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The Politics of Third Cinema

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The concept of Third Cinema was begun in Latin America in the 1960's by two Argentine filmmakers, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino. According to Solanas and Getino, Third Cinema is concerned with making political films. This is in contrast to both 'First Cinema', which describes the type of films made by Hollywood with the aim of making a financial profit; and Second Cinema, which refers to so-called 'Art Cinema', where the aim is to depict the director's vision of the world. Third Cinema is a collaborative process and its aim is to instigate political revolution. This paper explains the history of Third Cinema and examines whether the concept still has relevancy in the present.

Keywords : Third Cinema, national cinema, nationalism, audiences

1 INTRODUCTION

Any discussion of Third Cinema, its revolutionary appeal, and its relation to national cinema, needs to begin by examining each of these concepts and how they interact with each other. Third Cinema is not necessarily synonymous with 'Third World'; 'revolutionary' can be applied to a film's content, its aesthetics, or its effect on audiences; while the notion of 'national cinema' eludes easy definition, differing quite considerably depending on which side of the film camera you focus – depicted content or production. One also has to consider whether 'Third Cinema', a concept almost four decades old, and its emphasis on the revolutionary potential of film, may find itself, in both theory and practice, an anachronistic concept in light of current technologies and the uses they are put to. In addition, there is the thorny issue of media audiences and media effects. Who are the intended audiences of Third Cinema? Do different audiences, given the political, cultural, social and geographic specificity of these films, see the same film? And, relatedly, what are the effects on these differing audiences? Are they in keeping with the filmmakers' intentions or otherwise? This leads to the final point of debate, the continuing divide between practice and praxis. Akin to the continuing debate that surrounds media and development, one also has to consider the normative assumptions developed principally by First World theorists of Third Cinema, and the practices of both filmmakers and audiences in the Third World.

2 THIRD CINEMA

Whereas Third World cinema can be constituted as a geographically based concept that includes both commercially driven filmmaking and the more marginalized works of individual auteurs, Third Cinema is a more prescriptive concept that extends beyond national borders. According to Benamou, it adopts an independent, if not outright oppositional stance, towards commercial genre and auteurist cinemas emanating from the Western World, instead recognizing and utilizing "the inherent power of cinema, as a modern medium of communication, to effect sociopolitical transformation within nations and across continents" (2007). The avowed aim of Third Cinema is not only to enlighten audiences to their sociopolitical reality, but also to engage and provoke them into confronting this reality with a view to changing it. The term 'Third Cinema' originally appeared in a manifesto written by two Argentinean filmmakers, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, entitled 'Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation for the Third World'. The publication of the manifesto followed the release of *La Hora de los Hornos* (1968), a documentary that critically examined the economic, social and political situation of the masses in Argentina at that time. According to their manifesto, Solanas and Getino conceived of Third Cinema in opposition to what they termed 'First Cinema', represented by industrial scale, commercial film making, be it originating in Hollywood or Bollywood. 'Second Cinema' was similarly geographically non-specific, its

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main frame of reference being auteur or art cinema “which, although oftentimes politically reformist in theme, is incapable of achieving any kind of profound political change” (Chanan 1997:745). Third Cinema by contrast, is a call to arms, “a gun (the projector) that can shoot twenty times per second” (Solanas and Getino, 1973), in the struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism. Solanas and Getino insist on intervention “...revolutionary cinema is not fundamentally one which illustrates, documents or passively establishes a situation: rather it attempts to intervene in the situation as an element providing thrust or rectification. It is not simply testimonial cinema nor cinema of communication, but above all action cinema” (1973). This passionate call to action though became diluted over the years as subsequent writers redefined Third Cinema to “encompass all films with social and political purpose” (Gabriel, 1982:121). To this Bakari adds that Third Cinema should be “committed to the development of a new and appropriate film language (aesthetic)” (1996:23). Willemen has identified filmmakers as diverse as Angelopolos, Chahine, Kaige, Ghatik and Gitai as practitioners of Third Cinema (Willemen, 1989), but only for their films, not, as Buchsbaum notes, “for their active political work for specific organizations” (2001:154). What Buchsbaum is criticizing here is the gradual evanescence of the original notion of Third Cinema as a tool for political purposes rather than as an end in itself. Solanas and Getino, in subsequent commentaries on their manifesto, repeatedly stressed the ‘instrumentalization’ of filmmaking; “Filmmakers bring their expertise to the militant organization, but their work acquires value only as it advances the organization’s strategy. The film itself has no intrinsic value” (Buchsbaum 2001:158). Thus, judging a film on its efficiency as an instrument of political activism inherently alters the status of the film itself, and accords an extremely functional role to aesthetics. Although writers such as Gabriel (1982), Ramsay (1988), Stam and Spence (1983) and Bakari (1996) define Third Cinema in terms of both form and context – “third cinema films make revolution on the ideological level with a new film style” (Ramsay, 1988:266) – Solanas and Getino themselves did not impose any restrictions on what form such films should take, “What defines the revolutionary act in film is not the form in which it is expressed, but the transformative role that it reaches in a specific circumstance in a strategy of liberation” (Buchsbaum, 2001:160). Context rather than content dictates whether this is so. Thus, a film like Ousmane Sembene’s *Xala* (1975) may be considered revolutionary in Senegal but bewilder audiences in Argentina. To adequately determine whether a film can achieve the aforementioned ‘transformative role’, one must therefore examine the relationship between the film and the spectator, not just the film text in isolation. Third Cinema as a means of instigating revolutionary change is constrained in practice by the specific

