

FIRE OF WIND

a film by Marta Mateus



Clarão Companhia / Casa Azul Films / Les Films D'Ici

SYNOPSIS

The vine has borne fruit, and it's harvest time. Soraia, a young girl, cuts herself. Blood mixes with wine. A black bull is on the loose. Up in the oak trees, time swells, and a community takes shelter. They share bread and wine, memories and dreams, the history of a landscape and of a struggle. We enter a long night, where nature also speaks. The fiery wind that brings the heatwave, it's burning.

Director: Marta Mateus

Screenplay: Marta Mateus

Cinematography: Marta Mateus, Vítor Carvalho

Sound: Hugo Leitão, Elsa Ferreira

Editing: Marta Mateus, Claire Atherton

Direction of Production: Joana Ramos

Producers: Marta Mateus, Pedro Costa / Clarão Companhia

Co-producers: Fabrice Aragno / Casa Azul Films, Richard Copans / Les Films d'Ici

Cast: Soraia Prudêncio, Maria Catarina Sapata, Safir Eizner, José Moura, Maria Clara Madeira, Margarida Cabaço, Jorge "Tati" Maltinha, Jaime Fortio, João Prudêncio, Tânia Ramos, José Códices, Miguel Aldeaga, Manuel Geadas "Coimbra", Antónia Paulos, Eliel Santos, Rui Serrano, João Neves, Vera Garcia, Maria João Onofre, Tina Campos, Maria João Silveira, André Campanha, Maria Monteiro, Telma Monteiro, Lúcia Barrela, Rui Moreira, Nelson Idalécio Cigano

Supports: ICA - Apoio à Escrita e Desenvolvimento de Obras Cinematográficas, Casa de Velázquez — Académie de France à Paris, RTP, RTS, Cinéforum, Câmara Municipal de Estremoz, Valentim de Carvalho Estúdios, Monte dos Cabaços, Optec Filmes



NOTE OF INTENTION

"Fogo do Vento" ("Fire of Wind") is the continuation of an archaeological exercise about the memories of the people of Alentejo, a work that began in the short film "Farpões Baldios" ("Barbs Wastelands"). It is a reflection on the present day: the marks that History has made on the landscape, on our bodies, our gestures and affections, and on the collective unconscious. What changes have we undergone as a community, what differentiates and unites us? What do we want to sow in order to reap, what fruits will spring from this fertile ground?

One day during the summer of 2017, a black bull appeared in my mind. Several days later, an image of a fire arrived, an image of scorched earth. I've learned to pay attention to signs, dreams, visions, and to retain the slightest foreshadowing inside an idea, or in a breath of wind. These are the initial images from which I've been weaving a plot that intertwines the experiences of the people in my community in Alentejo, images deriving from our memories and those which our imaginations invent.

Over the course of seven years, I dove into this source, plumbing its depths, without ever losing sight of the light. The preparation of the film was very long for many different reasons. I quickly realized that this climb into the trees offered us a place of suspension between heaven and earth, and that we were entering another space-time. We wanted to stay up there, to enter a great dreamlike night, as if in a ritual, and summon our ghosts out into the light. It was also a way of reckoning with the past.

Shooting began in the summer of 2021. We were slowly emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic. We had been through a strangely disruptive and overwhelming time. We weren't the same anymore.

Robert Bresson wrote in "Notes sur le cinématographe":

*"Dans tout art, il existe un principe diabolique qui agit contre lui et tâche de le démolir. Un principe analogue n'est peut-être pas tout à défavorable au cinématographe"*¹

It was vital to work on the things of life, of our world, to welcome everyone and also to separate the wheat from the chaff. We shared our pains and loves, our stories of war and peace. We called on our dead to help us tame the beasts and release the forces of the past, to examine our roots and to sprout new shoots.

¹ "In all art there exists a diabolical principle which acts against it and tries to demolish it. A similar principle is perhaps not entirely unfavorable to the cinematograph."

We fell, we cried, we learned a lot, we reinvented ourselves.

A new film was born, the script of which was further developed over four years of shooting. In the first year I worked on the script and shooting with a small crew; in the following years I took the camera and reflectors and, like an apprentice painter carrying her easel, usually in the company of someone other than the protagonists, family or friends, invented the script while I was filming.

Life is art's friend, says another poet. The most profound cultural and social function of art is magical, it has the power of exorcism. Its hidden and essential expression acts on the work, and on life. I like to imagine that cinema has the gift of sorcery.

This film brings together many people from different backgrounds and socio-cultural contexts, particularly the members of the community of Estremoz and the surrounding areas, which never connect with each other. We form an extended family. Especially important for me was the extraordinary work with the Roma people, inhabitants of Bairro das Quintinhas, who star in this film.

