

## HOW MANY NATIONS ARE WE ABLE TO IMAGINE?

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### Abstract

Who sings the Nation-State in Guinea-Bissau? I will try to answer this and other questions by putting two films into dialogue. The first one is *En Nations Födelse* (The Birth of a Nation), a film shot by Lennart Malmer and Ingela Romare in Guinea-Bissau in 1973. The second one is a reel sequence, a film fragment that documents the 10th World Festival of Youth and Students which took place in East Berlin in 1973 and where several nations that still did not exist on a political level sought to assert themselves on a symbolical level. The sequence was filmed by Guinean director Sana N'Hada. If the first one was made by two foreigners who were engaged in the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau, the second one was shot by a Guinean director who was in East Germany in order to represent his country, then on its way to becoming an independent state. Both films seek to activate mechanisms for the construction of Guinea-Bissau as a nation-state, sharing ideological repercussions. I do not take them as images of the past, but rather as a projected future in an idealized past. A future conjugated in the imperfect, a future imperfective.

### Keywords

Cinema; propaganda, Guinea-Bissau; liberation struggle, Nation-StateIntroduction

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### PROJECTING GUINEA-BISSAU

In the context of liberation struggles, different statesmen understood that cinema was a powerful tool in building the identity memory of nations fighting for their autonomy, having become an essential component in the struggles that marked the end of colonialism. This cinema approach is part of the Third Cinema movement, whose aim was to promote a critical reflection around social and political inequalities and to enable a global revolutionary consciousness through cinema:

[...] in an alienated world, culture - obviously - is a deformed and deforming product. To overcome this it is necessary to have a culture of and for the revolution [...] In the specific case of the cinema [...] its transformation from mere entertainment into an active means of delineation becomes imperative [...]. The camera then becomes a gun, and the cinema must be a guerilla cinema. (Solanas & Getino, 1969, p. 1)

Despite the fact that non-Western cinema had a long previous history, it was during that time that it gained an ideological awareness around the fight against colonialism. The authors of the Third Cinema called for a cinema based on limited budgets, using simple technical resources (natural lighting, 16mm film, etc), improvisation techniques and non-professional actors. The deconstruction of colonial narratives and the

subversion of Western cinematic traditions were the pursued goals. This encounter began at the time of decolonization and continued after independence, when many of the new African states took to cinema as a form of political expression of their sovereignty at the symbolic level.

African cinema developed in the context of the struggles between the colonizers and the colonized and their legacy in the post-colonial era, believing that the anti-colonialist action could only be completed by successfully restoring the gaze, history and memory of the colonized. For this reason, the liberation movements used cinema in order to contribute ideologically to their cause. In this context, different filmmakers attached to left-wing political groups engaged in anti-colonial struggles through film production. It was believed that through the appropriation of cinematographic tools one might claim the “African authenticity” and turn African men and women into authors and subjects rather than mere objects of ethnographic observation. Therefore, African cinema emerged with a will of social realism, moral and political education and cultural rehabilitation, at a time when everything was to be done in order to refuse the exotic and colonial alienation (Diawara, 2011, pp. 89-90). Despite this optimism, it is necessary to bear in mind two issues that arose (and still persist today): African filmmakers received all of their training, as well as their funding, from Western schools. This fact does not facilitate the creation of an African aesthetic identity and imposes colonial or neo-colonial dynamics in film production (Diawara, 2011, p. 93). In this context, four young Guineans were sent by the liberation movement, PAIGC (Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné-Bissau e Cabo Verde), to study film in Cuba. Thus, the idea of the Guinean nation was intended to be projected onto the people’s collective imagination through the social representations of processes evoked by cinema.

#### **GUINEA-BISSAU: FROM AN IMAGINED COLONY TO AN AFRICAN NATION FORGED IN THE STRUGGLE**

Located on the West African coast, Guinea-Bissau is a small country with only 36,125 km<sup>2</sup>. Portuguese installation in this area goes back to the sixteenth century, when the first colonists settled in the Cacheu region, but Portugal had no way of monitoring the slave trade that took place off the coast of Guinea, which is why the Spanish, French and Dutch began to explore the region. Later, during the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), which led to a distribution of the African territories between the European powers, Portugal expanded its old possessions and this colonial expansionism encountered strong resistance, which would last until 1918 (Diawara, 2011, p. 18). As asserted by Johannes Augel, “the Portuguese power could only transgress, during its presence in the country, the range of the radius of its cannons at the beginning of this century” (Augel, 1997, p. 251). For example, in the city of Bissau, the population of the ethnic group “Papel” was only “pacified” in 1915, and in the Bijagos islands, the population does not recognize the defeat in which the Portuguese claimed to have conquered the islands in 1935, explaining that “the Portuguese withdrew” right after the “victory” and never really occupied the islands (Augel,

