



***Flame*, 1996**

Director: Ingrid Sinclair

Flame was the first film to be set during the historical period of the country's liberation struggle. Shot in Zimbabwe with an entirely Zimbabwean cast, the film is based on the accounts of women who joined the liberation war. It opens with a flashback to 1975, fifteen years earlier when the country was in the midst of civil war.

Main Characters:

- Florence (Flame)
- Nyasha (Liberty)
- Danger (Florence's Boyfriend)
- Che (Young Political Commissar)

Historical/Political Context: Centuries before the British colonists arrived at the end of the 19th century, this region had been the site of a great civilization centered on the stone citadel of Great Zimbabwe. While the majority of the population remained African, white farmers settled in what was then known as Rhodesia, to a greater extent than in other areas of East Africa, such as Uganda or Kenya. When the British were ready to grant independence and majority rule to Rhodesia in the mid-1960s, the white minority settlers staged a putsch and established an illegitimate regime led by Ian Smith. This regime was condemned by Britain and most other countries and was isolated by United Nations sanctions.

Two opposition guerrilla movements emerged to fight the white minority regime - ZANU, the Zimbabwe African National Union and ZAPU, the Zimbabwe African People's Union. The white settler army launched a brutal counterinsurgency campaign against these two guerrilla movements and the civilian African population. By 1975, when *Flame* begins, the neighboring country of Mozambique, had already won its independence from the Portuguese and had become a refuge for guerrilla fighters. The Zimbabwean liberation movement, or *chimurenga*, coupled with international support, eventually forced the white settler regime to capitulate to majority rule in 1980.

ZANU won the subsequent election and has ruled the country under Robert Mugabe since then. Although Zimbabwe inherited an unusually high number of college graduates and a developed infrastructure, the country has faced increasing problems. Although corrupt politicians had received land from the large white farmers, in 1999 land had still not been redistributed to black farmers and reemerged as a major issue. Subsequent forced and sometimes violent removal of white farmers resulted in a halt of agricultural production with economic repercussions for all sectors of society. Urban workers have protested declining standards of living and what amounts to a one-party government has attempted, not always successfully, to crush dissenting voices.

Questions to think about while watching:

- What are seminal moments of change for Flame and Liberty? How do they redefine what it is to be a woman in these moments? In relationship to their male comrades?

- Is the struggle for national liberation a feminist one? Why or why not? (Consider the tensions between nationalism and feminism that Cynthia Enloe examines in her chapter that was assigned for today, “Nationalism and Masculinity.”)

Controversy over the film:

“If this film is not stopped, it will give the wrong picture to people. The rape scene detracts from the lofty goals of the struggle for independence. What should have been emphasized was the rape and torture of civilians by the white Rhodesian soldiers.”

- Richard Chirongwe, Deputy Secretary General of the War Veterans Association of Zimbabwe

“I was raped and that is the truth. A society which denies the truth cannot develop or move forward. Saying the truth out loud is a kind of therapy and should be accepted.”

- female ex-combatant

“Women went to the war to fight . . . If the war was about rape we wouldn’t have fought or won.”

- another female ex-combatant

- Who is right? Are they all right given their point of view?

Ingrid Sinclair, although she has good credentials as a long-time supporter of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, originally came from England and is white. Those who opposed the film were openly hostile to the fact that the first film on the *chimurenga* was made by a foreign white woman. Sinclair responded: “The first question I asked each of the women I interviewed was, ‘Do you think it’s legitimate that I, a white woman, should make this film?’” The answer was always that they found it easier to talk to me than a black Zimbabwean who, they felt, would have many more preconceived ideas, prejudices or political views than I did as an outsider. They were one and all delighted that anyone should be interested in their stories as nobody had ever had any interest in them before. The general view was that since I had the means to make a film and they did not, they should make use of me to tell their story.”

- What do you think about “an outsider” making this film and how do you think it may have affected the final film? Do you think that Ingrid Sinclair is being disingenuous about Zimbabwean women’s failure to criticize her for undertaking the project? Why do you think Ingrid Sinclair had “the means to tell their story” while none of these women, indeed, no Zimbabweans did?

For more information on the film:

<http://www.newsreel.org/nav/title.asp?tc=CN0034>

<http://www.zimmedia.com/flame/>