

African cinema and aesthetic education: a mythohermeneutic study of the film *Chikwembo*

ARTICLE

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to investigate the relationship between African cinema and aesthetic education through a mythohermeneutic study of the Mozambican film *Chikwembo*, by Julio Silva. Although the approach can be established using Western analytical canons, an African view is proposed on how art and aesthetics are inextricably linked to everyday life and culture, in an ethical dimension, i.e. one that involves ways of life. The results point to the presence of a pedagogical dimension in black cinema, based on the way it circulates African culture through art and, more specifically, through cinema.

Keywords: African Cinema. Aesthetic Education. Cinema and Educatio.

Cinema africano e educação estética: Um estudo mito-hermenêutico do filme *Chikwembo*

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo investigar a relação entre o cinema africano e a educação estética através de um estudo mito-hermenêutico do filme moçambicano *Chikwembo*, realizado por Julio Silva. Embora a abordagem possa ser estabelecida a partir de cânones analíticos ocidentais, propõe-se uma perspectiva africana de como a arte e a estética estão inseparavelmente relacionadas com a vida quotidiana e a cultura, numa dimensão ética que envolve modos de vida. Os resultados indicam a presença de uma dimensão pedagógica do cinema negro, que se baseia no modo como a cultura africana circula através da arte e, mais especificamente, do cinema.

Palavras-chave: Cinema Africano, Educação Estética, Cinema e Educação.

"You can only subvert reality, in the movies or elsewhere,
if you first accept everything that exists,
simply because it exists."

Eduardo Coutinho

1 Introduction

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Over the last two decades, studies on cinema and education have benefited from a notable increase in research, which finds different ways of articulating the two terms in question. Thus, there are approaches that consider cinema to be a didactic resource to be used in the classroom (NAPOLITANO, 2003), or sociological knowledge (DUARTE, 2002), or even a language to be produced and practiced at school (BERGALA, 2008; FRESQUET, 2013); other perspectives treat cinema as a production of meanings that replaces, limits, includes and excludes realities (FABRIS, 2008), or as a pedagogy of the gaze that reworks relevant themes for dialog and changing perspectives (MARCELLO; FISCHER, 2011), or even as a possibility of affirming minorities, especially those of African descent, through black cinema (PRUDENTE, 2021), thus exerting a pedagogical pressure that contributes to the circulation of certain imaginaries (ALMEIDA, 2017), in short, as discourses that are more or less opaque, more or less transparent, that make people think (XAVIER, 2008).

These studies show that cinema should not be understood from a reductionist perspective, as a didactic complement or illustration of content, since it has the potential to carry out an educational process in a broader sense, less concerned with teaching certain content and more attentive to the notion of culture, since every formative process involves participation in certain cultures. What can be observed, therefore, is an aesthetic dimension, in which art forms and other cultural manifestations are imbued with an ethic, through which cultural appropriation contributes to updating ways of life, in other words, to the formation of an ethos, not just for individuals, but for groups.

In view of this broader dimension of education, which involves an aesthetic and ethical dimension, we are interested in thinking about this dimension from the perspective of African cinema. And here we must avoid the misconception of generalizing an immense continent. It would be more appropriate to use the expression *African cinemas*, in reference to and recognition of the multiple peoples and complexity of the nations in question. Nowadays, we are seeking to broaden our understanding of non-Euro-American peoples,

whether through decolonial approaches or through the contributions of anthropology, ethnology and linguistics.

It is not a question, however, of confusing the quest to understand the other with the imposition of an acceptance of the different, in the name of tolerance or any other principle, but of recognizing that, beyond ethnic ancestry, there are cultural traits that point, even with the contingent transformations imposed by history, to the permanence of invariants among peoples, such as the sharing of the idea of god (or its absence), regardless of the religion instituted; the idea of freedom, regardless of legislation; the human-nature relationship, whether sustainable or predatory; the notion of family; aesthetic cultivation, as well as the sharing of what we can call education, understood as a formative process through which new generations are inserted into culture.

