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Politics of Memory: A Study in Latin American Revolutionary Cinema

Abstract

This work underlines the key concepts of the Third Way revolutionary cinema of Latin America contextualizing the collective memory and politics of remembrance. The National Project and reshaping of the National identities and the ideological shift from de-colonial and postcolonial matrixes in the revolutionary utopianism of modernistic cinema and its academic reevaluation is the basic assumption of the paper. Resurfacing of the ideologies of indianismo, indigenismo and mestizaje helps in revealing the true aims of the revolutionary filmmaking in Latin America which had more than aesthetic agenda in mind when it set trademarks of National cinemas like Yawar Mallku in Bolivia or La Hora de los Hornos in Argentina. The work tried to emphasize the original voice of the revolutionary cinema while tracking its apparatus with the theoretical works from de-colonial and Marxist perspective.

Keywords: National Project, indianismo, revolutionary, Third Way, mestizaje

The goal of this paper is to underline the key concepts of the Third Way revolutionary cinema of Latin America with regard to collective memory and politics of remembrance, the National Project of reshaping the National identities and the ideological shift from de-colonial and postcolonial matrixes in the revolutionary utopianism of modernistic cinema and its academic re-evaluation. Latin America is often unnecessarily burdened with a universal theoretical framework of postcolonial production of the difference when in fact it should be investigated through the National paradigm, which reveals (although seen as backward and academically out of date) a unique usage of philosophical ideologies of indianismo, indigenismo and mestizaje that shaped its cultural landscape during the 20th century.

A prerequisite for accurate research on the subject is to distance ourselves from the ideological apparatus of the western contemporary identity theory (mainly postcolonial) to accomplish any insight into revolutionary processes of the making of contemporary Latin America. But paradoxically, it is necessary to resurface the ideology of the Oppressed (weapon of de-colonial philosophy) in order to establish a yearning goal of its philosophers – the re-enactment of the past; a past that cannot be seen as an actual historical event but a designed utopian self-fashioning of the de-colonized modern society. Building upon these premises it is necessary to deconstruct the binary oppositions of the prevailing colonial/de-colonial/postcolonial chain which deformed the essence of the Third Way (not Third World) philosophy on the academic level worldwide by pursuing the audibility of the other, subaltern or the underdeveloped instead of dwelling on the liminality of the reshaping of the National Project. Latin American revolutionary cinema became a vehicle (cultural and artistic) of rewriting the new ideology of the region or the nation, in fact it visualized the National Project with a more or less utopian vision by producing a new national/cultural identity deliberately mixing racial, ethnic and class differences[1] . Cinema, like no other media before or after, offered a new visual design of the philosophical and ideological apparatuses that fought the battle for Third way politics in Bolivia (indianismo), Brazil (indigenismo), Argentina (nationalism) and Cuba (socialistic cultural revolution).

Walter Benjamin prophetically wrote that today and tomorrow could not be apprehended without remembrance of the essence of yesterday (in the tumult of the world economic crisis and future nationalization of Europe)[2] . His depiction of Paul Klee's Angelus Novus as an agency of awareness is an epitomized version of the Oppressed in the context of Latin America, miles away from the speechless subaltern that awakes in the era of the postindustrial identity struggle. This awareness is evident in the indigenismo cultural output in Mexico where the pre-Colombian better past is merged with the colonial struggle of the oppressed and de-colonized new nationalism of the won revolution; especially in la pintura de murales of the Mexican avant-garde artists like Oroszco, Siqueiros and Tamayo. On the other hand, a different ideology is shaped in Taino/Negro Franco-anglicised postcolonial emancipation torched by the Toussaint L' Overture Haitian revolution and preached through Frantz Fanon's de-colonial philosophy which also marks the limitations of any regional success of future postcolonial producing of difference by amplifying the inaudibility of the

