explicitly, his authorial voice in this regard is not difficult to detect. Shortly after this scene, the shot of the boy walking along the beach at sunset – a beautiful sunset ("doce"), which is revealed slowly by the panning movement of the camera to be a scene of horror and sadness ("triste") – could be read as a response to Santos's poem, implying the director's position on the MPLA's realisation of its post-independence national project.

A wider interrogation of the lyricism present throughout *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* reveals further essayistic tendencies. The film's narrative component is composed as a fragmentary and paratactic discourse, which moves somewhat episodically between ideas, citations and different speakers. These poetic techniques might be read to cloud the film's fundamental, subjective argumentation – what Lopate considers to be the essay's necessary "plot" – and thus complicate a reading of the film as a move towards the essay film form.<sup>70</sup> Rascaroli has outlined the historical separation of the supposedly oppositional essay and lyrical forms. She argues that if the former is associated with rationality, knowledge and the intellectual pursuit of truth, the latter has been considered a vehicle for pleasure and beauty, based in affect and emotion, with a pervasive view of the lyric as "an aesthetic surplus that does not partake of

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<sup>69</sup> De Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 69.

<sup>70</sup> Lopate, 'In Search of the Centaur', p. 20.

the logical argument” dominating discussions of a lyrical essay form.<sup>71</sup> For Rascaroli, however, the potential affinities between the essay and the lyric forms have been undertheorized. Lyricism in the essay film may, in fact, be conceived as “a powerful epistemological tool” which is “used by filmmakers to create audiovisual spaces for thought”.<sup>72</sup>

As Alex Fletcher points out, literary and film essayists have typically and historically drawn upon “the paratactic and serialist techniques of poetry and music, rather than logical forms of discourse or plot-based narrative structures”.<sup>73</sup> Montaigne, the father of the essay form, offered a direct comparison between his own essays and poetry, likening the “jumps and tumblings” of the poetic mode to those of the essay and stating “I scatter prose here no differently than verse”. Essays, he writes, “sparkle” with “poetic power and daring”.<sup>74</sup>

In this way, the film’s “strained dialogue” with Angola’s revolutionary nationalist poets also surfaces at a formal level, through the reappropriation and adaptation of the lyric form.

Drawing on David Foster, Rascaroli suggests that “the function of lyricism in the essay film” can be read “as a way to guarantee a balance between subjectivity and critique”.<sup>75</sup> She notes that lyricism can be understood “as a counter-narrative strategy, one of the many strategies that the essay film may use to create a dialectical tension and, as a result, textual interstices,

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<sup>71</sup> Laura Rascaroli, ‘Compounding the Lyric Essay Film: Towards a Theory of Poetic Counter-Narrative’, in *Beyond the Essay Film*, ed. by Julia Vassileva and Deane Williams (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), pp. 75-93 (p. 76).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>73</sup> Alex Fletcher, ‘Compilation and Critique: The Essay as a Literary, Cinematographic and Videographic Form’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Kingston University, 2018), p. 31, <<https://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/id/eprint/42576/1/Fletcher-A.pdf>> [accessed 3 October 2024].

<sup>74</sup> Michel de Montaigne, ‘On Vanity’, in Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. by M. A. Screech (Penguin, 1991), pp. 1071-1133 (p. 1125).

<sup>75</sup> Rascaroli, ‘Compounding the Lyric Essay Film’, p. 80.

within which new audiovisual thinking can emerge”.<sup>76</sup> Even if it was not entirely written by the director, the recourse to lyricism and citation of poetry within the purportedly documentary narrative of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* might equally be understood as an engagement with a more essayistic practice that embraces “a contingent perspective”, yet also attains “critical distance”.<sup>77</sup> This is to say that, perhaps, the narration of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* does not unquestioningly advance its revolutionary rhetoric in such a way that posits this as a foregone conclusion, but structurally introduces a dialectic through the lacunae of a more lyrical form.

Rebello’s adaptation of the narrative component of his film amplifies the effectiveness of the text’s lyricism in this regard. As director and editor, he heightens the fragmentary structure of the voiceover not only by concluding this well before the end of the film, but also by breaking up the narrative voiceover with music and diegetic sound, allowing for tensions and varying interpretations to arise and multiply. Around these gaps, Rebello weaves both documentary footage and his more profoundly poetic images, such as the sequence beginning with the dead bird. To return to this sequence, these images’ apparent “irruption” into the fabric of the film could equally be read as a lyrical or poetic gesture, with its potency relying on both the affective qualities of the shots, as well as the Žižekian “irrationality” that invades the screen in these moments, each of which would typically be associated with the lyrical form rather than the rationalistic essay, but which also reveal a subjective and critical directorial presence.

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<sup>76</sup> Rascaroli, ‘Compounding the Lyric Essay Film’, p. 81.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Beyond these staged images, Rebelo's presentation of documentary footage can also be read in terms of a more paratactic lyric form. For Sven Birkerts, a "lyrical" essay is one which does not necessarily "march forward logically" but which presents its elements "associatively, sometimes without obvious connective tissue".<sup>78</sup> In relation to the film's central thesis – its optimism for the resilience of Angolan artistic creativity – the "connective tissue" that links the images presented through the majority of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* is relatively clear. To begin to detect a more critical authorial voice, however, which belies a tension with the text of the film's narrative voiceover, the viewer must instead follow the associative, non-linear and loosely connected threads that emerge across the film as a whole – the use of birds, for example – and rely on an interplay between the film's various narrative, sonic and visual elements.

That *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* appears to move towards a more "lyrical" essay form is unsurprising given the context of censorship and limited freedom of expression framing its production. These concerns are alluded to within the film and go some way towards explaining a recourse to a more lyrical, essayistic mode, less plain and obvious in the unfolding of its argument, but which nonetheless offers "truths about our world".<sup>79</sup> Reading Rebelo's film as an adaptation thus has a double sense, referring both to its intertextual engagement with Angola's revolutionary literature, and to the director's adaptation of the essay film form for the unique conditions and challenges of Angolan filmmaking during this time.

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<sup>78</sup> Sven Birkerts, 'For Cyberwriters, A Lyrical Link', *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 20 October 2006 <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/for-cyberwriters-a-lyrical-link/206182.article#:~:text=For%20cyberwriters,%20a%20lyrical%20link.%20The>> [accessed 3 October 2024].

<sup>79</sup> Rascaroli, 'Compounding the Lyric Essay Film', p. 82.

The extent of Rebelo's involvement with the voiceover text, its provenance and the nature of his editing process are all, ultimately, unclear. However, the lyrical tendencies that emerge through the film, both within and in response to its narrative component, can be read to suggest a different layer to the director's adaptation of Angola's founding poets. This is to say that *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* perhaps not only presents a "strained dialogue" with the nation's revolutionary literary figures, but also deliberately returns to a lyric subjectivity to explore questions of form and expression in an evolving Angolan post-independence cinematic context.<sup>80</sup>

### **Conclusion: The struggle for truths**

At the end of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*, the quoted words of Agostinho Neto featured in the film's voiceover during the opening scenes appear on screen as a title card. Rebelo's choice to end with this recognisably Brechtian technique could be read to negate the varying dialogical interpretations permitted to arise through the film, returning instead to the didactic model previously adopted by the MPLA's Marxist-Leninist vanguard. However, at this point in the film – after the irruption of Rebelo's poetic images, and the emergence of a lyric subjectivity – the quotation functions somewhat differently. Neto's statement, that life is "uma sucessão e um somatório de fatos contraditórios, resolúveis ou não", can now be read to suggest that no "resolution" has been presented in the film. Rather, what *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* sets forth are contradictory, irresolvable threads that weave together to form a multi-voiced, dialogical

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<sup>80</sup> Mata, 'Under the Sign', p. 60.

whole, which stands at odds with the established conventions of previous Angolan cinema produced under the MPLA.

Critical debate over the notion of a multi-voiced essay film has been fraught. Attempts at a very strict delimitation of the essay film form, to differentiate the essay film from more politically and aesthetically didactic forms, risk becoming overly dogmatic themselves. As I have argued, *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* demonstrates a contextually specific move towards an essayistic filmmaking practice. In his speech, Neto goes on to detail the specific task of the Angolan writer and artist, who he argues must reflect the reality of life-in-nature, and not avoid its complexities or contradictions.<sup>81</sup> Embracing the subjectivity and formally experimental possibilities of the essay film, Rebelo's dialogical, essayistic adaptation advances a more expressive and personal stance on the material he interprets, and also demands a critical engagement from its audience, which moves beyond the monologic model employed by the majority of ideological and educational nation-building cinema seen up to this point. Before the quotation is shown on screen, the final scenes of *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* show children being handed books, not only reinforcing Rebelo's ongoing concern with children and young people in Angola, but also consolidating his call for more education, debate and engagement, rather than the imposition of empty ideology from above.

Ultimately, Lopate's summation of the work of the essay filmmaker is relevant here. He states that "an essay is a continual asking of questions – not necessarily finding "solutions", but enacting the struggle for truth in full view".<sup>82</sup> Rebelo's work is concerned less with

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<sup>81</sup> Neto, ...*Ainda o Meu Sonho...*, pp. 25-36.

<sup>82</sup> Lopate, 'The Search for the Centaur', p. 19.

presenting fixed and foregone conclusions, and more with developing a personal cinematic language that can engage with urgent issues in a constant process of “working it out”, embracing the uncertainty, doubt and humanity that this process requires. This, I suggest, is the crucial thread that links *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* to other Angolan films produced from the early 1980s through to the 1990s. Orlando Fortunato’s films, for example, which I analyse in the following chapter, move from a more monologic portrayal of history towards a visceral depiction of this struggle for truth, and its violent consequences, through a process of dialogical historical adaptation. Like *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*, these films demonstrate where Angolan directors began to adapt and expand a limited conception of the documentary form in post-independence Angola to construct a dialogue with, rather than restate, the MPLA’s foundational narratives.

## Chapter Two

### Dialogical historical adaptation: Orlando Fortunato's *Memória de um Dia* (1982) and *Comboio da Canhoca* (2004)

#### Introduction

Like Asdrúbal Rebelo, comparatively little has been written about the Angolan director Orlando Fortunato. Born in 1946, Fortunato studied in the United States before receiving film training in France in the 1960s. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he worked as assistant to the Senegalese director Mahama Johnson Traoré during the production of his films *Diankha-Bi* (1968) and *Diègue-Bi* (1970). In Senegal, Fortunato also worked with Djibril Diop Mambéty, the acclaimed director of the ground-breaking fantasy-drama film *Touki Bouki* (1973).<sup>1</sup> Returning to Angola, Fortunato participated in the post-independence boom in national film production. This included working as part of the collective directorial team on the “Ngoma” project during the early 1980s, producing “revistas culturais” for the LNC under the first MPLA government. According to Abrantes, these ten-minute programmes differed from the “jornais de actualidades” which had been produced since the 1970s, moving beyond the predominantly factual and informative model of earlier state programming to present cultural topics in greater depth. While Abrantes suggests these programmes remained markedly “informative” in nature, their existence implies a wider recognition that a move away from a purely educational model of cultural production was needed in Angola, and positions Fortunato within this shift from the outset of his career.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Luanda, IACA, *Orlando Fortunato 1983 Entrevista* [interview].

<sup>2</sup> Abrantes, *O Cinema Angolano*, p.14.

Fortunato began his first post-independence solo project, a short film entitled *O Caso Nosso*, in 1978.<sup>3</sup> His first fiction film, *Memória de um Dia*, was released in 1982.<sup>4</sup> This was followed by three further documentaries; *A Herança* and *Festa da Ilha*, both released in 1986, and *Agostinho Neto*, released in 2000.<sup>5 6</sup> His most recent feature film, *Batepá*, which explores colonial violence in São Tomé e Príncipe through the story of the 1953 Batepá massacre, was completed in 2010.<sup>7</sup>

Undoubtedly, Fortunato is best known for *Comboio da Canhoca*, one of three narrative feature films released in 2004 in what has been described as the post-civil war “renaissance” of Angolan cinema.<sup>8</sup> Alongside Zézé Gamboa’s *O Herói* (2004) and Maria João Ganga’s *Na Cidade Vazia* (2004), the release of these films signalled the promise of a revitalized Angolan film industry after almost three decades of civil conflict, which came to an end in 2002, as well as the crisis that had beset national filming from the late 1980s until the early 2000s. For Abrantes, “a estreia quase simultânea desses três filmes nos primeiros anos do novo século assinalou uma radical mudança no panorama cinematográfico angolano”.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This film is not featured in the *Filmografia*, nor is it mentioned by José Mena Abrantes in his overview of Angolan cinema. Some sources include the film as part of Fortunato’s filmography (see ‘Orlando Fortunato de Oliveira’, African Film Festival New York, n.d., <<https://africanfilmny.org/directors/orlando-fortunato-de-oliveira/#:~:text=Orlando%20Fortunato%20de%20Oliveira%20was%20born>> [accessed 5 October 2024]). An additional film, entitled *San Pedro de Barra*, from 1985, is also mentioned here, and in the Portuguese Instituto do Cinema Audiovisual e Multimédia’s volume *Cinema Portugal 2004* (Lisbon, 2004). In an interview given by Orlando Fortunato, the director refers to “uma tentativa que fiz em 1978, a história é conhecida: “Um Caso Nosso” que julgo um dia terminar” (see Luanda, IACA, *Orlando Fortunato 1983 Entrevista*).

<sup>4</sup> The *Filmografia* states *Memória de um Dia* was released in 1984. However, Abrantes states the film was released in 1982 (see Abrantes, *O Cinema Angolano*, p. 13). Fortunato gave interviews about the completed film in 1983 (see Luanda, IACA, *Orlando Fortunato 1983 Entrevista*). I have chosen to use the earlier date here.

<sup>5</sup> I have not been able to access any of these films. The documentary *Agostinho Neto* has also been referred to as *Kilamba, o Poeta Guerrilheiro* (see Abrantes, ‘Cinema Angolano’, p. 29).

<sup>6</sup> Another film entitled *A Paz é Necessária*, released in 1994, is included in Fortunato’s filmography in the Portuguese volume *Cinema Portugal 2004* (Instituto do Cinema Audiovisual e Multimédia, 2004). I have not seen this film referenced anywhere else, nor have I been able to access it.

<sup>7</sup> I have not been able to access a full version of this film. The first section is available on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dg6rmVQ4lCo>.

<sup>8</sup> Arenas, ‘The Renaissance’, p. 205.

<sup>9</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p.44.

Beyond this, however, to what extent should these films be grouped? The three films are most often situated in the post-civil war context of their release date. The fact that each project began well before the mid-2000s, during the period termed by Abrantes as “o colapso”, is less frequently acknowledged. Arenas notes that the screenplay for *Na Cidade Vazia* – which is also an adaptation, based on Pepetela’s *As Aventuras de Ngunga* (1972) – was completed by the early 1990s. The making of *O Herói*, too, began in the mid-1990s, but the film took ten years to be completed. Both Ganga’s and Gamboa’s films were hindered due to a lack of funding and other challenges presented by the ongoing civil war.<sup>10</sup>

The origins of *Comboio da Canhoca* can be traced back even earlier. The project had certainly already been conceived by 1986; Abrantes’s 1986 edition of *O Cinema Angolano: Um Passado a Merecer Melhor Presente* mentions that Fortunato was already working on the film at the time of the volume’s publication.<sup>11</sup> Filming took place in Benguela, in the south of Angola, between 1988 and 1989.<sup>12</sup> The production and distribution of *Comboio da Canhoca*, however, was delayed for over a decade due to the challenging political and cinematic conditions of the 1990s.

Of the three films, Fortunato’s is the least accessible and has been the least discussed. This is partly because *Comboio da Canhoca* was only released in Angola, while the other films were released internationally. Subsequently, *O Herói* and *Na Cidade Vazia* were both released on

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<sup>10</sup> Marissa Moorman and Michael T. Martin, ‘Imagining Angola in Luanda with Ondjaki (Ndalú Almeida), *Black Camera*, 1:2 (2010), pp. 38-62 (p. 40), doi:10.2979/BLC.2010.1.2.38.

<sup>11</sup> Abrantes, *O Cinema Angolano*, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Abrantes and de Matos-Cruz, *Cinema em Angola*, p. 56.

DVD in the United States, and are comparatively much more widely available to view, particularly in Europe and North America. *Comboio da Canhoca*, on the other hand, was only released domestically on DVD in 2006, with relatively fewer copies remaining publicly accessible both within and outside Angola.<sup>13</sup> Both Ganga's and Gamboa's films have been met with international acclaim; *O Herói* won the Best Foreign Feature Award at Sundance Festival in 2005. Conversely, Abrantes considers Fortunato's film to be "o menos conseguido dos três em termos de realização e actuação".<sup>14</sup> Here, running alongside his critiques of the Angolan state, Abrantes's implicit equation of value and success with a film's status and reception on a world stage, and particularly within elite, Western film festival circuits, is perhaps rooted in an internationalist projectionism that has shaped the MPLA's self-image since its inception. This chapter seeks to interrogate this bias.<sup>15</sup>

There are further significant differences between *Comboio da Canhoca* and the two other feature films released in 2004. Both *O Herói* and *Na Cidade Vazia* are set after independence. The former's plot takes place after the end of the civil war. The latter is set in 1991, the year the Bicesse Peace Accords were signed in Lisbon by José Eduardo dos Santos and Jonas Savimbi, the leader of UNITA, promising a transition to multi-party democracy and the country's first democratic elections. Although the country returned to war shortly after

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<sup>13</sup> Arenas, 'The Renaissance', p. 212.

<sup>14</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> Abrantes references the Portuguese-Angolan filmmaker Jorge António's critique of the rise in amateur video production after the end of the civil war. Abrantes and António find fault with the low quality and small reach of these productions. The latter terms them "pseudo-filmes" and argues they are not representative of Angolan national cinema, nor are they of sufficient quality to be featured on international film festival circuits (see Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 51-52). Levin is more favourable towards these peripheral filmmakers, who have been referred to as "realizadores da poeira". She highlights the popularity of these films, made by young filmmakers with limited resources, noting that there are often long queues when they are screened in cinemas (see Levin, 'Dos Filmes dos Pioneiros', p. 87). António's assertion that films made by this circuit of filmmakers are not of sufficient quality to be screened on an international stage has been invalidated. Films by Henrique 'Dito' Narciso, for example, have been screened at the International Film Festival Rotterdam. See 'Henrique Narciso 'Dito'', International Film Festival Rotterdam, n.d. <<https://iffr.com/en/person/henrique-narciso-dito#:~:text=Skip%20to%20content%20About%20us;%20FAQ;%20Shopping>> [accessed on 6 October 2024].

elections were held in 1992, with UNITA claiming that the election had been rigged, the signing of the peace agreement represented “a moment of hope in the history of the twenty-seven-year-old armed conflict”.<sup>16</sup> Both films are deeply concerned with processes of rebuilding, reconciliation and national reconstruction after Angola’s decades-long civil war. Both also feature children as protagonists – the orphan Ndala in *Na Cidade Vazia*, and Manu in *O Herói* – who find themselves becoming part of unconventional family units which represent Angola’s national reunification.

Additionally, both films are set in Luanda, reflecting the reality of life for around a quarter of Angola’s population at that time, with many of the city’s inhabitants having been forced to move from rural areas as a result of the war.<sup>17</sup> The capital was the focal point of the MPLA government’s post-war programme of national redevelopment. For Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, after 2002, Luanda became “a mirror of the elite’s aspirations for the new Angola”, and “centre stage for the spectacle of reconstruction”.<sup>18</sup> However, as Soares de Oliveira goes on to explain, “the irony behind the showmanship of Luanda’s gaudy remake [...] lies in its utter neglect of foundations”.<sup>19</sup> Despite Luanda’s massive urban reinvention, the MPLA did little to improve the lives of the vast majority of the city’s inhabitants. In both *O Herói* and *Na Cidade Vazia*, Luanda’s extreme socio-economic inequality, as well as the enduring effects of war, are rendered visible through the directors’ representations of the city, as characters attempt to rebuild their lives against a backdrop of dilapidation and disparity. In this and other ways, both Ganga and Gamboa’s films speak directly and defiantly to the

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<sup>16</sup> Arenas, ‘The Renaissance’, p. 209.

<sup>17</sup> Tony Hodges, *Angola: Anatomy of an Oil State*, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*, p. 71.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

immediate context of their release, attempting to “expose the lack of responsibility on the part of the Angolan government in addressing urgent social issues”.<sup>20</sup>

*Comboio da Canhoca* focusses instead on Angola’s colonial history. The film reimagines a real event which took place in Malange in 1957, in which 59 Angolan men were rounded-up and arrested by Portuguese colonial authorities and abandoned in a train carriage.<sup>21</sup> Depicting Angolan resistance to colonial violence in the lead up to the armed liberation struggle, Fortunato’s film might initially appear to situate itself within an earlier revolutionary cinematic tradition that both Ganga and Gamboa’s films actively work to deconstruct in the aftermath of Angola’s civil conflict. The notion that *Comboio da Canhoca* does not quite so overtly speak to the post-civil war context of its release might also go some way towards explaining why the film has been so overlooked.

In this chapter, I offer an alternative reading of *Comboio da Canhoca*, positioning the film not in a post-2002 context, but against the backdrop of what Abrantes defines as “o colapso”. As I have noted, multiple sources indicate that *Comboio da Canhoca* was already filmed by the end of the 1980s, setting the film somewhat apart from the other 2004 releases with which it is ordinarily grouped.<sup>22</sup> By discussing the film in the context of its production date, I do not intend to gloss over the conditions that contributed to the film’s delayed release, or the impact these delays may have had on the final version of the film. I do not wish to suggest that Fortunato’s film is less effective or relevant in a post-civil war context. Rather, a

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<sup>20</sup> Fernando Arenas, *Lusophone Africa: Beyond Independence* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 152.

<sup>21</sup> *Cinema Portugal 2006*, ed. by ICAM Instituto do Cinema Audiovisual e Multimédia (2006), p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> Abrantes, ‘Cinema Angolano’, p. 29; Paula Faccini de Bastos Cruz, ‘Filme em debate: Ondjaki fala de sua obra Oxalá cresçam pitangas’, *História Oral*, 15:2 (2012), pp. 243-257 (p. 246).

reconsideration of *Comboio da Canhoca* as a product of the 1980s begins to reveal where Fortunato's film is far more subversive and significant than the dearth of existing scholarship around his work would imply. This reading opens up new ways of understanding the film in the context of both its initial production and its eventual release.

Considering the film in the context of the late 1980s also brings into clearer focus the proximity of *Comboio da Canhoca* to Fortunato's first fiction film, *Memória de um Dia* (1982). Like *Comboio da Canhoca*, *Memória de um Dia* is based on Angola's colonial past. Initially titled "Massacres de Icolo e Bengo", the film centres around events that took place in Icolo e Bengo on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1960, when peaceful demonstrators from Agostinho Neto's hometown were gunned down indiscriminately by Portuguese colonial authorities while protesting the future president's arrest.<sup>23</sup>

In this chapter, I also ask whether *Comboio da Canhoca* can be considered as a critical development of the ideas, forms and aesthetics found in *Memória de um Dia*. To an even greater extent than *Comboio da Canhoca*, *Memória de um Dia* has been almost entirely absent from discussions of Angolan cinema. Here, I suggest that the film is vitally important to understanding Fortunato's subsequent narrative feature film, as well as his trajectory and philosophy as a filmmaker.

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<sup>23</sup> Luanda, IACA, *Orlando Fortunato 1983 Entrevista*.

Fortunato is, fundamentally, a historical filmmaker.<sup>24</sup> Much of the director's career has been concerned with chronicling instances of Portuguese colonial violence, as well as resistance to Portuguese colonial rule, in Angola and other Lusophone African contexts. Abrantes claims that *Memória de um Dia* might just as accurately be titled "Memória de uma Época"; while it culminates in a recreation of the Icolo e Bengo massacre, the majority of the film's narrative is devoted to an exploration of the longer-term history of the region, documenting histories of colonial violence, oppression, exploitation and resistance in Luanda's hinterland from the 1500s up to the 1960s.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond documenting historical events and atrocities from the nation's colonial past, these two historical films also demonstrate a broader concern with history as a process, calling into question how dominant historical narratives are constructed, by whom, and to what ends. Most obviously, the films address these issues in a postcolonial context, countering and destabilising dominant colonial histories and narratives by telling African history from African perspectives. In post-independence Angola, Fortunato's engagement with history also takes on a specific and unavoidable political dimension. History, as Justin Pearce notes, is "a politically sensitive subject in Angola".<sup>26</sup> Since independence, as competing nationalist movements have struggled to assert their legitimacy, varying and conflicting interpretations and representations of Angola's history have emerged. Specifically, as Rothwell has explored, the nation's history has been "repeatedly recast" by the MPLA in order to justify and consolidate the party's grip on power.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Addamms Mututa, *Crisis Urbanism and Postcolonial African Cities in Postmillennial Cinema* (Routledge, 2021), p. 114.

<sup>25</sup> Abrantes, *O Cinema Angolano*, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Justin Pearce, *Political Identity and Conflict in Central Angola, 1975-2022* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. xi.

<sup>27</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 7.

In the years that followed independence, the MPLA would become increasingly preoccupied with controlling how the past was presented.<sup>28</sup> According to Vasco Martins, one of the party's primary goals after taking power "was to establish and disseminate its own narratives, which entailed the mnemonic removal of contenders in attempts to shape public memory about the liberation struggle".<sup>29</sup> The MPLA is particularly concerned with constructing historical narratives that position the party at the centre of anti-colonial activity in Angola, which mask its internal divisions, and which delegitimise its political opponents. The party's post-independence cinematic project, in which Fortunato had participated, was a central arm of this historical regulation, with state-produced films generally reaffirming the MPLA's revisionist historical narratives. Films that did not uphold the MPLA's version of Angolan history – such as Ole's *O Ritmo de N'Gola Ritmos* (1978), in which the director advanced "a perspective marginalised in the official history offered at that time" – were subjected to extensive censorship by the state.<sup>30</sup>

Through the 1980s, the rate of state-backed film production slowed and general disillusionment with the MPLA's post-independence project began to grow. In this context, Fortunato's films begin to diverge from official MPLA histories and established, party-influenced cinematic models of historical representation. In a 1983 interview with the IAC, Fortunato explicitly addresses his stance on historical filmmaking in respect to *Memória de um Dia*:

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<sup>28</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Vasco Martins, 'Hegemony, Resistance and Gradations of Memory: The Politics of Remembering Angola's Liberation Struggle', *History and Memory*, 33:2 (2022), pp. 80-106 (p. 81), doi:10.2979/histmemo.33.2.04.

<sup>30</sup> Moorman, 'Of Westerns, Women and War', p. 113.

A escolha do tema de “Memória de um Dia” surgiu como uma tentativa de lançar para a juventude um debate que estivesse ligado por um lado ao nosso passado histórico e cultural e por outro porque julgo que o assunto é muito importante e que naturalmente deve ser conhecido, discutido, analisado e compreendido pela Juventude. É um tema que é muito importante em conteúdo e que tem tendência a ser esquecido. São estas as razões fundamentais que me levaram a realizar o filme. Lançar, fora do binómio garina-bodó um novo tipo de diálogo mais amplo que estivesse ligado ao nosso passado, à nossa história.<sup>31</sup>

The director’s stated intention to open “um novo tipo de diálogo mais amplo” surrounding history is particularly charged in the context of the MPLA’s increasingly authoritarian and monolithic regime. Even if Fortunato does not explicitly reference the party’s representations of history, his classification of this dialogue as “new” suggests that his film intends to transgress an established order or norm, implying a divergence from the MPLA-mandated filmmaking practices which dominated post-independence Angolan cinema. The notion that this dialogue would be “fora do binómio” points to the party’s doctrine of moral absolutism and Manichean representations of history, which unambiguously positioned the MPLA as the “heroes” of Angola’s liberation struggle, and all others as enemies of the nation.

How do *Memória de um Dia* and *Comboio da Canhoca* open up these new forms of dialogue? I suggest that Fortunato’s historical films move beyond the monologic cinematic model established by the MPLA towards a more dialogic cinematic form. The films can be read as adaptations that engage in a dialogical, discursive practice of *historio-photy*, presenting the polyphonic historical reality of colonial resistance, nationalism and nation-

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<sup>31</sup> Luanda, IACA, *Orlando Fortunato 1983 Entrevista*.

building in Angola. At the level of content, aesthetics and form, the director's transformations and narrativizations of historical sources demonstrate anew the subversive political possibilities of adaptation in a post-independence Angolan context. The fictionalized retellings and re-imaginings of historical events that constitute Fortunato's films speak not only to Angola's colonial past, but also to the contexts in which the films were made.

Fortunato's films stand out in an Angolan cinematic landscape dominated by documentary film. According to the *Filmografia*, *Memória de um Dia* was one of only three fiction films released in Angola between 1975-1985.<sup>32</sup> The first, *Kiala Mukanga*, a short film directed by the "Equipa Ngenji", a directorial team made up of Henrique Ruivo Alves ("Ritz") and Manel Tomás Francisco ("Fininho"), was released in 1981.<sup>33</sup> The following year, Ruy Duarte de Carvalho released *Nelisita* (1982). I discuss this film in more detail in the next chapter. The last of the fiction films, also released in 1982, was *Memória de um Dia*.

Other sources suggest that the *Filmografia* does not provide a complete picture. In *O Cinema Angolano: Um Passado a Merecer Melhor Presente* (1986), Abrantes notes an earlier fiction film produced by Henrique Ruivo Alves, entitled *Luimbi*, from 1980, which he describes as "bem intencionado mas sem fôlego".<sup>34</sup> *Luimbi* is also included as part of Alves's filmography in his director's profile in the IACA archive, but the film is not mentioned in the *Filmografia*.<sup>35</sup> However, even considering this additional film, it is clear the production of narrative cinema in Angola in the decade following independence was minimal. After 1985,

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<sup>32</sup> Instituto Angolano de Cinema, *10 Anos Cinema Angolano*, p. 26.

<sup>33</sup> I have not been able to access this film.

<sup>34</sup> Abrantes, *O Cinema Angolano*, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> I have not been able to access *Luimbi* or any additional information about the film.

although the figures remained low, comparatively greater numbers of fictional films were produced in Angola as the production of state-backed documentary cinema began to decrease.

The classification of *Memória de um Dia* and *Comboio da Canhoca* as “fiction” films is not unproblematic. I expand on this through the next section of this chapter. However, as fictional historical adaptations, both films can be read as markers of a wider move away from documentary towards narrative cinema through the 1980s and beyond. Like Rebelo’s *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*, Fortunato’s films represent a departure from Angola’s earlier post-revolutionary cinematic tradition without entirely abandoning the documentary impulse. The films remain based in historical fact and demonstrate the director’s commitment to documenting the harrowing reality of Portuguese colonial rule in Angola. In doing this, the director’s adaptive interventions also deliberately and increasingly move towards a representation of Angolan history that allows for the co-presence of different perspectives, interpretations and debates, rather than seeking to communicate a single, unequivocal historical “truth” to the viewer.

### ***Memória de um Dia: Angola’s first historical adaptation?***

There is a wide scholarship surrounding historical cinema and historical adaptation, particularly around the issue of whether historical films should be considered adaptations. Some academic historians and historiographers have dismissed historical cinematic narratives on the basis that the visual medium cannot sufficiently capture the detailed content or

complexity of understanding contained in written historical accounts.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, it has been argued that historical narratives on screen do not reflect satisfactorily on the “nature and adequacy of history”, simply presenting events, rather than addressing questions about history as a discipline.<sup>37</sup>

Others are less sceptical. Thomas Leitch, for example, notes the fundamentally “adaptive nature of historiography”.<sup>38</sup> For the historian Robert A. Rosenstone, “the familiar, solid world of history on the page and the equally familiar but more ephemeral world of history on the screen are similar in at least two ways: they refer to actual events, moments, and movements from the past, and at the same time they partake of the unreal and the fictional, since both are made out of sets of conventions we have developed for talking about where we human beings have come from”.<sup>39</sup> Here, the historiographer’s written account of history is levelled with the *historio-photical* – that is, “the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse”.<sup>40</sup>

In Adaptation Studies, too, questions have been raised around whether the use of historical source material constitutes an adaptation. For Leitch, given that “non-narrative sources or adaptations, or both, have been the norm for most of human history”, favouring “a literary

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<sup>36</sup> See Robert A. Rosenstone, ‘History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History into Film’, *The American Historical Review*, 93:5 (1988), pp. 1173-1185, doi:10.1086/ahr/93.5.1173; Ian C. Jarvie, ‘Seeing through Movies’, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 8:4 (1978), pp. 374-397, doi:10.1177/004839317800800404.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Leitch, ‘Not Just the Facts: Adaptation, illustration, and history’, in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis R. Cutchins, Katja Krebs, and Eckart Voigts-Virchow (Routledge, 2017), pp. 67-79 (p. 70).

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Leitch, ‘History as Adaptation’, in *The Politics of Adaptation: Media Convergence and Ideology*, ed. by Dan Hassler-Forrest and Pascal Niklas (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 7-20 (p. 7).

<sup>39</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (Routledge, 2023), p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Hayden White, ‘Historiography and Historiophoty’, *The American Historical Review*, 93:5 (1988), pp. 1193-1199 (p. 1193), doi:10.1086/ahr/93.5.1193.

narrative-to-cinematic narrative model of adaptation is arbitrary and parochial”.<sup>41</sup>

Approaching the same question, Defne Ursin Tutan proposes a broader notion of *all* history as adaptation, arguing that “every version of history should be regarded as a rewriting, essentially an adaptation, since the historian adapts the material she or he has at hand into a pre-planned scheme to meet a certain end”.<sup>42</sup> She suggests that film is not a special case. Rather, “all historical representations are radically adaptive”, and “the ways in which these alternative representations are conceived and perceived tell us more about the present than about the past they refer to”.<sup>43</sup> The question is not whether (or which) historical films count as adaptations, but how and why a director makes specific adaptive interventions while creating their film from historical source materials. If all history is “adaptive”, and all historical films could be termed “adaptations”, clearly the nature, self-consciousness and intent of the practice of historical adaptation varies drastically.

In his exploration of postcolonial Anglophone historical literary fiction, Greg Forter suggests that while many works produced during the decolonization of former British colonies are clearly attuned to and interested in history, certain texts constitute a deeper, “fictional, anticolonial historiography”.<sup>44</sup> Examples of a “radically adaptive”, decolonial, fictional historiography can be identified in an Angolan literary context, too. In her analysis of the postcolonial Angolan novel, Dorothee Boulanger notes that while in other postcolonial contexts writers have often chosen to “write back” to Western literary works, “in Angola, this subverting of the European canon has taken place mostly through the rewriting of classical

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Leitch, ‘Post-Literary Adaptation’, *Post Script*, 23:3 (2004), pp. 99-117 (p. 99).

<sup>42</sup> Defne Ursin Tutan, ‘Adaptation and History’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas Leitch (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 576-586 (p. 576).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 577.

<sup>44</sup> Greg Forter, *Critique and Utopia in Postcolonial Historical Fiction: Atlantic and Other Worlds* (Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 1-2.

historical documents and archives, rather than novels and plays”.<sup>45</sup> Pepetela’s *A Gloriosa Família* (1992), for example, the product of years of archival research in Angola, Portugal and the Netherlands, takes as its subject the Dutch colonial occupation of Luanda in the 1640s. The novel follows the story of a fictional, wealthy Creole family, the Van Dums, told from the imagined perspective of an unnamed, mute slave. By choosing to centre a voice typically erased from history, as Margarida Calafate Ribeiro notes, Pepetela’s decolonial historical narrative demonstrates that “the Other does have their own story to tell, and they are quite capable of telling it”.<sup>46</sup> For Boulanger, Pepetela’s choice of narrator also allows the writer to highlight moments of anticolonial resistance and solidarity enacted by ordinary people, such as when the narrator helps a fellow slave, Dolores, and her child to escape.<sup>47</sup>

The muteness of Pepetela’s narrator draws attention to the silences, omissions and gaps of the colonial archive. His novel attempts to locate and recapture the voice of the enslaved subject, while simultaneously acknowledging the impossibility of this endeavour and foregrounding a self-awareness of his positionality as a white Angolan author engaging in this process of narrative invention. The possibilities and problematics of this speculative turn in historical narrative have been expounded by Saidiya Hartman in her conceptualisation of “critical fabulation”.<sup>48</sup> In repeatedly stressing the impossibility, failure and futility of attempts to restore voices excluded from history, Hartman suggests that the “productive tension” that arises through these narratives is most valuable for the way it illuminates the legacies of historical violence in the present.<sup>49</sup> Importantly, she reminds us, “narrating these counter-

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<sup>45</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 66.

<sup>46</sup> Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, ‘Literary Voices of Luanda and Maputo: A Struggle for the City’, *Journal of Lusophone Studies*, 1:1 (2016), pp. 88-106 (p. 104), doi:10.21471/jls.v1i1.37.

<sup>47</sup> Pepetela, *A Gloriosa Família* (Publicações Dom Quixote, 1997), p. 371.

<sup>48</sup> Saidiya Hartman, ‘Venus in Two Acts’, *Small Axe*, 12:2 (2008), pp. 1-14 (p. 11), doi:10.1215/-12-2-1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

histories of slavery” is “inseparable from writing a history of the present” and the “incomplete project of freedom”.<sup>50</sup>

In Angola, speculative historical writing thus also became a way of resisting and destabilising the MPLA’s nationalist narratives and revisionist histories. For Mata, the emergence of historical fiction about Angola’s more distant past, as seen in the case of Pepetela’s *A Gloriosa Família* and *Lueji: o nascimento de um império* (1990), can, in fact, be understood as a move away from the triumphant nationalism of earlier Angolan literary production.<sup>51</sup> As Boulanger explains, for writers such as Pepetela, writing about the nation’s early colonial history became “a way of exploring Angolan history in its multiplicity, its complexity, and embracing a plural perspective at odds with the Manichean history conveyed by the regime in Luanda”.<sup>52</sup> Rather than revisiting Angolan history to assert or affirm a certain ideology, Pepetela’s fiction attempts to illuminate and interrogate the varying histories making up the nation, and encourage a deeper consideration of the nature and reliability of history and historiography itself. Writing about the past was an easier and less risky way to critique the MPLA. As Boulanger notes, historical writing was “a safer way to write about power and the elite without directly targeting the regime, while seeking answers and explanations for widespread violence and authoritarianism”.<sup>53</sup>

Post-independence directors in Angola shared a deep concern with the nation’s colonial history. Many historical films were produced in Angola in the wake of independence,

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<sup>50</sup> Hartman, ‘Venus in Two Acts’, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Inocência Mata, ‘Narrando a nação: da retórica anticolonial à escrita da História’, in *Lendo Angola*, ed. Margarida Calafate Ribeiro and Laura Calvacante Padilha (Edições Afrontamento, 2008), p. 75.

<sup>52</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 66.

<sup>53</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 66.

focussing on key events from the struggle for independence and resistance against Portuguese colonial rule. However, where writers might have engaged in a process of “fictional, anticolonial historiography” or “critical fabulation”, most early post-independence filmmakers addressed colonial history through a documentary lens intended to foreground a rootedness in historical objectivity, truth and fact. As I have noted, some directors made deliberate aesthetic interventions that moved their historical documentaries away from a dominant mode of didactic militant filmmaking.<sup>54</sup> What is strikingly different and novel in Fortunato’s *Memória de um Dia* and *Comboio da Canhoca* – each of which clearly addresses the violent historical reality of Portuguese colonial rule, focussing particularly on the intensification of colonial oppression in Angola through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – are the ways in which the director engages in a “rewriting” of Angola’s colonial history through the use of a narrative plot and other fictionalised narrative components. As Hartman notes, this practice “jeopardize[s] the status of an event, to displace the received or authorized account” and question what can be said about the past.<sup>55</sup> In an Angolan context, and particularly in the context of the MPLA regime and state-funded national cinema, the effects of this “jeopardization” and the origin of the “authority” to which it responds must always be considered twofold.