In the case of artistic manifestations, there is a huge challenge in terms of their conceptualization. Distinguishing what is art from what is not involves a debate that involves cultural history, processes of institutionalization of art (its rules), forms that are more or less accepted or rejected, debates between artists, critics, curators, in short, a whole range of variables that involve complex interests and often involve discrimination and prejudice against certain groups or ways of life. The situation is aggravated when it comes to evaluating the artistic production of other peoples, with their own peculiarities. Thus, the criteria that validate artistic manifestations and, above all, hierarchize their values bring with them a historical-cultural perspective that should not be neglected, especially when appreciating Amerindian arts, for example, or even African arts, which most of the time appear inseparable from everyday life.

To avoid this risk, it is important to see the importance of the aesthetic experience regardless of the values attributed to cultural goods. As Maturana (2001, p. 154) puts it, "we live in experience, in the praxis of living as human beings in the flow of being living systems in language, as something that happens in us and to us as we speak". Thus, experience doesn't happen through the event, but through the way we live it in language.

Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish that, although experiences are different, there is an aesthetic dimension to these experiences that is universal. In this way, although

it is not possible to standardize the ways of life and experiences of the peoples of Antiquity in relation to their contemporaries, or even of the Greeks in relation to Africans, it can be seen that the aesthetic experience continues to be significant in the processes of shaping humanity, including in its everyday dimension, as French sociologist Michel Maffesoli (2007, p. 187) points out:

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Offering vision concerns all creation in everyday life. This is not a subculture that can be measured according to the benchmark of bourgeois good taste, but has an intrinsic quality. Photography, as mass art, painting clubs, literary workshops, all forms of kitsch, from the well made of tires to garden dwarfs, all bear witness to a search for happiness through form.

The experience is therefore not in the exceptional, but in what is most banal and repetitive, that is, in everyday life.

In all sectors, experience is the key word for explaining the relationship that each person establishes with the group, nature and life in general. Experience that ignores rational scruples, resting essentially on the nebulous aspect of affection, emotion, attunement with the other (MAFFESOLI, 2007, p. 203)..

The expansion of the field of art and aesthetics to ever wider sectors of society undermined the modern principle of an art focused on the new: "Artistic practice is deterritorialized, for better or for worse; that is, for the exercise of singularities or for the realization of communicative reason, if not for modish opportunism" (FAVARETTO, 2011, p. 105). There was, therefore, a process of displacement whereby art ceased to be an exclusive attribute of works and became an art of living witnessed in the aestheticization of everyday life: places, scenes, events: "Thus, the broadening of the artistic experience, interested in the transformation of art processes into sensations of life, allows us to think about the possibility of founding a generalized aesthetic that takes into account the ways of living, the art of living" (p. 108).

This aesthetic dimension of life, which inseparates art from everyday activities, has always been a constant in African cultures. Myth is not restricted to a narrative cloistered in the pages of a book, but is lived daily, mixed with the elements of modern life, which, despite being imposed on African peoples, has not managed to erase their cultural traditions, their ancestry, their relationship with the supernatural. This is what can be seen

in the manifestations of African cinema. Although cinema is a modern art form that depends on technology, when it is assimilated by Africans, it becomes a vehicle for the circulation of their culture, their values and their *ethos*.

As far as African artistic production is concerned, it is essential to understand its aesthetic dimension, starting by recognizing what art is, which is also a criterion for recognizing the artistic character of the cinematographic works made in Africa. Despite the restrictions of budget and technical resources, it is possible to see in Mozambican films, for example, a concern with elements that are not reduced to the experience of resistance to colonial oppression, but circulate values such as myth, cosmogony, spirituality, social differences, the issue of sustainability and family relationships, in a broader historical and cultural dimension.