1997, p. 251). Thus, there were only trading posts on the coast and along the rivers where they built small towns, formed by Europeans, assimilated people and cabin boys who were coming from villages and were at the service of European traders. It should also be observed that, unlike what occurred in Angola and Mozambique, there was never an effective settlement colonization in Guinea, since the territory was an exploration colony. Therefore, the administrative structures that were implemented, such as schools and courts of law, were insignificant because the colonial administration in Guinea-Bissau took place through *indirect rule*. Furthermore, Guinea-Bissau is considered the place where the Portuguese colonial expansionism encountered more resistance from the local people. It is therefore crucial to bear in mind that the population of Guinea-Bissau had been systematically creating pockets of resistance against Portuguese rule, a heritage that came to be decisive in the liberation struggle, as suggested by Basil Davidson:

[...] These campaigns of “pacification” continued every few years until such a late date as 1936 [...]. This long resistance decisively influenced the attitudes of African rural populations of Guinea [...]. For them, the Europeans have always been a danger [...] either due to the slave trade of old , or the military invasions of more recent times. (Davidson, 1975, p. 33)

It should be noted that the life paths of those who participated in the liberation struggle span a much longer period of time, comprising the Portuguese colonization, which was marked by numerous dynamic resistances. Wars have always been present in colonial encounters. In Africa, these wars were fought between the colonial powers and the African peoples who resisted their domination, as well as among the colonial forces that fought each other for certain territorial positions. In Guinea-Bissau, the last conflict was the Liberation Struggle and it was framed by the political context that emerged after World War II. Seen as part of the struggle against German expansionism, the Allied victory allowed the claim of anti-colonial principles that would later be formally drawn up in the 1945 Charter of the United Nations (UN). Subsequently, the UN proclaimed it the duty of the colonial powers to prepare the territories under their administration for independence. In turn, the anti-colonial movements were calling for a new ethical-political order, manifested in the Bandung Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement. It is crucial to bear in mind that the wars of liberation were part of the Cold War, which in turn cannot be analysed without reference to the “hot moments” that took place in Africa, where major conflicts proliferated with the support of the great powers, being to some extent what Leopoldo Amado calls “proxy wars” (Amado, 2009, p. 32). This strategy allowed the US and the Eastern bloc to engage in conflicts where they were not directly involved, but by which they supported insurrectionary outbreaks in areas important to the assertion of their own supremacy. Seeing the liberation struggles from this point of view implies recognizing the extent of a conflict that exceeded both the Soviet project and the Western project.

The Republic of Guinea-Bissau would be, in the words of the liberation movement leader, Amílcar Cabral, an “African nation forged in the struggle” against Portuguese

colonialism. Attributing the foundation of the nation state to the liberation struggle, the formation of the PAIGC is considered the most important event in the political history of Guinea-Bissau. Furthermore, considering the common colonial heritage and taking their artificial borders as an argument, the PAIGC assumed that the national unity between the territories of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde would allow for a better understanding and analysis of the colonial system that was subjugating them, as well as for the elaboration of collective strategies of resistance to the Portuguese colonial rule.

Guinea-Bissau as we know it would not exist if it had not undergone European colonization with all its consequences, African nationalism being rooted in a paradox, claiming independence while taking for granted the borders defined in the Treaty of Berlin, the founding act of colonialism (Gomes, 2013, p. 134). Also, the territory consists of so many different ethnic groups with their own languages, the answer to the question of whether there exists a nation today in Guinea-Bissau is ambiguous, and the only thing that can be said with certainty is that the national liberation movement brought the collective political will to build a nation (Lopes, 1988, p. 164). It should be noted that during the liberation struggle the concept of “class-nation” was adopted, representing the union of all “classes” existing in Guinea: the petty bourgeoisie, employees and peasants of all ethnicities. Thus, the colonial domination was the domination of a class (the Portuguese one) upon a “nation” also considered as a “class” (Sousa, 2008, p. 163). The PAIGC being a vanguard party, it became associated and combined with the Nation-State under construction. Strongly influenced by Frantz Fanon (1961), who argued that it was the colonizer who made the colonized, the anti-colonial struggle aimed to create a “new man” freed from colonial exploitation, able to destroy the ideas and the corrupt habits inherited from the past, capable of developing the scientific spirit which would eliminate superstition and promote the emergence of a national culture.

