

From Algiers to Buenos Aires ;Error! Marcador no definido.

The Third World Cinema Committee (1973-1974)

by Mariano Mestman

'If we manage to strengthen the wrongly called 'coproductions' we will be able to overcome, to a certain extent, the problem of economic resources (...) In order to make an African film, they provide the basis and we, Latin Americans or Asians, provide the economic and financial support, or vice versa. The same happens with technology. In the Third World there are countries such as Argentina, which have laboratories for black and white or colour film developing, for the processing of sound, and so on. Then why should we let other countries send their films to laboratories in the metropolis? This is a concrete example of how we intend to break dependency, making each country put their technology at the disposal of Third World cinema'. (Jorge Giannoni, Director of the *UBA Third World Cinematheque*; May, 1974)

The concept of Third World has always involved a series of different realities. However, in the 'long sixties' one notion of Third World with more or less definite characteristics prevailed, partly as a result of a unity based on the confrontation with Western imperialism, thus comprising a great variety of regimes, some of them contradicting each other. Although soon afterwards the concept started to crumble, by then it was at its zenith. Actually, from the beginning of the decade on, with the expansion of the African decolonisation process and after the triumph of the 1959 Cuban revolution, the Nonaligned Movement created at the Bandung Conference (1955), which had previously been circumscribed to Africa and Asia, took on a tricontinental status. The dominant socialist tendency among the original leaders (no matter how distant from the USSR)

was consolidated over the decade through the experience of various decolonisation processes and strengthened with a thirdworldism which transcended the national character of liberation movements and for some time became an emancipation horizon attracting important left-wing groups worldwide.

Towards 1973-74, the notion of Third World achieved a significant international visibility, articulating national confrontation with imperialism and class struggle within each country.

Similarly, the cinema made in the Third World shows a great diversity depending on the region or country in question: disparity between the development levels of the industry; coexistence of films following Hollywood aesthetics, attempts to renew contents and form or politically revolutionary films, etc. But towards the late 1960s, there was a gradual consolidation of a cinematic-political project whose main principles were very similar to the 'Third Cinema' proposed by Solanas and Getino, or to García Espinosa's 'imperfect cinema', but also included claims in other Asian or African manifestos. That is, an aesthetic-political identity — built around an opposition to Hollywood mainstream model rather than a distinct aesthetic prescription — which did not encompass all the films made in Third World countries, but only those perceived as an expression of national liberation or cultural decolonisation processes, although it must be borne in mind that the limits varied according to the different interpretations involved.

Because of its boldness and ambition, the creation of a Third World Cinema Committee intending to gather filmmakers from the three continents stands out from other moves tending to the construction of this cinematic thirdworldism. Two successive meetings, in Algiers (December 1973) and Buenos Aires (May 1974), gave rise to this organisational structure and established its goals. But whereas the Algiers meeting is a reference point in historiography on Third World Cinema, the Buenos Aires gathering remains almost unknown.

I. The 'battle' of Algiers

The gathering of African, Latin American and Asian filmmakers in December 1973 intended to lay the groundwork for an organisation of Third World filmmakers. Apart from the opportunity for exchange and mutual knowledge, the main concerns of the meeting had to do with the contribution of cinema to national liberation processes, the 'decolonisation of Third

World screens', and the fight against 'cultural alienation'.

The document released in Algiers is concerned with some models of analysis informing the development of thirdworldism in those years. As opposed to the notion of 'underdevelopment', a dialectical interpretation of the phenomenon is encouraged, associating it with the evolution of world capitalism and retrieving the concept of dependency, with the identification of a common enemy, imperialism, as the main obstacle to development. Thus, the existence of different imperialist power relations is recognised: from direct and total colonisation by violent invasion to a 'new kind' of domination system, known as 'neo-colonialism'.

The legitimisation of domination is completed through a process characterised as 'deculturation/acclulturation', and is sustained by an ideological system articulated along several channels, mainly cinema; a type of film made by the dominant model of Western imperialism which invades Third World screens.

These assertions are characteristic of their time. But the distinctive feature of the Algiers meeting is the search for concrete alternatives and the vast significance it achieved as an expression of the most advanced groups in peripheral filmmaking (speaking in political terms), which is related to some particular facts:

On the one hand, its association with the famous Nonaligned Movement Conference held in September, also in Algiers, within the framework of the parallel geopolitical growth of Third World countries.

On the other hand, the position attained by Algerian cinema at that moment. If Algerian Independence (1962) was an outstanding milestone, Algerian cinema was the 'big engine' of Maghrebi cinema and the new Arab cinema, as well as one the highest manifestations of the emergence of the new African cinemas (Elena 1995). By 1973, it had a solid structure with agencies such as the ONCIC (Office National pour le Commerce et l'Industrie Cinématographique), in charge of the filmmaking and distribution sectors, which had summoned the meeting.

