

POLIFONIA	CUIABÁ	EdUFMT	Nº 11	p. 109-132	2005/2006	ISSN 0104-687X
-----------	--------	--------	-------	------------	-----------	----------------

TWO NARRATIVES, MULTIPLE SPACES: THE LITERATURE OF ISMAIL KADARÉ AND THE CINEMA OF WALTER SALLES

Mariana A. C. da Cunha* (Queen Mary, University of London)

RESUMO: Este ensaio – inserido no contexto dos Estudos Críticos e Culturais – pretende discutir o processo da adaptação cinematográfica numa perspectiva transcultural e espacial. Trata-se de analisar o filme *Abril Despedaçado*, dirigido por Walter Salles, e o romance albanês no qual o filme foi inspirado, *Broken April* de Ismail Kadaré, sob a luz de teóricos como Zygmunt Bauman e Mikhail Bakhtin, que pensaram os conceitos de território e de espaço nos diferentes gêneros ficcionais. Além do processo de adaptação, o ensaio observa também, as dicotomias entre o local e o global, o centro e a periferia, o litoral e o campo, o único e o universal – noções que perdem suas definições estáticas e começam a se entrecruzar e a se confundir no contexto artístico e social da contemporaneidade brasileira.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Adaptação cinematográfica. Espaço. Cinema brasileiro.

ABSTRACT: This essay – part of the Cultural and Critical Studies field – aims at thinking the film adaptation process in a cross-cultural and spatial perspective. It analyses the film *Behind the Sun*, directed by Walter Salles, and the Albanian novel in which it was inspired, *Broken April*, written by Ismail Kadare, in the light of theoreticians such as Zygmunt Bauman and Mikail Bakhtin, who

* Mariana A. C. da Cunha is a Junior Lecturer (Leitora) at Queen Mary, University of London, teaching Brazilian Portuguese Language and Culture. She has a Master in Cultural and Critical Studies from Birkbeck College, University of London and is now studying her PhD at the same university in Brazilian Cinema and Literature.

thought the concepts of territory and space in the different fictional genres. Beyond the adaptation process, this paper observes the dichotomies between the local and the global, the centre and the periphery, the coast and the countryside, the unique and the universal – notions that lose their static definitions and start to mix up in the contemporary social and artistic context of Brazil.

KEYWORDS: Filmic adaptation. Space. Brazilian cinema.

1. Introduction

Albania, 1930. In the High Plateaux a young mountaineer, Gjorg Berisha, kills Zef Kryeqyqe. It is the forty-fifth death in a family vendetta initiated seventy years before. It started when a stranger was killed by a member of the Kryeqyqes, after being sheltered by the Berishas' clan. The blood feud is an imposition of the *Kanun*, the code of customary law, that for centuries, generation after generation, has been handed down in the Albanian mountain region. After carrying out his obligation, Gjorg Berisha has twenty-eight days before the Kryeqyqes can avenge the spilling of their blood by murdering him.

The *Kanun* – this vicious circle of executions – sets the plot of *Broken April* (first published in 1982). The novel is an almost anthropological account of the murders, seen as both a right and a duty, and the author, Ismail Kadare, extracts from this Code all the fury of the tragedies.

Brazil, 1910. In the Northeast's arid *Backlands*, Tonio Breves' father forces him to avenge the blood of his brother, killed by the Ferreiras, a neighbouring family. After the deed, Tonio has only a few days of truce until he too, in turn, is hunted by a Ferreira. The blood feud started many years before. A disagreement over a territorial boundary dividing their lands led to fighting. Since then, the lives of the two families' members have been reduced to vengeance and death in the name of their lands and their honour.

The same story with different characters; the same scenery in two different landscapes; Eastern Europe and Latin

America; the disparities present in the works of two authors from different generations, one Albanian, the other Brazilian, that use two different narrative systems, diverse and dialogic, literature and cinema. This essay proposes to investigate the significance of the representation of space in the film adaptation *Behind the Sun* [*Abril Despedaçado*] (2001), directed by Walter Salles, and its inspiring novel, *Broken April*.¹ I will examine in what ways the notion of territory affects the adaptation. In both the novel and the film the narration of the events takes place in very culturally specific spaces, giving the reader/spectator a sense of uniqueness, in which local communities can be regarded as alienated from the global culture. However, despite their geographical distance, the two cultures bring about a common theme in which the Albanian Balkans and the Brazilian *Backlands* are the stage for a cross-cultural narrative.