### **O NASCIMENTO DE UMA NAÇÃO**

The film *En Nations Födelse* (The Birth of a Nation) was directed by two Swedish directors - Lennart Malmer and Ingela Romare - in 1973. Both filmmakers had already filmed in Vietnam and Mozambique. When I asked Malmer about the reasons that led them to shoot in Guinea-Bissau, he told me stories about his questioning of his Catholic education, May 68 in Paris, the “Kommune Zwei” in Berlin - where he filmed *An Experiment in Living Together* - and about the way they began to receive requests from the Swedish television to film guerrilla wars that marked that historical period. He combined stories and places as if they were part of a patchwork that, with time, had lost its colours, each piece becoming indistinguishable from the ones preceding and following it. In many ways, it was a difficult interview to conduct, but faithful with regards to the plurality of memories contained in each event. About Guinea-Bissau he specifically told me:

Well, I think the function of the films made in Guinea-Bissau, documenting the social or the state activities, all this that was created by - in the liberated areas, the schools, the hospitals, the whole organization [unclear] and

everything, everything like that is what was necessary to document and to show, because in the beginning, of course, very many critical voices said that this is just fake, that they [the guerrillas] they were just terrorists. (Lennart Malmer, interview, June 2015)

The film begins with a view of Bissau from above. We see numerous estuaries and then the Pidjiguiti harbour in Bissau, where a Portuguese navy ship can be spotted. The voice-over informs us that we're in Guinea-Bissau and it states explicitly that this territory is under Portuguese colonial rule. We realize that we (i.e. the camera) are in a helicopter of the Portuguese army. The following image moves us to a flatbed truck where PAIGC guerrillas are traveling and we (the camera) with them. The light is very beautiful and the images are accompanied by the sound of a kora. We can see the guerrillas sharing one jug of water, going through muddy water sources, crossing a river with difficulty and we see the ruins of a building that resembles destroyed military barracks. Then, we move to a close-up of Amílcar Cabral speaking about development, the colonial occupation and the need to free Guinea-Bissau from 500 years of colonization that led its people to ignorance. In the next image, Amílcar Cabral is no longer alive. It is September 24<sup>th</sup> 1973, the day of the unilateral proclamation of the State of Guinea-Bissau: Amílcar Cabral had been assassinated in Conakry eight months before, on January 20<sup>th</sup> 1973. However, in his "New Year speech" in January 1973, he states that the People's Assembly in Guinea will convene as soon as possible in order to accomplish its first historical mission: "the Proclamation of the existence of our State, creating an executive for that State and extension of a fundamental law: the first constitution that will be the basis of the existence of our African nation" (Cabral, 2008, p. 149). In the film, we see Nino Vieira solemnly proclaiming the State of Guinea-Bissau, for which he would be appointed president of the National Assembly. We hear Guinea-Bissau's national anthem: the top leaders of the liberation movement are all present. Then follows a speech by Luís Cabral, who will be appointed President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, ending with the following ovations: "Long live the sovereign state of Guinea-Bissau built by the heroic struggle of our people", "Long live international solidarity of all anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist forces in the world" and "Down with the aggressors and the Portuguese colonialists". The people and the soldiers sing and dance. We notice the presence of international representatives, attesting the existence of diplomatic relations with some states. The leaders embrace each other warmly and there are several foreign journalists, before we see a military parade. Later come interviews with ordinary people who denounce the submissive conditions to which Portuguese colonialism subjected them, explaining the reasons why they decided to engage in the armed struggle. Another interview in close-up: Luís Cabral, brother of Amílcar Cabral and the first President of Guinea-Bissau. Later, we see an informal school in the village with images of children learning how to read - "The colonialists bombed Morés, destroyed the village, killed the livestock and burned the houses" - with course books published by the PAIGC. We see images of Cuban doctors operating outdoors, respecting all clinical procedures: using saline solutions, anaesthetics, etc. This scene