After a first period (1965-1971) of films vindicating the independence epic, by the early 70s Algerian cinema was acknowledged even in established Festivals, and by 1972 it was going through a renewal process related to the agrarian reform implemented one year before. In

control of the exhibition sector from 1964 on, after the nationalisation of distribution in June, 1969 and the tension unleashed in the following years by the boycott organised by the Motion Pictures Export Association of America (MPEAA), Algeria became an important reference point on the regional level.

Furthermore, two other factors indicate the significance of the Algiers meeting: its vast response and its participants' representativeness, and the ambitious programme adopted.

The meeting was attended by some 45 filmmakers, mainly Africans (apart from the host country, Egypt, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Congo, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, Tunisia) and Latin Americans (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay) and Palestinians, as well as some European observers.¹

The Committee's final membership reflects the presence of the experiences of new cinemas and Third World political cinema. The committee was presided over by Lamine Merbah (Algeria), and according to Brossard (op.cit.) among its members were Santiago Alvarez (Cuba), Ousmane Sembene (Senegal), Jorge Giannoni (Argentina) and Hamid Merei (Syria).

Cuba, Algeria and Senegal were the three main driving forces of the commitment assumed by new Latin American, Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan cinemas. Merbah, with *Les expropriateurs* (The plunderers, 1972), was part of the initial impulse of Algerian cinema's second period, that of the 'land films', breaking the monopoly exerted by the liberation war theme. The documentary work by Santiago Alvarez was a symbol of the link between Third World struggles, from Latin America to Vietnam. Ousmane Sembene, a pioneer since his debut with *Borrom Sarret* (The cart driver, 1962), was one of the main figures to make an early denunciation of the long-standing monopoly of the Compagnie Africaine Cinématographique et Commerciale (COMACICO) and the Société d'Exploitation Cinématographique (SECMA).

¹ Jean Pierre Brossard comments that there was a unanimous 'regret for the nearly total absence of representatives from Asian cinema', which he attributes to the haste in which the meeting was organised (*L'Algérie vue par son cinéma*, Locarno, Festival International du Film, 1981; 39). Anyway, there was one Syrian representative at the committee.

Moreover, the Algiers meeting is situated at the core of a period of expansion (between 1970 and 1975) of the Fédération Panafricaine de Cinéastes (FEPACI).² In July, 1969, in the Pan-African Culture Festival in Algiers, filmmakers decided to create a continental organisation which, in the following year during the Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage (Tunisia) adopted the name of FEPACI. In its beginnings, the Federation made a commitment to use films for the liberation of colonised countries and as a step towards African unity under the sign of Pan-Africanism. This orientation derived from the leftist tendency of most members and from the socialist horizon they adhered to. Besides, several governments undertook the partial or total nationalisation of their film industry, in an open challenge to the French-American monopoly.

FEPACI reached its highest peak of development in French-speaking Africa, where it contributed to create national film centres, and to organise an inter-African distribution centre (CIDC), a production centre (CIPROFILM) and the Festival Panafricain de Cinéma de Ouagadougou (FESPACO, in Upper Volta, former name of Burkina Faso).

Thus, the 1973 Algiers meeting fed on the impulse of the Federation and at the same time, it fed back into it.

The meeting had three working sub-committees on the following subjects: the filmmaker's role, the problems of production and co-production, film distribution in the Third World.

Following a series of considerations, the final General Assembly recommended: the control (via nationalisation, 'in the interest of the masses') of production, film distribution and commercialisation; the acquisition of films from Third World and 'progressive' countries; the use of cinema to raise the general cultural level through new films accessible to popular masses; solidarity with anti-imperialists struggles, the denunciation of fascist coups d'état (such as the Chilean case), freedom for imprisoned filmmakers and the end of censorship; support for revolutionary Third World filmmakers from national cinema structures; the abandonment of capitalist countries' cinematic conceptions and the search for new forms based on the authenticity and reality of Third World means; the training of film technicians; the promotion of

² During that period, its membership increased to 39 countries. Although the FEPACI achieved several objectives, its programme often collided with administrations less inclined to change (Diawara 1992).

co-productions between Third World countries, excluding imperialist countries.

The most important result of the meeting was the creation of the Third World Cinema Committee with permanent headquarters in Algiers, seeking to create a tricontinental organisation for film distribution (see the resolutions of the meeting in Bakari and Cham1996).

The project was undoubtedly ambitious, but by that time it could count on several countries which had effective control over their cinema industries and had implemented national cinema promotion policies.