In this way, we need to understand that, historically, Europeans entered southern Africa armed with a vision of superiority, which justified not only territorial and economic domination, but also the process of imposing the Christian religion through religious conversion, on the basis that the polytheistic vision is an idolatry to be combated. The artifacts found through archaeological explorations were considered "idols", with the purpose of practices considered by Christianity to be evil. This procedure of demeaning African art by moving it into the realm of "spiritual worship" is one that has not been abandoned to this day, especially when the artwork escapes Western canons. In this way, religiosity and ideology were instrumentalized for five centuries to dominate and control colonized sub-Saharan peoples. In this process, not only was African art considered inferior, but also other manifestations of knowledge, whether scientific, philosophical or otherwise.

2 Ancestral African art and African cinema

The evaluation of African cinemas has changed over time, from being considered a product of the colonizer's affirmation, a cinema of limited forms, the target of satire, showing

Africans as exotic and inhuman, to a cinema that deserves to be part of the great world festivals.

Most film production on the African continent lacks financial resources, with the exception of South Africa and Nigeria (in sub-Saharan Africa), and some countries in North and West Africa with a French language influence, such as Mali and Senegal. In the case of Burkina Faso, there is an idiosyncrasy, as this country wanted to be one of the hubs of this art on the continent and directed huge resources towards it within its capacity. Moving on to southern Africa, in the case of Mozambique, the meager financial resources come from provincial governments, as well as funding from European institutes, such as the Goethe Institut, or Christian groups (however, these fund productions of customs, such as disease prevention and drug use), as well as independent contemporary cinema productions whose resources come from the filmmakers themselves. One example is the *Afromakers*¹. In a *live* stream and in video interviews with the filmmakers, it is shown that for the more than twenty-two young filmmakers and the production team, there is only one camera that is used in recording mode, a desktop computer for production, and a great deal of improvisation, such as weapons made of cardboard and ambient microphones held up by broomsticks², como está no vídeo de JJ Nota, um dos cineastas do grupo, intitulado “Como fazer um filme sem dinheiro”.

Despite these monetary difficulties, this group produced a large number of short and medium-length films. In the same way that African sculptural art was accused of being inferior because the techniques used were not the same as those used in Europe, Mozambican cinema is also subjected to this indigestible criticism, but with a more refined and unprejudiced eye, the cinematographic techniques of European and North American cinemas are present in the films, but this is not the essential thing, you can't watch a film from Mozambique, Benin, Angola or Ghana with this measuring stick, you have to strip off the technological garments and produce an aesthetic deconstruction in your being in order

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6X0PD_A0GGI&t=73s&ab_channel=AFROCINEMAKERS

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Bd0O4bNGr0&ab_channel=AFROCINEMAKERS

to enter this field; let's consider three steps: deconstruction, disenchantment and reconstruction.

Deconstruction is knowing that the majority of sub-Saharan African films will deal with issues related to the culture of these countries, which makes the viewer a traveler (which is why mytho-hermeneutics is present). Even though it is possible to make a cinematographic reading with the familiar concepts of world cinema (the techniques and especially the five Cs³ of cinematography), sticking to committed formulas will only make us lose part, if not all, of what will be seen, so the second step is just as important.

To be disenchanted is to remove the charm from the aesthetic, in other words, to describe, to make the mind and the understanding create a way of seeing reality from the point of view of those people (the point of view of the filmmaker also brings with it the way of seeing the world of its population, with the exception of those who are trained in European schools and try, at all costs, to produce films with the formulas of that great school of cinema). Take, for example, the short film *Tlhuka* (by Gil de Oliveira), also by the *Afromakers* group. Without going too deeply into the analysis of this short film, which deserves an article dedicated to it alone, what do we see?