cuts to an interview with a nurse revealing that, thanks to the party, she could know study and get to know other countries. The same woman reports, in addition, the bombings carried out by the Portuguese army. Later, we see one of the most iconic images from the Portuguese colonial war. In order to show to the international community that Portugal controlled that territory, the Portuguese government allowed a French television channel to make a report about the war and to accompany a military column. Eventually, this report came to be used as counter-propaganda, since the military group in question was attacked, resulting in the death of one soldier and on the serious injury of another one. The survivors have a lost and distressed look. They are young (between 20 and 22 years old), beardless and clutching their weapons. A soldier looks at the camera and, for me, this look constitutes the *punctum* - what hurts me; a kind of subtle off-field (Barthes, 2012, pp. 61-67) – of this image. A Portuguese soldier with traces of blood on his face, leans against a tree, exhausted and looks at the camera. He looks at me as if I were a spectator. It is an image that looks at me and which consequently implicates me, making me question myself: “What am I doing here?” I am confronted by a question that goes far beyond what the film gives me to see. This soldier is between 20 and 22 years old and was born during the longest European dictatorship. Portugal was, at the time, a totalitarian and corporatist dictatorship ruled according to an imperial policy that persisted in maintaining its overseas territories. In this context, this young man is “only” doing his military service 3400 km from home. Possibly, he knows very little about the Cold War, Cuba, Korea or the interests of Americans and Rhodesia in Africa. But his look allows us to understand that he realizes that he is a pawn in a game over which he has no control. We move to an interview with General Antonio Spínola, arguing that the situation in Guinea-Bissau is the same as in any other Portuguese territory. This interview stands in stark contrast with the violence of the previous images and the lucidity of the interview that follows, with Aristides Pereira, who, after independence, will become the President of Cape Verde.

Then our gaze is directed to a village partially destroyed by a napalm bomb. The following shot takes us to a hospital. We see a woman with her arms amputated breast-feeding a child. Someone covers the woman’s shoulders with a white cloth; her breasts are beautiful, as well as the way the baby grabs at them. Aesthetically this image is perfect, being usually described as an African *Pietà*. The woman looks at the floor, then looks at the camera and then quickly averts her eyes, as if asking to not be filmed. What hurts me in this picture is the objectification of her as a victim of war or the lack of control over the representation of her that is being constructed through the moving image. If the contemporary notion of atrocity requires photographic proof (Sontag, 2003), Judith Butler argues that “rather than merely referring to acts of atrocity, the photograph builds and confirms these acts for those who would name them as such” (Butler, 2010, p. 70). Thus, the image will no longer require our interpretation, constituting by itself the interpretation: “to communicate the suffering of others in such a way that viewers might be prompted to alter their political assessment of war” (Butler, 2010, p. 68). The angle and the way this woman and her baby are framed do not allow us access to who they are.

Instead, it shows that who filmed them was actively involved in the struggle, constructing an image that was able to validate a particular point of view. Other shots of amputees in the same hospital follow, as well as an interview with Nino Vieira.

This will be the last interview of the film and it is interesting to note the leaders of the PAIGC to which the film chose to give voice: Amílcar Cabral, historical leader of the PAIGC; Luís Cabral, Amílcar Cabral's brother, who will become the president of Guinea-Bissau; and Aristides Pereira, who will be the first president of Cape Verde. Finally, Nino Vieira, who will be the president of the National Assembly and who in 1978 will be appointed Prime Minister. Two years later, in 1980, Nino Vieira will carry out the first of many coups in Guinea-Bissau, in consequence of which Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde will separate. Luís Cabral will be ousted from power and exiled. The importance of cinema can thus be understood when it comes to diffuse propaganda to the international community and to the people who will be the political leaders in a post-independence Guinea-Bissau. Then, there appear images of one of the major military offensives: the attack on the Guidaje headquarters by the PAIGC troops in May 1973, which lasted over a month and involved about 1,300 men. These images were filmed by Flora Gomes, who is one of four young Guineans sent to study cinema in Cuba, currently being the most well known Guinean filmmaker. Finally, we see a propaganda action in a village where Xico Bá, who was the Political Commissar in the Northern Front, informs and explains to the local populations the importance of Guinea-Bissau's State Proclamation and the political actions of the PAIGC that "each passing day conquers another piece of its own land, where it intends to build schools, hospitals and other structures from which the entire population can benefit". At the very end, we return to the sound of kora as we continue on the road with the guerrillas with which we entered the truck, but now walking. This film allows us to understand the importance of publicizing the struggle and giving visibility to actions developed in the liberated areas. In addition to being a war testimony, these images also proved that in these areas, state structures as schools, courts, health centres, etc. were being constructed. Therefore, these images legitimized the claims of these movements, conveying the message that having conquered part of the territory, they were now creating a civil society in the liberated areas and developing an effective military action against Portugal. To defend and to consolidate the idea that Guinea-Bissau was a state occupied by foreign forces, it was essential for the PAIGC to organize and to create a state structure in the liberated areas, which is why Cabral defined the fundamental characteristics of the liberation as follows: "Practice of democracy, criticism and self-criticism; the growing responsibility of the people for the administration of their own lives; the creation of schools and health services; the training of personnel originating in the peasant and working classes" (Cabral, 1974, p. 23).