Although this programme failed to achieve the necessary impact in the following years, only six months after the Algiers meeting a new gathering was held across the Atlantic, in Buenos Aires.

II. The Second Meeting of the Third World Committee

Towards 1973 the New Latin American Cinema had no organisation like the FEPACI, but it did have a series of valuable contacts and had managed to constitute a sort of regional Movement. Festivals and Filmmakers Meetings in Viña del Mar (Chile) in 1967 and 1969, and the First Exhibition of Documentary Cinema in Mérida (Venezuela) in 1968, are the main milestones of its trajectory, together with Festivals organised by *Marcha* magazine and the activities of Third World Cinematheque in Uruguay from 1969 on. These meetings witnessed the presence of members from two major movements, Brazilian cinema novo and Cuban cinema, as well as the emergence of filmmakers from other countries. In the early 70s, the experience of Chilean cinema under Unidad Popular (and the ICAIC-Chile Films agreement) strengthened the relations of regional political cinema.

Argentinean filmmakers actively participated in this process. It is a known fact that the most important expression of politically intervening Argentine cinema is *La hora de los hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces, Fernando Solanas y Octavio Getino, 1968). Together with Gerardo Vallejo, they created Grupo Cine Liberación, which engaged in a vast activity of clandestine screenings linked to the Peronist left-wing. In the following years, Cine Liberación was increasingly integrated into the Peronist Movement and other filmmakers, with a greater or lesser

degree of contact with that core, started to emerge.³ Even though we cannot expand on them here, it is important to outline the overall situation by 1973-1974: on the one hand, Cine Liberación as the main reference point, aligned with Perón and the Justicialist Party, which had entered into politics through state institutions with Octavio Getino's brief period of office as director of the Film Rating Agency. On the other hand, Cine de la Base, created in 1973 by Raymundo Gleyzer, Alvaro Melián and Nerio Barberis in parallel with the appearance of *Los traidores* (The Traitors), directed by Gleyzer. This group was aligned with the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Revolutionary Workers' Party).

If we consider the filmmakers attending the Algiers Meeting, this map may be expanded. Fernando Birri had emigrated from Argentina in 1963, but his previous experience in the Documentary School of Santa Fe was an inevitable reference point for national and regional political cinema. Humberto Ríos, born in Bolivia but living in Argentina, was experienced in social documentary. In 1971 he made, as a member of the Third Cinema group, the film *Al grito de este pueblo* (The cry of the people) on the Bolivian situation. In 1973 he collaborated with Getino as a consultant in the Agency and had entered the Frente de Liberación del Cine Nacional, fostered by Cine Liberación together with other filmmakers. Jorge Cedrón had filmed, in 1972, Rodolfo Walsh's non-fiction text *Operación Masacre* (Operation Massacre), a research on the execution of Peronist civilians back in 1956 after the civilian-military coup against Peron. Even though identified with the Peronist left-wing, Cedrón had contacts among the various tendencies of political cinema by those years.

The UBA Third World Film Cinematheque

With the return of democracy in 1973, Peronism was back in the government after being

³ For example, in 1969 were produced two films on the Cordobazo, the most important working-class demonstration of the period. *Ya es tiempo de violencia* (It is already time for violence) was directed by Enrique Juárez, a film-maker connected to the Peronist left-wing. *Argentina, mayo de 1969. Los caminos de la liberación* (Argentina, May 1969: the paths of liberation), was a collective film made by the Realizadores de Mayo group.

banned from elections for 18 years. In this context, a Cinematheque was created within the 'Manuel Ugarte' Third World Institute under the jurisdiction of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) Rectorate while Rodolfo Puiggrós was the Rector.

The Cinematheque was created on the initiative of Jorge Giannoni, who later became its first director. A filmmaker little known in his country, Giannoni had established an interesting previous contact with political cinemas in other countries. By the early 60s, Giannoni, accompanied by Gleyzer, travelled to the Brazilian North East to shoot a film, attracted by the experience of cinema novo, but he later abandoned the project. In 1966 he moved to Rome, where he attended the courses of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia as a non-registered student for two years. During May 1968 he went to Paris as a correspondent for an Italian news service. There he was reunited with Jorge Denti, with whom, years before on the Argentine coast, he had engaged in a venture to finance his film projects. Back in Rome, while participating in a communal experience in Trastevere, he got in touch with a similar move in London, where he directed the avant-garde film *Molotov Party*.⁴ After a trip to the Middle East to film the Palestinian experience together with Denti, he returned to Rome in order to constitute a political cinema collective, on which we will enlarge below. In Italy, Giannoni used to take part in events like the Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema di Pesaro. Back in Buenos Aires in 1973, Giannoni politically adhered to the Frente Amplio por el Socialismo (FAS) and he and Denti got in touch with Cine de la Base.⁵

