

ASCALF BULLETIN 20

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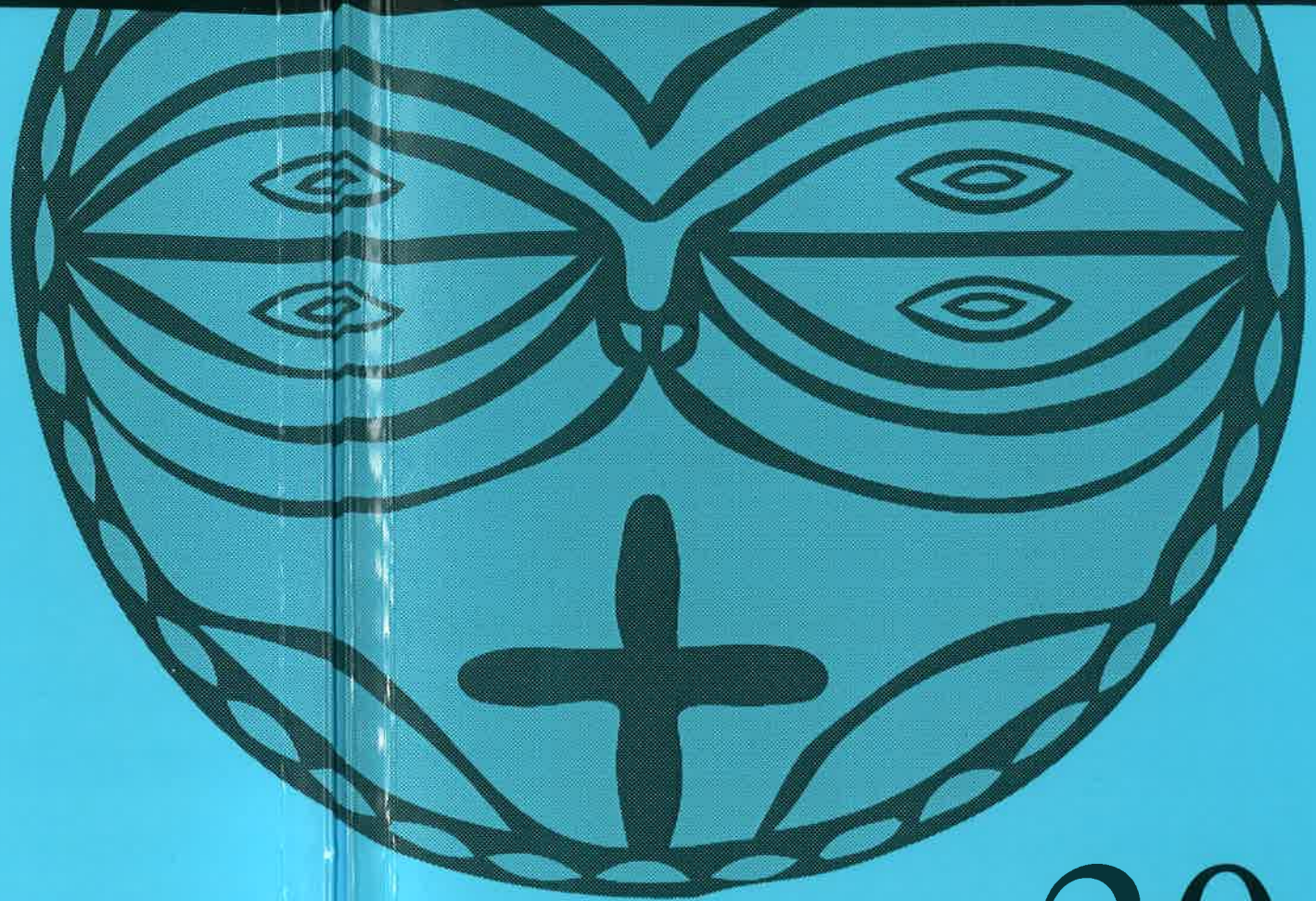
Mary Gallagher



ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF
CARIBBEAN AND AFRICAN LITERATURE
IN FRENCH

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Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French

The pioneering work of ASCALF has helped to bring about the expansion of postcolonial studies in French over the past decade or so. There are now many academics working in this field, interested not solely in literature but also in what is generally termed as cultural studies. However, there remain few journals dedicated to publishing articles on postcolonial studies in French. The *ASCALF Bulletin* has been publishing material on postcolonial literature in French for the past ten years. It is a bi-annual journal that contains news, book reviews and conference reports related to African and Caribbean literature in French, and it has also published brief articles on these subjects. However, in light of the growing interest in French postcolonial studies, the *ASCALF Bulletin* has adopted a new editorial policy: we have established an editorial board, as well as an advisory board composed of renowned academics with an international reputation to referee articles, and we intend to publish three substantial refereed articles per issue (6,000 words max.). Submissions are invited on any topic related to francophone postcolonial studies, and particularly to African and Caribbean literature in French. Authors should submit two copies of their article, in English or in French, to Dr David Murphy, Department of French, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA, Scotland. Articles should conform in presentation to the guidelines in the *MHRA Stylebook*. The *ASCALF Bulletin* uses blind reviews. To facilitate this, authors are asked to ensure that the manuscript (other than the title page) contains no clue as to their identity. Book reviews, conference reports (max. 500 words), calls for papers, should also be sent to the editor.

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Introduction: History, Memory and Orality in the Cinema of Francophone Africa

The three articles in this issue of the ASCALF bulletin were delivered as papers at a conference organised by the Scottish Forum for Francophone Studies at the University of Aberdeen, on 10-11 March 2000. The conference, entitled 'History, Memory and Orality in the Cinema of Francophone Africa', had the dual objective of gathering together a number of specialists to explore these interconnected questions, and of introducing those working inside and outside African studies to the cinema of francophone Africa by showing three representative films, two of them — Sembene's *Xala* (1974) and Mambety's *Touki-Bouki* (1973) — now classics of African cinema, and the other — Draba's *Taafe Fanga* (1997) an example of the innovative work of the new generation of filmmakers. We were particularly fortunate to be able to welcome Olivier Barlet, the founder and editor of the excellent Francophone African monthly cultural magazine, *Africultures*, and author of a definitive study of African cinema, *Les Cinémas d'Afrique noire: le regard en question* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), which is to be published in English translation this year by Zed Books as *African Cinema: Decolonising the Gaze*.

Orality is perhaps an obvious thematic focus when discussing African cinema, but it would be wrong to reduce it to one theme among others, rather it would be more accurate to say that the inexhaustible cultural fund of Africa's past which it represents (stories and legends, imagery, metaphors and symbols, mythopoetic components, music and dance, and so on) essentially informs the aesthetics of African cinema, and is thus inseparable from its very definition. What makes filmmakers such as Sembene,

Djibril Diop Mambety, or Adama Drabo stand out, however, is that they do not conceive of the oral tradition in terms of a nostalgia for a precolonial past, with its myths of cultural authenticity and purity of origin, since while it is a crucial marker of identity, it also represents a trap, 'le piège identitaire', as Olivier Barlet puts it (*Les Cinémas d'Afrique noire*, p.93). In the most successful and artistically adventurous films, the resources of orality are redeployed in rich and startling ways within contemporary frames of reference. Different styles of memory and history are thus two of the multiple forms that this redeployment and reinscription take (and Sembene, as the 'griot cinématographique' par excellence, is perhaps the exemplary filmmaker in this regard). Although this often leads to a tension, common not only to African cinema but to its literature too, between tradition and modernity, the more subtle and powerful of recent African films engage in different negotiations or transactions between these two poles, and thus make a case for cinema as playing a crucial role in Africa's creative and expressive future. The three papers all addressed these concerns, which converged on the problem of defining the specificity or authenticity of African film, as it questions its own myths of cultural authenticity. Olivier Barlet gave an absorbing overview of some very recent films, stressing their subversive nature. David Murphy, in his paper, showed how both *Xala* and *Touki-Bouki* problematise, in different ways, the representation of historical memory. Melissa Thackway, finally, argued the case for *Taafe Fanga* as an exemplary instance of 'secondary orality', that is, the hybrid cinematic adaptation of orality within a contemporary setting.

Michael Syrotinski
University of Aberdeen

Recent African Cinema: A Farewell to Orality?

This article is not an academic study of African cinema. As a journalist and film critic, my approach is both personal and sociological. My work on African cinema is the result of a personal contact with the films and the filmmakers rather than a cold analysis of a cinematographic phenomenon. It questions the Western gaze, the way we see Africa and also the way Africa presents itself to us.

Orality is a key but problematic issue in relation to African cinema. The following quote from the Congolese writer, Sony Labou Tansi, provides a poetic illustration of the manner in which orality links the individual to society:

Moi
Nommé à crier tous les hommes
d'une seule bouche
dans une seule émission de voix

However, orality is not only spoken words: it embraces metaphoric language, symbols, songs, music, the narrative as rite of passage, myth and morality.

In a recent conversation with the Congolese (Kinshasa) director, Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda, he claimed that there is often a confusion between the two meanings of orality: firstly, orality as a narrative device that shapes the story and involves the spectator in the process of narration, and, secondly, orality as a cultural form that is completely separate from cinematic techniques. This article (which borrows heavily from my book on African cinema¹) seeks

1. Olivier Barlet, *Les Cinémas d'Afrique noire: le regard en question* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996). The English translation of this book, *African Cinema: Decolonising the Gaze*, will be published by Zed Books later this year.

to discover whether young African filmmakers use orality differently to the older generation of filmmakers.

A society with a written culture cultivates the use of syllogism, a rigorous form of reasoning in which the conclusion is deduced directly from two premises. In a society with an oral culture, truth has multiple dimensions which cannot be pinned down in closed rational systems. Sony Labou Tansi writes that 'les mots sont souvent plus morts que les morts, à moins qu'ils ne mentent'.² To solve the puzzle which faces them, characters in African films often have to appeal to a wisdom based on the observation of natural and cosmic forces. They do, of course, go to see the marabout, who perhaps divines a message from cowrie shells or kola nuts thus taking the story forward. However, it is, first and foremost, from a natural reading of the world that they come to understand what is happening to them. The Dogons traditionally watched their children play to know whether it was going to rain. The Fulani examined the colours and designs of the coats of oxen scattered about the landscape to divine the future. Nature offers human beings an imaginary dimension from which they derive order, harmony and rhythm. Human beings integrate themselves into that dimension, playing to that rhythm. It is in this sense that Ababacar Samb Makharam asserts that Africans have their own rhythm for speaking, telling stories and behaving.³ Symbols and paradoxes abound in the films to express the dynamic relation which exists between human beings and the world. They are aids to understanding the very complexity of existence.⁴

Silence is, paradoxically, another key element in the orality of

2. Sony Labou Tansi, *La Vie et demie* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), p.124.

3. Ababacar Samb Makharam, interviewed by Pierre Haffner in Pierre Haffner, *Kino in Schwarzafrica*, (Munich: Institut Français de Munich, 1989).

4. Betty O'Grady, 'Le parler-écrit: l'exemple de Tchicaya U'Tamsi', in: Anny Wynchank and Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *Afriques imaginaires — regards réciproques et discours littéraires, 17ème-20ème siècles*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), p.262.