He argued that the combatants were not soldiers but "armed militants", considering that the use of weapons was just a matter of temporary circumstances and that what was most important was the integral development of the country. Then, since 1969, when the military control was assured in much of the territory, PAIGC focused much of its efforts on creating a new social order.

To that end, administrative commissions were created in every village of liberated Guinea (Davidson, 1975, p. 101), effectively constituting the political and administrative centre of each village. Each commission included five members elected by the population, two of which had to be women. According to the regulation of the PAIGC, each of the five members had very clearly defined functions in the village: the president was responsible for the overall operation of the village commission and the management of agricultural production; the vice-president had more specific responsibilities relating to security and local defence; the third member was responsible for health, education and other social services; the fourth was responsible for armament and the accommodation of the guerrillas in the villages; and, finally, the fifth member was responsible for keeping the records and the accounting (Chabal, 2002, p. 105). Given these particular historical circumstances, it is important to note that, in this case, the state preceded the nation. Also, all this experience of social organization illustrates the urge to follow the historical example of Western nation-states.

The idea of the state emerges as an undeniable legacy of modern colonial geography. Thus, colonial rule was considered illegitimate, not because it represented the political domination of a people, but because it consisted in a nation's exploiting force and the annihilation of its productive system. On the other hand, a postcolonial nation state turned out to be a historically necessary step towards national development, representing the only legitimate way of exercising power. It was so decreed by the ideology of the liberation movements that the postcolonial world should be a producer and a consumer of modernity. It is important to have in mind the homogenizing role played by the state in order to promote legal and political integration, as well as to frame identities and territories.

#### 10TH WORLD FESTIVAL OF YOUTH AND STUDENTS

The World Festival of Youth and Students is an international event, organized by the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) since 1947. In 1973, the WFYS took place in Berlin in the former German Democratic Republic under the motto "For Anti-Imperialist Solidarity, Peace and Friendship". Having returned from Cuba in January 1972, Sana N'Hada went to Berlin, along with other young Guineans, to take part in this festival in his quality of filmmaker able to document this historical moment. This film fragment shot in East Berlin belongs to the Archive of the National Institute of Cinema of Guinea-Bissau (INCA), having recently been digitalized in the context of the collective project *Luta Ka Kaba Inda*, directed by Filipa César. The first images place us in East Berlin. We recognize Alexanderplatz's TV Tower. Then we see a group of young black men and we realize that they are Guineans because they all wear the traditional skullcap known as *sumbia*. This is a skullcap widely used in West Africa, made of mechanically knitted wool or cotton, in two colours. It has become a symbol of the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau, as Amílcar Cabral always wore it. If today many people know it, it's because they immediately associate it with the historical leader of the PAIGC. We see young Guineans



exchanging badges with blondes and white children. A young Guinean writes in a white child's notebook and one signs a poster on the back of another. We see a young man with a beret putting a scarf (to me, it looks like a pioneers' handkerchief) on a young Guinean. The next shot show us a poster of Leonid Brezhnev on the left, followed by one of Erich Honecker, on the right. After that, the flag of the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) appears. Later, the camera focuses on the parade and delegations from different countries appear: Denmark, Japan, Korea, etc. I highlight the appearance of Mozambique's / FRELIMO's delegation, whose young people come dressed in military uniforms. Subsequently, the delegation of Guinea-Bissau/PAIGC appears, made up of young people, the majority of which also wears military uniforms, but now wearing the neck scarf that we had seen in a previous image. It is curious that the young delegations from Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau are in military clothing, confirming that they are still engaged in an armed struggle and emphasizing the role of the guerrillas as the nation's founders. Everyone hosts the party/country flag and Guinea-Bissau's delegation is led by a poster reproducing the portrait of Amílcar Cabral, who had been murdered three months earlier. All the elements typical of political marches are there: music bands, gymnasts, onlookers, journalists and photographers.