subaltern[3] . Fanon's decolonization through denationalization is a strikingly absent principle outside the Caribbean region and the majority of Latin American revolutionary processes dwelt into New National Projects on a completely different level. Peru, for instance, reshaped the national identity of cholo (a colonial depreciative term for lesser racial types) by transformation of the colonial meaning rather than employing a de-colonial other; as a result most Peruvians will nowadays say todos somos cholos (we are all cholos) instead of claiming we are all different/Other. Quite in contrast, the radical nationalization through racial/ethnic mobilization witnessed in the writings of Bolivian Fausto Reinaga produced the New Oppressed - the abolishment of Mestizaje and Mestizo[4] as the symbol of postcolonial tolerance in favor of Castizo or Indio puro (pure Indian)[5] . The Bolivian indigenist aim thus became an Indian nation much in the terms of pure ethnic society rather than in terms of egalitarian state via postcolonial recipe.

Third Way/el Tercer Camino became the predominant mean of emancipation of cultural and ideological preferences of modern Latin American artisans, especially in cinema which became an ideological apparatus for different causes: Brazilian Cinema Novo tried to build an indigenous utopian society by unification of racial and ethnic differences into a hybrid identity of the Sertao, an anti-class system that was soon deformed; Argentine Grupo Cine Liberacion sought for a new aesthetic in the political and ideological context by applying Peronism and Justicialismo (justice for social and working classes outside an oligarchic elite) onto everyday life; the Bolivian Grupo Ukamau mixed two philosophies of indianismo and indigenismo[6] in order to strike the prevailing criollo/mestizo driven minority state. Quite the opposite, the Cuban model of Cine Imperfecto constructed a class abolishment after the successful revolution through the dissemination of western intellectual freedoms and paradigms exemplified best in Alea's Memories of Underdevelopment and Solase's Lucia- both from 1968. Finally, Mexico can be analysed as a counterpart of the third way with no real revolutionary cinema and with the socially engaged Nueva Cine group from the 1960s driving towards policies of Mestizaje equality and class struggle in the neo-liberal oil driven society[7] .

Politics of memory became a prevalent vehicle of re-designing the past and self-fashioning of national identity in most revolutionary cinemas of Latin America, but also it fulfilled the avant-garde and highly ideological aesthetic principles of the auteur filmmakers of the region. The tradition of

the first cinema (Hollywood type capitalist-imperialist) constructed the cultural preferences of Latin America with exotic, stereotypical, binary opposition as a kernel of most productions from the 1920s until the early 1960s. Rare exceptions came from the outside (European avant-garde); a critique of exoticism manifested in Marcel Camus Orfeu Negro, an archetypal indigenismo in Sergei Eisenstein's !Qué viva México! and destruction of Mestizaje social heaven in Luis Buňuel's Los Olvidados. First cinema epigones in Latino cultures build a powerful ideological apparatus within the simple cinematic framework, which ensured subjection to the ruling ideology given in Althusserian terms (Althusser 95). This was done through exemplary archetypal dramatization with no subversion from oppressed, class or racial issues; colonial casta systems lived through tropicalistic cinema where all identification was already determined in the pre-text and never questioned through visual narrative.

Liberation certainly came through a revolutionary struggle of both political and cultural agitators. As Marcuse stated in Counterrevolution and revolt: "the political potential of the arts is first of all expressive of the need for an effective communication of the indictment of the established reality and of the goals of liberation" (79), and precisely cinema became this communicator for the oppressed masses with opposite results. The cinema went through radical transformation from a predetermined archetypal apolitical media (but highly ideologized towards keeping the capitalist/western matrix intact) to a highly political weapon of revolt. Often discussed in relation towards a Marxist reading of cinematic material are the Brechtian concept of dialectic between modern art and utopia for an emancipatory mass culture and the Bakhtinian notion of cinema/literature as a rejoinder between mediatized subject and the audience (Bakhtin 279). Dialectics are contested within the same mediatised subject since modernism and avant-garde media produced highly philosophical output aimed towards left wing intelligentsia but at a same time it showcased the context of lived experience of the mass culture. What is revealed in the process is the act of collectiveness, the sense of emancipatory possibilities found in the urban modernity. Argentine Tercer cine used this mechanism to its limits, La Hora de los Hornos being the best practical document of the theory behind the Brechtian notion of media dialectics. A re-evaluation done by the collective, or aimed at the collective, opened a fear for the new production of subjective ideology but open criticism of almost every cultural or political institution was far more

