They Will Call Me the Black God

Imaging Christianity and the Bible in African Film

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the ways in which African filmmakers have historically addressed Christianity and the Bible on the continent. It begins with the premise that on the African continent, marked political films (Mazierska) are embedded in transnational dynamics involving movements of economic and symbolic capital, ideas, discourses and multiple publics. Within these movements, questions of identity, and questions, of the cultural, political or religious are explored in conversation and encounter with Others. With this premise in mind, I ask how the films address Christianity and interpret the Bible; how they frame the religious in relation specific historical, cultural and political contexts; and what are the potential implications of the transnational dynamics and circulation of films. Although much research has focused on the representation of religions in African video and screen media especially in the 2000s, surprisingly little has been dedicated to earlier cinematic expressions and political cinema. To contribute to the history of the cinematic treatment of religion on the continent, four fictional films were chosen as case-studies: *La Chapelle*, (*The Chapel*, dir. Jean-Michel Tchissoukou, 1980, Republic of Congo), *Au Nom du Christ* (*In the Name of Christ,* dir. Roger Gnoan M'Bala, 1993, Côte d'Ivoire), *La Génèse* (*Genesis*, dir. Cheick Oumar Sissoko, 1999, Mali) and *Son of Man* (dir. Mark Dornford-May, 2006, South-Africa). The analyses reveal that filmmakers have portrayed and interpreted the presence of Christianity and the Bible in relation to legacies of colonialism and decolonisation. Their attitudes narrate the presence of Christianity and the Bible in terms of resistance, suspicion, negotiation, and appropriation. In doing so they oscillate between distancing from and rapprochement with developments in African Christianity and theology. The films' narratives and aesthetics reflect tensions around the creation of discourses of African authenticity, but also around religious modernity. The political framing roots the contextualisation of biblical narratives in social and historical analyses that strive to provide responses to local instances of oppressions as well as a platform for a more universalist reading addressed to global publics. Finally, the films contribute to the construction of African religious realities and imageries and to the broader image of Africa.

Keywords: Religion in film, African Film, Reception of the Bible, World Christianity, Transnational

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In loving memory of Marc and Olli

Contents

Acknowledgements

A friend once told me that each and every one of us is the result of a series of jackpots. While this is a debatable statement when it comes to creation, my interpretation of it got me to reflect that my own existence has Cold War politics as its grand historical narrative. It is a direct result of the spread of communism on the African continent in the face of capitalism. Most importantly however, it is the result of my parents' courage and love in the face of racial prejudice, cultural and ideological differences and geographical distances. Puts things into perspective.

The same goes for this thesis. Its existence would not have been possible without the contribution of incredible people, and various institutions spread out in different countries. My gratitude goes first to Uppsala University, Sweden, where my supervisor Professor Kajsa Ahlstrand, always saw further than I could imagine, and whose guidance and support ranged from sharp and constructive critique to chili paste exchanges. My gratitude also extends to my second supervisor, Professor Ashleigh Harris, who managed, through eloquent phrases and even more eloquently pertinent questions, to fish out my clumsy and confused ideas and make them sound somewhat coherent. Both gave me an invaluable sense of belonging. I am forever grateful.

The thesis project officially started at the Department of Practical Theology, University of Helsinki, Finland. It is there where, Arto Kuorikoski, at the time in charge of the Kuvio Digital Archive, took my light-hearted idea of combining African film and religion in a doctoral thesis seriously. Later, Professor Jyrki Knuutila, Associate Professor Johan Bastubacka and Associate Professor Mari Maasilta joined forces. Their confidence in the project was essential and I cannot thank them enough for pushing it forward.

The seed of the thesis was planted at the Department of West European and Russian Cultural History, Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia. Professor Elena Sergeevna Kashenko taught me that in the study of film we need to look further and wider than the line of the horizon and encouraged me to write my Master thesis as a comparative study of Hollywood and South African cinema. In the process, I discovered Mari Maasilta's work on transnational African cinema.

The thesis was nurtured and consolidated by the members of the seminar in History of Religions and World Christianity at Uppsala University: Julia Kuhlin, Anita Yadala Suneson, Hans Nicklasson, Angelika Drigo, Emma

Introduction

 "Is it to show faith in their God, who they place in the sky over their heads, that the people of this valley like to travel hanging from above?"[1] Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Marie Téno wonders in the opening scenes of his documentary *Le Malentendu Colonial* (2004).[2] The scenes show the Schwebebahn, the suspension monorail of Wuppertal – a German city in North Rhine-Westphalia, formed in 1929. From these opening shots, we travel directly to a valley 300km from Cape Town, South Africa, where another, earlier Wupperthal (also spelt Wuppertal), was founded in 1830 by two missionaries from the Rhenish Missionary Society. I begin this thesis with *Le Malentendu Colonial* as it paints with broad brush strokes an account of history constituted by transnational movements of political ideas and economic flows, of beliefs and religious traditions, of sacred and mundane objects.[3] Téno's documentary is an invitation to take a voyage across times, countries and continents, ideas and conversations. The goal of his cinematic exploration is to chart the interrelated histories of the mission and colonial endeavours. On this journey, Téno traces routes between Germany, South Africa, Namibia, Cameroon, Togo and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Through interviews with missionaries, archivists, historians, pastors, museum curators located both in Europe and Africa, the documentary unravels the complex shifts and turns that form the history of Christianity, the Bible and colonialism on the continent.