In *Memória de um Dia*, Fortunato’s move towards narrative cinema is more tentative. In his interview with the IAC, Fortunato described the film as a “documentário de intervenção”, rather than as a work of fiction, marking a contrast with the film’s classification in the *Filmografia*.<sup>56</sup> The film employs a combination of fictionalised, scripted drama and

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<sup>54</sup> Moorman, ‘Of Westerns, Women and War’, p. 113.

<sup>55</sup> Hartman, ‘Venus in Two Acts’, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> Luanda, IACA, *Orlando Fortunato 1983 Entrevista*.

documentary techniques. For example, there are sections of the film in which events are relayed to the audience by a presenter, in a style more associated with non-fiction documentary. The director also includes interviews with real people, as well as archival footage and sound recordings. Fortunato's self-proclaimed "intervenção" is then found in the narrative elements, which include fictionalised re-imaginings of individuals and conversations, and dramatized reconstructions of the events leading up to the Icolo e Bengo massacre. These speculative interventions heighten and nuance the film's condemnation of colonial violence and historical erasure, demonstrating a fictional, anticolonial *historio-photy* that appears to be the first of its kind in post-independence Angola.

The dramatic reconstructions of slavery and forced labour in *Memória de um Dia* reveal the extreme verbal and physical violence suffered by Angolan colonial subjects in the region from the early twentieth century until the mid-twentieth century. These reconstructions are based on real historical places, facts and events. The film also references named historical figures; José Bernardo, for example, who is featured in the film, was a white Portuguese owner of cotton plantations in Angola in the early twentieth century.<sup>57</sup> Cut with documentary-style pieces to camera, which provide the viewer with additional details about the events shown, Fortunato's dramatized reconstructions underscore the nature and extent of the violence expounded through the film. In the opening scenes, for example, a white Portuguese officer is shown beating a woman who is being punished for trying to feed her sick baby. The sounds of his shouting, coupled with those of the baby and its mother crying, heighten the viewer's appreciation of the brutality of the regime. Another highly disturbing scene shows an Angolan worker as he is tortured by the Portuguese authorities, further revealing the

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<sup>57</sup> Ponte de Lima, Arquivo Municipal de Ponte de Lima, CNM\_00903, Letter from José Bernardo to Norton de Matos, pp.1-4 <pesquisa-archivo.cm-pontedelima.pt/descriptions/1020666> [accessed 4 October 2024].

extreme violence of the colonial regime. Here, the extended close-up shots of the man's face emphasise his tremendous pain (Fig. 2.1).

Fortunato also uses dramatized reconstructions to expose the structural violence exacted by the Portuguese colonial regime in Angola. In a later scene, an older man recounts to his wife that the landowner – Senhor Lagos – has ordered the peasant workers to clear the land on their own smallholdings to plant more cotton. The film goes on to explain, cutting to a documentary-style piece to camera, that this seizure of land, compounded with the ongoing drought, led to famine and starvation for the indentured workers in the region, who were no longer able to grow their own food or crops to support themselves.

Fortunato's reimagined reconstruction of these events makes visible the extent of the suffering experienced by the workers during this period of famine. Close-up shots of the woman, “a morrer à fome”, crying softly and leaning against the wall of the house, highlight her exhaustion and desperation. The scene is lit only by the open fire inside the dark room, creating a chiaroscuro which encourages the viewer to focus on the faces of the man and woman and invites empathy and identification with their plight. The dramatic shadows cast across their faces by the flickering light accentuate their pained expressions and a sense of the hardship they have endured (Fig. 2.2). The scene that directly follows this sequence is another reconstruction, taking place at the grand house belonging to “o Senhor Chefe”. Fortunato begins with a shot of water pouring from a bucket, zooming out to reveal a man watering the plants in the house's large garden. The shot establishes a contrast between the luscious garden, full of green plants and blossoming trees, and the dry, parched land beyond the walls, as well as the extreme disparity between the lives of the workers suffering due to

drought and famine, as seen in the previous scene, and the frivolous use of resources by the Portuguese. These fictionalised reconstructions thus further elucidate the nature of colonial oppression and violence in Angola.

The culmination of the film's narrative is the protest against the arrest of Agostinho Neto, resulting in the massacre of Icolo e Bengo, in which thirty workers were killed and around two hundred injured.<sup>58</sup> Again, Fortunato presents a dramatized reconstruction of these events. Large groups of men are shown joining together as they walk towards the colonial "posto" (Fig. 2.3). Guns are then pointed from the upper levels of the building, and the colonial authorities begin to shoot indiscriminately at the workers. Here, the director chooses to position the camera within the crowd (Fig. 2.4). When the shooting begins, we are part of the collective panic and fear; the camera is even knocked over in the chaos as the men begin to scatter and flee. In this way, Fortunato employs narrative techniques to demand an identification with the victims of colonial violence. In the final moments of the film, after the massacre has taken place, a hand-held camera is used for close-up shots of the deceased. The camera pans to each man killed, lingering for a few moments on each individual, ensuring that the audience concludes their experience of the film with a contemplation of the extreme violence and murder committed under Portuguese colonial rule.

After independence, representations of Angola's colonial past were rarely concerned solely with documenting and communicating the violence of Portuguese colonization. As I have noted, the "radically adaptive" historiography at the core of Angolan political discourse has been well documented, with competing nationalist movements advancing different versions

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<sup>58</sup> Fernando Martinho, 'The Poetry of Agostinho Neto', *World Literature Today*, 53:1 (1979), pp. 46-49 (p. 47).

of historical “truth” at various historical junctures to position themselves at the forefront of Angola’s liberation struggle. As Boulanger has pointed out, after the MPLA seized power in Luanda following independence in 1975, writers affiliated with the party – who made up the vast majority of writers in Angola – not only engaged in an anticolonial revisioning of the nation’s past, but were also implicitly expected to use their works to exercise “a careful control and, if necessary, a rewriting of recent history, to assert the exclusive legitimacy of the MPLA as nationalist movement and ruling party, masking its internal fractures and dissensions”.<sup>59</sup> The same expectations existed for early post-independence filmmakers, with early film production in Angola almost exclusively tied to state-run production companies. In this sense, many of the historical documentaries produced in Angola after independence were “adaptive”, serving as much to support the MPLA’s struggle for political power and cultural hegemony as to accurately document the historical realities of the anticolonial struggle.

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<sup>59</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 25.

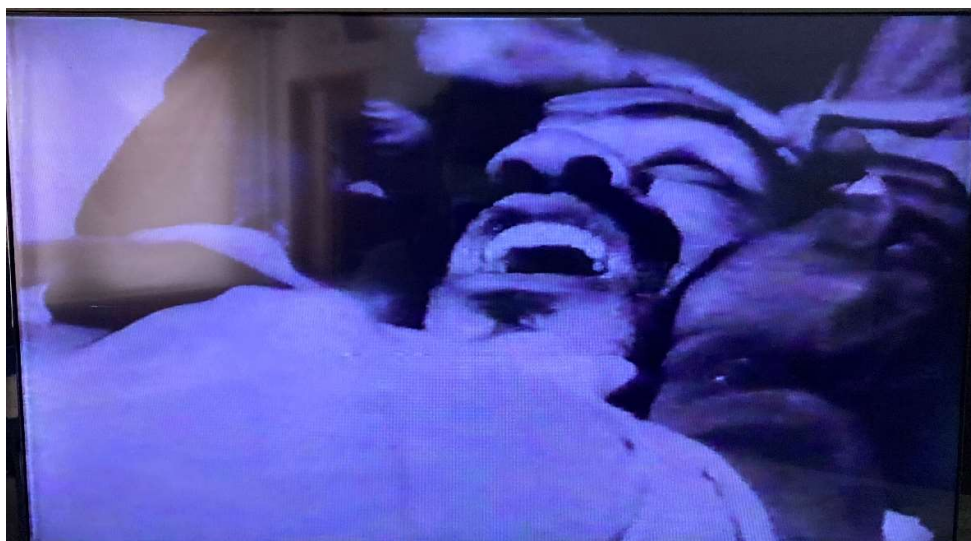


Fig. 2.1. *Memória de um Dia* (LNC, 1982), dir. Orlando Fortunato.



Fig. 2.2. *Memória de um Dia* (LNC, 1982), dir. Orlando Fortunato.

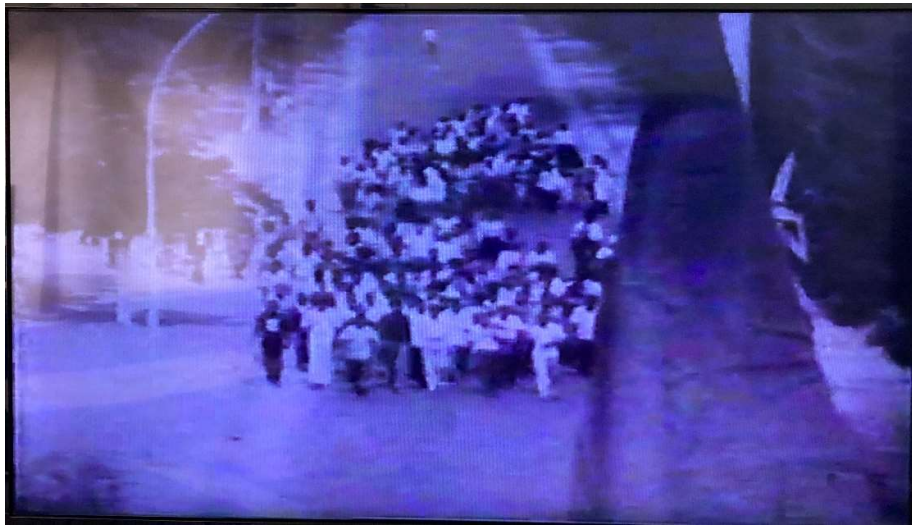


Fig. 2.3. *Memória de um Dia* (LNC, 1982), dir. Orlando Fortunato.



Fig. 2.4. *Memória de um Dia* (LNC, 1982), dir. Orlando Fortunato.

It is vital to consider not only how Orlando Fortunato's anticolonial historical adaptations address colonial narratives and histories, but also how they function in relation to the MPLA's nationalist project. His films can also be understood as an attempt to explore the variety of complex and plural histories making up Angola's past, beyond dualistic, binary perceptions of history – "fora do binómio" – established through official party narratives. As Pepetela does, Fortunato's films seek to open up dialogue and debate about Angola's history, allowing for the co-presence of differing and diverging perspectives, while also drawing attention to the constructedness of history as a narrative. In this way, the films move towards what might be considered a more dialogically open and radically adaptive practice of historical adaptation in the context of Angolan cinema.

This is not to say that the films, or their director, are unsupportive of the MPLA. *Memória de um Dia* is clearly aligned with the party. Through the film, Fortunato continues to employ many of the socialist realist-inflected aesthetics and techniques seen in previous post-independence historical cinema. At the same time, the director can also be read to depart from the more monologic, didactic model of earlier Angolan films, embracing a multiplicity of perspectives and voices and making adaptive interventions into the film's historical sources which interrogate and destabilise dominant MPLA nationalist and historical narratives.

The events that form the historical basis for *Memória de um Dia* are striking in this regard. Many of the MPLA's foundational narratives hinge on its self-positioning as the nation's sole actor of anticolonial and imperial resistance.<sup>60</sup> Opposing political movements – UNITA and the FNLA – have been repeatedly presented as imperial actors, acting in the interests of neo-

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<sup>60</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 8.

colonial forces such as the United States. Overstating its centrality to the anticolonial struggle, the MPLA advances an adapted version of Angolan history which conveniently positions the party as the only legitimate rulers and protectors of the nation. The Icolo e Bengo massacre of 1960 preceded what many - including the MPLA - officially consider the first confrontation of the war for independence, when Angolan nationalists attacked the São Paulo prison in Luanda on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1961. This claim is contested; others argue that the war originated with an outbreak of violence which took place one month earlier, in January 1961, when famine-stricken peasant cotton farmers from the Malange district in Luanda's interior hinterland revolted and burnt down warehouses containing the following year's seed crop. The uprising resulted in the massacre of several thousand Angolans by the colonial regime.<sup>61</sup>

The MPLA claims responsibility for the 4<sup>th</sup> February Luanda revolt, asserting that it was the movement that led Angola's anticolonial struggle from the outset. Since taking power, the party has commemorated this date through the naming of public spaces and official government communications. The date was enshrined in Angola's national anthem, written by Manuel Rui Monteiro, then Minister for Information in the MPLA's first government, after independence in 1975.<sup>62</sup>

Undoubtedly, the 1961 Luanda insurrections sparked the war of independence and were the catalyst in both the MPLA and the UPA's mobilisation to arms.<sup>63</sup> However, as David

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<sup>61</sup> David Birmingham, *A Short History of Modern Angola* (Hurst & Company, 2015), p. 70.

<sup>62</sup> Venceslau Mateus, 'Hino nacional escrito e musicado em dois dias e sob muita pressão – escritor Manuel Rui', *Portal de Angola*, 3 July 2015 <<https://www.portaldeangola.com/hino-nacional-escrito-e-musicado-em-dois-dias-e-sob-muita-pressao-escritor-manuel-rui/#:~:text=O%20escritor%20angolano%20Manuel%20Rui%20aborda,>> [accessed 4 October 2024].

<sup>63</sup> Newitt, 'Angola in Historical Context', p. 78.

Birmingham has noted, in the case of the February uprising in Luanda, it is most likely “that the protest and the ensuing massacre were spontaneously sparked off by young local hotheads”, rather than being a considered and strategic action coordinated by the MPLA leadership.<sup>64</sup> In Newitt’s words, “the MPLA barely existed at the time of the 1961 uprising”.<sup>65</sup> In this way, the party’s insistence on its involvement with the Luanda uprisings demonstrates the ways in which histories and narratives of anticolonial resistance have been instrumentalised by the party to maintain power for nearly fifty years.

The repeated omission of the Malange peasant uprisings from the MPLA’s official narratives also reveals a “contempt” for popular resistance within the upper echelons of the party.<sup>66</sup> After adopting Marxist-Leninism as the official party ideology in 1977, the MPLA’s decidedly urban, elite leadership established itself as a political vanguard of intellectuals, who would guide the Angolan masses through revolution, emancipation and the construction of a new socialist state. Early post-independence films followed this model. Leonel Efe’s *Reconstrução Nacional na Agricultura* (1982), for example, focusses on rural agricultural workers. Crucially, however, “o povo” are not self-directed. Rather, the film shows how the workers are always guided, educated and led by the MPLA’s vanguard leadership, whose presence is felt constantly through footage of state-led educational initiatives, or personal appearances by MPLA politicians who work in the fields alongside farmers for the cameras. In these cinematic narratives, Angola’s successful liberation and post-independence development becomes inconceivable without the party, which is positioned as central to the very notion of Angolanness itself.

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<sup>64</sup> Birmingham, *A Short History*, p. 71.

<sup>65</sup> Newitt, ‘Angola in Historical Context’, p. 74.

<sup>66</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 127.

*Memória de um Dia* does not feature the Luanda uprisings of the 4<sup>th</sup> February, nor does it deal with the Malange uprisings of January 1961. The film ends abruptly with the 1960 Icolo e Bengo massacre. It might be suggested that Fortunato's film positions the 1960 protest against Agostinho Neto's arrest as the culmination of local resistance to Portuguese colonial rule in this region. Viewed in this way, the popular resistance seen through the film retains a connection to the MPLA, in line with previous early post-independence Angolan films. The nexus of organised anticolonial resistance in the region is Neto himself. However, while this may be the version of history that the director sought to present, it is hard to overlook the similarities between the social conditions of the workers depicted through the film and those which led to the January 1961 uprisings. Equally, the film's glaring omission of subsequent events, which developed out of the same colonial exploitation and violence towards indentured labourers on Angola's cotton plantations, is perhaps less a question of aligning with official MPLA narratives, and more to do with censorship or self-censorship. It is possible that focussing on the massacre of 1960, which is less controversial and more readily accepted into MPLA narratives than subsequent peasant revolts, was a way for the director to nod to the later uprisings without explicitly wading into territory that might have jeopardised the realisation of his film.

In either case, the film's focus on marginalised histories and memories of popular anticolonial resistance is significant, representing a divergence from official MPLA narratives and allowing space for the viewer to consider the complex and manifold origins of anticolonial activity in Angola. Through *Memória de um Dia*, Fortunato combines both documentary and narrative components to expound the nature of popular, peasant resistance in the region

through the twentieth century. The film shows how ordinary workers repeatedly attempted to organise and resist colonial oppression in a self-directed, collective fashion, protesting in the sanzalas and hiring lawyers to challenge unfair working conditions.

The director stages secretive conversations and interactions that sowed the seeds for popular uprising and revolt. These reinventions reveal a more nuanced view of individual resistance to the colonial regime, implying that even these side-lined resistance movements were not homogeneous. During the scene of the husband and wife, for example, who discuss the seizure of their land for the cotton plantation, Fortunato's dialogue reveals both the determination of the wife to resist the colonial dispossession – despite her evident exhaustion, she states decisively that they must not accept – and the unwillingness of her husband to complain – “E agora onde é que nós podemos queixar? O Senhor Lagos é branco, o Administrador também é branco”. Despite their differing positions, there is no moralising lens applied to this scene. The husband is not presented as a bad revolutionary, nor can any “contempt” be detected towards his wife. Rather, the identification encouraged with both characters, by the use of lighting and close-up shots, suggests the director's attempt to create space for a variety of different experiences and perspectives to co-exist within his film.

The popular resistance depicted through the film is framed within a Marxist interpretation of history, which contains these moments of self-directed opposition to colonial oppression within a historical process of dialectical materialism that inevitably leads to revolution and eventual communist utopia. The opening sequence of *Memória de um Dia* features a series of images and short clips, including colonial photographs and paintings depicting slavery in the Atlantic world. Fortunato chooses to highlight instances of violence within these images,

zooming in on aspects of the artworks which clearly depict the physical violence experienced by colonial and enslaved subjects, such as enslaved black Africans being taken prisoner or thrown from slave ships. These images are overlaid with video footage; close-up shots of soldiers' boots marching in formation, and scenes of war and conflict. This montage exposes the *longue durée* of Angola's colonial history, demonstrating how the violence of capitalist world-systems and the exploitation of the labour of colonial subjects led to the armed struggle against imperialism. Accompanying the images is a voiceover track which narrates the violence depicted in recognisably revolutionary terms, referring repeatedly to "o nosso povo, o nosso povo".<sup>67</sup>

The opening sequence immediately appears to insert *Memória de um Dia* into a tradition of revolutionary, militant filmmaking, framing the entirety of the film's action in terms of the MPLA's ideological conception of historical progress. However, as the film's action begins, this sequence is followed directly by a shot of a man urinating on the ground. The camera pans up from the stream of urine hitting the dusty earth to reveal an old man, "o velho Kimbinga", the central narrator of the film. The choice to introduce this character while he is urinating is striking. Is the scene intended to be humorous and light-hearted, or derisive and contemptuous? Is this derision directed towards the colonial violence exposed through the film? Does the figure of Kimbinga – urinating or otherwise – mark a moment of rupture and separation between the film's action and the blatantly ideological and didactic form advanced through the opening sequence? Does the film do both?

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<sup>67</sup> The sound quality was low on the copy of the film I was able to access. It was challenging to decipher parts of the voiceover.

Here, we might consider the potential formative influence of Senegalese cinema on Fortunato's work. In the two decades that followed its independence from French colonial rule in 1960, Senegal was the "epicentre" of African filmmaking.<sup>68</sup> It was during this period, between the late 1960s and early 1970s, that Fortunato worked in Senegal alongside the celebrated directors Mahama Johnson Traoré and Djibril Diop Mambéty. I return to the possible influence of the latter in my discussion of *Comboio da Canhoca*.

In this context, it is hard to imagine that Fortunato would not have also encountered or been influenced in some way by one of the most important and influential figures in African cinema, Ousmane Sembène. Heralded as the "father" of African film, Sembène, like many of Angola's pioneering filmmakers, considered cinema a means of political action.<sup>69</sup> An acclaimed author, Sembène grew increasingly frustrated that low literacy rates in Senegal meant that his written work did not reach a wide audience. Cinema, on the other hand, was not restricted to an educated elite; it was, in the director's words, the people's night school.<sup>70</sup> In the 1960s, Sembène, a proponent of Marxist-Leninism, began to create revolutionary, militant and uniquely African films which were intended to educate and politicise his fellow countrymen, employing a social realist aesthetic to expose the societal and systemic issues faced during Senegal's ongoing struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism. Beyond entertainment and enjoyment, his narrative films attempted to communicate an ideological message to Senegalese audiences. They were, according to the director, "at the same time spectacular and didactic".<sup>71</sup> The move towards an ideologically committed narrative cinema

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<sup>68</sup> Claire Andrade-Watkins, 'Film Production in Francophone Africa 1961 to 1977: Ousmane Sembène -- An Exception', *Contributions in Black Studies*, 11 (1993), pp. 26-32 (p. 30).

<sup>69</sup> David Murphy, *Sembène: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction* (James Currey, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Murphy, *Sembène*, p. 70.

<sup>71</sup> Harold Weaver, "Film-makers Have a Great Responsibility to our People", *Cinéaste*, 16:1 (1973), pp. 26-31 (p. 27).

exemplified through *Memória de um Dia* perhaps draws on Sembène's simultaneously innovative and didactic narrative style.

To what extent can the Sembènian features of *Memória de um Dia* then be read to align with a dialogical process of historical adaptation? Sembène's films are often characterised as highly ideological, militant, Marxist films, which function as a political "call to action".<sup>72</sup> For Jonathon Repinecz, however, despite a clear ideological orientation and appeals for political mobilization, Sembène's cinema does not attempt to communicate a single, monologic meaning or "truth" to the viewer. Rather, he argues that Sembène's films work self-consciously and explicitly to "thematize their own fictionality", repeatedly drawing attention to the constructedness of the ideological message in order to encourage the audience to reflect on and engage in dialogue with the various narrative components.<sup>73</sup> In this way, Repinecz claims, Sembène's works "move in two directions at once: they strive to maintain a certain militant force that might be called committed, ideological or social realist, but at the same time, they encourage the audience to question the very possibility of receiving an ideological or authoritarian message in a monologic way".<sup>74</sup> The director himself noted that "a film is only useful if it allows debates between spectators after it".<sup>75</sup>

This dialogically oriented duality can also be identified through *Memória de um Dia*.

Fortunato's film does, in many ways, clearly and intentionally align with the militant,

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<sup>72</sup> Sheila Petty, *A Call to Action: The Films of Ousmane Sembène* (Greenwood Press, 1993).

<sup>73</sup> Jonathon Repinecz, "'This is not a Pipe'?: Reflexivity, fictionality and dialogism in Sembène's films', *Journal of African Cinemas*, 8:2 (2016), pp. 181-197 (p. 183), doi:10.1386/jac.8.2.181\_1.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>75</sup> Guy Hennebelle, 'Ousmane Sembène: For me, the Cinema is an Instrument of Political Action, But...', in *Ousmane Sembène: Interviews*, ed. by Annett Busch and Max Annas (University of Mississippi Press, 2008), pp. 7-17 (p. 7).

socialist realist-informed filmmaking that characterised early post-independence Angolan cinema. The opening sequence is an obvious example of this. However, through the film, Fortunato also makes self-reflexive interventions which invite various dialogical possibilities and responses to his work. The choice to open the film's action with a shot of Kimbinga urinating, for example, establishes an additional montage which self-consciously draws attention to the constructedness of the film's opening sequence. The urination is not explained, nor does it appear to add to the plot in any way. The film's action simply moves on, and it is left up to the viewer to interpret its significance and consider the nature of its possible relation to the preceding images. As a result of this, the images included in the opening sequence are no longer "bonded to a single ideological meaning" but contain "enough ambiguity to encourage multiple readings".<sup>76</sup> Allowing for this Sembènian "interpretive openness" at the very beginning of his film, Fortunato invites his audience to dialogue with his film, encouraging an active engagement with, rather than passive consumption of, the ideological message contained.<sup>77</sup>

Our introduction to Kimbinga also immediately establishes the fictionality of Fortunato's film, calling into question his reliability as a narrator and the reliability of historical narratives more broadly. Through the film's opening scenes, we learn that Kimbinga occupies a hybrid role, somewhere between the dramatized action and the documentary segments which appear through Fortunato's film. Although based on a real person, he forms part of Fortunato's dramatized reimagining of life under the colonial regime.<sup>78</sup> He interacts directly with the other characters and is referenced by other characters when he is not present. Despite

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<sup>76</sup> Flanagan, *Bakhtin and the Movies*, p. 19.

<sup>77</sup> Repinecz, "'This is not a Pipe'?", p. 182.

<sup>78</sup> Luanda, IACA, *Orlando Fortunato 1983 Entrevista*.

this, he is also often presented at a critical distance from the action, watching events from afar, or at a midway point between spectator and actor. Kimbinga also communicates directly with the audience. In the film's opening scene, he tells the viewer that he occupies a unique position due to his age. He can no longer be put to work or exploited by the Portuguese, and so they no longer bother him. Kimbinga's ability to wander through scenes with apparently no interference from the colonial authorities is confirmed during a scene in which he walks in the path of a guard post, in full view of an armed Portuguese colonial officer, and simply waves to the camera, which is positioned just behind the guard's shoulder. Unlike the documentary presenters, who appear later in the film, Kimbinga presents information anecdotally, introducing events with phrases such as "ouviu-se mais tarde dizer que...". Conversing with an older woman as he passes through a village, he admits he has been unwell, "não tenho passado muito bem, há tanto tempo", to which the woman replies, "julgava-te doente". This, along with his advanced age, sets up a contrast between Kimbinga and the film's other narrators, casting further doubt upon his narrative, and calling into question not only his construction and presentation of historical narratives and truths, but the constructedness of all historical narratives.

Fortunato's self-reflexive interrogation of the nature and construction of historical narratives again warrants comparison with the historical novels of Pepetela. For Rothwell, *A Gloriosa Família* is self-consciously "about the nature of history as a discipline".<sup>79</sup> Like Fortunato, Pepetela draws attention to the possible biases and unreliability of his unnamed narrator, who claims to be an impartial observer but repeatedly allows his emotions to affect his narrative and more than once interferes directly in the events he relays to the reader. Additionally, at

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<sup>79</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 96.

the beginning of all but the final two chapters of the novel, *Pepetela* includes real historical sources as epigraphs. Mata suggests that the presence of these epigraphs draws attention to the presence of multiple historical authors within the orbit of the text – including *Pepetela* himself, who tampers with these sources – inviting a reflection on the radical adaptiveness and constructedness of historiography that can easily be read in relation to the MPLA’s instrumentalization and manipulation of history.<sup>80</sup> In *Memória de um Dia*, Fortunato’s cast of historical authors – Kimbinga and the various other presenters and narrators, who feature both on-screen and in the film’s voiceover – self-reflexively thematises the film’s own status as a historical adaptation, further encouraging the audience to think about the factitiousness of historical narratives in an Angolan context.

Beyond this, Fortunato’s choice of multiple narrators also allows for multiple temporalities to exist within his film. Unlike the documentary-style presenters, who do not occupy a fictional role, the fictionalised Kimbinga is a wandering, time-travelling storyteller, “um personagem inter-temporal; um indivíduo que vive, viveu e vai continuar a viver”.<sup>81</sup> In this way, the character of Kimbinga unsettles the linear temporality established in the film’s opening sequence, presenting an alternative to both the revolutionary Marxist faith in linear historical progress, and, more broadly, Western notions of linear time. What is crucial here, however, is that both co-exist with Fortunato’s film, leaving *Memória de um Dia* dialogically open to multiple perspectives, ideologies and interpretations.

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<sup>80</sup> Inocência Mata, *Ficção e história na literatura angolana: o caso de Pepetela* (Colibri, 2010), p. 175.

<sup>81</sup> Luanda, IACA, *Orlando Fortunato 1983 Entrevista*.

Much of the film's dialogue is not in Portuguese. Kimbinga does not speak in Portuguese, nor do most of the fictionalised characters, besides the Portuguese colonial officials. Fortunato's choice to allow his characters to speak in their mother tongue dislocates and decentres the colonial language, addressing another form of violence and domination enacted upon Portugal's colonial subjects. Again, here, it is perhaps worth noting the potential influence of Senegalese cinema. Around the time that Fortunato was present in Senegal, Sembène produced his first Wolof-language film, *Mandabi* (1968). Sembène's films increasingly favoured Wolof over the French language, as the director sought to speak to the masses "in an intimate, transformative way".<sup>82</sup>

Beyond this, Fortunato's multilingualism also presents a challenge to the MPLA ideology that places the Portuguese language at the centre of its conception of Angolan unity and national identity. As Soares de Oliveira notes, the national identity promoted by the MPLA conceives of Angola "first and foremost as the historical product of Portuguese imperialism", acknowledging that the country has no pre-colonial unity and seeing "the experience of Portuguese rule and the Portuguese language as the common threads of an otherwise immensely diverse patchwork of cultures".<sup>83</sup> By locating anti-colonial resistance outside of the colonizer's language and a "unifying" experience of Portuguese colonialism, *Memória de um Dia* further interrogates the party's ideologically driven, revisionist historical narratives. In doing this, however, the film does not appear to create an oppositional relationship between Portuguese and native Angolan languages. Rather, Fortunato leaves his film open to a multiplicity of voices, with the film's other presenter and narrators speaking in Portuguese.

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<sup>82</sup> Akin Adesokan, 'The Significance of Ousmane Sembène', *World Literature Today*, 82:1 (2008), pp. 37-39 (p. 37).

<sup>83</sup> Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*, p. 18.

There is scope for further examination of the dialogue between Fortunato's and Sembène's films, as well as where Senegalese cinema intersects more broadly with Angola's post-independence filmmaking. Sada Niang, for example, remarks on the prevalence of adaptation in Senegalese cinema, noting Sembène, as well as Mambéty and Traoré, as directors who engage in adaptive processes of "appropriation, re-interpretation, refocusing and 're-outillage'". As a historical adaptation, *Memória de um Dia* is firmly committed to an anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggle dating back hundreds of years into Angola's history. At its heart, Fortunato's film seeks to refocus colonial historical narratives, exposing the extreme violence of Portuguese colonial rule in the Icolo e Bengo region, and offering a history of collective, popular, anticolonial resistance in this part of Angola. Moving beyond the historical documentary towards a more "radically adaptive", hybrid form, combining fictional and documentary components, Fortunato also begins to depart from the strictly monologic, ideological constraints of early post-independence Angola cinema, making self-reflexive interventions that reach towards a more dialogically open cinematic form. It is in this sense that Fortunato's first feature film sets the scene for his next project, *Comboio da Canhoca*.

### ***Comboio da Canhoca*: Legacies of violence**

Fortunato's narrativization of Angolan colonial history in *Comboio da Canhoca* can be read as a critical development of the techniques initiated with *Memória de um Dia*, which had been released just a few years prior to the conception of Gamboa's second feature-length film. Here, I suggest that *Comboio da Canhoca* develops the dialogical and narrative elements of *Memória de um Dia* through a range of adaptive interventions into its historical

sources, which expose the nature of Portuguese colonialism in Angola and register a growing sense of disillusionment with the MPLA's post-independence nationalist project.<sup>84</sup> How is *Comboio da Canhoca* constructed in relation to Angola's colonial history, and how does it address the MPLA's revisionist histories and the national civil conflict, ongoing at the time of the film's production?

Like *Memória de um Dia*, *Comboio da Canhoca* is firmly situated within Angola's colonial past, reconstructing a series of real events that took place in Malange in 1957. The film is another example of "radically adaptive" *historio-photy*, dramatically reimagining the conditions experienced by a group of Angolan men imprisoned and abandoned in a train carriage by the Portuguese colonial authorities. The film clearly seeks to expose the brutality and violence of Portuguese colonial rule in Angola and trace moments of resistance to the regime. There are also considerable differences between *Comboio da Canhoca* and *Memória de um Dia*. *Comboio da Canhoca* is, undoubtedly, a narrative film in its entirety, and does not feature any of the documentary elements discussed in the previous section. *Comboio da Canhoca* was also internationally co-produced by production companies from Angola, Portugal and France.

The film's action begins in the house of a Portuguese corporal, Marques, who is stationed in Angola. He and his wife, Senhora Marques, are entertaining his superior, Colonel Airoso, and his wife. As the couples discuss the latest happenings in the colony over coffee and whiskey,

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<sup>84</sup> The absence of these sources is indicative and characteristic of the violence and erasure of the colonial archive. The events upon which the film is based are referenced in the additional features of the *Comboio da Canhoca* DVD. The synopsis of the film included in the DVD extras states that 59 men were trapped in the train carriage in Malange for a period of five days in March 1957. Beyond this, I have not found any additional details about this event.

the scene becomes increasingly tense. Senhora Airosa makes no effort to hide her disgust at the coffee served to her by Senhora Marques, and fans herself constantly in the stifling sitting room (Fig. 2.5). The sound of a dog barking, which grows louder and louder, can be heard from outside the house. When Marques's wife attempts to alleviate the tension with a light-hearted comment about the dog, a visibly annoyed Senhora Airosa replies with a cutting remark: "Animais domésticos? Só os que servem para a panela". Although the corporal and the colonel appear assured and optimistic about Portugal's successes in Angola, the mounting tension in the scene foreshadows the impending war of independence, intimating that these are the dying days of the Portuguese empire.

As the couples talk, a male domestic servant clears the dinner table in the adjoining room. The group barely registers his presence, and initially he is relegated to the background of the scene, slightly blurred and positioned behind the corporal, in a formation that visually recreates the hierarchies and dynamics of colonial power. Even in the background of the shot, however, the man's furtive upward glances capture the audience's attention, heightening the prevailing sense of tension through the scene by indicating that he is clearly listening to a conversation about defending "a pátria" from "os indígenas". Fleeting, his gaze appears to connect almost directly with the spectator's, creating moments of complicity, collusion and conspiratorial connection with the audience, which deepen the irony and tension of the scene (Fig. 2.6). The perspective then shifts; the camera is positioned on the other side of the dining table, so that the spectator looks into the room where the group is sitting (Fig. 2.7). While the man remains slightly blurred and out of focus, as he enters and re-enters the room, his body creates moments of blocking which occasionally obscure the group in the sitting room, relegating the Portuguese figures to the background and further foregrounding a sense of

inevitable and imminent change. The opening scene thus immediately establishes Fortunato's concern with dismantling colonial history and narratives to tell the other side of the story.



Fig. 2.5. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.



Fig. 2.6. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.



Fig. 2.7. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.

Leaving his employer's house, the man goes to meet his friend at a bar. Here, it is revealed that the pair are part of the growing movement of clandestine anticolonial resistance. Having just overheard the information from his employer, the man informs his friend about the formation of a new branch of PIDE in Angola. As they discuss their fears about not knowing who they can trust during this moment of burgeoning nationalist, anticolonial political activity, they recall an incident in which a group of Angolan men were taken prisoner and deserted in a train carriage at Canhoca station. After a young Angolan man, Njololo, attacked a white Portuguese officer, Cabo Faria, for raping his wife, the Portuguese colonial authorities organised a raid to avenge the suffering and humiliation caused to their colleague, rounding up men "de influência e prestígio no meios social angolano".<sup>85</sup> These men were due to be taken to Luanda, but the carriage was abandoned and did not make it to the capital. An extreme close-up shot of the man's face, who states "dá medo, é terror", foregrounds the sheer horror of the incident. The second man admits he "trembles" at the thought of what happened to those men.

As in the opening sequence of *Memória de um Dia*, these opening scenes reiterate the violence and brutality of the Portuguese colonial regime. The inclusion of the fictional men in the bar confirms the director's continued focus on popular anticolonial resistance in *Comboio da Canhoca*. The frame narrative established through the opening scenes informs our reading of the historical events in these terms. The pair's exchange also highlights both the challenges of excavating marginalised memories and histories of colonial violence, and the enduring violence, pain and terror of these memories.

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<sup>85</sup> *Comboio da Canhoca*, dir. by Orlando Fortunato (2005) [on DVD].

The reconstruction of the events of 1957 begins with the man's final words; "eles são terroristas". The screen fades to black, and the viewer is transported back to the night of the raid. It is nighttime, in a railway yard, and it is pouring with rain. Again, as in *Memória de um Dia*, the scene depicts the extreme violence of the Portuguese colonial authorities as they direct the men into the train carriage. An unconscious man, covered in blood, is pulled from the back of a truck with an audible thud, before being dragged through the mud towards the carriage. The rapid cuts, which switch between different shots and camera angles amid a cacophony of noise – the sounds of rain and thunder, shouting, slamming car doors, trains – plunge the viewer into the chaos and commotion of the scene. The darkness and lashing rain require the audience to strain to make out the action, adding to the sense of panic and disorientation created by the director.

Close-up shots of faces also clearly depict the fear of the men being arrested, intensifying the experience of the violence. One man, who is extremely distressed, is berated by a white Portuguese officer (Fig 2.8). The close-up shot reverse-shot sequence shows both the terror of the prisoner – who visibly shakes and stammers – and the brutality of the Portuguese officer, who takes the man's documents, a photo of his family and his glasses, before trampling everything into the dirt and forcing the man into the carriage (Fig. 2.9). The nature of this humiliation and the personal objects removed from the man reveal the nature of colonial violence, as the colonial subject is stripped of their dignity, humanity, community and identity.



Fig. 2.8. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.



Fig. 2.9. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterranée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.

At the end of this scene, the focus turns to two *assimilados*, who stand calmly to the side, believing they are safe from arrest. The men explain to the officers that they have the right documents, that they are, in fact, Portuguese – a myth at the centre of the regime’s assimilation policy, in which those granted *assimilado* status through the model of colonial citizenship imposed by the Estado Novo remained second-class citizens. They are not spared and are forced into the carriage.

Inside the carriage, the men are packed tightly together in the cramped space. During the day, a small grate lets in some sunlight, while at night the carriage is completely dark. The temperature inside the carriage is unbearably high; the men are all visibly perspiring, and gradually remove more and more of their clothing. Extended close-up shots of their faces, dripping with sweat, reveal the intensity and relentlessness of the heat, while cutaway shots to the outside of the carriage show the harshness of the sun through a visible heat shimmer across the screen. The men have nothing to eat or drink and nowhere to urinate. The suffering experienced in these undignified and intolerable conditions further emphasises the cruelty and violence of Portuguese colonialism. The bloodied, beaten man, who lies unconscious in the centre of the group, and eventually dies from his injuries, appears in many of the shots inside the carriage, serving as a recurring reminder of the extreme physical violence enacted by the colonial authorities (Fig. 2.10).



Fig. 2.10. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.

Inside the carriage, the men discuss the incident which led to their imprisonment and abandonment inside the carriage. The rape of Njololo's wife is depicted through a dramatized flashback scene. The scene begins suddenly; the woman sits on her bed, screaming and crying, her dress ripped open to reveal her breasts. The camera cuts to the doorway, where Cabo Faria stands, staring hatefully and unrepentantly at the woman before leaving without a word. Three young children run into the room, also crying. It is clear they have heard the violence suffered by their mother.

Upon discovering the rape of his wife, we learn that Njololo "perdeu a cabeça". The subsequent flashback scene shows him confronting the officer, who we learn was hospitalised after their altercation. Here, the film reveals sexual violence as another facet of Portuguese colonial brutality. By using the flashback scene, rather than simply the men's description of the event, Fortunato intensifies the viewer's experience of this brutality. The brightness of these scenes, which take place in broad daylight, and the volume of the woman's cries create a jarring contrast with the quiet darkness of the carriage. The jolt created by the sudden cut to the flashback might be seen to mirror the violence depicted.

At the same time, however, little agency is afforded to the victim of the rape; she barely speaks, men tower over her in every shot, and her story is told for her by the men in the carriage. As Rothwell has noted, in the case of Pepetela's first novel *Mayombe* (1980), which tells the story of revolutionary Angolan fighters in the Mayombe forest during Angola's war of independence, the ideological transformation of the men in the novel is enacted narratively through the rape of the female character Ondina. Her body "becomes the material over which

a new social contract is delineated by the New Men of Angola”.<sup>86</sup> In a similar process, by debating the rape of Njololo’s wife from inside the carriage, Fortunato’s cast not only thrash out their differing moral and ideological positions, but also restage and reproduce the sexual violence that occurred.