After President Héctor Cámpora, Perón's delegate, took office, the University of Buenos Aires fell under the Peronist left-wing's orbit, but nevertheless this space had to be shared with other sectors. It is interesting to note that whereas Giannoni promoted the Committee meeting in Buenos Aires on the basis of his identification with the new Marxist left, but with an open and frontist proposal, Saad Chedid, the director of the Third World Institute, perceived the meeting as inscribed in 'the spirit of Justicialist Doctrine of openness towards the Third World' (in Bissio

⁴ An experimental 16mm-film including the song *Sympathy for the Devil* granted by the Rolling Stones, which was exhibited in Rome and London achieving a certain impact within underground circles.

⁵ Author's interview with Giannoni (Bs.As., August 1993) and Denti (Mexico, November 1994).

1974). This is an example of the coexistence of socialism and nationalism in the thirdworldist perspective.

During its short life, the Cinematheque carried out two main activities: on the one hand the preparation of film programmes to be distributed according to the demands from public or popular institutions. Giannoni remembers that a circuit fed by the Archive had been organised around 30 projectors. On the other hand, they organised Latin American and Third World film cycles, the most important activity of which was the Second Meeting of the Cinema Committee.

Although far from the dimensions of the Algiers meeting, the event held in Buenos Aires was attended by filmmakers and representatives from institutions of each country. The fact that it was presided over by the Committee full members indicates the continuity with the Algiers event.⁶ But the Buenos Aires meeting was basically a gathering of the Committee members, and guest 'observers' (with the exception of Palestinians and Libyans) came from Latin American countries (Bolivia, Cuba, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela). Among these, the absence of Brazil and Chile —even though due to the repressive context— is significant. However, the articulation with the gestation process of the New Latin American Cinema Movement lay in the presence, among others, of Walter Achugar from Uruguay (from the Montevideo Third World Cinematheque),⁷ Carlos Rebolledo from Venezuela (organiser of the major Mérida Exhibition, 1968); Mario Arrieta from Bolivia (member of the production crew of films made by the Ukamau group, led by Jorge Sanjinés); Manuel Pérez (who soon afterwards was appointed as the Cuban representative at the emerging Latin American Filmmakers Committee). In turn, the presence of Peruvian (Federico García y Juan Aranibar) and Panamanian (Modesto Tuñón) representatives is indicative of a phase characterised by national policies fostered by Latin American states.

As in Algiers, the meeting in Argentina comprised both debates and film exhibitions. Most

⁶ Mandiou Toure (Guinea), Hamid Merei (Syria), Jorge Giannoni (Argentina), and the president of the committee, Lamine Merbah (Algeria).

⁷ Achugar and Argentinean Edgardo Pallero were active distributors and organisers of events related to regional cinema.

films were Latin American; but there were also some African (from Algeria, Egypt, Guinea) and Middle Eastern films. The screening of Argentine films included a homage to Fernando Birri and the Documentary School of Santa Fe. Apart from the militant films of the 1968-1973 period, the exhibition included commercial films with a political content which had been produced within the context of the return of democracy, such as *Quebracho* (R.Wullicher) and *La Patagonia rebelde* (Rebellion in Patagonia, H.Olivera). Among Latin American films, *El coraje del pueblo* (The Courage of the People, J.Sanjinés, Bolivia), *El hombre de Maisinicú* (The Man from Maisinicú, M. Pérez, Cuba), *La nueva escuela* (J.Fraga, Cuba), *Viva la República* (P.Vega, Cuba), *Venezuela tres tiempos* (C.Rebolledo, Venezuela), short and medium-length films by the Panamanian GECU group, Peruvian films and films by Cuban-born Santiago Alvarez.

Although the meeting was held in Buenos Aires, its influence reached the city of Santa Fe. Invited by the Filmmaking Institute of the Universidad del Litoral, Rebolledo, Touré, García, Aranibar, Merei and Tuñón travelled to Santa Fe to take part in the exhibition of films and debates.⁸

The Buenos Aires event included the Committee meeting, with specific organisational tasks and a strict internal functioning, as well as colloquia among participants and the provincial delegations gathered in the parallel First University Cinema Symposium.

These colloquia were organised along four lines: the processes of decolonisation and recovery of national heritage in each region; national productions and co-participation agreements; the distribution of regional cinema; and teaching in training institutes. These debates addressed issues such as the problem of cultural domination and the use of cinema as a tool for knowledge and the decolonisation of the viewer; the transformation of the viewer into the protagonist of the story; the resource problems to develop national cinemas; the

⁸ From 1973 on the direction of the Institute was identified with Fernando Birri's pioneering experience. The contact with the Buenos Aires meeting was on the initiative of the Unidad de Cine Político Nacional y del Tercer Mundo, whose leader, Rolando López, had organised the clandestine screening of *La hora de los hornos* in that city from 1970.

technologies to be used; policies in the countries with a state control over the sector; experiences of mobile screening units.