The present work – "They Will Call Me the Black God: Imaging Christianity and the Bible in African Film" is a similar journey across times, discourses, and places rooted in images. It explores how politically engaged filmmakers have approached the presence and expansion of Christianity and the Bible on the continent.

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[1] Subtitles to *Le Malentendu Colonial* (2004).

[2] Translated as *The Colonial Misunderstanding*. References of films are given in the Appendix and filmography.

[3] The film itself is a transnational product involving such actors as the French Les films du raphia, the Agence gouvernementale de la francophonie and CIRTEF, Centre National de la Cinematographie (CNC), PROCIREP/ANGOA; the german Bärbel Mauch Film, ZDF/ARTE, Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED-ABP/EZEF), VEM – Archiv und Museumsstiftung; the Swiss Films pour un seul monde (Brot für alle/HEKS/Caritas/Fastenopfer); the Niger Office de radio Télévision du Niger; the European Commission; the Cameroonian ministry of culture.

Along this road, we will encounter the (mis)understandings left in the post-colonial states by the cataclysmic experiences, which involve processes of re-writing, appropriating, remediating, re-reading and remembering texts, characters, and stories. Just as *Le Malentendu Colonial* does, the thesis will map out the long and uneasy conversation between actors with diverging, and sometimes, opposed views and perspectives. Also, it will explore how the chosen case-studies potentially address various publics, who may experience the colonial and postcolonial legacies in differing ways, but ultimately portray the layered and complex histories of the continent. In other words, I will look at how African filmmakers have historically framed the relation between the political, Christianity and the Bible.

African Film and Religious Realities

The category "African film" means a number of things in the present work. First, it designates fictional feature-length films. As in the introductory paragraphs, documentaries will be mentioned along the way, but only as examples illustrating a specific point. Second, the category designates films produced and shot by African filmmakers south of the Sahara, and so Maghrebian films will not be included in the story. This delineation, though contested, has been constructed in relation to the differing historical trajectories of, for example, Egyptian or Algerian cinemas from the rest of the continent. While these countries possess infrastructures, which make for a cinematic industry, most of the continent still does not. In terms of contexts and modes of production, African film scholarship has divided the cinematic history of the continent regionally, and it is with the sub-Saharan production that I am most familiar. In a similar vein, African diasporic cinema will be excluded, as I am interested in narratives about and of Christianity and the Bible on the continent. That said, the links the films have with the global will be made apparent.

Third, the films I will explore are marked as political and mostly gravitate in the international film festival world. As film scholar Ewa Mazierska reminds us,[4] political marking can take place on three levels of the film's existence: production, text and, finally, distribution and exhibition. We will see in the course of the thesis that, for the filmmakers I focus on, the political takes place mainly on the level of text, for production, distribution and exhibition are tied to an imbalanced access to resources. On this level, the political is understood as movements against collective oppression. It is portrayed through the struggles of communities, nations and peoples, and even when the focus is on an individual character, they are often symbolic of the wider society. In view of their modes of production and publics, the films circulate within the transnational and global flows of economic and symbolic capital.

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[4] Mazierska 2014.

On the African cinematic scene, such films are sometimes labelled *FESPACO films*, after one of the oldest and largest African film festivals. They often have a socio-political emphasis, focus on social critique, are explicitly militant and engaged, and, as such, they mirror certain expectations. These are related to the political ambitions of the filmmakers, who endeavour to make films politically but also want their films to be received politically.[5] They specifically point to oppressive structures, and want to affect reality.

These works are created by filmmakers who have been educated in the best European film schools, have been influenced by various intellectual, political and philosophical currents and have striven to achieve a certain sophistication in their cinematographic language. In addressing religious realities on the continent, all these elements inevitably lead to the films creating certain publics, adhering to specific discourses and perhaps distancing themselves from more popular expressions of Christianity and the Bible in film, such as the Nollywood film.[6] My goal is not to perpetuate a value-laden divide between African cinematic expressions.[7] Rather, I find such categories as *festival film* or *Nollywood* useful in as much as they help contextualize the films, and explain their form, aesthetic devices and content. Part of my argument is constructed around the influence of cultural fields and modes of production, in which the films are created and in which they gravitate. The films I look at should be understood as *political films in a transnational landscape*. As mentioned above, the political is related to both a specific community and a nation, but also to how the image of that community and nation is to be received globally. The transnational landscape is (in)formed to varying degrees by funding systems, the symbolic capital, the cultural fields and the publics. Thus, the films present narratives in ways that imply multiple conversation partners, and are to be understood from their respective stands. In view of these, Nollywood, despite being the cinematic expression mostly associated with Christianity and the Bible in Africa, will be left out of the analysis.