To participate in this march as a country in the process of "coming into being" was to project itself into the future and to assume that Guinea-Bissau, as a nation forged in the struggle against the Portuguese colonialism, shared the political aspirations of the socialist countries, who were regarded as a possible option for Guinea-Bissau to "recover and continue its own story in the modern world" (Cabral, 2011, p. 359). When we look at this from the distance of the present, we find that, if some countries are still in the process of coming into being, others – like the German Democratic Republic, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union - have since ceased to be. What emerges in this film is the fragility of the nation-state as a political reference.

#### **GUINEA-BISSAU: THE SOCIALIST (IM-) POSSIBILITY**

Amílcar Cabral did not claim to be a Marxist and said many times: "If you want to call us Marxists then do it, but that's your problem". Moreover, he did not corroborate the idea that the driving force of history is the class struggle, since he considered it to be of little relevance in the Guinean context of mobilizing revolutionary energies (Neves, 2005, p. 7). Furthermore, he did not share the premise that the History of a people only starts when the class phenomenon - and consequently the class struggle – is triggered, claiming instead that the African cultural identity historically precedes colonial domination. At the same time, he recognized the existence of other historical devices, highlighting in the specific case of the struggle he was leading the level of productive forces and the property regime. These two concepts are fundamental to Cabral, since his conception of national liberation goes beyond the frameworks of formal achievements of independence and implies the "liberation of human productive forces and materials of our land, in the sense of them being able to fully develop in accordance with the historical conditions we

are living today” (Cabral, 1976, p. 205). This reinterpretation of Marxist ideology is due, among others, to the fact that the latter was not fundamental to the politicization of the Guinean population. However, the armed struggle had as its fundamental mission “making hundreds of men, thousands of men and women think the same way and seeking the same thing” (Sousa, 2008, p. 163). And this thing was a nation-state led by a single party. In the context of the Cold War - and even if Cabral did not identify himself as Marxist -, Soviet economic and military support presupposed also an ideological transfer. According to Pedro Rosa Mendes (forthcoming), Guinea-Bissau is described in Soviet literature as a kind of “technological African project”, fitting the history of the emancipation of the oppressed under the guidance of the USSR. In addition, this struggle had the support of China, North Korea, Cuba and the former Yugoslavia. This support was both economic and military. But above all, it allowed the formation of professional staff, who would constitute one of the struggle’s fronts. There were many Guinean men and women who had attended schools and universities in Cuba, the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union and were now doctors, nurses, teachers and military officers. Nevertheless, the PAIGC refused its categorization by the grid of the Cold War, sharing the positions expressed at the Bandung Conference.

Today much remains to be said of the African nationalist struggles, as well as their geostrategic implications in the context of the Cold War (Meneses & Martins, 2013, p. 18). Taking cultural memory as a system of attribution of meaning that is permanently and constantly undergoing changes, Enzo Traverso suggests that the public memory of anti-colonialism experienced a near total eclipse:

A massive revolt of colonized peoples against imperialism has been forgotten, covered by other representations of the “South” of the world, accumulated over three decades: first, the mass graves in Cambodia and Rwanda; then “humanitarian wars”; and finally, Islamist terrorism, whose spokesmen have replaced the guerrillero image. (Traverso, 2012, p. 127).

The fall of the communist bloc and the disappearance of the antagonistic context that presided over the inclusion of economic aid made visible a hidden aspect of the old rival blocs: the way that the political and ideological nature of economic aid is substantial to the development model it sustains and that it tends to reproduce completely. In this context, the young independent nations still have to deal with what has most negatively affected the South since the beginning of colonialism: having to focus their energies on the adaption and resistance to the impositions from the North (Banuri cited in Santos, 2006, p.115).