important than its flaws. Tercer Cine and Grupo Ukamau deliberately designed a new politics of memory shifting from scientific or culturally based common knowledge to the lived, collective and experienced historicity of the events. On the other hand, a rejoinder was used again onto a collective notion of bringing together all the participants of the cinematic narration purposely destructing the objectivity and neutrality. La Hora de los Hornos stands as a huge rejoinder of the multiperspective, multifocal dialogue on all cultural and political tendencies seen through the eyes of the collective, a collective that is by itself heterogeneous and multiplicative. When an account is being made about a social/cultural crisis in Argentina we witness a massive critique from all corners of the society; the baker, policeman, writer, peasant, unemployed etc. which produces a subjectivity phenomenon necessary in the time of profound social urgency. I will underline four different employments of this device showcasing how to build a new politics of memory on the fringes of rewriting the collective past.

The most radical of all is the Bolivian never fulfilled Indian-state project began in 1952 after the successful revolution led by MNV and crushed in 1969 by the dictatorship of Banzer[8] . It produced the central figure of the Bolivian cinema Jorge Sanjines and his Grupo Ukamau and three seminal films on the subject of nation/oppressed/liberation: Revolucion in 1963, Ukamau in 1966 and Yawar Mallku in 1969. Ukamau (in Aymara language for and so it is) is an emblematic showcase of Reinaga's indianismo graphically designed to overwhelm the traditional Mestizaje ideology in which Mestizos and Indios are equals. The plot is rather simple; the Indian Mayta seeks revenge upon Mestizo Ramos who raped his wife Sabina and the final sequence of the film with killing of the trader/capitalist/Indian rapist elaborates two goals: liberation from capitalist/Mestizaje past and an urge for a New Indian Nation. Sanjines used an epic cinema device borrowed from the Brechtian theatre in order to awake empathy and self-consciousness upon his audiences and the results were far from positive. Like in Brecht's theatre the mirror image in front of a selective audience produces apathy rather than empathy[9] . Reception of the programmatic ideology exhibition lacks sufficient research and measurable premises both in theatre and cinema but should be the main aspect of academic analysis when dealing with politics of memory and their representation through visual imagery.

Yawar Mallku (Blood of the Condor) works on an entirely different level; produced in the year of resurgence of dictatorship it serves as a starting point of reinvestigation of the past through the basic Althusserian method: how is an order established and fortified through ideological state apparatuses, in this case unrevealed sterilization of Indian women with goals of slow genocide of the indigenous by the capitalist/neo-colonial elite. Sanjines resurfaced the old device of revolutionary cinema (mainly Soviet) of the Collective acting as a subject/hero with aims of building a peasant/indigenous uprising. A massive flashback takes place of classic narration marked with Deleuzian usage of recollection of the past as a memory of the future (Deleuze 88). This is done through peculiarities of visual narrative; the main character Ignacio Mallku is on the deathbed after unsuccessfully plotting against the foreign Cuerpo del progreso (Peace Corps) and recalls through flashes the struggle of the Indios against US imperialism, which proved to be fruitless. Nonetheless Mallku and Indios tried to fight imperialism with its own weapons; killing the scientists of the Corps and refusing to take part in the so-called progress for the future. The final sequence of Mallku dying on a hospital bed with dreams of the Andes and with arms in the hands of the Indios fulfils the noted Deleuzian premise: memory of the future will be memory of the Indios liberating themselves from the gringo enslavement. Indogenous communities had a hard time understanding the Marxist/Indianist agenda of Sanjinese's plot especially since the main leitmotif of the film, offensive towards cunning imperialistic plans for slow genocide was highly intellectual to be brought to the mass (mainly illiterate) audiences (Sanjines 1979, 14-18). But power of the final sequence with brothers in arms pushed the masses towards expulsion of the Peace Corps from Bolivia after the initial showing of the film and created trouble for the existence of the Grupo Ukamau. It also emphasized rare but true capabilities of revolutionary cinema, which can set real-life events in motion and make a significant cultural turmoil. These stances and possibilities pushed Sanjines to a more populist/agitation approach in his subsequent films: El coraje del Pueblo (The Courage of the People) from 1971 and El Enemigo Principal (The Principal Enemy) from 1973 – both work as open anti-imperialistic manifestos in the aesthetic of Tercer Cine[10] . That meant that heavy intellectualism and surrealism of dream-like narration had to be abolished in favour of easily read, didactically powerful Indian cinema.