*Comboio da Canhoca* also uncovers what Hannah Arendt described as the “banality of evil”.<sup>87</sup> Through the film, Fortunato cuts to scenes of the station manager at Canhoca station, who does not realise that a group of men are trapped inside the carriage which arrives at his station without a manifest. Eventually, after telling his colleague he intends to complain about the carriage, which they have left on a siding for four days, the pair discover that men are imprisoned inside. Panicked, the manager and his colleague run from the carriage. They make no effort to help the men, and the manager is worried only about how he might be affected by this incident, frantically reassuring his colleague that “a responsabilidade não é nossa”. They had not received any order to move the carriage, and so they did not. Inside his office, the station manager is visibly shaken and demands to be brought water, drinking two full glasses in full knowledge that the men inside the carriage have not had access to water for days. Even when his colleague tries to protest, the manager is only concerned with protecting himself; “quero esta merda fora dos meus olhos e longe de aqui”. Fortunato’s dramatized reimagining of this scene thus demonstrates what Arendt identifies as the “sheer thoughtlessness” and apathy of evil.<sup>88</sup> The colonial bureaucrats and functionaries of Portugal’s authoritarian regime, who blindly follow orders, and whose only motives for their actions are personal

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<sup>86</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 28.

<sup>87</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, ed./intro. by Amos Elon (Penguin, 2006).

<sup>88</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann*, p. 125.

advancement, represent a form of colonial violence that is not radical or even necessarily intentional, but which is perpetuated through its utter banality and normalcy.

Fortunato's reconstruction of the men's imprisonment inside the carriage not only portrays their extreme suffering, but also reveals varying levels of defiance towards the colonial regime and the violence to which they have been subjected, signalling the director's continued concern with tracing and re-examining moments of popular resistance to Portuguese colonial rule in Angola. As the men discuss why they have been imprisoned, they also debate revolutionary, anticolonial ideas. Some of the men are more sympathetic to the regime. The two *funcionários públicos*, who believed themselves safe from arrest at the beginning of the film and subsequently distance themselves from the rest of the group, are demonstrably supportive of and trusting in the colonial state. Upon hearing of the rape of Njololo's wife, one of the pair criticises Njololo for taking action personally against the officer and suggests that he should have gone to the colonial authorities; "não pode fazer justiça por mãos próprias, há autoridades". This statement is met with laughter from others in the carriage, who know that the regime would have protected a man from within its own ranks. Another man, Tondela, is also committed to fulfilling his duties as a citizen, and defends his own *assimilado* status, asking the group; "Quem é que não quer subir na vida? Se não fores assimilado que possibilidades tens de garantir um futuro?". For him, and others, gaining *assimilado* status is a way to "melhorar esta vida miserável". It is a personal choice that depends on individual circumstances.

Others are more critical of the colonial regime. Another man, responding to Tondela's comments, challenges him on his trust in the Portuguese model of colonial citizenship he so

vehemently defends, asking how the “rights” he has so dutifully earned, and the Portuguese he has learnt to speak so perfectly, will help him now that he has been abandoned in the carriage. *Assimilado* status is, he argues, “um certificado de pobreza”. The rights it affords are not given freely but imposed, and black colonial subjects are obliged to accept them.

Unsurprisingly, those in the carriage who have suffered greater violence under colonialism are more resistant to accepting the regime. One man, who removes his shirt to reveal deep scars across his back, angrily derides Tondela’s defence of *assimilado* status, declaring he could eat like a Portuguese, sleep like a Portuguese, fuck like a Portuguese – do “tudo direitinho” – and would still not be accepted as an equal citizen. For another man in the carriage, assimilation policies are nothing but a way to control Angolan subjects and divide the colonial population amongst themselves; “assimilados ou não, ficamos na mão deles”.

The film thus gives rise to a range of different political opinions and revolutionary sentiments. In doing so, Fortunato does not attempt to privilege or assert one voice over the other. Through the scenes inside the carriage, the director uses a wide range of camera angles, including low, high and eye-level shots, to grant the viewer access to different perspectives on the dialogue and action taking place. When characters are speaking, they are generally positioned in the centre of the shot, taking up most of the frame, either through a close-up or medium shot, ensuring that all the different perspectives offered within the carriage are given equal visual weight on screen. The darkness of the carriage means that characters are often illuminated against a dark background, creating a contrast that ensures attention is focussed on each of the speakers when they appear on screen (Fig. 2.11 – 2.13).



Fig. 2.11. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.



Fig. 2.12. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.



Fig. 2.13. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.

In this way, *Comboio da Canhoca* can also begin to be understood as a dialogical historical adaptation. The director's dramatized rewriting of historical events does not amount to a didactic or dogmatic representation of Angolan history, nor is it an attempt to communicate a single, unequivocal ideology to the audience. Furthermore, rarely does the director seem to develop the cast of characters beyond the specific positionalities and world views they represent. Instead, as in *Memória de um Dia*, Fortunato's primary motivation appears to be to allow multiple independent voices to co-exist within his film. The emphasis is on individuals thinking historically, which will in turn empower and dynamise their effective political and social engagement.

Another comparison can be drawn here with Pepetela's first novel, *Mayombe*. As Rothwell argues, "one of the most common literary techniques in Pepetela's literary output is dialogic characterization". In *Mayombe*, he notes, "the dialogic technique was blatant, as a multiplicity of characters controlled the narrative, laying bare the tensions and inconsistencies of the struggle for independence."<sup>89</sup> In doing this, Pepetela's novel directly challenges revisionist MPLA narratives which attempted to conceal division and tensions within the party. For this reason, *Mayombe* faced delays in its release due to concerns surrounding its politicised content. Although the novel was written at the beginning of the 1970s, it was not released until 1980, remaining unpublished for nine years due to the fact that the author "deals directly with the problem of tribalism that claimed to be based on ideology and not race".<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 134.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Despite this, there is a fundamental optimism at the heart of Pepetela's novel. For Phyllis Peres, the writer's early works, including *Mayombe*, "optimistically posit that the nationalist liberation struggle will transform contentious voices and histories into a single nation".<sup>91</sup> As Rothwell notes, as tribal and racial tensions are played out through the novel, "the freedom fighters come to realise that it is their commitment to the MPLA's cause rather than their ethnic identity that defines them as Angolan".<sup>92</sup> Ana Maria Martinho suggests that *Mayombe*'s dialogism reaches towards a "national representativeness", anticipating "a society of people educated for decision and discussion".<sup>93</sup> If *Mayombe* works to reveal the ways in which the MPLA has experienced internal divisions, this is uncompromisingly underpinned by a staunch belief that the movement itself can unify these diverging groups in a newly liberated Angola.

The "dialogic characterization" at the centre of *Comboio da Canhoca* can perhaps also be considered in these terms. Unlike *Mayombe*, the film does not explicitly deal with tension and division within the MPLA. The historical events on which Fortunato's film is based predate the formation of the party. However, as in *Memória de um Dia*, Fortunato's adaptation invites comparison with later events. Most of the men inside the carriage are shown to come from social groups that would come to dominate the MPLA membership. A number are *assimilados*, they are mostly educated, many are well dressed in European-style clothing, and all the characters that speak do so in Portuguese.

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<sup>91</sup> Phyllis Peres, *Transculturation and Resistance in Lusophone African Narrative* (University of Florida Press, 1997), p. 67.

<sup>92</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 19.

<sup>93</sup> Ana Maria Mão-de-Ferro Martinho, 'Utopian Eyes and Dystopian Writings in Angolan Literature', *Research in African Literatures*, 38:1 (2007), pp. 46-53 (p. 49), doi:10.2979/RAL.2007.38.1.46.

Through the film, the two *funcionários públicos* are repeatedly shot using a pocket mirror, combing their hair and checking their appearance (Fig. 2.14 – 2.15). The mirror not only indicates the men's self-interest, creating a tangible sense of distance between the pair and the other men in the carriage, but could equally be read as a sign that the film is holding a mirror up to contemporary Angola, to its leadership and the ongoing conflict. In this sense, like Pepetela's novel, *Comboio da Canhoca* works more obliquely to reveal (and reflect) that division and tribalism have existed within the social foundations of the party, and address falsified historical narratives that advance an image of the MPLA as a consistently unified movement.

Fortunato's film does not appear to share Pepetela's revolutionary optimism that a commitment to the MPLA's ideology can supersede these divisions. Unity, or unified and productive decisions and discussions, never materialise. Instead, what prevails in the film is violence. Again, like *Memória de um Dia*, it could be suggested that it is precisely the lack of a unifying ideological cause that leaves the men inside the carriage vulnerable to division and violence. Equally, it could also be that Fortunato's film focusses more on the extreme difficulty of resisting colonial violence. It is perhaps implied that the dehumanising conditions of the carriage, rather than the difference of political opinion that co-exists within this space, ultimately causes the violence.



Fig. 2.14. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.



Fig. 2.15. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.

But is Fortunato's film more contentious? As Rothwell notes of *Mayombe's* delayed release, the novel's "exposition of tribal tensions was of less concern to the MPLA elite than the implicit warning that the movement would repeat à la Fanon the structures of colonialism".<sup>94</sup> For the Martinican anti-colonial philosopher Frantz Fanon, whose militant decolonial theory in part focussed on the enduring legacies of colonial oppression in the postcolony, inherent to the decolonization process was the risk of recreating a national bourgeoisie, through the "transfer into indigenous hands the privileges inherited from the colonial period".<sup>95</sup> The emergence of a new national elite after colonialism would stem directly from a native elite manufactured by European colonialism. The suggestion that the Angolan socio-cultural elites making up the MPLA might, after independence, replicate oppressive colonial mechanisms of power, rather than dismantling and destroying the legacies of colonization and Portuguese colonial rule in Angola, can also be detected through *Comboio da Canhoca*.

In this sense, it is important to consider the nature of the violence that occurs in the carriage. Physical violence begins in earnest when one of the most outwardly revolutionary and radical men in the carriage accuses another man of not understanding racism and oppression, headbutting him and shoving him across the carriage before being restrained. The altercation reveals the presence of moralistic revolutionary standards within the carriage, by which characters begin to be assessed and punished for not being revolutionary "enough". This is pre-empted by the moralising nature of the verbal violence that has already occurred during the arguments between the men; a defender of *assimilado* status is accused of being a "filho negro de Salazar", for example. If, as Fanon suggests, "the colonial world is a Manichean world", Fortunato's film implies that even during these nascent moments of anti-colonial

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<sup>94</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 19.

<sup>95</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2004), p. 100.

activity, prior to the formation of Angola's main independence movements, colonial structures were re-inscribed themselves amongst the nation's future revolutionaries.<sup>96</sup> Within the carriage, the more stridently anti-colonial figures do not attempt to bring others with them, to unify or unite, but rather condemn and denounce those they consider to lack sufficient revolutionary credentials, ultimately resorting to violence.

Fortunato's concern with Fanon's work is made explicit more than once in the film. In an early discussion about the merits of *assimilado* status, one man refers to Portugal's colonial citizenship as "uma máscara branca em pele de negro", making a direct reference to Fanon's 1952 text, *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the final scene inside the carriage, one of the men who previously defended *assimilado* status – "porque não aproveitar as boas coisas deles?" – appears with his face completely painted white (Fig. 2.16 – 2.17). Here, Fortunato makes a radically adaptive intervention into his historical source material – as well as Fanon's original text – to suggest that an adherence to and replication of the colonizer's paternalistic model, violence and repression can never amount to true liberation or revolution and will only result in more violence. During this scene, the man with the painted face appears crazed, bouncing around the carriage and laughing manically. The psychological nature of his transformation further indicates the pervasiveness of the colonial logic to which he has prescribed.

The scene also marks a departure from a heavily realist style to something altogether more experimental. It seems unlikely that the man has really applied the white substance to his face, given the lack of resources within the train carriage, suggesting that the scene is intended to be read as a dream or hallucination sequence. The echo effect applied to the

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<sup>96</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 6.

man's speech and laughter and the dragging, slow motion effect applied to the shots create a more impressionistic image of the men's imprisonment and the psychological break experienced by the subject. Again, we can consider here where the influence of Fortunato's time in Senegal might be discerned. Sheila Petty notes that Djibril Diop Mambéty, with whom Fortunato worked directly, chose to pursue a more expressive and creative mode of filmmaking than his peers, avoiding what has been considered to be the essentialist nationalism of filmmakers like Sembène.<sup>97</sup> For David Murphy and Patrick Williams, too, Mambéty's "films certainly stand out for their rejection of the dominant, 'prosaic' social realism of his colleagues, in favour of a more 'poetic', indirect and highly experimental style".<sup>98</sup> Beyond this potential connection to Mambéty, however, the "poetic" and experimental style of Fortunato's scene stands out in an Angolan cinematic landscape dominated by the documentary mode, and in which rare instances of narrative cinema remained committed to social realism. The director's impressionistic rendering of the profound psychological impact of colonial violence further underlines the transgressive thrust of the film's adaptation of its historical and theoretical source material.

Fortunato's film acts as a reminder that, as Fanon notes, imperialism "sows seeds of decay" which "must be mercilessly rooted out" from both the land and the mind.<sup>99</sup> This residual "decay" is not limited to characters that have outwardly defended colonial institutions. By the end of the film, physical violence in the carriage descends into murder. The two men killed both defended elements of Portuguese colonial rule. Firstly, the man attacked for not being revolutionary enough is strangled, and his neck broken. Secondly, one of the *funcionários*

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<sup>97</sup> Sheila Petty, 'Djibril Diop Mambety: un cinéaste à contre-courant', *African Studies Review*, 46:2 (2003), pp. 154-155 (p. 154), doi:10.2307/1514860.

<sup>98</sup> David Murphy and Patrick Williams, 'Djibril Diop Mambéty' in Murphy and Williams, *Postcolonial African Cinema: Ten Directors* (Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 91-109 (p. 109).

<sup>99</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 181.

*publicos* appears on screen with his throat slit, although it is unclear as to whether he slits his own throat or his throat is slit by someone else, as he is also shown to be the one who breaks the mirror to create the blade (Fig. 2.18). Regardless of responsibility, these men are punished, and in the case of the latter, the nature of this punishment is clear; his death is caused by the same object that designated his lack of revolutionary, anti-colonial solidarity with the other men. If an undemocratic and oppressive order is re-established within the carriage, this is perpetrated by those who consider themselves most opposed to the colonial regime. Within this order, it is the wrong types of revolutionaries, or those who do not meet the revolutionary standards that have been established, who are subjected to moralistic punishment, and even death.

*Comboio da Canhoca* briefly allows for the co-existence of multiple, diverging perspectives. However, the death of the men at the end of the film implies that, ultimately, this dialogism is not permitted to survive. In this sense, while Fortunato can be understood to engage in a process of dialogical historical adaptation, the director's dramatic rewriting of the historical events depicted is perhaps more critically concerned with demonstrating the dangers that arise within a monologic revolutionary movement which does not create or sustain the conditions for dialogue, debate and differing positionalities.



Fig. 2.16. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.



Fig. 2.17. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.



Fig. 2.18. *Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterrannée, 2005), dir. Orlando Fortunato.

In the context of the film's production, this danger could easily be related to Angola's ongoing civil conflict. However, more specifically, the film speaks to the MPLA regime. If the men inside the carriage can be considered the base of the movement's initial support, Fortunato shows not only the original proximity of the party to colonial power, through the characters who defend colonial institutions and their *assimilado* status, but also the ways in which the development and execution of the party's revolutionary, anti-colonial ideology has repeated the violence and oppression of the colonizer. It is not only the violence and brutality of the colonizers, or the men's inability to reconcile their political and ideological differences, which results in the "collective immersion in a fratricidal bloodbath" cautioned by Fanon, but, more precisely, the perceived failure of some men to meet the revolutionary and moral standards imposed by those leading the anti-colonial charge. In an Angolan context, this would likely have recalled the events of 27<sup>th</sup> May 1977, in which the MPLA leadership oversaw a violent purge of the party's membership following an alleged coup.

In this way, like *Memória de um Dia*, the dialogical thrust at the heart of Fortunato's second feature film remains committed to dismantling the party's foundational historical narratives, showing that decolonial and independence movements in Angola were never coherent or unified, and gesturing to the fact that even after independence the MPLA had been unable to reconcile political and ideological differences without resorting to violence. Like his first film, too, *Comboio da Canhoca* engages in a process of historical adaptation which reveals the extreme violence of the Portuguese colonial regime in Angola. Ultimately, however, there are no heroes in *Comboio da Canhoca*. Fortunato's retelling of marginalised histories from Angola's colonial past is less focussed on celebrating moments of popular resistance, and more interested in identifying and reassessing the early clues that the utopian promises of revolution and independence in Angola would not come to pass. The film was conceived and

filmed against a backdrop of ongoing civil conflict and increasingly authoritarian ideological control asserted by the MPLA, and as the party officially abandoned its socialist ideology. In this context, if Fortunato continues to pursue a practice of dialogical historical adaptation, this is markedly less optimistic.

The sentiment of *Comboio da Canhoca* is not one of resignation. Rather, Fortunato's violent muffling of the dialogism that emerges within the carriage also self-consciously reveals the impossibility and tension at the core of his historical adaptation and "critical fabulation".<sup>100</sup> Hartman suggests that a technique of "narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure, is a requirement of this method, as is the imperative to respect black noise—the shrieks, the moans, the nonsense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and the law".<sup>101</sup> The intent of this practice is not only to "give voice", to reimagine and reproduce dialogue, but also to self-consciously reveal the impossibility and instability of historical narrativization.<sup>102</sup> In the film, as dialogue breaks down and gives way to violence, suffering and silence, Fortunato refutes any notion that the wounds of coloniality can be easily or neatly healed through cinema, while also inferring that revisiting and acknowledging these gaps, this violence, might prevent their reproduction in the present. Thus, in retracting dialogue, Fortunato's film also works towards a more radical departure from the logic and language of the MPLA's early post-independence cultural project, which supplemented, recast and reappropriated the past in pursuit of political domination and hegemonic power.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', p. 11.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>103</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 7.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, to varying degrees, both *Memória de um Dia* and *Comboio da Canhoca* move away from the dominant aesthetics and forms of Angola's early post-independence cinema. Both films depart from the MPLA's didactic and monologic model of revolutionary cinema, to explore a more dialogical and critical process of representing Angola's colonial past and anti-colonial resistance. In doing so, Fortunato's films present versions of history which do not, to borrow a term employed by João Paulo Borges Coelho in the context of post-independence Mozambique, stick to the MPLA's official "liberation script".<sup>104</sup> Instead, the director's radically adaptive *historio-photy* appears to reveal mounting disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the evolution of the party after independence, particularly in relation to its instrumentalization of historical narratives and repression of debate and dialogue.

Crucially, Fortunato's films do not abandon the revolutionary commitment of the nation's earlier militant filmmaking. The director's re-centring of popular anti-colonial resistance in *Memória de um Dia*, and his Fanonian examination of the dangers of national elites replicating colonial power structures in *Comboio da Canhoca*, indicate a filmmaking practice firmly rooted in class solidarity and decolonial praxis. In this way, like Rebelo, as well as Sembène and Pepetela, Fortunato's films are perhaps best understood in terms of what Es'kia Mphahlele has characterized as "degrees of commitment". Mphahlele uses this term to suggest that "commitment need not give rise to propaganda", and the writer – or here, filmmaker – "can make his stand known without advocating it openly in two-dimensional

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<sup>104</sup> João Paulo Borges Coelho, 'Politics and Contemporary History in Mozambique: A Set of Epistemological Notes', *Kronos*, 39 (2013), pp. 20-31 (p. 21).

terms”, engaging in a healthy critique of the power while also remaining committed to the cause.<sup>105</sup>

As I have noted, both *Memória de um Dia* and *Comboio da Canhoca* can also be situated within a wider move towards narrative cinema in Angola through the 1980s and 1990s. Like Fortunato, Ruy Duarte de Carvalho made two narrative films during the 1980s, in 1982 and 1989. In the following chapter, I explore where Duarte de Carvalho’s final film, *Moia ou o Recado das Ilhas*, continues to register and examine the psychological effects of colonial violence, as well as interrogate the formation and foundational narratives of Angola’s socio-political elites, through an increasingly poetic and experimental practice of narrative cinema and cinematic adaptation. He also shows that history was never monolithic and commitment to thinking about the past is a powerful weapon.

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<sup>105</sup> Ezekiel (Es’kia) Mphahlele, ‘African Writers and Commitment’, in Mphahlele, *Voices in the Whirlwind* (Macmillan Press, 1972), pp. 185-198 (p.187).

## Chapter Three

### “Were you looking for me, or were you looking for yourself?”: Autoethnography and Adaptation in Ruy Duarte de Carvalho’s *Moia ou O Recado das Ilhas* (1989)

#### Introduction

Ruy Duarte de Carvalho is one of the most significant filmmakers of Angola’s early post-independence period.<sup>1</sup> In the *Filmografia*, he is credited as the director of twenty-two documentary films produced by TPA between 1975 and 1979, one of the highest outputs of any Angolan director active during this period. A multifaceted and prolific career as a filmmaker, writer and trained anthropologist has afforded Duarte de Carvalho a much greater cultural profile than that of the other filmmakers I discuss in this thesis, particularly on an international stage. Despite this wider recognition, the director’s final film, *Moia ou O Recado das Ilhas* (*Moia*), which was completed in 1989, has received minimal critical attention. The film was never screened publicly, and stands out in Duarte de Carvalho’s cinematic repertoire, as well as in the landscape of post-independence Angolan cinema more broadly, for its daring aesthetics, politics and poetics.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I explore where – in the contested context of “o colapso” – *Moia* can be read as a culmination of ideas explored by Duarte de Carvalho through his cinematic career. Specifically, I ask how the director’s extensive literary adaptation represents a reflection not only on his filmmaking practice, but on his own identity and positionality in an Angolan societal context.

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<sup>1</sup> Duarte de Carvalho signs off his films Ruy Duarte. In the *Filmografia* he is named as Rui Duarte. Here, I will use Ruy Duarte de Carvalho throughout.

<sup>2</sup> Livia Apa, ‘Duarte de Carvalho, Ruy’, Oxford African American Studies Centre, 30 September 2012 <<https://doi-org.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.48498>> [accessed on 6 October 2024].

Born in Santarém, Portugal in 1941, Duarte de Carvalho spent his teenage years in Moçâmedes, a coastal city in the south of Angola, where he moved with his Portuguese parents in 1953. After returning to Portugal to study agronomy, he moved back to Angola in 1960. During the colonial war, he was drafted to serve with the Portuguese colonial army first in Huambo, then in Luanda, where he became involved in the clandestine struggle for independence, aligning himself with the MPLA. After his anticolonial activities were discovered by PIDE, he spent a brief period working as an agronomist in the province of Cuanza Sul, before eventually leaving Angola for Mozambique. He subsequently spent time in Germany and London, where he studied cinema, as well as Algeria.

After independence, Duarte de Carvalho returned to Luanda and declared himself Angolan, considering himself to be more Angolan and African than European.<sup>3</sup> He soon began working at TPA, producing documentaries for Angolan television as part of the MPLA's post-independence politico-cultural project. His early films and newsreels followed the lives of the nation's "popular classes, including workers and peasants".<sup>4</sup> Additionally, films registered the formation of the MPLA and the struggle for independence, with titles such as *Faz lá coragem camarada* (1977).

Duarte de Carvalho's cinematic output during this early period suggests at least some level of initial commitment to the MPLA's post-independence project. Abrantes emphasizes the significant role the director played in establishing Angola's national cinema immediately after

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<sup>3</sup> Hilarino Carlos Rodrigues da Luz, 'Bridging Borders: Travelling through Ruy Duarte de Carvalho's Life and Works', in *Challenging Memories and Rebuilding Identities: Literary and Artistic Voices that Undo the Lusophone Atlantic*, ed. by Margarida Rendeiro and Federica Lupati (Routledge, 2020), pp. 13-24 (p. 14).

<sup>4</sup> Inês Ponte, 'An Angolan vernacular-language fiction film as para-ethnographic film: Nationalism and the evolving politics of film circulation and reception', *History and Anthropology*, 32:3 (2021), pp. 596-616 (p. 600), doi:10.1080/02757206.2021.1881079.

independence, producing films which dealt with resistance, the militant struggle and national reconstruction.<sup>5</sup> During this time, however, Duarte de Carvalho became “increasingly disillusioned with the relationship between state, nation, and culture” that was evolving under the MPLA regime.<sup>6</sup> In the midst of the ongoing civil war, the party leadership, ever more anxious over dissent and tribalism, made a concerted effort to promote cultural unity in Angola. This, as Rothwell states, was “code for accepting MPLA orthodoxy”.<sup>7</sup> Objecting to this political and cultural “strategy of nationwide hegemonic consolidation”, the director quickly began to distance himself from the militant cinema of the early post-independence period.<sup>8</sup> Instead, as Inês Cordeiro Dias notes, his documentaries sought to represent a plurality of Angolan experiences and identities, “tanto rurais como urbanas, que contrastam com a versão oficial de nação promovida pelo governo angolano”.<sup>9</sup>

Duarte de Carvalho “saw Angola in a decentralized way, as a vast territory with great ethnic diversity”, and was particularly committed to the nation’s rural communities.<sup>10</sup> He became deeply critical of Angola’s ruling elites, arguing “that they think mainly about their own interests and those of the people who are close to them, when they should think about the whole”.<sup>11</sup> Duarte de Carvalho’s growing objections to the MPLA’s limited view of Angolan national and cultural identity can be detected clearly through his first narrative feature film, *Nelisita*, which I return to in the following section. *Nelisita*, which was released in 1982 and remains indisputably the director’s best-known cinematic work, centres around the

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<sup>5</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Moorman, ‘Of Westerns, Women and War’, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*, p. 128.

<sup>9</sup> Inês Cordeiro Dias, ‘A câmara e a nação: a criação de um país nos filmes de Ruy Duarte de Carvalho’, in *Diálogos com Ruy Duarte de Carvalho*, ed. by Ana Balona de Oliveira, Marta Lança, Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, and Rita Chaves (BUALA and CEC, 2019), <<http://hdl.handle.net/10451/37994>> [accessed 5 October 2024].

<sup>10</sup> Rodrigues da Luz, ‘Bridging Borders’, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Mumuhuila people of Huila, an ethno-linguistic group belonging to the Nyaneka-Humbe of south-west Angola. For Marissa Moorman, Duarte de Carvalho's dissent can most plainly be detected in *Nelisita* "through a concern with difference and his implicit advocacy for promoting the centrality of local cultural practices in the struggle to create a nation".<sup>12</sup>

In a piece published in 2005, Duarte de Carvalho noted that it was around the time of the production and release of *Nelisita* that he realised it would not be possible to continue making the films he wanted to make in Angola. From 1975 to 1981, he writes, he had made films in various locations across the country, believing that his aim of celebrating Angola's rich cultural diversity through cinema would eventually be well-received.<sup>13</sup> While his work had not yet been censored, Duarte de Carvalho was increasingly attracting negative attention from the MPLA. In a separate interview, he noted:

Até os 80, quando eu fazia filmes, se procurares os meus filmes vai encontrar filmes que tratavam de kimbandas, curandeiros, da medicina tradicional, e várias vezes fui avisado que estava a tratar matéria que não fomentava, não – nunca fui impedido, nem obstruído, como mais tarde fui pelo [...] –, mas que era fazer apologia de alguma forma, ou era dar lugar ao obscurantismo, e portanto o programa era acabar com qualquer obscurantismo e portanto isso desenvolveu-se, era essa a linha programática que apontava, e o que se percebia que não correspondesse a isto, ou que correspondesse a alguma coisa, estava sempre sob observação por parte do poder.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Moorman, 'Of Westerns, Women and War', p. 116.

<sup>13</sup> Ruy Duarte de Carvalho, 'Uma espécie de habilidade autobiográfica', 12 August 2010, <<http://www.buala.org/pt/ruy-duarte-de-carvalho/uma-especie-de-habilidade-autobiografica>> [accessed 5 October 2024].

<sup>14</sup> Kelly Cristina Oliveira de Araujo, 'Angola de dentro para fora nas "Actas de Maianga": Percursos de reflexão sobre as guerras e o político no pensamento de Ruy Duarte de Carvalho', interview with Ruy Duarte de Carvalho, February 2002, in *Diálogos com Ruy Duarte de Carvalho*, ed. by Ana Balona de Oliveira, Marta Lança, Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, and Rita Chaves (BUALA and CEC, 2019), <<http://hdl.handle.net/10451/37994>> [accessed 5 October 2024].

In 1983, Duarte de Carvalho took a break from filmmaking. The director moved to Paris to complete a PhD in Anthropology at the École des Hautes Études de Sciences Sociales, having developed and refined a critical interest in the discipline through his filmmaking career. He completed his doctoral studies in 1986. His subsequent and final film, *Moia*, was completed in 1989. Shot and set on the island of São Vicente, in Cape Verde, and co-funded and co-produced by France, Portugal and Cape Verde, along with support from the Angolan LNC, *Moia* marks a decisive break with the director's filmmaking practice under the MPLA's state production companies.<sup>15</sup> The film is an entirely fictional narrative, following a young Angolan woman, the eponymous Moia, whose mother was born on the island. Moia decides to travel to Cape Verde to explore her cultural heritage. While there, she embarks on a journey of self-discovery that provokes a profound transformation in her outlook on herself and the world around her.

*Moia*'s potentially autobiographical elements are perhaps not immediately obvious. There are glaring differences between the director, a white, Portuguese-born man, and his fictional protagonist, a mixed-race, Angolan woman with Cape Verdean heritage. According to Duarte de Carvalho, however, both he and his protagonist are “mestiços angolanos”, which he defines as a “cultural and social” identity, rather than a racial category.<sup>16</sup> For the director, he and Moia are “armados ambos da nossa pele de mestiços angolanos, cultural ou social, eu que

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<sup>15</sup> Carolin Overhoff Ferreira, ‘Os três anéis da lusofonia nas adaptações literárias de língua portuguesa: *Bocage – O Triunfo do Amor; Palavra e Utopia e Moia ou o Recado das Ilhas*’, paper delivered at the XI Congresso Luso Afro Brasileiro de Ciências Sociais: Diversidades e (Des)igualdades, <<https://unifesp.academia.edu/CarolinFerreira>> [accessed 5 October 2024].

<sup>16</sup> Ruy Duarte de Carvalho, ‘Poesia, cinema e antropologia, três pólos de um exercício de acção (1990)’, in Duarte de Carvalho, *A Câmara, A Escrita e a Coisa Dita: Fitas, Textos e Palestras* (INALD, 1997), pp. 109-114 (p. 109).

sou branco total, ela mulata”.<sup>17</sup> The character of Moia is made to espouse this belief; speaking to a Cape Verdean man with whom she develops a relationship during her trip to the islands, she rejects his suggestion that, as a person of colour, her identity is defined by her race. Rather, she asserts that as an “intellectual”, she lives her identity differently. As I show in the following sections, Duarte de Carvalho ultimately builds on his own anthropological studies and literary practice to unsettle and complicate this position.

Both Moia and Duarte de Carvalho’s apparent belief in an Angolan “mestiço” identity, which transcends race and is instead based in cultural hybridity and a social commitment to the nation, is an attitude that was shared by the MPLA’s leadership at independence. The MPLA was founded as a class-based, rather than a race-based, liberation movement, calling for solidarity between all those who had been oppressed by colonialism. After independence, as Rothwell notes, the movement avoided race-based rhetoric, “implicitly discouraged the post-independence discussion of race as a factor of determining economic privilege”, and sought to rally support for the party’s “post-racial” vision for the newly independent nation.<sup>18</sup> Despite the MPLA’s aversion to discussions of race, however, it did not go unnoticed or uncriticized that the upper echelons of the party were dominated by members of a “mestizo and white-looking urban elite”, who had “little to no understanding of rural Angola or the plight of a black underclass with no formal education”.<sup>19</sup>

With a cosmopolitan and Westernized gaze firmly planted on the rest of the world, the MPLA’s post-independence political project sought to shape the developing nation according

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<sup>17</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, ‘Poesia, cinema e antropologia’, p. 109.

<sup>18</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

to a vision of nationhood based primarily on European ideas and principles. As Alexandra Santos has explored in depth, Duarte de Carvalho was vehemently opposed to that which he considered “the ongoing Western expansion” and processes of “Westernization” taking place in Angola under the MPLA, and across the Global South more widely.<sup>20</sup> Santos notes that “the struggle for independence was often presented as an opportunity to end Western dominion over Africa and restore to Africans control over their own destiny”.<sup>21</sup> In an Angolan context, while Duarte de Carvalho was supportive of the struggle for independence, “his analysis of post-independence Angola led him to believe that liberation from colonial dominion was in fact the end of the process of westernization” that had taken place over centuries.<sup>22</sup> He was particularly critical of the MPLA’s imposition of Western models and ideals in the newly independent Angola, and the party’s disconnect from and dismissal of rural communities within the nation it attempted to govern. As I have noted, the movement claimed to fight for the liberation and emancipation of all Angolan subjects, representing the totality of the Angolan people. In practice, the party leadership continued to disparage poor and rural Angolan populations, who remained secondary to the nation’s cosmopolitan elites.

By centring native Angolan populations ignored and derided by the MPLA, *Nelisita* confirmed Duarte de Carvalho’s opposition to this elite group’s inherited and enduring sense of social superiority, as well as the Westernized perspective he believed this powerful section of Angolan society had inherited from the colonial system. Conversely, *Moia* turns the lens away from the nation’s rural communities, focussing instead on the privileged Angolan socio-cultural elite to which Duarte de Carvalho belonged, and from whom he had sought to

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<sup>20</sup> Alexandra Santos, ‘Critique of Western Technological Hegemony and Neo-Animism in Ruy Duarte de Carvalho’, in *Portuguese Philosophy of Technology: Legacies and contemporary work from the Portuguese-Speaking Community*, ed. by Helena Mateus Jerónimo (Springer International Publishing, 2023), p. 195.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

distance himself through his prior cinematic work. At this juncture, why did the director move his cinematic focus to a group he had actively sought to decentre through his previous films? Does *Moia* represent a continuation of, or a rupture with, Duarte de Carvalho's previous cinematic practice?

Reflecting on the making of *Moia* in a lecture entitled 'Poesia, Cinema e Antropologia: Três Pólos de um Exercício de Acção', delivered a year after the film's completion, Duarte de Carvalho explicitly locates his film at a particular nexus between poetry and anthropology; "eu tinha que introduzir no filme, traduzir no filme, a particular ressonância da minha própria poesia e a especificidade orientada da minha própria análise sociológica ou antropológica".<sup>23</sup>

He states:

O tipo de cinema que eu tinha querido fazer conta à partida com situações que excedem a mise-en-scène. E então pensava: o tempo e o feitiço que investi neste filme o que dariam, aplicados em poesia escrita ou em reflexão analítica, isto é, antropológica, no meu caso? Não teria sido melhor traduzir, numa dessas modalidades, o testemunho que eu tinha para dar? Não, não teria. Não se tratava afinal de querer ou ter para dar um testemunho mas sim dar corpo à expressão que um comércio pessoal entre mim e Cabo Verde me impunha dar.<sup>24</sup>

For Duarte de Carvalho, therefore, despite differences in form, content and aesthetics, *Moia* represents a continued development of the marriage between cinematic narrative, poetic imagery, anthropological analysis and social critique that he achieved in *Nelisita*. Unlike his

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<sup>23</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, 'Poesia, cinema e antropologia', p. 109.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

previous films, however, the emphasis in *Moia* is on the director himself, and the specific cultural and social located-ness he shares with his protagonist.

Beyond simply evoking or representing his own personal experiences, Duarte de Carvalho's film offers a critically poetic, sociological analysis of his own positionality within Angolan society. In this chapter, therefore, I propose that *Moia* can be understood as a form of autoethnographic film. Combining elements of ethnography, autobiography and fiction, the film entails an anthropologically and poetically oriented narrative inquiry into a self that, as Deborah Reed-Danahay notes in her seminal exploration of autoethnography, is located firmly and explicitly within its social context.<sup>25</sup>

The term "autoethnography", which literally refers to an ethnography of the self ("auto"), has been the subject of much discussion and debate. It is largely accepted that it is the prominence of social analysis that differentiates autoethnography from autobiography or autofiction; as Catherine Russell notes, "autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film- or videomaker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes".<sup>26</sup> For Dean Caivano and Sarah Naumes, whose work concerns written autoethnography, the term relates to "personal stories that go beyond individual experiences in order to tell readers something about the broader world".<sup>27</sup> Andrew Sparkes, too, defines autoethnographies as "highly personalised accounts that draw upon the experiences of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological

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<sup>25</sup> Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Auto/ethnography: rewriting the self and the social* (Routledge, 1997), p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography* (Duke University Press, 1999), p. 276.

<sup>27</sup> Dean Caivano and Sarah Naumes, *The Sublime of the Political: Narrative and Autoethnography as Theory* (Transcript, 2021), p. 25.

understanding”.<sup>28</sup> There is now a general consensus that the practice of autoethnography is not restricted to a single form, but is both a text and a method of inquiry, which includes literature, cinema and other artistic forms.<sup>29</sup>

As Reed-Danahay has outlined, the term autoethnography can have a double sense, “referring either to the ethnography of one’s own group or to a more autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest”.<sup>30</sup> Like the anthropological method of ethnography, autoethnography is concerned with the study of an “other”. This “other”, he suggests, can be one’s own culture – which becomes the object of the ethnographic study – or another culture – in this case, the autoethnographer examines “her personal self” in relation to the customs and social practices of another group. Duarte de Carvalho’s film could be considered to fall into both categories (which, as Moser points out, often cross over and are closely connected).<sup>31</sup> Through his protagonist, Moia, the director restages and appraises his own ethnographic encounter - his “comércio pessoal” – with Cape Verdean culture. In doing so, he also presents an autoethnographic account of his own social group, of which Moia is a part.

Participation in an autoethnographic practice allows Duarte de Carvalho to investigate the Angolan social elite to which he belonged, and of which he was highly critical. Numerous scholars have noted the radical possibilities of autoethnography as a means by which to use one’s own experiences to interrogate power structures. For Russell, “autoethnography is a vehicle for and a strategy for challenging imposed forms of identity and exploring the

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<sup>28</sup> Andrew Sparkes, ‘Autoethnography and Narratives of Self: Reflections on Criteria in Action’, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17:1 (2000), pp. 21-43 (p. 21), doi:10.1123/ssj.17.1.21.

<sup>29</sup> Reed-Danahay, *Auto/Ethnography*, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Reed-Danahay, *Auto/Ethnography*, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Christian Moser, ‘Autoethnography’, in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 232-240 (p. 232).

discursive possibilities of inauthentic subjectivities”.<sup>32</sup> Autoethnography has emerged as a particularly important strategy for marginalised and indigenous subjects – those typically othered by Western anthropology – to represent themselves on their own terms and dismantle the colonial gaze.<sup>33</sup> Fay Ginsburg, for example, has described the “parallax effect” created by an ethnographic subject’s self-representation, tracing the ways in which “indigenous media” offers diverging perspectives and “different angles of vision” to the traditional gaze of Western ethnographic practice.<sup>34</sup> As is made evident by *Nelisita*, unsettling and challenging an othering, ethnographic gaze was central to Duarte de Carvalho’s practice.

In the case of *Moia*, it is thus important to remember that Duarte de Carvalho’s autoethnography is concerned with his belonging to an elite. His film not only attempts to represent Angola’s socio-cultural elite class, but also to interrogate and undermine this group’s privilege, particularly its proximity to colonial power structures. As I elaborate on further in my discussion of *Nelisita*, it is clear from Duarte de Carvalho’s previous films that the director is deeply concerned with disrupting and dismantling enduring Western and colonial power structures in Angola. Through *Moia*, Duarte de Carvalho remains careful not to replicate the centrality of this elite portion of Angolan society through his autoethnographic inquiry. Rather, in order to navigate critically his own positionality, *Moia* not only focusses on this elite group, but also simultaneously decentres and unsettles both the director and his protagonist.

