

MEMÓRIA EM RIZOMA: CINEMA BRASILEIRO E UMA CERTA IDEIA DE NORDESTE

MEMORY IN RHIZOME: BRAZILIAN CINEMA AND A CERTAIN IDEA OF NORTHEAST

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Abstract

The article deals with the relations between cinema and particular notions about Northeastern Brazil, which build representations about this region. The construction of memory is understood here within a rhizomatic logic, based on Deleuze and Guattari (1995). It seeks to draw clues about this game of representations, which both affirms the power of diversity of the Northeast and denies and imposes an imaginary fixity based on strategies of stereotypy.

Keywords: V!15; Memory; Cinema; Identity.

Cinema is a cultural production that establishes social discourses, in a continuous dialogue with the modes of sociability. Memory is constructed in a rhizomatic sense: the production of knowledge occurs at the same time, from several points and under the influence of different observations and conceptualizations. In essence, a rhizomatic structure is open, receptive to various influences, flexible and unstable, but at the same time, it acts with solidity lines that determine relatively stable territories. "There are no points or positions in a rhizome as they are in a structure, in a tree, in a root. There are only rows" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1995, p.24, our translation).

It is, therefore, a particular idea of the Northeast that founds the territoriality on which cinema operates and speaks, demarcated by geographical boundaries, but which, as we have seen, also causes "escape lines" (one of the manifestations of the rhizome), systematically constructing and deconstructing such boundaries. "Every rhizome comprises lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, meaningful, attributed, etc. But it also comprises lines of deterritorialization, by which it runs away without stopping" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1995, p.25, our translation).

Cinema has built a memory about the Northeast, refluxing ideas about this space, feeding, consequently, a sense of Nation that has in the Northeast region a dear symbolism: for some, expression of national backwardness; for others, a portrait of "true Brazil".

In such perspective, a film, as a collective work, is constituted as a social document, "cultural text/discourse" (Carretero, 1996), elaborated from the propositions and intentions of determined cultures and ideologies. Thus, in analyzing film production, considering its forms of production, argument, and context of achievement, it becomes possible to understand the historical period in which it was produced, and the ways this memory is translated.

At first, several documentaries reported a miserable Northeast, followed by fictions that invested in a similar tone. Stereotyping (Lobo, 2006) is a process in which there is the production of a matrix which can originate from sources such as literature, essays, folklore or pop music. This matrix, usually applied outside the context in which it was generated,

begins then to be reproduced in series. We have thus the simplification of its peculiarities, facilitating its quick consumption. And, in the end, there is a generalization.

What occurs in the cinema concerning this region is the extension of a broader historical process. Such imagery appropriations of the Northeast always sought to appease diversity signals to, instead, propose an unequivocal tone around the northeastern symbolism. The reasons - social, historical and mainly economic - remain in debate, and have in Durval Muniz Albuquerque's book "*A invenção do Nordeste*" [The invention of the Northeast] (1996), a fundamental work to understand this question. According to this Historian, this whole process is related to a regional affirmation of sectors of the dominant classes, interested in political and economic domination through the construction of nationalist ideology.

Albuquerque (1996) explains that, in 1877, a severe drought ravaged northeastern Brazilian states, leading the region to economic decline. This fact was capitalized by the states of the "South" and marks the beginning of a discursive production about the Northeast as a poor area with no prospect of economic prosperity. Albuquerque explains that, from then on, we can see the construction of a discourse that draws the "North" as the ingrained tradition, sugar, and economic decay, in contrast to the "South" of the prosperous coffee culture, the dynamism, and modernity. "Space lost its natural, geographical dimension, to become a historical, artificial, man-made dimension" (Albuquerque, 1996, p.47, our translation).

The region was neglected in the economic transactions, since the focus was on the South, in those years, due to the success of the coffee activity, and came to be determined as a particular part of the nation under construction. This discourse, about the Northeast as picturesque and tragic in its physical and cultural space, was further strengthened by the calamity situations that the region experienced when it was affected by periods of drought and economic abandonment. The image of the poorest, peculiar part of Brazil, according to the author, was propagated in newspaper pages, literary works, and artistic achievements, also reaching the cinema.

Throughout history, this discursive construction will lead to the constitution of a stereotyped image of the Northeast and Northeastern people. This process develops, first, in other arts - with special emphasis on literature - but gains, in the cinema and later, in television, fundamental supports for its dissemination.

'The Northeast will be imagined as the opposite pole, the reservation of nationality for its opposition to cosmopolitanism, its connection to the rural world, which, as we know - and the cinema will repeat it incessantly, according to the German romanticism matrix -, associates its origins with the roots, the earth and the agrarian world' (Schwarzman, 2010, p.187, our translation).

Also according to Schwarzman, the representation of the Northeast by the cinema will take two sides: the sensational and the tragic. Until the third decade of the twentieth century, there is a predominance of documentaries on the northeastern scene. Aba Films produces a number of documentaries, such as "*A festa de Iracema*" [The Feast of Iracema] (1926), "*A inauguração dos filtros no açude do Acarape do Meio para abastecimento d'água em Fortaleza*" [The inauguration of the filters at the Acarape do Meio dam for water supply in Fortaleza] (1927), both by Adhemar Albuquerque, and the most famous, "*Lampeão*" (1937), by Benjamin Abraham.

In the decades when domestic production expands, the images projected on the region will emphasize even more strongly drought and *cangaço* [banditry], in a series of works that showed the Northeast as a territory of social and environmental decay. Some of these films are considered classics of Brazilian cinema, like "*O cangaceiro*" (1953), by Lima Barreto, which defined the region from stigmas of violence, and gave support to an extensive body of work that, until the most recent years, emphasized the area as wild, due to *cangaço* and drought.