African films. In Gaston Kaboré's film, *Wend Kuuni* (Burkina Faso, 1982), the young boy has been struck dumb by a traumatic experience. His actions, perceptions and, at the end, his recovered speech are all the more significant for that. In the Sudanese cultural zone, words take on significance only when shrouded in shadow. Only when incomplete do they express themselves fully. Is this why the cinema of that region is so rich, in spite of the poverty of the states concerned? The place that silence and reserve occupy in Mandingo thought sits well with a filmic language in which the play of simplicity and complexity lends a certain grace: an image without overblown signs; a dialogue without verbiage; counterpoints sought in actions, movements and glances; a filmic texture playing, like language, on more than one level of understanding; fragmented scenarios and exploded editing structures. There is a subtle, tightly woven fabric of events, situations, interchanges and dialogues, which gives the films a particular sharpness.

It is this sense of a close interconnection between events which distinguishes African films from Western films. For example, *Le Franc* by the Senegalese director, Djibril Diop Mambety, describes the tribulations of Marigo, a musician whose landlady has confiscated his instrument, a congoma, because he never pays his rent.⁵ Marigo gets himself a lottery ticket and sticks it on his door so no one will steal it from him, hiding it behind a poster of Yaadikooné Ndiaye, 'the defender of children and the weak'. The ticket wins the jackpot and Marigo lifts the door on to his back to carry it to the lottery booth. This profusion of metaphorical images, with what appears on the screen eventually representing only Marigo's imagination, constitutes a radical reappraisal of cinematic representation. The film's use of

5. *Le Franc* was intended as the first part of a trilogy on "ordinary people", which was followed in 1996 by *La Petite vendeuse du soleil/The Little Girl who Sold the Sun*. A third part, *L'Apprenti voleur*, was planned but never completed.

symbolism to evoke the deep forces at play within human beings and the world is reminiscent of the scene in Roberto Rossellini's *Stromboli* (Italy, 1950) in which the fishermen sail in singing on a calm sea, their nets filled with jumping, flapping tuna fish. We find this same duality — both sociological and esoteric — in *Le Franc*, but, in spite of appearances, Mambety's film produces not so much a dizzying whirl as a sense of unity. Marigo sings as he sets his door out to sea, and cries and laughs crazily, as though knocked senseless by the waves. With all his gangling body, he understands the forces under which he labours. The emotion the image produces is not sentimental but poetic. It is a participation, a communion, with the force which drives the universe. This unity does not emanate from the will to dominate nature, as seen in European cultures, nor from the effort to escape the world seen in some Asian ones. It is an alliance and a participation with great natural forces. The lottery ticket seems in the end quite derisory when the ironic movement of the waters leaves it sticking to Marigo's forehead, for we are no longer dealing here with the dream of wealth it represented during the film, but with the symbolism of life and of the order of the world.

When all is said and done, the *originality* of films from Africa is that they respect human beings and open up an understanding of their place in the universe. As Serge Daney writes, Souleymane Cissé manages to do this 'très bien', not by aestheticising the world, but by fitting bodies immediately into their environment. He does this to such a degree that the transition from the 'natural' to the 'supernatural' is effected seamlessly, a glance is enough to transfix a rival or possess a woman.⁶

Cissé's work refuses both the picturesque and the exotic. Exoticism requires chocolate-box images: the kind of backdrops designed to serve our desires and our fantasies of the barbarian, the

6. Serge Daney, 'Cissé très bien, qu'on se le dise', *Libération*, 9-10 May 1987.

savage and the primitive. By contrast, the simplicity and clarity of Cissé's images, the only purpose of which is to advance the theme of the film, leave the characters endowed with the naturalness and grace of their presence in the world, as masters of the meaning of their acts and the rhythm of their being. In fact, in a filmed interview with Rithy Pahn, Cissé addresses this question:

The positive impression you derive from seeing a person or a thing and which remains in your heart and mind for a long time is something the Bambara call *damu*. Perhaps it is what is known as grace. When you see a human being living, you observe all that he is, everything around him. When you can understand him, you must show him with *damu*.

It is doubtless this sensitivity to reality, this complicity with human beings, animals and things which gives Cissé's films their powerfully convincing moral force.

The strong relationship between African cinema and the oral tradition is also to be found in the work of younger directors. In his film, *Tanun* (1994), Gahité Fofana, the Guinean director, tells the story of a young Guinean, born in France after his parents have fled the Sekou Touré regime. Curiosity about the memories evoked in the adults' stories prompts him to go to Guinea to see his grandfather. *Tanun* is a funny, lucid dialogue between yesterday's world and the camera examining it. The film allows time to pass slowly. It is an inner vision which does not deny its sources: 'I try to take my inspiration from the oral tradition: not to repeat, but to repeat all the same, to hover around things without passing judgement, and yet to put forward truths all the same. A series of images surrounding the topic rather than the topic itself.'⁷

Are African directors the new griots? In a recent interview, the film director, Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda, spoke to me about the links between film and the African oral tradition:

7. Author's interview with Gahité Fofana (Paris, 1995).

En écoutant le kasala, on est ému, mais c'est surtout en comprenant comment il fonctionne. Il ne fonctionne pas sur les émotions, il fonctionne sur les images que le narrateur suscite en toi. Les images d'un passé de bravoure, du présent, du futur; contrairement aux griots maliens, les diseurs de kasala ne glorifient pas une personne, mais installent une personne dans une lignée, ou un territoire dans une lignée. Et ça suscite des images, pas des émotions, mais l'émotion est dans l'image. J'ai donc écrit des textes comme ça, c'est-à-dire en partant d'une sculpture, très proche des Kasalas, qui fonctionnent en structures tressées. En poésie, ce serait des rimes tressées à la limite, et je l'ai appliqué pour mon film *Dix mille ans de cinéma*, d'abord je l'ai écrit comme on écrit un kasala, c'est-à-dire que le diseur de kasala raconte quelque chose, il dit 'je vais vous raconter, je vais vous dire', et j'ai écrit *Dix mille ans* comme ça, en essayant au niveau de l'image de tresser ce qui va être dit avec une pensée, avec ce qui va être filmé. Tout en créant toujours, à l'intérieur de la sphère narrative, cette tresse qui paraît être une déstructuration, mais qui devient une structuration, parce qu'elle est voulue ainsi. John Akomfrah, du Ghana, arrive à faire la même tresse.⁸

In the same interview, Bakupa-Kanyinda claims that it is the role of the storyteller to be both the guardian of collective memory and a subversive figure:

Le diseur est subversif, il n'appartient pas à une cour comme en Afrique de l'Ouest, il est considéré comme chef de lui-même. Le diseur de la mémoire: il interprète le monde, et crée toujours une rupture avec lui-même en disant: moi je vous raconte ça, mais moi quand je mourrai qui parlera de moi? Et ça c'est le moment le plus fort en émotions: il se détache des autres et se met comme ça devant l'assemblée, et revient là-dessus souvent, mais il est subversif, parce que les diseurs de la mémoire ne sont pas comme les griots, il ne dépend pas de ce que les gens lui donnent. Avec *Dix mille ans*, la texture a

8. Author's interview with Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda (Berlin, 2000).

été faite de la même façon: la voix off devait porter un malaise poétique, être fatiguée, comme venant de loin, ayant marché. Et pour y arriver, moi-même je me mets en conflit: soit je me bourre au whisky, et je le fais, ça c'était *Dix mille ans*, mais je le fais dans la salle de montage avec un walkman, pour que le son n'ait pas la texture professionnelle forte d'un DAT ou d'un agra. Qu'il y ait ce malaise sur la structure technique. Dans *Sankara*, j'ai appliqué toujours ça en cabine de montage, je gardais toujours la même atmosphère mais en essayant d'être proche avec la voix des montées du griot. La voix off ne raconte pas vraiment le film, elle raconte ce que j'ai moi à l'intérieur sur cette histoire, mais avoir des points proches d'un griot de l'Ouest.

This subversiveness is also evident in Cheikh Oumar Sissoko's *Finzan* (Mali, 1989). Nanyuma's father is furious with her for stubbornly refusing to marry her dead husband's brother. Interestingly, palaver does not resolve the conflict. The tension is heightened due to the fact that, within African culture, palaver should produce unanimity. The filmmaker questions the role of orality as a unifying force.

Although the filmmaker takes inspiration from the griot's technique, his intention is not to enhance the group's cohesion, but rather to introduce new ideas into the community. Whereas the traditional griot is committed to maintaining and legitimating the existing socio-political structures — and is efficient at doing so — the filmmaker employs the griot's 'active wisdom' and turns it into a weapon for change. In this respect he is, like the griot of Ababacar Samb Makharam's *Jom ou l'histoire d'un peuple* (Senegal, 1981), an agitator. The filmmaker draws on the oral tradition, which never specifically defines the true and the false, and appeals to the maturity of the spectator. In so doing, the griot himself willingly becomes a therapist of his society, not just to dispel depression, as in traditional socio-therapies but also to cure society

of its inhibitions and its perversions.

By translating the word into action, filmmakers avoid both fiction and ethnology. They swing between retailing impersonal myths (denounced as 'epic cinema') and personal fiction (rejected as 'Western psychological cinema') and anchoring a local story in the history of their society, if not indeed in the history of the world. In giving life to the word, African filmmakers reject not only the domination of a fixed past, but also the dictates of cultural neo-colonialism, thus contributing to the invention of a future for the people to whom they feel an allegiance, which means their own people, of course, those among whom they were brought up, but also — and above all — all those throughout the world who share their determination.

In African cinema, the film's narrative is often synthesised within a tale, as in Idrissa Ouedraogo's *Samba Traoré* (Burkina Faso, 1992), where Samba tells little Ali the story of Moriba:

- Samba, tell me another story!
- Another one? You're asking a bit much. Alright then, but this will be the last.
- Alright.
- We're going to talk about Moriba.
- Who's Moriba?
- Don't you know him? He's like you. Stubborn *and* stupid!
- Don't call me names!
- I'm joking. You're brighter than Moriba.
- Right, that's better.
- Now, listen. One day, Moriba went off to market and bought himself a pair of trousers. The feast days were coming. When he got back home, he realised the trousers were big, very big and too long for him. Moriba begged his father to shorten his trousers. But his father refused, and his mother too, and all his sisters, because Moriba was a stubborn boy. Late that night Moriba went to sleep, unhappy and bitter. Without telling anyone, his father decided to shorten the

trousers. His mother did the same thing. And so did the sisters, again in complete secrecy. The next day, Moriba put on the trousers but they had become small, very small. Guess what comes next.

– I know. On the feast day, Moriba had just a pair of underpants!

With the story of Moriba's shortened trousers, Samba sums up the thrust of the film, his own difficulty in tailoring his existence to the right size, the problem of finding his place in the world. However, as Burkinabe director Fanta Nacro points out, 'the tale is not a gratuitous, unmotivated thing, because it takes its cue from daily experience'.⁹ His short film, *Un certain matin* (1993), a metaphorical piece on the reception of cinema, has the density of a folk-tale and uses its narrative devices: repetition, symmetry, surprise, appeal to the imagination, the use of signs, objects and hence of space rather than dialogue. A peasant hears some shouting and sees a man chasing a woman. When the scene repeats itself, he intervenes and shoots at the man, who falls. We then hear the word 'Cut!' because this is a film being shot in a remote area. When he catches up again with his father, who has run away for fear of reprisals, the son asks him, 'Daddy, what's cinema?' By its cinematic transcription of the oral tradition, producing a contemporary folktale, the film provides its own answer to this question.