"Nelson has never sung so well", said Zé Moura. Nelson has always sung, he just hasn't been heard the way we hear him in "Fogo do Vento", I would add. Nelson, Lídia, Soraia, Maria Catarina, all of us, the trees, the fruit, the birds, the stones in the muddy earth: we are all members of the same community. And above our heads, the stars that light up the day and the night. They are the main source of our energy. They guide us, make us stand and look up.

The wonderful cluster of cork oaks where we filmed became our studio. We got to know the movements of the sun on each tree. Our "Day-for-Night" is very close to the luminosity of Alentejo's nights with a full moon. This is how I learned to see it, from the remotest hills, of my childhood without electricity.

We faced a raging bull head-on. In this dangerous confrontation with animal strength, we see that nature also feeds us, connects us and supports us. The collective saves us (always).

We faced the memory and wounds of war. We invoked the thousands of men who were taken to fight in the former colonies, like Maria Catarina's brothers, and who appear here alongside my grandfather João da Encarnação, whom I never met because he died too young, and about whom I know little, apart from the fact that he lost an eye in the First World War. In "Fire of Wind", he is played by my son, Safir Eizner. The war is inscribed in our genes, in our daily lives, and must be remedied.

Images create languages and emit vibrations. That's why cinema has such responsibility. We learned from Godard that the language of war creates the language of war. Its repercussions can only be resolved through the past, by deconstructing our imaginary and inventing other languages.

It will thus be through the language of affection, through Maria Catarina's generous and wise heart, that we throw our arms into the water that washes and flows, that we share the bread that feeds the generations, that we celebrate life with the juice of the vine.

Marta Mateus



Photos from the shoot



QUE NINGUEM
TRABALHE DE
SOL A SOL



In *Fogo do Vento (Fire of Wind)* we see a braiding of Time, of tree sap and blood, bread and wine, snakes and oxen, vineyards and cork oak. Marta Mateus films work, a “money beast” with many legs, the class struggle, those with "cold, bare feet", those who say "the dizziness of hunger is worse than that of wine", those who lament: "if only they bled like us". The forgotten, the outcast—those with memories, the wise. A woman who hopes to marry a good man. "A man who can hang the laundry," says another woman, Maria Catarina Sapata, whom we first met in Mateus's short *Farpões Baldios (Barbs Wastelands, 2017)* and who we meet again here, at the heart of the director's first feature. This is a summary of a conversation that began long, long ago, and will continue.

- Interview by Anabela Mota Ribeiro, August 4, 2024, Alentejo.

Marta - Are you good?

Maria - Good, not so good. I'd be fine if it weren't for the pain. My leg and my back hurt. My bones are all damaged. From work. It's not worth having an operation because it could get worse, it could even put me in a wheelchair.

You're almost 84. When you were still working, did you feel your body weakening?

Maria - I never felt anything. I just carried on like everyone else. Boxes of grapes, everything. When picking olives, I could carry 30 or 50 kilos. We'd put them on our backs and pull. As much as we could.

At what age did you start picking olives?

Maria - Very young. At 14 I was already in Vila Viçosa on a contract. I got on at a ranch with my brother. We wanted to earn money. And I've always carried on with the same life, always working in the fields.

Look at your hands and tell me what you see in them.

Maria - They're good at everything. Because my mother made me learn everything. I was the middle child, so I had to look after the little ones, and do things for the older ones. Ironing, washing. There was no water in the house. I just didn't like service work. I liked it and I didn't like it... I started when I was about six or seven. I scrubbed the stove, the tableware, helped in the bedrooms, in exchange for food. At night, I would cry: my belly was full and my brothers' weren't. I'd end up leaving the places where I was serving. We were seven children. At home, I looked after them. In the wee hours of the morning, I'd be on the go. I'd knock on doors and ask: "A bit of bread, for God's sake". Or flour to make some porridge.

Marta - In Maria's hands I see the hands of work, giving hands Her work in the field was always done with her hands. Nowadays, for her it's less a job of strength, but above all skill. And she always gave a lot of herself to others.

Maria - My mother only had two rooms, one above and one below. "Get up, lazybones." I'd get up straight away. I would water off the doors and the street. Things you don't see today. And then I would knit. They didn't let us walk the streets, did they? It's not like that today. I have a daughter who can't sew. Sometimes I think: my rich hands, so well put together, who will I leave them to as an inheritance? I'll leave them to Marta.

How did you meet?