The perception of universality in Salles' adaptation was recurrent in the critical response when the film was released. As Brett affirmed,

some stories, however foreign they may seem, are universal. This is evident with *Behind the Sun*, the latest from Oscar-winning director Salles, as he has translated a tale set in the Balkans to his native Brazil. It proves starkly memorable, the kind of elegiac drama that might equally have suited a film set in the American West. (BRETT, 2002)

McGavin, from Indie Wire, Toronto adds:

As a 20th century art form, the cinema is the ideal medium for subverting or expanding the primal and mythic stories linking culture, language and social origins. The fourth feature of the exceptionally gifted Brazilian filmmaker

¹ For the purpose of this paper, I will use *Broken April* to refer to the novel and *Behind the Sun* to refer to the film. Even though the film's original title is a direct translation from the novel's title (*Abril Despedaçado*), this terminology is used to avoid confusion.

Walter Salles, *Behind the Sun* is a dark and pungent western reconfiguration as a foundation myth, a story about civilization and its discontents. (MCGAVIN, 2001)

Both critiques point to the fact that the director was able to break the boundaries of specificity and create a film which thematic can be considered universal, no matter where it takes place.

In addition to the focus on spatiality, this essay broadens the notion of adaptation and discusses the role of *Behind the Sun* in adapting Brazil's own culture. I will examine how the transposition of *Broken April* to the Brazilian context contributes to the contemporary production of cinema and culture in Brazil. I will argue the significance of the film's role in the construction and rescue of a national identity.

What prompted Walter Salles to adapt *Broken April* was the possibility of reconstructing a "tale of origins". After reading Kadare's novel Salles started to research the issue of the blood feuds in Brazil. Salles took his questions to Kadare who suggested "we immerse ourselves in a second round of research, which led us to Greek tragedy, and more specifically, the plays of Aeschylus." (Salles)². One of the main differences in the narratives of Salles and Kadare is the presence of a written Code of Law, the *Kanun*. In the novel this is crucial for the development of the plot, since it governs all the characters' actions. However, in Brazilian history, there is no equivalent to the *Kanun*. In the film, the recurrence of the blood feud is not ruled by the State or by a written Code. According to Salles:

The shedding of blood and fratricidal struggles for power are some of the themes that nourished the birth of Greek tragedy. I learned that until the 7th century A.D., blood crimes committed in Greece were not judged by the State. The outcome was determined by the

² See reference below for Salles, W. [Director's Notes](#). This is the original webpage for the film but it is an undated document.

warring families, who established their own codes for reparation of the blood spilled. Curiously, it is also in the absence of the State that the land wars between families in Brazil came to develop. (SALLES)³

Hence, *Behind the Sun* was the product of a dialogue between various discourses. From this point of view, the notion of adaptation applied to this work refers to the notion of intertextuality based on Barthes' idea of a plurality of texts resulting in an original product. As Robert Stam defines it:

[...] intertextual dialogism refers to the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated, which reach the text not only through recognizable influences, but also through a subtle process of dissemination. (STAM, 2000, p. 64)

Following Stam, it could be argued that the adaptation of a novel into a film could result in an art form which reaches a public in a much easier and spontaneous way, considering film today as one of the most popular media.

This notion of adaptation values the various interpretative possibilities, that is, allowing the adapting film to "take up, amplify, ignore, subvert, or transform" (STAM, 2000, p. 68), in opposition to the idea of fidelity *per se* that obstructs the possibility of recreation.

2. Adapting *Broken April*, narrating spaces

Despite the cultural disparities, *Behind the Sun* preserved a crucial element of the novel for the functioning of the adaptation. As Walter Salles explains:

³ Idem.

