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## Transmission from the Liberated Zones

### Filipa César

2015, DCP, color, 30 min., English. **Producer** Olivier Marboeuf, Filipa César. **Production company** Spectre Productions (Rennes, France). **Screenplay** Filipa César, Gi Dias. **Director of photography** Matthias Biber. **Production design** Filipa César. **Sound** Dídio Pestana. **Sound design** Dídio Pestana. **Editor** Filipa César. **With** Gi Dias, Lennart Malmer, Birgitta Dahl, Ingela Romare, Folke Löfgren, Rosa Waschke.

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*Transmission from the Liberated Zones* is an experiment departing from the concept of “Liberated Zones,” a designation used to describe areas freed from colonial domination, organized and managed by the guerrilla militants of the PAIGC (Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde) in Guinea during the 11-year liberation war between 1963 and '74.

The film presents interviews with diplomat Folke Löfgren, filmmaker Lennart Malmer, filmmaker and psychologist Ingela Romare, and politician Birgitta Dahl. These Swedish protagonists all shared experiences in the Liberated Zones, which they visited in the early 1970s. Their statements, combined with documents from the time, are accessed and presented by a boy through a low-fidelity feedback channel – an optical dimension created to move through time and between tepid and tropical encounters. The boy states that recalling instances of liberation prepares the ground for further recurrences.

## In conversation, Filipa César and Emily Fahlén

*Emily Fahlén: Since 2011, you have been researching the origins of cinema in Guinea-Bissau. Can you tell us how this archival project started and how it has developed over the years?*

**Filipa César:** Cinema in Guinea-Bissau has its roots before independence and is directly linked with the liberation movement during the armed struggle. My role in the project was partially an accident. When I had visited the filmmakers Sana na N'Hada, Suleimane Biaí, and Flora Gomes in January 2011, they had shown me the room with the film archive (at INCA – Instituto Nacional de Cinema e Audiovisual), and later I decided to address institutions that could be interested in preserving it. In Portugal, I was told that the archive was irrelevant, technically and content-wise, since it was in a very advanced state of degradation and most of it was copies of foreign productions and un-edited footage. This was true about the condition and content of the archive, but for me those were the more relevant issues. The archive includes only three finished Guinean films and the rest are foreign copies and un-edited footage or films in the editing process. Its condition mirrored many of African liberation movement whereabouts.

Once we got a partner – Arsenal – Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin – the filmmakers and I set in motion a project of digitization that had several principles: we were not going to restore the films to a hypothetical original state, but we would simply digitize their state at the moment. I like to say, we documented our passage through the films. In this way, the inscription of decomposition – known as the vinegar syndrome – and their unfinished state were also part of the overall imagination and imagery. Another principle was the importance of the presence of the filmmakers at public events showing the material.

We called the project “Luta ca caba inda” after an unfinished film in the archive. The title became a kind of a curse on the project. We started to understand that this archive was both a micro cinegeography of solidarity collaboration and also a cine-archeology with time and post-independence political instability inscribed into it. We produced several events with the filmmakers, sometimes looking at unedited footage that they commented on live. We were urgently trying to find a format to keep the material as open as we had found it and to expand it further. For me, that is why this archive is not about the past but about imagination projected onto the present. (...)

*Cinema seems to have played a certain role in the struggle for independence from Portuguese colonial rule. What are your thoughts on film as medium, as well as its political potential?*

In 1966, the revolutionary leader Amílcar Cabral participated in the first Tricontinental Conference in Havana, a very important moment for Cuba's solidarity statement and where Cabral delivers his outstanding “The Weapon of Theory” speech. In 1967, four young Guineans were sent there to study cinema, among them N'Hada and Gomes, and they were introduced to cinema by the ICAIC (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos) team and the filmmaker Santiago Álvarez, one of the driving forces of Cuban militant cinema. I think Cabral shared an understanding with Fidel Castro that cinema would be a pillar to construct common understanding and a place of reflection about people's living conditions. N'Hada often mentioned that they had a project of

introducing the different ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau to each other through cinema dissemination. When we were discussing what to do collectively with the digitized footage, N'Hada proposed continuing this impulse with the mobile cinema and showing it to different publics across Guinea. The footage shows many moments, particular moments of the liberation time in the territory and abroad, like in East Berlin, a kind of a fragmentary, kaleidoscopic insight into the struggle. That is when we developed the mobile cinema project “From Boé to Berlin” in collaboration with Arsenal and film curator Tobias Hering. With an entourage of ten people, we travelled for four weeks through Guinea-Bissau setting up a big screen on squares, school courtyards, or communal centers. For each station, we adapted the selection of un-edited footage to the context, and N'Hada and Gomes commented on them live, and at the end we always screened *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral* (The Return of Amílcar Cabral), a film that had been given up on as long lost. After the screening we always would open up the session for public discussion. Often people would make statements and ask the filmmakers questions. What I loved about these sessions was that they became a public editing room, a collective and public moment of viewing rushes, when you think about what you can say with that. The material is un-edited, so it is even more open for the public to write its own narrative. These sessions were not only about watching films, but also about a participatory cinema praxis. This experience showed the potential of the medium of cinema in the moment: it is about producing instruments of reflection and awareness about your own conditions. This was clearly articulated by the public in their eloquent statements.