contexts in which that change is supposed to take place.

3 NATIONAL CINEMA

Following from this then is the argument that if the effective intentions of the filmmakers are determined by the audience’s tacit recognition of the film’s political aims within their own specific, socially constituted context, then Third Cinema could be described as a form of nationalist cinema. ‘Nationalist’ though not as it is traditionally defined in geo-political terms, but rather in the sense ascribed to it by Anderson (2006) as an ‘imagined community’, “a cultural artifact constituted on the undefined but shared notion of what constitutes ‘our culture’, ‘our country’” (2006:7). In this view of nationalist cinema, due consideration is given to “the responses of audiences and how they make sense of and use the films they watch” (Bakari, 1996:13). Indeed, despite King’s description of it as “a-historical” (1996:21), Third Cinema exhibits a distinct historical progression in that in the newly emancipated post-colonial nations, it was often the case that ‘revolutionary cinema’ was initially a state-sponsored movement (Rajadhyaksha, 2000). Post independence these fledgling cinema industries were constituted through direct state intervention and were intended to establish indigenous film infrastructure in the context of political independence. “This can be seen in Cinema Novo’s commitment to GEICINE and subsequently Embrafilme, the Brazilian state organization for funding cinema; the Cuban cinema and ICAIC; the FELPACI in Africa; the NFDC in India; the Sri Lankan State Film Corporation; the Royal Nepal Film Corporation and a host of others” (Ragadhyaksha, 2000:31).

The development of these state organizations could be ascribed to two main impetuses. The first was that in establishing a nation state as a distinct entity, there was a need to emphasize the similarity of its members while simultaneously differentiating themselves from non-members. Culture is one such means of emphasis (Das and Harindranath, 1996) and film, in its role “in conjuring up the imagined community among both the literate and illiterate strata of society” (Burton-Carvajal, 2000:194), gave an immediate and accessible validation to the national projects. Film, in its convergence of moving image and sound, “became the most important register of popular culture, in part through its ability to selectively hegemonize social types, costumes, customs, landscapes and eventually speech patterns and musical traditions into composites that came to symbolize both the national and the popular” (Burton-Carvajal, 2000:195).

Yet, one should also be aware that this ‘hegemonization’ of culture in the creation of a ‘national community’ necessitated an undue emphasis on the common at the expense of the particular. The homogenization inherent in a national cinema that was the “product of national industries, [as] told in national languages and referring to a dense cluster of national

references, political, historical and cultural” (King, 1996:5), was determinedly biased against minorities. Dissenting local narratives, be they political, ethnic or religiously based, were ignored in favor of a cinema that privileged “a uniform and artificial mantle of similarity” (Das and Harindranath, 1996:11), while reducing, or indeed ignoring, the significance of mutual differences amongst citizens.