I was attracted by the mythic quality of the ancestral confrontation narrated by Kadare – this tragic clash between a hero forced to commit a crime against his will, and his fate which impels him forward. Attracted to a world before time, before speech, formed by what is not said. A huis-clos in the open air⁴, intimate and at the same time epic. (SALLES)⁵

The problem of territory is fundamental to the construction of the plot in both works. On the whole, the two narratives are structured in a similar way. For the purpose of this analysis, I will divide the narratives into three parts; three sections in which the spaces take different contours in the construction of the tale.

2.1. Part One

The first part introduces the heroes, Gjorg/Tonio, and their families in the context of their lands. Their actions are performed within the triviality of their lives. In the case of the novel, the monotony of their days is justified by the existence of a code of law, to which their lives are dedicated and to which all their obedience is granted. For that reason, after having avenged his brother's blood by killing his enemy Zef Kryeqyqe, Gjorg had to attend his enemy's funeral. The recounting of the memorial service emphasises the significance of the archaic frontier between the terrains of the two enemy families. And the fragment below shows the subservience to the laws:

At first he [Gjorg] had refused to take part in the ceremony, but at last he had given in to his father's urging. He had said, "You must go to the burial. You must also go to the funeral dinner to honor the man's soul."

⁴ My emphasis.

⁵ See reference below for Salles, W. Director's Notes.

“But I am the Gjaks,”⁶ Gjorg had protested. “I’m the one who killed him. Why must I go?”

“For that very reason you must go,” his father declared. “If there is anyone who cannot be excused from the burial and the funeral dinner today, it’s you.” “But why?” Gjorg had asked one last time. “Why must I go?” But his father glared at him and Gjorg said no more. (KADARE, 1982, p. 14-5)

By going to the funeral, Gjorg crosses the boundary and steps into the enemy’s land. The family space, evoked in the conversations between Gjorg and his father, is a space haunted by the family’s history, in which the respect and the honour bestowed on the dead and their code have more significance than their own will.

In addition, it is possible to recognise here the authority of the father that is echoed in the film adaptation.

Moving to the film, the camera focalises on the everyday life of the Breves family in the rural sugarcane fields of Northeast Brazil. On their barren piece of land they produce sugar in a time-honoured way, with ageing, simple equipment and no other labour force. At the beginning of the film there is an aerial view sequence showing the mechanism of the sugar production: there is a big sugarcane crusher wheel that moves in circles pulled by oxen. As the director expresses it, the wheel of the sugarcane crusher dictates the inexorable cycle from which the Breves family cannot escape. Interestingly, the movement of the wheel represents immobility. And this is exemplified in the words of the narrator of the film, Pacu, the youngest of the Breves brothers, who with his notable perspicacity asserts: “We are like the oxen here. We go ‘round and ‘round and never go anywhere.”⁷

⁶ From the Albanian *gjak* (blood), killer, but with no pejorative connotation, since the *gjaks* is fulfilling his duty under the provision of the *Kanun*.” (KADARE, 1982:, p. 15, translator’s note)

⁷ The focalisation of the camera is corroborated by the discourse of the narrator. In this perspective, the film takes a different approach from the novel. Walter Salles



Scene of the father operating the sugarcane crusher in *Behind the Sun*.

Also, in the sequence of this shot showing the family working together with the sugarcane crusher under the harsh beating sun of the Brazilian Northeast, there is a scene inside the Breves' house. Contrary to the outside, the inside of the house is dark and silent. The director not only uses the contrast between the radiant colours of the outside and the obscurity of the inside, but also makes use of sound resources. The noises of the sugarcane crusher in movement and the loud shouts of the father at the oxen contrast with the silence inside the house, building an atmosphere of stillness and obedience. There are pictures of family men that died in the vendetta hanging on the wall. Their presence lies heavy in that environment. A space where the living have no say, evident in the narration of *Broken April*. It is also inside the house that, during the family dinner, the father beats the youngest son when the latter pleads with Tonio not to avenge the blood of their older brother. It is the space of a blind authority and

chose to adopt a narrator that is not only the instance that tells, but also the instance that experiences.

violence. In this aspect, the novel and the film share the same point of view.

