Between memory and erasure: Zézé Gamboa's *O Grande Kilapy* and the legacy of portuguese colonialism

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Abstract

While the 40th anniversary of the "fall of the Portuguese Empire" has provoked fresh critical approaches to the colonial legacy within Portugal, much less attention has been paid to how memories of colonialism are being reconfigured within contemporary lusophone African cultural production. The films of Angolan director Zézé Gamboa have thus far received very little academic attention, particularly his most recent feature, *O Grande Kilapy* (2012) (The Great Kilapy), which is the focus of this article. Yet the film demonstrates the urgency of redeeming memory in a postcolonial society, and how the power to silence such memories is embedded in the geopolitical structures of the lusophone world. This article will demonstrate how Gamboa decolonises the imagination by reclaiming memories and reframing history, but also how this very redemption and transmission of memories is limited by production and distribution constraints imposed upon the film itself, defined by configurations of power within the postcolonial lusophone space. Therefore, while recognising the importance of the archive for memory, as Pierre Nora proposes, this article will posit that alternative strategies, present within *O Grande Kilapy*, such as the oral transmission of stories, are essential for working around such constraints.

Keywords

African Cinema; memory; forgetting; portuguese colonialism; postcolonialism

Introduction

In his seminal work on memory, "Les Lieux de Mémoire", Pierre Nora writes that "modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image" (Nora, 1989, p. 13). The idea of the archive as having a central, essential importance as the modern "medium" of memory, to borrow a term from Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 2005, p. 576) provides the starting point for considering the redemption of memory in *O Grande Kilapy* (The Great Kilapy, 2012), the second feature film by the Angolan director Zézé Gamboa. The film takes us back in time to the final years of Portuguese colonialism from the late 1960s to 1975, and we, the audience, are asked to bear witness to a testimony, albeit fictionalised, of the Angolan liberation struggle and to the falling of the Portuguese Empire. It is a memory given life through the story of Joãozinho, an apolitical antihero.

If the official history of the Portuguese-Angolan colonial relationship is written in Portugal's archives, in *O Grande Kilapy*, this relationship is reworked and reimagined through the reclamation of unofficial and marginalised memories. As this article will demonstrate, in part, this is done through the film's use of archive film footage and radio broadcasts, and also through the layered narrative form, which hinges on the oral

performance given by the film's narrator, a figure who provides an oral testimony of historical events and transmits them to collective guardianship.

Secondly, the situation of the film's production and distribution also provides insights into how collective memory is shaped in the postcolonial lusophone space, and how the film itself acts as a record, as well as highlighting its vulnerability for erasure. Through an exploration of both the problems Gamboa faced filming in Angola and the lack of distribution of the film beyond the festival circuit, it will be shown how geographical factors of memory and power once again exert themselves, here acting upon the material film as a cultural product. Thus it seems essential to consider questions of individual, collective and cultural memory in relation to archived and archivable material, and to explore what Soraia Ansara has termed "políticas do esquecimento" ("politics of forgetting", Ansara, 2012, p. 297) and what Paul Ricoeur refers to as "institutionalized forms of forgetting" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 452). Demonstrating such politicised forgetting in relation to *O Grande Kilapy*, this article will argue that the film also transmits memories which do not rely on the materiality of the archive, in particular the use of oral performance mentioned above, which addresses both intra- and extra-diegetic audiences.

As will be evident throughout the article, *O Grande Kilapy* is a multi-layered and highly nuanced film, in which constant transfigurations of genre, aesthetics and structure are at play. The aspects analysed will be limited to the space and time of the narrative structure, and how archive material is used within it, as well as the questions of production and distribution. These are the most salient elements of the film for considering the redemption of memory within the postcolonial lusophone matrix. There is not the space here to fully analyse the film in all its complexity; both the soundtrack and visual aesthetics, for example, warrant extended study. It is hoped, therefore, that this article will also lead to further scholarship on the film.