However, one can notice changes in the narrative structure of recent African films, changes we cannot attribute solely to the pressure of American images or the increasing penetration of television. Young filmmakers today are attempting to break with linear narrative and are looking to give their films a new, distinctive pace. The unfulfilled hopes of the independence years

9. Fanta Nacro interviewed by Françoise Balogun in *Cinéma et libertés* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1993), p.98. My translation.

have given way to a desire for democracy, and this is reflected in the cinematic sphere. The filmmaker's relationship with the viewer has become more subtle: it is no longer a question of taking them down a well-worn path, but of frustrating them, so as to take them to a different place, to an understanding which is not a product of didacticism, but more akin to a reflection on themselves, their experience, their society.

As early as 1973, Djibril Diop Mambety employed a cyclical compositional style in *Touki-Bouki*, something he further developed in *Le Franc* (1994). The effort required of the viewers to reassemble the narrative makes identification less likely, but shifts them towards a new view of reality. The images induce a reality-effect in much the same way as the photographs included by André Breton in *Nadja*. The viewer attempts to find a coherence among those images. The irony of the narrative then sharpens the critical faculties and one's reflection on one's own actions. The themes and the symbolism point the viewer towards an overall understanding. The viewer is then called upon to situate him/herself in the world, within a general logic which the circular narrative structure imposes as a metaphysic: when set against time, a life is merely a transient episode, but one which inscribes itself in time, through multiple rites of passage, as a permanently creative act.

Can we thus speak of a new form of African filmmaking? This is the question raised in *Bye Bye Africa*, a long feature by the Chadian director, Mahamat Saleh Haroun, which received an award at the most recent festival in Venice. New African cinema has caused a number of ruptures with previous cinematic practices but some of these ruptures are not the ones that had been anticipated.

Filmmakers of the 'postcolonial generation', generally born after independence, want to base their films on contemporary

African life: social problems, day-to-day politics, focusing on individual relationships between men and women, between people at work, filming love and desire. Issa Serge Coelo's *Un taxi pour Aouzou* (Chad 1994) serves as a striking example of this type of filmmaking.

Ali, the taxi-driver, trawls the streets of N'djamena, picking up a whole gallery of characters on the way. There is the woman who is smuggling because her husband has no job, the glue-sniffer, the 'moaner' complaining about the greedy taxi-drivers, a woman with a fish which leaves a terrible stench in the taxi. At one point, Ali states that 'the taxi is democracy: anybody can get in, even if they stink!' When Ali learns that his wife has given birth, a parade of taxis gathers around him, his colleagues expressing their solidarity, which holds the society together. The film's director argues that the taxi provides a privileged vantage point for 'observing political realities, social distress, love — subjects which have their place in the cinema'.¹⁰ The reality of life in Chad, which is so remote from Westerners (though so present on the world's television screens in recent years), is conveyed with finesse and sensitivity. When at the end of this 23-minute film, the camera pulls back to show the whole of N'djamena, the city already seems familiar. We have shared its turbulence, its tensions, its humour and the violence of a war which is still present, the everyday emotions of the place.

Filmmakers of the new generation see the contemporary cultural melting pot in Africa as positive. They no longer believe in authenticity and identity. They define themselves as 'Afro-Europeans'. In fact, many African filmmakers received their film education in Europe, and many of them choose to live there. However, these directors are deeply aware of their African background, which they seek to express in their work. They are the

10. *Écrans d'Afrique*, 11 (1995), p.17. My translation.

product of two cultures. This debate between older and younger generations about the nature of African reality and identity is at the heart of much contemporary African filmmaking. For younger filmmakers, the films of their elders often appear too far removed from social and political reality. The young directors accuse some of the elders in the Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes (FEPACI) of using their position within the organisation to extract subsidies from the North. They also believe that the work of older directors has not evolved in terms of style and technique. Some filmmakers of the new generation have created an organisation called La Guilde des cinéastes africains in order to act as a lobby and as a forum for like-minded directors to express their ideas and solidarity. In many ways, these directors are in the process of launching a new kind of Nouvelle Vague: low budgets, quick shots, natural locations both outside and inside, in the streets and in their houses, small crews, films that eschew chronology with a fragmented editing style, a reflection of the lack of cohesion to be found in contemporary African urban societies. It has become clear that young African filmmakers are engaged in a profound reflection on their art and on their relationship to their societies. I believe that their films are asking fundamental questions about African societies, exploring individual responsibility and the complexity of human relationships. This questioning of the cinematic representation of Africa has even led directors such as François Woukoache to ask whether African filmmakers should only allow their films to be shown in Africa, thereby removing the temptations of trying to please a Western audience. The fact that young African directors are asking such radical questions gives an indication of the vitality of recent African cinema.

Olivier Barlet
Editor of *Africultures*

The Cinematic Representation of Post-Independence Africa: Culture, Capitalism and Neo-Colonialism in *Xala* and *Touki-Bouki*

The study day at which this article was originally presented as a paper invited the speakers to look at African cinema in the light of the questions of history, memory and orality. I am aware that the title of this article might, at first glance, appear to deviate from these questions somewhat. Therefore, I would like to begin by explaining the terms I have chosen to frame this brief discussion of two films by Senegalese directors, Ousmane Sembene's *Xala* and Djibril Diop Mambety's *Touki-Bouki*, films which in my opinion serve to highlight many of the issues at stake in the development of African cinema as a whole.

Firstly, I would like to address the questions of history and memory. Both *Xala* and *Touki-Bouki* are films that portray post-independence Senegalese society. Therefore, on one level, these films might appear to be unconcerned with historical questions. However, on the contrary, I would argue that these films provide a wonderful insight into such issues, for, in their presentation of contemporary 1970s Senegal, both directors interpret their country's history in radically different ways, and this historical memory of the past informs their interpretation of the present. The present is also part of history: it is the product of the past and it produces the history of the future. In their widely different representations of Senegalese society, Sembene and Mambety are engaged in a process of remembering: their films can thus be read as competing elements within the historical memory of post-independence Senegal, inviting us to interpret this period in very different ways.

Therefore, I will examine the questions of history and memory in *Xala* and *Touki-Bouki* in relation to the terms introduced in my title: namely, culture, capitalism and neo-colonialism. The basic questions I wish to ask are the following: how do these two filmmakers represent the legacy of colonialism? And what memory do they produce of post-independence Senegal?

Before turning to the analysis of these two films, it is important to explore some of the theories that surround African cinema, including orality (the third element of the title of the study day). Many critics have convincingly argued that African cinema (and indeed African literature) has borrowed heavily from the oral tradition. For example, both *Xala* and *Touki-Bouki* reproduce elements of traditional 'trickster' tales.¹ The archetypal 'trickster' narratives are those concerning Leuk-le-lièvre, the African forefather of the 'Brer Rabbit' character in the tales of the American South. Indeed, the title *Touki-Bouki*, which means 'the hyena's voyage', evokes another staple character of the 'trickster' tale, the hyena: in West African folk tradition, the hyena plays the role often attributed to the fox in the West, regarded as a cunning, deceitful animal that cannot be trusted. As in these traditional 'trickster' tales, the protagonists in both films are set a number of challenges with a prize waiting at the end of it. In *Touki-Bouki*, Mory and Anta deceive a number of hapless victims only to see the prize of their glorious journey to France ruined by Mory's last minute change of heart. In *Xala*, the main protagonist, El Hadji, becomes the hapless victim of deceit and cunning rather than its perpetrator, as he is set a number of tasks to overcome his impotence. A man who has callously deceived people in the past, El Hadji is forced to meet the fate that he has doled out to others.

1. For a discussion of orality in relation to Sembene's work, including analysis of 'trickster' narratives, see Mbye Boubacar Cham, 'Ousmane Sembene and the Aesthetics of Oral African Traditions', *Africana Journal*, 13, 1-4 (1982), 24-40.

Many African filmmakers have explicitly linked their work to the oral tradition. For example, Sembene's declaration that the filmmaker is the closest figure to the *griot*, the guardian of the West African oral tradition, in that his/her work combines music, gesture and storytelling, in a communal gathering, has become a standard critical dictum.² However, the exploration of cinematic links to orality often overlooks the fact that African cinema, while providing a certain continuity with elements of the oral tradition, also constitutes a major rupture with that tradition. Cinema literally introduces a different way of seeing and representing the world to the stories of the *griot*: a film, with its particular emphasis on spatial and temporal representation, introduces radically different questions to the oral performances of a *griot*. Equally, the relationship between the paying cinema spectator and a film, and the relationship between listener and storyteller, are vastly different. For example, films cannot engage in a dialogue with members of the audience. Above all, it should not be forgotten that films are commercial enterprises. One must pay to enter the cinema: it is not a 'traditional', communal gathering.

It is for these reasons that I have chosen to discuss the 'cinematic representation' of post-independence Africa rather than simply the question of orality. The oral tradition informs the work of African directors but it cannot be cited as the sole determining factor in the production of African cinematic representations. If elements of orality are used, they must be adapted to the expressive potential of the cinema as a medium. When Birago Diop and Bernard Dadié produced their literary versions of African tales, they were hailed as guardians of oral culture.³ However, the paradox was that, in writing down these tales, they were initiating

2. For an example of Sembene's ideas on filmmaking in Africa, see Siradiou Diallo, 'Jeune Afrique fait parler Sembene Ousmane', *Jeune Afrique*, 27 janvier 1973, p.45.

3. Birago Diop, *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* (1947; Paris: Présence Africaine, 1969); Bernard Dadié, *Le Pagne noir* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955).

the birth of a modern black African literature. Equally, African film directors, who seek a cultural continuity in borrowing from the oral tradition, are also creating a rupture through their development of an African cinematic discourse.

Arguments about the definition of what constitutes African cinema have dominated critical debate since the emergence of films by black Africans in the 1960s. As sub-Saharan Africa was one of the last regions in the world to produce its own cinematic images, it probably should come as no surprise that critics applied themselves so readily to the manner in which a 'true' African cinema should differ from other cinemas. For some Western critics, the emergence of African cinema was the source of a grave disappointment. These Western critics did not know exactly what this cinema should be like but they knew they wanted it to be radically different from everything that had come before. As the critic, Serge Daney, has claimed, a certain type of Western critic had been vaguely expecting African cinema to be a non-intellectual, all-singing, all-dancing extravaganza.⁴ What room do such views leave for *Xala* and films like it, which sought to produce a radical critique of independent African societies? The articulate and socially committed cinema represented by Sembene was simply too 'Western' for these critics.