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<sup>32</sup> Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, p. 276.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, ‘Arts of the Contact Zone’, *Profession*, (1991), pp. 31-40.

<sup>34</sup> Fay Ginsburg, ‘The Parallax Effect: The Impact of Aboriginal Media on Ethnographic Film’, *Visual Anthropology Review*, 11:2 (1995), pp. 64-76 (p. 65).

How does the director achieve this? Here, I focus on Duarte de Carvalho's adaptations of a range of literary source material. In *Moia*, a profoundly dialogical practice of literary adaptation underpins and expands the parameters and aims of the director's autoethnographic inquiry. Through his transformations of literary texts, which shape the development of the film's fictional narrative, Duarte de Carvalho engages in a process of critical self-reflection which disturbs the established myths at the heart of power in Angola, continually illuminating and responding to the wider social context within which his autoethnography is situated. In this way, I suggest that *Moia* can be read as an inquiry that radically unsettles and disturbs the accepted hegemony of the MPLA and Angola's socio-political elites, committed to liberation for all – including this group – from the enduring effects of imperialism and the hegemony of Western thought. Duarte de Carvalho's film represents a consolidation of a wider move towards a critical, socially committed narrative film form which adapts, in various ways, to the challenges and concerns of his historical moment.

### **The case of *Nelisita*: Situating Ruy Duarte de Carvalho's Cinematic and Anthropological Practice**

After the release of *Nelisita* in 1982, Duarte de Carvalho completed his Master's and PhD at the EHESS in Paris. For his Master's thesis, he produced a case study of *Nelisita*, published in Portuguese in 1984 as *O Camarada e A Câmera: Cinema e Antropologia para além do Filme Etnográfico*. In the text, Duarte de Carvalho outlines the reasons he does not consider *Nelisita* to be an ethnographic film, and claims that ethnographic filmmaking is not a practice suited to an Angolan context. Through this section, I show that Duarte de Carvalho's reflections on *Nelisita* invite new ways of thinking about ethnography and anthropology in an Angolan cinematic context, which can be related to the autoethnographic film practice that emerges in *Moia*.

Duarte de Carvalho does not dismiss ethnography as a method, nor does he reject the practice of ethnographic filmmaking outright. He is optimistic that ethnographic cinema has a role to play in Angola: “o cinema etnográfico tem a sua oportunidade, o seu lugar, o direito de recorrer a tudo quanto o define, e mesmo em Angola chegará o tempo em que ele assumirá a posição e o papel interventivo que lhe cabem”.<sup>35</sup>

The text discusses the complex nature of ethnographic film at length, drawing on a range of critical sources and highlighting that the category is notoriously difficult to define. The director stresses the importance of aesthetic consciousness in ethnographic filmmaking. He states his belief that “será efetivamente difícil admitir a existência de um etnólogo-cineasta indiferente ao facto de se ver na posse de um meio de criação artística”.<sup>36</sup> In this view, the dividing line separating an ethnographic and anthropological filmmaker becomes clear; “se ele apenas se server da câmara como instrumento de investigação, so será interpelado na qualidade de antropólogo e não se lhe poderá pôr a questão do filme etnográfico”.<sup>37</sup>

Ethnographic cinema, however, must be as committed to aesthetics as it is to the demands of science. To explicate this, Duarte de Carvalho draws on the work of Karl G. Heider, one of the first critics to theorize ethnographic cinema in his 1976 monograph, *Ethnographic Film*. Heider argues that ethnographic film “must be judged in relation to ethnography, which is, after all, a scientific enterprise”.<sup>38</sup> Duarte de Carvalho appears to agree with Heider’s stance,

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<sup>35</sup> Ruy Duarte de Carvalho, *O Camarada e A Câmera: Cinema e Antropologia para além do Filme Etnográfico* (INALD, 1984), p. 82.

<sup>36</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, *O Camarada*, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> Karl G. Heider, *Ethnographic Film* (University of Texas Press, 2006), p. 4.

but ultimately settles on Jean Rouch's view of ethnographic cinema as the statement most approximate to his own view. For Rouch, the unique challenge of ethnographic film is reconciling the rigour of scientific inquiry with the art of cinematography.<sup>39</sup>

For Duarte de Carvalho, ethnographic film represents “ao mesmo tempo o que há de melhor na antropologia e no cinema, criando a oportunidade de repensar a antropologia em termos de cinema e vice-versa, e criando novas vias para as duas disciplinas”.<sup>40</sup> In his text, the director outlines the specific challenges of developing an ethnographic film practice in Africa, and particularly in Angola. He notes that African directors are generally opposed to ethnography, and even to anthropology more broadly, which are viewed as Western, colonial disciplines. Angola is no exception. There, “quem faz os films são os realizadores e os realizadores angolanos são cineastas africanos”.<sup>41</sup> These negative attitudes towards anthropology and ethnography, with their racist histories and imperial connotations, are considered by the director as a barrier to the formation of new, radical and decolonial ethnographic film practices in Angola.

Duarte de Carvalho refuses the possibility of developing an ethnographic cinema in Angola most vehemently in relation to the challenging material conditions faced by the nation's filmmakers.<sup>42</sup> Specifically, the issue is not simply a lack of cinematic equipment or resources,

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<sup>39</sup> Jean Rouch, 'Le filme ethnographique', in *Ethnologie Générale*, ed. by Jean Poirier (Gallimard, 1968), pp. 429-471.

<sup>40</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, *O Camarada*, p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

which he notes is a concern across the African continent, but also the logistics of moving around the country during the ongoing civil war.<sup>43</sup> He writes:

Recusamos, entretanto, no contexto de Angola, a hipótese do cinema etnográfico. Colocamo-nos assim ao lado da grande maioria dos cineastas africanos, embora não exatamente pelas mesmas razões. Não partilhamos a marcada antipatia que a antropologia lhes merece e que está talvez na base da sua atitude de recusa. Entendemos apenas que Angola não dispõe de recursos cinematográficos, técnicos e humanos, suficientes para encarar como imediatamente viável o emprego do seu potencial produtivo na realização de trabalhos cuja preocupação maior é de aliar o rigor antropológico à expressão cinematográfica.<sup>44</sup>

Duarte de Carvalho also alludes to the influence of the state on film production in Angola, suggesting that the MPLA's specific political and ideological agenda presented an additional obstacle to the development of a truly ethnographic cinema. As Raquel Schefer has noted, anthropology had played an important role in earlier post-independence Angolan cinema, which sought to make visible "the ethno-cultural variety of the Angolan nation". In this context, "cinema became a facilitator of the semi-invisible imposition of the nation-state's universalism", with films screened in urban areas to demonstrate "the 'backwardness' of some regions, thus legitimising modernization" and garnering support for the MPLA's narrow conception of Angolan nationhood.<sup>45</sup> The demanding and rigorous nature of a truly ethnographic cinematic inquiry, however, was ill-suited to serve the party's interests. Such

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<sup>43</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, *O Camarada*, p. 35.

<sup>44</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, *O Camarada*, p. 90.

<sup>45</sup> Raquel Schefer, 'Ruy Duarte de Carvalho's *Nelisita*: Shifting the Boundaries of Art and Science in Angolan Revolutionary Cinema', *South African History Journal*, 72:3 (2020), pp. 405-430 (p. 420), doi:10.1080/02582473.2020.1836020.

films would not reach a wide audience, nor would they help to disseminate the party's ideology.

Despite dismissing ethnography as a realistic pursuit for his contemporaries in Angola, Duarte de Carvalho does not agree that African cinema must entirely reject and avoid the “olhar etnográfico”.<sup>46</sup> From a more practical standpoint, he suggests a meeting of cinema and anthropology “fora dos contornos formais e teóricos do filme etnográfico”.<sup>47</sup> This is clearly distinct from the MPLA's instrumentalization of anthropological methods through early state-produced national cinema. Rather, Duarte de Carvalho advocates for an “anthropology of change”. What this entails is not entirely clear. As Schefer highlights, the director's arguments “are not deeply developed in certain passages”, particularly relating to the specific form of anthropology required in an Angolan context.<sup>48</sup> Duarte de Carvalho states:

Para além do filme etnográfico, cuja produção não nos parece adaptada às condições da cinematográfica angolana, outras relações de interacção entre cinema e antropologia poderão revelar-se, entre nós, não apenas praticáveis mas também defensáveis.<sup>49</sup>

Duarte de Carvalho frames *Nelisita* as his attempt to move towards an “anthropology of change”. Through the text, he outlines the film's connections – “laços e relações a vários níveis” – with anthropology and ethnographic methods.<sup>50</sup> The film emerged from ethnographic fieldwork carried out during the making of his previous documentary series,

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<sup>46</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, *O Camarada*, p. 43.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>48</sup> Schefer, ‘Ruy Duarte de Carvalho's *Nelisita*’, p. 413.

<sup>49</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, *O Camarada*, p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

*Presente Angolano, Tempo Mumuhuila* (1978), which had also been commissioned and produced by TPA. Despite this, the director is clear that he does not consider *Nelisita* an ethnographic film. One reason for this is the film's lack of objective detachment. In the film, the director does not apply a detached, impartial or scientific gaze to the Mumuhuila. Rather, as Schefer notes, *Nelisita* reinforces its "absolute singularity" through its "transition from an observatory to a participatory and collaborative system of representation".<sup>51</sup> As Inês Ponte has explored in her analysis of the film, Duarte de Carvalho sought to give "complete cinematic authority to the Ovanyeka-inspired narrative and to its protagonists".<sup>52</sup> In this way, Duarte de Carvalho appears to consider the film as more of an ethical and civil intervention, "que excede o âmbito das responsabilidades científicas ou estéticas", rather than an example of ethnographic cinema as he conceives of this practice.<sup>53</sup>

Aesthetics are certainly a significant concern in *Nelisita*. The film's visually striking cinematography inscribes Mumuhuila culture at every level to ensure that the group's cultural practices are present, valued and legitimized throughout.<sup>54</sup> In this way, the director's aesthetic choices are most notable for the ways in which they pertain to an overriding ethical commitment to those marginalized within Angola. The choice to use black and white film, for example, rather than colour, was intended to avoid creating a "folkloric" appearance to the work that would position the film's subjects as backwards, or outside of Angolan modernity.

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<sup>51</sup> Schefer, 'Ruy Duarte de Carvalho's *Nelisita*', p. 422.

<sup>52</sup> Ponte, 'An Angolan vernacular-language fiction film', p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, *O Camarada*, p. 67.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

In an Angolan cinematic context, *Nelisita* is also formally innovative. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the film represents one of the first examples of narrative cinema in post-independence Angola. Additionally, like Fortunato's *Memória de um Dia*, which was released in the same year, the film marks another example of an evolving adaptation practice in Angolan cinema. The film is an adaptation of two Mumuhuila folk tales, which had previously been recorded by the French anthropologist Carlos Estermann.<sup>55</sup> Through a collaborative revisioning of the original stories, undertaken with the Mumuhuila, Duarte de Carvalho's adaptation reinscribes the orality of these narratives. Most obviously, this is achieved through language. *Nelisita* is recorded entirely in the Olunyaneka language, using subtitles in place of Portuguese language dubbing (as the director had done in previous documentaries). This is a clear ideological choice, particularly given the rates of literacy in Angola at the time of the film's release, and the barriers to access and understanding that this may have posed. However, if Duarte de Carvalho expands the formal and linguistic parameters of Angolan cinema through *Nelisita*, the intention of this expansion is firmly rooted in the director's ethical commitment to representing the diversity of the nation to the cosmopolitan and intellectual circles within which he moved, and of which he was intensely critical, emphasising the presence and legitimacy of different cultural groups within Angola.

*Nelisita* thus implicitly brings into question the positionality, practice and ethical responsibility of the Angolan filmmaker. I suggest that *O Camarada e A Câmera* is an autoethnographic text that expands on this process. While Duarte de Carvalho does not use the term autoethnography explicitly, the text itself is evidence of a self-reflexive,

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<sup>55</sup> Schefer, 'Ruy Duarte de Carvalho's *Nelisita*', p. 406.

autoethnographic impulse.<sup>56</sup> Through his thesis, the director further interrogates his ethnographic encounter with the Mumuhuila, reflecting on the ethical parameters and socio-political implications of his anthropological fieldwork and filmmaking practice. For Caivano and Naumes, autoethnography is fundamentally “an approach where scholars utilize their own experiences to interrogate power structures”.<sup>57</sup> Through his text, Duarte de Carvalho draws upon his own experience as a filmmaker in Angola to investigate and challenge accepted anthropological filmmaking practices under the MPLA, which represented one of the most influential methods of knowledge production in and about Angolan culture and society at this time.

Can an expansion of this critical autoethnographic practice be traced through *Moia*? While the film is not explicitly about the director, I have noted the ways in which Duarte de Carvalho inserts a certain amount of autobiographical material into his fictional protagonist, positioning Moia as an embodiment of his own identity and experiences in Angola and Cape Verde. As his antecedent text proves, this decision to turn inward does not represent an abandonment of his search for a viable “anthropology of change”. The question of anthropology and ethnography’s relevance to Angolan cinema and society was still very much at the centre of Duarte de Carvalho’s mind when he made his final film.

By this stage, however, film production had all but halted in Angola. The material factors identified by the director as impediments to the development of a properly ethnographic

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<sup>56</sup> The term “autoethnography” began to be debated and gain popularity in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Alice A. Deck, ‘Autoethnography: Zora Neale Hurston, Noni Jabavu, and Cross-Disciplinary Discourse’, *Black American Literature Forum*, 24:2 (1990), pp. 237-256 (p. 243), doi:10.2307/3041706). It is likely that Duarte de Carvalho would have encountered the term during his studies in Paris.

<sup>57</sup> Caivano and Naumes, *The Sublime of the Political*, p. 11.

cinema in Angola – a lack of infrastructure and resources, the ongoing civil conflict, the influence and interference of the MPLA in national filmmaking – had worsened since the completion of *O Camarada e A Câmera* in 1983. Under these circumstances, it would be impossible for Duarte de Carvalho to pursue the rigorously scientific and aesthetically demanding ethnographic cinematic practice he describes in this text. Furthermore, as frustration and discontent with the MPLA’s post-independence political project continued to grow, the ethical imperative to challenge the party’s hegemony in Angola also remained strong. The need to develop a form of anthropological filmmaking suited to this Angolan context persisted.

In this context, Duarte de Carvalho’s anthropological filmmaking would continue to be shaped and guided by his commitment to the nation. Through *Moia*, the director lays bare and interrogates his own relation to the nation’s elite ruling class. For Russell, autoethnographic film can act as “a vehicle to challenge imposed forms of identity”.<sup>58</sup> Falling somewhere between autobiography and social analysis, in an autoethnographic inquiry the objectivity and positionality of the autoethnographer is necessarily always in question. As in ethnographic filmmaking, there is also an important aesthetic dimension. Unlike ethnographic filmmaking, however, an autoethnographic filmmaking practice was a feasible pursuit during this period. Autoethnography is, by its very nature, “fora dos contornos formais e teóricos do filme etnográfico”.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, p. 276.

<sup>59</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, *O Camarada*, p. 36.

In exploring where *Moia* might be read as an autoethnographic film, perhaps the most significant factor to consider is the director's deep ethnographic interest and the way his view of the world was informed by his anthropological training. For Heider, whose theory of ethnographic film was a key influence on Duarte de Carvalho's analysis of *Nelisita* and the wider landscape of anthropological filmmaking in Angola, "the most important attribute of ethnographic film is that it is informed by ethnographic understanding".<sup>60</sup> It is hard to imagine that the director's studies in Paris, and his foray into autoethnographic inquiry through *O Camarada e A Câmera*, would not have influenced his final film. Indeed, in a trajectory of his own life sketched out by Duarte de Carvalho in 2001, he considers his time in Cape Verde to fall within an explicitly anthropological phase of his career (Fig. 3.1).

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<sup>60</sup> Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 4.

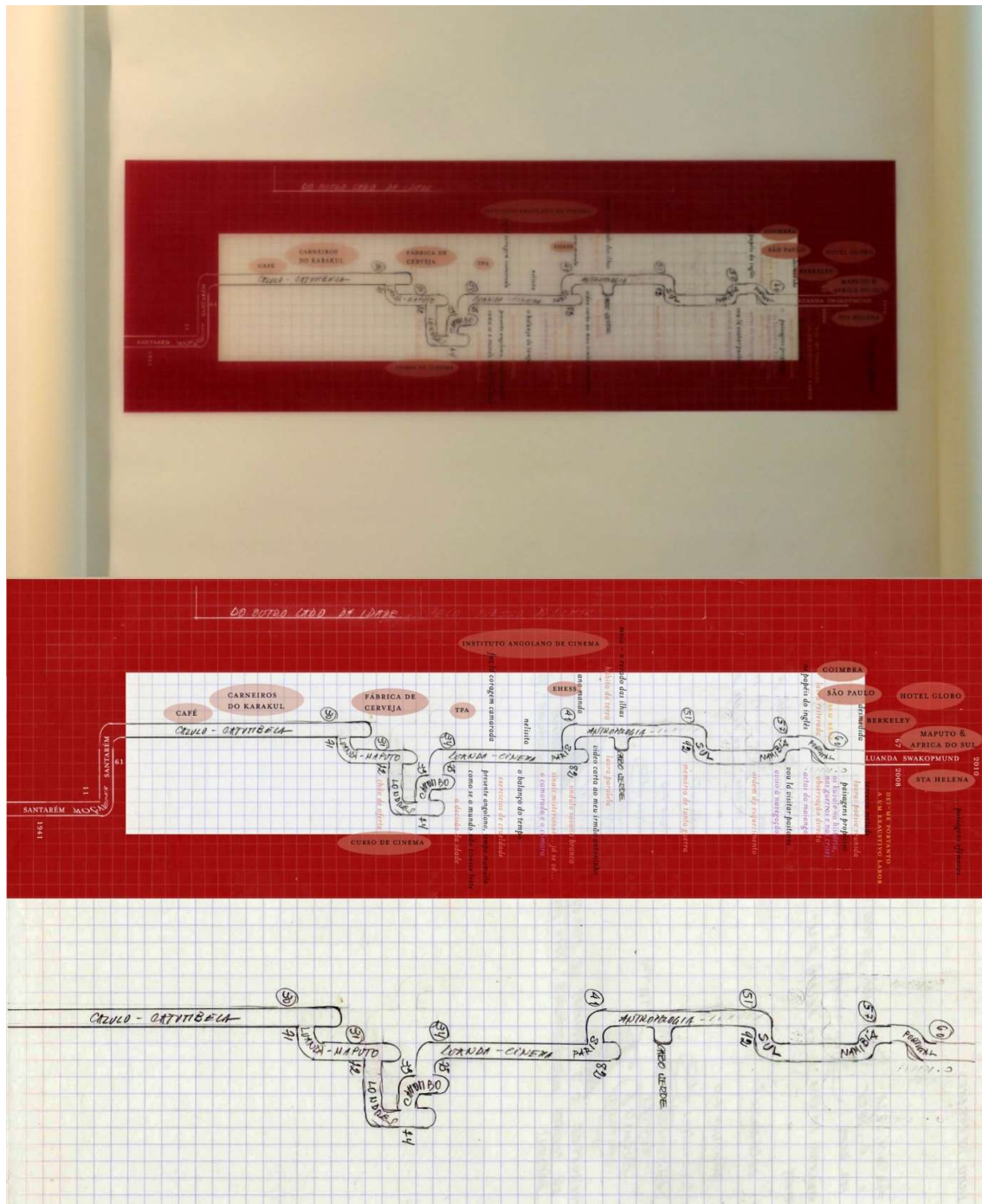


Fig. 3.1. 'Do outro lado da idade, pelo avesso do olhar', a trajectory of Ruy Duarte de Carvalho's life based on an original sketch by Duarte de Carvalho, produced for the exhibition 'Uma Delicada Zona de Compromisso', Lisbon, 2015  
 <<https://www.buala.org/pt/galeria/uma-delicada-zona-de-compromisso>> [accessed 7 October 2024].

Another of the obstacles to an indigenous African ethnographic cinema foreseen by Duarte de Carvalho is the proximity of the filmmaker to the space in which the ethnographic inquiry is made. In this regard, Duarte de Carvalho's thesis initially appears to refute the entire possibility of ethnographic cinema made for and by African directors; he argues that "o filme etnográfico feito por africanos não é, quanto a nós, de considerar, apenas e tão-só porque a sua realização se nós não afigura possível".<sup>61</sup> Through the text, he maintains that proper ethnographic inquiry is impossible when "o terreno de trabalho é simultaneamente o seu espaço nacional".<sup>62</sup> The director's decision to make *Moia* outside Angola further allows for a reading of the film as a form of autoethnography. In the following section, I turn to Duarte de Carvalho's choice of location, Cape Verde, as well as his adaptation of Cape Verdean literary sources, to ask where the director's "ethnographic understanding" intersects with his poetics and politics in the development of this autoethnographic filmmaking practice.

### **Cape Verde: Autoethnography from the Margins**

Cape Verde has always defied binaries. Described by Fátima Bettencourt as "nem africano nem europeu", the ten islands that make up Cape Verde constitute an idiosyncratic space of hybridity and liminality.<sup>63</sup> The archipelago was colonized and settled by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century. Previously uninhabited, the islands' position on important transatlantic trade routes, as well as the forced relocation of enslaved Africans to the colony by the Portuguese, resulted in the development of a racially mixed, Creole society.

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<sup>61</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, *O Camarada*, p. 39.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>63</sup> Fátima Bettencourt, 'Ilhas de Cabo Verde – Mitos e Esperanças', in *O Ilhéu de Cabo Verde*, ed. by Corsino Tolentino, Crispina Gomes, Amália Vera-Cruz Lopes, and Adriana Monteiro (Universidade Católica Editora, 2019), pp. 123-130 (p. 125).

Under Portuguese colonial rule, as Patrick Chabal notes, most Portuguese made a clear distinction between Cape Verdeans and other Africans.<sup>64</sup> The islands and their inhabitants were seen as an extension of Europe, rather than part of Africa. Greater proximity to the colonizer and a supposedly greater cultural similarity to the Portuguese meant that Cape Verdeans were afforded a higher status in Portuguese colonial society. As Richard A. Lobban Jr. outlines, Cape Verdeans commonly operated as “strategic intermediaries in the colonial system, serving as local administrators and functionaries in all parts of the Luso-African world”.<sup>65</sup> However, despite this relative cultural privilege, Cape Verde was still an exploited colony. Until 1975, absolute power “always lay outside of the islands and virtually always in the hands of the Portuguese or a few other Europeans resident in the islands”.<sup>66</sup> Racist categories and policies meant that Cape Verdeans were still considered and treated as second-class citizens of Portugal, “trapped in a system in which they were simultaneously subordinated and elevated”.<sup>67</sup>

Cape Verdean Creole society is historically and culturally located at the threshold between Europe and Africa, colonizer and colonized, white and black. The islands complicate and destabilise these dualisms. Some conceptions of Cape Verde’s Creole culture have emphasized a double alterity within established binary structures, a state of non-belonging either to Africa or to Europe. Martina Giuffré notes that most Cape Verdeans prefer “a vision of Cape Verdean-ness as an autonomous, original, unique identity” that is fundamentally separate from categories of Africanness or Europeanness.<sup>68</sup> The writer Vera Duarte, for

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<sup>64</sup> Patrick Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People’s War* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 34.

<sup>65</sup> Richard A. Lobban Jr, *Cape Verde: Crioulo Colony to Independent Nation* (Westview Press, 1995), p. 58.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>68</sup> Martina Giuffré, ‘Female migration in the Cape Verde islands: From islandness to transnationalism’, *Island Studies Journal*, 16:2 (2021), pp. 117-135 (p. 122), doi:10.24043/isj.180.

example, suggests that Cape Verdean Creole identity entails “continually overcoming” such antinomies, in a creative and generative process of cultural synthesis and becoming.<sup>69</sup>

What does it mean for Ruy Duarte de Carvalho – himself a border crosser, a white, Portuguese-born Angolan citizen – to conduct an autoethnography of an Angolan socio-political elite from Cape Verde? From a wider nissological perspective, scholars such as Boon, Butler and Jefferies have noted that “to think from an island” is necessarily “to think from a threshold space”.<sup>70</sup> Islands are heterogenous, contradictory, paradoxical. They are simultaneously hard-edged, isolated and insular, and precarious, fluid and permeably boundaried.<sup>71</sup> The “shifting liminality” of the island opens up imaginative and epistemological possibilities that remake and unsettle from the borders.<sup>72</sup> How and why does Duarte de Carvalho construct his autoethnography from these margins? What do the islands reveal about the purpose of the director’s autoethnographic inquiry?

*Moia* begins with a shot of a hand pushing a video tape into a VHS machine, which begins to play on screen. The footage depicts Cape Verde, featuring aerial shots of the islands and scenes of Cape Verdeans dancing to traditional music. The film then cuts to a shot of Moia and a male relative, who sit in front of a television set watching the video. The footage is his, recorded during a recent trip to the islands. The pair begin talking about his visit, ruminating on the “magic” of Cape Verde. Their discussion is immediately revealing of their class and socio-economic status. Moia and her relative are both Portuguese-speaking, urban, multi-

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<sup>69</sup> Vera Duarte, *O escritor cabo-verdiano hoje* (Pré-textos, 1994), p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> Sonja Boon, Lesley Butler, and Daze Jefferies, *Autoethnography and Feminist Theory at the Water’s Edge: Unsettled Islands* (Springer International Publishing, 2018), p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> Pete Hay, ‘A Phenomenology of Islands’, *Island Studies Journal*, 1:1 (2006), pp. 19-42.

<sup>72</sup> Gillian Beer, ‘Island Bounds’, in *Islands in History and Representation*, ed. by Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (Routledge, 2003), pp. 32-42 (p. 33).

racial cosmopolitans, who move between Europe and Africa with ease. At the time of their conversation, they are in Lisbon. In this opening scene, Duarte de Carvalho thus immediately situates his characters socially, establishing the film's primary concern with this stratum of Angolan society.

In this social context, the pair's fascination with Cape Verde takes on a significance that extends beyond their immediate family connections. The term "Creole" has very different meanings in Cape Verde and Angola. Members of Angola's elite classes do not identify as Creoles, or even as descendants of early Angolan Creoles, rejecting the imperial associations of this group in an Angolan context.<sup>73</sup> Moia, too, clearly differentiates between her mother's Cape Verdean Creole identity and her own "mulata" identity. However, there are possible affinities between a privileged Angolan socio-political class broadly descended from a nineteenth-century Angolan Creole elite, which also traditionally occupied a position of relative privilege and proximity to European and colonial structures, and the Creole society that emerged in Cape Verde. Without reducing the film's cultural specificity, the space of Cape Verde allows for a wider interrogation into manifestations of Creole and culturally hybrid identities across the Lusophone world, and particularly invites a consideration of where this intersects with Angolanness, necessarily setting up a comparison through the film's Angolan protagonist. In the film, Moia decides to go to the islands to explore her "identidade crioula". The ambiguity of the term used could relate specifically to her Cape Verdean heritage, or to a broader notion of a hybrid, "Creole" identity that transcends national formulations.

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<sup>73</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 7.

While watching the video, Moia's relative describes Cape Verde as "um país bíblico", a magical place unlike anywhere he has ever known before. Travelling to the islands marked a moment of "rupture" with what came before. His description of Cape Verde implies a perception of the islands as an Edenic paradise, suspended in time and beyond the reach of Westernized notions of modernity and progress. The statements suggest a fundamentally Eurocentric perspective. Walter Mignolo, for example, has theorized the ways in which the rhetoric of modernity "goes hand in hand with coloniality".<sup>74</sup> European narratives of modernity are intrinsic to the "colonial matrix (or order) of power" which relegates the non-Western to a space of pre-modernity and underdevelopment, and thus legitimises processes of colonization and domination.<sup>75</sup>

While Cape Verdean Creoles might have benefitted from some cultural privileges under the Portuguese colonial regime, the islands are historically extremely poor. Challenging economic conditions, exacerbated by the region's harsh geography and climate, along with frequent periods of drought and famine, have resulted in centuries of mass emigration from the islands.<sup>76</sup> For Sonia Miceli, in the context of *Moia*, if Luanda, "capital de um país extensor e dotado de recursos notáveis", is positioned as the "periferia do centro" – Lisbon, the colonial and European "centre" – then the small and poor nation of Cape Verde can be considered the "periferia da periferia".<sup>77</sup> In the opening scene, Moia and her relative might be

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<sup>74</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Duke University Press, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 42

<sup>76</sup> Jørgen Carling and Luís Batalha, *Transnational Archipelago: Perspectives on Cape Verdean Migration and Diaspora* (Amsterdam University Press, 2008), p. 18-19.

<sup>77</sup> Sonia Miceli, 'Os triângulos de Ruy Duarte de Carvalho', in *Diálogos com Ruy Duarte de Carvalho*, ed. by Ana Balona de Oliveira, Marta Lança, Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, and Rita Chaves (BUALA and CEC, 2019), <<http://hdl.handle.net/10451/37994>> [accessed 5 October 2024].

understood to conceive of the islands in this triangulated way. Cape Verde also sits at the margins of their own experience, given that they have never, or only recently, travelled there.

In the following scene, Moia is shown reading *Noite de Vento*, a collection of short stories by the Cape Verdean author António Aurélio Gonçalves, first published in 1951. António Gonçalves is most often associated with the Cape Verdean literary journal *Claridade*, which was published between 1936 and 1960. Founded by the *Caboverdianidade* literary movement, the journal was intended to explore the foundations of Creole culture and celebrate Cape Verde's unique cultural identity, as well as to develop a Cape Verdean artistic expression that could account for the "intolerable living conditions" on the islands.<sup>78</sup> While the movement laid the literary foundations for decolonization and the future development of political independence movements in Cape Verde, the publication has also been criticised for being too Eurocentric in its formulation of Cape Verdean identity. Giuffrè suggests that "the *Claridade* movement still suffered from a marked Portuguese influence, with the African component of Cape Verdean culture seen as folkloric and marginal in a predominantly European context".<sup>79</sup> For Alfredo Margarido, Gonçalves was "o mais europeu" of this group of Cape Verdean writers.<sup>80</sup> The reference to *Noite de Vento* associates Moia with this perspective, which differs from the triangulation identified by Miceli, instead reinforcing the "otherness" of Africa and reaffirming the cultural hegemony of Europe, with Cape Verde located somewhere in between. In each configuration, however, Europe remains at the centre, as, to differing degrees, Cape Verde and Angola are variably marginalised and "othered".

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<sup>78</sup> Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral*, p. 32.

<sup>79</sup> Giuffrè, 'Female migration', p.121.

<sup>80</sup> Alfredo Margarido, *Estudos sobre Literatura das Nações Africanas de Língua Portuguesa* (A Regra do Jogo, 1980), p. 417.

The film's opening scenes thus reveal some of the cultural preconceptions, attitudes and beliefs held by a specific Angolan socio-cultural elite within which *Moia* is located. In these scenes, Duarte de Carvalho also inserts himself into the film at multiple levels. Both the self-reflexive film-within-a-film – the travel footage – and Gonçalves's book not only establish a specific social framework for his protagonist, but also draw attention to the question of authorship. In the opening scene, this self-reflexivity is heightened by the film's credits, which appear over the travel video as it plays on the screen, momentarily giving the impression that the footage of Cape Verde is Duarte de Carvalho's film (Fig. 3.2). In these ways, the director positions himself as part of the same social sphere as his protagonist, possibly implying that, through the film, the director/authorial figure will be as much the subject of the film's autoethnographic inquiry as its fictional characters.

For Duarte de Carvalho, however, there is an obvious problem that comes with investigating this Angolan elite. The director was deeply critical of this class and its monopoly on power, advocating for a more decentralized nation, as well as the valorisation of other cultural identities in Angola. His previous documentaries – *Nelisita* and *Presente Angolano, Tempo Mumuhuila* – had sought to challenge the cultural dominance of the MPLA and its privileged, urban-focussed leadership. How, then, could an autoethnographic inquiry into this section of Angolan society avoid replicating the centrality of this elite? Additionally, in the context of the MPLA's post-independence cinematic project, how might an introspective film such as *Moia* simultaneously dislocate an authoritative directorial voice, rejecting the ideological and political connotations of the monologic model of cinema developed in the early years of independence, in favour of a more dialogical form of autoethnography?

Within the “shifting liminality” of Cape Verde, Duarte de Carvalho places himself and his protagonist both as the subject of his inquiry and at the margins of the film’s action. Moia decides to visit São Vicente before returning to Luanda. Upon arriving, she is portrayed as detached and removed from her surroundings. After being collected from the airport, point-of-view shots from Moia’s perspective are interrupted by the glass of the car windows, which creates a visible border between the protagonist and the Cape Verdean landscape. The constant movement of the car through this scene further precludes any focus on the people or places passing by. During this sequence, Moia is also shot from outside the car, through the window looking inwards, again marking a tangible boundary between her character and the surroundings. When the car is shot from the outside, a number of the shots are far removed from the vehicle, which is then partially obscured, further signalling the distance between Moia and the islands.

Exploring the islands, Moia initially appears uncomfortable in her new setting. Approaching the house of one of her relatives, she hesitates multiple times before knocking. She eventually asks Marquino, another relative who is sitting outside, to knock as she is too scared to do so herself. Inside, Moia is shown having her hair braided. Her participation in this act is significant. Hair, particularly in black communities, is a means of connection, solidarity and resistance across cultures and diasporic populations.<sup>81</sup> The scene implies that the protagonist has begun to close the distance that existed between herself and the islands, possibly arising from her own preconceived notions of Cape Verde and her relationship to this space.

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<sup>81</sup> Emma Dabiri, *Don't Touch my Hair* (Penguin, 2019).

Duarte de Carvalho presents this literally as a transformative moment. Looking in the mirror after her hair has been braided, Moia sees another young woman looking back. The woman could be read to represent Moia's mother, with the maternal reflection again suggesting the protagonist's growing approximation to Cape Verdean culture and her own heritage (Fig. 3.3 – 3.4). However, while the director focusses here on Moia's transformation, the visual representation of hybrid cultural identity that appears on screen in this moment literally splits the protagonist into multiple subjects. This technique, which is repeated throughout the film, simultaneously centres and displaces both Moia and, by extension, the Angolan socio-political elite she represents, destabilising the monologic and hegemonic perspective and rhetorical stance of this group.



Fig. 3.2. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.3. Moia looks into the mirror..., in *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.4. ...and sees a different reflection, in *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.

This shifting marginalization extends to the director. Another example of intertextual self-referentiality in the film comes shortly after Moia's arrival in São Vicente, when she attends a performance of 'Blimundo', a traditional Cape Verdean folk tale. There are various versions of this story. The play performed in *Moia* is based on Leão Lopes's 1982 version, entitled *A História de Blimundo*. In Lopes's retelling, the great, strong bull, Blimundo – a defender of liberty and peace, who is loved and respected by everyone in the kingdom – is enslaved and exploited by the King. He works day and night at a press, crushing the sugarcane needed to make grogue, a traditional Cape Verdean liquor. The King is threatened by Blimundo's popularity and orders the bull to be killed. Blimundo flees, and the King's men are unable to find him. A young man comes to the King and claims that he can track down the bull. He will travel across the land, singing a beautiful song to entice him.

Eventually, Blimundo hears the music and is lured to the man. The man tells him the King is looking for him and wishes to give him a wife. Blimundo agrees to go with him, and they travel back to the King. Before the wedding, the man suggests Blimundo trims his beard. Blimundo agrees, wanting to look his best for his new bride. The barber slits Blimundo's throat. Realising the plot, Blimundo uses his final breaths to sing a beautiful and melancholic song, condemning the betrayal he has suffered. The young man and the barber escape, but Blimundo's song haunts them forever. Despite its tragic ending, 'Blimundo' remains an enduring narrative of liberation, freedom, rebellion and resistance in Cape Verde. In all the versions of the story, the bull symbolises those who have experienced injustice, representing the dignity of persecuted subjects and reclaiming histories of revolt against the oppressor.

The performance of ‘Blimundo’ in *Moia* invites comparison with Duarte de Carvalho’s previous film, *Nelisita*, which also adapts traditionally oral and folk narratives. Like *Nelisita*, the folk play is performed by non-professional, local actors. In *Moia*, these actors are local children. This is not a detached, ethnographic study of Cape Verdean society. Rather, Duarte de Carvalho again models the collaborative system of production and representation seen in *Nelisita*. In *Moia*, His cinematic adaptation of this traditional folk tale also refuses to present the Cape Verdean subjects as “outside of time”. The performers wear contemporary clothing and use modern technology, such as headphones. Through the play, Duarte de Carvalho fundamentally rejects the “othering” of Cape Verde that occurs in the film’s opening scenes. Instead, delinking from a Eurocentric perspective, the performance centres both Cape Verdean culture and its enduring African heritage and traditions.

The obvious self-referentiality in the adaptation of ‘Blimundo’ underscores the autoethnographic nature of Duarte de Carvalho’s film. In doing so, however, the director also intentionally relegates both himself and his protagonist to the margins of the performance. Scenes from the production attended by Moia - which mostly takes place on a boat – are intermittently cut with footage of a different performance, where the same scenes are performed on land (Fig. 3.5 – 3.8), shifting the focus away from Moia’s perspective and experience of the play. Leão Lopes – the author of the version of ‘Blimundo’ performed – is present through the scene, playing the role of the Cape Verdean man who takes Moia to see the play, and who then narrates the story to her and the film’s audience (Fig. 3.9). The film’s credits reveal that Lopes also directed the play in the film. The presence of Lopes concurrently foregrounds and effaces Duarte de Carvalho, self-reflexively drawing attention to the film’s writer and director, while also rendering him secondary to the writer and director of the play.



Fig. 3.5. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.6. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.7. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.8. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.9. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.

Here, Duarte de Carvalho stages an autoethnographic reflection on his own ethnographic encounters with an “Other”. The decentring of the autoethnographic subject inherent to this staging can be interpreted in multiple ways. The collaboration with Lopes is a direct continuation and expansion of the collective filmmaking practices developed by Duarte de Carvalho through *Nelisita*, as well as an active strategy to avoid casting an “othering” gaze upon the Cape Verdean subjects engaged in the performance of the play, by working with a local director. Equally, by marginalising the film’s protagonist, as well as reducing his own influence as director, Duarte de Carvalho undermines the social and cultural hegemony of the social group to which they both belong. In this way, the director interrogates an Angolan socio-political elite without reinscribing its authority or centrality through his film.

This aligns with the director’s move away from the monologic, didactic filmmaking seen in Angola after the initial post-independence period, towards a more dialogic form of cinema that allows for the co-presence of multiple voices and equally valid perspectives. In his exploration of D. H. Lawrence’s 1927 short story, ‘The Man Who Loved Islands’, Adam Nicolson observes that Lawrence’s islands “are not so much islands as ‘I’lands’, where the inflated self smothers and obliterates all forms of life”.<sup>82</sup> Here, Duarte de Carvalho’s concern with the self is not one of withdrawal and isolation, or as Tasmanian poet Pete Hay notes, “anti-social self indulgence”.<sup>83</sup> Rather, *Moia* presents an autoethnography of a socially contingent “I”, which is aware of and works to dismantle its own privilege and power.

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<sup>82</sup> Adam Nicolson, *Sea Room: An Island Life* (HarperCollins, 2002), p. 344.

<sup>83</sup> Hay, ‘A Phenomenology’, p. 21.

Beyond the issue of class, Duarte de Carvalho's choice of a female, non-white protagonist might also be read as part of the director's conscious self-marginalisation as a white man. In this light, the inclusion of Gonçalves's *Noite de Vento* takes on a further significance.