The narrative structure of *O Grande Kilapy*

The film's title translates as *The Great Kilapy, Kilapy* being a Kimbundu word which, as we learn early in the film, means a 'sting' or a 'swindle'. The first scene of *O Grande Kilapy* opens on a rooftop bar in Lisbon. The film's narrator, for now an enigmatic, nameless character, begins to tell the story of Joãozinho, a privileged Angolan student studying at one of Lisbon's *Casas do Império* during the 1960s. In reality, quite contrary to the aims of the Estado Novo, these university boarding houses became revolutionary training-grounds, as intellectuals from across the Portuguese African colonies formed alliances and ignited ideas. Among these students, Agostinho Neto, Eduardo Mondlane and Amílcar Cabral went on to lead the liberation struggle across lusophone Africa. This political history is something which Gamboa subverts here, since Joãozinho is anything but a revolutionary leader. When he is implicated in the liberation struggle, it is always reluctantly and almost accidentally. Joãozinho is instead characterised as a swindler and good-time guy. As the narrator tells his diegetic audience, as well as the spectating audience: "He was a true artist of the kilapy" (03:05).

With this opening section, the first spatiotemporal section of the film is thus laid out, locating us in present-day Lisbon, and setting up the film for a lengthy flashback. In her extensive study on film flashbacks, Maureen Turim notes that "memory, in its psycho-analytic and philosophical dimensions, is one of the concepts inscribed in flashbacks. Memory surges forth, it strengthens and protects or it repeats and haunts" (Turim, 2013, p. 2). Flashbacks themselves may not be particularly disruptive for the spectator: as Aline Sevenants and Géry d'Ydewalle (2011) demonstrate, straightforward flashback sequences do not put excessive mental load on the viewer. *O Grande Kilapy* is relatively sequential, with Joãozinho's story occupying the majority of the film in linear form, bookended by shifts to the present. In fact, given that the present-day sections last for only a few minutes at the beginning and end of the film, it could be argued that they function more as flash-forwards from the main narrative. Such a structure does not stray far from the principles of classical, semiotic cinema. Furthermore, the colour palette and lighting of the film endows it with a stylised visual quality which has more in common with Hollywood melodrama and film noir than with resistant counter-cinema (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Scene from *O Grande Kilapy*, 2012 (credit: David & Golias)
Source: David & Golias

However, by applying Turim's analysis of flashbacks, we can understand how Gamboa exploits these classical cinema conventions to create alternative narratives within the film. According to Turim, "the telling or remembering of the past within a film can be self-conscious, contradictory, or ironic. Some flashback narratives actually take as their project the questioning of the reconstruction of the historical" (Turim, 2013, p. 3). In *O Grande Kilapy*, I would suggest that the project of reclaiming memories of the colonial period is inscribed into the narrative structure of the film. It is in this context that Gamboa's use of the flashback and historical memory emerges as something more subversive and more politically engaged.

It is also significant that the recounting of the past, the audible telling of the narrative, is realised by a white Portuguese *retornado* narrator. This is a provocative act, and

one which would seem to position Joãozinho merely as the enunciated object of the narrative, rather than the active agent of it: the coloniser speaking on behalf of the colonised. However, as both Christian Metz (1974) and Stephen Heath (1981) emphasise in their seminal works of film theory, the visual language of cinema takes precedence over the auditory, and in the visual domain of *O Grande Kilapy*, it is Joãozinho who dominates. Furthermore, Gamboa builds a complex character portrait with which the spectator is never quite sure how to identify. Many of Joãozinho's actions are morally reprehensible, including cheating on his various girlfriends and swindling the Bank of Angola, siphoning off money to fund an increasingly lavish lifestyle for himself and his friends. Yet he is also cast as the hero in contrast to the villainous *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado* (PIDE); he helps his friend Rui escape from enforced Portuguese military training; and he is generous to those in need in Luanda. Gamboa uses composition and light to great effect in order to support this characterisation: PIDE officers are often shrouded in darkness, their faces eerily illuminated, with lingering shots of rooms and movements that suggest torture (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Scene from *O Grande Kilapy*, 2012 (David & Golias)
Source: David & Golias

There is a scene in which Joãozinho is commanded by a member of the PIDE to strip, in public. The shots cut between the grey-suited officer and Joãozinho, stripped down to his pants, before panning out to encompass the two contrasting figures, at which point the officer pats him on the cheek. There is no need for extra-diegetic narration to interpret the scene; the indignity and inequality is palpably transferred to the spectator.