The political resolutions encompassed some topics already at issue in Algiers which were to be developed by a series of specific measures: the committee members were to take charge of its organisation in each continent and to obtain its recognition; a bulletin was to be published in order to strengthen links; the promotion of co-operation among countries; the exchange of technicians; the creation of a Latin American Filmmakers Federation.

As we can conclude from the resolutions, this second meeting of the Committee took on a basically political character, not leaving much room for formal or aesthetic concerns. This does not mean, however, that these were totally absent. An article published in those days mentions some discussions on subjects and language related to the question of the communicability with a popular audience and, in consequence, the course to take with the pattern of commercial cinema. Manuel Pérez, the director of *El hombre de Maisinicú*, stated: 'We apply techniques and resources used by mainstream cinema, but we exert violence against the viewer's habits with a revolutionary subject matter, wholly different from the message in a capitalist producer's film' (in Bissio 1974). Years later, Humberto Ríos remembered the 'sotto voce' controversy in the meeting 'around the form and the dramatic and aesthetic discourse of Manuel Pérez's film.' (Ríos 1980:17)

But, as revealed by the above-mentioned 'voice level', this kind of debate occupied a marginal position; it was rather an 'essentially political meeting, (where) cinema was little discussed, for Argentina was pervaded by the impressively intense political life.'⁹

In effect, although the resolutions adopted might be read as indicative of a favourable context, in those days there was actually a high political tension in Buenos Aires. After mid-1973, the Peronist left-wing had been gradually forced out of the governmental positions it had once achieved, and by the time the committee meeting was held, the relationship between that left-wing sector and President Perón was going through one of its worst moments.

The inner conflict within Peronism is the main remembrance in the account of delegates

⁹ Author's interview with Manuel Pérez (La Habana, November 1996).

such as Manuel Pérez (Cuba) and Federico García (Peru). They both recall the confusing and tense climate they sensed in the hotel where they lodged, owned by a trade union aligned with union bureaucracy, then in open confrontation with Peronist left-wing.

Federico García participated in the meeting in his capacity of representative from SINAMOS, the official agency in Velasco Alvarado administration's media area.¹⁰ In his account a series of facts illustrate the embedding of the event in the political context: his trip to the cities of Santa Fe and La Plata to exhibit films which actually became excuses to discuss the Peruvian process; the contacts with Liberation Cinema group and meetings with Gleyzer and Cedrón; the impact made on him by the mobilisation power of the Peronist Youth in a mass demonstration where he gave a public speech about the Velasquist experience; his official visit — just a day later — to the Government House, where he was not very warmly welcomed. All these activities, with the exception of the latter, were part of the climate pervading the meeting.

The tensions of the political interplay were also apparent in the relationships between Argentinean filmmakers. The early leftist orientation of Cine Liberación had undergone a certain transformation related to its equally early alignment with Perón. The change of *La hora de los hornos*'s ending when it was publicly exhibited in commercial theatres by late 1973 (with the replacement of Che Guevara's image for Perón's), was regarded by some militant filmmakers (albeit on different scales) as an act of betrayal of early principles (on the film (distributed in the United Kingdom by The Other Cinema group) see Stam 1990 and on the change of the images see Mestman 1999). Since Giannoni was among the critics, Solanas's and Getino's participation in the event was highly restricted. In general, testimonies do not recall Solanas's presence (he may have been abroad), and Getino seems to have kept an extremely low profile. This is a meaningful absence because they made up the most important political cinema group and the meeting was actually attended by several figures from Argentine political cinema, some of whom had a good relationship with the founders of Cine Liberación and even shared organisations like the Frente de Liberación del Cine Nacional.

In the months following the meeting, the Argentine situation dramatically worsened. After

¹⁰ Author's interview with Federico García (La Habana, November 1996).

Perón's death on July 1st, political repression spread with the attacks of the para-military group known as AAA. In September in Caracas (Venezuela), Giannoni participated in the creation of the Latin American Filmmakers' Committee, promoted in the Algiers and Buenos Aires meetings. He was then forced to leave Argentina and was exiled first in Peru for some months and finally in Cuba. The experience of the Cinematheque was over and the materials collected were scattered, many of them getting lost.

III. Thirdworldism as a gap-bridging imaginary

Jorge Giannoni is the main protagonist in the history of the link between the Algiers and the Buenos Aires meetings. His relationship to cinematic thirdworldism went through a very particular phase by the early 70s, when he got in touch with the Palestinian struggle and participated in the activities of a small Italian production company, San Diego Cinematográfica.