Both FESPACO and the Nollywood types of films, alongside their publics, mirror the multiple discourses that surround Christianity, theology and religion on the continent. To illustrate this point, I refer to Achille Mbembe, who in *Afriques Indociles* (1986), differentiates between contextual theology, what he calls theology "under the tree", and the theology of colonial ethnology and Négritude. He observes that these different theologies do not depart from the same hypotheses in their explorations of African history and, in turn, do not produce the same knowledge about African religious realities. I understand

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[5] Mazierska 2014, p. 37.
[6] Like the "FESPACO film", "Nollywood film" is used here as an encompassing term that designates a popular form of video film or screen media, with its specific modes of production, aesthetic and publics.
[7] Not only film scholars, but also filmmakers from both sides of the celluloid and video, have historically kept each other at a distance, on the grounds of form, content, tastes. These boundaries are fortunately continuously blurring in African cinematic expressions.

the various cinematic forms on the continent as performing a similar function when it comes to addressing the religious. The premise from which the Ghanaian Pentecostal pastor departs in making a film about Christian practices in Ghana is different from that of Ghanaian politically engaged filmmaker Kwah Ansah in *Héritage Africa!* (1989). If the first strives, in an entertaining manner, to educate his or her parishioners in how a good Pentecostal Christian should behave and what dangers lurk in the bustling spaces of the city; the second strives to educate viewers regarding how Christianity came to Ghana in the first place and what this entailed historically, ideologically and culturally. The first illustrates a particular charismatic turn in African Christianity, while the second presents an interpretation of religious encounters embedded in the anti-colonial and Pan-Africanist ideology of the Ghanaian state at the time. The films I will focus on belong to this latter version of African religious realities, and it is from this perspective that I ask: how can we understand the films' treatment of Christianity and the Bible?

Premise, Aim and Research Questions

This work is an interdisciplinary endeavour between film and religious studies, and as such, it strives to attain a certain balance. Nevertheless, my approach starts with African film theory, which then speaks to African religion/Christianity theory. My research does not begin with African Christianity, the place and role of the Bible and African Christians. Rather, it starts from looking at how film receives and depicts Christianity and the Bible in Africa. I argue in my thesis that developments in African film have influenced the cinematic treatments of Christianity and the Bible.

The first act of African filmmakers in the post-independence period of 1960-1970s, was largely aimed at authenticating African perceptions of reality,[8] creating, through the combination of a realist style and social criticism, an African c*inéma engagé*. The main themes of this post-independence socially engaged cinema were the consequences of colonialism and neocolonialism, in which, Islam and Christianity, seen as accomplices of colonial rule, are fiercely criticised. With the growing disenchantment in the face of harsh economic, social and political conditions in the 1980s, the didacticism of the first two decades gradually faded. The new independent progressive African society project failed, and authoritarian regimes flourished.

The decolonising agenda continued to be important, but shifted from denouncing colonialism or neo-colonialism, to exploring pre-colonial African histories, mythologies and religious traditions. In the 1990s, Christianity resurfaced, but against the grain of African traditional religions, which were shown in a positive light, in contrast to the dubious practices of Christian sects,

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[8] Barlet 2000.

14

Christian zealots and self-proclaimed prophets. The 2000s have seen the advent, along with video, of explorations of aesthetic and narrative possibilities, which are not restricted to an oppositional idea of African authenticity and identity. Although the earlier trends of social criticism and political awareness have not been abandoned, they have become more nuanced and experimental and touch a broader sphere of subjects. When it comes to religion and religious themes, Christianity begins to appear as a given during this era. Filmmakers ponder, in new ways, theological issues of forgiveness, humanity and redemption and also traditional rituals, witchcraft and religious belonging. They now use sources that would have been considered "inauthentically African" by the film pioneers, such as the Bible, in order to place cinema and African interpretations of the Bible on the world map. The screen adaptations of the Bible examined here, for example, challenge the idea of it being the coloniser's text by embedding it politically, socially and culturally into African contexts.

Thus, in some instances, Christianity and its texts are seen as "foreign", as casting aside indigenous religions and traditions, and working as a medium for cultural imperialism.[9] In other films however, Christianity and the Bible have come to be constructed as an integral part of African religious and cultural life,[10] and are incorporated in the socio-political and cultural interpretation of events and histories. The films' political agendas are the lenses through which the perceptions and depictions of Christianity and the presence of the Bible are seen. The connecting threads of my case studies as cinematic expressions of the religious are, first, their social critique and, second, the fact that, as films that navigate in transnational and global cultural flows, they are always in conversation with and dependent on a globalised public.