Memory and the archive

Joãozinho may be an ambivalent character who frustrates attempts at political classification, but the film enacts its project of redeeming memory and retelling colonial

history on cinematic levels beyond the purely narrative, and particularly through the use of archive film and audio recordings. At this point, it is firstly necessary to clarify what is meant by the redemption of memory, and secondly the specific ways in which Gamboa employs archive material for such a project within this film.

Among Walter Benjamin's many writings on history and memory, in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', he says that "the past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 255). We can understand the idea of redemption as the active reclamation and reconfiguration of the past in the present, as, for example, Uri Matatayaou (2008) and Tim Woods (2007) do. In his book on African literature, reflecting upon the historical traumas of liberation struggles in Africa, Woods says:

> Memory recalls one not to the life that has been lost but to the life that is yet to be lived. In this respect, history and memory [...] are the crucial sites where postcolonial national and cultural identities are being formed and contested. (Woods, 2007, p. 3)

This makes the redemption of memory a crucial project in the present because it not only carries with it the power to rethink and rewrite official history, but also the power to assert identities which have previously been marginalised. The spatiotemporal aspects of the film therefore have a vital role to play.

The concept of time and its cinematic representation is a key consideration in African film scholarship, particularly in contrast to Western linear time[1]. An emphasis on cyclical time is common; Melissa Thackway, for example associates it with the cyclical nature of village life (Thackway 2003, p. 152), while an aesthetic of 'slowness' has been identified by Souleymane Bachir Diagne (1998, p. 7), among others. More applicable to Gamboa's treatment of time here, however, is what Thackway terms "narrative layering" (Thackway, 2003, p. 78). In *O Grande Kilapy*, different memories and recounting of history are layered upon one another, complicating the cinematic structure, which at first seems straightforward.

I would argue that, in the sequences analysed below, space takes precedence over time. This is important, because physical, geographical space, and the manipulation of it, is strongly connected to the preservation or erasure of memory. Aminata Cisse Diaw argues, in her paper on time and development in Sub-Saharan Africa, that acts of deterritorialisation, such as the vandalism of official monuments, can be a recourse to the deconstruction of official, national memory and what she terms "l'imaginaire colonial" ("the colonial imaginary", Cisse Diaw 1998, p. 233). Through this deterritorialisation of official memory then, unofficial memories can be redeemed, and alternative narratives created. Gamboa's use of archive material within the film can also be understood as symbolic acts of deterritorialisation. The historical artefacts are displaced from their original

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[1] It should be noted that the terms 'African film' and 'African cinema' are problematic and their use has been contested by Françoise Pfaff (2004) and Olivier Barlet (2000), among others, who argue for using the terms 'African films' and 'African cinemas' in the plural. In this article, I use the terms in the singular to refer to the body of scholarship which seeks to establish distinct frameworks for studying African films, and to the questions of distribution which affect cinema across Africa. At various points, I also seek to establish how *O Grande Kilapy* both employs and diverges from classic tropes of 'African cinema'.

contexts and presented in a different light, thereby opening up possibilities for the telling of an alternative history.

About halfway through the film, Joãozinho is deported from Portugal back to his native Angola by the PIDE. Here, Gamboa uses the geographical transition in order to create a bridge between the fictive diegetic narrative and actual historical film from that era. The archive film shows aerial shots of Luanda, followed by street scenes which segue back into Gamboa's fictive shots. Thus historical past and narrative fiction are seamlessly blended. Joãozinho's journey back to Luanda, then, takes the spectator on a visual journey back into the past. This prompts the start of the redemption of this past in the way that Matatayou (2008) conceives it; as reconfigured and renegotiated in the present. Furthermore, the spectator, now positioned as a witness to this past, is invited to take an active role in its redemption.