Created in 1969 by Renzo Rossellini, soon later San Diego focused on Third World political documentaries, fostering liberation movements. Towards 1971, Giannoni and Jorge Denti, who were in contact with San Diego, created Collettivo Cinema del Terzo Mondo. As explained above, the Argentineans had been reunited in Paris during May 1968. After the *Molotov Party* experience, they travelled to Beirut where they got in touch with the Palestinian cause and the Arab culture. Renzo Rossellini remembers that they visited him in Rome with the material they had shot in the region and asked him for an editing bench to edit it. In exchange, he asked them to edit another material he had received from Bolivia.¹¹ Out of that relationship came the medium-length films *Palestina, otro Vietnam* and *Bolivia, el tiempo de los generales*.

San Diego dealt with both production and distribution and was funded through two sources: some cutting and editing jobs commissioned by Roberto Rossellini; and the edition of the newscast of the Office des Actualités Algériennes (OAA), whose director was Mohamed

¹¹ Testimony recorded by the author (September 2000). Renzo, Roberto Rossellini's son, was a militant in an Italian new left or revolutionary left group. At the same time, in 1970 and 1971 he was in charge of the editions of the Marsala Terzo Mondo Cinema Review, in Sicily, respectively on African and Latin American cinema.

Lakhdar Hamina, one of the most outstanding figures in Third World cinema.¹² Therefore, we may infer that the San Diego laboratories operated as a regular meeting place of Third World filmmakers and particularly of some Algerians and Giannoni.

However, within the context of the Algiers meeting the relationships between the ONCIC (hosting the meeting) and the Office run by Lakhdar Hamina were tense, and this marginalised the latter in the event. In this sense, the organisation of the meetings took another course.¹³

Towards mid-1973 and back in Argentina Giannoni obtained UBA credentials for him and his partner, Susana Sichel, to attend the Algiers Nonaligned Conference in September. They went via Rome, participated in the event and made contact with the Algerian Minister of Culture, thanks to references given by Saad Chedid in Buenos Aires. Under the impact of the Conference experience, they visited the ONCIC with the proposal to organise a Latin American exhibition (the one included in the IX Mostra di Pesaro by those days)¹⁴ in Algeria. Back in Rome, they participated in it, and between Rome and Algiers, the original proposal became a Third World cinema event. The ONCIC agreed with the idea and contributed the technical infrastructure and human resources for its implementation. Between October and November, the Argentinians' work together with ONCIC gradually shaped the proposal. Official invitations were sent to those countries that had nationalised their film industry as well as to liberation movements in others. In the middle of the controversies between sectors of the Algerian film industry, the project had its ups and downs until it was finally held with a massive attendance, in

¹² His first full-length film, *Le vent des Aurés* (The wind from the Aurés, award-winning in Cannes and Moscow, 1967) is regarded as a landmark in Algerian cinema. Renzo Rossellini had collaborated with the Algerian FLN while being a student in Paris, where he met some young people who were later to become Algerian leaders. Among them was Lakhdar Hamina.

¹³ Author's interview with Susana Sichel (Bs.As., January 2001).

¹⁴ In fact, Salvatore Piscicelli, then secretary general of the exhibition, was among the European 'observers' of the Algiers meeting, which he attended with the purpose of developing the relationships with Third World cinema (Author's interview with Lino Micciché, director of the Pesaro Exhibition, Rome, September 2000).

early December.

Before returning to Buenos Aires, Giannoni and Sichel travelled to Cuba and Peru, where they strengthened links with ICAIC and SINAMOS.

Originally the meeting in Argentina was supposed to be held in Mar del Plata, following a proposal made by University teachers in that city. They planned a big gathering like the Algiers event, possibly taking the Argentine International Festival held in the 1960s as a reference point.¹⁵ In the early 1974, Susana Sichel went to Mar del Plata in an attempt to organise the event, but because of budget restrictions, it was finally decided to hold it in Buenos Aires.

The boldness and originality of this initiative to connect 'peripheral' cinema movements through a committee and with a common programme can only be understood in relation to its socio-historical conditions of possibility.

Apart from Algeria as a propitious space for a first meeting, two other phenomena could be mentioned. On the one hand, the general influence of a "thirdworldist liberation" model which could be totally or partially appropriated (and enhanced) by social change movements on both sides of the Atlantic. On the other hand, a sort of international circuit of festivals, meetings or cinema exhibitions which occupied an alternative or oppositional position in relation to the commercial cinema structures and established festivals.