Maria - 36 years ago, my friend asked me if I wanted to go to the vineyard. I was always out and about. Lisbon, Alverca, Vila Franca, Samora Correia, Castanheiro do Ribatejo, Benavente. Wherever there was work. Always in the countryside. Both before and after I got married. I got married when I was 21.

Marta - The first time I saw Maria Catarina we were labeling bottles. This one boy said it reminded him of Chaplin's *Modern Times*! Because we went so fast and were part of the machine. Maria said what she really liked was being in the countryside. And she told us why.

Maria - I like planting the vines. It used to be like this: the tractor would go in front and there would be three people behind it drilling into the ground and planting the *bacelo* (rootstock).

Marta - *Bacelo* is the plant grafted onto another plant, the young vine.

Maria - After putting in the *bacelo*, we used a stick and tamped it down so that it would stay. Later, we'd dig holes to water it.

Marta - Maria talked about the vineyard almost like a mother talks about her child. She followed the whole cycle. The grapes that are born depend on how the pruning is done. It's this knowledge from the hands that bears the fruit. In other words, if you overload the vineyard, it will produce many bunches, but of lower quality. The vine is not spontaneous (unlike wheat, which is sown and grows on its own). When you want to make a quality wine, the vineyard has to be less overloaded, so the grapes are more concentrated.

Maria - There was an engineer in the vineyard. They know a lot, but it's from books. I often taught the engineer where to cut.

The shape of the vine sums up what you're talking about: it's one plant grafted onto another. Like a child's body is generated in another body. Your relationship with cinema began in *Farpões Baldios*. In *Fogo do Vento*, there are two elements: the vineyard and the cork oaks. What is your relationship to them?

Maria - I don't have much of a relationship to the cork oaks: it's more for the men. They harvest the cork, they climb up and strip it down. My husband used to do it. They made more money. We, the women, would gather the leftover wood for kindling, or bag the acorns. In the fields, each of us had her own path. I go here, my partner goes there, I do mine, she does hers. For

weeding we used a hoe. And we sang! We sang a lot. *Cante Alentejano*. Singing was all we could willfully do.

What couldn't you do at will?

Maria - I worked for many years before April 25th (The Carnation Revolution). We could only urinate twice a day. In the morning and in the afternoon. We wore “readymade pants” with checkered stripes. They were baggy skirts that we tied on the inside with three pins. There were some people who felt it more; they would leave the *eito* (work path) and pee (while squatting). Nobody wore underpants because of that; you’d need to pee and you couldn’t pull your underpants down. Where there were ranches there were also men.

What was your political awareness before the Revolution? Apart from the job rules, how did you understand that there were things you couldn't say?

Maria - We didn't know much, because those who knew something didn't explain it. We knew our life was just that. You had to come in at this time, leave at that time, and that was it. And we weren't supposed to talk back to those in charge. For example, we worked on contract for 35 days. It was “for the eating”. At sunrise, we'd have a snack. Bread and olives. We'd been working for a long time. Around nine o'clock, it was a little flour soup with the farmers, or vinegar soup. At noon, dinner: bean soup, chickpea soup. At four in the afternoon, the ‘gaspacho’. A man, the *manteeiro*, always brought the food at that time, in big wagons. We would spread out our shawls, lie on our stomachs and eat, four or five people to a bowl. There were no plates for anyone. There were two people who talked a lot; one was my brother. When the food wasn't any good, they'd say: "Is this the kind of food you give someone who's exhausted from work?". And there was always someone who'd gossip... The next year, the boss didn't want them there any more. We had to be very careful what we said.

Marta - What do you mean by "for the eating"? Did they give you food in exchange for your work?

Maria - No, no, we earned it. On top of the pay, they gave us food. During those 35 days, we didn't stop, we didn't go home. In those 35 days, we filled our bellies well. On “grain day”, they gave us meat. On “bean day”, they gave us half a cheese. We saved the cheese. When our mothers came to bring us laundry, they would take the cheese to whoever was at home.

When did you realize that you wanted to work on the history of the class struggle in your films?

Marta - I'd hear stories about what life was like before. "Split one sardine for ten", a phrase that Maria says in *Farpões*, was a phrase that Vitoriana (a second mother to me) used to say. I remember calculating the size of a sardine and wondering how that was possible.

Maria - And that was when we ate at all!



Workers harvesting wheat. Maria Catarina in the corner, with a hat on her head, on top of the straw.