However, there were just as many left-wing critics, both African and Western, who readily saw such radical African films as defining the 'true' African cinema.⁵ The mood of revolutionary optimism which accompanied the process of decolonisation saw the birth of the theory of what was to become known as 'Third

Cinema', which stressed the political function of cinema.⁶ Those critics who have advocated the theory of a 'Third Cinema' have stressed that 'authentic' Third World films must abandon the structures and thematic concerns of commercial Western cinema. This ideological imperative is clearly at the heart of Sembene's cinema and he has often stressed the need to move away from the preoccupations of Western cinema, and, more particularly, from its stereotypical images of Africa. However, does this mean that Sembene's work is 'authentically' African? If it is 'authentically' African, should we then consider the experimental and dreamlike films of Djibril Diop Mambety, which are primarily interested in cultural issues, to be somehow less African?

Debates upon the nature of African cinema have too often been trapped within a reductive opposition between Western and African culture. Basically, this argument proposes that an 'authentic' African film must not only exclude all things European or Western, but must also set itself up in opposition to them. If we follow this argument through to its logical conclusion, then all African films are 'inauthentic' or 'Western' simply because cinema was first invented in the West. However, if we remove this strict opposition between the West and the rest of the world, we get a much better view of the ways in which different cultures interact and influence one another. Cultural influence is not simply a one-way street with the West influencing the rest.⁷ Therefore, I would

6. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 'Towards a Third Cinema', *Afterimage*, 3 (Summer 1971), 16-35. The article was originally published in Spanish in 1969.

7. A fascinating example of the circulation of cultural influences can be found in the work of the late Japanese director, Akira Kurosawa. His early films were heavily influenced by American westerns. Then, as Kurosawa became an established figure in world cinema, his films in turn became models for American directors to copy. African cinema has not yet reached a prominent cultural position within the Western world (not even on the arthouse circuit) that would allow it to influence a generation of aspiring Western filmmakers. However, in other cultural spheres, African cultural influence is clearly visible. For example, African/black music is recognised as a major influence on the development of Western popular music since the 1950s.

4. Serge Daney, 'Ceddo (O. Sembene)', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 304 (octobre 1979), 51-53.

5. The French journalist, Jean-Louis Bory, championed 'radical' African films in his column in the *Nouvel Observateur*. For example, see his article, 'La Nouvelle arme du tiers monde', *Nouvel Observateur*, 28 octobre-3 novembre 1968, pp.50-51. One of the most influential works on the theory of 'Third Cinema' is Teshome H. Gabriel's *Third Cinema in the Third World: the Aesthetics of Liberation* (London: Bowker, 1982).

argue that Africa and the West are not mutually exclusive worlds that possess their own authentic and unchanging identities: they are hybrid entities that influence and modify each other, and this process of exchange applies just as much to cinema (although in the contemporary world order, the West remains the dominant force in this process of hybridisation).

The filmmaker and critic James Potts has noted the tendency within Africa and the West to make sweeping generalisations about the nature of 'black' or 'African cinema'. Not only do such arguments neglect the vast cultural diversity of the African continent, but they also assume that it is possible to create radically different film 'languages'. Having worked as a technical adviser on film projects in Ethiopia and Kenya over a five-year period, Potts was able to experience the problems of filmmaking in Africa first-hand. This leads him to argue that the technical limitations within which African filmmakers are forced to work can be shown to impose an aesthetic on a film far more readily than one can argue that such matters are governed by the director's ethnic origins. Essentially, Potts believes that we do not yet have the theoretical basis to talk about national or ethnic film styles. Instead, he proposes an approach that attempts to negotiate the relationship between the 'universal' and the 'local' aspects of filmmaking:

I still prefer to think that film-making is a form of universal speech — not so much a 'Visual Esperanto' as a developing visual language with a rich variety of dialects and idiolects which contain both alien and indigenous elements. These elements must be studied more closely and made more explicit if genuine intercultural communication is to take place.⁸

I believe that this approach allows us to develop a more complex vision of African cinema, viewing it in terms of its ability to adapt

and modify established film codes from around the world.

I would now like to look more closely at the two films under discussion, beginning with Djibril Diop Mambety's *Touki-Bouki*. The film was released in 1973 and was immediately greeted by the critics as Africa's first genuine avant-garde movie, although, as was mentioned earlier, subsequent critics have sought to situate the film's complex narrative structure within the oral traditions of Senegal.⁹

As I have argued, the reductive opposition between Africa and the West merely produces a sterile stand-off between the different cultural influences which are so clearly present in Mambety's work. Mambety borrows heavily from Western experimental films in *Touki-Bouki* but, in the process, he creates something radically different, adapting such models to his own culture. In fact, *Touki-Bouki* can be read as an exploration of the cultural encounter between the West and Africa. The film tells the tale of a young Senegalese couple, Mory and Anta, who long to escape from their home town of Dakar to the promised land of France where they hope to find the money that will allow them to return both rich and famous to their homeland.

As we see in the opening sequence of the film, Mambety uses a complex array of imagery to reflect this contradictory pull between France and Africa. He deliberately plays around with the standard binary opposition between Africa and the West. In a static, medium distance shot, we see a small boy riding on an ox's back, slowly advancing across the open savannah towards the camera. On the soundtrack, we can hear what appears to be a 'traditional' African tune, played on a wind instrument. The spectator is led to expect a tale of rural Africa, perhaps even a tale

9. For example, Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike strongly criticises Western critics who describe *Touki-Bouki* as an avant-garde film. See his *Black African Cinema* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994), pp.172-77

of a simple, African past. However, as boy and beast move into the foreground of the shot, the sound of an engine revving up begins to vie with and eventually to dominate the sound of the music. The image then cuts to a shot of Mory, the male hero of the story, riding along on his motorbike. Filmed from the position of a pillion passenger over Mory's shoulder, the shot conveys a sense of speed and exhilaration far removed from the preceding rural imagery. Time and location are fragmented as the spectator is shaken out of his original expectations and thrust into a tale of modern Africa, complete with motorbikes, motorways and machinery.

Despite the sudden intrusion of modern, technological artifacts, a visual link to the preceding rural scene remains in the shape of an ox's skull attached to the front of Mory's motorbike. In fact, the horns of the skull act as a sort of frame through which we observe the rapidly passing urban landscape. Essentially, Mambety provides us with a vision of an Africa in which the modern, technological world is to be found side by side with the traditional, rural world. As one of the characters in the film puts it, Mory is unsure whether he is driving an ox or a motorbike. He is the hybrid product of two vastly different cultures.

For Mambety, this hybrid culture is the main legacy of the colonial era. Mambety takes great pleasure in presenting the adventures of Mory and Anta, the marginal couple, whom he depicts as a sort of African Bonnie and Clyde (without the guns), who steal and deceive their way towards a passage to the promised land of France. The hybridity represented by the couple is the source of a rich cultural diversity but it also produces a sense of alienation that causes Mory and Anta to identify completely with a vision of France as the land of wealth and opportunity. The lure of France resurfaces throughout the film, in the repeated use of the French song, 'Paris, Paris, Paris'. Equally, the use on the

soundtrack of songs by Josephine Baker, the African-American singer who made her name on the Parisian club scene in the 1920s, serves to echo the theme of the attraction of Paris for the 'peripheral', black world.

The obsession with material wealth is the other main legacy of the colonial era. For Mambety, the capitalist system is rapidly eroding the communal bonds that hold together African communities (a theme he would return to in his 1992 film, *Hyènes*). Mory and Anta are obsessed with status and consumer possessions, and in one extended dream sequence Mory imagines the couple's triumphant return to Senegal, after making their fortune in France. Standing naked in the back of a chauffeur-driven open-top convertible which he has stolen from a rich homosexual called Charlie, Mory holds his right arm aloft in salute to the cheering crowds he imagines all around him. However, this desire to attain material wealth comes to nothing. In spite of the couple's dreams of escaping to the bright modern dream world of France, images of rural Africa, and in particular, violent images of the ritual slaughter of an ox (which are present even in the opening sequence) haunt Mory throughout the film, eventually preventing him from boarding the ship to France with Anta.

Above all, *Touki-Bouki* is concerned with the fascination that the West holds for Africa. In fact, one could describe this fascination as a form of mental neo-colonialism. The rebellious couple, Mory and Anta, long to get away to the Paris of which they dream. However, the dream of the West, and its various attractions, is not set up as an ideal to be attained by Africans: it may be a source of hope and inspiration for Mambety's characters but there is a huge price to pay for obtaining this dream. This does not mean that his films reject the West in favour of some idyllic African past. The meeting of Africa and the West has created a new reality, sometimes exciting and dynamic, sometimes menacing and

destructive. In many ways, Mambety's cinema itself stands as an example of the diversity and richness of this new culture while also warning of its dangers.

Abandoning all pretense at realism, *Touki-Bouki* blurs distinctions of time and space. The narrative flits from one scene to the next, and, in true picaresque fashion, it is the protagonists' travels that generate the story, with the film's narrative meandering through seemingly irrelevant detours and deadends. It is easy to spot the influence of a number of experimental Western movies on *Touki-Bouki*: firstly, one could mention *Easy Rider* and its psychedelic tale of the adventures of two drug-fuelled bikers; we might also think of Nicholas Roeg's films, especially *Performance*, and their blurring of identity, location, gender and time. However, Mambety adapts these Western influences to his own ends and creates a hybrid and distinctive symbolic filmscape. He rejects the openly political and social considerations of many African filmmakers of the 1970s. Indeed, in one highly significant scene early in the film, Mory is attacked by a group of young, left-wing intellectuals who despise him for his apolitical, amoral lifestyle. In many ways, this scene can be read as Mambety thumbing his nose at those who would have him present a political agenda in his films. This does not mean that Mambety's films are not political, simply that he sees the world primarily in terms of culture rather than politics. In fact, perhaps the ultimate strength of Mambety as a director lies in his ability to encapsulate vast political, social and cultural questions in the densely symbolic world of his films.

I would now like to examine Ousmane Sembene's film, *Xala*, which was first released in 1974. One of the most interesting things about *Xala*, which means the curse of impotence, is the fact that it managed to achieve that which is so elusive for most African films: namely, popular box-office success within Africa (many African films never even go on general release in Africa). The film

finished second in the 1975 Senegalese ratings behind a film featuring the formidable Bruce Lee, the most successful of the Kung-Fu kings who still dominate the screens of African cinemas today. A film that provides a scathing critique of the Senegalese ruling-classes as well as being a genuine popular success within Africa, *Xala* stands as an example of the possibilities of a popular, radical African cinema.

The film is essentially the satirical story of El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, a businessman who has just acceded to the Dakar Chamber of Commerce with his Senegalese colleagues, replacing their white, French counterparts. On this very same day, El Hadji is to marry his third wife. As both a businessman and a respectable Muslim, El Hadji would appear to have reached the top of the social ladder. However, disaster strikes on his wedding night when he is struck down with the *xala*, the curse of impotence. For the rest of the film, he desperately seeks a cure for his problem but, in the process, he spends his money wildly on bogus witchdoctors (or *marabouts*) and his business collapses. Although he suspects his first two wives of having placed the curse upon him, it turns out to be the blind beggar who sits outside his office who is responsible. At the end of the film, the blind beggar and his army of beggars and cripples burst into El Hadji's home and cure him by spitting on his naked torso. The political symbolism is plain to see: the neocolonial bourgeoisie are presented as an impotent class whose downfall will be brought about by the destitute and the oppressed of their society.