A black and white movie, with two women as the main characters (the mother, whose name is *Nothisso*, and her teenage daughter). The tone of the black and white is darker than usual, and the film is black Mozambican storytelling and poetry in motion, with a soundtrack reminiscent of the ancient *Ronga* rituals, the language spoken in the film, which is one of the forty-three languages of Mozambique. There are no special effects, although various angles are used (vertical, horizontal, inclined, transversal and from a distance). Delving into the customs of this ethnic group will lead us to another understanding of the art of cinema, of the dialog between the various arts (poetry, visual arts, sound art, literature). This can lead to enchantment, another way of reading what is visible and what cannot be seen. From this movement, the third begins. The reconstruction of the aesthetic gaze towards southern African cinema takes us back to a group of

³The five Cs of cinematography are: cutting, composition, close-ups, continuity/camera and angle.

hundreds of ethnic groups, most of whose films are not spoken in the official language and, therefore, the question of financial return is not the main objective. What we have is a look at culture, the maintenance and transmission of customs, with cinema being a vehicle for perpetuating and resisting the culture imposed by the colonizer, therefore fulfilling an educational function. Therefore, a cinema of resistance does not necessarily have to be one that produces films about wars of independence and guerrilla warfare, but rather subtle ways of rejecting cultural oppression.

Like sculptural art, which had to go beyond the concepts of art, moving from the field of exoticism to an original art, African cinema also had to move from a cinema of landscapes and animals to a cinema of reflection and the imposition of words. The process of assuming the category of art demanded the recognition that it was part of the other arts along Western lines, as advocated by Canudo in his classic definition of cinema:

cinema adds to the traditional arts: architecture, music, painting, sculpture, poetry and dance. It is, at the same time, the fusion of the plastic arts and the rhythmic arts, of Science and Art... it must develop this extraordinary and poignant faculty of representing the immaterial. (apud AGEL, 1957, p.10)

In formulating this concept, Ricciotto Canudo, the first to define cinema as the seventh art, sought a universal category that would standardize film production, even though he had only seen the nascent cinema of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Gombrich considered that other manifestations of thought different from the West, such as that of the so-called "primitive", would be subordinated to the same idea of progress, which is why he qualified both the thought and the artistic manifestations of these people as childish, since they were closer to the emergence of humanity; it was a way of stating that such societies, the "primitive", did not possess art, since "paintings and sculptures are used to perform magic work". For Gombrich (1999, p. 20),

it is impossible to understand these strange beginnings unless we try to penetrate the minds of primitive peoples and discover what kind of experience makes them think of images as something powerful to be used and not as something beautiful to contemplate.

The interpretation of African art was strongly influenced by Gombrich, who saw it as a manifestation close to the beginnings of humanity, in contrast to Greco-Roman art,

which was considered developed. This positivist reading influenced the way the Western world also understood sub-Saharan cinema.

From this point of view, Africa, as well as the other colonized and subalternized peoples, represented a "backwardness" in relation to the West, identifying their peoples and their productions with the stage of childhood, which would justify tutelage until their emancipation, to be achieved in adulthood, when they could then truly produce art.

Given this scenario, we understand that two theoretical paths open up for reflection on African film production, and especially Mozambican cinema.

3 Theoretical lines for understanding Mozambican cinema

In order to delve into the complexity of Mozambican cinema, we have chosen two lines of theory that can help us enter this multiple universe: aesthetic theory and mythohermeneutics.

Aesthetic theory deals with the way in which a work affects the senses of the observer. It is therefore linked to sensitivity and understands that "the meaning of a work is not important for its appreciation, the only thing that counts is the way in which it affects us" (EINSTEIN apud MUNANGA, 2004, p. 35). This theory defends the idea of a more democratic capacity to read art, without the need for theoretical mediations. It underlies the notion that, although we recognize interpretative differences based on the formative experiences that come from contact with cultural and even scientific manifestations, anyone can enjoy a work of art aesthetically. The focus here is on the pleasure that a work can bring.

There is an important implication derived from this theory. By considering the perspective of art for art's sake, it clashes with interpretations that link black African art to religiosity or even to other dimensions of everyday life, rejecting any perspective of functionality. However, in order for African art to be considered within the logic of art for art's sake, it would be necessary to penetrate the culture of these peoples in order to understand aesthetic concepts such as beauty and ugliness, or even aesthetic pleasure.

This sets up an impasse: on the one hand, ethnological or anthropological analysis is removed from the field of science, freeing up artistic interpretation; on the other hand, if aesthetic concepts are recognized among African peoples, it is complicated to enter into these concepts without the aforementioned sciences. The search to overcome this dilemma is offered by another science, linguistics.