In this Angola-set section of the film, Gamboa goes on to employ archive material more extensively. The archive material I will focus on here is not simply woven into the narrative thread, as with the scenes just explored; it is used actively. Significantly, a visual, cinematic record is contrasted with an audio record of the same period in history, narrating the same events, at the height of the Portuguese colonial war in Angola. The archive footage is a propaganda film by the Estado Novo, designed as a show of the strength and ability of the Portuguese military, while the audio recording is a radio broadcast by the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA), then one of Angola's independence movements.

Unlike the earlier scenes in which the archive footage is almost indistinguishable from the rest of the film, here a clear narrative break is made, by an abrupt cut from a scene of Joãozinho working in the bank, and the narrator beginning to reveal the details of the Kilapy, or sting, that is being enacted, to the start of the archive film. The juxtaposition of these two scenes and the swiftness of the cut means that the narrator's words about the sting leave an echo, or a trace, that carries over into the next scene. He says: "the sting was very simple. There were two receipt books, two accounts and two destinations. The true miracle of the multiplication of the loaves" (53:15). Such dualism of perceived reality also seems relevant for considering the archive material which follows, since it is concerned with two divergent memories of the same history.

The archive film demonstrates the training of Portuguese soldiers learning the skills necessary to fight insurgent groups in Angola, but rather than the immediate, persuasive impact that would have been intended, as viewers of *O Grande Kilapy*, this film is kept at a distance, culminating in it being seen through two screens, and through Joãozinho's eyes. After little more than a few seconds of footage, there is a cut to Joãozinho watching the film at the cinema. While he remains indisputably politically apathetic, preferring to turn his gaze on the woman sitting behind him than demonstrating any reaction to the film, he acts as a kind of vehicle for self-conscious awareness on the part of the spectator, who is given the necessary space to consider this piece of official history from a new perspective, particularly with the hindsight of earlier scenes, in which enforced conscription of Angolan revolutionaries into the Portuguese army as a threat and punishment somewhat undermines the legitimacy of the film's claims.

If memory is reconsidered in that scene, it is rewritten in the next one, in which Joãozinho's father listens to the MPLA radio broadcast. Over a crackly speaker, a disembodied voice declares: "our heroic warriors are fiercely fighting the Portuguese army that defends the continuation of the hated colonialism in Angola" (57:33). As well as providing a counter-history of the Portuguese colonial war, it further undermines the official history as told in the propaganda film. The anti-subversion fight, claimed by the *Estado Novo* as a success, is clearly failing if an ordinary, mild-mannered citizen has access to subversive messages in his own home. The impact of this counter-testimony is made even greater by the fact that, outwardly, the father is an *assimilado* and holds a respectable position at the Portuguese-run bank. He listens to this broadcast in complete secrecy, hiding his actions even from his wife. This further underscores the potential for disparity between personal and official history and memory.

Furthermore, the use of a radio broadcast to present the alternative history carries its own subversive power. The subordination of the auditory by the visual in cinema is so well-established that the auditory is often used as a tool of subversion to disrupt narrative coherence in counter-cinema, something which Kaja Silverman (Silverman 1988) discusses comprehensively. Yet, as mentioned above, in *O Grande Kilapy*, the auditory seems to be relatively secure, corresponding to Heath's framework of "the containment of sound as the safe space of the narrative voice" (Silverman, 1981, p. 120). If anything, this makes the deployment of the archive radio broadcast at this point, in a direct and provocative contrast to the archive film material, all the more potent. The film – the moving image – seems almost to freeze at this point: the scene is dark, with little background detail, and Joãozinho's father sits motionless, listening intently. It is therefore the auditory broadcast which is foregrounded, in a kind of reversal of the previous scene, in which the archive film became contained within and constrained by the narrative.