Cinema as a ‘national industry’ (King 1996:5) is also an explanation for the second impetus behind the creation of state sponsored film organizations. The economic cost of producing, distributing and exhibiting domestic films was beyond the ability of private producers and necessitated the use of public funding. The effect of this though was to both privilege the commercial over the political, and enable the state to exert considerable control over content through both overt and covert censorship (Dissanayake, 2000:145). Similarly, the capital intensive nature of film production in many cases dictated that funds were sourced through joint ventures with foreign producers such as African films and the French Ministry of Corporation (Bakari, 1996:18); and revenues were increased by selling the films to a wider, international audience. Such steps brought with them their own set of problems in that, as McArthur perceptively notes, “the more your films are consciously aimed at the international market, the more their conditions of intelligibility will be bound up with regressive discourses about your own culture” (1994:118). The distribution of films from the Third World on the international film circuit invariably leads to a focus on narrative and aesthetics at the expense of critically examining and engaging with the specific cultural and political milieu in which they are grounded.

4 PRAXIS AND PRACTICE

Ukadike, in examining the works of African filmmakers such as Ousmane Sembene, Med Hondo, Souleymane Cisse, Haile Gerima, Safi Faye and Sarah Maldora, ascribes to them an “ideology of interrogative narrative patterns...appropriating and subverting ‘dominant’ conventions, blending them with their own cultural codes (oral narrative art) to create a novel aesthetic formula” (2000:187). This he calls the “aesthetics of decolonization” and equates it with the pioneering period of the 1960’s and 70’s in African cinema, which he describes as “didactic and unabashedly political and denunciative” (Ukadike, 2000:187).

What Ukadike’s comments highlight is the tendency among praxis theorists to paint compelling arguments with very broad-brush strokes whilst ignoring the historical specificity of the films they examine, what King calls “the limits of the possible within each country” (1996:21). Similarly, the post-colonial ideology of national independence, the “attempt to map a redemptive future within the modern world” (Bakari, 1996:33), assumes an edificial form, unchanging down

through the years. It is easier, as the example of Ukadike highlights, to formulate upon the influences and styles evident in African cinema, but much harder to place them within the narrative framework of the political positions the films take. There is a seemingly subconscious tendency towards reductionism in such writings, of seeking a cultural essence, be it ‘griot’ or the oral tradition in African cinema; the allegorized expressionism of Brazilian Tropicalismo (Burton-Carrajal, 2000); the Turkish national cinema movement use of Islamic mysticism (Kaplan, 1997); and the Dangdut musical in Indonesian cinema (Hanan, 1997). Discussions of the revolutionary role of national cinema in decolonialised countries tend to focus on the period from the early 1960’s to the mid 1970’s when cinema was at the vanguard of cultural nationalism. The epoch that gave us *Hour of the Furnaces* (Argentina 1968), *Soleil 0* (Mauritania 1967), *Xala* (Senegal, 1974), *Interview* (India, 1970) and *Manila in the Claws of Neon Signs* (Philippines, 1975), also gave rise to a rather entrenched canon of nationalist cinema which have, unlike the vast majority of domestically produced films, found their way onto the screens and into the consciousnesses of western audiences.

5 AUDIENCES

This does then raise the question of who the intended audiences for these films are. The Mali director Abderrahmane Sissako made the point that his most recent film *Bamako* (2007) was shown in 70 theatres throughout France, but only in 3 in his native Mali and he had doubts as to whether it would be screened widely in the rest of Africa (Sight and Sound, 2007: 31). As Haynes notes “the failure of national and Pan-African solutions to the intractable problems of film production and distribution meant an enforced recognition of the necessity of continued co-production with European funding agencies” (2002:646). Similarly, Burton-Carrajal contrasts the early period of Latin America nationalist cinema which was primarily produced and distributed to domestic audiences, with the contemporary context where “films now circulate as part of an international art cinema that is relatively indifferent to national specificity and targets privileged rather than popular audiences” (2000:195).

