

# MUEDA, MEMÓRIA E MASSACRE (1979-1980), DE RUY GUERRA<sup>1</sup>

Raquel Schefer\*

## Resumo

Reencenação, documentário histórico, ficção política, filme etnográfico, todos esses gêneros são evocados, à primeira vista, por *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* (*Mueda, Memória e Massacre*), um longa-metragem moçambicano de 1979-1980 dirigido por Ruy Guerra, um dos Os mais importantes cineastas de Cinema Novo, nascidos em Lourenço Marques (agora Maputo) em 1931. *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* é geralmente considerado o primeiro filme de ficção de Moçambique independente. No entanto, o filme cria uma síntese profunda entre os gêneros cinematográficos, superando todos os esforços na classificação genérica e, assim, abrindo a categoria de obra cinematográfica, como forma cultural, até novas dimensões que incluem modos de expressão de cinema, teatro e memória coletiva, bem como o projeto político de Moçambique, no qual o cinema desempenhou um papel fundamental. Ao mesmo tempo, a estrutura diegética do filme revela uma complexa concepção intertextual da narrativa histórica – e do objeto fílmico como uma forma de representação histórica –, questionando a validade das categorias operacionais de documentário e ficção e dando aos procedimentos cinematográficos de reconstituição novos significados. Uma análise crítica do contexto de produção do filme, bem como de suas características estéticas, narrativas, ideológicas e temáticas, nos permite esboçar uma genealogia do cinema revolucionário moçambicano e começar o desenvolvimento de uma arqueologia de suas formas de ficção.

**Palavras chave:** Ruy Guerra; *Mueda, memória e massacre*; Cinema Moçambicano

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\* A researcher, filmmaker and film curator, Raquel Schefer has a Ph.D. in Film and Audiovisual Studies from the New Sorbonne – Paris 3 University, with a dissertation on aesthetics and politics, focused on Mozambican revolutionary cinema. She published the book *El Autorretrato en el Documental* in 2008, in Argentina, where she received a master's degree in Documentary Film. Graduated in Communication Sciences from the New University of Lisbon, she is co-editor of the film journal *La Furia Umana*. Realiza Pós-doutorado na Universidade de Lisboa. Doutora em Estudos Cinematográficos pela Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3, com uma tese sobre estética e política, focada no cinema revolucionário moçambicano. Email: [raquelschefer@gmail.com](mailto:raquelschefer@gmail.com)

## Abstract

### MUEDA, MEMORY AND MASSACRE (1979-1980), BY RUY GUERRA

Reenactment, historical documentary, political fiction, ethnographic film, all those genres are evoked, at first glance, by *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* ('Mueda, Memory and Massacre'), a 1979-1980 Mozambican feature film directed by Ruy Guerra, one of Cinema Novo's most important film directors, born in Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) in 1931. *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* is generally considered to be the first fiction feature film of independent Mozambique. Nevertheless, the film creates a profound synthesis between cinematographic genres, overriding all efforts at generic classification, and thus opening the category of cinematographic *œuvre*, as a cultural form, up to new dimensions that include cinema, theatre, and collective memory's modes of expression as well as Mozambique's political project, in which cinema played a fundamental role. At the same time, the film's diegetic structure reveals a complex intertextual conception of the historical narrative - and of filmic object as a form of historical representation -, questioning the validity of the operative categories of documentary and fiction, and giving the cinematographic procedures of reenactment new meanings. A close and critical analysis of the film's context of production as well as of its aesthetic, narrative, ideological and thematic features allows us to sketch out a genealogy of Mozambican revolutionary cinema, and to begin the development of an archaeology of its fictional forms.

**Keywords:** Ruy Guerra; Mueda, memória e massacre; Mozambican cinema

Reenactment, historical documentary, political fiction, ethnographic film, all those genres are evoked, at first glance, by *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* ('Mueda, Memory and Massacre'), a 1979-1980 Mozambican feature film directed by Ruy Guerra, one of *Cinema Novo*'s most important film directors, born in Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) in 1931. *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* is generally considered to be the first fiction feature film of independent Mozambique. Nevertheless, the film creates a profound synthesis between cinematographic genres, overriding all efforts at generic classification, and thus opening the category of cinematographic *œuvre*, as a cultural form, up to new dimensions that include cinema, theatre, and collective memory's modes of expression as well as Mozambique's political project, in

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The historical issues at stake in *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* point to a genealogy of Mozambican revolutionary cinema, interwoven with the country's political project: one of the founding films of Mozambican cinema, since it launched the formal and expressive conditions of its development, *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* would be censored, partially re-shot, and reedited, without Ruy Guerra's direct supervision, and

finally relegated to the dusty shelves of an archive after being screened in the Tashkent Film Festival, where it was awarded with the Prizes “Film and Culture” and “People’s Friendship Union” in 1980, and other international events as an exemplary piece of Mozambican revolutionary cinema.