The revolutionary aims of Brazilian Cinema Novo worked on a different level by employing the politics of memory onto a social and cultural emancipation of the neglected Sertanejo identity (mainly peasants of mulatto, cafuzo, caboclos or sambaigo origin from the northeast wasteland) which became an emblem of a utopian National Project, with Sertao as a new utopian identity encompassing Brazilian hunger driven oppression. As postulated in Glauber Rocha's manifesto Eztetyka do fame (An Aesthetic of Hunger) in 1964, for Brazil, the politic of memory is a politic of violence and only when the coloniser is confronted with the very horror he produces over the colonised can he comprehend the culture he exploits (Rocha 1981, 524). This is an evident approach of Vidas Secas from 1963 (Barren Lives) by Nelson Perreira dos Santos and Rocha's Deus o Diabo na Terra do Sol from 1964 (Black God, White Devil). Both films insist on the re-enactment of the past by abolishing cultural traditions, religion and neo-colonialism and by postulating a new narrative of a hunger driven individual that becomes audible, becomes a revolutionary force[11] . Paradoxes of the decolonization and class struggle are best witnessed in the closing frames of Vidas secas where the Sertao duo, wife Sinha Vitoria and husband Fabiano are seen walking through the desert landscape of Bahia trying to figure out the future. Sinha Vitoria states that "one day we will become real people, we can't go on living like animals" and Fabiano replies: "No we cannot."[12] The camera then turns to encompass their desolate family faced with the wasteland in front of their path and closing with a long fade out in which characters become the landscape fortified by the textual closure of a Graciliano Ramos novel. The final scene resembles the opening scene making the story cyclical in narration and in symbolism; the change is possible but it also may never happen. Cyclical nothingness is also a kernel in Deus e o diabo na terra do sol but with one distinctive difference, the violence which becomes the vehicle of all social change. This rather classical postcolonial amplification of the Oppressed campesinos or ejidos is soon proven utopian and discarded in the author's subsequent films (mainly because of the military coup of 1964 in Brazil but also on the basis of the socio-ideologically divided racial policies which were too great to be hybridized into the new National revolutionary identity of the Sertanejos).

Instead, Rocha's sequel on the issue of the National Project Terra em Transe (Land in Anguish) from 1967 is easily the most ambivalent and radical rewriting of the ideology he built in An Aesthetic of Hunger and a landmark in revolutionary politics of memory. Terra em Transe develops

a cyclical utopian litany on issues of power, memory and identity transgression and in fact is a pessimistic antipode of postcolonial vision. As Lucia Nagib noticed, the film built and destroyed the utopian imagery of National myth based on cultural and political cohesiveness (3). The main character Paolo Martins, a poet and journalist is a post-utopian, post-political desperado in search of any stance of stable memory fixation in an allegorical world of lost/destroyed El Dorado which in Ismail Xavier's view stands for defeat of the New National Project (Xavier 144). Disillusionment that embarks on utopian self-fashioning of the better past is resolved again through violence and rewritten in subsequent films by Rocha as a real memory of the past that was/is/will be violent and can be fought only through violence[13] .