Gonçalves's collection of short stories all feature female protagonists who follow or explore their desires. In this way, while Duarte de Carvalho's protagonist can be considered somewhat autobiographical, Moia's association with this book also foregrounds her character's relative agency and autonomy, simultaneously side-lining the director. During her time in Cape Verde, however, Moia – who still operates within and benefits from various systems of privilege, through her proximity to whiteness, her class and socio-economic status – also becomes increasingly marginalised and decentred within the film's narrative. The steady fragmentation of the director and his protagonist thus operates at various levels to open up potentially uncomfortable questions for the audience about the specific social contexts and structures from which both emerge.

The film actively marginalises the privileged subjects of the film's inquiry. For the viewer, these processes are uncomfortable, and the unsteady positionality of the film's subjects is disorientating. Furthermore, just as the director displaces himself through his specific use of *Noite de Vento* and 'Blimundo', the literary references and adaptation in Duarte de Carvalho's film position the viewer at another, intertextual margin, which demands a critical engagement with the film beyond a recognition of the borders and binaries traversed by the director and his protagonist. Positioning an intended Angolan viewer at the margin between an Angolan film and these Cape Verdean texts necessarily and simultaneously evokes specific Lusophone and nissological dynamics – and invites the audience to reflect on these from an interstitial, unfixed perspective.

I have noted Linda Hutcheon's distinction of the "knowing audience" in adaptation studies.<sup>84</sup> In Duarte de Carvalho's film, given that many of the film's transnational literary references appear to emerge from Moia's consciousness, it could be argued that, at least on some level, the film assumes that if a "knowing" audience exists, this would originate from the same educated, cosmopolitan elite to which the protagonist belongs. For this "knowing" audience, the dialogical aspect of the adaptation is heightened. This is to say that an awareness of a film's status as adaptation necessarily entails a form of engagement in which audiences must always hold (at least) two texts, two voices, in their mind at the same time. The dialogical confrontation, here, arises when the viewer's original interpretation or understanding of the source text collides with that of the director's, revealing affinities or discrepancies between the two.<sup>85</sup>

In this way, the audience are no longer what Bakhtin calls "non-participatory third parties". Instead, as John Bruns notes, "we do more than witness, we judge".<sup>86</sup> Perhaps, then, in the wider context of the film, Duarte de Carvalho engages with multiple literary sources to emphasize the film's polyphony to a "knowing" subset of his Angolan audience that he believed operated mainly out of their own self-interest and were uninterested in hearing or valuing the voices of others. This audience could no longer be the passive recipients of a monologic cinema that affirmed their identity and worldview. Rather, negotiating the structural duality of the adaptation, and repeatedly encountering an "other" perspective on the

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<sup>84</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 120.

<sup>85</sup> Cutchins, 'Bakhtin, Intertextuality, and Adaptation', p. 80.

<sup>86</sup> John Bruns, 'The Polyphonic Film', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 6:2 (2008), pp. 189-212 (p. 204), doi:10.1080/17400300802098313.

originary text with which they are familiar, the viewer becomes “active in the form” of the film.<sup>87</sup>

The adaptation central to *Moia* is also a more indirect and covert means of levelling critiques at the MPLA and Angola’s elites. It is important to note again here that the film is an international co-production.<sup>88</sup> The director would thus have had more freedom to explore ideas and aesthetics falling outside of that which was approved by the MPLA. However, as I have noted, in the context of the party’s increasingly authoritarian one-party system, censorship would have remained a concern. Duarte de Carvalho already had experience with the MPLA’s practices of cultural repression. The fact that the film was reportedly not released or screened publicly is surely testament to this repression. Additionally, of course, the process of dialogic thought in which Duarte de Carvalho asks his audience to participate is not limited to Angolan audiences. His film could equally be directed at an international, mostly Western, film festival-going elite.

The particularities of the intertextual interplay in *Moia* exemplify Duarte de Carvalho’s unique ability to combine poetics, politics and anthropological analysis. Through his literary adaptations, the director self-reflexively foregrounds himself and provides the contextual coordinates of his autoethnographic inquiry, while also simultaneously decentring and destabilising the very self his film seeks to interrogate, relegating both himself and his protagonist to the margins in a refusal to replicate the socio-political hegemony of the group

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<sup>87</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, trans. by Vadim Liapunov, ed. by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 306.

<sup>88</sup> Ferreira, ‘Os três anéis da lusofonia’, <<https://unifesp.academia.edu/CarolinFerreira>> [accessed 5 October 2024].

that they represent. Creating these layers of literary reference, the director demands that the viewer – and, in an Angolan context, specifically viewers belonging to the socio-cultural elite investigated through the film – engage actively with the dialogical exchange established through literary adaptation, while also being positioned at an equivalent, intertextual margin. The director’s adaptive practice thus reveals what Bakhtin describes as a radically dialogical “will to combine many wills”.<sup>89</sup> In the next section, I show how Duarte de Carvalho expands these elements of his autoethnographic inquiry through another instance of literary adaptation within the film – his re-visioning of *The Tempest*.

### ***Moia’s Tempests***

‘Blimundo’ is not the only theatrical adaptation in *Moia*. After the children’s performance, Moia visits two elderly relatives in an old, colonial house. Entering the courtyard, she stops to take photos of men and large bulls working around a sugarcane press in the centre of the courtyard, before ascending the stairs to greet her hosts. There is a sudden crash, and Moia looks down into the yard to see enslaved men working at the stone mill alongside the bulls, as a colonial master and his aggressive, barking dog stand by watching on (Fig. 3.10 – 3.11). The scene, which is a direct reference to the story of Blimundo, blurs the line between fiction and reality, as the islands’ colonial past appears to erupt into the present.

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<sup>89</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 21.



Fig. 3.10. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.11. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.

From here, the film cuts to a series of shots of the sea and coast, some of which feature a man looking out to the horizon. Over these shots, a voiceover – in English – recites the following lines from Act I, Scene II of William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*:

PROSPERO: Thou poisonous slave, got by the Devil himself  
upon thy wicked dam, come forth!

*Enter CALIBAN*

CALIBAN: As wicked dew, as e’er my mother brushed  
With raven’s feather from unwholesome fen  
Drop on you both! A south-west blow on ye,  
And blister you all o’er!

PROSPERO: For this be sure, tonight thou shall have cramps,  
Side stitches that shall pen thy breath up, urchins  
Shall for that vast of night that they may work  
All exercise on thee. Thou shalt be pinched  
As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging  
Than bees that made ‘em.

CALIBAN: I must eat my dinner.  
This island’s mine by Sycorax my mother,  
Which thou takest from me. When thou cam’st first  
Thou strok’st me, and made much of me. Wouldst give me  
Water with berries in’t. And teach me how  
To name the bigger light, and how the less  
That burn by day and night.<sup>90</sup>

*(The Tempest, I.2, pp. 117-118)*

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<sup>90</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by David Lindley (University of Cambridge Press, 2002), pp.117-118.

Through the twentieth century, *The Tempest* became a crucially important reference for decolonial writers and artists across the world, from the Caribbean to Africa, India to Latin America.<sup>91</sup> Shakespeare's tale of the exiled Prospero "has been re-read and re-written more radically, perhaps, than any other play".<sup>92</sup> This passage in particular – in which the native Caliban articulates his claim to the island, and alludes to the question of language as a tool of colonial domination – has been repeatedly revisited in liberation and postcolonial narratives. The Barbadian George Lamming's 1971 novel *Water with Berries*, for example, takes its title from this scene.

In *Moia*, Duarte de Carvalho's engagement with *The Tempest* not only speaks to Shakespeare's original, through the direct quotation in the voiceover, but also adapts one of the most famous anticolonial revisions of the play, the Martinican writer and politician Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1969). As Shakespeare's lines are recited, the film's action cuts to a shot of a woman in a white dress, who runs down a hill towards the camera. As she reaches the beach at the bottom of the hill, the camera cuts to reveal an older man roasting a small pig. We learn from the opening lines of their conversation that this man is Caliban, and the woman is Ariel. The pair's exchange is a revised version of Act II, Scene I of *Une Tempête*. In Césaire's adaptation, Caliban is recast as a "black slave", and Ariel as a "mulatto slave".<sup>93</sup> Prospero, who enslaves them both, is not brought to the island by a freak storm, but because of his own "imperial ambitions".<sup>94</sup> In this scene, Caliban and Ariel discuss how they might liberate themselves from their enslavement.

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<sup>91</sup> Jyotsna G. Singh, 'Past and Present Shakespeare-Postcoloniality', in Singh, *Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory* (Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 81-100.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman, *The Tempest and its Travels* (Reaktion, 2000), p. xi.

<sup>93</sup> Aimé Césaire, *A Tempest*, trans. by Richard Miller (Ubu Repertory Theater Publications, 1992).

<sup>94</sup> Rob Nixon, 'Caribbean and African Appropriations of "The Tempest"', *Critical Inquiry*, 13:3 (1987), pp. 557-578 (p. 571), doi:10.1086/448408.

Césaire was one of the founding members of the Francophone *négritude* movement, a group of African and Caribbean intellectuals which formed in Paris in the 1930s in response to French colonialism and racism. As I have noted, negritude would go on to develop into a multifaceted and globally dispersed artistic movement broadly concerned with affirming and celebrating the shared struggle, identity and African cultural heritage of black subjects and communities around the world. Duarte de Carvalho's recourse to a writer synonymous with negritude might seem at odds with the apparently "post-racial" conception of Angolan national identity he claims to share with his protagonist. By entering into dialogue with Césaire's play, however, the director contextualises and problematizes this view, further elucidating his position, deepening his autoethnographic inquiry and inviting a more critical engagement from his audience through his adaptation.

It is important to note again here that the negritude movement is not as essentialist as is often believed. Alexandra Reza has conceived of negritude as a polyphonic, evolving and multilingual phenomenon, which came to signify "a more-than-national sensibility and solidarity whose significance changed over time and space".<sup>95</sup> Even within a Francophone context, articulations of negritude have shifted and changed. The Senegalese poet and cultural theorist Léopold Senghor, who would become Senegal's first president and was one of the co-founders of the negritude movement, defined negritude as "the awareness, defence and development of African cultural values".<sup>96</sup> Senghor is often considered one of the most essentialist thinkers of negritude. However, as Souleymane Bachir Diagne has outlined, Senghor's approach to negritude became increasingly deracialised through his life, as he

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<sup>95</sup> Reza, *Anticolonial Form*, p. 122.

<sup>96</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Prose and Poetry*, trans. by John Reed and Clive Wake (Heinemann, 1976), p. 96.

solidified a belief that “everyone must be mixed in their own way”. Over time, Senghor would come to include white Africans and Arab North Africans in his broad defence of African cultural values.<sup>97</sup>

Césaire’s conception of negritude was arguably even more expansive, and less essentialist and reductive, than Senghor’s. Again, Diagne suggests that accusations of essentialism in Césaire’s work are overstated, and mostly arise from early readings of his earlier writings.<sup>98</sup> Rather, he called for an openness to all cultures and a process of “continuous hybridization”.<sup>99</sup> As Doris L. Garraway has noted, Césaire’s negritude “is not a fixed object or idea but a dynamic process”.<sup>100</sup> He suggests that it is necessary to achieve racial self-consciousness in order to understand how the black subject has been constructed historically and socially through colonial discourse and the violent conditions of colonization, colonial oppression and slavery. In this way, Césaire “accepts blackness as a contingent figure for those made physically or intellectually wretched through colonialism and slavery precisely in order to become human again”.<sup>101</sup> It is this racial consciousness, “that is attuned to the historical construction of any and all blackness”, rather than an inherent or mystified precolonial, African “essence”, that “will enable the black man to imagine himself as human”.<sup>102</sup> In this way, as Garraway states, the formation of black consciousness also “becomes the means of throwing off race as essence *and* as construction”.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Souleymane Bachir Diagne, ‘Négritude’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/negritude/>> [accessed 5 October 2024].

<sup>98</sup> Souleymane Bachir Diagne, ‘Rereading Aimé Césaire: Negritude as Creolization’, *Small Axe*, 19:3 (2015), pp. 121-128 (p. 121-122), doi:10.1215/07990537-3341717.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>100</sup> Doris L. Garraway, “‘What is Mine’: Césairean Negritude between the Particular and the Universal”, *Research in African Literatures*, 41:1 (2010), pp. 71-86 (p. 76), doi:10.2979/RAL.2010.41.1.71.

<sup>101</sup> Garraway, “‘What is Mine’”, p. 76.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

Reza notes that “the pluridirectional processes of diffusion that accompanied the development of negritude mean that canonical negritude texts in French cannot accurately be conceptualized as overarching, central, fixed, or ‘sacred’ texts at the centre of this landscape with their influence radiating outwards into a void”.<sup>104</sup> Negritude and the black consciousness movement had been an important influence for many of the MPLA’s early revolutionary leaders, including Agostinho Neto, Mário Pinto de Andrade and Viriato da Cruz, during the 1950s and 1960s. For these writers and thinkers, negritude “continued to be articulated to racially informed expressions of class politics”, coming to represent a call for wider revolutionary solidarity beyond solely black solidarity.<sup>105</sup> Duarte de Carvalho was inspired by the poetry of this movement, which he considered to be fundamental to the realization of his own Angolan identity. Along with Neto and da Cruz, he identifies the writing of José Luandino Vieira as a critical influence that led to the discovery of his “Angolan soul”.<sup>106</sup>

Duarte de Carvalho would become increasingly and critically “aware of the contradictions between the rhetoric of Africanity adopted by those who sought independence and the Western and westernising matrix governing the ideologies which the Angolan state adopted over time”.<sup>107</sup> The director was passionately opposed to what he considered to be the Eurocentric ideals of Angola’s MPLA elites, which were solidified by the vanguard-party after independence. This relentless advance and expansion of Western ideas of progress and modernization in Angola disregarded, disenfranchised and marginalised traditional Angolan communities and African cultures, leaving no room in post-independence Angola for “other”, or indigenous, perspectives or alternatives.

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<sup>104</sup> Reza, *Anticolonial Form*, p. 135.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>106</sup> Santos, ‘Critique of Western Technological Hegemony’, p. 189.

<sup>107</sup> Santos, ‘Critique of Western Technological Hegemony’, p. 197.

In Duarte de Carvalho's view, the MPLA's failure to acknowledge race-related issues and value Africanity after independence, despite the party's claims otherwise, was a barrier to total liberation from colonialism and imperialism. The director's engagement with negritude speaks to this concern. As Rothwell notes, in the context of the early twentieth century, "Marxist thinkers' failure to factor in race as a prevalent matrix through which power relations were also marshalled was challenged by the rise of negritude".<sup>108</sup> For Christopher Miller, negritude was conceived as a racially informed and "engaged corrective" to Marxism.<sup>109</sup> The personal and political relevance of negritude to the director is made evident in the film through his own rearticulation of Césaire's play.

Césaire's reworking of *The Tempest* is a fierce denunciation of colonial power, oppression and violence, which confronts the question of what happens when the colonized subject adopts the colonial practices and logic of the colonizer. The play decentres the white, imperial Prospero and instead shifts the play's focus to the enslaved Caliban and Ariel, to reveal "the brutality which underlies colonization".<sup>110</sup> However, while Césaire's Ariel and Caliban are both enslaved by Prospero – for Ariel, they are "brothers in suffering and slavery", each of whom wants their freedom – the pair take different approaches towards liberation.<sup>111</sup> Ariel favours a more collaborative process of achieving freedom, working with Prospero towards mutual liberation from the colonial structures in which they are all trapped. Caliban, on the other hand, supports a more violent break from the colonial oppressor.

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<sup>108</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 9.

<sup>109</sup> Christopher L. Miller, 'The (Revised) Birth of Negritude: Communist Revolution and "the Immanent Negro" in 1935', *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 125:3 (2010), pp. 743-749 (p. 747), doi:10.1632/pmla.2010.125.3.743.

<sup>110</sup> Judith Holland Sarnecki, 'Mastering the Masters: Aimé Césaire's Creolization of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', *The French Review*, 74:2 (2000), pp. 276-286 (p. 276).

<sup>111</sup> Césaire, *A Tempest*, p. 20.

These attitudes reflect the characters' relative positions of privilege and status within the colonial system. In *Une Tempête*, as Césaire notes, while Ariel “est un intellectuel au service de Prospero, Caliban est également un esclave, mais à un degré plus absolu, plus total” [“is an intellectual in the service of Prospero, Caliban is also a slave, but to a more absolute, totalising degree”].<sup>112</sup> Ariel is more forgiving of Prospero, believing him capable of change and understanding the injustice he has perpetrated. She unwillingly carries out Prospero's bidding in exchange for freedom, which has been promised “a thousand times”. For Caliban, her obedience, which translates to an “Uncle Tom patience”, will get them nowhere.<sup>113</sup>

The scene's resonance in a Lusophone context is clear. Césaire's revised Ariel forms a parallel with native colonial elites that arose under Portuguese colonial rule in various African contexts, and the pair's discussion illuminates the specific challenges of revolution and decolonization under a colonial system that has created an elite minority amongst its colonial subjects. Ariel and Caliban's conversation in this scene recalls the revolutionary debates which take place in Fortunato's *Comboio da Canhoca*. Here, Ariel's position loosely aligns with that of the Angolan *assimilados* trapped inside the carriage, who defend colonial institutions and dismiss violent rebellion against the oppressor as futile. Caliban, in response, considers Ariel to be a “colonial collaborator”.<sup>114</sup> As in Fortunato's film, the pair's conflict could be read to point to these underlying tensions within the MPLA.

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<sup>112</sup> Albert Owusu-Sarpong, *Le Temps historique dans l'oeuvre théâtrale d'Aimé Césaire* (Éditions Naaman, 1986), p. 122.

<sup>113</sup> Césaire, *A Tempest*, p. 21.

<sup>114</sup> Nixon, ‘Caribbean and African Appropriations’, p. 573.

The scene's applicability to an Angolan context is heightened through the connection that is established between Ariel and Moia. Ariel is played by the same actor as the woman that appears in Moia's reflection after her hair is braided, possibly signifying her mother. In another guise, the woman also sits opposite Moia in the bar when she attends a performance by Cesária Évora. Through the film, this woman literally becomes Moia's mirror image, and in the final scenes, we learn she is a figment of Moia's imagination. By constructing this comparison, Duarte de Carvalho also utilizes Césaire's *Une Tempête* to elucidate the social context of his protagonist. The play becomes a critical point of reference in the development of the director's autoethnographic exploration of Moia and her social class, further revealing an approximation to colonial structures and systems of power and privilege, and attitudes towards decolonization and liberation.

After Caliban and Ariel's exchange, the action cuts to a shot of a group – mostly in early colonial dress – climbing a steep hill. From here, the scene consists of Duarte de Carvalho's own rewriting of *The Tempest*, which subverts both Shakespeare's and Césaire's versions of the play to highlight the specific circumstances of Portuguese colonization in Africa. As the group appear at the top of the hill, two men – one white man, dressed in a captain's uniform, and one black man, dressed in a contemporary shirt and trousers, wearing glasses and carrying a briefcase – break off from the group and walk towards the camera. The white man – Prospero – addresses the other man in Portuguese:

You know, we are both children of colonization. I am the legitimate son, and you, the adopted son. This is why we sent you to university. We've taught you how to think

and behave properly.<sup>115</sup>

Here, the director introduces another colonial subject, distinct from the enslaved Caliban and Ariel of the previous scene. The young man is a more transparent representation of an Angolan (or, more broadly, Lusophone African) *assimilado* subject who has been educated within the colonial system and, having reached an accepted level of “civilization” according to the colonizer’s Western, Eurocentric standards by sufficiently distancing himself from his African roots, occupies a position of relative privilege within colonial society. As I have noted, in Angola, this elite *assimilado* class would be instrumental in the formation of the MPLA. In the scene, the insufficiency of the white Prospero’s education in an African revolutionary context is revealed through his character’s ignorance of his surroundings. Listening to a radio broadcast about Namibian independence, which is spoken out loud by a man who “delivers the news”, he states arrogantly: “I don’t understand any of it. He just gives me incomprehensible news”.<sup>116</sup> This reimagining of Prospero thus perhaps levels a further critique at the MPLA’s leadership, who the director considers similarly disconnected from the realities of many Angolans.

In their conversation, Duarte de Carvalho’s Prospero asserts that he is also a son of colonization. In ‘Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Inter-Identity’, Boaventura de Sousa Santos outlines the “subaltern” nature of Portuguese colonialism. He argues that Portugal has, since the birth of modern capitalism in the

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<sup>115</sup> Due to bad sound quality, this translation is taken from the French subtitles: “*Vous le savez, nous sommes les enfants de la colonisation. J’en suis le fils légitime, et vous, le fils adoptif. C’est pour cela que nous vous avons envoyé à l’université. Nous vous avons appris à bien vous tenir et à penser*”.

<sup>116</sup> My translation: “*Je n’entends rien à tout ça. Il me donne des nouvelles incompréhensibles. Tout comme je ne comprends rien à ces graffiti.*”

seventeenth century, occupied a semi-peripheral position within Europe and the global capitalist economy. The Portuguese thus cannot be neatly categorized within the “typical binarisms” of Western modernity. Rather, Santos argues that “the Portuguese Prospero is not just a Calibanized Prospero; he is a very Caliban from the viewpoint of European super-Prosperos”. As a result, he suggests that Portugal’s colonies “were subjected to a double colonization”; Portuguese colonization and, indirectly, colonization by the powerful European countries on which Portugal was dependent.<sup>117</sup>

Santos suggests that the Portuguese historical situation gave rise to various “comforting readings” of Portugal’s semi-peripheral status in Europe.<sup>118</sup> Prospero’s statement exemplifies one of these readings: the Luso-tropicalist fantasy at the heart of Portuguese colonial expansion. The term Luso-tropicalism was devised in the mid-twentieth century by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, who proposed the theory that the Portuguese were particularly well-suited to colonization and could easily adapt to the tropics by intermarrying and intermixing with local populations, due to the fact that Portuguese society was itself a mixture of various cultures. At the core of this theory, as Cristiana Bastos notes, was “the assertion of a benign, humanistic, and nonracist Portuguese character”.<sup>119</sup>

In Duarte de Carvalho’s adaptation, Miranda, who sits beside Prospero as they dine, is mixed race (Fig. 3.12). Additionally, two, mixed-race children are shown playing in front of the long

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<sup>117</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, ‘Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Inter-Identity’, *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 39:2 (2002), pp. 9-43 (p. 9-10), doi:10.3368/lbr.39.2.9.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>119</sup> Cristiana Bastos, ‘Luso-tropicalism Debunked, Again: Race, Racism, and Racialism in Three Portuguese-Speaking Societies’, in *Luso-Tropicalism and its Discontents: The Making and Unmaking of Racial Exceptionalism*, ed. by Warwick Anderson, Ricardo Roque, and Ricardo Ventura-Santos (Berghahn Books, 2019), pp. 243-264 (p. 243).

table (Fig. 3.13). However, Duarte de Carvalho's adaptation actively debunks any Luso-tropicalist myth of colonial harmony and Portuguese exceptionalism. The absence of a black mother at the table possibly suggests the violent encounters between colonizer and colonized that the Cape Verdean writer Vera Duarte identifies in her characterization of the Cape Verdean Creole society.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, Prospero's vitriolic and specifically racial violence and prejudice towards Caliban, which occurs throughout the scene, negates any reading of his character as a softer or more generous colonizing force.

As young, mixed-race women, there are also similarities between Miranda and both Ariel and Moia (Fig. 3.14). In the scene, Duarte de Carvalho evokes a comparison between Miranda and Ariel – and, therefore, Moia – through costume, with both wearing long, white dresses. Additionally, a common absent parentage on the islands creates a further parallel between Moia and Miranda. Through Miranda, Prospero's daughter, Duarte de Carvalho further underlines Moia's proximity to colonial power.

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<sup>120</sup> Vera Duarte, 'Blimundo ou O mito fundador da cabo-verdianidade', *Observatório da Língua Portuguesa*, 20 July 2021, <<https://observalinguaportuguesa.org/blimundo-ou-o-mito-fundador-da-cabo-verdianidade/#:~:text=Vera%20Valentina%20Benr%C3%B3s%20de%20Melo%20Duarte>> [accessed 5 October 2024].



Fig. 3.12. Miranda, in *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.13. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.14. Ariel, in *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.

Beyond Ariel and Miranda, Moia could also be linked to the scene's other central characters. Caliban, like Moia, lays claim to the islands through his mother, Sycorax. Equally, like Prospero, she is the one who washes up on the island. At the end of the film, Moia's name is revealed to mean "that which washes up after the shipwreck". Through these various affinities, and despite her absence from the scene, Duarte de Carvalho positions Moia within a shifting and porous matrix of Portuguese colonial power. His adaptation of Césaire and Shakespeare's plays establishes the complex historical and cultural roots of Moia's character and the Angolan social group she represents, providing the social context for his autoethnographic inquiry by revealing the various relations that exist between an Angolan socio-cultural elite and the structures and myths of Lusophone coloniality. In this way, the director's adaptation engages with and subverts Césaire's play to contribute to a consciousness of the specific coordinates of Portuguese colonial oppression. Beyond this, Duarte de Carvalho also highlights the dangers of a submission to or complicity with the colonizer, by depicting both the insufficiency and violence of the colonizing force, as represented by Prospero.

The fragmentation of Moia that occurs through her connection to multiple other characters both centres and decentres his protagonist – and by extension, an Angolan socio-political elite – as she becomes both present throughout, and simultaneously absent, from the scene. Additionally, the director also deliberately decentres himself and his own voice through his explicit use of both Shakespeare's original play and Césaire's adaptation, along with his own subsequent adaptation of both plays. This is to say that Duarte de Carvalho's adaptation of *The Tempest* explicitly works alongside two antecedent texts (and, arguably, implicitly engages with many other previous iterations of the play), necessarily creating a dialogic, rather than a monologic, narrative. In this way, by repeatedly and deliberately blurring the

boundaries between characters and versions of the play, the director also unsettles his audience, who are placed at multiple boundaries between multiple different texts and must actively engage in the recognition and judgement of the adaptation. Through this subversively destabilising adaptation, therefore, Duarte de Carvalho not only presents an artistic representation and social analysis of Portuguese colonialism in Angola, but also makes a deliberate political intervention that undermines the dominance and hegemony of a social group that he believes continues to be “caught in the net” of the colonizer.<sup>121</sup> In doing so, he demands a higher necessary level of critical engagement in his viewers.

The scene ends with the sudden invasion of pirates, scattering the dining party. Caliban and Ariel run to the beach, where Moia is sunbathing. Grabbing her, the trio flee. The film then cuts to a shot of a small plane flying across the islands. Inside the plane is Moia, who is being flown by Caliban, now dressed in contemporary clothing. Time has passed, and as they fly over the mountains, Caliban points out the place they fled to on the day of their escape from the pirates. This scene could again be read to relate Moia to Prospero. The quotation from Act I, Scene II of *The Tempest* recited in the film’s voiceover at the beginning of this sequence continues with Caliban’s recollection of showing Prospero “all the qualities o’ th’ isle”.<sup>122</sup> Equally, the scene also self-reflexively associates Moia with the director. As Caliban shows Moia the islands, she takes photographs of the scenes below with a large camera. The self-referential motif of Moia’s camera, which appears throughout the film, underscores the autoethnographic nature of the film. Here, the connection in this scene between Moia and Prospero also then implicates the director within the matrix of power and oppression present though *The Tempest*. In presenting this self-critical reflection, however, the director

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<sup>121</sup> Santos, ‘Critique of Western Technological Hegemony’, p. 199.

<sup>122</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, p. 118.

simultaneously decentres himself as the film's autoethnographic subject through the shifting positionality of his fictional, somewhat autobiographical protagonist.

The pair fly over Tarrafal, the colonial Portuguese prison camp where revolutionaries from across the Portuguese colonies were sent and imprisoned during the liberation struggles and wars for independence. Caliban refers to Tarrafal as the place that “your compatriots” – Moia's, or the director's? – were imprisoned. Again, we find here a suggestion of the duality of Angola's ruling independence movement, as both oppressed (by the Portuguese) and as oppressor (as compatriots of Prospero).

The film cuts to a shot of another man we have seen before – on the boat during the performance of ‘Blimundo’, and again at the beginning of the restaging of *The Tempest*, looking out to sea (Fig. 3.15). In this scene, he walks with a stick around the ruins of Tarrafal (Fig. 3.16 – 3.17). The voiceover recites an extract from ‘The Coming of the Ship’, the opening poem from the Arab American writer and philosopher Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* (1923). There are numerous resonances to Duarte de Carvalho's engagement with Gibran – from the writer's radical poetic expression to his ethical commitment “to transform exile and displacement into art and a borderless sense of belonging”.<sup>123</sup> In the film, a Portuguese translation of the poem is recited. The original quotation, in English, is as follows:

How shall I go in peace and without sorrow? Nay, not with a wound in the spirit shall I leave this city.

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<sup>123</sup> Kahlil Gibran, Jean Gibran and the Interlink Gibran Project, *Kahlil Gibran: Beyond Borders* (Head of Zeus, 2017), p. xviii.

Long were the days of pain I have spent within its walls, and long were the nights of loneliness; and who can depart from this pain and aloneness without regret?

Too many fragments of the spirit have I scattered in these streets, and too many are the children of my longing that walk naked among these hills, and I cannot withdraw from them without a burden and an ache.

It is not a garment I cast off this day, but a skin I tear with my own hands.

Nor is it a thought that I leave behind me, but a heart made sweet with hunger and thirst.<sup>124</sup>

Gibran's collection tells the story of a prophet, Al Mustafa, who has been shipwrecked on an island for twelve years and is about to go back to the country of his birth. Recited in the context of Tarrafal, the notion of an exile who returns home clearly references the MPLA figures, and other revolutionaries from African nations colonized by the Portuguese, who were imprisoned in Cape Verde during Portuguese colonial rule. Discussing the pain and suffering endured in exile, the poem serves as a reminder of the violence of Portuguese colonial rule, the suffering of Angolan people, and the sacrifices of revolutionaries and freedom fighters who struggled for independence and liberation.

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<sup>124</sup> Kahlil Gibran, 'The Coming of the Ship', in Gibran, *The Prophet* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), p. 7.



Fig. 3.15. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.16. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.17. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.

The image of the shipwreck in Gibran's poem also evokes an immediate association with *The Tempest*. Appearing in the film directly after Duarte de Carvalho's adaptation, into which he inserts Moia at multiple levels, the poem perhaps also then implies the possibility of the protagonist's "exile" to the islands of Cape Verde as a radically redemptive or transformative experience. As I explore in the following section, after Duarte de Carvalho deconstructs his protagonist's relation to colonial power structures through his adaptation of *The Tempest*, the film depicts Moia's own transformation, as her understanding of herself and the world around her begins to unravel. In this sense, the inclusion of Gibran's poem here perhaps marks a moment of hopefulness and rebirth, as Moia tears off a "skin" in a painful but redemptive process of change.

Equally, the use of Gibran's poem might also directly reference the director. At the time of making the film, Duarte de Carvalho was living in a form of exile in Cape Verde. His unpopularity amongst the upper echelons of the MPLA, along with the worsening material conditions faced by filmmakers in Angola, had made it impossible for the director to continue making films freely within the nation. Through the film, the man who appears in this scene is explicitly related to the director. I expand on this in the next section. Here, then, the director aligns himself with the early Angolan nationalist revolutionaries – those imprisoned at Tarrafal – to whom the director still feels commitment and affiliation. The ruined space of the colonial concentration camp perhaps makes a visual reference to the director's assertion that the original, revolutionary ideals of these individuals – such as their commitment to negritude – has been abandoned.

It is a long-held myth that *The Tempest* was Shakespeare's last play. While this belief has been proven erroneous, scholars and audiences have long speculated over the extent to which

the character of Prospero reflects the playwright's own departure from the theatre.<sup>125</sup> In the final act, Prospero relinquishes his magic, claiming "I'll break my staff" and "I'll drown my book".<sup>126</sup> "Our revels have now ended", he tells Ferdinand and Miranda, as he prepares to return to Milan.<sup>127</sup> Each of these moments has been interpreted as Shakespeare's farewell to play-writing. While the autobiographical elements of Prospero's character have been overstated, the notion that the play is a self-reflective retrospective on Shakespeare's own career, representing a consolidation of many of the themes and ideas explored through his previous works, persists.<sup>128</sup> As his final film, to what extent can *Moia* be understood as Duarte de Carvalho's reflection on his own filmmaking career? In the following section, I suggest where another intertextual reference reveals further dimensions to the director's autoethnographic film practice.

### **Surreal Encounters with Self and Other**

The connection between the director and the male figure who appears at Tarrafal is made most plain in the film's final scene. Here, the man is shown holding the script of *Moia* (Fig. 3.18 – 3.19). The scene includes *Moia*'s final explicit intertextual reference, as an extract from the poem 'Retour' ['Return'], by the French surrealist poet and ethnographer Michel Leiris, is recited in the voiceover. The specific verse that is quoted deals with similar themes to Gibran's poem, discussing the possible return of an exiled subject:

Rentré chez lui le voyageur

se lave les mains

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<sup>125</sup> Catherine M. S. Alexander, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Last Plays*, ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander (Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-4 (p. 1).

<sup>126</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, p. 201.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>128</sup> Laurie Maguire and Emma Smith, *30 Great Myths about Shakespeare* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p. 130.

rallume sa pipe éteinte  
tend les deux poings  
à l'avenir qui lui remet ses lourdes chaînes de silence<sup>129</sup>

[Returned home the traveller  
washes his hands  
relights his unlit pipe  
raises his two fists  
to the future that hands him heavy chains of silence]

The scene in which this verse appears marks the end of the film's journey to the islands. The final lines of the stanza, which present an image of the returnee resisting a future in which they must remain silent, could be intended to reference the director's own subsequent return to Angola, where he would continue to critique the Westernized programme of national development imposed by the MPLA through his writing, despite the official unpopularity of these opinions and the ongoing threat of censorship in Angola.

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<sup>129</sup> Michel Leiris, 'Retour', in Leiris, *Haut Mal: Suivi de Autres Lanciers* (Gallimard, 1969), pp. 86-87 (p. 87).



Fig. 3.18. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.

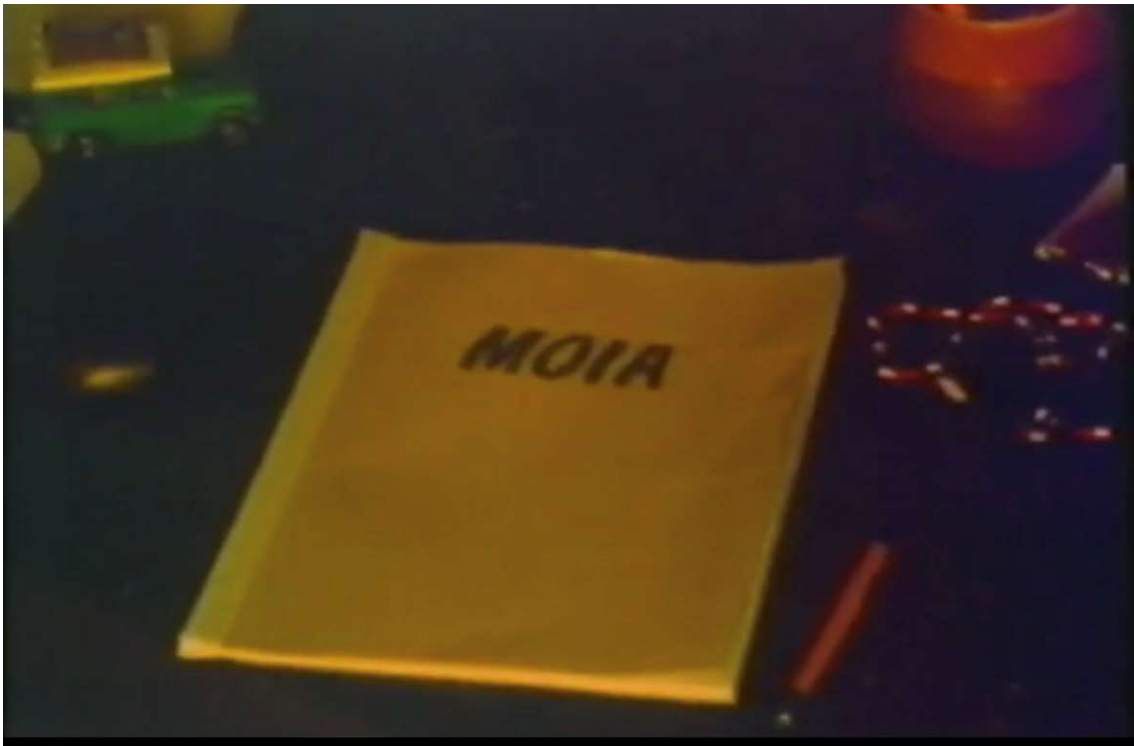


Fig. 3.19. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.

In terms of the autoethnographic nature of the film, Duarte de Carvalho's choice to adapt a poem by Michel Leiris is significant. Born in 1901, Leiris's career spanned seven decades. In the early 1920s, he became involved in the French surrealist movement, moving in circles that included some of the movement's most important figures, such as Georges Bataille and André Masson. Through the late 1920s, after officially joining the movement, he wrote surrealist texts, including his novel *Aurora*, which was later published in 1946.

During this time, Leiris became increasingly outspoken and critical of French surrealism's Eurocentricity, denouncing the ways in which the movement exoticised the "Other".<sup>130</sup> Following a disagreement with André Breton, the leader of the French surrealist movement, Leiris decided to pursue ethnography. In 1930, he embarked on his first ethnographic expedition, a two-year undertaking across sub-Saharan Africa, during which he worked as the expedition's Secretary-Archivist. The experience would be formative, shaping the remainder of Leiris's career. Upon his return to France, he practised as an ethnographer at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris until 1971. For Aleksandar Bošković, "there is perhaps no single figure that influenced so strongly French ethnology and anthropology".<sup>131</sup>

Two years after the Dakar-Djibouti expedition, Leiris published *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934). The book recounts and reflects on his experiences in Africa. Combining autobiography and ethnography, it is widely considered to be one of the earliest precursors to autoethnography. Sean Hand, for example, characterizes the text as a "prototype ethnography of the

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<sup>130</sup> James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Surrealism', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23:4 (1981), pp. 539-564 (p. 555), doi:10.1017/S0010417500013554.

<sup>131</sup> Aleksandar Bošković, 'Michel Leiris: Ethnologist in Search of Meanings', *Anthropos*, 98:2 (2003), pp. 526-529 (p. 526).

ethnographer”.<sup>132</sup> Phyllis Clarck-Taoua suggests that “the reader learns as much, if not more, about Leiris’s inner world in *L’Afrique fantôme* than about the peoples and cultures that he encountered along the way”.<sup>133</sup> Beyond the text’s singularly impressionistic focus, Hand stresses the notable ethical dimension of Leiris’s transgressively subjective ethnography.<sup>134</sup> As in his earlier critiques of surrealism, Leiris was not content to accept the anthropological discipline’s proclivity to cast an “othering” gaze upon the subject of its inquiry. For Clarck-Taoua, “Leiris’s quest was not only to discover the Other but to find himself *as Other*”.<sup>135</sup>

In *Moia*, the reference to Leiris can be read as an affirmation of the film’s objectives, confirming and expounding Duarte de Carvalho’s own search for an ethical and self-reflective “anthropology of change”. Like Leiris’s work, *Moia* presents a confessional and “inherently disruptive autobiographical consciousness”, which destabilises both the established parameters of the discipline and the specific Angolan social context in which the film is situated.<sup>136</sup> Through his adaptation of Leiris, and the presence of the self-referential director figure in this scene, Duarte de Carvalho closes his film with a final admission of the autoethnographic, and specifically French-influenced, nature of his film.

Hand notes that Leiris’s proto-autoethnographic work operates within a “dialectic of activist and aesthetic interests”.<sup>137</sup> Throughout this career in anthropology, Leiris continued to write poetry. He was a firm believer in the redemptive power of poetry and art, particularly in furthering the specific aims of his unique ethnographic methods. As Leiris himself states,

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<sup>132</sup> Sean Hand, *Michel Leiris: Writing the Self* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 54.