2.2. Part two

The second part of the narratives is defined by the arrival of new characters into the environment of the heroes' families. The novel introduces a recent married couple (Bessian and Diana) from the capital, Tirana, on their honeymoon. Bessian is a writer who is very interested in the *Kanun* and all the stories that have come up from its laws. The narrative of *Broken April* is brought to another perspective, in which these two new characters are not trapped as in the reality of the hero, but can look at it from the point of view of the outsider. Thus, the introduction of the characters brings about a new perception in the reality of the Berishas and the blood feud issue. As Bakhtin poses it:

When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide. For at each moment, regardless of the position and the proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself; parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face, his expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him. As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes ... but in order to annihilate this difference completely, it would be necessary to merge into one, to become one and the same person. (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 22-3, In: HARVEY, 1996, p. 270)

For Bakhtin, one can only perceive and understand the world with the presence of the other. The acknowledgement of the other and the exchange of ideas through dialogue is what makes one a human being. In this sense, in both narratives, the other's perspective and point of view, now shared by the characters, change the whole perspective of their lives.

Similarly to the novel, the film narrative changes with the arrival of new characters. It is interesting to note how the closed universe of the hero's family is represented and developed. Before the arrival of the new characters, Clara and Salustiano, artists in a travelling circus, the reality in that community called Riacho das Almas⁸ was the eternal blood vendetta between the two neighbouring families. The centre of their lives is their land and honour, and the enemy's land. This is well illustrated when Tonio is on his way to avenge his brother's death, walking towards his enemy's territory. The narrator who also assumes the role of the character that sees beyond the everyday reality, comments in voiceover:

Tonio will be walking over the land that used to be ours. The Ferreiras took it from us and we took it back. Now, it's theirs again. That's how the feud's begun.

⁸ Riacho das Almas is situated in the State of Ceará, Brazil, translated in English as Stream of Souls. The film director and director of photography Walter Carvalho decided to use a geographical locale that would be true to the plot and, "whenever possible, using the dramatic natural light of Northeast Brazil" (in: Salles, Director's Notes). In the film, the narrator comments: "It's in the middle of nothing. All we know is that it's above the ground and below the sun."



Scene of Tonio walking towards the Ferreras land for revenge, *Behind the Sun*.

Not only by means of visual elements, but also through the narrator's discourse, is it possible to note the circularity that symbolizes the lives of the families involved in the vendetta. It is as though there was an imaginary line dividing the same arid and ungrateful land. Fear and violence are sparked when these limits are crossed from one side or the other in this archaic frontier.

Zygmunt Bauman (1990) discusses the question of territory through a very interesting panorama defined by the social relations of friends, enemies and strangers. This can be applied to the analysis of *Broken April* and *Behind the Sun*. For the question of boundaries, he proposes:

Territorial and functional separation is both a reflection of existing hermeneutical problems and a most powerful factor in their perpetuation and reproduction. With segregation continuous and closely guarded, there is little chance that the probability of misunderstanding (or at least the anticipation of such misunderstanding) will ever diminish ... they have an in-built tendency to self-perpetuation ... As boundary-drawing is never foolproof and some boundary-crossing is difficult to avoid –

hermeneutic problems are likely to persist as a permanent 'grey-area' surrounding the familiar world of daily life. (BAUMAN, 1990, p. 147)

This is a very suitable explanation to the boundary problem portrayed in the film. To illustrate this comment, there is a clear suggestion that the characters (and consequently the spectator) have a conscious knowledge that the killings and the suffering are never going to end.

Before the arrival of the circus artists, the narrative revolved around the problem of the boundary, precisely how Bauman explains it. However, in what I propose to be the second part of the narrative, the Breves family, especially Tonio and Pacu – the narrator – acknowledge the existence of the strangers. Prior to their arrival, the only clear distinction in the community was between the space of the Breves family and the space of the Ferreiras, in what Bauman calls the territory of friends and the territory of the enemies:

Being a friend, and being an enemy, are the two forms in which the other may be recognized as another subject, construed as a 'subject like the self', admitted in the self's life-world, be counted, become and stay relevant. (BAUMAN, 1990, p. 144)

The role of the circus artists in the film, as well as the role of the young couple in the novel, is developed to excite a change in the vicious circle of the family feuds. However, their arrival was treated ambivalently, seen in the eyes of the brothers as a way of liberation and in the eyes of the parents, as a menace.