The opening sequence of the imagery of the ocean which reveals a utopian nostalgia for the lost El Dorado and melts into the political turmoil of various ideologies responsible for the destruction of the National Unity (which was in fact never realised) but also of the main corruptive agencies of modern Latin America: populism, oligarchy, religion, capitalism, underdevelopment. Paolo Martins, a disillusioned character disabled to serve any of these premises, is depicted in the final sequence dying, but not dead with a rifle pointing towards the Sun maybe to leave open a possible better recollection of the past. Throughout the film a short frame crescendo is emerging, depicting various ideologies of the colonial, de-colonial and postcolonial context, all seen as corruptive mechanisms through the eyes of Paolo Martins. The dynamics of the short-sharp-shock montage is overlapped by long frames of flashbacks and carnivalesque intermissions as to give an audience a chance to analyse or re-join the stances of the represented ideologies. Terra em Transe became a cornerstone for the future revival of utopian/nostalgia cinema in The New Brazilian Cinema of the 80s and 90s; Walter Salles made Terra Estrangeira (Foreign Land) in 1996 on the basis of postmodern disillusionment with the past and memory and Toni Venturi's radical Latitude Zero from 2000 completely abolishes archetypal masculine principles of revolutionary cinema with an installation of feminine principles of ideology and politics[14] .

Argentine cinema rarely ventured into the liminalities of racial/heterotopic ideology, designing the revolutionary aims through employment of the self-fashioned Third Way approach that destructed postcolonial and western driven theorizing as alien to new nationalism that emerged with Octavio Getino's manifesto Hacia un Tercer Cine in 1969 and through his collaboration with Fernando

Solanas on highly ideological documentary masterpiece La Hora de los Hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces) the year before. Getino's guerrilla group Cine Liberacion was organized in 1966 aiming to fulfil the revolutionary gap left by abolishment of near-left populism of peronism in favour of the socially ambivalent and bourgeois Union Civica Radical. La Hora is a voluminous multi-perspective re-enactment of the country's recent history with live testimonies over issues of neo-colonialism, violence and liberation. It applied almost a Brechtian amount of ideologemes in a process that Benjamin famously called "a laboratory of work rather than a finished work of art" (Wayne 122). As we have seen, dialectics and questionable objectivity (collective resurgence) can be applied to all that Solanas and Getino ever made but it is precisely this dialectical production of subjectivity[15] on the national/collective level that marks the revolutionary significance of their work. The film is a 260-minute multi-narrative encompassing Fanons de-colonization in the same frame with the questionable populism of peronistic renovation. The first part, titled Neocolonialismo y violencia brings together all voices of the decolonization of Latin America finishing in the last frame with the death face of Che Guevara prompting a need for a guerrilla uprising (which happened soon afterwards with the emergence of Montoneros and FAP). De-fragmenting the policies of the First Cinema with an imperialist-capitalist agenda and the Second Cinema of European bourgeoisie auterism, Argentine third cinema seeks to structure national liberation as a self-willed and self-governing ideology of the social populism of the collective (via Peron and ideology of justicialismo – justice for the oppressed middle class and labourers) (Getino 7). La Hora's massive ideological multi-focal narration and deliberate subjectivity sets it apart from similar revolutionary documentaries in the region; La Batalla de Chile (Battle for Chile) from 1975, a three-part study on Pinochet's military coup and its aftermath is an exemplary scientific account on politics of memory – director Patricio Guzman edited and finished the film in exile although the narrative lacked the heavy ideological subjectivity present in La Hora de los Hornos.

Finally, the Cuban revolutionary cinema constructed on the basis of truly won revolution reveals several exceptions of the socialistic dogma superimposed over the aesthetics and artistic production that exiled many important Cuban scholars and artisans over to the USA. Julio García Espinosa's manifesto Por un Cine Imperfecto (For an Imperfect Cinema) called for a committed art that will do away with the elite once and for all (Espinosa 66). This is uniquely witnessed in