*Mueda, Memória e Massacre* was produced by INC, Mozambique’s National Institute of Cinema, established in 1976, as one of the Frelimo Party’s first cultural acts, just a few months after the country’s independence from Portugal in June 1975.<sup>2</sup> The institute closed its doors in 1991, as a result of a fire that partially destroyed its production and editing facilities - two years after FRELIMO renounced Marxism-Leninism -, and was reconverted in 1994 into INAC, the current National Institute of Audiovisual and Cinema, where INC’s archive remains today.

A close and critical analysis of the film’s context of production as well as of its aesthetic, narrative, ideological and thematic features allows us to sketch out a genealogy of Mozambican revolutionary cinema, and to begin the development of an archaeology of its fictional forms. Although documentary film would be the dominant form of expression of Mozambican revolutionary cinema (comprising the country’s pre-cinema<sup>3</sup>

and the cinematographic production made during the post-revolutionary period), the birth and decline of fiction happens at the same time as Marxism-Leninism is adopted as the country’s official ideology, during FRELIMO’s Third Congress in 1977, and it is later abandoned in 1989. The production of *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* between 1979 and 1980 was followed by 1985 *O Tempo dos Leopardos (The Time of Leopard)*, by Zdravko Velimirovic, co-produced with Yugoslavia, and 1987 *O Vento Sopra do Norte (The Wind Blows from the North)*, by Mozambican filmmaker José Cardoso, which can be regarded as fictions of the Liberation War, close to the Socialist Realist aesthetics. The cinematographic production would then decline, while the production of feature fiction films would stop until recently. The history of fiction film in Mozambique seems to be twisted together with the history of the country’s revolutionary project.

During the Liberation War, an important number of militant and engaged films on FRELIMO’s anti-colonialist struggle was produced, such as 1966 Yugoslavian film director Dragutin Propovich’s *Venceremos! (We will win!)*, *Behind the Lines* (1971), directed by British filmmaker Margaret Dickinson, 1972 North-American film director Robert Van Lierop’s *A Luta Continua (The Struggle Continues)*, or 1973 *Étudier, produire, combattre*, directed by the Group Cinéthique, on the education work in a FRELIMO training centre in Tanzania, among others.

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Socialist Realism (1984/1985-1987). In accordance with this chronology, *Mueda, Memory and Massacre* would mark, respectively, via its aesthetic system and its material history, the transition from the period of institution—insofar as it has an influence on the cinematic language under development—to the period of destitution—inasmuch as it announces canonization and state control of the film production—of the INC’s Aesthetics of Liberation.

2 The Front for the Liberation of Mozambique, founded by Eduardo Mondlane in Tanzania in 1962 to fight for the independence of Mozambique.

3 According to the operative chronology proposed in this article, Mozambican revolutionary cinema has three phases: pre-cinema (1966-1974/1975), prior to the country’s independence, a category which is simultaneously temporal and material, linked to the affirmation of an aesthetics of contingency or an “aesthetics of the possible”, according to Guerra (Ruy Guerra, Interview with Catarina Simão and Raquel Schefer, Maputo, 16 September 2011); the Aesthetics of Liberation (1975/1976-1984) of the National Film Institute (INC), the organisation set up in 1976, spanning its two stages—the period of institution (1975/1976-1979), and the period of destitution (1979/1980-1984) of cinematic language—;

In a country with 90% illiteracy and great linguistic diversity, cinema would soon be conceived by FRELIMO as an instrument to decentralize the place of colonial history within postcolonial Mozambique; it would also serve as an instance of legitimization not only of the socialist state under construction, but also of Mozambican identity and cultural specificity, establishing the idea of nation beyond ethnic multiplicity. With this purpose, international cinematographic technicians and filmmakers were called to Mozambique, including Jean Rouch, and Jean-Luc Godard. From 1976 to 1991, INC produced thirteen documentary and feature films, 119 shorts and 395 cinema reports, newsreels, denominated *KuxaKanema* (*Birth of the Image or Birth of Cinema*). The *KuxaKanema* were screened from South to North, even in remote rural areas, where the film rushes and screening equipment were taken by mobile cinema units. To paraphrase Jean-Luc Godard (1979),<sup>4</sup> evoking his work in Mozambique in the late 1970s to assist in the foundation of the first television station, the political birth of the country would coincide with the birth of its cinematographic images and filmic forms of representation.