The separation between what Walter Salles calls *huis-clos*, that is, the closed, local space of Gjorg/Tonio's life-world (ironically represented in the openness of the countries' landscapes with all the imaginary limits imposed by tradition), and the open world outside their gates and fences, comes together through the encounter with the strangers, who offer the heroes the rest of the world.

The stranger has an ambivalent character. As Derrida puts it, it does break the binary friend-enemy, being both, being none ... Oppositions enable knowledge and action, undecidables paralyse. They brutally expose the fragility of a most secure of separations. They bring the outside into the inside, and poison the comfort of order with suspicion of chaos. This is exactly what strangers do. (BAUMAN, 1990, p. 145-6)

In *Behind the Sun*, however, this encounter not only brings about the sense of mystery and discovery to Tonio and Pacu, but as implied before also threatens to break the cohesive structure of the family, as Bauman explains above. In the film, the introduction of the strangers suggests the idea of the hero overcoming his limits. At this point, the film adaptation takes a different path from the novel.

In *Broken April*, the characters of Diana and Bessian are developed differently. The landscape in the Albanian High Plateaux described as “part-imaginary, part-epic” (Kadare: 1982: 64) contrasted immensely with the world they came from. Therefore, their encounter with Gjorg meant that a new world would be presented to them as well as to Gjorg, and that, for them all, this new space would have a life-changing impact. In a passage of the novel, while the couple is driving for hours on end through the country in their carriage, there is a notable contrast between the two worlds, the city and the country:

Leaning against him, her eyes closing now and then with the jolting of the carriage, as if to ward off the sadness that the barren scene aroused in her, she thought in a fragmentary way about the days when they were first acquainted and the early weeks of their engagement. The chestnut trees lining the boulevard, café doors, the glitter of rings as they embraced, park benches strewn with autumn leaves, and dozen of other such memories – all those things she poured out upon the endless

waste, in the hope that those images might in some sort people the void. But the wasteland did not change. Its wet nakedness was ready to engulf in a moment not just her own store of happiness but perhaps the heaped-up joy of whole generations. (KADARE, 1982, p. 66-7)

Their encounter with Gjorg was very brief and happened at an inn where they casually met. Gjorg is the personification of all the mythic stories recounted about the High Plateaux. Diana was moved to see the mark of death, a black ribbon around Gjorg's arm, which symbolised all the wounds in a life torn apart by tradition.

In *Behind the Sun*, the encounter with the hero and the strangers goes beyond a brief contact and from that moment on the whole tension of the narrative lies on the possibility of Tonio going away with the artists and breaking out. Bauman explains:

The stranger retains (if only in theory) his freedom to go and so is able to view local conditions with an equanimity the native residents can hardly afford ... The commitment the stranger declares cannot be trusted, as it comes complete with a safety valve of easy escape which most natives often envy yet seldom possess. (BAUMAN, 1990, p. 150)

The circus artists, Clara and Salustiano, enter inside the Breves' trivial lives but refuse to stay. They are passing by, looking for another village to put on their show.

This is when Tonio crosses the frontier of the inside-outside and goes in search of that other world. In one part of the film, Tonio takes his younger brother Pacu to the nearby village where the circus has settled. There, they encounter a world of fantasy, represented by the circus where Clara plays a fire-eater while she dances and juggles with fire and where Salustiano plays a clown. They enter a space of magic, laughter, and play, so estranged from their everyday lives. It is also the space in which

Tonio falls in love with Clara. And for that reason, Tonio walks away from his house for a second time, to meet the artists again.

Hence, in both the novel and the film, the encounter with the new characters broadens the possibility of a transformation in the cycle of the heroes' lives, but differently in either case. Salles successfully presents this idea of hope and happiness when he introduces the new characters. In the original novel though, the tone is much heavier. These elements presented in the film will later be taken up again in this paper, when we discuss these aspects in relation to Brazilian film history.