Xala is structured principally around the notion of fetishism.¹⁰ A fetish is an object which is given an inflated value

10. The theme of fetishism is a long established one in Marxist theory. Marx begins his sweeping analysis of nineteenth-century capitalist society in *Capital* with a discussion of the 'commodity', essentially defining capitalism as the accumulation of commodities. He then proceeds to examine the phenomenon that he terms 'commodity fetishism', that is the quasi-religious process by which value is attached to these commodities. This process

above its objective worth: whether it be the good-luck charm of an African witchdoctor or an attachment to the objects (televisions, briefcases, cars, etc.) of the consumer society. Fetishistic objects are usually surrounded by a series of rituals and the film sets out to present the rituals of the African bourgeoisie in all their contradictions. An idealisation of the West is shown to exist side by side with a profound belief in superstition and magic: as we saw in Mambety's film, the African and the Western have merged to form a new, hybrid reality. Thus, the representation of the various rituals, both modern and traditional, within Senegalese society becomes a means towards an examination of that society's ills. However, in contrast to the symbolic and indirect approach of Mambety's work, there is an explicitly social and radical impulse behind *Xala*, which tackles political issues head on.

The film's concern with ritual is evident in the opening scenes. In a piece of Brechtian symbolism, the African businessmen chase the French from the Chamber of Commerce, at the same time removing all the signs of French colonial power. Dressed in traditional African clothes, they place on the steps of the Chamber, amongst other items, a statue of Marianne, the symbol of the French Republic, and a pair of jack-boots, symbolising French colonial domination in Africa. The President of the Chamber's speech, which we hear on the soundtrack, makes

by which the 'exchange-value' of commodities is given almost inherent, religious qualities, effectively denying the labour that went into their making, is described by Marx as 'the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities'. See Karl Marx, 'Commodities', Chapter 1, section 4, 'The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof', in *Capital*, I, trans. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974), p.77. Sembene discusses the role of fetishism in *Xala* in a number of interviews. See Tahaar Cheriaa and Ferid Boughedir, 'Jeune Afrique fait parler Sembene Ousmane', 2 avril 1976, pp.54-56 Sembene expresses similar ideas in his interview with Aly Khary N'Daw: 'Sembène Ousmane et l'impuissance bourgeoise', *Jeune Afrique*, 27 avril 1974, p.20.

it clear that this act is being carried out on behalf of the whole nation. In fact, Senegalese businessmen had taken control of the Chamber of Commerce in the aftermath of a period of great social turmoil in May 1968. Their struggle to gain a larger slice of the economic cake from the French was cast in nationalist terms, turning the issue of control of the Chamber of Commerce from what was essentially an economic issue into a nationalist one.¹¹

The first scenes on the steps of the Chamber are shot from a low angle. This is an 'heroic' moment and the crowd, whose viewpoint the camera adopts, looks up at its leaders in respect and admiration. However, what Sembene sees as the true nature of this takeover is shown in the very next scene. The cameras have moved back to a higher, more remote angle as the crowd, in whose name the businessmen had supposedly been acting, are pushed back by the police, led by their white commander.¹² In the space cleared around the Chamber appear Dupont-Durand (the 'representative' Frenchman) and a white companion, both of whom had been ejected from the Chamber in the previous scene. The businessmen's struggle for control of the Chamber had needed the support of the people but, now that this has been achieved, the former colonial powers resurface, filling once more, both literally and metaphorically, the space which the people had momentarily occupied. As these two men ascend the steps of the Chamber, carrying the briefcases, we can hear, on the soundtrack, the continuation of the President's speech (which is clearly a parody of

11. For a discussion of the aftermath of May 1968 and the lobbying powers of the Senegalese business class, see Pierre Fougeyrollas, *Où va le Sénégal?* (Dakar: IFAN; Paris: Anthropos, 1970), pp.11-43.

12. The then Minister for the Interior, Jean Collin, was a Frenchman who had taken on Senegalese citizenship after independence. No doubt due to this, all scenes featuring the white chief of police were cut in Senegal. For a discussion of Collin's career, see Momar Coumba Diop and Mamadou Diouf, *Le Sénégal sous Abdou Diouf* (Paris: Karthala, 1990), pp.101-14.

Senghor's notion of 'African socialism'): 'Nous avons opté pour le socialisme, le seul vrai socialisme, le socialisme africain, le socialisme à hauteur d'homme. Notre indépendance est complète.'¹³ The irony of this final line becomes clear as Dupont-Durand and his partner distribute the briefcases full of money to the members of the Chamber, who are now dressed in Western suits. For Sembene, this is the reality of African independence: the ritual handing-over of the briefcases is the true commemoration of the businessmen's taking over of the Chamber of Commerce. In fact, the briefcases become the symbol of the neo-colonial state: it is French money rather than French guns that now controls the country.

As was mentioned above, El Hadji's impotence is brought about by the blind beggar who has placed the curse upon him. The film sets up the group of beggars and cripples who gather around the blind man as an opposite communal pole to the ostentatious and hypocritical gatherings of the African bourgeoisie. Excluded from independent Senegalese society, they act as reminders of the harsh realities of neocolonialism. As we later discover, El Hadji is directly responsible for the destitution of the blind beggar whose land he had stolen by changing the names on the title deeds, using his Western education in the name of corruption and capitalism (which are synonymous terms in the film).

In a repetition of the violent imposition of neocolonial order in the opening section, the police arrive and round up the beggars and cripples whom they dump on the outskirts of the city. But despite these efforts to banish the beggars and cripples, they are never out of sight for long. The camera shows them constantly reappearing to remind those in power of their existence, and, more

13. For Senghor's ideas on African Socialism, see his *Liberté 2: Nation et voie africaine du socialisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), especially the paper entitled 'La Voie africaine du socialisme: nouvel essai de définition', pp.283-315.

pragmatically, because the city is the site where they gain their income. In many ways, the film constitutes a fight between the beggars and the bourgeoisie to occupy the screen, a fight which is eventually won by the beggars. In one of the key scenes in the film, we see the blind beggar and his young helper leading the beggars and cripples back from the outskirts of the city where they have been dumped by the police.

There is a great sense of community in this scene. Able-bodied characters carry the disabled. Then, when they sit to eat at a roadside canteen, the camera attentively follows the hands distributing the food and drink, making sure that everyone gets his share. In a society where the communal, ritual aspect of eating is so strong, the sense of community which emanates from the beggars' meal is of great significance. It is a far cry from the lavish extravagances of the wedding reception, where the ritual of the feast has been completely appropriated by the neocolonial bourgeoisie. This ritual of the communal meal is repeated in the final part of the film where the beggars confront El Hadji. They share out amongst themselves the lavish imported food which is stored in his well-stocked refrigerator as a prelude to their punishment/cure of El Hadji.

This exploration of rituals and fetishes reaches its climax in the final scene of the film. The combination of supernaturalist fetishism and socialism in the beggars' punishment/cure, spitting on El Hadji's naked torso in the film's most gruesome and disturbing scene, proposes a new ritual for African society. When the beggars spit on him (a ritual which does not exist in Senegalese tradition), they are spitting out the anger of all those who are socially excluded from Senegalese society. Sembene claims to speak out for the oppressed but he does not advocate bloody revolution to overthrow the rich. The beggars' act is repulsive but it is not murderous. El Hadji is punished but they leave open to him the

promise of redemption. The film ends with a freeze frame on El Hadji as we continue to hear the sound of the beggars spitting on the soundtrack. The spectator is left to ponder on the nature of this political and supernatural act merged into one.

Sembene's use of rituals and fetishes forces the spectator (particularly the Senegalese spectator to whom the film is primarily addressed) to examine the values which his society attributes to certain objects. *Xala* presents a society where the signs of consumerism, fetishism and socialism are shown to intermingle, creating new social meanings. Dealing with the rituals known to his Senegalese audience, Sembene then proceeds to put them into new configurations.¹⁴ A similar process is at work in Mambety's *Touki-Bouki* but Sembene marries this examination of ritual to a very strong, and often comic, narrative on a subject with which his native audience could readily identify. His 'socialist fetishism' proved highly popular with Senegalese film audiences, and obviously touched a sore point with the Senegalese government which ordered ten cuts to the film before allowing it to be released (thus creating the paradoxical situation whereby foreign audiences, who were secondary to Sembene's thinking, are the only ones who get to see the film in its entirety).

In conclusion, I do not want to suggest that the popularity of Sembene's film somehow makes him a better or a more 'authentically' African director than Mambety. In fact, none of Sembene's subsequent films has managed to gain access to the wide African audience that *Xala* managed to reach. Instead, I would argue that both directors use their vastly different ideological and cinematic visions to capture the realities of a Senegalese society in the middle of a period of extensive change and turmoil. The two

14. Laura Mulvey provides a useful discussion of the film's exploration of rituals and fetishes in her article, 'Xala, Ousmane Sembene 1976: The Carapace that Failed', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), pp.517-34.

directors set about recording their nation and their continent's history. Their films become part of historical memory to be interpreted by their own people. We can only hope that Africans will have better access to this historical memory in the future.

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Secondary Orality: Oral Narrative Techniques in Adama Drabo's *Taafe Fanga*

This article proposes to look at ways in which orature and its narrative techniques have been integrated into, and have marked Francophone West African film, taking Adama Drabo's *Taafe Fanga* (Mali, 1997), as a representative example of a range of works marked by these narrative techniques.¹ In so doing, the article aims to highlight the importance of orality, and its influences on films from the region, thereby helping to understand some of their agendas and styles, which are not necessarily immediately obvious to viewers unfamiliar with cultural norms in the region. Moreover, it will also illustrate the ways in which the integration of such narrative techniques has conferred what can tentatively, and without wanting to be too essentialist, be referred to as a certain specificity on West African film. This examination of the influences of orality will also reveal the importance of the past — or memory — which will be seen to be both a key point of reference in orature and these orature-influenced films, and, in a post-colonial context, a 'site of resistance'.²

Before looking specifically at *Taafe Fanga*, however, it is first of all important to consider briefly the socio-political context in which West African filmmaking was born, in order to understand the significance of this embracing of orature. Secondly, some of the characteristics of the arts and the role of artists commonly found

in the region, and which have influenced its filmmakers, will also be outlined.

When discussing West African film, it is useful to remember that filmmaking in the region was born in the aftermath of colonial independence, and has thus been strongly marked by that era and its political agendas. Filmmakers 'coming to voice' at that time were faced with the legacy of misrepresentative images of Africa and its people made in the West, which not only reflected and reinforced the racist, white supremacist theories of the nineteenth century, but also helped to justify Western imperialism in Africa. This gave rise to films in which African characters were (and, indeed, often still are) predominantly absent and/or voiceless, as well as a range of stereotypes, showing, for example, Africans to be devious, or subservient and childlike. In short, Africa on film generally became little more than a projection of the West's exotic and/or hegemonic fantasies.