From a linguistic perspective, we searched for terms and words that could help classify African art: beautiful, ugly, bad, wonderful, etc. However, even with the appearance of these terms, the meanings attributed to them are not necessarily the same as those conferred by the West. The alternative to these impasses arises with the proposal of an artistic re-education, where the most important thing is form. According to Munanga (2004, p. 36), "it doesn't matter if the object was made for a particular cult. For aesthetic theory, the object must be looked at for its own sake, the only thing that is essential is perfecting its form."

With this in mind, and so that we can advance our knowledge of African film production and its relationship with the concept of aesthetics, mythology, art and culture of these peoples, as a form of non-formal education, we will adopt a mitohermeneutic perspective (FERREIRA-SANTOS, 2008).

Mitohermeneutics or symbolic hermeneutics, from the perspective of education, places self-understanding as the starting and finishing point of the interpretative journey. It's not a question - it's important to stress - of applying an interpretation technique, but of understanding that the hermeneutist, in his interpretative journey, installs himself in the cultural landscape of the works under investigation, penetrates inside them and reconstructs the meanings of such immersion (FERREIRA-SANTOS, 2008, p. 4).

To understand a movie is to understand oneself. From this perspective, there is a constant dialog with the works under study, as well as with the contexts in which they were produced, so that possible meanings can be raised and confronted from the very network of relationships of which it is a part. In this approach, symbolic recurrence is a central element, as it is the redundancy of symbolic elements that will enable interpretation and understanding. According to Gilbert Durand (1988, p. 19), the symbol is a

sign that refers to an unspeakable and invisible meaning, thus being obliged to concretely embody this adequacy that escapes him, through the play of mythical, ritual and iconographic redundancies that inexhaustibly correct and complete the inadequacy (DURAND, 1988, p. 19).

It is symbolic recurrence that allows meaning(s) to be inferred. "Not that a single symbol is not as significant as all the others, but the set of all the symbols on a theme clarifies the symbols, one through the other, adds an extra symbolic 'power' to them" (DURAND, 1988, p. 17).

In the work selected for this article, we will look for these recurrences in order to better understand not only the film in question but also Mozambican culture and, more specifically, the ethnic group involved in it.

4 Chikwembo - the movie

Chikwembo is a movie produced in 2009 by filmmaker Júlio Silva. The language of the movie is Changane, with Portuguese subtitles. Chikwembo translates as spell. The work is divided into two parts: the first is called Chikwembo and the second, The Return of the Spirit. The first part of the film begins with images of the Banhine Reserve, which is described geographically so that the viewer can know where it is on the map of Mozambique.

After images of a region still inhabited by wild animals, there is a cut to a young woman who is sifting flour, her cell phone rings and a dialogue begins, it is her fiancé who, for no apparent reason, informs her that he is leaving her. She, Catarina, doesn't understand what's going on and says, among other things, that he, called Langa, has been bewitched by a "girl" from the town. Although one of the characteristics of African cinema is the dichotomy between the city and the rural hinterland, it's too early to reach this conclusion.

The film is made with amateur actors and residents of the region (for the most part), so when we watch Chikwembo, it is necessary to strip away the classic analysis of an actor's film, in other words, that criticism which projects the weight of the entire work onto

the performances, from which we can already see that Mozambican cinema escapes and suggests that we follow it from an entirely different angle, where Western canons do not reach. This initial part, of the break-up of the relationship, ends with the scene in which Catarina, after a crying fit, walks with a gallon of water over her head, on a dirt road in the middle of a thicket.

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Langa then disembarks from the body of a pick-up truck that was used as a means of transport for several people, and is immediately recognized by Catarina herself and a friend of hers. Langa is now with another woman. He is indifferent to Catarina's tears. The director uses closed framing in this scene to allow the viewer to observe the expression on the characters' faces in detail. The scene moves from an open to a closed frame, denoting a moment of tension. Langa introduces Rosa, his new girlfriend, to the family; his brother pulls him away from the celebration, calls him into a corner and warns him of the danger of the return of the sadness he has caused Catarina. What danger? The danger of revenge by spell.

