
The Third Cinema Revolutionary Cinematic Movement

The revolutionary cinematic movement of the 1960s and 70s 'Third Cinema' was developed as a response to the realities in Latin America (and Europe's other former colonies) at the time, be it economic, social or political. It challenged the very notion of filmmaking that had taken the cinema world by storm; going against capitalist, commercial Hollywood as well as the author-driven European cinema, in order to focus on the cultural decolonization of their nations and the oppression they still faced. Three directors who participated in the movement were: Ousmane Sembene; who was located in Senegal, Yamina Bachir; from Algeria, and Jorge Sanjines; from Bolivia. There were multiple goals for the movement, the main one being to expose oppression, but in addition, the other aspects include: Expressing the experiences of the masses, to raise political consciousness in the viewer, and to inspire spectators to take action and seek change. These facets can be seen in the films of the three aforementioned directors in their films *Ceddo* (1977), *Rachida* (2002) and *Blood of the Condor* (1969).

Ousmane Sembene's film *Ceddo* takes place during an unspecified time within a Wolof-speaking village in Africa; during a time of religious unrest. Their king has just converted to Islam and the *Ceddo*, or commoners, refuse to follow him. They kidnap his daughter in protest against the onslaught of both Islam and Christianity; as the villagers try to preserve their own traditional culture. Although the film does not have a specific date in which the events take place, from a historical view; as the conversion towards Islam began in the 18th century and was cemented in the 19th by the French attacks against their kingdoms it can be assumed that it occurs within this two centuries. During this time of conflict, Sembene chose to use the small village seen in the film as a microcosm for the whole of West African society as it was being forced through this transition by external, foreign powers as an act of defiance and a fruitful attempt to show the history of Africa from the perspective of the oppressed class, rather than the oppressor. In Solanas and Getino's *Towards a Third Cinema* they write "The great themes — the history of the country, love and unlove between combatants, the efforts of a people who are awakening — all of this is reborn before the lens."

Exploring the experiences of the populace is one of the key points of Third Cinema, as mentioned previously, and as a cinema that attempts to revolutionize its audience it would be feasible to say that producing films that corrects a nation's history from the one that the colonizer constructs is the first step towards independent and decolonization. It is a steppingstone towards something greater, a way to open the eyes of the masses, to remind them that they were not always oppressed or shamed for their own beliefs. But in the context of *Ceddo*, the film is a way of uniting the masses in their shared experiences, which Solanas and Getino refer to as cinema of the masses. According to Teshome Gabriel there are multiple

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phases in the route towards Third Cinema and within the third phase, that of the combative phase, he writes "Filmmaking is a public service institution; while the industry in this phase is owned by the nation and/or government, it is managed, operated a run for and by the people". Sembene has been known to create somewhat controversial films, a number of them, including *Ceddo* being banned in Senegal for political and ethical reasons. In the case of this film, it caused the Senegalese government to ban the film as "Islamic brotherhoods still exercised considerable power within their government" (Kindem and Steele) which brings to light the reason that Third Cinema exists, to combat the bourgeois and the oppressing factors, whether it be a militarized nation hoping to colonize, or their own government. Sharing the experiences of the masses is only one aspect of Third Cinema, and for a film to be considered revolutionary there are multiple facets in which it should fall under.

Producing a film one hopes to be revolutionary fails to become such when the viewers have no knowledge of the truth of their situation, thus in order for a film to be considered within the sphere of Third Cinema, the audiences need to be educated on the crisis and ultimately raise the political consciousness within the masses. Solanas and Getino compare the political knowledge of the masses to the teaching of handling guns writing, "Teaching the handling of guns can be revolutionary where there are potentially or explicitly viable leaders ready to throw themselves into the struggle to take power, but ceases to be revolutionary where the masses still lack sufficient awareness of their situation or where they have already learned to handle guns". A film cannot be revolutionary and awake any consciousness within a viewer who already has the knowledge being presented to them and simply choses to ignore any use this knowledge serves them.