The unfinished project of the Third World Cinema Committee gradually vanished with the end of the 'long sixties' and the disappearance of the conditions enabling its material and symbolic construction. That is to say, its gestation took place in a time previous to the

¹⁵ This A-category Festival was created in 1959 thanks to the promotion of the Argentine Film Reviewers Association. Until 1966 it was an interesting space, with an initiative like the meeting of theorists and critics such as George Sadoul, Guido Aristarco, Marcel Martin, Henri Langlois, Cesare Zavattini, among others. For instance, this festival witnessed a controversy between French and Italian critics about Algerian War and European cinema. With General Onganía's military coup d'etat in 1966, the official control led to the suspension of the 1967 Festival. After that only two editions were held: 1968, when the official censorship was denounced by filmmakers and critics; and the last one in 1970.

recuperation, revision and expansion of the concept of Third Cinema by Teshome Gabriel in the 1980s, which allowed him to connect it with the emerging independent black counter-cinema in the United Kingdom (Pines and Willemsen 1994; Mercer 1986). An interesting attempt which, as Jameson notes, made possible 'square this circle' of the cinema made in peripheral countries and 'to retain the formal strengths of Third-World political cinema in a period in which its content has necessarily been modified beyond recognition.' (Jameson 1992: 186 note 1)

Dating from a previous period when Third World cinema was infused with 'formal inventiveness and political ferment', where 'form was also an extraaesthetic issue and what you did to movies and movie-making was also expected to have its impact on changing the world' (Jameson 1992: 187). This intensity did not reach all the films made in those countries. It covered only a part, small in comparison to the general panorama, but very important in some areas inasmuch as it represented the rise or renewal of cinema, which achieved a significant worldwide visibility.

In this sense, the tendency which is expressed in Algiers and Buenos Aires can also be found in the main Latin American and African cinema manifestos of the period, particularly those inspired by a marked anti-imperialist confrontation. These texts (as well as many films) were elaborated under the remarkable influence of one of the main models supporting the revolutionary thought during the 1960s — Frantz Fanon's model of the struggle between Coloniser and Colonised (Fanon 1961 and Said 1993)

In an essay outlining a history of vision and the visible, Jameson identifies an early phase which he terms 'colonial or colonising look', or 'visibility as colonisation', whose response demands a radical inversion of the Coloniser's look through a violent reply (Jameson 1998). Even though it is true that this rigid model finds its limit in the relative simplicity of the colonial situation and the achievement of independence in Third World countries, considering that the subsequent liberation of new forces involved in this process is certainly ambiguous (for decolonisation historically went hand in hand with neocolonialism) (Jameson, *Periodizing the 60s*), it is a model whose influence persisted throughout the decade, operating as an axis which articulated thirdworldism as a cultural political imaginary. This is a utopia which allows the grouping together of newly liberated or decolonising countries within the same project as others

which, though politically independent, were perceived as 'neocolonised'.

Consequently, this sort of political-cultural pattern, articulated with other locally or nationally-rooted patterns, is one of the conditions of production of many films or manifestos of the period. This is clearly the case of *La hora de los hornos*; as well as the above-mentioned *Hacia un Tercer Cine*, whose influence can be perceived in African documents dating from the early 1970s. In this sense, the Algiers-Buenos Aires relationship is sustained by a bond based on an 'epochal' (1960s) thirdworldist imaginary. Besides, this is also associated with the influence of the Algerian experience on the new Argentine left through two major mediations: Fanon's writing and Gillo Pontecorvo's film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). The international repercussion of this film, related to the achievement of the Golden Lion in the Biennale di Venezia in 1966, was remarkable; most Argentinean political filmmakers regard it as a milestone in that period and acknowledge its influence.

But at the same time, we might think that the international impact made by several Third World political films has to do with the workings of this thirdworldist imaginary — with the corresponding mediations — in the First World as well, especially in the circles reached by that kind of cinema.

From the second half of the 1960s onwards, the creation of meeting spaces for Latin American and African political filmmakers in their own region meant an incipient distinctive feature in relation to previous periods when the most usual meeting place (if any) were European Festivals or Exhibitions.¹⁶ The wording used by the Chilean Valparaíso-based newspaper *La Unión* (3-8-67) to title its review on the 1967 Viña del Mar Festival illustrates the prevailing spirit: 'Viña displaces Europe as a meeting point for Latin American Filmmakers'. Similarly, in Algiers Giannoni stated that the importance of the meeting lay in the fact that for the first time Third World filmmakers met without Western intervention (quoted by Merdaci 1974: 12).¹⁷ His idea of

¹⁶ In Carthage (Tunisia), Ouagadougou (Upper Volta), Viña del Mar (Chile) Mérida (Venezuela), among others. In the case of Latin America, this circuit was in open confrontation with official festivals, organised under military regimes, such as those in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and Mar del Plata (Argentina).