<sup>133</sup> Phyllis Clarck-Taoua, ‘In Search of New Skin: Michel Leiris’s *L’Afrique fantôme*’, *Cahiers d’études africaines*, 42:3 (2002), pp. 479-498 (p. 479).

<sup>134</sup> Sean Hand, *Alter Ego: The Critical Writings of Michel Leiris* (Routledge, 2017), p. 5.

<sup>135</sup> Clarck-Taoua, ‘In Search of New Skin’, p. 481.

<sup>136</sup> Hand, *Alter Ego*, p. 6.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

“par l’exercice de la poésie, on pose autrui en égal” [“through poetry, we can position the “Other” as an equal”].<sup>138</sup> As I have noted, Duarte de Carvalho explicitly positions his film at a confluence between poetry and anthropology. Through the film, the director’s concern with the transformative and social potentialities of art is clear. Dialogical literary adaptation, particularly, becomes a means to unsettle a dominant monologic cinematic model and ensure the film’s audience participates actively in this dialogue from intertextual margins.

Additionally, a specific poetic affiliation with Leiris can be detected in *Moia* through the film’s engagement with surrealism. The two poems – ‘The Coming of the Ship’ and ‘Retour’ – both centre around the theme of a return. Alongside *Une Tempête*, the use of these texts also evokes Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, or *Notebook of a Return to my Native Land*, his epic surrealist poem. Césaire, along with his wife, Suzanne Césaire, were actively involved and affiliated with surrealism. In 1941, the pair founded *Tropiques*, a surrealist journal for Martinican writers, poets and intellectuals. While he had become disillusioned with French surrealism and ultimately left the movement, Leiris remained a big promoter of the Césaires, and “the poetry and ethnography associated with the French Caribbean”.<sup>139</sup>

Through all their work, Suzanne and Aimé Césaire were deeply concerned with interrogating a Martinican colonial elite, comprised of colonial subjects who strove to assimilate and confirm to Western cultural standards in order to be accepted by Europe. Having co-founded the anti-colonial negritude movement, which sought to liberate the black colonial subject through racial self-consciousness and a valorisation of African cultural values, Aimé Césaire

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<sup>138</sup> D’Alain Jouffroy, ‘Préface’, in Leiris, *Haut Mal*, pp. 7-15 (p. 9).

<sup>139</sup> Hand, *Alter Ego*, p. 3.

later professed that “surrealism provided me with what I had been confusedly searching for”.<sup>140</sup> For Suzanne Césaire, surrealism equated to liberation from the global hegemony of coloniality, imperialism and whiteness:

Surrealism is living, intensely, magnificently, having found and perfected a method of inquiry of immeasurable efficacy [...]. Such is a surrealist activity, a total activity, the only one that can liberate humankind by revealing to it the unconscious, one of the activities that will aid in liberating people by illuminating the blind myths that have led them to this point.<sup>141</sup>

For the Césaires, the appeal of surrealism lay in the possibilities for resistance and revolt against these “blind myths”. Madness became a means for the colonial subject to find true freedom and liberation from the oppression and violence of the colonizer. Accessing the unconscious was a way to produce real social change. For Suzanne Césaire, the surrealist poets, painters and artists would preside “over the metamorphoses and the inversions of the world under the sign of hallucination and madness”.<sup>142</sup> As Chienyn Chi suggests, “the Césaires were transfixed by poetry's ability to defy scientific and objective language and characterized this power in poetry as madness or the unconscious”. The madness of surrealist poetry was an escape route out of the psychological trauma, violence and neuroses produced and perpetuated by imperialism, a way of “restructuring the symbolic order and society” and imagining and reimagining new and possible futures .<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> René Depestre, ‘Interview with Aimé Césaire’, in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. by Joan Pinkham, intro. by Robin D. G. Kelley (Monthly Review Press, 2000), pp. 79-94 (p. 83).

<sup>141</sup> Suzanne Césaire, “1943 Surrealism and Us”, in *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945)*, trans. by Keith L. Walker, ed. by Daniel Maximin (Wesleyan University Press, 2012), pp. 34-38 (p. 37).

<sup>142</sup> Penelope Rosemont, *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (University of Texas Press, 1998), p. 137.

<sup>143</sup> Chienyn Chi, ‘The Poetics of Being Mad and Black: (Psycho)analyzing the *Évolué*’, *Free Associations*, 75 (2019), pp. 102-125 (p. 114), doi:10.1234/fa.v0i75.255.

Like Leiris and the Césaires, Duarte de Carvalho is concerned with combining poetics and social analysis to contribute directly to the liberation of all those oppressed by global colonial and imperial systems. In the second half of *Moia*, between his references to the two poems – Gibran’s and Leiris’s – Duarte de Carvalho adapts a surrealist poetics of madness and the unconscious to reach towards the same liberation through his film. He stages this “madness” through his protagonist, Moia.

After the scene at Tarrafal, *Moia* cuts to a dream sequence. By this point in the film, the line between dream and reality has already been blurred. Moia’s vision of the enslaved men working in the courtyard, for example, and the recurrence of characters in different guises and personas, render unclear the distinction between what is real and what is not. Moia’s dream scene is composed of a montage of footage from the islands, which are rapidly cut together and set to music which becomes increasingly frantic and foreboding. The scenes depict life in Cape Verde, with shots of workers in the fields, and the traditional dancing shown in the film’s opening travel footage. The film then cuts to a shot of Moia having a nightmare, writhing in bed before suddenly waking. Running out of the room, now apparently awake, Moia tries to flee down the corridor. The chilling music continues, punctuated with fast, punchy chords. At the end of the hallway, she attempts to escape through a door, but she is blocked by a familiar figure – the man featured in the scene at Tarrafal. Still apparently between dreaming and waking, she begins to run down the stairs towards the ground floor. She stops on the stairs, paralysed and distressed by the events taking place above her (Fig. 3.20). The shot of Moia frozen between the floors is indicative of the character’s suspension between consciousness and subconsciousness.

Moia's movement between these two planes, and that which she accesses through her unconscious, challenges and disrupts the symbolic order she comfortably occupied before her visit to Cape Verde, referenced here through the callback to the travel footage in the film's opening scene. Just before she descends the stairs, an image of five tarot cards appears on screen, suspended in mid-air against a plain white background (Fig. 3.21). Engagement with the occult, including tarot, is an established trope in Surrealism. Rachael Grew points out that many surrealists – including Breton and Leonora Carrington, for example, who engaged extensively with tarot through her practice - were drawn to the occult's inherent assertion that “there is something else beyond the dogmas and ideologies that take the lead in shaping society”. In an act of rebellion, occultism “rebels against, and even rejects, these dominant rationales”, suggesting that there is more to the world than the Western rationalism that emerged during the Enlightenment. Additionally, as Grew notes, “by drawing on the hidden, secret world to understand and change the physical world, the occult also operates parallel to the core Surrealist aim of uniting the dream and the real”.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Rachael Grew, ‘The Occult, Magic, and Alchemy’, in *The Routledge Companion to Surrealism*, ed. by Kirsten Strom (Routledge, 2023), pp. 46-52 (p. 46).



Fig. 3.20. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.



Fig. 3.21. *Moia* (Gemini Films, 1989), dir. Ruy Duarte de Carvalho.

The cards which appear are significant, particularly The King of Swords. This card is generally understood to represent paternal authority. As in the case of Rebelo's birds, the paternal function can be read psychoanalytically as an authoritarian force which represents law, order and societal norms.<sup>145</sup> In *Moia* this paternal authority might represent the global hegemony of Western models, which the director believed were becoming entrenched through a "process of worldwide Westernization".<sup>146</sup> In Duarte de Carvalho's view, breaking free of an uncritical deference to the paternalistic authority of the West was imperative for liberation. Establishing a paternal authority in this scene, Duarte de Carvalho specifically frames his surrealist intervention as a mode of liberation from the dominant societal power structures which shape the conscious. Another of the cards, The Fool, represents new beginnings. The inclusion of that card alongside the King of Swords could further signal the transformative nature of Moia's experience on the islands, as she becomes conscious of and detaches herself from the dominant structures shaping her world.

It is curious to note the specific "father figure" that Moia confronts during this dream scene. The man that appears behind the door in this scene – who is related to Duarte de Carvalho as the "director" figure, as well as to Angola's revolutionary nationalists through his appearance at Tarrafal – perhaps also signals the ways in which the MPLA, and those wielding power in Angola, replicated and reproduced inherited paternalistic models after independence. Here, the director again refuses to reinscribe this model in the film, using Moia's dream scene to undermine his own directorial authority. Moia is a cinematic extension of the director, a fictional self-representation who, as the director himself states, acts according to his own "critérios".<sup>147</sup> In this scene, however, the protagonist displays a level of autonomy. As Moia

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<sup>145</sup> Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 90.

<sup>146</sup> Santos, 'Critique of Western Technological Hegemony', p. 195.

<sup>147</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, 'Poesia, cinema e antropologia', p. 109.

runs away from the director figure during the dream scene, breaking free of the paternal authority he represents, she begins to participate freely and autonomously in her own liberation. In this way, by relinquishing control over his character, the director continues to decentre and marginalise himself through his autoethnographic inquiry, dismantling his own paternal or paternalistic authority over the film and its narrative.

*Moia* thus contains a markedly polyphonic adaptation of a surrealist poetics of madness. As I have noted, for Bakhtin, the polyphonic novel contains “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses”, a cast of characters which are “not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse”.<sup>148</sup> Each of these voices has its own world view and represents its own perspective, which is levelled equal with that of the author. The polyphonic novel is “constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness” – an authorial consciousness – “but as a whole framed by the interaction of several consciousnesses”.<sup>149</sup> By relating himself to his protagonist, while also relinquishing his directorial authority and affording her a level of autonomy, Duarte de Carvalho expands his exploration of the unconscious beyond a single subject. He becomes the “Other” in his own autoethnographic inquiry, which he conducts from both the centre and the margins.

From the dream scene onwards, it is unclear whether *Moia* is dreaming or awake. After the stairs, she “wakes up” again on the beach. A group of men and women slowly dance towards her. As they pass, she stands up and accompanies them to a spot beneath some cliffs. Behind them, *Moia* again spots the director figure, who turns to walk towards the top of the cliffs.

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<sup>148</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 6-7.

<sup>149</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 18.

Moia follows the man to a deserted town, and the pair walk through the streets, with Moia at some distance behind, occasionally losing sight of him. Pursuing him, it often appears as though Moia literally bumps into herself, when turning a corner and then quickly jumping backwards, for example, before the camera almost immediately jumps to a shot of her walking down the same street. Again, this can be read as a polyphonic technique. John Bruns states that the polyphonic film, as he conceives of it, is comprised of “simultaneities and turbulence, of interferences and cross-purposes of the noise rather than the order of things”.<sup>150</sup> As Moia walks around, continually crossing paths with subconscious projections of herself, there is a sense of an “irreducible plurality” which repeatedly creates moments of confrontation and dialogue.<sup>151</sup> In this way, even within his exploration of the protagonist’s own mind and subconscious, Duarte de Carvalho ensures that there are multiple voices.

Moia follows the man into a café. Inside, he sits down next to Moia’s counterpart, Ariel. Moia joins them. Here, Duarte de Carvalho confirms that the pair are a product of Moia’s subconscious, as the woman asks her, “why did you invent me?”. In the conversation that follows, Moia is thus depicted in dialogue with herself. Through the exchange, she interrogates and reckons with her Westernized view of the world, her identity and her psychological trauma, moving towards a critical self-consciousness and deepened understanding of her Creole heritage that exceeds the limited view she possessed at the beginning of the film. In line with the surrealist methods advanced by Leiris and the Césaires, the protagonist’s unconscious, or madness, is presented as the “way out” of the structures of colonialism and imperialism within which she had operated. Crucially, in Duarte de Carvalho’s film, this madness is constructed as a moment of dialogue. Adapting a surrealist

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<sup>150</sup> Bruns, ‘The Polyphonic Film’, p. 200.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

poetics, the director uses this scene to underscore the fundamental ethical and socio-political thrust of his autoethnographic work. He moves beyond monologic hegemony towards a proliferation of voices and identities – within oneself, within Angolan society, within the world.

## **Conclusion**

In an earlier scene, Moia records a message on a cassette tape to send to her brother. In the message, she describes how her journey to the islands has “sown disorder” in her mind. Disorder is perhaps the central ambition of Duarte de Carvalho’s film. In this chapter, I have explored some of the ways in which the director uses his final film to construct an autoethnographic inquiry into an Angolan socio-political elite which profoundly destabilises and decentres this group. Specifically, I have explored where the director’s extensive dialogic literary adaptation, spanning Shakespeare to the surrealists, formally and thematically disrupts the foundations of this elite group’s power and privilege in an Angolan context.

In his lecture on *Moia*, Duarte de Carvalho makes an enlightening statement about his anthropological career; “para tanto, assim, me fiz antropólogo, para saber, em plena consciência, com quem lidava, de um lado e do outro”.<sup>152</sup> Influenced by his travels through Angola and commitment to the cultural diversity of his nation, the director’s cinematic and anthropological work was – from at least the time of *Nelisita* – as concerned with documenting the cultural practices of communities across Angola as it was with interrogating his own positionality.

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<sup>152</sup> Duarte de Carvalho, *A Câmara, A Escrita*, p. 114.

Like Michel Leiris, Duarte de Carvalho thus demonstrates “an ethnographic rigour that itself is transformed by the ethics of solidarity”.<sup>153</sup> Investigating Angola’s powerful ruling class from the vantage of Cape Verde, the director makes significant ethical and political interventions into the autoethnographic film form to ensure that he does not replicate or reinscribe the uncritically Westernized logic of this section of Angolan society. Central to this is Duarte de Carvalho’s poetic commitment, which is seen not only through the film’s aesthetics, but in the director’s clear and unwavering belief in the transformative and redemptive power of art and poetry to help Angola rediscover its “soul”. This belief is particularly significant during the period defined by Abrantes as “o colapso”, considering the limited resources and institutional support available to artists at this time.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have noted that in autoethnography, “the *bios* of autobiography is replaced by *ethnos* or social group”.<sup>154</sup> In the following chapter, I continue a move from *ethnos* to *ethos*, to ask where Angolan director Mariano Bartolomeu’s short films further explore the question of ethics in a post-revolutionary Angolan context. Bartolomeu only began making his own films at the end of the 1980s, when the crisis in national filmmaking had already taken hold. He directed his first short film in 1989, the same year that Duarte de Carvalho completed his last piece of cinema. Bartolomeu offers a different perspective on the ways in which Angolan filmmakers adapted to this moment in Angolan cinematic, social and political history. How does this positionality shape the ethical

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<sup>153</sup> Hand, *Alter Ego*, p. 4.

<sup>154</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 258.

dimension of his films, and where is this expanded and enhanced through his various literary adaptations?

## Chapter Four

### Adaptation, Dialogue and Ethics in the Short Films of Mariano Bartolomeu

#### Introduction

Born in 1967, Mariano Bartolomeu formed part of a new generation of Angolan filmmakers who came of age after independence. The director did not participate in the early boom in post-independence filmmaking under the MPLA in Angola, which reached its apex in the late 1970s. By the time he started his career in the early 1980s, working in the archives of the Cinemateca Nacional in Luanda, and later as an assistant director on educational television programmes, Angolan national film production had already entered the period designated by Abrantes as the “retreat”.<sup>1</sup> In 1988, Bartolomeu received a scholarship to train at the Escuela Internacional de Cinema y Televisión de San Antonio de Los Baños, also known as EICTV, in Havana, Cuba. It was here, almost fifteen years after the birth of Angolan national cinema, that he began directing his first films.

The three-year period in which Bartolomeu studied at EICTV was a time of major global upheaval and change. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, irrevocably altered the international political landscape. In Angola, the MPLA officially transitioned from Marxist-Leninist socialism to free-market capitalism in 1989. The transition was not surprising. When José Eduardo dos Santos became leader of the party in 1979, following President Neto’s death, the MPLA would continue to present itself as

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Chemhere, ‘Angola Film Industry at a Glance’, Buala, 14 August 2010 <<https://www.buala.org/en/afroscreen/angola-film-industry-at-a-glance#:~:text=Angola%20is%20a%20leading%20oil%20producer%20in>> [accessed 6 October 2024].

a vanguard party for much of the following decade. As Rothwell notes, however, dos Santos's choices during this decade paved the way for a post-socialist Angola.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the 1980s, the party had entirely abandoned its early socialist principles and embraced a form of neoliberal capitalism rife with cronyism and corruption, fuelled by the exploitation of Angola's rich natural resources and geared towards the accumulation of extreme wealth for a minority of elite families with close ties to the MPLA leadership.

The MPLA's ideological transition, together with the challenges that beset Angolan cinema from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, marked the end of the early post-independence phase of Angolan filmmaking. In this chapter, I analyse three short films directed by Bartolomeu at EICTV between 1989 and 1991. Despite differing social and cinematic contexts, I suggest that the singular circumstances of Bartolomeu's formal training at EICTV place his early short films into productive dialogue with those produced by earlier Angolan directors, particularly as their filmmaking practices evolved through the 1980s in late socialist Angola. Through these short films, Bartolomeu continues to engage in dialogical processes of adaptation, informed by a tradition of revolutionary commitment, to respond to the rapidly changing local, national and global contexts of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Bartolomeu's films thus offer a unique perspective on Angolan filmmaking at the outset of the period that has been too schematically defined as the "collapse", and bring renewed energy and relevance to Angola's fading revolutionary cinema even after the end of the post-independence phase of Angolan national filmmaking.

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<sup>2</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 77.

EICTV remains one of Latin America's most significant cinematic institutions. With support from the revolutionary Cuban government, the school was created in 1986 by the Foundation for New Latin American Cinema, a coalition of prominent Latin American directors, theoreticians and other important cultural and artistic figures, which included the Cuban filmmaker and theorist Julio García Espinosa, the Argentine filmmaker and theorist Fernando Birri, the Brazilian director Orlando Senna and the Colombian writer Gabriel García Marquez. Many of the school's founding members had been influential in the development of revolutionary Latin American cinema movements. Espinosa, for example, wrote the manifesto for Cuba's Imperfect Cinema, one of the most important examples of Latin American Third Cinema. EICTV was conceived as a continuation and consolidation of these movements, which intended to foreground a politically informed, participatory style of education grounded in anti-capitalist and anti-imperial global solidarity.<sup>3</sup>

The institution was founded with a profoundly transnational ethos and mission, to support the training of filmmakers from across the Global South. The original name of EICTV was "The School of Three Worlds", denoting tri-continental solidarity between Latin America, Asia and Africa, united against European and Western capitalist imperialism. As Nicholas Balaisis notes, "in the geographic imagination of the school's founders, EICTV would be a truly transnational film school, devoted exclusively to training of filmmakers from the developing world committed to making their own national images".<sup>4</sup> The programme of teaching was designed to ensure exchange and collaboration across borders, and was also responsive and attentive to the cinematic conditions of these students' home nations, providing training in

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<sup>3</sup> Mackenzie, *Film Manifestos*, p. 309.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Balaisis, 'The School for Every World: Internationalism and Residual Socialism at EICTV', in *The Education of the Filmmaker in Africa, the Middle East and the Americas*, ed. by Mette Hjort (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 185-201 (p. 187).

“emergency cinema” for those arriving from countries with less developed national cinemas. The school also attracted prestigious directors from across the world, who participated in its programming and expanded its international focus; Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, and István Szabo, for example, all contributed to teaching at the school in the first years of its existence.

EICTV was envisioned as a profoundly utopian space of South-South solidarity, a refuge in which revolutionary theories and practices of Third Worldism and socialist internationalism combined in response to the “imperial injustice and atomic madness” of the late twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> As Joel del Rio has noted, the founders of EICTV not only sought to provide students with formal and technical cinematic training, but also hoped to instil within these young filmmakers a notion of ethics, a critical vision of the world, the capacity to dream, a concern with the fate of humanity and a clear opposition to barbarism, injustice and oppression.<sup>6</sup> Above the door of the school, one of the founders, Fernando Birri, placed the following words: “para que el lugar de la Utopia, que, por definición, esta en ‘ninguna parte’, este en alguna parte” [“so that the place of Utopia, which, by definition, is ‘nowhere’, can be somewhere”].<sup>7</sup>

Entering EICTV in one of the school’s first cohorts, Bartolomeu received his cinematic training, and began his directorial career, in this deeply idealistic, utopic, socialist environment. In this way, although he started his career during a period of national cinematic

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<sup>5</sup> Mackenzie, *Film Manifestos*, p. 309.

<sup>6</sup> Joel del Rio, ‘EICTV: 20 años de la utopía puesta en práctica’, *Cinemas d’Amérique Latine*, 15 (2007), pp. 84-90, (p. 87).

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Balais, *Cuban Film Media, Late Socialism, and the Public Sphere: Imperfect Aesthetics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 78.

crisis – after the initial surge in post-independence Angolan filmmaking under the MPLA, when the situation for Angolan filmmakers became exceptionally challenging – Bartolomeu’s early short films were produced in a context perhaps more analogous to the optimistic early years of Angolan cinema. After 1975, the MPLA had channelled significant resources and energy into the development of a truly revolutionary national cinema, which would unite the nation behind the party’s socialist ideology, transmit the movement’s revolutionary principles and combat “the oppressive nature of imperialist cinema and its fundamentally negative ideological and cultural effects”.<sup>8</sup>

Even before the official creation of the movement, the future MPLA leadership had connections to the same networks of global, anti-imperial solidarity that would come to inform EICTV’s internationalism. Mário Pinto de Andrade, for example, took part in the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana, the legacy and spirit of which would be reflected in the establishment of EICTV two decades later. Cuba’s revolutionary government would go on to become one of the MPLA’s most important allies during the armed liberation struggle, sending troops to fight alongside MPLA forces against the Portuguese colonial army. After independence, political and cultural connections between the MPLA and Cuba remained strong. From 1975 to 1991, Angola represented the “biggest foreign engagement” in Cuba’s history.<sup>9</sup> Cuban backing buttressed the MPLA, enabling the party to hold onto power in Angola during the country’s civil war, and providing an “exemplary” model for the development of Angola’s socialist state.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Conferência Africana de Cooperação Cinematográfica, *Documentos*, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> Christine Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola: South-South Cooperation and the Transfer of Knowledge* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola*, p. 77.

Cuba's influence and support would extend to the development of Angola's national cinema after 1975. In Luanda, the cinema-going culture fostered under the first MPLA government was profoundly transnational in its focus. The party organised regular cinema cycles – *Semanas de Cinema* – in which revolutionary films from across the world were screened to public audiences. Many of these cinema cycles featured revolutionary Latin American cinemas, including Cuban cinema, as well as films from the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> It was within these wider conditions that the earliest post-independence Angolan films were produced.

By the time of EICTV's inception, the MPLA's relationship with Cuba had changed dramatically. As Christine Hatzky notes, "the political aim of building a socialist nation-state in Angola, which was initially pursued both by the Cuban government and the MPLA, took a back seat in the mid-1980s due to the power ambitions of the MPLA", whose leadership ultimately chose to pursue a capitalist agenda and position Angola as an emerging actor on a global neoliberal stage.<sup>12</sup> These changes eroded the impetus for cooperation between Angola and Cuba. Cuban forces were fully withdrawn from Angola by 1991, a process initiated in the mid-1980s, which severed Angola's official ties with one of the world's last bastions of socialist revolution and government and marked the consolidation of the post-socialist Angolan nation.

Beyond its withdrawal from Angola, Cuba was greatly affected by the global turmoil of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The fall of Soviet communism and the disintegration of the

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<sup>11</sup> These include cinema cycles such as the 'Ciclo 'Lenine no Cinema'' in collaboration with the U.S.S.R. in 1980, to celebrate Lenin's 110th birthday, the 'Semana de Cinema Cubano' in 1980, and the 'Semana de Cinema Anti-Imperialista' in 1981.

<sup>12</sup> Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola*, p. 283.

Eastern bloc left Cuba economically isolated, resulting in the sudden loss of fourth fifths of its international trade and triggering a period of severe economic and social crisis known as the “período especial”. This “Special Period” brought years of severe shortages, austerity and uncertainty for Cuba’s population.<sup>13</sup>

Described as “an island on the Island”, EICTV operated continually through the late 1980s and 1990s, weathering the turbulence of the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola, and the Special Period.<sup>14</sup> However, the school was not immune to or detached from shifting local, national and global dynamics. In a 2014 interview with Maria M. Delgado, the directors Mariana Rondón and Marité Ugás – both of whom were part of the first cohort of students to attend EICTV in 1987 and trained there at the same time as Bartolomeu – noted EICTV students’ constant and heightened exposure to this rapidly changing world in the years that followed the school’s creation. Rondón stated: “we were getting the information first hand. The Russians sent perestroika to the school! At 10am we were sitting there, listening to Russian intellectuals speaking about perestroika at EICTV. It was very strange but also very exciting.”<sup>15</sup>

While parallels can be drawn between the utopian energy, socialist ideology and internationalism that informed cinematic production both in post-independence Angola and during the early years of EICTV, there are also important distinctions to be made. In these

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<sup>13</sup> Alessandra Lorini and Duccio Basoni, *Cuba in the World, the World in Cuba: Essays on Cuban History, Politics and Culture* (Firenze University Press, 2009), p. 278.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Lord and Zaira Zarza, ‘Intimate Spaces and Migrant Imaginaries: Sandra Gómez, Susana Barriga, and Heidi Hassan’, in *New Documentaries in Latin America*, ed. by Vinicius Navarro and Juan Carlos Rodríguez (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 199-217 (p. 199).

<sup>15</sup> Maria M. Delgado, ‘Meeting Points: An Interview with Mariana Rondón and Marité Ugás’, in *A Companion to Latin American Cinema*, ed. by Randal Johnson, Stephen M. Hart, and Maria M. Delgado (John Wiley & Sons, 2017), pp. 487-498 (p. 489).

two contexts, the expectations placed on filmmakers differed significantly. In Cuba, by the time of EICTV's creation, cinema had left behind the "dogmatic and antagonistic position that is emblematic of Cuban revolutionary art and film of the 1960s".<sup>16</sup> The first generation of post-revolution Cuban filmmakers drew inspiration from various global counter-cinema movements, including Brazilian Cinema Novo, French New Wave and Italian Neorealism, as well as Soviet socialist realist cinema. Initially, post-revolutionary filmmaking was characterised by experimentation and energy, as directors sought to establish an authentically Cuban national cinema that would further the aims of the socialist revolution. In the 1970s, however, as Antonio Álvarez Pitaluga has outlined, the Cuban government increased its control over national cultural production. The intensification of censorship and enforcement of aesthetic codes that favoured "a rigid legitimization of the system rather than any creative subversion" obliged filmmakers to abandon experimentation for "severe ideological reaffirmation".<sup>17</sup> During this time, a greater recourse to a didactic Soviet-influenced socialist realist mode can be identified in Cuban cinema, as directors were forced to move away from social criticism towards films that played "a key role as an ideological cog within the hegemonic machinery of the state in order to legitimise various aspects of social reality".<sup>18</sup>

Even at the height of this dogmatism, however, Cuba's brand of socialist realism was never as didactic as that of the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> By the 1980s, the state had become more open to reflection, criticism and debate. Departing from strict, socialist realist cinematic codes, filmmakers including Espinosa – a founding member of EICTV – contributed to the rebirth of

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<sup>16</sup> Balaisis, 'The School for Every World', p. 198.

<sup>17</sup> Antonio Álvarez Pitaluga, 'Brief Notes on a History of Cuban Cinema (1959-2015)', trans. by Guy Baron, in *The Cinema of Cuba: Contemporary Film and the Legacy of Revolution*, ed. by Guy Baron, Anne Marie Stock and Antonio Alvarez Pitaluga (Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 9-29 (p. 12).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Isabel Story, *Soviet Influence on Cuban Culture, 1961-1987: When the Soviets Came to Stay* (Lexington Books, 2019).

a revived and reenergised Cuban national cinema that was more openly critical of Cuban social reality, and which embraced new themes and aesthetics. In their interview, Rondón and Ugás note EICTV's emphasis on criticism and debate. At the school, "demolishing each other's arguments was permitted but it had to be supported by a solid line of reasoning, otherwise you would lose the right to give your opinion".<sup>20</sup> EICTV's manifesto, written by Birri, deems the school "not a scholastic but an anti-scholastic institution", stressing that teachers and students at EICTV were all to learn together.<sup>21</sup> The importance placed on creating a non-hierarchical and critical pedagogical environment at the school aligns with a wider departure from the strict vanguard model that had been adopted by Cuba's revolutionary government after 1959.

As I have noted, during the early post-independence phase, Angolan filmmakers were expected to make films that aligned with the aims of the MPLA party-state. Films which diverged from or were perceived to challenge the movement's foundational narratives were often censored. Even after the MPLA's departure from Marxist-Leninist socialism removed any lingering requirements for Angolan filmmakers to produce films that explicitly furthered the revolutionary socialist cause, criticism of the MPLA, and Angolan social reality more broadly, remained difficult. In 1990, the MPLA "decided to abandon the one-party system and allow open political competition between different political parties".<sup>22</sup> In theory, the signing of the Bicesse Peace Accords in Lisbon in 1991 promised freedom of political opinion and diverse political representation in a multi-party democracy. In reality, during this

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<sup>20</sup> Delgado, 'Meeting Points', p. 490.

<sup>21</sup> Mackenzie, *Film Manifestos*, p. 309.

<sup>22</sup> Hodges, *Anatomy of an Oil-State*, p. 11.

period of transition and unstable peace, the party remained anxious to retain its grip on power through careful control of national cultural discourse.

As I have explored, these conditions did not prevent Angolan directors from challenging the MPLA through their films. As in Cuba, an analysis of the development of Angolan cinema after independence reveals a similar trajectory of filmmakers seeking to move away from a restrictive, state-backed, socialist realist influenced national cinema towards new forms, themes and aesthetics that allowed for a more nuanced consideration and critique of urgent societal issues. Undeniably, however, the intellectual, political and ideological freedom and debate fostered by EICTV during the late 1980s and early 1990s differed fundamentally from the situation experienced in Angola by Bartolomeu and his contemporaries under the continued authoritarianism and oppression of the MPLA.

Casting a critical eye from the outside, what do Bartolomeu's films tell us about Angola at this historical juncture? Besides the material challenges faced by filmmakers at the end of the twentieth century, these decades can be characterised as a time of profound disillusionment. For many Angolan directors who had participated in the development of Angola's national cinema after 1975, the idealism and hopefulness of the early years of independence had been shattered by the realities of the MPLA's postcolonial project and protracted war. Promises of a socialist revolution made at the advent of independence had not come to fruition. Instead, more violence, more inequality, and more failed attempts at peace materialised. For a new generation of filmmakers, the crisis in national cinematic production threatened to thwart their careers before they had even begun. In this context, how does Bartolomeu reconcile the utopic optimism of EICTV with the challenges faced in Angola, as well as the colossal global

transformations and existential threats to socialism that occurred during his time in Cuba?  
How can the tensions that arise in Bartolomeu's works be compared to the films produced in Angola during the 1980s – discussed in the last three chapters – expanding and nuancing an understanding of Angolan cinema from this critically understudied period?

Against this backdrop, I suggest that Bartolomeu's short films from his time at EICTV chart the director's own ethical self-discovery. Bartolomeu has stated that his filmmaking is a very personal and introspective process; "ultimately, I write to discover myself, to learn about myself, but also include some fantasy".<sup>23</sup> Ethical self-reflection was encouraged at EICTV. In this context, any interrogation of individual ethics necessarily also required a social dimension. With the MPLA's abandonment of socialism and transition to capitalism, Bartolomeu's films examine social responsibility and socialist, revolutionary commitment outside imposed moral frameworks. Through his short films, the director attempts to reconcile the dreaming and utopia of EICTV – his radical belief in and hope for something better – with the practical challenges and disillusionment he faced not only as an Angolan during this period, but also as a committed global citizen confronting what Francis Fukuyama described as "the end of history", the ascendance of Western capitalist liberal democracy.<sup>24</sup>

In Bartolomeu's early work, the rejection of ideological and moral imposition is thus not a renunciation of collective social responsibility, but a move from external morality to interior ethics. Through his short films, the director explores various individual responses to moments of crisis and upheaval, in which uncomfortably human experiences of hopelessness and

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<sup>23</sup> Marissa Bell Toffoli, 'Interview with Writer & Filmmaker Mariano Bartolomeu', Words With Writers, 17 January 2011 <<https://wordswithwriters.com/2011/01/17/mariano-bartolomeu/>> [accessed 22 June 2022].

<sup>24</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Penguin, 1992).

desire interfere with morality and ethics. His characters are not framed on simplified moral binaries, nor are his films didactic or dogmatic. They do not always provide clear moral guidance. Rather, as his viewers assess their own responses and come to their own conclusions about the complex ethical dilemmas seen in the films, the director appears to hope – to trust – that they arrive at an acceptance of the value of our collective responsibility to one another, at their own understanding of a common social good. His belief in the power of cinema, and art, to contribute meaningfully to an ethical future is tangible through each of his short films.

Again, central to this is dialogue. Through his films, Bartolomeu not only presents dialogue through his characters, but also demands a level of dialogical engagement from his audience. The director does not instruct his audience, but asks the viewer to participate in the conversations he sparks. His short films thus avoid the monologic model characteristic of early Angolan films and other comparable revolutionary cinematic traditions. Instead, his use of dialogical techniques expands the self-reflective ethical dimension of his films to the viewer, while also underscoring Bartolomeu's unwavering criticism of global systems of power, injustice, exploitation and oppression.

Through my analysis, I focus on the ways in which Bartolomeu's short films from EICTV achieve this through processes of adaptation, and particularly literary adaptation. These adaptations reflect the director's fundamentally transnational approach to art and filmmaking. This internationalist worldview was certainly cemented and expanded during his time at EICTV, where he continued to produce cinematic adaptations of literary texts, and other art forms, from across the world. However, it is worth noting here that Bartolomeu's first

screenplay, which he wrote in Angola aged just 16, before attending EICTV in Cuba, was an adaptation of a German play by Frank Wedekind.<sup>25</sup> Here, I suggest where Bartolomeu's continued adaptative interventions and practice bring the global and national context of his films into relief, while also serving to illuminate the coordinates of the director's own ethical development and self-discovery in Cuba, by establishing further dialogue with his various source materials.

In his research into EICTV, Nicholas Balaisis uses films produced at the school to map changing attitudes towards socialism in Cuba. He notes:

This mapping is complex and wide with ambivalence, nostalgia as well as critique. As such, [films produced at the EICTV] portray a complicated and often contradictory image of Cuba, one that is liminally situated between its attachments to the revolutionary national past, and the globalized, late socialist present. The films thus provide a transnational map laying out – aesthetically – the complex and ambivalent terrain of late socialism.<sup>26</sup>

Bartolomeu's short films from EICTV can be read to reveal a similar cartography, which illustrates and illuminates the equally complex and ambivalent terrain of Angolan politics and society during this period of transition and uncertainty. Beyond a national context, Bartolomeu's films also speak to global histories, as well as the more specific conditions of EICTV. From this uniquely utopian vantage-point, Bartolomeu's short films reveal the

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<sup>25</sup> In his interview with Mariano Bartolomeu, Martin Chemhere states this was shot as a telefilm for Angolan television. Bartolomeu apparently "did not like the result". I have not been able to find any details of this film, when it was released or whether it was directed by Bartolomeu. See Chemhere, 'Angola Film Industry at a Glance', <<https://www.buala.org/en/afroscreen/angola-film-industry-at-a-glance#:~:text=Angola%20is%20a%20leading%20oil%20producer%20in>> [accessed 6 October 2024].

<sup>26</sup> Balaisis, *Cuban Film Media*, p. 77.

adaptive strategies of a young Angolan director grappling with the ethical implications of a changing world and attempting to chart a path between revolutionary pasts and uncertain futures.

### ***Caribeando* (1989)**

*Caribeando* is the first of the three publicly available short films written and directed by Bartolomeu during his studies at EICTV. The film offers an insight into the director's politics, and his ethos on filmmaking, at the outset of his cinematic training and career. With a running time of just under ten minutes, *Caribeando* explores themes of race and racial justice through a series of performances by the Danza Contemporánea de Cuba. These are intercut with archival footage and narration by Eduardo Rivero, the Cuban dancer, choreographer and founding director of the Compañía Teatro de la Danza del Caribe, who appears through the film.

*Caribeando* could perhaps be most accurately categorized as an impressionistic, even essayistic, documentary film. As in the case of Rebelo's *Levanta, Vôa e Vamos*, the work arguably does not neatly meet the criteria of the essay film form, focussing not on the director's own voice, but that of his subject, Rivero. However, like Rebelo, I suggest that Bartolomeu's presence can be felt in dialogue with the voice that is centred through the film. Through his cinematic adaptation of Rivero's work and testimony, Bartolomeu highlights and emphasizes shared issues and concerns spanning both Cuba and Angola. In this adaptation, the director does not impose or privilege his own monologic viewpoint but invites the audience to join him in a process of dialogical and ethical reflection that will evolve through his subsequent films.

Bartolomeu's film opens in a dark, empty theatre. The second shot moves outside of the theatre to show a man walking down a dark, empty alleyway. Suddenly, a police car appears behind him. The man begins to run, but he is shot by one of the officers. They drive away, and the man is left alone in the street, presumably dead. Almost immediately, three other men arrive and slowly pick up the man, carrying his body out of shot and then, in the next shot, directly onto a spot-lit stage (Fig. 4.1). When the men reach the centre of the stage, dancers fall upon and move around the body. A grieving woman is comforted as she is passed between dancers and moves across the body (Fig. 4.2). Through the performance, the extra-diegetic sound of police sirens can still be heard.

The dance performed is part of 'Tributo' ['Tribute'], a piece choreographed by Rivero that was included as part of his first program as director of the Compañía Teatro de la Danza del Caribe. Rivero was an important figure in the world of contemporary Cuban dance. He had trained as a ballet dancer before the 1959 revolution. At that time, it was almost impossible for a black dancer to advance professionally in Cuba. After the revolution, Rivero joined the state-founded Danza Contemporánea de Cuba, a contemporary dance company that progressed *técnica cubana*, a hybrid mix of Caribbean and African folklore, European ballet, North-American modern dance and popular, theatrical dance styles such as cabaret and flamenco.<sup>27</sup> Here, Rivero would develop as "a dance internationalist exploring African and African diasporic culture".<sup>28</sup> His practice was particularly influenced by his association with

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<sup>27</sup> Martha Suki John, 'La Técnica Cubana: A Revolution in Dance' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Connecticut, 2007), p. 1 <<https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/la-i-técnica-cubana-revolution-dance/docview/304860096/se-2?accountid=13042>> [accessed 6 October 2024].

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth B. Schwall, *Dancing with the Revolution: Power, Politics and Privilege in Cuba* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2021), p. 201.

the Grupo Antillano, a Cuban art collective, active through the 1960s and 1970s, whose work drew on theories of *afrocubanismo* and *negritude*.<sup>29</sup> While Rivero was not officially a part of this group, he contributed to their projects, and developed a “long-standing commitment to collectively celebrating Black culture in Cuba and beyond” that would shape the remainder of his career.<sup>30</sup>

‘Tributo’ is both a celebration of black identity and culture, and a sharp critique of racial injustice. The opening dance of Rivero’s piece is set to Bob Marley’s 1976 song ‘Johnny Was’. As in the performance, Marley’s lyrics tell the story of a young man – Johnny – who is shot and killed, and his mother, who is comforted by a passer-by as she mourns her son. Both the song and the dancers’ performance highlight issues of violence against racialised subjects. Rivero’s piece foregrounds the dignity of the victim, who is carried slowly onto the stage above the heads of three men, and laid carefully in the centre of the shot. The extent of the mourners’ pain is expressed through wide, extended movements. Rivero’s piece depicts solidarity and strength in the face of this suffering. The dancers move in unison, reaching upwards and rolling their bodies through waves of sorrow. At the same time, the synergy and coordination of their movements suggest a level of familiarity with and expectedness to the events that have taken place. This is not a scene of chaos or surprise. Rather, for this community, this violence is known all too well.