In *A dying colonialism*, Frantz Fanon writes about the transformation of radio during Algeria's liberation struggle, in which radio went from being a French-controlled tool broadcasting the "'truth of the oppressor'" (Fanon, 1965, p. 76) to a revolutionary weapon. Fanon explains that not only did the Algerian radio broadcast 'Voice of Algeria' present listeners with an alternative perspective, an "acted truth" (Fanon, 1965, p. 76), which opposed the dominant French narrative, but the very act of having a radio and listening to the 'Voice of Algeria' meant that the listener was a participant in the struggle:

> Buying a radio, getting down on one's knees with one's head against the speaker, was no longer just wanting to get the news concerning the formidable experience in progress in the country, it was hearing the first words of the nation [...] having a radio seriously meant *going to war.* (Fanon, 1965, p. 93)

Certain parallels with this Algerian situation, and particularly with Fanon's description of the listener above, can be seen in *O Grande Kilapy*. Indeed, Joãozinho's father takes on almost exactly the pose that Fanon proposes, crouching close to the radio, his ear pressed to the speaker. This striking image, along with the risk associated with

listening to a subversive radio broadcast that is conveyed during the scene, transforms this mild-mannered bank clerk into an active participant in Angola's liberation struggle.

As Fanon alludes to at various points in his analysis (Fanon, 1965, pp. 69-98), and as is evident in the use of 'our' in the radio broadcast in *O Grande Kilapy*, even if listening to the radio is an individual act, it is simultaneously collective, an example of what Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined communities* (2006), conceives of as an imagined, shared experience which binds together members of a community. Though when listening to the radio in the privacy of your own home, you cannot see other people doing the same thing, the broadcast has a public function and references are made to it within society, and therefore it takes on a social aspect. In the case of subversive radio, this collective nature is what gives it power as a revolutionary weapon. In the film, Gamboa extends this idea a step further: the audience becomes the imagined collective for the character on screen, as we too listen to the radio broadcast. In contrast to the visual archive material used in the earlier scene, here the archive exists only in the auditory sphere, but it is embodied by the film. Its potential as an active tool of liberation and of redeeming memory, is therefore achieved through the character's and audience's shared act of listening.

Constraints on memory and the politics of place

If *O Grande Kilapy* is a film which mediates between what Soraia Ansara terms the "políticas de memória" and the "políticas do esquecimento" ("politics of memory and the politics of forgetting", Ansara, 2012, p. 297), as an artefact of memory in its own right, the film is not immune from such politics acting upon it. Cinema and memory are closely linked, even "symbiotic" (Sinha & McSweeney, 2011, p. 2), and our collective anxiety to preserve, archive and restore films is hard, if not impossible, to extricate from our desire to preserve, archive and redeem memories[2]. *O Grande Kilapy* is a film in which the interaction between cinema and memory is particularly notable, not only because of its subject matter but also because of the modern-day postcolonial politics of the lusophone world, which themselves shaped the film's narrative.

In an interview with Marta Lança about *O Grande Kilapy* in 2010, during the final period of production, Gamboa talked about his plans for the scenes he had left to shoot, which were the present-day beginning and end sequences with the narrator. He explained: "we are going to film on the coast of Luanda in order to create a counterpoint between colonial Luanda and the Luanda of today" (Gamboa, 2010, para. 29). At this point, the transcribed interview contains a note, presumably added latterly: "(NOTE: this did not end up happening)!" (2010, para. 29). As already mentioned, the narrator we see in the finished film is located in Lisbon, not Luanda, so it would seem that at some late point during the shooting, something went awry. Gamboa has spoken on several occasions about the difficulties of filming in Angola, and indeed the historical sections of *O Grande Kilapy* set in Angola were filmed in Brazil. Yet in this interview, Gamboa's aims are

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[2] Paolo Cherchi Usai (2001) provides a meditative and critical view of the preservation of film and of cinema's links to cultural memory in *The Death of cinema*.

clear: by filming the beginning and end sections in Luanda, with views of the coastline, he would have created a clear link between the archive film which shows aerial shots of Luanda – colonial Luanda – and independent Luanda in the present. This would have not only put Luanda at the centre of its own history, but would have also located the power for giving voice and image to silenced memories and erased histories there.