¹⁷ The European participants mentioned in the final document are referred to as 'observers'.

'co-production' (quoted in the epigraph) and the place reserved for distribution are indicative of the project of creating new flows between Third World countries to increase the production and percentages of regional programming.

However, this idea autonomy should not be mistaken for the overall rejection of European and North American production and circuits. The creation of the Third World Cinema Committee was sustained by an incipient and precarious bridge between Algiers and Buenos Aires — with antecedents and ramifications on both sides of the Atlantic —,¹⁸ but a significant part of the conditions of its emergence lay in the dialogue with an alternative First World circuit. That is, the international visibility attained by Third Cinema (or Third World cultural decolonisation cinema) a few years earlier was possible thanks to the links that cinema had been able to establish with political filmmakers, alternative distribution and screening circuits and a series of exhibitions, reviews or Festivals in the developed world and the Eastern countries.

Although the political confrontation in the field of cinema was at its zenith in that period with the 1968 revolt and found its expression in Cannes and Venice Festivals, the search for autonomous market-free alternatives dated from the beginning of the decade and found a stronger reference point in areas like the Pesaro Exhibition after 1965 (on the Pesaro Exhibition in the sixties and seventies, see Micciché 1989 and *Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema* 1984). The Latin American movements which were a more solid presence in these spaces throughout the decade were the Brazilian Cinema Novo and Cuban cinema. One characteristic of the post-1968 period was the remarkable increase of the number of Third World films included in parallel distribution and exhibition groups, as well as in First World Festivals and Exhibitions. In the early 1970s, there were intense debates in those circuits which included magazines and militant cinema collectives.¹⁹

¹⁸ Among Latin American antecedents we can mention the relationship between Algeria and Cuba; and in the case of Argentina, Humberto Ríos' collaboration with a clandestine network for the support of Algerian War while he was a student in the IDHEC in Paris.

¹⁹ For example, the debates on political cinema among French cinema magazines (*Positif*, *Cinéma 71*, *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers du Cinéma*) in 1971, and the debates among Italian cinema magazines (*Cinema nuovo*, *Bianco e*

It was certainly not a homogeneous circuit. Its diversity has more than one dimension. There were exhibitions to disseminate little known cinemas; meetings of militants; discussions on language or aesthetics, etc. In many of the European circles Third World cinema was mostly perceived as a 'second cinema way', prioritising the auteur-artistic dimension of the films at the expense of the political aspect (Willemen 1994: 9). By those years, this tendency co-existed (either harmoniously or conflictingly) with another area closer to post-1968 politically intervening European cinema.

It is evident that the issues under discussion (in terms of tendency) show differences both between the First and Third World and within each one. It is likely that some of the main differences between the European notion of 'counter-cinema' (Willemen 1994: 7) and the Third Cinema were the less prescriptive character of the latter and its rejection (following Brecht) of a single aesthetic model.

However, two other major elements account for these distances: on the one hand, Europe's greater development of an aesthetic-formal debate on language, including the recent theoretical developments in the social sciences. On the other hand, Third Cinema prioritised issues of production-distribution or cinema's direct intervention, either through its testimonial-informational or agitative role, or through the unifying idea of cultural decolonisation, associated, for instance, with the position of Dependency Theory within social thinking.

Undoubtedly, these two tendencies were also present within European counter-cinema and Third World political cinema; still, for the most part, in the former case few experiences remained uninfluenced by the above-mentioned formal debates; in the latter, these debates were either more general or directly displaced. Thus, some meetings involved conflicts derived from the clash of different viewpoints or priorities. Anyway, these spaces strengthened the

Nero, Cinema 60, Rivista del cinematografo, Cineforum and Filmcritica) in 1972, both at the Porretta Terme Exhibition (Italy) (Boarini and Bonfiglioli 1981). On British alternative or oppositional groups of these period see Dickinson 1999.

networks of an alternative and helped to extend the scope of Third World cinema.

Although changes in the world conditions on every level from the 1970s on prevented any further meetings of the Third World Cinema Committee, a few days after the meeting in Buenos Aires there was an attempt to link all the progressive and militant cinema collectives around the world in Québec under the name of Rencontres Internationales pour un Nouveau Cinéma, organised by Montréal-based Comité d'Action Cinématographique and attended by over 250 participants from 25 countries of 5 continents. This article cannot expand on this event any further, but we want to mention it as an illustration of the alternative or oppositional space referred to. And Third World cinema intended to seek dialogue with the most advanced core of this space, as it perceived that the potential for its consolidation in the geopolitics of international cinema could also be found there.

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