*Tell us about the title for your film *Transmission from the Liberated Zones*.*

The research departs from the concept of Liberated Zone as designation for the areas freed from Portuguese colonial domination, a notion coined by the PAIGC (African Party for the Liberation of Guinea and Cap Verde) to address the zones organized and managed by its guerrilla militants during the 11-year Liberation War (1963–74). The protagonists are four people from Sweden: diplomat Folke Löfgren, filmmaker Lennart Malmer, psychologist and filmmaker Ingela Romare, and politician Birgitta Dahl, all sharing experiences of different moments in the Guinean Liberated Zones that they visited in the course of the 1970s. The research is presented by a young boy who plays in a feedback channel of images and sounds; his life is also conditioned by the past he convokes.

*Can you elaborate on the four protagonists' presence and on what that international insight meant for the liberation struggle?*

Yes. Their presence in the liberated zones is very striking and effective. Portugal at that time had a slow, outdated, and isolated dictatorship that hadn't participated in WWII and kept a majority of the population illiterate. The decolonization process in other European colonies was developing, and Portugal insisted on an anachronic possession of its overseas provinces, promoting colonial wars that lasted for 13 years. The liberation struggles were considered terrorist insurgencies, and there was a negation about the existence of organization in the liberated zones. So it is relevant that four Swedes made these zones of liberation visible to the Western world in such a way that contributed to the legitimization of the unilateral proclamation of

independence that took place in the Boé jungle in 1973. All of these four people seem to be energized and inspired by a kind of self-realization through their experience in the liberated zones. I wanted to channel this in this film experiment: to bring these forces into a field of propagation. I was less interested in “telling their story” than I was in reactivating their experiences. The feedback effect became a possibility to intersect these imaginaries with present conditions.

*By making films about collective memory in Guinea-Bissau, you contribute to the writing of national history. How do you reflect on your position as an artist and maker of history?*

I’m not interested in making history but, rather, in the mechanisms behind this word. Philosopher Walter Benjamin and dramatist and poet Bertolt Brecht were so precise in creating images and awareness about the power and the threats of using historical narratives. History is the narrative of the winner, of the governments, but not of the oppressed or the subaltern, not of the workers. As writer Boris Souvarine said “History is something which has not taken place, told by someone who was not there.” (quoted from *Immemory* by Chris Marker). I’m interested in the mechanisms of empowerment that are embedded in creating spaces of visibilities while using documents. To some extent, that is why I see my work as influenced by Chris Marker’s praxis, who was developing a cinema language of a counter-history and a non-authoritarian way of poetically creating visibilities that are not in power but can nevertheless empower. The fact that I was born in Portugal and interested in African liberation movements brings me out of a comfort zone and to the channels I found to reposition my perspective. Initially, I was searching for other positions to look at what had conditioned me before I moved to Germany. Until very recently, the small country of Portugal was ruling over peoples and countries on three other continents. When I first visited Guinea and was able to hear inspiring variations and appropriations of my native language, it expanded the possibilities of my own meaning production. But there is also a particular danger while working on these subjects – once Avi Mograbi described it like this: “I make a living from the occupation of Palestinian territories.” With this statement, he addressed the fact that his films – although part of a critical praxis – were making him a profit on the same Israeli politics he criticized. The conflict of making consumable products about certain critical issues risks being opportunistic. To enter a discussion on issues around colonialism is always a question of what kind of operation you are engaging in: it is never about the subject/theme but about the operational dimensions. If I appropriate the imaginaries of the Liberation Movements, I risk reproducing a colonial operation of taking something that does not belong to me. I was more interested in knowing about this part of common history would change in my ways of seeing. That is why for me “Luta ca caba inda” was not necessarily about making films, but more about opening collective spaces of sharing and changing visibilities, a cinema praxis.

*Emily Fahlén is a mediator at Tensta konsthall. The conversation took place on the occasion of the symposium “The Eros Effect: Art, Solidarity Movements and the Struggle for Social Justice,” Tensta konsthall, 2015*

Filipa César, born in 1975 in Porto, Portugal, is an artist and filmmaker based in Berlin. In her work she is interested in the porous boundaries between the moving image and its reception, the fictional dimensions of the documentary, and the economies, politics, and poetics inherent to cinema praxis. The majority of César’s experimental films have focused on the specters of resistance in Portugal’s geo-political past, questioning mechanisms of producing history and proposing spaces for performing subjective knowledge. Since 2011, César has been researching the origins of cinema in Guinea-Bissau, its imaginaries and potencies, developing this research into the collective project “Luta ca caba inda (The struggle is not over yet)”. The work of Filipa César is widely shown in solo and group exhibitions, biennials, and festivals.

#### Films

2007: *Allee der Kosmonauten* (8 min.), *Rapport* (16 min.). 2008: *Le passeur* (35 min.). 2009: *The Four Chambered Heart* (29 min.). 2010: *Insert* (10 min.), *Memograma* (40 min.), *Porto* (10 min.). 2011: *The Embassy* (27 min.). 2012: *Cuba* (Forum Expanded, 10 min.), *Cacheu* (10 min.). 2013: *Conakry* (10 min.). 2014: *Mined Soil* (32 min.). 2015: *Transmission from the Liberated Zones*.