The aim, then, is to show the ways in which the socio-political emphasis and decoloniality have influenced portrayals of Christianity and the reception of the Bible in African marked political films. The questions I ask in relation to this aim are – how do the selected films address Christianity and interpret the Bible? How are they framed in relation to specific historical, cultural and political contexts? What are the potential implications of the transnational framing and circulation of the films?

In order to answer these questions, I have chosen four fiction feature dramas: *La Chapelle*, (*The Chapel*, directed by Jean-Michel Tchissoukou, 1980, Republic of Congo), *Au Nom du Christ* (*In the Name of Christ*, directed by Roger Gnoan M'Bala, 1993, Côte d'Ivoire), *La Génèse* (*Genesis*, directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko, 1999, Mali) and *Son of Man* (directed by Mark Dornford-May, 2006, South Africa). I will explain the selection process in more detail in the *Method and Material* section. Suffice it to say that *La Chapelle* and *Au*

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9 Isichei 1995.
10 See for example, Adogamé et al., 2008; Ogbu U. Kalu et al., 2008.

Nom du Christ address the question of encounter between Christian expressions and local beliefs and practices. *La Chapelle* is set in a village in the 1930s where inhabitants encounter colonialism's civilising mission. *Au Nom du Christ* raises the question of the Christian – African traditional religion encounter through the story of a fake prophet in the 1990s. These films focus on the potential consequences Christianity has for local religious traditions and ways of life in colonial and post-colonial periods. *La Génèse* and *Son of Man* both take their narratives from the Bible (Old and New Testaments). *La Génèse* transposes onto the pre-colonial Malian soil the story of Jacob and Esau from the Book of Genesis, while *Son of Man* retells the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in a (post)apartheid South Africa.

Theoretical Pathways

The initiated conversation between film studies and global Christianity begins at the intersection of multiple theoretical pathways. Following Isabel Hofmeyr's work on John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, I suggest that placing the films in a transnational landscape, within the economy of historical exchange, has implications on how we understand their reception of the Bible and Christianity.

The story of Christianity in film on the African continent narrated here should provide a fuller picture of how films engage with religions. It is to understand how through films, complex processes of resistance, incorporation, subversion or acceptance are negotiated. In this sense, I follow the scholarly turns in the discipline of World Christianity that ask what it means to explore Christianity in the era of globalisation.[11]

The premise of this question rests on the fact that significant shifts have happened during the course of the nineteenth and, in particular, twentieth centuries that have forced a change in the understanding of the church and Christianity in today's world. Christianity has moved from being a Eurocentric to a polycentric religion and is now mainly located in the southern hemisphere. The polycentricity of Christianity requires, in the African context, a reassessment of the mission movement and historical accounts of local agency. Writing about Christianity in a global world is an endeavour to flesh out the various experiences and developments of movements often considered monolithic. It is also an attempt to incorporate into the conversation different actors and relational perspectives that can take a number of trajectories. It is looking at Christianity in a way that puts it at the center of economic, socio-political and cultural elements in a specific context. For theologians that deal with the Global South, such as M. Mundadan, P. Leung or L. Sanneh, the global his-

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[11] Shenk 2011.

16

torical perspective very much starts from the local and with questions of identity. This is because the Indian context, the history of mission in China, or African Christianity have histories that inherently speak of interconnections and interrelations with other faiths, religions, cultures and politics. My concern here is what the interconnections and interrelations are and how they are reflected in African film.

A number of scholars have asked similar questions within literary studies, reception of the Bible, media studies or anthropology. Their works have produced a more nuanced view of, for example, the missionary endeavour as well as African agency. Even in such seminal oppositional, anti-colonial works by Chinua Achebe or Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Megan Cole Paustian, argues we can trace how the missionary presence was more a site of contradiction than outright rejection.[12] The role of African Christians having access to education, participating in translation and developments of literacy has had a profound impact on the formation of national identity and African intellectual thought.[13] Jean and John Comaroff, in their seminal *Of Revelation and Revolution* have suggested we place these apparent controversies within a long conversation,[14] understood as "a process in which [cultural] signifiers were set afloat, fought over, and recaptured on both sides of the colonial encounter".[15]

In a similar fashion, I aim to show such complications and contradictions in films that, for example, at first glance seem to oppose Christianity and the Bible. We will see the traces of the "long conversation", which will nuance rigid categories of resistance/opposition and acceptance/incorporation.

We will also see how multiple publics are addressed and interpellated by this conversation through film. Following Michael Warner, the publics in question can be a social totality (a nation), a concrete audience (at a festival) but also publics that come into being in relation to texts and their circulation.[16] For Warner, these addressees are essentially imaginary, but it does not mean that they are not real, or that they do not have the potential to become real. Herein lies the texts', in this case films' potential for political and social change. The idea of multiple publics and circulation taps into the transnational flows of influence, wherein a film is more than its narrative or image. It is also an industry affected by and using global networks, and it addresses local and global audiences simultaneously.