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<sup>29</sup> Alejandra Bronfman, ‘Grupo Antillano: The Art of Afro-Cuba’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 94:2 (2014), pp. 337-338, doi:10.1215/00182168-2641478.

<sup>30</sup> Schwall, *Dancing with the Revolution*, p. 202.



Fig. 4.1. *Caribeando* (EICTV, 1989), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.



Fig. 4.2. *Caribeando* (EICTV, 1989), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.

Rivero's portrayal of specifically racialised violence through 'Tributo' reacted against the attitudes to race that had been adopted by the Cuban state. As Devyn Spence Benson notes, while Cuba's revolutionary government made tangible reforms that directly improved conditions for Cuba's black communities after 1959, the state's "attitude towards blackness was ambivalent and unstable and left little space for Afro-Cubans to be both black *and* a citizen".<sup>31</sup> The government's anti-racist rhetoric actively suppressed manifestations, affirmations and discussions of blackness and black identity. Discussions of race were viewed as incompatible with the revolution's aims of national unity. Specifically racial identities were to be cast aside in favour of a post-racial Cuban identity, determined by revolutionary commitment to the cause. In doing so, as Danielle Pilar Clealand explains, Cuba's ethos of racial democracy removed "the category of race as a cleavage that can produce unique social, economic and political consequences and sides with the logic that race is irrelevant because racism has disappeared. The use of anti-racism by both the government and the citizenry in Cuba serves to deny the presence of racism while simultaneously preserving negative black stereotypes and the belief in black inferiority".<sup>32</sup>

Like the MPLA, the Cuban revolutionary government adhered to "the Marxist emphasis on class over race, in the belief that addressing the former would correct the latter".<sup>33</sup> As in Duarte de Carvalho and Fortunato's films, Bartolomeu's adaptation of 'Tributo', with its explicit focus on issues of race, also presents a challenge to MPLA's "post-racial" vision. Like the previous films, this adaptation references alternative frameworks of solidarity and

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<sup>31</sup> Devyn Spence Benson, *Antiracism in Cuba: The Unfinished Revolution* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Danielle Pilar Clealand, *The Power of Race in Cuba: Racial Ideology and Black Consciousness during the Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs, *Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba* (University of Florida Press, 2020), p. 22.

racial consciousness. The director's use of a song by the Jamaican reggae musician Jimmy Cliff, for example, along with the song by Marley used during the performance, further evokes an association with Pan-Africanist thought and global solidarity and unity between all Africans and people of African descent.

In his adaptation of 'Tributo', Bartolomeu chooses to draw attention specifically to state violence. Unlike Marley's song, the victim in the film is shot by police officers. This takes place outside of the theatre, as a prologue to the performance. The director's addition of this scene underscores a critique of race-related government policies and makes explicit the structural violence and injustice that race-blind attitudes have concealed in both a Cuban and an Angolan context. In particular, the emphasis on state violence is significant in light of the MPLA's increased authoritarianism and brutality, and specifically the events that followed the 27<sup>th</sup> May 1977. The brutal massacre facilitated by the party's leadership was a response to a supposed coup that was "inspired in part by dissatisfaction with the revolution's reach among poor and overwhelmingly black neighbourhoods and regions".<sup>34</sup> The party's violent purging of dissent and repression of popular resistance contained a specifically racial dynamic.

In *Caribeando*, when the dancers leave the stage, the camera cuts back to the theatre, completely empty apart from Rivero, seated at a table listening to the radio (Fig. 4.3). Turning his radio off, Rivero begins to write a letter, which is narrated through the voiceover track. Through the letter he informs the audience that, many years ago, he met a "great poet" called Michael Smith. Years later, he writes, he heard of Smith's violent death. Mikey Smith was a renowned Jamaican dub-poet who was killed following a political rally in Jamaica in

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<sup>34</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 35.

1983, during which he heckled the right-wing Jamaican Labour Party's Minister for Culture. While the exact circumstances of Smith's death are debated, it is alleged that the poet, who was politically on the far left, was murdered by right-wing political opponents.<sup>35</sup> Smith was unwavering in speaking truth to power, and an unflinching critic of authority and structures of domination and oppression. For Mervyn Morris, his poetry and performances cried out "against poverty, indifference, racism, greed, 'politricks' and lack of cultural awareness".<sup>36</sup>

Rivero's reference to Smith underlines both his performance and the film's critical stance on structural injustice. Through the voiceover, Rivero also states his belief that to be an artist is "um comprimisso moral". His words are set to footage of Rivero himself pacing the stage and images of scenes from the Caribbean, including a shot of two men confronting a police officer. The montage of footage used by Bartolomeu in his cinematic adaptation of Rivero's testimony heightens the connection between art and social justice expressed by the director. Rivero's narration explicitly situates this moral responsibility within wider, transnational networks of solidarity, particularly across the Global South. As an artist from the Caribbean and from the "Third World", he remarks, his art will always be connected to Smith's and the realities of life in these spaces.

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<sup>35</sup> Julie Pearn, 'Mikey Smith', *Index on Censorship*, 12:6 (1983), pp. 49-50 (p. 49), doi:10.1080/03064228308533647.

<sup>36</sup> Mervyn Morris, "Smith, Mikey (1954-83)", *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2005 <<https://www.proquest.com/encyclopedias-reference-works/smith-mikey-1954-83/docview/2137903161/se-2?accountid=13042>> [accessed 6 October 2024].



Fig. 4.3. *Caribeando* (EICTV, 1989), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.

As I have noted, this more-than-national orientation and solidarity would have aligned with the internationalist environment of EICTV, forming a foundational ethos for Bartolomeu's cinema in Cuba. The film's title, "Caribeando", could relate to Rivero. The use of the present participle implies the notion that cultural, political and social identity is an active process of commitment, which Rivero enacts through his art. In his life, Rivero had moved away from notions of Cuban national identity constructed by the post-1959 revolutionary government towards a greater affiliation and solidarity with Antillean and Caribbean cultural identity. Equally, the film's title could also relate to Bartolomeu's own ongoing process of self-discovery in Cuba, and where his experiences in the Caribbean were influencing his own conceptions of cultural and racial identity.

Rivero's narration continues, discussing his piece 'Tributo'. He states:

Esta obra surge como uma necessidade minha, uma necessidade muito orgânica, de expressar muitas das coisas que vi no Caribe, a violência, o racismo, assim como a cor, os gestos, a expressividade das pessoas. Acho que a minha obra é uma obra de resistência.

Rivero's words further advance his concern with issues of racial and structural injustice across the Caribbean, and illuminate his ethos on socially committed art, which can also be mapped against the ethical coordinates of Bartolomeu's filmmaking practice.

I have suggested that Bartolomeu's film can be read as an adaptation of 'Tributo' and Rivero's accompanying monologue. Through his representation of Rivero's work and

testimony, such as the addition of the film's opening scene, which extends the performance in order to highlight state violence against racialised subjects, Bartolomeu enters into explicit dialogue with the film's source material both to reaffirm and to expand its original content. While subtle, this dialogical practice of cinematic transformation and intervention would be developed by the director through his subsequent short films. Additionally, through his film, Bartolomeu presents a dialogue with himself. As in Duarte de Carvalho's film *Moia*, the presence of a director figure on screen is self-reflexive. Bartolomeu's choice to stage artificially Rivero's own self-reflection through the letter-writing scene, rather than solely through the voiceover and filmed footage, gestures more emphatically towards an equivalent process of reckoning and self-reflection on the part of the film's director. Again, the engagement in a process of self-reflection and self-discovery that is referenced here pre-emptly Bartolomeu's development as a director during his time at EICTV.

In *Caribeando*, how is the audience positioned in relation to these dialogues and debates?

The opening shots of the film immediately foreground questions of spectatorship, art, and its connection to real life and real politics. When the shooting of the man takes place, there is no one there to witness it. The victim is strikingly alone, his solitary silhouette contrasted against the bright background behind him (Fig. 4.4). When the men enter the theatre, it is – as far as we can tell – still empty. As the film progresses, the theatre begins to fill up – firstly with one man, the director, whom we see sitting alone in the theatre, and subsequently with a full audience, whom we see in the film's final shot.

In the context of the film, bearing witness is presented as an ethical and political act. This sentiment is echoed by Rivero, who notes the “necessity” of recording the culture, as well as

the violence and racism, he had seen in the Caribbean. In the following sections, I suggest that through his next films, both of which are literary adaptations, the director would also come to demand a more actively dialogical engagement from his audience. The cinematic expression and experimentation of Bartolomeu's first film sets the scene for many of the questions dealt with in his later works.



Fig. 4.4. *Caribeando* (EICTV, 1989), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.

### ***Un Lugar Limpio y Bien Iluminado (1991)***

Bartolomeu's second short film, *Un Lugar Limpio y Bien Iluminado (Un Lugar)*, is also shot and set in Cuba. The film is an adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's short story 'The Killers' (1927). The film adapts Hemingway's text to present an examination of individual responses to despair, disillusionment and the loss of coherent ideological and moral frameworks, as well as the dangers these can pose. In the context of the ongoing cinematic crisis and the MPLA's ideological transition, the director's transformations of Hemingway's text clearly speak to the challenging situation faced by artists and filmmakers in Angola. Additionally, Bartolomeu's engagement with previous film adaptations of the original source text illuminates the global context of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this way, the film demonstrates a continued commitment to transnational revolutionary solidarity, as well as the director's concern with global systems of power and oppression.

In terms of plot, *Un Lugar* stays relatively loyal to Hemingway's original, transposing the basic story into a small Cuban town. In 'The Killers', two men, named Max and Al, arrive at a restaurant. After complaining about the service and mocking the staff, they announce that they have been hired to kill a man named Ole Andreson, a boxer who eats at the diner every night. Nick Adams, another of the diner's regular customers, is sitting at the counter when the killers arrive. He rushes to inform Ole of the men's plan. Ole, however, is unbothered, saying "there ain't anything to do" and he is "through with all that running around".<sup>37</sup> Nick is disturbed by Ole's indifference. He decides he must leave town, telling George, the diner's

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<sup>37</sup> Ernest Hemingway, 'The Killers', in Hemingway, *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: The Finca Vigía Edition* (Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1998), pp. 215–222 (p. 221).

owner, that knowledge of Ole's fate is "too damned awful", and he "can't stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he's going to get it".<sup>38</sup>

Bartolomeu's adaptation of Hemingway does not end with 'The Killers'. The title of the film takes its name from another of the writer's short stories, 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place' (1933). The titular reference to Hemingway's later work introduces some significant new dynamics to the adaptation. Set in a Spanish café, 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place' follows a conversation between two waiters. The younger waiter is angry that an old man drinking brandy will not finish up and leave. He wants to close the café and go home. The older waiter is more sympathetic. He tells his colleague that the man is lonely and tried to kill himself the week before. The older waiter understands the old man's decision to commit suicide as he is also struggling with life's meaninglessness, telling his colleague that "it was all a nothing and a man was nothing too". Through Hemingway's free indirect narration, it is suggested that the older waiter's hopelessness stems from a loss of Christian faith. In the final paragraphs, he recites a hollowed-out version of the Lord's Prayer: "our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada...".<sup>39</sup>

As Stam notes, "in some cases a changed title signals the transformations operative in the adaptation".<sup>40</sup> By positing a connection between the two works, Bartolomeu's title suggests a more penetrating exploration of the psychology of Ole, the boxer, who in the film is named Rosendo. Beyond his tiredness, 'The Killers' provides no real explanation for Ole's

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<sup>38</sup> Hemingway, 'The Killers', p. 222.

<sup>39</sup> Ernest Hemingway, 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place', in Hemingway, *The Complete Short Stories*, pp. 288–291 (p. 291).

<sup>40</sup> Stam, "The Dialogics of Adaptation", p. 65.

apparently willing acceptance of his fate. Bartolomeu's reference to 'A Clean Well-Lighted Place' suggests that Rosendo's inaction – which leads to his proxy suicide at the hands of the assassins – relates to a more general existential malaise and sense of a loss of meaning in life, where once there may have been a coherent moral framework, represented in the original story by the waiter's Christian faith. In Bartolomeu's film, Rosendo's dialogue echoes the disillusionment and hopelessness of the older waiter. When his partner, Ella, asks him to escape the assassins and move with her to a new city to start a new life, he replies "all places are the same", "there isn't one clean and well-lit place".

Tony Hodges notes that the MPLA's transition to free-market capitalism at the end of the 1980s took place in a "moral and ideological void".<sup>41</sup> Through the 1980s, the party gradually abandoned its revolutionary socialist framework. Despite this, the party continued to present itself through the revolutionary language and socialist imagery that positioned the MPLA government as the true liberators of the nation and a movement firmly on the side of the Angolan people. In this context, many high-profile writers, artists and filmmakers, some of whom had also been senior figures in the party's early government, such as Pepetela, began to distance themselves from the MPLA, dissatisfied with its empty rhetoric and ideological evolution, and disillusioned by the party's failure to deliver on its revolutionary promises and its mishandling of power.

In Bartolomeu's film, the loss of a central ideological and moral framework is not presented as inherently or necessarily negative. Here, it is interesting to note the director's choice to adapt two works by Hemingway. In interviews, Bartolomeu has noted his respect for Hemingway

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<sup>41</sup> Hodges, *Angola: Anatomy of an Oil-State*, p. 11.

as a writer.<sup>42</sup> On a personal level, there are certainly similarities between the two men. Hemingway is considered one of the great writers of the ‘lost generation’, who reached early adulthood during World War One. Bartolomeu, born in 1967, was younger than his revolutionary counterparts, coming of age after independence, when the idealism and hopefulness of liberation and revolution was beginning to fade. Like Bartolomeu, Hemingway spent time in Cuba, as well as Africa. Hemingway was also a “fierce individualist”.<sup>43</sup> For Kenneth Kinnamon, a “salient characteristic of Hemingway’s political position was a strong individualism hostile to control by any exterior force”.<sup>44</sup> While the writer certainly had strong leftist sympathies, this was outweighed by his belief in a minimum of government. His works thus often explore the individual psyche and existential dread of characters who have lost faith in or distanced themselves from wider social structures.

Responding to the MPLA’s moral and ideological paucity, and within the critical and dialogue-oriented space of EICTV, Bartolomeu’s attraction to Hemingway might also lie in the latter’s emphasis on a leftist revolutionary commitment outside of imposed moral frameworks, a sense of socialist and human solidarity that comes from within, which the director also reaches towards in his works. In this sense, Bartolomeu’s adaptation can be read to highlight the potential risks and dangers that emerge at the point of losing one’s external moral and ideological guidance. His film questions how to navigate the world ethically without this.

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<sup>42</sup> Toffoli, ‘Interview with Writer & Filmmaker Mariano Bartolomeu’, <<https://wordswithwriters.com/2011/01/17/mariano-bartolomeu/>> [accessed 22 June 2022].

<sup>43</sup> Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), p. 194.

<sup>44</sup> Kenneth Kinnamon, ‘Hemingway and Politics’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway*, ed. by Scott Donaldson (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 149–169 (p. 158).

Bartolomeu emphasises this concern, and further subverts Hemingway's original text, by introducing the character of Ella into the narrative. As his partner, Ella is a figure to whom Rosendo has responsibility. However, the boxer ultimately ignores this responsibility, and her appeals for him to leave with her, deciding instead to stay in the town and accept his death. By introducing a partner into the narrative, Bartolomeu emphasises the consequences of an individualism devoid of moral responsibility to others. Ella is clearly affected by Rosendo's actions. She talks about her disturbed dreams, where she is frightened by his abandonment of her and the prospect of his death. When she leaves, she is clearly upset at having to leave Rosendo behind, further stressing the significance of maintaining some form of collective responsibility. At the end of the film, her fate is uncertain.

Through the film, we never see Rosendo outside his room. The room he refuses to leave is a cinematically violent space. When Ale comes to visit Rosendo in his bedroom, the director employs a striking and violent framing technique. For most of this scene, the upper half of Rosendo's body is cut off by the camera. We can only see his lower body and legs as he lies on the bed (Fig. 4.5). Here, Bartolomeu demonstrates the imminent violence faced by Rosendo at the hands of the assassins: for Jean-Louis Comolli, "to frame is to inflict violence - a virtual violence, naturally, but a highly visible violence that is especially apparent when its victim is the filmed body".<sup>45</sup> Here, the violent consequences of Rosendo's hopelessness are emphasised to the audience.

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<sup>45</sup> Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Frames and Bodies - Notes on Three Films by Pedro Costa: Ossos, No Quarto da Vanda, Juventude em Marcha', *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, 24:1 (2010), pp. 62-70 (p. 63-64), doi:10.1086/655929.



Fig. 4.5. *Un Lugar Limpio y Bien Iluminado* (EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.

Bartolomeu's adaptation also introduces additional context to the relationship between Ale and Rosendo. In 'The Killers', the men live in the same town. In *Un Lugar*, it appears that Ale idolises Rosendo. At the beginning of the film, Bartolomeu shows Ale getting ready to leave his apartment, checking his reflection in a mirror. Affixed to the mirror is a photograph of Rosendo, wearing his boxing gloves. Ale's own boxing gloves hang by the mirror. Ale poses in the mirror, with his fists raised, reenacting Rosendo's pose in the photograph (Fig. 4.6). When Ale asks Rosendo if he is coming to training, it is implied that he was Ale's coach.

The director's reference to 'A Clean Well-Lighted Place' also heightens the generational dynamics of the relationship between Ale and Rosendo, possibly figuring Rosendo as a paternal figure. Bartolomeu's choice to introduce this explicit generational divide into his adaptation perhaps signals the director's concern with the ways in which different generations were responded to a wider context of disillusionment and despair in Angola, particularly in relation to filmmaking. Several eminent Angolan film directors from the early post-independence period had, by this point, given up making films. Many were dissatisfied with the lack of opportunities and support for filmmaking in Angola, as well as the ways in which the need for state funding placed certain demands upon directors and restricted their artistic and creative freedoms. As a young director early in his career, it is possible that Bartolomeu felt the older generation had given up too quickly on Angolan national cinema and the potential to build on filmmaking and transform it into a more critical idiom. As in Rebelo's and Duarte de Carvalho's films, we thus find in *Un Lugar* a possible reaction against a paternal function. Here, the difference perhaps is that this paternalistic force is not directed solely towards the MPLA's early revolutionary vanguard, but also towards the dissident directors of the previous generation.



Fig. 4.6. *Un Lugar Limpio y Bien Iluminado* (EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.

In *Un Lugar*, Rosendo is not presented as entirely hopeless. He still has the capacity to dream. Through the film, he talks about a childhood dream to become a musician. This dream, he states, has become “an obsession”. When Ella recounts her dream to Rosendo, however, he is dismissive. She tells him she dreamt that he was calling to her across a deep blue hole. Rosendo simply responds that there are no blue holes. The theme of dreaming running the film through could again be read to relate to a disillusioned Angolan generation. Rosendo is still dreaming, he is still idealistic, but his dreams are nostalgic, melancholy and sentimental. He takes no action towards them and merely accepts his fate. Ella, on the other hand, proposes a practical alternative to their situation - leaving town. Rosendo’s refusal to move beyond his nostalgia to respond practically to the urgent and dire situation in which he finds himself could be equated to an Angolan cinematic context contemporaneous with the film.

Rosendo’s assertion that all holes are black, that nobody can see through them, clearly points to the feelings of darkness he is confronting. He cannot imagine the hole described by Ella to be anything other than a total impasse. In his despair, the dialogue between Rosendo and Ella is frustrated. He does not listen to her and repeats things she has already said, with Ella snapping back at him – “that’s what I said!”. Later in the scene, she tells him, “you’re wrong if you think you know everything. You don’t know anything!”. The invention of the character of Ella in Bartolomeu’s adaptation thus provides an additional voice through which to present a dialogic, oppositional response to Rosendo’s position of hopelessness and despair, suggesting a tangible alternative to his passive acceptance of an unhappy fate.

The film’s closing scenes gesture towards a changing of the guard. During the final scene in Rosendo’s room, Rosendo sits in a chair by the window. In the same long take, Rosendo

stands up, returning to his bed, and Ale takes the seat, directly replacing Rosendo in the space he leaves behind (Fig. 4.7 – 4.8). At the end of the film, Ale leaves, giving up on Rosendo. In line with Hemingway’s original text, the implication is that Ale “cannot stand” to wait around to see his friend die. After Ale leaves his room for the last time, to return to the city, the camera lingers on the picture of Rosendo on the mirror. This shot could be read as an indication that Ale is also moving on from his devotion to the paternal figure represented by Rosendo in this image. Like Bartolomeu himself, Ale departs from a hopeless situation to pursue something distinct from the predecessors that trained him in his craft.

In this way, despite the seemingly unhappy and hopeless ending of *Un Lugar*, Bartolomeu’s adaptation implies a continued commitment to and belief in the future of Angolan cinema. The director’s choice of Hemingway’s text arguably locates this optimism within a more-than-national framework, expanding on themes developed through his first short film and reaffirming the profoundly internationalist outlook of the EICTV. The “activist stance” taken by Bartolomeu in his adaptation extends beyond purely Angolan concerns.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Stam, ‘Beyond Fidelity’, p. 64.



Fig. 4.7. *Un Lugar Limpio y Bien Iluminado* (EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.



Fig. 4.8. *Un Lugar Limpio y Bien Iluminado* (EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.

*Un Lugar* is not just an adaptation of Hemingway's short stories. There are three film adaptations of 'The Killers' that predate Bartolomeu's film. His work is a response to these, as well as to Hemingway's original texts. The first adaptation was Robert Siodmak's 1946 film-noir *The Killers*, which was followed by a further Hollywood adaptation by Don Siegel in 1964, starring Ronald Reagan in his final role before leaving acting to launch his political career. Between these two versions, in 1956, the Soviet Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky released an adaptation while he was studying in Moscow, which he co-directed along with fellow film students Marika Beiku and Aleksandr Gordon.

Between them, the three pre-existing film adaptations of 'The Killers' capture one of the most significant dynamics in the global politics of the second half of the twentieth century: the Cold War. During the Cold War, Angola "was seen as a proxy arena for the superpowers" involved in the - the USA and the Soviet Union - "by way of their client states, Cuba and South Africa".<sup>47</sup> During his presidency, Reagan and his administration supported UNITA - the main opposition to the MPLA in Angola - and were instrumental in assisting South Africa in their "struggle" against the MPLA's "Marxist regime", which was supported to varying degrees by the Cubans and the Soviet Union. While supporters of the Reagan administration claimed that their interventions aided Angola's transition to peace and resulted in the ultimate withdrawal of foreign troops, U.S. interference in fact prolonged and amplified conflict during the civil war, worsening the human cost of the violence.<sup>48</sup> Bartolomeu's adaptation "writes back" to these superpowers by inserting an Angolan voice into the global political conflicts for which the Angolan Civil War was a silenced, bloody and harrowing proxy.

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<sup>47</sup> Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Michael McFaul, 'Rethinking the "Reagan Doctrine" in Angola', *International Security*, 14:3 (1990), pp. 99-135 (p. 99), doi:10.2307/2538933.

Responding to the earlier films, Bartolomeu also specifically targets the insidious racism and racialization apparent in each of these productions. In both Tarkovsky and Siodmak's versions, the Black cook – Sam – is uncredited. In the former, Sam is played by the Afro-Russian actor Ermengeld Konovalov, who appears in the movie in heavy makeup intended to darken his skin tone, akin to 'blackface'. In the latter, he is played by the African American actor Bill Walker, who is best known for his role as Reverend Sykes in Robert Mulligan's 1962 adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In Siegel's version, the character of Sam is left out entirely.

Correspondingly, none of the pre-existing films challenges the racism of Hemingway's original text. Toni Morrison argues in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) that Hemingway's engagement with race – particularly the African-American experience – is "artless and unselfconscious".<sup>49</sup> His works repeatedly demonstrate "narrative discrimination" against his black and African-American characters, reducing these figures to a position of "passive powerlessness".<sup>50</sup> In *The Killers*, Sam is subjected to many of the same acts of linguistic and narrative violence that Morrison identifies in her analysis.

As is made clear in Morrison's work, and as Ian Marshall notes, "being on the political left did not, for Hemingway, mean producing work that can be read as antiracist".<sup>51</sup> Although Bartolomeu may have respected and related to Hemingway, his adaptation does not shy away

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<sup>49</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 69.

<sup>50</sup> Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, p. 73.

<sup>51</sup> Ian Marshall, "Hemingway, Race(ism) and Criticism", in *The New Hemingway Studies*, ed. by Suzanne del Gizzo and Kirk Cumutt (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 161–175 (p. 161).

from the writer's complexities. He reframes the original text, as well as its previous cinematic adaptations, with an Afro-Cuban cast, bringing issues of racial justice to the forefront of his film. Like *Caribeando*, we might read this radically adaptive intervention as a call for a new, alternative form of collective social responsibility to counter global racist structures.

*Un Lugar* is a deeply critical and dialogical adaptation. Responding to these multiple antecedent texts, Bartolomeu deliberately avoids presenting a moralising or didactic point of view. Rather, the director encourages his audience to explore the moral and ethical questions posed through his adaptation. The use of mirrors through the film, for example, provides the audience with multiple versions of the same image at the same time. This can be seen in a shot of Ella getting ready in her and Rosendo's bedroom (Fig. 4.9). Here, the camera is positioned just above Ella's head, and she is reflected multiple times. Rosendo, lying on their bed in the background, is also reflected twice. The spectator is given multiple versions of the same image, and, therefore, must choose how to order and combine them through their own individual interpretation of the scene. The use of mirrors means that this very process of interpretation and dialogue is made visible, and attention is drawn to it by the very proliferation of images on screen.



Fig. 4.9. *Un Lugar Limpio y Bien Iluminado* (EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.

Ultimately, the ending of the film is ambiguous. The final shot of the film shows Ale walking away down the train tracks. We do not know what happens to any of the characters. Nobody really wins, no decision is proven right or wrong. The clear moral associations of 'good' and 'bad' that are implied through Hemingway's original text (represented by Nick and the killers, respectively) are diminished. With this moral code gone, the director then simply presents the complex ethical choices made by each individual. Which is the most ethical choice is left up to the spectator to decide.

In this way, Bartolomeu does not reproduce a monologic cinematic model or impose a fixed moral framework through his film. What is clear, however, is that the capacity to dream, to believe in the possibility of an alternative future, is presented as less deadly and dangerous than a passive and cynical acceptance of one's fate. As I have noted, the resonance of this assertion in the context of Angola's ongoing cinematic crisis is significant and powerful, with the film's adaptive interventions perhaps directed towards an old guard of post-independence Angolan filmmakers. Beyond this, however, the ways in which Bartolomeu's film diverges from the multiple previous adaptations of Hemingway's text bring into relief the equal weight given by the director to more-than-national concerns, and to ensuring that his work remains dialogically open to various interpretations and is not restricted to a specific Angolan context.

In his next film, Bartolomeu appears to confirm that living ethically outside imposed frameworks is possible, if not without its challenges. Like Ale, Bartolomeu had left behind an older generation's disillusionment at a moment of crisis and despair in search of something new. His final film from EICTV asks how he might find his way back.

### *Quem Faz Correr Quim?* (1991)

Bartolomeu's third and final short film from EICTV – *Quem Faz Correr Quim?* – was directed in 1991. The film is shot and set in Angola and was produced with support from both EICTV and the Angolan LNC. The film was subsequently released in Angola in 1992, and screened publicly as part of the Cinemateca Nacional's cinema cycle *Cinema Nosso: Últimas Produções*, a celebration of Angolan filmmaking from the 1990s.<sup>52</sup>

Many of the concerns found in the director's previous works can be traced through the film. Particularly, this can be seen in the director's exploration of how the film's protagonist – Quim – responds to crisis, oscillating between hopelessness, transgression, and a pervading sense of moral responsibility. Arguably, the film settles on an optimistic view of the individual's capacity to make ethically sound decisions, even in adverse and challenging conditions. Laying bare the vicissitude of living ethically outside imposed moral frameworks, I suggest that the film also exposes some of the limits of the director's own ethical existence.

*Quem Faz Correr Quim?* is an adaptation of Japanese Nobel Laureate Kenzaburō Ōe's novel *A Personal Matter* (1964). Some parallels can be drawn between Ōe and Bartolomeu. Susan Napier characterises Ōe as a writer of crisis, both at a personal and socio-cultural level, referring to his activity in the aftermath of the Pacific War.<sup>53</sup> As David Stahl further explains, “for Ōe and his generation the ambivalence of identity, the apparently unsettled meaning of values, and the difficulties faced by individuals forced to create their own moral universe

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<sup>52</sup> I have not found any evidence that Bartolomeu's previous short films were screened publicly in Angola. In 2014, the Cinemateca Portuguesa in Lisbon screened five of Bartolomeu's short films – including the three analysed in this chapter – as part of their event *Olhares sobre Angola*.

<sup>53</sup> David Stahl, *Social Trauma, Narrative Memory, and Recovery in Japanese Literature and Film* (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 141.

were not mere abstractions, but defining experiences”.<sup>54</sup> This situation echoes that of Bartolomeu and other Angolan artists and writers active during this period, when the “moral universe” created by the MPLA had been dismantled from within, through the party’s failure to adhere to its own values and its eventual ideological shift.

The plot of *Quem Faz Correr Quim?* remains relatively loyal to Ōe’s novel. The protagonist – named Bird in *A Personal Matter*, and Quim in Bartolomeu’s film – discovers his baby has been born with a severe brain deformity. To survive, both children require surgery that is likely to leave them seriously disabled for the rest of their lives. While their wives remain seriously ill in hospital, Bird and Quim deal with the trauma of this discovery by retreating to the homes of old girlfriends – named Himiko and Djamilia, respectively. Using the framework of *A Personal Matter*, Bartolomeu’s adaptation explores how Quim responds to this personal crisis, a moment of severe shock and a difficult decision that forces him to confront his own morals and ethics.

As in his previous films, Bartolomeu’s adaptation calls the audience’s attention to specific Angolan socio-political concerns by transposing the story into a military context. The film opens with shots of plane wreckage, soldiers at a military base, and planes landing on an airstrip, suggesting that the action is taking place during a period of increased military activity, such as Angola’s civil conflict. We learn that Quim is a soldier, while in Ōe’s original text Bird is a teacher. At the hospital, the revelation of the severe bodily trauma suffered by Quim’s wife and child during the difficult birth would have taken on a further significance for contemporary Angolan audiences in the context of protracted war. Besides the violence

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<sup>54</sup> Stahl, *Social Trauma*, p. 141.

experienced by his family, simply the image of Quim in the setting of the hospital in his military uniform is evocative of real scenes of injured veterans across the nation.<sup>55</sup> As in the case of Rebelo's film, the suffering of the child also invokes the real suffering of Angolan children at this time, when the country had one of the highest child mortality rates in the world.

In this explicitly military context, the new baby can be understood as a metaphor for the newly independent – newly 'birthed' – nation, brought into being by the symbolic figures of the military New Man and his Angolan wife. The difficult and violent birth denotes the conditions of colonialism, war and conflict from which the independent nation was born. Understood symbolically, the deformity of the child implies a categorical break with early post-independence cinematic representations of Angola's liberation, which projected wholly positive images of the nation under the MPLA government. Bartolomeu's film is decidedly more disparaging. The disturbing image of the child with "two heads" can arguably be read as representative – and critical – of the changed ideological affiliations and Janus-faced nature of the party's leadership.

Throughout the film, we never see the child on screen. Again, this is a departure from Ōe's original text, in which Bird describes his child in detail to the reader. Instead, Bartolomeu's unseen baby occupies what Gilles Deleuze terms a "radical Elsewhere", an offscreen space "which cannot even be said to exist".<sup>56</sup> In this offscreen space, due to its inherent non-existence, all meaning collapses. The grotesque, abject "two-headed" baby is therefore

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<sup>55</sup> See *O Herói*, dir. Zézé Gamboa (2004).

<sup>56</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p.17.

simultaneously a symbol of the failures of the MPLA, whose original moral frameworks and structures have also collapsed, and the *result* of the symbolic violence that can occur within this ideologically vacant space, which evokes the same “moral and ideological void” occupied by Rosendo in *Un Lugar*. In this sense, Quim runs not only from his sick child, but also from the baby-as-violence and baby-as-nation, as well as the loss of structure and meaning represented by the offscreen space that the baby occupies.

David Stahl argues for a reading of *Õe*'s original text based in social trauma theory, drawing attention to the “the personal/microcosmic and collective/macrocosmic dimensions of dissociated/disavowed traumatic experience and its haunting aftereffects and enduring legacies”.<sup>57</sup> If Quim’s decision to flee from his child can equally be understood as a response to the “void” in which his child is positioned, and the violence and national upheaval the child represents, this further reveals Bartolomeu’s anxiety about how individuals associated with the MPLA were to reckon with the traumatic loss of moral frameworks based in notions of common good and collective responsibility experienced following the movement’s departure from its revolutionary socialist ideology. Returning to Angola from the utopic environment of EICTV, this is perhaps a markedly personal concern – Bartolomeu’s own “personal matter”.

Bartolomeu appears to attempt to evoke empathy with Quim’s initial decision to withdraw to Djamila’s flat. When he first learns the details of his wife’s difficult birth, during a scene in the doctor’s office, the camera remains almost entirely focussed on Quim’s face (Fig. 4.10). Through these close-up shots, the director implies that the most important element of the

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<sup>57</sup> Stahl, *Social Trauma*, p. 144.

scene is not the events that have occurred within his family, but Quim's reaction and response to them – an emphasis which is kept up through the film. As Mette Hjort has noted, “the human face, captured in reaction shots and close-ups, has had a central role to play throughout much of film's history in generating viewers' identification with characters on the screen”.<sup>58</sup>

Quim cannot escape the haunting presence of the child. At Djamila's apartment, when Quim falls asleep, the film cuts to a nightmare scene in which the protagonist's dreams are disturbed by the thought of the baby (Fig. 4.11). The scene follows a distressed Quim as he staggers through the darkened hospital, which is bathed in red light. No matter where he turns, Quim is repeatedly faced with his distressed wife and the doctor, along with other characters who shout and laugh manically at him. The nightmare becomes increasingly frantic, with rapid cutting and overlaid shots that heighten the pace and intensity of the scene. The symbolic relationship between the child and the nation is again made explicit through this dream sequence. Along with sounds of babies crying, the scene is accompanied by the noise of bombs, alarms and planes, as well as images of fire and flashing lights, evoking the sounds and images of war and further suggesting how this trauma has also affected the psyche of the veteran Quim.

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<sup>58</sup> Mette Hjort, 'Unlikely Empathy: The process and effect of identification in *Listen*', *Short Film Studies*, 8:1 (2018), pp. 73-77 (p. 74), doi:10.1386/sfs.8.1.73\_1.

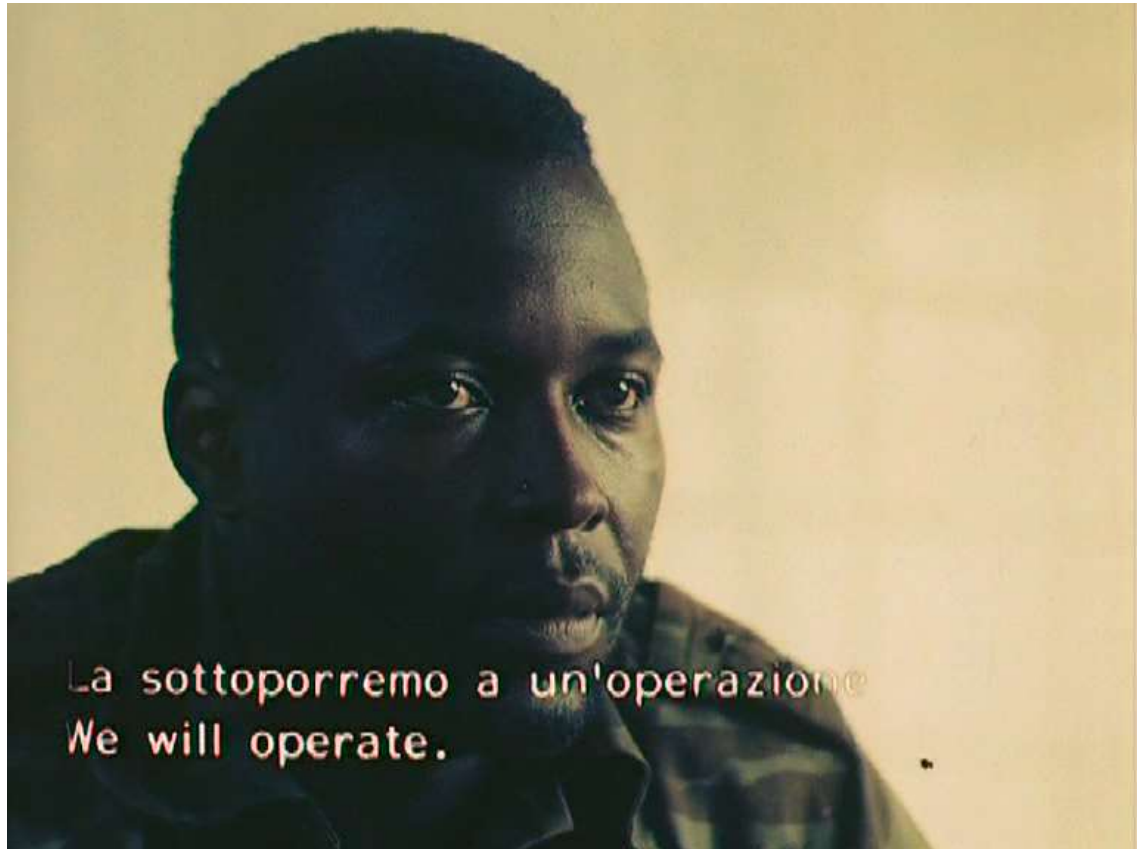


Fig. 4.10. *Quem Faz Correr Quim?* (LNC & EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.



Fig. 4.11. *Quem Faz Correr Quem?* (LNC & EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.

After the nightmare, Quim wakes up and vomits, attempting to reject and expel the trauma from himself. The gesture seems futile. Even in the ‘safety’ of Djamila’s apartment – which is itself a windowless “void”, a space of escapism removed from the social structures in which Quim exists – he cannot escape the trauma, and the problems represented by his child. In his reading of *A Personal Matter*, Stahl notes Bird’s and Himiko’s “self-deception”.<sup>59</sup> Here, too, Bartolomeu’s adaptation reveals that Quim’s withdrawal is a pretence, and neither he nor the audience, who also experience the horror of the nightmare, can truly escape the effects of the “void” by resorting to this strategy. In this way, as with Rosendo and Ale in his previous film, the director warns of the futility and potential dangers of what happens when individuals “give up”, renouncing their moral and social duty and responsibility.

Like *Un Lugar*, the altered title of the film is also pertinent here. The change from Ōe’s original “personal matter” to an emphasis on external factors – who makes Quim act in the way that he does – suggests not only a concern with understanding the ways in which we act, but also who is responsible for our actions, and how these actions impact others outside of the purely personal sphere.

Quim’s reaction – or inaction – becomes more uncomfortable for the viewer as the film progresses. Any potential identification with or sympathy for Quim’s character becomes more complex. Quim is not a straightforwardly moral or ‘good’ character, and – despite his own trauma – nor is he innocent of violence. In Ōe’s original, Bird makes an illicit deal with the doctors, attempting to starve the baby to death to avoid paying for surgery or facing the possibility of a lifetime of caring responsibilities. While Quim does not explicitly enact the

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<sup>59</sup> Stahl, *Social Trauma*, p. 143.

same plan, he does desert his wife and child in their moment of need. On some subconscious level, he desires or fantasises about the death of the child. During the dream sequence, Quim throws a bundle of cloth – which we assume to contain the baby – into a burning bin before riding off into the sunset on his motorbike with Djamila.