The existence of such images has, in turn, resulted in the West African filmmakers' expressed desire to counter these images, and to provide alternative representations of their own. For many filmmakers, film is seen as a means of challenging Western hegemony, and of restoring African dignity by establishing a plurality of perspectives and voices, and by depicting African realities from an African point of view. These desires have been further reinforced by the intellectual climate of the liberation era, in which theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral described culture as a powerful tool for mental decolonisation.³ This concept has, of course, found a resonance in the West African cultural context, where the arts are 'traditionally' considered to

1. See, for example, Dany Kouyaté's *Keita! L'Héritage du Griot* (Burkina Faso, 1995), or Cheikh Oumar Sissoko's *Guimba* (Mali, 1995).

2. This notion is taken from the work of Michel Foucault, who posits memory as a 'site of resistance'. Cited by bell hooks in 'The Oppositional Gaze', in bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), p.131.

3. See Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*. (1961; Paris: Gallimard, 1991), pp.280-81, and Amílcar Cabral, *Unité et lutte I: l'arme de la théorie* (Paris: Maspéro, 1975), pp.319-20.

play a socio-educational role.⁴

In the post-colonial context, therefore, the first generation of filmmakers particularly, and, to a certain extent, a number of contemporary filmmakers, have inevitably been faced with the issues of representation, especially as film, by its very nature, is a medium of visual representation. This has frequently led to the embracing of both a predominantly engaged vein of filmmaking, and of the traditional community-based conception of the filmmaker as being at the service of his/her people. It has also resulted in the widespread desire to explore local identities in film, which are, of course, diverse and multiple, as filmmakers have appropriated the medium to become the subjects, rather than just the objects of representation, and have used the cinema to define their identities. In the process, they have, as has been mentioned above, often both identified with existing West African conceptions of the role of the artist and the arts, and, consciously and unconsciously, embraced local narrative traditions and codes in order to reflect better these identities and realities. This tendency has been all the more marked in recent years as there has been a greater desire to develop and explore film language and styles, and as filmmaking has developed and diversified.

When discussing cultural forms and the place and role of the arts and artists in West Africa, it is important to remember that there are cultural convergences, which arise from shared periods of history, ethnic alliances, trade links, migrations, amongst other

4. It is important to clarify the use of the term 'traditional', at this point, as, in much Western discourse on Africa, it has often been used to portray the pre-colonial as a homogeneous and monolithic entity, which is fundamentally opposed to the 'modern' — by which we can understand 'Western'. In reality, of course, the cultures existing in West Africa prior to the European colonial encounter were syncretic, changing and plural. Furthermore, many elements of so-called 'traditional' culture are still very much alive today, rather than being relics of an unchanging, static past, hence the need to understand 'traditional' in an essentially flexible manner.

factors. Nonetheless, we must not lose sight of the fact that there are also many divergences.

Generally speaking, however, West African societies traditionally have a holistic view of the human and his/her environment, and their societies tend to be community-based. Cultural forms tend to reflect this, the arts being destined for the whole community. Art forms are thus often totally integrated into daily existence and activity, and the different art forms themselves are commonly interrelated and juxtaposed. Songs, for example, will habitually be woven into oral tales, not just as embellishments, but as an integral part of the narrative development and structure, and audiences will often respond to the narrator in codified call-and-response refrains. Examples of this are clear from the filmed storytelling sessions in Drabo's *Taafe Fanga*, as shall be seen in more detail later.

This holistic symbiosis between humans and their environment is often reflected in the spatial organisation of films, as is, once again the case in *Taafe Fanga*. Spectators will notice, for example, the importance accorded to landscapes, the sky, trees, and other natural elements in shots, which is particularly clear from the way in which the camera lingers on these features once the characters have left the frame. Similarly, slow, sweeping pans across landscapes often situate characters in relation to their surroundings, and there is a predominance of long and medium-shot compositions, frontal frames, and group shots, which place emphasis on the community, and/or relate the characters to their environment. Whilst such framing may seem stylised or theatrical to Western viewers used to shot-counter-shot type framing, it in fact recreates the kind of communal performance space characteristic of traditional outdoor theatre in West Africa. It is interesting to note in this respect that *Taafe Fanga*, which was originally a play written by Drabo, is indeed marked by the

conventions of Mali's popular Koteba theatre, which no doubt accounts for the film's theatrical group and/or character movements, and acting styles.

With regard to orality, oral tales remain the main narrative expression throughout West Africa. They are not just a form of entertainment, but also traditionally play a fundamental socio-educational role. Stories are used to pass on a community's moral codes, values, belief systems, and collective memory, for example, and provide a forum for addressing social issues and conflicts.

The language of the tales is often highly metaphorical, and will be read on different levels by different audiences. The traditional introduction to the Fulani initiation tale, *Kaïdara*, makes this clear, stating, for example:

For the children playing in the moonlight, my tale is an imaginary story.

For the women spinning cotton in the long, dry season nights, my tale is a delectable past-time.

For the bearded chins and rugged feet, it is a veritable revelation.

I am futile, useful and instructive.⁵

Not only are the tales educational, but, by using allegory and satire in particular, they are also traditionally a vehicle for articulating protest and criticism. In the post-colonial context referred to earlier, this engagement has frequently been openly embraced by filmmakers. It is also important to stress that the tales themselves — like all cultural forms — have evolved, their messages often being up-dated and adapted to suit their period, which accounts for the fact that oral tales are still present and alive today. Indeed, as Christopher Miller puts it, 'the lessons of the past are [...]

5. Amadou Hampaté Bâ, *Contes initiatiques peuls* (Paris: Stock, 1994), p.251. Author's translation.

constantly translated into the terms of the present'.⁶ Once again, this will later be seen to be the case in *Taafé Fanga*.

The centrality of orature and the importance of its role accounts for the influence it has had on all the contemporary art forms, including cinema. This centrality is also a reflection of the reverence accorded to speech itself in many West African societies, whose creation myths insist on the sacred origin of words. As words are considered to be a divine force breathed into humans, they are seen to have the power to harmonise or to upset the natural balance between the forces of the earth, hence the importance of ritualised speech in the ceremonies aimed at modifying this balance, and the preference in many societies for controlled, enigmatic, and ritualised speech, which is clear from their predilection for proverbs.

This is again reflected in many films, including *Taafé Fanga*, in which the long, and often static, moments of speech form part of the film's internal logic and rhythm. Not only do characters often resort to proverbs, therefore, but there is also a tendency to include ritualised moments of speech (greetings, discussions, and so forth) in the diegesis. Although this is highly uncharacteristic in Western film, in which the dialogue is often used to advance the narrative, here, dialogue serves not as a short-cut, but is there to be listened to.⁷ These ritualised moments are often distinguished in West African films by their poised settings, the centrality of speakers in frame, and their static, unobtrusive camera work, which, by not controlling or directing the viewer's gaze, leaves him/her free to listen.

In a culture where the word takes on such importance, it

6. Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.98.

7. As André Gardies writes: 'La parole ne sert pas à écouter, pas plus qu'elle ne saurait être écoutée. Au contraire, elle demande à être écoutée.' André Gardies, *Cinéma d'Afrique Noire Francophone: L'Espace Miroir* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989), p.137.

comes as little surprise that there are people who are 'specialists' of the word. Whilst commonly referred to under the generic term of 'griot', this in fact masks a multitude of roles, and statuses, which vary from one ethnic group or region to another. A griot's functions may range from that of scholar, mediator, advisor, to musician and storyteller, or parasitic scandalmonger, hence the fact that griots are at times revered, at times despised. Irrespective of status, however, griots are always considered capable of manipulating the sacred force, word.

What is of interest here, is the fact that griots, again, whatever their status, are central figures in West African societies and their arts, and have become a point of reference for the filmmakers, who appear to identify in particular with the griot's freedom to broach topics which are taboo, or to criticise abuses of power. Once again, this also corresponds to the post-colonial conception of the artist as an engaged player in his/her community. The most striking example of this influence is the fact that a number of filmmakers liken their role to that of the griot. The Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene has, for example, often described the filmmaker's role as that of the 'modern griot', calling for film to emulate the traditional night-time storytelling sessions. Like the griot in *Taafé Fanga*, Adama Drabo similarly describes his role as being 'to interrogate the past, to reflect upon, and to forge, the present and the future'.⁸ This concept, or understanding, of the past as a point of reference is, again, frequently articulated in the works of liberation theorists, and reiterates the importance of history and collective memory in both orature and other West African cultural forms.

Other filmmakers who do not actually liken themselves to the griot, do, nonetheless, often acknowledge that they are influenced — whether consciously or unconsciously — by oral tales and their

narrative techniques, which is hardly surprising, given that these remain the predominant narrative form throughout West Africa. If I use the term, 'secondary orality', to borrow Keyan Tomaselli and Maureen Eke's expression, however, it is in order to stress that in film, like in other contemporary art forms, the techniques and codes of orature have been updated and blended with other artistic, and/or filmic, influences, both local and imported, thereby forming a new, hybrid version of orality — or secondary orality — which should not be confused with orality itself.⁹

This brings us on to some of the specific stylistic and structural influences of orature on film in general, and on *Taafé Fanga* in particular. To begin with, *Taafé Fanga* is one of a number of recent films which have overtly adapted the tale format and its codes to the screen, using a griot character to introduce and narrate the main diegesis. The opening sequence of the film, in which the griot, Sidiki Diabaté, arrives in a crowded urban compound, nonchalantly flicking off the black and white Hollywood musical on the television as he passes, before proceeding to narrate a tale, serves to introduce the spectator to the griot/narrator figure, thereby setting up the film's tale structure, and positioning the spectator in relation to the tale. At the same time, the griot's entrance also emphasises the fact that 'traditional' storytelling is still very much alive and part of West African society. Although Diabaté's gesture of turning off the television affirms the predominance of local forms of entertainment, the television sequence at the same time acknowledges the presence, and popularity, of these imported forms.

The ensuing sequence, in which the griot asks his audience to select the topic of the tale, goes on to stress the collective nature of the storytelling session. The audience's participatory role is further

9. See Keyan Tomaselli and Maureen Eke, 'Secondary Orality in South African Film', *iris*, 18 (Spring 1995), 61-71.

8. Interview with the author (Ouagadougou, February 1997). Author's translation.

highlighted by the way in which they accompany the griot's kora playing by clicking their fingers to the music, and by the circular panning movement of the camera, which further highlights the harmony of the group.¹⁰ However, when a mysterious woman enters the compound, provoking, and winning, a scuffle as she goes to sit with the men, the griot takes inspiration from the incident, which reminds him of a legend about a time when the Dogon women took over power from the men, and he proceeds to narrate the legend in the main body of the film. This thus demonstrates the way in which griots draw lessons from the events around them. It also highlights the way in which present events recall those from the past, which are in turn used to reflect upon the present. Indeed, in going to sit with the men, the stranger deliberately defies the order of the compound, where the male-female segregation reproduces the divisions between men and women in society at large. This defiance and challenging of male order, and, indeed, challenging of the stereotype of the subservient African woman, is, of course, echoed throughout the rest of the film, which as its title suggests — 'taafe fanga' meaning 'skirt power' in Bambara — explores the question of patriarchal domination.