It was in this context that Ruy Guerra, who had been living in Brazil since 1958, came back to his place of birth, invited by INC. At the moment of his return to Mozambique, Guerra had already directed some of his most remarkable works, such as 1962 *Os Cafajestes* (*The Unscrupulous Ones*), and

1964 *Os Fuzis* (*The Guns*). Guerra's international reputation as one of *Cinema Novo's* leading cineasts would legitimate Mozambican cinema, while his presence in Maputo would symbolically mark the birth of national cinema. He participated in the development of Mozambican cinema not only training technicians at INC, but also reconstituting cinematographically the collective memory of one of the most significant episodes of resistance against Portuguese colonialism, the Mueda Massacre, the subject of *Mueda, Memória e Massacre*.

On 16 June 1960 – just four years before the official beginning of the Mozambican Liberation War – the Mueda Massacre took place in the Makonde Plateau, in Northern Mozambique. The Portuguese colonial administration repressed a peaceful demonstration for the improvement of work and life conditions and eventually for the creation of an independent Makonde state, murdering more than 600 people according to official Mozambican history. The circumstances surrounding the massacre are still ambiguous today, particularly regarding the number of victims. The Mueda Massacre considerably contributed to the Makonde's politicization,<sup>5</sup> influencing the development of FRELIMO and of its military campaign. In fact, the first *liberated areas*<sup>6</sup> were established precisely on the Makonde Plateau. From this point of view, Guerra's film would not just commemorate one of the main sym-

4 Godard's visual essay was published in Cahiers du Cinéma's 300th issue: it is a hybrid piece, combining texts and images, excerpts of Godard's travel journal in Mozambique, using photomontage procedures: 'En route to the village where the comrades with the Super 8 stock are going to project their film. Stop on the banks of the Limpopo River. Children. A Polaroid colour instamatic. The first image. Of men. And of women' (119).

5 In 1917, the Makonde were already the protagonists of the final insurrection against Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique before the Liberation War.

6 'The guerrilla called "liberated areas" to the territorial surfaces where the administration was already made under its control. (...) The concept... was, for the FRELIMO's committee, even deeper since it integrated the idea that the fight for the socioeconomic transformation of people's life was also taking place in those areas' (Cabaço 2010: 274, my translation).

bolic antecedents of Mozambican Independence War, but it would also – and above all – found and historically inscribe (given the absence of archive images) the cinematographic memory of the historical event.

Yet, *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* goes even further since the massacre's representation is based on the shooting of a popular, spontaneous and collective dramatisation of the event that, from June 1976 until about two decades later, took place every year at Mueda's public square, in front and inside of the colonial administration's ancient building; that is to say, in the same place where the massacre happened in 1960. The theatrical and carnivalesque performance of the massacre was based on the homonymous theatre play by Calisto dos Lagos, who is also quoted as the film's screenwriter and dramatic director. In this oral and improvised play, which was never set down in writing, Mueda's people incarnated simultaneously the colonial administration's characters and the demonstrators. The film intercuts images from this *mise en scène* with documentary interviews with survivors and witnesses of the massacre.

This *fiction de mémoire* (fiction of memory) to quote a concept articulated by Jacques Rancière (2001), not only visually puts together the relation between affective memory and history, but also relates closely to the notions and practices of re-enactment and re-effectuation, a term with a deeper pragmatic dimension, since it re-constitutes the massacre's dramatic reenactment and takes a Makonde process of memory's fictionalisation as its point of departure. The film is characterised by a complex articulation between history, enunciative present, memory and their *mise en rapport*, which destabilises the operative categories of documentary and fiction, pointing to a politic

of representation that would be inseparable from the emergence of new sensible models as well as an affirmation of cinema as a form of historical thought. The filmic organisation of the temporalities and narratives in conflict inscribes this aesthetic and political manifesto –or, better, this statement on the inseparability between aesthetics and politics – in the programme of the new country under construction. At the same time, since the massacre's representation is based on its collective, direct and popular memory, the film –and its polyphonic enunciative system – indicates a reinvention of the expressive possibilities, which would be entwined in the creation of a new dimension of Mozambican identity, founded on a creative confrontation between modernity and traditional society.