Instead, these scenes had to be shot in Lisbon, relocating the act of remembering to the very centre of former colonial power. Given the postcolonial dynamic between Angola and Portugal, the transplantation of memory from one location to the other is not a neutral or unproblematic process. Indeed, geographical space appears to exert powerful forces upon cultural memory, reconfiguring or destroying memories. Peter Burke (1989) highlights this phenomenon in relation to the loss of collective memory that can accompany the destruction of the homeland of a particular group. Memory without territory seems to become very vulnerable, and perhaps this is something which can be understood by returning to Benjamin's writings. "Memory", Benjamin argues, "is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium. It is the medium of that which is experienced, just as the earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried" (Benjamin, 2005, p. 576). In making the connection between archaeology and memory and by positing memory as a medium rather than an instrument, Benjamin suggests an inalienable link between place and experience, in which various spatial factors may affect the retrieval and redemption of a particular memory. In this vein, Stephen Legg proposes that:

> Memory [...] changes in line with alterations in physical and social space, whether this be urban transformations, social revolutions, ecological restructuring, or, as Matsuda (1996) has argued, the ways in which new mappings of space and power restructure the `chronopolitics' of a period and place. (Legg, 2007, p. 457)

Colonialism is an aggressive and brutal "[re]mapping of space and power" (Legg, 2007, p. 457) and, evidently, the spatio-political structure it creates is a tenacious one which continues to exert a degree of influence within postcolonial relations[3].

The Lisbon location of remembering in *O Grande Kilapy* is perhaps all the more significant given that, beyond the archival records as exhibited in the film, memory and testimony of the colonial period is largely repressed in Portugal. Isabel Moutinho, for example, discusses "the conspiracy of silence surrounding the colonial war" (Moutinho, 2008, p. 34). This is an example of the "politics of forgetting" mentioned earlier (Ansara, 2012), which surround many events of collective trauma[4]. As Paul Ricoeur outlines, a policy of amnesty amounts to a "duty of forgetting" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 456), linking the notion of official amnesty with the phenomenon of amnesia associated with personal

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[3] Stephen Legg's "Reviewing geographies of memory/forgetting" (2007) offers a comprehensive overview of the major theoretical concepts and studies of geographical memory.

[4] This is not to imply that there is total silence surrounding colonialism in Portugal; indeed, there are numerous artists and writers, including Isabela Figueiredo and Dulce Maria Cardoso who are producing creative and critical reflections and mediations of the colonial period, but are doing so within a more generalised atmosphere of political amnesia, and recognise this in their work.

memory. Amnesty has the power, he explains, to deprive collective memory of a "lucid reappropriation of the past" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 456). Again, like the uprooting of memory from its geographical space, such a political, conscious and collective forgetting of the past can appear fatal for the redemption of memory, and the silence which consumes the colonial history in Portugal provides precisely the environment to which Ricoeur refers, in which official history relies upon tactical forgetting as much as remembering.

In Angola, the monumentalisation strategies employed by the MPLA, the party which has ruled the country since independence, also act as a form of amnesia. John Schubert provides a critical reading of the image of President José Eduardo dos Santos as an "architect of peace" (Schubert, 2015, p. 2), pointing to the deliberate destruction of informal neighbourhoods and markets in Luanda, and the relocation of residents to far-flung suburbs that the government has overseen. It could be argued that such actions represent a form of territorialisation, in contrast to the deterritorialisation discussed earlier, and as such, a form of control of public memory. Indeed, as Schubert demonstrates, in Angola, there is the frequent equation of post-war reconciliation with the physical reconstruction of the country's infrastructure, which "obliterat[es] remnants of a chaotic past and the *confusão* of the time of war" (Schubert, 2015, p. 15), effectively erasing memories which do not conform to the dominant narrative. With heavy state control of media, of the arts, and ironically, as Paula Cristina Roque points out, of NGOs (Roque, 2009, p. 142), the MPLA can inscribe its official version of history into almost every aspect of the nation.