2.3. Part three

It is in the third and final part of the narrative that the transformation is concreted. *Broken April* recounts Gjorg's way back home, where he would need to hide, as his days of truce have come to an end.

According to the laws of the *Kanun*, there were, in the Albanian mountains, some roads protected by the *bessa*, that means, in Albanian, the pledged word, or truce. The protected roads were the places of refuge for those involved in the blood feuds. And while walking back home after his period of truce Gjorg was on these secure roads.

The consequence of Gjorg's encounter with Bessian and Diana is outlined in the last few pages of the novel. In spite of the short time together, Gjorg had fallen in love with Diana, and wished to see their carriage in hope of seeing her face once more. In a brief encounter with another mountaineer also wandering the secured roads, Gjorg is told that Bessian and Diana are on their way back home. It would be the last chance for him to see Diana:

An hour's walk from here, he told himself. He raised his head to look for the sun's track behind the clouds. He reckoned that there were still two hours of daylight left. She had never been so near. He would be able to see his fairy.

Without further thought, without even saying goodbye to his fellow wayfarer, he went off like a madman in the direction where, according to the man with the black ox, the crossroads lay. (KADARE, 1982, p. 214)

It is this determination that makes Gjorg cross the boundary limiting safety from danger in the mountains. Walking beyond the boundary would make him vulnerable to the risk of being killed. And thus, Gjorg is shot by his enemy.

3. Adapting a film, adapting culture

Differently from the novel, Salles announces with a certain freedom the concretion of the hero's will in overcoming the circularity of his everyday life. The importance of the foreign element that is introduced into the narrative is manifested in the possibility of somehow being able to decode and decipher the very specificities of that *huis-clos* in the open air, as Walter Salles defines it.

There are two moments in the film that determine a different ending to the narrative. One scene shows the oxen trudging around the sugarcane crusher, after a particularly hard day. Their harnesses have been removed but their minds are still set in the cycle beaten into them by the father and they are going 'round by themselves. In Walter Salles words, they "have reached the complete illogical situation where now they are just going 'round and 'round for no reason whatsoever, as they are not attached anymore to the machine."⁹ This scene represents the eternal motion being perpetuated without anything to justify it. It is a decisive point because it is when Tonio realises that he has to leave.

There is also a fairytale-like aspect to the film that allows the hero to detach himself from the archaic tradition that his father insists on perpetuating. And this is the other definitive

⁹ See reference below for Salles, W. Director's Notes.

moment, when Tonio and Clara fall in love and Clara decides to leave the circus to go after Tonio. In the film, she quits the circus and tells Tonio she is heading east, towards the coast. However, the final occurrence that leads Tonio to leave is when his younger brother, Pacu, is killed. He is mistaken for his elder brother and shot in the tradition of the vengeance.

Film, with its alternative ways of representing space, has also witnessed a different way of perceiving it. With the focalisation in film being mostly visual, space loses its static character, often presented in novels through purely descriptive forms. Here space is dynamic, fluid and heterogeneously constructed and discontinuous. Its main element becomes simultaneity, where the distance can be abolished and the most different and remote places appear to be in proximity, as a continuation of one another.

And this is what is presented in the last scene of the film, when Tonio walks away from his family, from his land and from the vicious circle of the blood feuds. In moments (almost unnoticeably by the spectator) he arrives at the coast facing the immense sea. This is a clear allusion and dialogue with Glauber Rocha's *Black God, White Devil*¹⁰ (1964), and consequently with Cinema Novo. This movement in Brazil's 1960's inaugurated a kind of cinema that would revolutionize the Brazilian cinema previous to that period and established a critique of North American cultural imperialism. Many filmmakers of that period, mainly inspired by the Italian neo-realism movement, had the intention of denouncing reality, suggesting in their films a critique of society. Nevertheless, they wished to unravel and reveal the "real" Brazilian people. With that purpose, many of the films shot during that period took place in distant locations such as the Northeast *Backlands*.

¹⁰ The original title of this film is *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*.