Catherine returns home crying, puts herself at the feet of her mother who takes her pains and promises revenge: she goes after a friend who introduces her to a sorcerer. The second part of the story begins, still within the first movie.

This point of tension is important because one of the justifications of colonization was to impose Christianity on all the dominated African peoples, since they needed to be saved from evil practices. Historical Christianity and positivism are in dialogue in the sense that they believe in an evolutionary stage of humanity. For a long time, Africans were treated like children who needed a father to guide them. It is also important to narrate this event, which produces a break in history, directing it in another direction, because it demonstrates that the ancestral practices of the African peoples, which many call witchcraft or animism, continued to be practiced and continue despite more than five centuries of Catholic oppression (in the case of the Portuguese colonies). Remembering Nietzsche who says that where there is repression of the senses, resistance arises, the oppression of the colonizer's religion was not so effective as to completely annul and extinguish the spiritual manifestations of southern Africa and, in this case, Mozambique. Chikwembo opposes

Durkheim's concept of magic, because for Durkheim "although magical practices are sufficiently widespread within a social group, they differ substantially from religion in that they do not have the function of promoting unity and identity among the members of a group" (DURKHEIN apud WEISS, 2012, p. 11). In this case, since spiritual practices are a characteristic of that group, they promote identification among its members, since, culturally, they recognize it as part of their lives.

In the course of the film, Langa's brother, when he hears the sound of singing and drumming, celebrates, because he says that the healer mothers are happy, and this is the tradition: the singing, the dancing and the instruments, this tradition, he continues, touches their hearts deeply and makes them recognize each other. This is followed by a long sequence of traditional singing and dancing from the Gaza region.

When Rosa goes to take a bath, she is bitten by a snake and disappears, and the locals say that this event is the result of magic; Langa's family, in despair, go to a priestess to clear up the doubt and answer whether Rosa is alive.

During this first part of the film, Rosa is located in a sorcerer's hideout, Langa and his brother find her, rescue her and bring her home, but the conflict still continues. The director chooses to place small obstacles on the way back, which make the journey even more difficult, Langa doesn't believe that all this is the result of magic. Reminiscent of the structure of myth, in which the hero accepts the challenge and returns with the goal accomplished (the rescue of a person, the location of the philosopher's stone, victory over real or imaginary enemies), Langa passes through the valley of lions and elephants towards the village, while the director makes use of mysterious instrumental music, which opens up to a guttural tribal chant in the Changane language. The first part ends in this way, with Langa returning to Maputo with Rosa, abandoning Catarina once and for all.

The director chooses to begin the second part with the same identity chant that ended the first, now with Langa's brother (named Mavanga) saying that he has married Catarina, an attitude that is disapproved of by his mother, who accuses Langa of ingratitude. The country-city opposition is more evident here, since this dialogue takes place while mother and son are weeding the land. Langa's mother falls ill and momentarily

becomes unable to work, Langa returns from Maputo and the soundtrack prepares us for a new conflict, now of a family nature: Langa against his brother who has married Catarina.

There are two next moments in the film that deserve attention: the director of photography's choice of open and closed shots. Langa, when he leaves his brother's house after the argument, is filmed in an open shot, with him in a large forest. This choice of shot allows us to see the smaller man compared to the grandeur of nature, then the shot closes in as the character enters the forest, closing in so much that it brings him into contact with a priest of magic, known for his rough appearance and his colors. The dichotomy of colors brings us back to light and dark, something somewhat undefined and unreal, and therefore inhuman. Langa gets into an argument with this man who promises revenge. The shot opens and cuts to the next scene. An old woman, whose face is again in close-up, is teaching the young people (men and women) how to prepare the canhô drink. In detail, the canhô juice is described, prepared and enjoyed by everyone, including Langa who, while drinking it, reveals that he came into contact with this man in the forest. Soon afterwards, he becomes ill and is taken to a house where an old woman can resolve the issue. The music in the background once again places us at a point of tension to be resolved.