It is important to note that in the course of the liberation struggle, social identity built on ethnicity was considered a threat to the building of a nation. The fact of accepting the existence of tribes or ethnic groups as an integral part of history, reality and nature of the Guinean society did not mean that those tribal manifestations were accepted within the party. Consequently, despite seeking to represent local will, the post-independence political ideology ignored the pre-existing social hierarchies (Carvalho, 2000, p. 42) in

order to overcome local divisions. Against expectations of many observers of the African reality, especially in the period that followed immediately after independence and the establishment of the new African states in the 50s and 60s, traditional chiefs have not disappeared. On the contrary, they have become prominent in many different contexts. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, instigated by internal and external pressures, which had the direct consequence of the introduction of a multi-party system approved in the National Assembly in May 1991, the government started to accept forms of political association and their free expression, whether in the form of political parties or other forms of political association. One consequence of this phase of “political transition” (Cardoso, 1996, p. 138) was the accreditation of the *régulos*, the local designation for the heirs of the small pre-colonial kingdoms, which had been used during the colonial period to refer to any holder of traditional powers. It should be noted that the resurgence of traditional authorities in sub-Saharan Africa since the nineties relates directly to the crisis of the independent African states, expressing a profound inability to control and manage significant parts of their territories and their populations. Therefore, this kind of resurgence was an integral part of a process, which sought to replace or restore political control, which had been lost during the previous decades. It is worth noting that throughout this process traditional authorities have lost their absolute legitimacy, despite continuing to enjoy much prestige and local obedience. One of the reasons why their legitimacy has been maintained is related to the plurality and complexity of the social roles played by them, which are not only of a political-administrative, but also of a social and spiritual nature (Carvalho, 2000, pp. 39-41).

#### **TO WHOM DOES THE NATION BELONG?**

“The nation belongs to everyone. The nation must be the same for everyone. If it is not the same for everyone, then the leaders who call themselves the State become a gang” (Ribeiro, 2011, p. 41). The foundation of the Guinean nation was grounded in conflicting political dynamics that will reveal the internal divisions that have deepened since independence to the present day. The political instability shows that the nationalist phenomenon was not enough to formulate a national project. And the lack of a national project means the coexistence of various models. In June 1998, a violent civil war broke out and since then Guinea-Bissau continues to be affected by several episodes of political violence. It is necessary to analyse the political instability and violence, not as a resulting or characteristic phenomenon of the post-war context, but as framing the historical continuities by which this is understood and rationalized. In fact, when the violence of war is considered as an exceptional period, it is seen as a mere crisis or as an obstacle to development and stability. Thus, war is never taken as part of a political process of the collapse of states and societies.

Like a nation-state, a film is also a field of conflict, always open to new readings. In this context, it's essential to recall Michel Foucault (2004) for whom the “primary task” of history is not to interpret the document nor to determine if it's telling the truth, but to

“work on it from the inside”: to arrange, to cut, to distribute and to order it. Georges Didi-Huberman (2012) argues that it is necessary to play with the approach to images and texts produced about them, in order to describe the relationships established between them: to imagine, to question, to disassemble and to reassemble. Thus, the dialectic is a collision of words and images: the images collide to bring forth words, words collide to give birth to images, the images and words collide to visually furnish thought.

Usually, Guinea-Bissau is a territory portrayed as politically instable, where the utopian romanticism of the liberation movement has lost its place. However, the films I have discussed here lead me - when placed in dialogue - to question this romanticism as a form of political rhetoric. Today, from the distance of 40 years after the independence, we understand how both films sought to serve the construction of a chimerical nation-state, in which the Guinean national identity is taken for granted, neglecting completely the process that led to this ideological (de-) construction. More than means, these films are mediators sharing with the nation the same “revised and corrected reality” of which Frodon speaks (1998). From this collision emerge the visual absences of this traumatic history, opening up an arena able to reveal plural memories relating to different political options that have taken and continue to take place in that territory. These visual voids allow us to understand that the historical narrative that posits the struggle as the nation’s founding myth also generated absences and exclusions, by silencing stories of conflicting political dynamics in which the Guinean nation is grounded. And the silencing of certain memories calls not only for historical analysis but, above all, for a discussion of the representations carried by the liberation struggle. ✍

## FILMOGRAPHY

Lennart Malmer & Ingela Romare (Directors) (1973) *En nations födelse / O nascimento de uma nação*. Sweden.

Sana N’Hada (Director) (1973), *X marcha da juventude na república democrática alemã*. Guinea-Bissau.

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## INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

Interview with Lennart Malmer, June 2015

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\* **Submitted: 02-12-2015**

\* **Accepted: 10-04-2016**