In the African context, the engagement of filmmakers with topical issues, decolonising agendas or decolonial thought is not solely related to the post-colonial situation but is also related scarcity of resources. As filmmaker Dani Kouyaté observes, it is almost a necessity that one be "serious" and making films that "matter", as one's next film is always an uncertainty. Kouyaté points

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[12] Paustian 2014.
[13] See for example, Becker et al. 2018.
[14] Comaroff & Comaroff 1991.
[15] Ibid, p. 18.
[16] Warner 2002.

to the endemic lack of cinematographic infrastructure that pushes filmmakers to make use of global networks. Such impetus creates a dependence to the requirements and politics of funding agencies. Scholars of African film[17] have repeatedly emphasised the power imbalances that tend to produce politically relevant, non-commercial cultural expressions with high prestige potential. This precarity – these acrobatics of survival – are an important aspect of the story. To this end, within the structure of every chapter I focus on the cinematic contexts from which the films stem.

The treatment of Christianity and the Bible in film has taken particular pathways due to the history, development and conceptualisation of the art form on the continent. The theorisation and conceptualisation of cinemas in Africa is a burgeoning field, sometimes overwhelmingly so, where critics, academics, and filmmakers relentlessly explore ways of thinking through and defining films, screen media, or video films. Scholars have conceptualised African cinemas as nationalist,[18] postcolonial,[19] postcolonial and feminist,[20] and postnationalist.[21] They have established periodisation, paradigms[22], waves[23] and winds.[24] They have explored African cinema through discourses of identity,[25] modernity,[26] decolonisation,[27] from below as "trash",[28] through memory,[29] or through violence.[30]

Broadly speaking, earlier studies of African cinema have concentrated on the role of cinema in nation-building and its relation to economic and political power characterised by colonialism, imperialism and nationalism.[31] Gradually the focus on the nation-building processes has been challenged, especially with the explosion of video, and has shifted towards approaches and perspectives that emphasise transnational flows, cultural fluidity and movement.

The present thesis joins this last move through an exploration of expressions of religion within what Sheila Petty calls the relational histories of film.[32] In these relational histories, African films draw from global contexts in an

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[17] See for example, Andrade-Watkins 1990; Cham & Bakari 1996; Barlet 2000, 2012; Convents 2003; Armes 2006; Şaul & Austen 2010;
[18] Niang 2014.
[19] Murphy & Williams 2007.
[20] Harrow 1999.
[21] Tcheuyap 2011.
[22] Harrow & Barlet 2017.
[23] Diawara 2010.
[24] Higgins 2015.
[25] Diawara 1998.
[26] Shaka 2004.
[27] Barlet 2000, 2012.
[28] Harrow 2013.
[29] Petty 2008.
[30] Dovey 2009.
[31] Maasilta 2007.
[32] Petty 2019.

identity-shaping process, which involves binary constructions of race, oppositional narratives of difference, events, blurred memories and myths to address multiple audiences. I endeavour to look at how Christianity and the Bible have come to take part in these processes and what role they play in these relational histories.

Method and Material

On the level of the image, the films I look at portray and address what can be broadly understood as religious beliefs, structures, functions and practices, made visible through objects, people and entities, based on myths and texts, oral or written, and which are crucial to the plot. I limit myself to the "religious" in terms of a substantive definition for this particular case – as beliefs in supernatural beings and the expressions of that belief. Another limitation of this approach is that it deals with elements that are already recognisable as religious. The selected films (re)present, as V.Y. Mudimbe writes: "certain things which, in their own right, are already – as anthropological, exegetical, historical, philosophical or theological discourses, to quote only the most used – representations of a given, a represented which is out there".[33] In the present work, Mudimbe's discourses are joined by those produced by filmmakers and audiences.

Therefore, certain elements will be necessarily left out. I do not think, however, that this is a crippling limitation, since film necessarily has a preferred meaning, never illustrating the whole. At the same time, film opens up to the negotiation process within what we consider religion, its multi-layered construction and expression in a specific context.

While in the course of the thesis, I will use the terms religion(s), religious practices and beliefs, I do not have a working definition of the concept of religion. Instead I consider it an entry point into broader socio-political, historical and cultural concerns. I side with Michel, Possamai, and Turner, when they write, "Religion is not univocal in meaning and orientation. It is first a source of direction. It provides religious individuals resources with which to articulate (or re-articulate) their relations to themselves, to others, and to the world".[34] I would go further as to say that religion has the potential to provide direction to all individuals, even when they distance themselves from it. Thus, the religious represented, constructed, addressed, and questioned in the symbolic dimension that cinema is part of, simultaneously speaks of and builds the political, social, historical and religious dimensions of the societies in question. This dynamic interplay catches glimpses of what has been and is considered religious.