Julio Silva, the filmmaker, by directing amateur actors and local residents, takes us back to the beginnings of cinema, in its close connection with theater. Agel (1957) says that "cinema designates the poetic aspect of things and beings that can be revealed by the new means of expression" (p. 11). He continues: "the fundamental elements of this writing (poetic art cinema) are four: the scenography, the light, the cadence (i.e. the rhythm of the story) and the mask (the actor and the performers). In this case, the choice to film with locals, with theatricalized gestures (in this case, the undefined being of the forest or sorcerer), even with natural gestures (most of them act as if they weren't being filmed, especially the women in the film who are more natural in their gestures, indignations and sensations), Silva breaks with a canon of cinema propagated by Dulac who says that filmmaking can only be done with professional actors, otherwise it isn't cinema (in AGEL, 1957, p. 12). Cinema and music together can provoke drama, but movement is also a fundamental element in Chikwembo. There is no fixity, there are comings and goings in

the search for solutions, which generates conflict, movement, tension and makes the story unfold. Far from the big, developed city (Maputo), this Gaza village eschews rational rules and follows its own traditions.

Langa's move to Maputo made him feel "modern" and he disbelieved in traditions; when he had problems, many of which he had created, he returned to his village in Gaza where he was forced to mold or remold himself to the traditions, feeling smaller in the face of everything, which is why the sequence shot opens and then closes when there is conflict, and closes even more (in close-up) when the characters speak, because it is in the eyes that we see the path to be traveled. The Israeli Christian critic René Schwob states that "it is at the roots of our being, at the point of tangency of our most secret being, most ignored by ourselves and the one that delights us the most, that cinema finally makes us descend... to the most prodigious probing into the infinite turmoil that we carry within us" (*apud* AGEL, 1957, p. 16).

Gaza, the region where the story takes place, has a very ancient occupation with historical records proving that there were already kingdoms and structured societies there before the arrival of the Portuguese:

Long before there were any white South Africans, the Bantu had actually occupied the only parts of the subcontinent with a climate and rainfall suitable for intensive agriculture. They had left the high and dry Karoo of the central plateau (OLIVER and FAGE *apud* SANTOS, 2007, p. 30).

Historically, the Gaza Empire was strongly structured and prepared for combat, with a military preparedness reported by travelers. In his doctoral research, Santana tells us that

The military force of this empire was made up of a plurality of regiments, which were constantly renewed and trained to carry out raids on villages that were not yet under Nguni rule or for wars of major proportions, such as the one in 1895-1897 against the Portuguese. Each regiment stood out for its way of dressing, its warrior dances and songs, which were used as part of the ceremonies aimed at the moral and religious preparation of the soldiers, in order to instill in them self-confidence in their warrior capacity and the certainty of victory. (SANTANA, 2016, p. 5)

In a sequence of Langa's new romance, now with a girl called Carolina, he goes to the house where this girl lives and looks for her (where he had accompanied her the day

before), where he is answered rather rudely by the girl's mother, who tells him that Carolina has been dead for a long time. Although it is not the aim of this study to analyze the use of color in the film, even though we know that it is a very important element of the story. *mise-en-scène*, in other words, everything that makes up the scene, the white color of Carolina's clothes deserves to be highlighted.

Among most sub-Saharan African peoples (including the Bantu and the Congo-Niger linguistic trunks, which includes the Yoruba), the color white is associated with the non-material world. Many call it the world of the dead, but this nomenclature has no correspondence in most African cultures, since there are different types of death, and not just physical death as it is for Westerners.

The color white is linked to the non-physical state of death, the entry into the world of the dead, since it is the absence of colors, according to the dialogue in the South African film *Inxeba* [A 2007 South African film directed by Jhon Trengove. In Brazil, it was released under the title *Os Iniciados*. The film depicts the initiation of young men into adulthood, but one of them is homosexual and rejects the traditions of his ethnic group. *Inxeba* in Xhosa means scar. The film won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film the following year], in which an old man explains to the young initiates why they are painted white.