It is perhaps telling that Gamboa's two feature films, *O Herói* and *O Grande Kilapy*, concern themselves with the immediate post- and pre-war periods, but do not venture into the civil war period itself, thereby conforming on some level with the "30-year hiatus in Angolan history" that Schubert identifies in MPLA ideology (Schubert, 2015, p. 12). However, through the characterisation of Joãozinho as a self-interested swindler from the privileged echelons of Angolan society, criticisms of political corruption and the self-interest of the post-independent leadership are implied. In the film's final sequence, Joãozinho's actions finally catch up with him and he is imprisoned on charges of corruption, but shortly after, the war of independence is won, and the prisoners released. Joãozinho is, ironically, fêted as a political hero. The possible parallels to the current political situation Angola are left for the spectator to draw.

Despite the spatial and geographical challenges posed to memory in both contexts, *O Grande Kilapy* emphatically demonstrates the persistence of apparently 'forgotten' events within cultural, collective memory. Firstly, the shift from Luanda to Lisbon is a potentially destructive one, yet the power of the film to tell its own story is not necessarily lost altogether. Portugal may be the location in which the memories are narrated, but the voice that emerges is Angolan, and by inscribing an Angolan viewpoint of the shared colonial history into Portuguese testimony, the coloniser's official history can be questioned and challenged from its very centre of power. Secondly, traces of memories can and do remain within a system of enforced forgetting. In order to redeem these memories, the links between personal and collective memory become vital. Making the link between personal and collective memory, or "social memory" (Burke, 1989, p. 100),

is not unproblematic, but through the transmission of stories, memories can be passed between people in a particular community and between generations. As Thomas Butler puts it, "memory is not only what we personally experience, refine and retain (our 'core'), but also what we inherit from preceding generations and pass on to the next" (Butler, 1989, p. 13). This is not to say that individual memories can be transmitted in a complete and unadulterated form from one human to another, but through direct, interpersonal communication, a practice which falls outside of the archives, monuments and commemorations of a state's official history, these memories are able to survive.

In *O Grande Kilapy*, this process of transmitting memories is illuminated in the very structure of the film. The narrative is, after all, presented as an oral performance, transmitted by the narrator to his audience, two young people born after 1975. Yet of course, we, the spectators, are also the narrator's audience, and therefore implicated in the transmission – and guardianship – of this memory. Burke talks about the role of the historian in preserving "records of a past which has become awkward and embarrassing, a past which people for one reason or another do not wish to know about, though it might be better for them if they did" (Burke, 1989, p. 110). *O Grande Kilapy* is both an oral performance (in its diegesis), an example of an ephemeral social memory, and an archivable audiovisual record in its filmic material. That is not to suggest that this is an accurate historical portrayal of events; it is a work of fiction "based on true events", as explained in the opening credits. However, through its integrated use of archive material, fiction becomes indivisible from fact, and the fictional narrative acts much like oral folklore, as a form of storytelling in which memories are embedded.

Orature is almost indissociably linked with African cinema. Manthia Diawara's comparison of the role of African filmmakers to that of *griots* (Diawara, 1992) is well known, and has been influential for considering the dialectic between oral tradition and African cinema. It is an idea to treat with a degree of caution, since as Tshishi Bavuala Matanda points out, the function of the *griot* is to transmit, not to create (Bavuala Matanda, 1984, p. 167), and also because, while oral storytelling traditions have a prominent position in communities and societies across the African continent, the *griot* is a figure specific to West African societies. It is, however, a trope which Gamboa plays upon to great effect here, combining historical memory and political satire through oral performance, while recognising the specific complexities of postcolonial Angolan society in his deployment of the *retornado* narrator.