There is also the related issue of the dissonance between the ‘means’ and ‘ends’ of Third Cinema, between the predominantly educated, middle class filmmakers and their intended working class audience. The ‘political message’ of their films can be criticized for flowing in only one direction, “from the lettered to the unschooled” (Benamou, 2007). Nor is there any clear indication of how such films are received. Usage of terms like ‘African Cinema’, ‘Latin American Cinema’ and even ‘Third Cinema’ are as much restrictive as descriptive labels. Advances in technology are contributing to an ongoing and accelerating shift in the ‘cinema experience’ from the public arena to the home. The spectacular growth of

video filmmaking in Africa (Haynes, 2002) and cheap B-movies in Mexico (King, 1996), with their attendant commitment to commercial rather than ideological principles, continues to exert pressure on traditional notions of cinema. In addition, the ever-broadening reach of television, both cable and satellite, is constantly encroaching upon the cultural context in which hitherto cinema had predominated. Ukadike, in highlighting the case of the South African satellite television network MNET's dominance across the continent, describes it as "the worst perpetrator of cultural colonialism inside Africa" (2000:186). In Mexico the majority of the population tune into the hugely successful telenovelas while cinema finds itself in an increasingly "parlous state" (King, 1996:26). The ongoing expansion of television, video and increasingly the internet, have undermined cinema's claims to be an integral part of the national project, with a corresponding decline in the collective use of it as a public space for depicting and debating national identity. "Until the early 1980's the cinema was at the forefront of post-colonial theory but now has virtually disappeared from recent debates on post-coloniality" (Rajadhyaksha 2000:30).

Further undermining the historical association between Third and national cinema are the varied effects of globalization. Previously held notions of national cinema conforming to national boundaries are complicated by the ongoing migration of talent, international co-productions, exile and diasporic film production. *Banbaro* for instance, was a jointly funded venture between France, Mali and the USA. On the other side of the screen, viewers are increasingly socialized into accepting consumerism and the neo-liberal economic ideology underpinning it, as the benchmark for national development. Haynes highlights how the video film boom in Nigeria and Ghana is based on depictions of soap-opera life in "urban nouveau-riche mansions...[paying] avid attention to prestigious brands of automobiles" (2002:647). Cultural identity is increasingly being replaced by consumer identity.

6 CONCLUSION

There are, however, some grounds for optimism. This realignment of Third Cinema away from the national to the global may be, in some ways, regarded as a positive development. Third Cinema, as Solanas and Getino conceived of it, is premised on the call to political action it provokes in the film's audience. Should the audience primarily consist of cineastes in the developed world does not dilute this premise if the film is instrumental in bringing about political change. The change may not be revolutionary, it seldom is, but the accumulative effect on the audience and from them, its resonance into wider society, can be noticeably effective. A good example of this was the French film *Indigenes* (2006) which tells the story of those Algerians who fought for the French army in the

Second World War. Upon seeing it, the then French President Chirac ordered that pensions to the former Algerian servicemen should be henceforth equivalent to that paid to French ex-servicemen (Guardian, 2007). Films such as *In this World* (2004), *Maria Full of Grace* (2004), the *Road to Guantanamo* (2005), *Paradise Now* (2005), and *Persepolis* (2007) are ostensibly first world productions but take as their theme and politics avowedly Third World concerns. Their perspective is less to do with post-colonial cultural and national self-determination, and much more to do with charting the inequalities of the human condition.

In the era of globalization, the claims for the importance of regional specificity in film, of 'Latin American Cinema' or 'Pan-African Cinema', increasingly seem archaic. "The precondition for Third Cinema – the worldwide uprising of the masses – sounds like a rhetorical anachronism, soggy with Marxist internationalism" (Buchsbbaum, 2001:161). Likewise, in this day and age of international media conglomerates, the post-colonial national cinema projects will probably never return. Whether Third Cinema can survive their demise remains to be seen, but if we are less strict in our definition, then one can see its continuing revolutionary influence in forms and locations as varied as the video messages of the Zapata's in Mexico, or the internet documentaries of Hamas in Palestine. These developments suggest that the central tenets of Third Cinema are still very much alive as objects of renewed analysis and debate.

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サードシネマの政治

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概要

サードシネマは、1960年代のラテンアメリカで、二人のアルゼンチン人映画製作者 Fernando Solanas と Octavio Getino によって始まった。Solanas と Getino によれば、サードシネマというのは画期的な政治映画である。ファーストシネマはハリウッドで製作された映画を示し、その映画の描写目的は利益を挙げることである。セカンドシネマはヨーロッパの芸術映画であり、その描写目的は監督の心象を表すことである。サードシネマは政治的映画であり、それは共同制作による映画で、描写目的は‘革命’である。この論文はサードシネマの歴史を説明し、この政治的映画がいかにも実際の価値を今日にいたるまで持ち続けているのかを示すものである。

キーワード：サードシネマ、国内映画、ナショナリズム、観客