This loss of notion and awareness that confuses Langa also leads us to a loss of understanding of what can happen, which is why aesthetic theory allows us to understand another culture through its own lens. So there we have various micro-conflicts that Langa faces in the course of his existence, both between visible and invisible existences, forcing him to return, in his being, to his culture that he had set aside under the allegation of a supposed maturity given by living in the big city. Underneath and within Langa's existence, the conflicts fulfill what Heidegger (1997) calls "coming home" to poetically inhabit things, that is, it means being in the presence of the gods and being touched by the essential closeness of things.

5 Final considerations

By choosing to add various stylistic elements to the film, director Júlio Silva opposes the dictates of what we know as Western cinema. In other words, he chooses to cast locals as actors, seeks out the essence of spiritual traditions, values music, dance and the fruits of the place, converges ethics and aesthetics with the dimension of everyday life, values orality, a striking feature of African cultures and, above all, excludes the Portuguese language (the language of the colonizer) as a fundamental element of the work, amplifying the educational character of his cinema by prioritizing his own culture.

By putting the African on screen, in front of the camera and behind it, with his small production team, the director is not only making a stylistic statement, but above all, a political statement, namely that he is seeking to colonize the mind:

the act of production, the availability, the quantity, the essence of African cinema, so to speak, is undoubtedly the most obvious prerequisite. There must be films made by Africans under the African condition before we can talk about African cinema. The resources for the production of films, their distribution and accessibility to African audiences are indispensable factors for the existence of a cinematography. (WA THIONGO', 2007, p. 27).

When we set out to watch an African film, especially one from countries where funding is scarce (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Gabon, Benin, Central African Republic, Zambia, Burundi, Ethiopia, among others), we need to prepare our minds to enter a universe whose film production often takes us back to the early days of cinema, without great special effects or lavish locations, or expensive cars or costumes that could be on European catwalks. African cinema, especially made by Africans and for African audiences, although it can and should circulate to other audiences, such as Brazilians, due to the origin of its people, has a position of valuing its culture, its traditions and facing the dilemmas of cinema, formulating its own rules, trying at all times to escape the limited and triadic interpretation of the conflict between tradition and modernity, wild animals and magic. Although these elements are present in many productions, it is the readings of them and their meanings that need to change. These are foundational elements of customs, such as the dialogue between man and nature, nature and culture, the production of consumer goods and sustainability, money and sacralization, among many other themes.

In this sense, we have identified an educational dimension in African cinema, which is associated with the educational foundations of cinema (ALMEIDA, 2017), especially with regard to the anthropological and mythical foundations, through which we can observe the role of cinema in expanding knowledge about other cultures, including the most decentralized ones, also enabling the appreciation of minority groups, in the way they experience their contradictions and position themselves ethically. In the case of African cinema, the mythical foundation is present not only in the direct mention of myths, but above all by fulfilling the function of reconciling our consciousness with the mystery of the universe, offering an interpretative image of this mystery, as well as imposing a moral order and helping the individual in the search for congruence with the culture of their people and their particular existence. There is, therefore, what Celso Luiz Prudente (2021) observes as a pedagogical dimension to black cinema, through which the image of black people, whether African or of African descent, is affirmed, as it "teaches society how it should be treated, helping to overcome its exclusionary anachronism" (p. 15).

Even though *Chikwembo* contains these elements, it invites us to take a deeper look not only at what we are seeing, but especially at what is not explicit on the screen as the main element, but which is spread umbilically among the African peoples, namely: the resistance to staying alive culturally, even if this means having to pay a price, which is to go down paths already imagined by the film industry. Keeping their culture, orality and spirituality alive is a continuation of the various wars of independence and guerrilla wars that many of these countries have gone through and, by extension, keeping themselves alive culturally and spiritually as their various descendants do scattered throughout the various places in the post-black diaspora world.

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