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[33] Mudimbe 2016, p. xi.
[34] Michel, Possamai & Turner 2017, p. 3.

Christianity, the Bible and film have a complex relationship marked by varying degrees of suspicion and adoption. Robert K. Johnston, in mapping the academic terrain of theology and film, identified, relying on Richard Niebuhr's theological typology of culture, five approaches of theology to film. According to him, theologians (1) avoid film, (2) approach it with caution, (3) engage in dialogue with film, (4) use the multiple educational possibilities film provides or (5) consider film a medium to divine encounter.[35] At the cinematic end, filmmakers' approaches to Christianity and the Bible also vary. In Western mainstream and art films for example, the Bible has been spectacular (C. De Mille), men and women have reached transcendence (R. Bresson, C. Th. Dreyer), nuns were violent abusers (P. Mullan), Judas Iscariot sung Motown (N. Jeweyson), Death engaged in a game of chess (I. Bergman), God turned out to be a Canadian female pop singer (K. Smith). From irreverence to transcendence, filmmakers have tackled both Christianity and the Bible in multiple ways.

Such multiple approaches and perspectives illustrate the deep embeddedness of religion in cultural expressions. On the one hand, the religious shapes what films portray and construct. In a reverse move, the images we see shape our understandings of the religious. It is because of this relationship that we can trace developments in society, as well as in changing political and religious climates through the study of film. At the same time, the methodological process of separating the religious from the cultural, or even of pinpointing what is religious within a film, is a complex endeavour. In the African context, Nigerian scholar Rotimi Omotoye quoted his colleagues' definition of African religion as, among other things, a "…religion that has no written literature yet it is "written" everywhere for those who care to see and read. It is largely written in the peoples' myths and folktales, in their songs and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in their proverbs and pithy sayings".[36] The religious and religion that is everywhere to *see* are also grounded in images. The religious, and religion, that one can *see* everywhere is also grounded in images. Illustratively, prophetisms, Pentecostalism and Charismatic movements, and media-savvy Muslims on the rise readily employ different forms of media to construct and mediate their practices in the public sphere. Similarly, mediations of Christianity, Islam and African traditional religions are well established and popular in the continent's booming video industry.

Religion is everywhere in Africa seems then to be the unavoidable statement one has to tackle when presenting an account of how religions have been addressed in African film. It does not just presuppose the continent's religious plurality, the growth of different Christian denominations, belief in spirits and ancestors or the understanding of the occult as a means to handle insecure and unstable societies. It reflects the contexts' ways of experiencing reality and

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[35] Johnston 2007.
[36] Awolalu and Dopamu cited in Omotoye 2015, p. 31.

relating to it, a reality tied to convoluted networks involving specific historical trajectories, constructions of modernity, global capital, and cultural flows.

If religion is everywhere and permeates all cultural practices, including film, how does one analyse it? From the very few existing accounts of the religious in sub-Saharan African cinemas, with the exception of the video industry, and Jolyon Mitchell's article addressing religion and decolonisation in African film,[37] scholars have tackled the question either by looking at categories such as the sacred[38], spirituality[39], and magic;[40] at particular filmmakers and their attitudes towards religion, such as Sembene Ousmane's irreligiosity, [41] or Gaston Kaboré's Catholicism;[42]; or by looking at specific films.

From a broader disciplinary context, there are numerous ways to approach religion and film. Religious traditions in film have been explored and resulted in research on: (1)how film portrays religion;[43] (2) the various religious dimensions and themes in film;[44] (3) film as a potential medium for Revelation;[45] and (4) film as religion.[46] These approaches are not mutually exclusive and often overlap, but the first step is always the choice of film, guided by the dimensions of the religious one explores.

My selection criteria are inspired by Melanie Wright's deliberately cautious position, itself infused by the works of Margaret Miles and William Telford, which looks at films that deal extensively and explicitly with characters or texts associated with belief systems and practices, make use of a particular religion for character definition, are dependent on written and oral narratives issued from a belief's structure and related to a religion's functional components and sacred places, and are set in the context of a religious community or communities.[47] What is characteristic to this approach is that it does not concern itself with considerations of the religiosity of film, meaning that whether the film has proven to influence audiences' beliefs is not a criterion of choice.

The films I look at in my thesis portray and address religious practices and expressions, are based on written texts. Most importantly, the religious components are crucial to the plot. This entails that the religious is in focus and drives the narrative and message of the film rather than just being part of the socio-cultural background or the film's mise-en-scène. Thus, in the selection

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[37] Mitchell 2009.
[38] Pokam 1983.
[39] Binet 1983.
[40] Vast 1995.
[41] Day 2008.
[42] Convents 2007.
[43] See for example, Wright 2007; Plate 2003; Martin & Ostwalt Jr. 1995.
[44] See for example, Marsh & Ortiz 1997; Deacy, 2005.
[45] See for example, Brant 2012.
[46] Lyden 2008.
[47] Wright 2007.

process, out of approximately sixty sub-Saharan films that deal to varying degrees with religion, and especially Christianity, from 1966 to 2017,[48] I have chosen the four aforementioned films as case-studies.