As the first establishing shots of the Dogon village in which the story of the women's revolt and quest for power is set, take us into the past tense of the film, Sidiki Diabaté's kora is heard off-screen, thereby linking the film's contemporary present tense to the main body of the film set in the past, and reminding the spectator that the issues of the past are to be taken as a lesson for the present. Throughout the rest of the film, the griot's presence, and thus the fact that this is a tale, is recalled each time the kora punctuates the filmic narrative, and whenever the kora serves as a musical

10. The kora is a twenty-one stringed harp-lute, traditionally played to accompany oral tales.

interlude between scenes, linking time and place, as is often the case in the oral tales.

This orature-inspired technique of using music as a structuring device serves to lend an overall coherence to the narrative, especially when, as is again common in tales, the griot/narrator introduces parallel stories and digressions to illustrate the main narrative. Examples of this narrative layering can be seen in *Taafe Fanga*, when, for example, Yandju, one of the characters in the past tense of the film, narrates her own story to the children one night, or the sequence in which elements of Dogon cosmogony are explained. Whilst Western audiences, who are more used to narrative causality, might find such digressions disconcerting, or take them as a sign of a poor narrative construction, West African audiences, on the other hand, will be used to such digressions in the tales.

Taafe Fanga similarly contains a number of songs which also play a structuring role. Their words provide a commentary, or a reflection, on the events depicted, thereby adding another narrative voice, as is again often the case in the tales. This is clear, for example, in the griotte's (female griot) song, when the women take power:

Qui a vu la chèvre mordre le chien? O nuit de pouvoir.
L'extraordinaire s'est produit. Être femme n'est pas faiblesse.
C'est le croire qui l'est. Le pouvoir a été donné aux femmes.
Elles le garderont. Si tu t'en prends aux femmes du Mande,
elles te vendront pour une noix de cola. Portez vos yeux ici!
Le pagne a terrassé le pantalon.

These final words echo those of the man who wrestles with the mysterious woman in the compound, thereby stressing once again the link between the film's two narrative tenses.

Not only is the film itself structured as a tale, but, as was already mentioned, it also contains its own tale and narrative

digressions, providing a narrative layering often found in tales. Yandju's storytelling sequence referred to above, for example, not only provides a pause in the narrative, offering a moment of entertainment in itself, but also serves as an allegory for what will happen to the stolen mask if the women refuse to give it back. Importantly, the sequence again stresses the social significance of the act of storytelling, the tale serving here as a moment of reconciliation between the warring girls and boys, thereby reinforcing the cohesion of the group, which is again emphasised by the way the camera focuses on the whole group, highlighting the collective. The children and Yandju also answer one another in traditional call-and-response refrains, thereby setting up an echo with the storytelling session at the beginning of the film, which, once again, links the past and the present.

It is also interesting to note here that Yandju and the stranger in the compound are played by the same woman. This link is visually accentuated by the red clothes they both wear, and the Dogon cross motif on the stranger's *boubou* at the outset of the film. This suggests, therefore, that the griot is inspired by both the incident and the actual person, thereby further blurring the boundaries between the film's reality and fiction, between past and present, and adding a magical dimension, which is also common in the tales.

The repetition of such musical and visual leitmotifs, and of narrative incidents and the way in which they are filmed, is another common structuring device found in the oral tales. Several narrative incidents and their shot sequences are indeed repeated in *Taafe Fanga*. A good example is the confrontation between the stranger and the angry man in the compound, which is echoed in the later confrontation between Yayémè and her husband Agro in the Dogon village. In both instances, women stand up to the men's violent domination. This again sets up echoes within the film,

giving it cohesion, and again linking its different narrative tenses. *Taafe Fanga* offers an example of the allegorical and satirical register common in orature. As mentioned above, the tales habitually use metaphorical language, and are often allegories which different audiences will interpret on different levels. This technique encourages audiences to interpret and to analyse the meaning of a tale, just as the static camera work in film leaves viewers free to direct their own gaze.

Satire is common in both tales and traditional theatre forms, such as the Koteba in Mali, which directors, including Drabo, often cite as an influence. In the Koteba, satire is used to mock figures of authority, and to attack abuses of power, thereby encouraging reflection through laughter. Numerous directors in West Africa have embraced the political potential of such engaged satirical forms. Just like other satirical works, *Taafe Fanga* also addresses the question of power, which is again a common theme in the tales.

West African audiences are used to such allegorical forms in orature, and will quickly recognise them as such, reading their layered meanings. It is, indeed, important to recognise the allegorical nature of such works. Accusations from some quarters that films from the 1980s and 1990s such as *Taafe Fanga*, which have been somewhat disparagingly dubbed the 'return to the source' films, have sold out to Western exoticism, seem to ignore the engaged nature of their allegorical messages, and to ignore the fact that such works are often highly popular in West Africa too.

Taafe Fanga can thus be read not only as being about male/female relationships, but also about power relations in general. As the character Timbé's references to the need for an economic base to consolidate the women's power suggest, the film can also be seen as an allegory for the African continent in the face of neo-colonial economic imperialism.

The film employs a structure which Denise Paulme identifies as a 'descendant tale' in *La Mère dévorante: Essai sur la morphologie des contes africains*.¹² As in the descendant tales, the status quo (here of male/female relationships) is upset due to the intrusion of an outsider (in this case the mask, which enables the women to take power), before order is established again. This upsetting and re-establishing of the status quo may also be seen to reflect the Dogon conception of the spiral of order and disorder which is explained in one mystical sequence in the film, and which also reflects a traditionally cyclical conception of time.

What is significant here, however, is that whilst in tales the re-establishing of the status quo would traditionally be seen as positive, *Taafé Fanga* provides a characteristic example of the way in which orature is up-dated. The upsetting of the status quo is seen as timely and beneficial, as the film portrays the male order in a negative light. Although this male order is re-established, the final words of the film lie with female child Kouni, who, as a child, traditionally symbolises hope for the future, and with the griotte, both of whom effectively promise that women will one day be free. The restoration of male power is not seen as good, therefore, but offers a warning of what will happen if the patterns of domination and subordination are simply reversed rather than being fundamentally modified. Consequently, the film can be seen to offer a more progressive message. Drabo himself says of the film's ending: 'This story is a warning to women. Women took control of power in the past, but they lost it. We must stop history from repeating itself. The defeat can be turned into a victory, if we correct the errors of the past.'¹³ This once again highlights the way in which the lessons of the past can be used to inform the present.

11. See Denise Paulme, *La Mère dévorante: Essai sur la morphologie des contes africains* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

12. Interview with the author (Ouagadougou, February 1997). Author's translation.

Numerous archetypal characters and/or themes of the oral tales have similarly found their way into West African films. Once again, they are often up-dated or adapted, as is also the case in the tales. West African audiences will again quickly recognise and interpret standard character traits and their symbolic significance. In *Taafé Fanga*, Kouni is typical, for example, of what Denise Paulme describes as orature's archetypal 'enfant malin', or precociously clever child character, who habitually defies and outwits figures of authority. As mentioned above, children are also commonly the symbol of hope. Kouni thus plays a pivotal role in the plot, and it is significant that it is she who pronounces the final words of reconciliation. The 'enfant malin' is a positive character for West African audiences, and so by putting these words in Kouni's mouth, Drabo reinforces the positive reception of the film's message. The didacticism of the film's message, and its overt addressing of social issues, and notably the abuse of power, is also characteristic of the tales, which, as mentioned earlier, are often a vector for exploring socio-cultural issues.

The influence of the oral tradition can perhaps be most clearly noted in manner in which the magic realism of these oral tales has been carried over into the film. This supernatural realm is present not only in tales, but in society at large, in which, for example, there is considered to be no concrete division between lands of the living and dead, the natural and supernatural. In tales and films, it is unsurprising, therefore, that we move from one realm to another without any great to-do. As Drabo puts it: 'We evolve in this atmosphere all our lives, so it seems normal to me that my films, which are an emanation of my whole culture, should be infused with this knowledge which people call magic.'¹⁴ Such representations of the supernatural also reclaim traditional beliefs and the way in which they are represented. Indeed, it is

13. Ibid.

beliefs and the way in which they are represented. Indeed, it is interesting to note that, since the 1980s, these representations are not only a far cry from the 'mumbo-jumbo' mystifications of Western representations, but also from earlier African representations, which often condemned such beliefs in the name of modernity. As in *Taafe Fanga*, today's representations thus tend to be less inhibited, less judgmental, and less concerned with the Western gaze, showing these beliefs to be an integral part of the cultural environment in which the films are set. A number of films, like *Taafe Fanga*, also serve to convey and/or to rehabilitate other understandings of human existence, in this case the Dogon conception of the spiral of order and disorder.

This non-exhaustive appraisal has aimed to provide just a few examples of the many ways in which filmmakers in West Africa have adopted and, above all, adapted the narrative techniques of orature to film. This has produced rich and syncretic forms, which may be referred to as 'secondary orality'. This process has not only brought new aesthetic and thematic dimensions to what was originally an imported medium, thereby conferring a certain specificity on West African film without confining or limiting its expressive possibilities, but has also enabled film to become fully integrated into the cultural environment it portrays, as it seeks to reflect West African sensibilities.

Melissa Thackway

11th Annual ASCALF Conference: The Future in and of Francophone Literature

26-27 November 1999

Pius Ngandu Nkashama (Paris III) opened the first session with his paper, 'Propositions pour une histoire des littératures post-coloniales en Afrique'. He cited Nazi Boni's *Crépuscule des temps anciens* as the starting point for a consideration of the postcolonial African novel. Boni was merely one of a generation of African writers who were fascinated with the question of history: how should one write African history and which history should one write? Foundation myths played a key role in such works. Independence from the colonial powers marked the beginning of a new history for the continent. Many African novels of the 1970s had a messianic tone, portraying characters who saw themselves as prophets. He concluded by arguing that contemporary African novelists are attempting to overcome ethnic and national differences, and are reappropriating their own history from Europe. These writers are also attempting to forge their own distinctive, narrative styles. The second paper in the session saw Roger Little (TCD) analyse Bertène Juminer's *La Revanche de Bozambo*. He situated the novel in a line of science fiction narratives based on role reversal going back to the 17th century (*Gulliver's Travels*, *Paul et Virginie*, *La Planète des singes*). However, whereas *La Planète des singes*, for example, has become a worldwide bestseller, Juminer's novel has suffered from critical and popular neglect. Little argues that this is probably because Juminer's vision of *la République baoulienne* as a society in which blacks have replaced whites as masters is simply too difficult for a white audience to deal with. The session ended with Véronique

Tadjo, author of *Le Royaume aveugle* and, more recently, *Champs de bataille et d'amour*, who sought reasons for the 20 year gap after independence before the emergence of women writers in Africa. She believes there is cause for optimism, in spite of the delayed access of women to education. African women are becoming more assertive and are taking part in public life. The proliferation of new African publishing houses in Africa (in Dakar, Lomé and Abidjan), has increased opportunities for women writers.