In this way, *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* tackles the massacre's affective collective memory rather than the historical event in itself. According to Guerra, it is a movie about the massacre's *mythical significance*, the transformation of *such a cruel act into an act of joy*,<sup>7</sup> and about the self-representation forms of the people engaged in the revolutionary process. It is a reconstitution of the massacre's reenactment that creates its definitive forms of visibility, developing, in the process, Mozambican's film language. Yet, this re-constitution also contains a gesture of spatial and temporal transference, that is, a transference from the mythic nature of the past into the present of the country under construction, a living time that is already a past tense, a gesture of investment of the past's symbolic weight into the new images. The possibility of the past's refiguration comes out precisely through the intensity of the present. The film comes from a history already in progression; conse-

7 Simão and Schefer.

quently, the present –the cathartic and carnivalesque celebration of the massacre –is treated as the inaugural force of the history to come. All the work developed by Guerra in Mozambique may be inscribed in this lineage, particularly the monumental fresco *Os Comprometidos. Actas de um Processo de Descolonização* (*The Collaborators. Minute of a Decolonization Process*, 1982-1984) that assembles the declarations of ex-collaborators of the colonial regime in a popular court, and which constitutes, according to the director, *the catharsis of colonialism*.<sup>8</sup>

In *Mueda, Memória e Massacre*, the borderline between the interior and the exterior scenes signals the genre's conflict and determines the relation between a collective body and the camera's position. The film's structure is determined by the contrast between the sequence-shots of the self-determined theatrical play, shot at Mueda's public square, and the sequences shot inside the colonial administration's ancient building, which were re-staged for the film. During the shooting of these interior scenes, Mueda's inhabitants, who stayed outside the building, spontaneously performed the theatrical play again, becoming spectators of the political action, which was being staged inside the building, and active participants at once. Guerra's camera shows us incessantly their double condition, which also signals the contiguity and friction between documentary and fiction.

Nevertheless, the main filmed events are independent of the shooting, thus from direct *mise en scène*. The work of fiction is built upon the organisation of the different narrative levels in the editing process. Even if the film follows the theatre play's original structure, the editing articulates images from different (at least two) popular reen-

actments of the massacre and several interviews. The narrative structure that is formed by the montage, the deferred temporalities and the articulation of heterogeneous expressive systems create, in this way, a new memory of the massacre. At the same time, in its content and form the film is also a document about the revolutionary process in Mozambique.

*Genre's frustration*<sup>9</sup> is the expression that Guerra uses to describe *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* as it is a film that refuses politically both the epic reenactment and the documentary's reality effect. It is entirely a Mozambican production, which determined the usage of black and white negative film. Yet, the director's cut of *Mueda, Memory and Massacre* was refused in 1979 by Jorge Rebelo, then Minister of Information (1975-1980). Following a meeting between Guerra and the minister,<sup>10</sup> the film was censored, partially re-shot and reedited without the filmmaker's direct supervision. Unlike Guerra's cut, the film's official mutilated version, responded to João Paulo Borges Coelho's notion of "Liberation Script",<sup>11</sup> an epistemological apparatus of FRELIMO's politics of representation and political representation that aims to order and codify the history of the country, in particular the history of the liberation struggle.

The nature and the extent of the material interventions in the film reveal the normative deviation from Mozambique's politico-cultural project and announce the

9 Simão and Schefer.

10 Guerra, Ruy, Interview to Schefer, Raquel. Paris, 2013.

11 Borges Coelho. João Paulo, 'Politics and Contemporary History in Mozambique: A Set of Epistemological Notes', in *The Liberation Script in Mozambican History*, ed. par Assubuji, Rui, Israel, Paolo and Thompson, Drew, *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, n°39 [special issue], p. 20-31.

8 Simão and Schefer.

process of aesthetic canonization of the Socialist Realist tendency, which was later extended to the sphere of cinema in the early 1980s (1984/1985-1987). *Mueda, Memória e Massacre's* performative and cyclical time seemed not to be adjusted to the Mozambican political project's didactic and progressive time, as it would not entirely sublimate the interaction between the historical and structural determinant (Mozambican people heroic fight for liberation) and the superstructural component (the representation of the conscience of the fight's heroism and justness).

Mueda, Memória e Massacre lies on the border of a period of transformation in Mozambican revolutionary cinema and in the country's political project itself. The excavation of the material time and space of Mueda, Memória e Massacre's images brings out discontinuities, fundamental contradictions and incompatible postulates. Starting to be the country's first fiction feature film, interconnecting African and Latin-American film, it became a film out-of-circulation, rarely seen, rarely shown, confined to the institutional archives, discarded as FRELIMO's political project. The film's images are deferred archives because they do not claim to be (nor are they) images from the past, as they constitute, on the contrary, a disruptive force that connects transversally to the past of the 1960s and to the enunciative present of 1979, as well as finally to today and to the failure of Mozambican revolutionary process. These three moments of the image punctuate the passage of time over history's discourse, ideology, and the work of memory.

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