My analyses are infused by a cultural studies perspective, which emphasises the necessary interrelatedness of content and context. I situate the films in their respective contexts, by looking at the production process as well as the historical, socio-political and religious contexts in which they were created. I then begin with an analysis of the film's narratives and mise-en-scène to flesh out the message, stylistic particularities, theologies and religious symbolism. Each film is thus looked at from a particular standpoint dictated by content and context.

Letting the films dictate the direction of analysis entails making use of a multi-sided methodology. Wright's perspective influences the overall take, but the emphases differ. Since the first two feature films focus on the dynamics of religious and cultural encounters, I consider the method for film analysis used by Wright to be the most appropriate.[49] It incorporates different forms of analysis, such as narrative, context, images and critical reception.[50] It shows how the storyline is related to a context, the implied ideology of the director, and how, by means of lighting, framing and décor (mise-en-scène), the religious traditions (symbols, religious actors and spaces) are represented in a certain way.

Similar concerns guide the analysis of *La Génèse* and of *Son of Man,* but with a particular focus on how they treat biblical texts. Here, the films are regarded not just as reinterpretations of the Bible, using approaches from reception and adaptation studies, but also as products of transnational cultural processes setting them into specific socio-cultural contexts and following specific political ideologies and theologies. The focus is on the specific contextual issues the films bring out. In *La Génèse,* the androcentric society and fratricidal conflicts are explored, while *Son of Man* inserts the Gospel into the memory of the South African liberation struggle.

The research material consists, then, of primary data – the films – and secondary data – materials related to the films – reviews, interviews with directors, audience reception materials retrieved from newspapers, film journals, academic publications and webpages. Furthermore, since the research involves modes of production embedded in transnational dynamics, documents related to the production process (e.g. funding agencies' policies and their reports, production and distribution contracts, and script requirements) were reviewed in the French archives of INA, BNF and CNC.[51] These institutions

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[48] See appendix.
[49] Wright 2007.
[50] Radovic 2014.
[51] INA (Institut national de l'audiovisuel), BNF (Bibliothèque nationale de France), and CNC (Centre national du Cinéma et de l'image animée). Furthermore, a similar archival work was to be conducted in South Africa, but the pandemic did not allow for travel.

were visited since France, as co-producer of three of the four case studies, the exception being *Son of Man,* has archived documents relating to the films.

Structure

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter, *Representing, Constructing and Authenticating Religious Traditions in African Films,* functions as a background chapter providing an overview of how religion has emerged in the history of African cinemas, from the colonial period to the 2000s. If one aim is to map practices and beliefs on the sub-Saharan cinematographic scene, another, related to the thesis' research question, is to unravel the cinematic trends addressing Christianity and the Bible. It is to map the context from which my case studies arose.

The case studies proper are put in a chronological order reflecting in a sense the imaginaries of the Bible and Christianity on the African continent – from symbol of colonisation and cultural imperialism to African expressions of the Bible and Christianity. Again, on closer examination and through the lens of decolonisation, through which the sequels of cultural imperialism are imagined as holding fast, the situation is revealed as complictaed. The Bible and/or Christianity were by no means rejected, resisted or fought in the process of colonisation with the same intensity or on all levels. The process should be understood more in terms of negotiation, including various degrees of acceptance and resistance, rewriting, reinterpreting and retelling.

I mentioned earlier that in the present work it is African film theory that speaks to African religion/Christianity theory. As a result, the films shape the structural logic of the chapters, and each film is looked at from a particular theoretical approach or concept. For example, the grotesque aesthetic of *Au Nom du Christ* was the impetus to use Achille Mbembe's notions of *commandement* and the *postcolony.* Similarly, in *La Génèse,* the status accorded to the character of Dinah motivated the use of insights from feminist and postcolonial biblical hermeneutics. Furthermore, in view of the methodological emphasis on the interplay between content and context, the production of meanings, and the potential publics – in what fields these circulate as screened texts – each film's cultural field is described, with particular attention paid to the cinematic background in their respective contexts.

In chapter two – *The Chapel and the Flag* – I analyse Tchissoukou's film through the prism of an image of Africa, constructed by colonial and missionary films. In chapter three – *The Prophet and the Termite Mound* – as mentioned, I explore Gnoan M'Bala's *Au Nom du Christ* through Mbembe's conception of the *postcolony*. Both chapters explore the idea of the Bible and Christianity as "foreign" within the anticolonial imagination. Although the films present the devastating effects of colonisation and the complicity of

Christianity in the process, they, perhaps unwittingly, illustrate the unavoidable presence and the transformations that Christianity and the Bible undergo in each respective context, within the "long conversation". For example, in *La Chapelle*, the Bible is on the table, the prayers are translated and the chief recognises or speaks in theological terms about positive elements of the new religion. Even the spirits agree to help build the chapel. The dreaded effacement of one religious culture by another does not happen. In *Au Nom du Christ*, the Bible is presented as a powerful symbol of authority.