Cinema itself as cultural memory was an idea touched upon at the start of this section, and it is one I will return to here, because it is essential for considering a final constraint on collective memory. *O Grande Kilapy* may fulfil the function of redeeming marginalised Angolan memories in a shared lusophone postcolonial space, but in order to transmit its narrative, it needs to be seen. It seems like an obvious point, but as Ricoeur points out, "there are witnesses who never encounter an audience capable of listening to them or hearing what they have to say" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 166). The same could be said for films, particularly in the context of African cinema. Distribution is a perennial problem, and the situation for *O Grande Kilapy* is no exception. Though it had its initial release in

2012, at the time of writing, four years on, the film still does not have a distribution deal and remains on the international festival circuit – a classic case of what Marijke De Valcke describes as "becom[ing] trapped in the [...] festival network" (De Valcke, 2007, p. 105).

Secondly, the festival circuit geographically limits the film's spectatorship. Again, this is a problem not unique to this film or to Angolan cinema, but one which is widespread across the continent: major urban centres throughout Africa today have very few cinema screens. In the 1950s and 60s, Luanda had dozens of cinemas, as detailed by the Goethe Institut (2015), and this colonial-era cinema culture is richly reflected in *O Grande Kilapy*[5]. Today, many of these cinemas are in a state of disrepair, a situation also evident in other African cities. This means that many films made by African directors, about African subjects, are simply not seen by African audiences. Zeka Laplaine, a filmmaker from the Congo, where there is no longer a single cinema screen in the capital city, Kinshasa, sums up the situation thus: "making films that you can't show in your country, living in the hope that they can be seen abroad is terrible, a little like being an orphan" (McAuliffe, 2015, para. 7). In this sense, the geographical uprooting of a film can have a similar impact to the spatial displacement of memory. *O Grande Kilapy* was shown in Toronto, London and Dubai before being screened anywhere in Africa, and had its Angolan premiere much later (Figure 3)[6].

Figure 3: International Poster for *O Grande Kilapy*, 2012 (David & Golias)
Source: David & Golias

[5] The Goethe Institut is currently running a project described as an 'archive of cinemas' in which historical cinema buildings in 15 different African cities (to date) are being recorded.

[6] The production company, David & Golias, has a full list of *O Grande Kilapy*'s festival screenings on its website, up-to-date as of 2015.

This is perhaps the most fundamental obstacle *O Grande Kilapy* faces in its redemption of memory, and a clear example of the boundaries of official history within the lusophone postcolonial space. After all, through the reclamation of archive material and through the communication between narrator and audience, film and spectator, there is agency with which to deal with the displacement of memory from Luanda to Lisbon, and with which to overcome the imposed "duty of forgetting" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 456). Take away the spectator, and the narrative (along with its memories) is silenced once more. Without tangible distribution, whether by digital or physical means, the film remains a temporary spectre at film festivals with a relatively short lifespan, unable to realise its own archivable potential, or to fully give a voice to the silenced memories and stories of Portuguese colonialism in Angola. In this way, it is effectively being prevented from becoming part of Angolan and lusophone cultural memory.

To return to Nora's statement, that "modern memory [...] relies on the materiality of the trace" (Nora, 1989, p. 13), it seems perfectly possible that *O Grande Kilapy* could be all too easily erased from cultural memory. However, as has been demonstrated, memories are able to endure in spite of geographical displacement and attempts at erasure through amnesty and the "politics of forgetting" (Ansara, 2012, p. 297), since so much of collective, social memory is based on communication. In being shown at film festivals, *O Grande Kilapy* bears a certain relation to its narrator, the oral storyteller: this is a story to be seen and heard, passed on, and embedded in collective memory. Its material trace, therefore, may not be quite so crucial. What is demonstrated, through the power politics at play in terms of its geographical settings and distribution (or lack thereof) is the urgency of both reclaiming archive material and redeeming marginalised memories in the face of Portugal's "duty of forgetting" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 456). *O Grande Kilapy* is a work of archive memories, of oral stories passed on from one generation to another, and of imaginative fiction which lingers in the memory of its spectator. In short, it is a prismatic work of memory which refuses to be erased.

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