Scene of *Black God, White Devil* (1964)



The rural Brazilian northeast in scene of *Black God, White Devil* (1964)

According to Randal Johnson,

Black God, White Devil sees Good and Evil (God and the devil) as internally contradictory values that must be understood in the concrete perspectives of the historical

process. Manuel wonders of salvation. But in the end, his salvation can come only through his own struggle. 'The land belongs to men / Not to God nor to the Devil'. This is the meaning of the film's final sequence. As Manuel runs across the Sertao¹¹, free from the opposing, mystifying forces of Good and Evil, the camera follows him in a long aerial track before cutting abruptly to the sea. However, it is the camera that reaches the sea that proposes the solution to the metaphysical problem raised by the film conflict. (JOHNSON, 1984, p. 135)

Glauber Rocha was inspired by the novel *Rebellion in the Backlands*¹² written by a Brazilian novelist, Euclides da Cunha, in 1902. In short, the novel recounts the story of Antonio Conselheiro, a preacher and leader of a small, religiously fanatical community in the *Backlands*. It was from Antonio Conselheiro's speeches that Glauber Rocha created a song, together with composer Sergio Ricardo, which said:

The Backlands will become sea
And the sea will become the Backlands!
My story has been told
Truth, imagination.
I hope that you
Have learnt a lesson:
That wrongly divided
This world is wrong,
That the land belongs to men,
Not to God nor to the Devil¹³

¹¹ *Sertão* can be translated into English as the *Backlands*. It consists of an arid desert in the Brazilian Northeast interior where a part of the population has to live in precarious conditions of life.

¹² The original title of the novel is *Os Sertões*.

¹³ In the original: "O sertão vai virar mar / E o mar vai virar sertão! / Ta contada a minha estória / Verdade, imaginação. / Espero que o sinhô / Tenha tirado uma lição: / Que assim mal dividido / Esse mundo anda errado, / Que a terra é do homem, / Não é de Deus nem do Diabo." Find reference below, Rocha, 1985. (My translation)

This recurrent will to escape towards the sea, to head east, has to be understood by considering the geography of Brazil. The majority of State's capitals and major cities are spread along the Atlantic coastline. One of the exceptions, the Brazilian capital, Brasilia, is situated in the centre of the country because it was planned and built recently. It is in the main cities that the economic power is centered and, therefore, the higher levels of poverty are concentrated in the rural areas, which have seen a very large migration to the cities. The coast, the seascape, has become an element of hope in the imaginary of the rural population.

In this sense, Tonio, bringing Rocha's character, Manuel, back to life, finds in this escape a way to unload the burden of tradition, as Gerber (1982) comments:

A national culture has to presuppose an archaic heritage that is transmitted generation to generation, unconsciously, because people are born in a world that is already given and that unloads a civilization burden onto every shoulder and every mind. Good or bad, many of our conflicts, of our contrasts, are perhaps insuperable because human life is conditioned by processes that are at once ontogenetic, that is, from the own individuals, and others that are philogenetic, from the human species and its history. (GERBER, 1982, p. 23)¹⁴

Thus, in *Black God, White Devil* and later in *Behind the Sun*, the hero is prompted to escape from the history that has been dictating his life. And therefore, the escape is towards the sea, which implies an aura of hope. Again, Gerber observes:

And the countryman, where does his desperation go to? To the fantasy. The escape to

¹⁴ My translation.

the sea, for the countryman, is the conquest of a fairer land. (GERBER, 1982, p. 51)¹⁵

In *Behind the Sun*, this idea of fantasy and hope is very well illustrated. I would like to return to one of the scenes in the film. It is when Pacu meets the circus artists for the first time and Clara gives him a book. When she asks him if he is able to read, he answers negatively, but says with a smile that he can read the drawings. The book allows Pacu to imagine and he starts to create his own story from the images of the book, which coincidentally are pictures of the sea, mermaids, fish and sea animals. At the end of the film, in voice-over, Pacu recounts:

One day, the mermaid came and took him to live with her. And he really liked that! She turned the kid into a fish and took him to live in the east, at the sea. In the sea, everyone wasn't dying all the time. There was room for everyone. In the sea, they lived so happily, so happily they couldn't stop laughing. In the sea, they were so happy, so happy together, they couldn't help laughing.