Marta - When people were telling me that story, they no longer lived in those conditions. I was very lucky in life: I was born at a time when conditions were different, and I was also born into freedom. My father was a so-called small landowner. He had olive groves, a vineyard and my grandmother's house. That's how he started farming and built his life. The social background of my maternal grandparents is different and closer to the people I grew up with. My grandfather was born in the mountains of Serra D'Ossa, went to school on Saturday mornings and learned to read by himself while looking after the sheep. He worked from Maria's age, the same thing. Then he went to Holland, took a different route, working from morning to night. I never felt comfortable with opulence and social stratification. I've always spoken to everyone and I have friends from different social backgrounds. When I was a teenager, when the time to confront our parents comes, I had huge arguments... I thought my father didn't understand that the place where he started was already a place of privilege, which really upset me. Of course, my father worked a lot. My mother, even more... The fundamental issue for me was the history of the struggle in the region, and above all class consciousness.

Conscience is a vast subject. Where do these struggles come from? What goes beyond class, and what connects us and inspires us?

Maria - I'm really right-wing. But when it comes to voting, I'm left-wing.

[The phone rings. It's a cousin of Maria Catarina's who lives in Switzerland. She tells her, with a smile, that the film is going to be shown in Locarno. "I'm not going. I've been invited, but I can't go. Can you imagine if I got sick there? Things get into my head. I get nervous, and I get worse. But go and take your grandchildren. They say it's beautiful."]

You can write your name, but you can't read. Did you go to school?

Maria - I went to school at the right age, when I was seven. But my mother had three younger children. As it wasn't compulsory, I'd go one day and stay at home for a week or a month. I can do math well with a pencil, and I even went on to second grade. Then I got married young. We weren't here, we were out and about, there was nothing to do. That's how it was.

Ramo da Espiga (the spike branch): what does it mean?

Maria and Marta - Wheat is bread, the nourishment. The olive tree is olive oil and represents peace. The marigold is gold. The poppy is love. The vine is wine and joy.

What do you get from the field and the plants?

Maria - It's good! That air. That sun. That little bit of wind. In winter it was more difficult because I'm cold. My feet get cold, even with two pairs of socks. I would tap my feet and they wouldn't warm up. The same with my hands. They wear gloves now, but they wouldn't let them before. You should see what it's like to pick olives from the ground, your hands get cold... But there's no work in the fields that I don't like.

Marta - In the film you say: "The countryside is really beautiful. We never tire of it".

Maria - I like all the work in the fields. All of it! And everyone's the same there, whether they're from my land or not. The gypsies say: "Now that's a great woman, she'd help us all".

You love it, even though it's such heavy work.

Maria - Absolutely. I carried a lot of stone. Today the tractors pass by and we load the stone. We used to have wooden paddles, one carried in the front and one at the back. Today, a machine goes by and spreads the manure. We used to have baskets and spread it. Here in the village, we used to make a manure patch every year and sell it to people who had a field. Manure is a fertilizer and we did everything by hand.



Branch of the Spike that is hung up inside the house as an amulet of protection and prosperity.

In *Fogo do Vento*, you show what's in your wallet. A four-leaf clover, saints, photographs. What things do you always carry with you? Are they like guardian angels?

Maria - Our Lady of Fatima. The Lady of Mileu, the saint of my village. Little gifts I'm given: I collect everything. Photos of my parents. Look at me when I was 18... We didn't have much clothes, but I had nice ones. Paper receipts. Funny drawings I do: this one has grapes! Photographs of António. A 50 escudos note that was his. He died three years ago. We were married for 61 years, I dated him for seven years. We were born on the same street.

There's a scene in the film where we see black boots...

Maria - That's where he put his money. Hidden from me. So he wouldn't spend it. He earned 50 euros more than me. He thought I didn't know he had the money in his boot! Well, I cleaned the boots, so I knew.

I carry a photo of my older brother, who died 40 years ago. My younger brother was buried on my birthday. I never celebrated my birthday on that day again. My mother was mischievous and scolded us more. We even had a joke around the house that I liked my father better than my mother.

Was António similar to your father in his way of being?

Maria - He was. He used to say that he was more like his mother. I moved out of my house to my mother-in-law's. I was four months pregnant. She opened the door for me. I bought her a grave like I did for my parents. My mother-in-law went from door to door carrying water; they gave her whatever she could find.

About António, we always liked each other. I was very fond of giving. I ran a lot in life. I could have a lot of money but I don't. That's okay. I split everything. My brothers might as well still be here asking me for money. He was always good. I've never, ever (and if I'm lying, let me never see my children healthy) spent a whole day angry with my António.

You said you consider Maria to be the voice of history and the voice of the land. What do you mean by that?

Marta - In *Farpões*, I felt that Maria was telling a story that wasn't just her story, but everyone's story. When we prepared *Fogo do Vento*, António was no longer here. What if we said something to him, as if we were writing a letter?

