

FILM REVIEW

Eduardo Williams, dir., with Mariano Blatt. *Parsi*. 2020. 23 min. Creole and Spanish (with English subtitles). Argentina, Guinea-Bissau, and Switzerland. Commissioned by the Center for Contemporary Art in Geneva for the Biennale de l'Image en Movement 2018. Price not reported.

The film *Parsi*, directed by Eduardo Williams, represents the intersection of poetry with technology. It combines or juxtaposes the poem “No Es” (It Isn’t) by Mariano Blatt with videos by young members of the Bissauan queer and trans community. These videos portray daily activities or journeys. We can view the poem, read aloud over the video, as a melting pot piece in which everything—images, landscapes, discourses, and ideas—forms a list of “what seems to be but isn’t.” Eduardo Williams’s film records the perpetual movements of people in the Bissau landscape, ranging from men dressing as women to young people fishing and rollerblading.

The videos, shot with a 360-degree camera, take us on a ride through Bissau’s neighborhoods by foot, taxi, and roller blade. The film opens with a group of men dressed up in women’s clothing as if they are getting ready to go out to a carnival or *bal masque*. The videographers recount one of their journeys, starting with their departure into the city, then showing their discussions with an older lady as they ride in a taxi around the Bissau Central Market. Still in the taxi, they laugh as they end a vivid discussion with yet another woman. In the following scene, a group of young women are running and getting ready for their soccer game, as they discuss the importance of the game and the way their team is viewed, in an environment where soccer is considered a man’s game. A further episode shows young men rollerblading, not just for fun but also as a mean of transportation, as they glide between cars on the busy streets of Bissau. The final scene presents young people at the beach fishing.

All these different scenes may seem disconnected, but they all speak to the daily normal life of Bissau Guineans. Each group of people pursues its own agenda and activities without interfering in the daily agenda of the others.

This is both a documentary and an art film. The poem “No es” is recited in Spanish with a quick beat. At the same time, the soundtrack of the video

records people speaking in Portuguese Creole, while subtitles in English transcribe both the Spanish poem and the Creole soundtrack. It is remarkable that every movement starts with the Spanish “*Parece*,” transposed in creole Bissau Guinean as “*Parsi*” (“it looks like” or “it seems like”). This key allows us to recognize an assemblage of cultural and social landscapes joining Latin America and Lusophone Africa linguistically and cinematographically. The poem “No Es” references every aspect of the visual, material, mental, and emotional environment: images, people, landscapes, words, memories, ideas, sadness, joy, and more. The film moves from scene to scene with challenging rapidity. The disparate segments of the film allow us to glimpse and explore the ways that all of the seemingly incompatible components of Bissau Guinean society interact with complicity and fluidity. The filmmaker challenges the viewers to work actively for an understanding and interpretation of the film’s possible messages.

While one may find this opacity off-putting at first, I found myself fascinated, drawn into reflecting on the many interactions among the poem, the characters, and the actions. By putting these disparate pieces into a frame together and setting them to the same poem and rhythm, the filmmaker challenges us to search for their symbiosis and harmony, and to recognize the commonalities that bind them all together.

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