Memorias del Subdesarollo (Memories of Underdevelopment) directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea in 1968, a story of a bohemian intellectual Sergio Carmona that cannot cope with the new reality of socialistic Cuba. Michael Chanan wrote: “it is an exercise in the fragmentation and dissociation of imagery and representation, as the pre-revolutionary world is dismembered while the cultural shapes of the new have not yet emerged” (289). This is an ambivalent and highly philosophical film that reorganized the hierarchy of society: the western type intellectual is represented as the underdeveloped since he cannot cope with the ideology of class liberation and the former oppressed underdeveloped are seen as the true children of the revolution. Alea employed a rare example of narrator (Sergio) as the subject/object of the film that is refused a chance to be familiarized as a hero in a positive way, giving the audience an ideological riddle that has to be solved in the reception (Testimonios y documentalumentos 208-209). Humberto Solas, another auteur filmmaker opted for a different kind of representation of politics of memory with his Lucia from 1968, which can be seen as an antipode of Alea’s film. Lucia is a tripartite story tracking the fortunes of three women named Lucia (a criollo aristocrat, a bourgeoisie and a rural peasant) in different times of the Cuban past: colonial, neo-colonial and socialist (Kovacks 4). The treatment of cathartic change of identity is done deliberately through feminine emancipation from class and through advocacy of proletarian liberation from capitalist predestination of personal freedoms (Biskind 2).

Memory that has been reshaped, re-enacted and revised to construct a National Project in most revolutionary cinema of Latin America is being disseminated in Lucia as a memory of crisis and undisclosed identity transformation that echoes in most of the postmodern cinema of Latin America that abolished the National Project and utopian politics of the past for a broad universalism of themes concerning individual and social identity issues. Recently, however, a number of important films merged a traditional preoccupation concerning the politics of memory with personal trauma and identity struggle. Perhaps most curious is La Teta Asustada (The Milk of Sorrow, 2009) directed by Peruvian Claudia Llosa that invokes Yawar Mallku and oppression of the indigenous with the theme of persistence of colonial/neo-colonial evil that has been symbolically shown as an genetic feature above culture and everyday politics. The Third way approach has been largely dismantled as an important theoretical framework of postmodern Latin American cinema but

paradoxically the issues debated and postulated in most manifestos of revolutionary cinema have yet to be dissolved in culture, society, politics and ideology.

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[1] For an accomplish study on utopian aspects of national cinema cf. Nagib, Lucia. Brazil on Screen-Cinema Novo-New Cinema-Utopia. London: Tauris 2007.

[2] Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations. London: Pimlico, 1999

[3] Fanon, Frantz. The Wretched of the Earth.New York: Grove Press, 2007

[4] Mestizaje – mixture, tolerance of different races and ethnicities; ideology of Mexican and Central American elites during the 20th century as a means of quasi-freedoms given to the oppressed; heavily criticized by most advocates of indigenismo

[5] Reinaga, Fausto. La revolución India. La Paz: Ediciones PIB, 1969

[6] Indianismo – an ideology of Indian supremacy in a National Indian State advocated mainly by Reinaga in Peru and by EZLN in Mexico; Indigenismo – an ideology based on reintegration and manifestation of pre-Colombian and colonial paradigms mainly driven by Jose Vasconcelos cultural programme in Mexico and in the Inca revival in philosophy of Peruvian Jose Mariategui.

[7] Compare memoricide aspects of cinema manifestos of Latin America

[8] MNR – Movimiento nacional revolucionario – a mass revolutionary party led by Victor Paz Estenssoro

[9] Brecht, Bertolt. Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964

[10] Sanjines, Jorge. Mestizaje Upside-down: Aesthetic Politics in Modern Bolivia. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004

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[12] Subtitles taken from Vidas Secas, DVD, 2002

[13] Fanon's negro revolution is witnessed in Carlos Diegues Ganga Zumba in 1963, a story of Quilombo dos Palmares – a fugitive community of escaped negro slaves that became a force in the 17th century Bahia region

[14] Mulvey, Laura. 'The Hole and the Zero: Godard's Visions of Femininity' in Mulvey, Laura. Fetishism and Curiosity. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press/BFI, 1996.

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