This simple and almost childish ending, which symbolises Tonio's salvation, is also a slight social and political suggestion of Brazil's lack of a good education system, accessible to the population, today, in 1910 or even before. Interestingly, this final narration is also where the earthy narrative acknowledges the existence of another space, the ocean, linking in with the images analysed.

4. Final thoughts

The process of adaptation from Ismail Kadare's literature to Walter Salles' cinema covers the complex question of cross-cultural construction of national identity. From the relations

¹⁵ Idem.

between the two narratives – one literary, the other filmic – new differences break out from what is represented as closed, local spaces and open, foreign spaces; scenery descriptions that lead the reader/spectator either to a known and familiar territory, or the field of the other. In the two narratives, there is a subtle combination between the representation of the national origin and the opening to the unknown. It is in this complex exchanging field that *Broken April* and *Behind the Sun* compose the portrait, unavoidably blurred, of the here and the beyond and of the inside and the outside.

There are many elements in common in *Broken April* and *Behind the Sun*. Not only do they adopt similar themes but also both make indispensable use of space representation for the significance of the plot, which reaffirms the status of adaptation to the film. In *Broken April*, Kadare shows different approaches through a prismatic narrative focusing on multiple characters and their highly differentiated views on a common theme. The construction of space in the narratives of both film and novel affects in every aspect the very development of each character. This is because the starting point of the narratives is the land and, as Harvey (1996) explains it, “losing the land is the equivalent of losing identity.” (p. 305) Thus:

Location and bounding are important if not vital attributes for the definition of the objects, events, and relationships existing in the world around us. (HARVEY, 1996, p. 264)

To conclude, the many evident traces of the dialogue between *Behind the Sun* and Cinema Novo – especially the rescue of Black God, White Devil’s images – reveal the great contribution this film makes towards the contemporary film production in Brazil. The valuable insight and perceptiveness of great director Walter Salles in bringing back to evidence some of the Cinema Novo themes help re-establish Brazil as one of the big markets of world and independent cinema.

Bibliography

- BAKHTIN, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- BARTHES, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana/Collins, 1977.
- BAUMAN, Zygmunt. (1990). Modernity and Ambivalence. In: FEATHERSTONE, Mike (Ed.) *Global Culture. Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1995.
- FEATHERSTONE, Mike and LASH, Scott (Ed.) *Spaces of Culture. City, Nation, World*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1999.
- FEATHERSTONE, Mike. *Undoing Culture. Globalisation, Post-modernism and Identity*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2000.
- GERBER, Raquel. *O Mito da Civilização Atlântica: Glauber Rocha, Cinema, Política e a Estética do Inconsciente*. Petropolis: Vozes, 1982.
- HARVEY, David. *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- KADARE, Ismail. *Broken April*. London: SAQI Books, 1982.
- LEVI, Jacques and LUSSAULT, Michel. *Dictionnaire de la Géographie et de L'Espace des Sociétés*. Paris: Edition Belin, 2003.
- McGAVIN, Patrick Z. *Review: Western Station; Salles Returns with Mythic "Sun"*, September 10, 2001. Available at: http://www.indiewire.com/movies/rev_011213_BehindtheSun.html (April 2004)
- ROCHA, Glauber. *Roteiros do Terceiro Mundo*. (Organizado por Orlando Senna). Rio de Janeiro: Editora Embrafilme/Alhambra, 1985.
- SALLES, Walter. *Interview with Walter Salles*. Provided by Buena Vista International/Beatwax Communications. Available at: <http://www.filmmonthly.com/Profiles/Articles/Wsalles/Wsalles.html> (April, 2004)

SALLES, Walter. **Director's Notes**. Available at: http://www.abrilidespedacado.com.br/en/oprocesso_pt.htm (April, 2004)

STAM, Robert. **Film Theory: An Introduction**. London and New York: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

VENN, Couze. Narrating the Postcolonial. In: FEATHERSTONE, Mike and LASH, Scott (Eds.) **Spaces of Culture. City, Nation, World**. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1999.