Maria - He died recently. He was a good man. Once, so that an ox wouldn't ram its horns into someone, he blocked them and the ox broke his ribs.

Marta - Being up in the trees to escape a bull was something that happened to a lot of people. It even happened to you.

Maria - Yes, it did. It took so long for the bull to get out of there... When bulls are startled, they get mad. We climb up the trees and shout. If they catch us, they'll really hurt us, they're brutes.



1. Four-leaf clover and an olive pit that is sewn together to make a *figa* (amulet) that is pinned to children's clothes to protect them. .
2. Maria Catarina next to a photograph of herself at the age of 18.

Apart from bulls, what are the greatest dangers in the fields?

Maria - Snakes, I'm very chicken about them, and there were a lot of them. We used a bag against them.

Marta - In *Farpões*, Maria says: "I stepped on a snake". It was a story Vitoriana told me. She was in the fields harvesting, she stepped on a snake and the snake wrapped itself around her leg. They coil and squeeze. You can't get them off because it strangles your leg.

Maria - Once, a snake came into my house. I saw it where the bathroom is today, it was my son's room, with an iron bed. It came from the yard.

Marta - At our first meeting, you told me about giving the children to the moon. And you told the story of the crows...

Maria - They say: "Can't sleep at night, there must be with the moon".

An enchantment, a spell? Like a lingering ghost.

Maria - Exactly. So we bless them and it passes. It's a saying, isn't it? They get well. The local people do the blessing, not the priest. I used to bless mine like this: "God is the Verb, the Verb is God, you have the evil eye, God bless you".

Crows: when we see one, we fear and respect it. Because they bring bad news: someone in our family has died. When my brothers died, crows were all over me: "Oh dear, something is going to happen," we all said at once. They picked me up from work every time my brothers died. My brothers, my mother. My father died at my house on the one year anniversary of my mother's burial.

Marta - And when you see two crows?

Maria - It's marriage!

How does it feel to have been chosen by Marta for her films?

Maria - Very happy. So many people have passed me by, if she chose me, it's because she likes me [laughs].

I didn't know what it was like to make a film. It's only annoying when they cut, they cut because we don't say the lines well. We say the same word five or six times! Some people are given a piece of paper to memorize. Since I can't read, I have to learn it and stick to it. There are some things I say that are true. I remember very well all the doors I've knocked on. Today we're rich compared to before, I value what I have. Other people forget, they're vain and don't tell. Why is that?





Maria Catarina's drawing of a vine



Filmmaker and producer, Marta Mateus (born 1984) studied philosophy, drawing and photography, music and theater. Her first film, *Farpões Baldios* (2017), was shown at the Quinzaine des Cinéastes, selected for various festivals, and won the Grand Prize at Vila do Conde and Hiroshima. She has participated in several group exhibitions with video and sound installations. In 2018, she was an artist-member of the Casa de Velázquez, Académie de France à Madrid and created the production company Clarão Companhia. *Fogo do Vento* is her first feature film.

PRODUCERS' NOTE

We decided to stand by Marta Mateus. Clarão Companhia in Lisbon, Les Films d'ici in Paris and Casa Azul Films in Lausanne, we decided to form a family of producers and directors committed to her cinematographic and poetic work.

A rare work, an investigation into the human experience, expressed through its very essence: the material expression of bodies, faces, words, noises, light and shadow.

In 2017, after seeing her magnificent *Farpões Baldios*, we were conquered by the complexity and beauty of that first gesture.

Naturally, and with great pride, we decided to accompany her on this second work, *Fogo do Vento*.

Marta Mateus films the deep rurality of southern Alentejo, its myths and ancestral tales, with knowledge and delicacy.

Each shot, composed with artisanal patience and plastic rigor, seems to unearth, at the same time, the roots and the remains of an ancient human geology, woven together with the threads of history. The concrete practice of this teamwork, which combines our different cultures and multiple experiences around the singularity of this film, can offer an admirable deepening of the possibilities of the craft of cinema itself.

Fabrice Aragno

Pedro Costa

Richard Copans

Contacts:

Clarão Companhia
fogodovento.clarao@gmail.com
www.clarao-companhia.com

Casa Azul Films
mail@casa-azul.ch
www.casa-azul.ch

Les Films d'ici
courrier@lesfilmsdici.fr
www.lesfilmsdici.fr

Makna Presse
Chloé Lorenzi
festival@maknapr.com
+33 (0)6 08 16 60 26

Portugal Film - Portuguese Film Agency
sales@portugalfilm.org
www.portugalfilm.org