This violent imagery reveals complex layers and levels of violence and disturbs – as in Bartolomeu’s previous film – binary oppositions and moral distinctions. It forces the viewer to recognise and question where individuals are complicit in violent systems, even when they are also victims of the same structures. If Bartolomeu establishes the context of an “ideological and moral void” and a duplicitous, “two-headed” nation, then – no matter how disturbing this may be – there is also an inherent irony and contradiction in the fact that Quim’s running away from his responsibility replicates and reinforces the same individualist logic espoused by the MPLA following their transition to neoliberal capitalism. Beyond the futility of withdrawal and “giving up”, therefore, the film also warns of individualism and individualistic desire at the expense of wider moral and social responsibility.

Djamila represents this individualism. She makes her own choices and decisions about how to live based on the material conditions that surround her, seemingly without any sense of moral duty or responsibility to anyone else – and Quim knows it. During a conversation at her flat, he asks her; “how is that a person like you can do nothing and still be happy?”. While this accusation of “doing nothing” is ambiguous, in the context of Quim’s ethical dilemma it possibly implies that Djamila does nothing for anyone else and contributes nothing to a common social good. The “nothing” here is reminiscent of Rosendo’s “nothing” in the previous film. However, rather than manifesting in inaction, despair and withdrawal,

Djamila's "nothing" – that is, perhaps, her existence outside of a framework of collective social responsibility – reveals another possible response to this "void".

As the film progresses, it is revealed that Djamila is involved in some illicit business activities. In two later scenes, she receives a package from an unknown man, and then exchanges it for a briefcase filled with money. While we do not discover exactly what is in the package, the implication is that it contains diamonds, one of Angola's principal exports. After receiving payment, we see Djamila at the airport, about to board a plane to France, asking Quim to join her and leave his family behind. Djamila capitalises on Angola's resources but ultimately deserts the country for Europe, representing the individualism and corruption that became common among Angola's elites and the MPLA's upper echelons during the 1990s. With their vast wealth, amassed through unfairly won contracts granting control over the previously state-organised production of natural resources such as oil and diamonds, these elites would continue to pay lip service to socialist and nationalist rhetoric while sending their children to European schools and enjoying a "global culture of luxury".<sup>60</sup>

Djamila also represents Quim's transgressive desires and fantasies, functioning as a means of sexual escapism from the reality of his family situation. In comparison to Bird and Himiko, who discuss the former's predicament at length, Quim and Djamila barely speak about the baby during the film. She is instead positioned as an idealised antithesis to Quim's trauma, a way to follow his desires and escape from the responsibility of what he sees as his now-spoiled family (and nation), as represented by his new child.

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<sup>60</sup> Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, 'The New Elite, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Inequality in Contemporary Angola', in *Cosmopolitanism in the Portuguese-Speaking World*, ed. by Francisco Bethencourt, pp. 267-284 (p. 267).

While they do not engage in any sexual activity during the film beyond a kiss, Quim and Djamila discuss a previous sexual encounter during their time at university. An independent and sexually liberated woman, Djamila admits that although she was “wild back then”, the encounter was also her “first time”, situating her simultaneously as both virgin and whore within an established tradition of male sexual fantasy. Her apartment is a space of escapism and retreat, which serves Quim’s stereotypically male needs. When he arrives, he pours himself a whiskey. He is later seen relaxing on the sofa reading men’s magazines (Fig. 4.12). As the camera lingers over the glamour models on the page, we are reminded that despite the lack of explicit sexual activity on screen, the apartment still functions as a space of desire, sexual gratification and escapism.

The notion of Djamila as an object of sexual fantasy and desire is also translated for the viewer. She is exciting, beautiful and glamorous, as seen by her sunglasses and flashy earrings. The first time she is shown in the film, she answers the door playfully in a towel (Fig. 4.13). Here, the camera surveys her from behind Quim’s shoulder, showing her from his desiring perspective, and replicating this gaze for the audience. Inside the apartment, she is repeatedly positioned as an object of sexual fantasy. Undressing behind a bead curtain, the viewer is teased with glimpses of her partially naked body (Fig. 4.14). The final scene ends with a lengthy, panning shot that moves up her smooth, bare legs. During a later scene at the beach, Djamila tells Quim to make a wish – his “deepest, craziest desire” – before the pair kiss. The scene is idyllic – hazy, almost dreamlike – with soft, romantic guitar music playing as the sun sets on the horizon (Fig. 4.15). Forming a stark contrast to the traumatic nightmare scene and the drab hospital, the scene evokes tropes of a Hollywood happy ending. The kiss

symbolises the culmination and satisfaction of Quim's desire, and the sun going down suggests we have reached a 'resolution' or 'ending' in the film. It is as if Quim's wife and child – relegated to the offscreen – no longer exist.

Here, drawing on established cinematic conventions, Bartolomeu forces the audience to ask themselves if they are also tempted by the escapism and relief that Djamila represents. In this way, the director draws attention to the audience's own desiring processes, and the ways in which these interfere with our ability to make a clear, uncomplicated ethical judgement on the events seen on screen. The director sets us up: he presents Quim's desertion of his family as desirable but has ensured we know that Quim's wife and child will suffer as a result. Djamila represents Quim's – and perhaps an Angolan audience's – transgressive desire for individualism, for the pursuit of desire, for desire itself. Testing the limits of their ethics, Bartolomeu implores the audience to begin to ask themselves how they will reconcile these desires with an ethical responsibility to others.

As the pair drive away from the beach, the guitar fades to the car radio. The lyrics of the song playing begin, "Salomé, Salomé, don't you know you ain't treatin' me right". The evocation of the biblical figure of Salome reinforces that Djamila represents forms of transgressive desire. As the song plays, we see Djamila reflected in the car's wing-mirror, smiling. Again, the shot suggests that she is a projection – literally, here, a reflection - of the protagonist's and the audience's own transgressive desires (Fig. 4.16). The reference to Salome also signals to the potential dangers of this pursuit of individualistic desire. If the previous scene at the beach asked viewers to reckon with desire and ethics on their own terms, here Bartolomeu

perhaps offers up his own position - that to succumb to the desirable “happy ending” could lead to rather more unhappy consequences.



Fig. 4.12. *Quem Faz Correr Quem?* (LNC & EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.



Fig. 4.13. *Quem Faz Correr Quim?* (LNC & EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.



Fig. 4.14. *Quem Faz Correr Quem?* (LNC & EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.

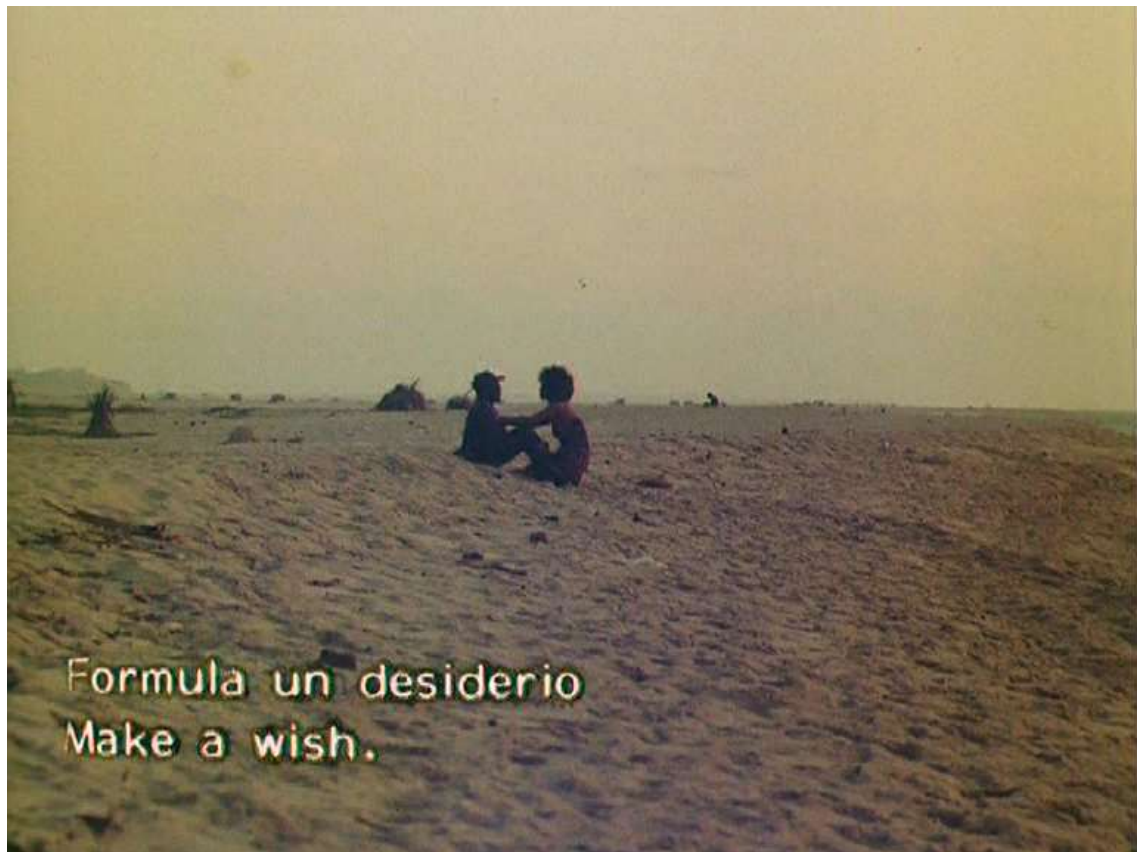


Fig. 4.15. *Quem Faz Correr Quim?* (LNC & EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.



Fig. 4.16. *Quem Faz Correr Quem?* (LNC & EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.

Like Rosendo, Djamila functions as a cautionary example of what can happen when collective ideologies are dismantled, and commitment to a common social good is abandoned for individualistic desire. However, as in the case of *Un Lugar*, this is not a monologic or imposed position. Again, the use of mirrors visually represents the existence of multiple interpretations and points of view, drawing the audience's attention to the specificity of their perspective, which is only one of many, and asking them to participate dialogically in the film, rather than receiving unambiguous moral instruction.

By depicting Djamila through her reflection in mirrors – a trope which is repeated through the film – Bartolomeu also literally frames her independence in relation to the psyche and desires of the male protagonist and the film's audience. Although she is characterised as independent and free, Bartolomeu's moral instrumentalization of Djamila arguably diminishes her agency. While these techniques allow for an interrogation of Quim's own psyche and resist the didacticism of national cinema, as well as enabling the audience's dialogical engagement with the issues dealt with on screen, it is important to think about the additional implications of Bartolomeu's portrayal of women.

Earlier in the film, there is a suggestion that Djamila is fighting some urge to conform to a sense of social, moral or ethical duty in her care of Quim. When Quim leaves her apartment, she calls after him to come back, saying "I feel that we need each other". In this statement, she acknowledges that, as humans, we do need one another and have some kind of collective responsibility to one another. As in the case of Rosendo, who – despite his inaction – demonstrates his capacity to imagine an alternative future by repeatedly articulating his dream of becoming a musician, the inclusion of this dialogue perhaps signals the director's

belief in the ethical redemption of Quim's love interest. Equally, however, Djamila's request could also be viewed as just another projection of Quim's sexual fantasies – he desires being needed and wanted by the object of his desires – or of the male protagonist's own internal conflict and ethical dilemma.

Although Bartolomeu's film almost entirely does away with the extreme sexual violence found in Ōe's novel, the cinematic gaze throughout the film is pointedly male. From the outset, Djamila is overtly sexualized and positioned in relation to a male point of view. Beyond Djamila, the other women in Bartolomeu's film are provided with little agency or character development. While there is no mention of Bird's mother in *A Personal Matter*, in Bartolomeu's adaptation, Quim visits his mother for advice. His mother represents tradition. She lives in rural village, speaks to him in Kimbundu, and suggests he sees a witch doctor, as the child might be under a spell. Quim disregards her advice, and even during their conversation, he appears distracted and as though he is paying his mother little attention. Quim's wife, who only appears once at the end of the film, is bed-ridden and unable to move or care for herself. Although it is not suggested anywhere that she ever was independent, she is stripped of any agency she may once have had by the difficult birth of their child.

In both the novel and the film, the protagonists' initial choice to retreat to a domestic space to process the news of their child's abnormality reinforces the personal nature of their concerns. It is curious, however, that both withdraw to a female space to process their trauma and undergo their moral rehabilitation. Does this suggest a dichotomy between the personal – the female, the domestic – and the socio-political, understood as a male-dominated, public sphere? In *Quem Faz Correr Quim?*, does the fact that female characters play a central role in

facilitating the ethical healing and development of the male protagonist truly involve women in the recovery of the nation at this historical juncture?

In his discussion of *Pepetela*, Rothwell remarks on the “non-reflexive patriarchy” that rears its head through the writer’s works.<sup>61</sup> Boulanger has explored in depth the ways in which Angola’s “male-dominated literary canon, despite its progressive and emancipatory agenda, generally participated in the erasure of women as historical agents by centering male experiences, perspectives and voices”.<sup>62</sup> Despite avoiding the questionable sexual violence of the original text, Bartolomeu’s film arguably betrays this same “erasure of women’s agency”.<sup>63</sup> The same might be said for each of the films discussed in this thesis. Do women appear and function solely as a means for male characters (and directors) to process their trauma or test the limits of their desires and ethics, before they return – rehabilitated – to the public domain? This question also brings to light to limits of the dialogism I have traced through the films. Have these works truly provided a representative cast of “fully valid voices”? As I have noted, the absence of female directors in Angolan cinema is and always has been stark.

In the end, Quim rejects the transgression and individualism represented by Djamila. He declines the offer to accompany her to France and returns to his family in hospital. He promises his wife that he will take care of her and their child. If we are to believe this promise, the subsequent shot of Quim riding through the city on his motorbike can be read as a suggestion that Quim has found his freedom by acting ethically, in accordance with his own

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<sup>61</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 27.

<sup>62</sup> Boulanger, *Fiction as History*, p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, p. 27.

prevailing sense of duty (Fig. 4.17). This reading problematises Western notions of freedom as individualism and liberalism, as represented through Djamila and her choice to leave the country behind. It asserts that we can find meaning and freedom in collective responsibility, collective subjectivity, and in the ways in which we care for others.

Equally, the final shot of the film could just as easily be read as the failure of the protagonist to keep his promise. Will he return to the hospital, or has he fled again? Again, this ambiguity refuses the imposition of a definitive moral example. In the end, it is up to the audience what they want to choose to believe in. However, Bartolomeu's self-conscious exploration of how individual desire can interfere with ethical decisions equips the viewer with more tools to recognise and interrogate how they come to their own conclusions, and what forces complicate the moral frameworks they use to structure their lives and decisions. Taking a much more forgiving, sympathetic and less dogmatic approach to the question of his spectator's ethical enlightenment, he suggests the importance of collective social responsibility and dangers of individualism without a vanguard morality and the didacticism of prior national cinema, putting his faith in the individual viewer to restore these ethics and values on their own terms. However, as we have seen, Bartolomeu is arguably less self-conscious in the way he uses women to achieve this ethical turn, revealing some of the limitations of this renewed notion of common social good.



Fig. 4.17. *Quem Faz Correr Quem?* (LNC & EICTV, 1991), dir. Mariano Bartolomeu.

## **Conclusion**

In the previous three chapters, I focussed on how directors who had taken part in the early phase of post-independence Angolan cinema adapted their filmmaking practices through the 1980s to move towards a more dialogical form of cinema. At the turn of the decade, during the early years of what has too readily been termed and accepted as a “collapse”, Mariano Bartolomeu – who represented a new generation of Angolan filmmakers – continued this spirit of critical and creative renewal, producing films that sustained the cinematic dialogue, debate and practices of adaptation initiated by his cinematic predecessors. Bartolomeu’s early short films trace the director’s evolving reflections on the questions of social commitment and living ethically in the wake of the local, national and global shifts and dynamics he was exposed to during his time at EICTV, and upon his return to Angola, between 1989 and 1991. Crucially, his films break not only with the early post-independence cinematic models imposed by the MPLA, but also with the previous generation of Angolan directors’ responses to the various crises that had beset the Angolan nation and its national filmmaking.

## Conclusion

### After “o colapso”: Legacies of renewal

Abrantes’s descriptions of Angolan cinema’s retreat, stagnation, “drag” and collapse seem to have been conceived initially to underscore the failures of the MPLA government to support filmmakers in Angola and to hold those in power accountable for the various state interventions, or lack thereof, that had stifled the development of a flourishing national cinema.<sup>1</sup> That this rhetoric has become an accepted characterization of Angolan cinema from the 1980s and 1990s, however, has precluded deeper critical analysis of what directors were actually doing during this time. In this thesis, I have shown is that this period of Angolan filmmaking was not wholly one of inactivity, dereliction and desertion, but a moment of continued revolutionary energy and creative renewal on the part of the nation’s filmmakers, the nature and legacy of which has been elided in discussions of Angola’s post-independence cinema.

Narratives of a desolate cinematic landscape in Angola during the 1980s and 1990s have positioned Angola’s early post-civil war cinema as a sudden flurry of filmic activity that embodied a post-revolutionary spirit of national reconstruction and reflected the global, post-nationalist outlook of a new generation of directors. Angolan films from the early 2000s certainly speak directly to the post-conflict context of their release. However, I have already noted that production of each of the three feature-length films released in Angola in 2004 began well before the end of the civil war, during the 1980s and 1990s. These films emerge

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<sup>1</sup> Abrantes and de Matos-Cruz, *Cinema em Angola*, p. 54.

not from a vacuum of non-existent cinematic activity, but as part of a continuum of cinematic evolution that was sustained despite the various crises in Angolan film production that arose during the final decades of the twentieth century. To conclude this thesis, and to underscore the importance of the overlooked period of Angolan cinematic production too uncritically characterised as the “collapse”, I offer some examples of where these legacies of renewal might begin to be discerned.

The final ten years of Angola’s civil war, from 1992 to 2002, would be one of the most fraught and challenging periods in the nation’s history. As Soares de Oliveira notes, “however traumatic the previous 30 years of war had been, the last decade would be of an entirely different order of magnitude, with hundreds of thousands killed and most of Angola levelled to the ground”. In 1991, the Bicesse Peace Accords had been signed between the MPLA and UNITA, marking a moment of fragile peace and tentative optimism for the nation. Angola’s first multi-party elections would take place the following year. The MPLA narrowly won the election. UNITA claimed the results had been rigged, and the country returned to war shortly after. Following UNITA’s rejection of the election result, the MPLA engaged in a particularly violent massacre of UNITA supporters across the country, during which “thousands of people, including top UNITA politicians [...] were slaughtered”.<sup>2</sup> The opposition subsequently stepped up its offensive. By 1993, UNITA would control 80 percent of Angola.

With an increasingly tenuous grip on power, the MPLA government would continue to utilize state-controlled media to attempt to assert its authority across Angola. Following the 1992 Halloween massacre, images of “battered, decomposing bodies were broadcast by Angola’s

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<sup>2</sup> Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*, p. 15.

public television, with voiceover justifications of the government's actions".<sup>3</sup> National cinematic production, however, was at an impasse. The MPLA officially blamed the consolidation of Angola's cinematic crisis on financial constraints caused by the heavy burden of war. Abrantes suggests that the breakdown in national filmmaking was, above all, caused by the carelessness, incompetence and excessively bureaucratic impositions of those in power.<sup>4</sup>

In these conditions, the crisis in national film production deepened. By this point, many directors had left Angola in search of better working conditions abroad or given up on filmmaking entirely. It was predominantly outside the nation that Angolan directors were able to continue making films. Orlando Fortunato's documentary *Agostinho Neto*, which was released in Angola in 2000, is a notable exception.<sup>5</sup> Outside Angola, filmmakers would also turn towards the documentary form, making films for international audiences that exposed the urgency and severity of the Angolan situation during the final ten years of the civil war. In 1995, Mariano Bartolomeu released his documentary *O Sol Ainda Brilha*. The film, which explores hunger and the consequences of war, was made for the French TV channel *Arte*, and won Best Documentary and the Fipresci Award at the Milan International Film Festival.<sup>6</sup> After directing his first documentary, *Mopiopio: Sopro de Angola*, in 1991, Zézé Gamboa released a second documentary film, *Dissidência*, in 1998. The film was co-produced and funded by bodies from Portugal, Belgium and France, and selected for multiple European film festivals, including Amiens, Milan and Cannes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> I have not been able to access this film.

<sup>6</sup> 'Mariano Bartolomeu', African Film Festival New York, n.d., <<https://africanfilmny.org/directors/mariano-bartolomeu/>> [accessed 6 October 2024].

<sup>7</sup> Diawara, *African Film*, p. 276.

*Dissidência* finds the majority of its subjects in exile. The film features testimonies by political dissidents from Angola's two main political parties, the MPLA and UNITA, who have chosen or been forced to move from Angola to Europe for refusing to toe party lines. The interviews establish an explicit and irreverent record of dissent across the Angolan political spectrum, and expose crimes committed by top party officials during the war – something previously unseen in Angola's MPLA-dominated cinema.

Gamboa's film was made at an important juncture in Angolan history, following the signing of the Lusaka Peace Protocol in 1994 and the formation of a new multi-party government for peace and reconciliation in 1997, created to oversee free and fair democratic elections. The film was released in February 1998, at which point a date for these elections had still not been set.<sup>8</sup> By December of the same year, the country had once again returned to all-out war. While the film comes across as generally sceptical about the prospect of a successful transition to peace under the existing system, an important focus of the director and his interviewees is how best to facilitate democracy in Angola. One interviewee, Manuel Jorge, previously the MPLA's representative to Italy, France and the European Union, explains that “in order to create national unity, it is necessary that everybody accept the idea of diversity, that is, freedom of thought for all”. He maintains that political and ideological diversity is not accepted in Angola and heeds the failure of the 1992 elections to offer a warning: “democracy must be inside people's minds before it can be put into practice”.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Angola Unravels: The Rise and Fall of the Lusaka Peace Protocol’, Human Rights Watch, 1999 <<https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1999/angola/>> [accessed on 6 October 2024].

*Dissidência* reveals a continued and heightened concern with free and open dialogue. The film is remarkable in that it explicitly features voices from across the political spectrum, not just the MPLA. In this way, Gamboa's film continues the legacy of the previous Angolan films that I have explored through this thesis. Like Rebelo, Fortunato, Duarte de Carvalho and Bartolomeu, Gamboa offers a profoundly dialogical disruption of the state's dominance and control over Angolan cinematic expression.

Gamboa's subsequent narrative feature film, *O Herói*, was released in 2004. The film, amongst others, including Maria João Ganga's *Na Cidade Vazia*, sparked optimism and hope for the revitalization of Angolan national cinema.<sup>9</sup> The language of rebirth that surrounds these films has marked 2004 as a moment of rupture, a break with the years of adversity and crisis that came before. Where can the cinematic legacy of the so-called "collapse", and the years leading up to this, be identified through these two post-civil war films?

In 2002, the death of UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, marked the end of Angola's decades-long civil war and the consolidation of the MPLA party-state. With the threat of a strong and united opposition removed, resources could once again be dedicated to the development of the nation's cinema. In 2003, the MPLA government established the new Instituto Angolano de Cinema, Audiovisual e Multimédia (IACAM), and reinstated the Cinemateca Nacional.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Beyond the three narrative feature films released in 2004, Abrantes notes several other Angolan productions released in cinemas and on video between 2000-2005, which represent the increased productivity and revitalization of Angolan cinema during this period. These films include: *Arte Nativa* (2001), directed by Dias Junior; *Gaivota Negra* (2003) and *Cidralia* (2005), directed by Nguxi dos Santos; *Há Sempre Alguém que Te Ama* (2004), directed by Pocas Pascoal; and *Proibido Parar, Obrigatório Caminhar* (2004), directed by Nástio Mosquito. Abrantes also notes the increased activity of non-Angolan filmmakers within Angola at this time (see Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 47).

<sup>10</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 47.

At this time, the state began to admit some of its failings in relation to Angola's national cinema. In 2005, the IACAM officially recognised “o colapso total do processamento laboratorial das nossas películas, da desarticulação e desaparecimento do circuito de distribuição e exibição de filmes, bem como a incapacidade material para a conservação e preservação da filmografia nacional”.<sup>11</sup> The end of the civil war produced a greater sense of security, which allowed slightly wider margins for social critique and honest reflection. However, open criticism of the MPLA and divergence from established party narratives was still not entirely possible. Soares de Oliveira notes that, in terms of post-civil war Angolan cinema, “the MPLA doesn't manifest much concern about the output unless it is blatantly disparaging of the regime, but it has a broad interest in having intellectuals and artists play a conformist role on the right side of history”.<sup>12</sup>

For Mark Sabine, *O Herói* is a “powerful critique not just of Angolan society but also and particularly of the nation's post-conflict political order”.<sup>13</sup> The film exposes the shortcomings of the MPLA's programme of national reconstruction. In doing so, Sabine argues, Gamboa's film reaffirms “an expressly national culture and ethos” and appeals for a revival of national solidarity and community.<sup>14</sup> This is not the monologic or prescriptive nationalist discourse of early post-independence Angolan cinema. Rather, alternative visions for a post-civil war Angola are brought into existence through the dialogic encounters and discourse staged between the film's characters, who represent the breadth of Luanda's social spectrum. Additionally, as Sabine suggests, the director's self-reflexive strategies and ambiguous use of

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<sup>11</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Sabine, ‘Rebuilding the Angolan Body Politic’, p. 202.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

allegorical structures and symbols destabilize any simplified reading of the film as an optimistic return to past revolutionary solidarity or socialist ideology.<sup>15</sup> Both structurally and thematically, the film underscores the fundamental importance of dialogue and diversity to the rebuilding of post-conflict Angola.

Manthia Diawara locates Gamboa's narrative cinema within a new wave of post-revolutionary popular African cinema informed by "a continual conversation about the desire to hear multiple voices and to see different images of Africa on the screen".<sup>16</sup> As I have noted, Diawara suggests this popular strand of African filmmaking is concerned not with communicating revolutionary nationalist sentiments but meets African audiences "where they are", "to use the mirror of cinema to form a socio-political imaginary of their place in the world".<sup>17</sup> Gamboa's documentary films from the 1990s, as well as the other films I have explored in this thesis, arguably work towards similar objectives. The militant thrust of *Dissidência* is the same dialogical openness that invites a diverse range of political voices and opinions into his film, and which leaves the interpretation of these firmly in the hands of the viewer. In *Dissidência*, these parallels and continuities are registered visually and symbolically in one of the film's final shots. The scene depicts two figures on a beach, a young man and a boy, silhouetted against the sunset as they look out towards the water. The man has lost his leg during the war and leans on a crutch as the boy sits beside him (Fig. 5.1). The shot is strikingly similar to some of the most memorable images of *O Herói*, which feature the young boy Manu and the war veteran Vitório, whose amputated leg and prosthesis are the film's most distinctive motifs.

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<sup>15</sup> Sabine, 'Rebuilding the Angolan Body Politic', pp. 201-219.

<sup>16</sup> Diawara, *African Film*, p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

In the same year as the release of *O Herói*, Maria João Ganga released *Na Cidade Vazia*. As I have noted, the screenplay for *Na Cidade Vazia* was completed by 1991. The film was then shot, produced and released after the end of the civil war. The film is an adaptation of Pepetela's *As Aventuras de Ngunga*, written in 1972 while the writer was a guerilla fighter in the MPLA's revolutionary liberation movement. The novella tells the story of a young boy, Ngunga, who joins the MPLA. As Rothwell has noted, the text – which was originally conceived by Pepetela as an educational tool for Portuguese language-learning amongst the MPLA's guerilla forces – is highly didactic. Ngunga quickly became an ideal against which “soldiers were to judge themselves”.<sup>18</sup>

Ganga's adaptation reimagines Pepetela's original text in the context of Luanda in the early 1990s. Ngunga becomes Ndala, an orphan who is brought to the city by a group of nuns. Ndala runs away, wanting to return to his village. The film follows the young boy as he attempts to navigate Luanda alone. Thiago Lauriti has traced in detail various aspects of the dialogical adaptation between Ganga's film and Pepetela's text, suggesting that the utopian vision of Angolan identity constructed by Pepetela through Ngunga is rendered acutely dystopian by Ganga in a post-independence Angolan context.<sup>19</sup> Ndala's experiences in Luanda expose the dangers and brutality of life in Angola during the civil war, and imply the failures of the MPLA government to make the revolutionary promises of independence a reality.

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<sup>18</sup> Rothwell, *Pepetela*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>19</sup> Thiago Lauriti, 'O Filme *Na Cidade Vazia* – Uma Adaptação Do Livro *As Aventuras De Ngunga* de Pepetela: Da Utopia À Distopia', *Literartes*, 1:17 (2022), pp. 105-133 (p. 130).

Like the films analysed in the previous chapters, Ganga's adaptation does not faithfully reproduce its literary source material. Her reappropriation of Pepetela's text is intended to amplify a dialogue between the two works, drawing attention to specific socio-political issues and concerns. For Lauriti, it is the "renovação de sentidos do passado e construção de sentidos futuros".<sup>20</sup> Where *Na Cidade Vazia* differs from these previous adaptations is perhaps in the accessibility of these meanings. Returning to Diawara's identification of new popular forms of African filmmaking, Ganga's film can arguably be read as a more popular adaptation that "meets African audiences where they are".<sup>21</sup>

Again, Linda Hutcheon's notion of the "knowing audience" is relevant here. *As Aventuras de Ngunga* remains one of Angola's most well-known texts. After independence, as Fernando Arenas notes, Pepetela's story became a "fable that has served an exemplary function for children in the formation of post-independence Angola under the tutelage of the Marxist-nationalist project of the triumphant MPLA".<sup>22</sup> Decades later, after the end of the civil war, the text would still be widely read.<sup>23</sup> The familiarity of Angolan audiences with the original text would have ensured the greater accessibility and legibility of Ganga's transformational "grammar" and the specific adaptative interventions she makes into her sources. Additionally, in *Na Cidade Vazia*, Pepetela's original text is staged as a play at a drama school, in a storyline running alongside Ndala's. At the end of the film, scenes of Ndala are intercut with the imagined stage adaptation of the same text. Ganga's explicit metatextuality highlights her

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<sup>20</sup> Lauriti, 'O Filme *Na Cidade Vazia*', p. 109.

<sup>21</sup> Diawara, *African Film*, p. 145.

<sup>22</sup> Arenas, 'The Renaissance of Angolan Cinema', p. 210.

<sup>23</sup> Ondjaki, 'Let's Share the Dream: Stories for Children in Angola', *Bookbird*, 2 (2009), pp. 46-52 (p. 47), doi:10.1353/bkb.0.0155.

own adaptation of Pepetela's story, underlining the differences between the two versions and making these more available to the viewer.

Beyond these examples, there are further points of connection, continuation, divergence and dialogue between Ganga's and Gamboa's post-civil war films and the films I have analysed through the previous chapters. A perceived halt in Angolan cinematic activity has tended to obscure these connections. A comparative reading of these films begins to reveal that the rhetoric of renewal so readily associated with Angola's post-civil war narrative cinema can partly be traced to earlier Angolan cinematic expressions.

This thesis has presented a nuanced and considered analysis of the development and legacy of Angola's revolutionary national cinema from 1982 to 1992. My analysis of these films has reiterated that the steady decrease in Angolan national filmmaking that took place during the final decades of the twentieth century did not constitute a homogeneous episode of decline and stagnation in the history of Angolan cinema, despite the increasingly challenging conditions faced by the nation's directors.

During this period, the four filmmakers I have analysed continued to locate themselves within socially committed and revolutionary traditions of "counter-cinema". Their films are expressly concerned with the development and future of the nation, as well as the wider structures and legacies of imperialism and coloniality which continue to operate not only in post-independence Angola, but across the world. In an Angolan context, the ways in which these colonial frameworks were replicated and reproduced by a post-independence elite became difficult to ignore. Reckoning with their disillusionment and disappointment, as well

as their own varying proximity and contributions to the MPLA's national cinematic project, these filmmakers turned their gaze to those in power, to suggest where the realities of the post-independence nation diverged from the idealised and ideologically charged images produced by the one-party-state.

From the very beginnings of Angolan national filmmaking, tensions arose between the artistic visions of individual Angolan filmmakers and the MPLA's conception of a revolutionary post-independence national cinema. Despite the obligations and limitations of state-controlled cinematic production, as well as the wider *cultura do medo* created by the party and the risk of censorship or violent repression, these filmmakers began to experiment with new forms, themes and aesthetics. As I have shown, their formal innovations and adaptive cinematic grammars bring into focus histories of dissent and critique that have been suppressed by official party narratives, and which often reveal themselves to be more-than-national in focus. In particular, notions of dialogue and adaptation have reemerged through each of the films. These manifestations are not uniform or even, but further reveal the radical non-conformity reached towards by Angolan filmmakers active during the final two decades of the twentieth century.

Further research and analysis are needed to represent and appreciate fully the cinematic careers, impact and legacies of Asdrúbal Rebelo, Orlando Fortunato, Ruy Duarte de Carvalho and Mariano Bartolomeu, as well as the other Angolan directors who continued and started making films during the 1980s and 1990s. Building on a close reading and contextualization of Abrantes's analysis and rhetoric, I have suggested that this moment of crisis and reckoning can be reframed as a period of energy, creativity, resilience and adaptation. An expanded

rhetoric of renewal begins to challenge the accounts of “letargia” and stagnation that have misrepresented this critical and transformative moment in the history of Angolan cinema.<sup>24</sup> Important acts of resistance were carried out by filmmakers who asserted “cinema is what we do”.

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<sup>24</sup> Abrantes, *Para uma História*, p. 49.



Fig. 5.1. *Dissidência* (Fábrica d'Imagens, RTP and Garance Productions, 1998), dir. Zéze Gamboa.

## **Filmography**

### **1. Films directed by Asdrúbal Rebelo**

*A Luta Continua* (TPA and Unicité, 1977)

*Filhos da Rua* (TPA, 1981)

*Levanta, Vôa e Vamos* (LNC, 1986)

*Nascidos na Luta, Vivendo na Vitória* (TPA, 1978)

*O Balão* (TPA, 1979)

*Velhos Tempos, Novos Tempos* (TPA, 1976)

*Valeu* (TPA, 2014)

### **2. Films directed by Orlando Fortunato**

*Agostinho Neto* (2000)

*Batepá* (IACAM and Missangalala, 2010)

*Comboio da Canhoca* (massangalalafilmes, continentalfilmes, and Transmediterranée, 2005)

*Festa da Ilha* (1986)

*Herança* (1986)

*Memória de um Dia* (LNC, 1982)

*O Caso Nosso* (1978)

### **3. Films directed by Ruy Duarte de Carvalho**

*Faz lá coragem camarada* (TPA, 1977)

*Geração 50* (TPA, 1975)

*Moia ou o Recado das Ilhas* (Gemini Films, Filmargem, RTP, and LNC, 1989)

*Nelisita* (LNC, 1982)

*Presente Angolano, Tempo Mumuhuila* (TPA, 1978)

#### **4. Films directed by Mariano Bartolomeu**

*Caribeando* (EICTV, 1989)

*Quem Faz Correr Quim?* (LNC and EICTV, 1991)

*O Sol Ainda Brilha* (Arte, 1995)

*Un Lugar Limpio y Bien Iluminado* (EICTV, 1991)

#### **5. Secondary films**

*A Escola*, (TPA, 1978), dir. by Virgínia Silva

*A Idade Maior* (Invicta, 1991), dir. by Teresa Villaverde

*A Ilha dos Cães* (CINEMATE and Geração 80 Produções Lda, 2017), dir. by Jorge António

*A Visita* (TPA, 1978), dir. by Virgínia Silva

*Aprender para melhor servir* (1977), dir. by António Ole

*Alda e Maria: Por Aqui Tudo Bem* (Cinemundo, 2012), dir. by Pocas Pascoal

*Arte Nativa* (2001), dir. by Dias Junior

*Burned by Blue* (1998), dir. Zézé Gamboa

*Café*, (TPA, 1978), dir. by Virgínia Silva

*Caravana* (LNC and Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIA), 1990),  
dir. by Rogélio Paris and Júlio César Rodriguez

*Carnaval da Vitória* (LNC, 1978), dir. by António Ole

*Cidrália* (2005), dir. by Nguxi dos Santos

*Conceição Tchiambula: Um Dia, Uma Vida* (LNC, 1982), dir. by António Ole

*Diankha-Bi* (Sunu Film Dakar, Secma Dakar and Ministère de la Coopération Française, 1968), dir. by Mahama Johnson Traoré

*Diègue-Bi* (Secma and Sunu Films, 1970), dir. by Mahama Johnson Traoré

*Dissidência* (Laterit Productions, 1998), dir. by Zézé Gamboa

*Feitiço do Império* (Agência Geral das Colónias, 1940), dir. by António Lopes Ribeiro

*Ferrovários (Caminho de Ferro de Luanda-Malanje)* (TPA, 1975), dir. by António Ole

*Francisca* (V.O. Filmes, 1981), dir. by Manuel de Oliveira

*Gaiyota Negra* (Dread Locks Productions, 2003), dir. by Nguxi dos Santos

*Há Sempre Alguem que Te Ama* (2004), dir. by Pocas Pascoal

*Kiala Mukanga* (LNC, 1981), dir. by Henrique Ruivo Alves and Manel Tomás Francisco

*Luimbi* (1980), dir. by Henrique Ruivo Alves

*Mandabi* (Filmi Domirev, Comptoir Français du Film Production (CFFP) and StudioCanal, 1968), dir. by Ousmane Sembène

*Marabu* (LNC, 1984), dir. by Denise Salazar

*Memórias de Infância* (2000), dir. by Pocas Pascoal

*Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (ICAIC, 1968), dir. by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea

*Meus Irmãos Cokwes* (LNC, 1991), dir. Manuel Mariano

*Miradouro da Lua* (LNC and Exclusiva, 1993), dir. by Jorge António

*Monangambée* (A Conferência das Organizações Nacionalistas das Colónias Portuguesas (CONCP), 1971), dir. by Sarah Maldoror

*Mopiopio: Souffle de Angola* (Laterit Productions, 1991), dir. by Zézé Gamboa

*Na Cidade Vazia* (Global Film Initiative, 2004), dir. by Maria João Ganga

*No Caminho das Estrelas* (LNC, 1980), dir. by António Ole

*O Caminho-de-ferro de Benguela* (Agência Geral das Colónias, 1913), dir. by Artur Pereira

*O Desassossego de Pessoa* (1999), dir. by Zézé Gamboa

*O Herói* (DAVID & GOLIATH, Les Films de l'Après-Midi and Gamboa & Gamboa, 2004), dir. by Zézé Gamboa

*O Ritmo de N'Gola Ritmos* (TPA, 1978), dir. by António Ole

*Pour Nous* (1998), dir. by Pocas Pascoal

*Proibido Parar, Obrigatório Caminhar* (2004), dir. by Nástio Mosquito

*Reassemblage: From the Firelight to the Screen* (Moongift Films, 1983), dir. by Trinh T. Minh-ha

*Reconstrução Nacional na Agricultura* (LNC, 1982), dir. by Leonel Efe

*Resistência Popular em Benguela* (TPA, 1975), dir. by António Ole

*Sambizanga* (Isabelle Films, 1972), dir. by Sarah Maldoror

*Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (Moongift Films, 1989), dir. by Trinh T. Minh-ha

*The Birds* (Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions, 1963), dir. by Alfred Hitchcock

*The Killers* (Universal Studios, 1946), dir. by Robert Siodmak

*The Killers* (Vsesoyuznyj Gosudarstvennyj Institut Kinematografii (VGIK), 1956), dir. by Andrei Tarkovsky

*The Killers* (Revue Studios, 1964), dir. by Don Siegel

*To Kill a Mockingbird* (Brentwood Productions, 1962), dir. by Robert Mulligan

*Touki Bouki* (Cinegrit and Studio Kankourama, 1973), dir. by Djibril Diop Mambéty

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