Yamina Bachir's *Rachida*, while a more recent film, still adheres to the loose guidelines of Third Cinema. The film follows a young schoolteacher, Rachida, in Algiers who, much like the rest of the women in her neighbourhood and throughout the country, do not believe that the current terrorism ravaging their home has anything to do with her. This opinion changes rather quickly as she is shot by a group of terrorists and forced to transfer to another village to work so that they will not recognize her. The film ends on a meta note, with Rachida crying while looking into the camera as she starts "today's lesson" for her students, who had just witnessed their own terror attack just the day before. Within the film the character Rachida acts as a stand-in the audience watching it, as the director is assuming that they have no knowledge of the conflicts overwhelming their state and hopes to educate them enough on their situation to inspire the call to arms, which will be discussed subsequently.

The revolution of Third Cinema ultimately means nothing if the viewers absorb the meaning of the film or internalize the intent behind it but do nothing to change their environment or their conditions. With Solanas and Getino's own film *La hora de los hornos* the act of watching the film itself was an act of defiance. They explain that "every comrade who attended such

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showings did so with full awareness that he was infringing on laws and exposing his personal security”, and that once they actively moved against society and the oppressive hold the government holds over it they shift from being merely a spectator he becomes “an actor, a more important protagonist than those who appeared in the film” because while the film emulated life and the struggles of real people, it was not real – the people who watched it were, and they faced real consequences.

In order to create a film that calls the masses to arms, the creator needs to be from the society they are trying to transform as “the filmmaker’s tie with reality makes him more a part of his people. Vanguard layers and even masses participate collectively in the work when they realise that it is the continuity of their daily struggle”, when they combine the shared experiences and the political awareness now conscious within the masses, the call to action is not far off, as they are now able to collect as an assembly and fight against the ruling class or people. Jorge Sangines’ 1969 film *Blood of the Condor* is perhaps the most revolutionary film of the three discussed here as it did not simply expose the perpetrators but removed them entirely.

Jorge Sanjines, the director of the film wrote that “the work of revolutionary cinema must not limit itself to denouncing, or to the appeal for reflection; it must be a summons for action” which is what his film resulted in and directly reflects one of the key aspects of Third Cinema as illustrated in Getino and Solanas’ article, “The revolution does not begin with the taking of political power from imperialism and the bourgeoisie, but rather begins at the moment when the masses sense the need for change and carry out this change”. The audience needs to feel as if they have no other choice but to make the change the film is calling for, lest they be stuck in the Imperialist world designed to limit them.

The *Blood of the Condor* told the story of Indigenous Bolivians who under the guise of receiving medical care from an American Peace-Corps agency were being sterilized. This act of quiet genocide showed how focused the Western countries were on modernization as the continued reproduction of Bolivian peasants would keep the country from moving forward and threaten the development of the country as a whole. It ends on a freeze-frame of lifted rifles, no doubt the summons to action that Sanjines was pressing for in the making of this film and as stated previously, the film had the desired effect, as not long after the film was screened in Bolivia, the American Peace-Corps were expelled, in a defiant act of nationalism. It is simple to say a film was revolutionary but there are not many films that push a populace into actively driving out a force

The creation of Third Cinema was a way for filmmakers to combat the first and second cinemas of capitalist Hollywood and author-driven European cinema as well as being a response to the political, economic and social realities that Latin American was facing during the 1960s. Solanas and Getino’s essay titled *Toward a Third Cinema* outlines what they believe to be the key

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aspects of a revolutionary film and while there are many the three main points are that the films showcase the experiences of the masses, as seen in Ceddo and the religious conversion of the Wolofs, the raising of political consciousness within the viewers like in Bachir's Rachida and how she educates the viewers in how anyone can be affected by terrorism, and finally the film should incite change within the viewer and call them to arms against their oppressors as seen in Blood of the Condor.

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