These forms of stereotyping (Lobo, 2006), as defined earlier, will manifest not only to the territory of the region and its social problems. They occur with similar recurrence through representations of the Northeastern man, seen as the traditional *sertanejo* [a person from the hinterland] and wild *cangaceiro* [bandit]. But also, as the migrant chased by the poverty of his native land, as in "*O amuleto de Ogum*" [The amulet of Ogum] (1974), by Nelson Pereira dos Santos, "*As aventuras de um Paraíba*" [The adventures of a Paraíba] (1983), by Marco Antônio Altberg, and "*O baiano fantasma*" [The Bahian phantom] (1984), by Denoy de Oliveira. The sensual and bohemian Bahian guy from adaptations of Jorge Amado works, between 1970 and 1980, as in "*Dona Flor and her two husbands*" (1976) and "*Gabriela*" (1983), by Bruno Barreto. Or, the figure of laughable accent and habits, explored in "*O auto da compadecida*" [The auto of the compassionate one] (2000) and "*Lisbela e o prisioneiro*" [Lisbela and the prisoner] (2002), by Guel Arraes. These representations operate in the naturalization of irrationality, traditionalism, poverty, sensuality, and irreverence as typical of those coming from the Northeast.

These stereotyped representations of the region, both geographically and socially, as well as concerning the ways of being and living of its inhabitants, were repeated in several cinematographic genres throughout the history of the seventh art in Brazil, and undoubtedly formulated for the country an archaic Northeast, embedded in patriarchal values and precarious atavistic economic conditions. A portrait that was already noticed in literary works, paintings and songs, as Albuquerque (1996) analyzes. It gained voice and form from moving images that not only projected what was already being propagated in the works of Raquel de Queiroz and songs by Luiz Gonzaga, for example, but also created new imagery speeches about this part of Brazil.

In this vast number of works on the Northeast, escape lines were obviously also drawn. However, it is essential to understand the difference that Deleuze and Guattari (1995) thought brings to a debate like this.

'There is a rupture in the rhizome every time segmental lines explode in an escape line, but the escape line is part of the rhizome. These lines do not stop referring to each other. That is why we can not count on a dualism or dichotomy, not

even in the rudimentary form of good and evil. A rupture is made, an escape line is drawn, but there is always the risk of rediscovering in it organizations that restructure the whole, formations that give power back to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject - everything you want, from Oedipal resurgences to fascist concretions' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1995, p.26, our translation)

In this sense, it is possible to point out experiences from a cinema that speaks of "other Northeasters". But the relationship between the productions already quoted and those listed below is rhizomatic - there are always traces of antecedent lines in what was sought to constitute as effectively new, as the new one will refer to what comes next, and will have, in principle, the transparent proposal to reaffirm the old stereotypy.

These are films such as Jota Soares's "*A filha do advogado*" [The lawyer's daughter] (1926), a project of the Recife Cycle, held between 1923 and 1931, when young people from the capital of Pernambuco made several feature films that portrayed more urban aspects of the city. There are the achievements which presented themselves as innovative aesthetic proposals, offering a reflexive stance on the country. See the productions of Glauber Rocha, Nelson Pereira dos Santos and Ruy Guerra in the first phase of Cinema Novo. Other examples are found in "*Cabra marcado para morrer*" [The guy marked for dying] (1984), by Eduardo Coutinho, and "*Baile perfumado*" [Scented ball] (1996), by Lírio Ferreira and Paulo Caldas. In these works, although the Northeast is still associated with elements such as *cangaço*, religiosity, and drought, there is a less naturalistic and more critical approach to these elements and their manifestation.

In the years following the Resumption of Brazilian Cinema - the Post-resumption, starting in 2003 - new ways of approaching the region will emerge. For example, many films about the Northeast begins to appear, which, unlike the works analyzed so far, approach the region from the urban space, within small and large cities' scenery. These accomplishments are undertaken by Northeastern filmmakers, mostly from Pernambuco, and have their culmination with the national and international repercussions of "Neighbouring sounds" (2012) and "Aquarius" (2016), both by Kleber Mendonça Filho. These films move the Northeast from the specific spatiality of the *sertão* [the hinterland] to insert it in environments of cosmopolitan identification, the periphery, and the big city.

These works present approaches that seek to deepen a critical discussion about the region, as in Cinema Novo's films, which emphasized the problems faced by the Northeast since it ceased to be the country's leading economic center in the late nineteenth century. However, they were not only portrayed as the base-stage for the development of the narrated story, as in many western-influenced *cangaço* films. There was an aesthetic investment, based on the inspiration of modern cinema via Italian neorealism and *nouvelle vague*, and much of what these two movements came to generate.

They also sought to integrate the Northeast to elements of modernity, as in "*Baile perfumado*" [Scented ball]. In this film, the coast is highlighted, along with a greener backland, which is not presented as spatial isolation but is integrated with symbols of the bourgeoisie, and Lampião's vanity is strongly linked to access to these elements considered bourgeois:

'There is no longer *sertão* as a closed cosmos, place of isolation. Everything circulates, inserts itself in exchange circuits. *Sertão* and littoral reveal their connections marked by varied products, from the perfume to the bottle of whiskey in the *cangaceiro* camp, from Lampião and Maria Bonita in the dark cinema hall of the city to the filmmaker who films the *cangaceiros* in the hinterland' (Xavier, 2006, p.57, our translation).

Given this history and the survey we have been able to conduct so far, it is possible to notice that the recent film production points to a different picture of this context of stereotypy. Based on a common territoriality, these works found new representations of the Northeast, creating, as would define Deleuze and Guattari (1995), lines of escape.

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