Session Two began with Priska Degras (CNRS Aix-Marseille) whose paper explored the technique of 'ressassement' ('churning over') and 'concassage' ('crushing') used by Ernest Pépin in *Le Tango de la haine* to show, through the frustration of the couple, the collective malaise of Antillean society. She was followed by Isabelle Gratiant who examined the specific form of 'oraliture' in Raphaël Confiant's *L'Archer du colonel*, a novel built on seven related narratives or circles in keeping with the oral tradition, and representing the 'unwritten memory'. Both of these techniques reveal the interaction between standard French, regional French and Creole. The next paper by Giuliana Toso Rodinis (Univ. of Padova) explored the case of Tahar Djaout who wanted Algeria to become a tolerant and open society, which he thought depended on its trilingual culture (Arabic, Berber, French). He saw this open society being jeopardised by the politics of enforced arabisation since 1992. Audrey Small (Aberdeen) ended the session with a paper on the politics of publishing in African languages in Senegal and Guinea. She began by analysing Sékou Touré's policy of promoting local languages to reinforce national cohesion in Guinea, which reflected the myth of a continental culture. She compared this with the situation in Senegal where the use of French as the key to education and power is challenged by the radical alternative of Wolof as a means of expressing cultural realities in local languages. The day ended with a projection of

Chef, a documentary film by the Cameroonian director, Jean-Marie Téo, which deconstructed the power structures at all levels of African societies and the development of a presidential cult, exploited by all dictatorial regimes.

The third session opened with Françoise Parent-Ugochukwu (UCLAN) who discussed Bernard Dadié's vision of the future in his writing. She argued that Dadié's resolutely optimistic view can be clearly seen in *Hommes de tous les continents* (1967), written at a time when independence seemed to open the way to hope and reconciliation. She was followed by Shona Potts (Queen's University, Belfast) who explored the links between the contemporary African novel and the work of visual artists such as the Zairian, Chéri Samba. Both writers and artists were argued to undermine state control of discourse, presenting an alternative view of life in contemporary urban Africa. The session ended with Roger Ravet (Aberdeen) who argued that Sony Labou Tansi's *La Vie et demie* demonstrates that the state of barbarism brought about by post-colonial dictatorships involves a wiping out of the past, reverting to natural chaos rather than cultural order so that no future, based on founding myths, can be envisaged and mankind is confined to a static ahistorical, atemporal space, a permanent present which makes an historical perspective impossible.

Session Four consisted of two papers. Théo Munyangayo (Nottingham) examined Achille Ngoye's novel, *Kin-la-joie, Kin-la-folie*, which offers a realistic picture of Zaïre under the rule of Mobutu. He argued that this realistic narrative is representative of narratives published in exile during the 1990s. As these authors are not bound by censorship, they are not obliged to cast their narratives of political oppression in the mythical and fantastic landscape that had marked earlier African novels. Catherine Wendeler (Luton) analysed Williams Sassine's novel, *Mémoire*

d'une peau. She described Sassine's work as being characterised by an asethetic of anger, an anger which is not simply intellectual but which is also inscribed in the body of the characters and in the body of the text.

The fifth and final session was unfortunately reduced to two papers, owing to the fact that the Congolese playwright, Caya Makhélé, was refused a visa. Kamal Salhi (Leeds) discussed new developments in Maghrebi theatre, focusing on the work of Slimane Benaïssa. Finally, Michael Walling, who translated and directed *Toufann*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Tempest* to a Mauritian setting by the Mauritian writer Déva Virahsawmy, which was to be premiered at the Africa Centre on Sunday, 28 November, discussed the background to this project. He argued that the success of Virahsawmy's play is due partly to its being in Creole, which is the unacknowledged language of the numerous minority groups in Mauritius, and to its challenging of the economic and cultural hegemony of English and French speaking groups in order to promote a melting-pot type of society.

The Conference ended with a vin d'honneur and the presentation of a Haïtian sculpture to ASCALF's Honorary President, Bridget Jones. We are glad to have honoured Bridget in this way before her untimely death.

Denise Ganderton

Postcolonial Cinema Conference

14-15 April 2000, Trinity College, Dublin

The aim of this conference was to examine some of the main issues raised by contemporary postcolonial discourse in relation to cinema, focusing on the contribution made by postcolonial films to national, ethnic or racial narratives of identity. The conference began with a screening of Djibril Diop Mambety's *Touki-Bouki*, which was subsequently examined alongside Mambety's later film, *Hyènes*, in the opening paper by Patrick Williams (Nottingham Trent). Williams argued that Mambety's films are striking enactments of utopian and dystopian visions of modernity. Modernity proves to be a deeply ambivalent notion, far from the positivist vision of it, and Mambety's work responds to modernity in an equally ambivalent way. This was followed by two more papers on African cinema. Frances Harding (SOAS) spoke about the development of video in Africa over the past 5-10 years, which has brought about the production of popular, action films. She argued that one can witness the birth of a new individualistic ideology in these films. The individual search for wealth, sex and power at any cost has broken the traditional communal bond, which had been the staple image of most African films. David Murphy (TCD) challenged the notion that there is an 'authentic' African form of filmmaking. Examining films by Sembene, Mambety and Cissé, he argued that these works combined both 'African' and 'Western' elements, each film expressing the director's different cultural and political concerns, rather than some essential African vision of the world. Murphy also examined the value of postcolonialism as a critical term, proposing it as a descriptive rather than a prescriptive category.

The next session shifted the focus to other parts of the world.

Ian Conrich (Nottingham Trent) discussed the relationship between cinema and identity in the Pacific rim, ranging from New Zealand to Hawaii, stressing the power of cinema to challenge dominant mythologies, both colonial and nationalist. Jean Dunne (UCD) discussed the role of cinema in the Caribbean, focusing on Trinidad. Although Trinidad is one of the wealthiest islands, its cinematic production lags behind that of poorer islands such as Jamaica and Haiti. She argued that the material wealth of Trinidadians had created a society that was content with its wealth and that did not want to question its dominant social narratives.

The final session shifted the discussion once again, this time to New Zealand and Australia. Stuart Murray (TCD) examined the crisis of identity in 1980s New Zealand film, as filmmakers sought to chart the shift in identity within post-imperial (if not quite post-colonial) New Zealand. Many films from this period depict a profound sense of disquiet and emptiness, often featuring isolated protagonists in a bleak, sometimes post-apocalyptic landscape. Ian Craven (Glasgow) argued that a sense of disquiet was also to be found in Australian films of the 1990s. 'Glitter films' such as *Strictly Ballroom* and *Muriel's Wedding* explore the pre-millennial tensions of Australian society, films in which the search for sensual pleasure is accompanied by a deep sense of unease. Tying up many of the ideas expressed in earlier papers, he argued that these films represent a shift from the previous search for authenticity to the search for individual fulfilment, and also for commercial success. The postcolonial narrative of the nation has broken down into fragmented, individual narratives that many critics have described as 'postmodern'. He concluded that this tension between postmodernism and postcolonialism is a central concern for many postcolonial societies. Over the two days of the conference, it became evident that postcolonial societies are not homogenous and one must remain aware of the differences

between them, especially those between settler colonies (New Zealand, Australia) and invaded colonies (most of sub-Saharan Africa). However, it was also evident that these societies display many similarities and the category of the 'postcolonial' remains a highly useful framework within which to analyse them.

David Murphy
Aedín Ní Loingsigh

Review

Bayreuther Frankophonie Studien/Études francophones de Bayreuth, ed. János Riesz and Véronique Porra (Bremen: Palabres Editions), 3 (1999): *L'Afrique centrale dans les littératures européennes: Etudes réunies par Pierre Halen*

This issue, entirely in French, is devoted to a selection of 'les discours non africains sur l'Afrique' of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries and to the general problematic that they raise. Examples are drawn from Belgian, French, German and Italian writings and lead Pierre Halen to welcome the opportunity 'd'examiner aussi les lettres "européennes" sur l'Afrique comme un domaine en soi'. The value of team-work on such an enterprise is manifest: each case needs to be considered as writing by an individual writer in a specific sociocultural context before patterns of generalisation emerge with legitimacy and authority. As Halen reminds us, mentioning missionaries and administrators, ethnologists and settled planters, journalists and fair-weather tourists in situations where doctrines differ and evolve, 'le colonialisme des uns n'est pas celui des autres [...]. Il en va de même pour l'anticolonialisme.' Through all the individual cases, more than one search for identity is conducted, and the critic follows the author in that quest: 'La littérature, qu'il s'agisse de lyrisme, de théâtre ou de récit, est souvent un laboratoire où des reformulations identitaires s'essaient; parfois aussi, elle est un lieu de reconnaissance des identités du départ.'

The issue contains some exemplary studies, of which for me the most penetrating were those by Véronique Porra (on Pierre Benoît and Pierre Ryckmans) and Pierre Halen (on Henri Cornélus, as well as the excellent Introduction). The fact that

many of the texts referred to are long since out of print, and are therefore inaccessible except in major libraries, prompts me, however, to mention a new collection which I am launching with L'Harmattan. 'Autrement Mêmes' will republish key or representative texts now out of copyright by Whites devoted to Blacks or more generally to the Other, with an introduction by a relevant specialist. Contact me for further details.

Roger Little
Trinity College Dublin

Bridget Jones

In Bridget Jones, ASCALF has lost a colleague of immense talent and experience and individual members have lost a most loyal and trusted friend. Bridget was a founding member of the association and a vibrantly active member of the committee. It is undoubtedly true to say that, were it not for Bridget, the 'C' of ASCALF would have been either completely absent or utterly nominal. She served as President from 1994 to 1995, as Publicity Officer from 1995 to 1997 and as Vice-President from 1997 to 1999. She was, above all, a most valued source of counsel and information for all of us involved in studying the French-speaking Caribbean.

Long before I knew her better, I already sensed that here was somebody who was more than just an extremely well-read expert in Caribbean literature in French; for she also had extraordinarily acute judgement, deep and varied first-hand experience of the Caribbean, and an immensely wide network of acquaintance and friendship in the field. All this would have been of immense value in itself to ASCALF, but Bridget was, in addition, a person of enormous generosity. To anything that she took on, and to all whom she befriended, Bridget was unfailingly two-hundred percent committed and gave of herself relentlessly. ASCALF was privileged to have her support from its inception right up to what would be the final months of her life. Even when she was physically exhausted in ways which one can only barely imagine, she always summoned up enough superhuman reserves of energy and enthusiasm to attend the association's committee meetings, study days, and conferences, where it was never her style to impose herself, but rather to give of herself in countless ways, sharing her considerable knowledge, insights, and wit, tirelessly and joyfully. The encouragement and support which she offered as though they

cost her nothing often made all the difference in the world for the beneficiaries: the difference between isolation and community of endeavour, between despondency and fulfillment. There was nothing, however, of empire-building in Bridget's efforts: she was simply passionate about Caribbean literature and genuinely anxious to develop its study and she combined this enthusiastic commitment with a rare and generous talent for nurturing and affirming the efforts of others. As a result, she will be remembered not just for the quality of her own work in the field, in particular for her research on Francophone Caribbean theatre and on Guyanese literature, but also for all the work which she enabled and inspired; she will also be remembered with a depth of affection and gratitude and with profound loneliness. ASCALF extends its heartfelt sympathy to Donald, Daniel and Matthew in their great loss.

Mary Gallagher