Isabel Hofmeyr writes "…when books travel, they change shape. They are excised, summarized, abridged, and bowdlerized by the new intellectual formations into which they migrate. These formations 'select' novel configurations of older texts and make them accessible to new audiences"[52] These processes are the focus of chapters four and five. Sissoko's *La Génèse* is looked at through the prism of postcolonial and feminist hermeneutics in chapter four – *Genesis in Mali*. Finally, in chapter five – *Black Jesus, Townships and Motherfuckers* – Dornford-May's *Son of Man* is analysed through the concept of memory.

"They will call me the Black God" – an utterance borrowed from *Au Nom du Christ*'s prophet Magloire the First – alludes to identification, becoming, transformation, but also memory. It similarly pulls in the worlds bound to participating in the shaping of images of Christianity in Africa.

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[52] Hofmeyr 2004, p. 2.

Chapter I: Representing, Constructing and Authenticating Religious Traditions in African Films

Michael T. Martin: Is there such a thing as an African cinema?
Jean-Marie Téno: Oh my God. We're not going to go into that question?
(laughs)
Michael T. Martin: It's key!
Jean-Marie Téno: It's not key! (laughs)[53]

Cinematic representation is a construction, a mode of address and a discursive formation. It is infused by the real, in as much as the real is infused by representation. In the words of Marc Augé, "the illusion film disseminates is of a piece with the reality, which they record".[54] Film has a preferred regime of social reproduction,[55] meaning that it has authenticity and truth claims about the reality it records, claims that are to be accepted, rejected or negotiated with.

On the African continent, the question of perception, reality and truth has been exacerbated by centuries of slavery, colonialism and the post-colonial situation and the use of images within these historical cataclysms. In these contexts, film has reflected and carried the claims of those who held the camera and created expectations. It is to these claims and expectations that the perennial question of "African cinema" is related, which Jean-Marie Téno rejects in the above-quoted interview. The interviewer's question presupposes the existence of an answer, which can encompass the cinematic activity of a whole continent, its aesthetics, themes, audiences, production and distribution networks, and present its specificity and authenticity, in relation to other cinemas, especially Western cinema.

Authenticity and its counterpart – otherness – have been part of a larger discourse on African cinema, entangled in definitions of aesthetics, thematic

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[53] Interview with Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Marie Téno taken in 2010 in Bloomington, at Indiana University, on the occasion of the symposium *From the Postcolonial to the Global Postmodern? African and Caribbean Francophone Filmmakers and Scholars in Conversation.* (Martin & Moorman 2015, p. 74.).
[54] Augé 1999, p. 91.
[55] Willemen 2009, p. 254.

content, ideological message, audiences, production and distribution processes and in questioning the very existence of a concept of African cinema. The discourse is built around the filmmakers' works and aspirations, the various audiences' expectations and tastes, and film scholars' interpretations. As Kenneth Harrow mentions, two of the most influential works in African film studies, Manthia Diawara's *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (1992) and Frank Ukadike's *Black African Cinema* (1994), try to retrace the history of film on the continent and explain as well as question what is authentic about African cinema, which is "different from European or Hollywood film, and true to the principles of struggle in an age of national liberation."[56] A lot of the focus within that cinema was on the political and militant. Since then, things have changed, especially with the advent of video, which challenged traditional ideas of films' aesthetics, production and distribution.

The argument I am making is that the ways religions have been addressed in African cinemas are connected to these entangled claims. They are made of a number of interrelated developments, both of an external and internal nature, informed by the overarching relationship between the global and the local, in an exchange of images and ideas. Including the discourses around what is considered *truly* African. Here, the obvious external factors were images and myths of the African continent and its peoples, created and perpetrated by European and American filmmakers, and which dominated the cinematic market from the colonial period onward. These have influenced cinemas in Africa, as filmmakers, especially in the first decades, took upon themselves to subvert the misrepresentations of cultural domination, and determined their thematic, narrative and aesthetic choices. The beginnings of African cinemas, when the overall mission set by film conferences, festivals and manifestos of Algiers (1975) and Niamey (1982), was to produce an engaged cinema, were on the one hand a direct response to the Western gaze, involving the creation of *authentic* African images and the search for national identities. On the other hand, as an 'internal' matter and in the nationalist vein, cinemas were to reflect and criticise societies' shortcomings in order to educate the peoples and set communities and nations on the right developmental pathways.

Gradually, this search for identity and imagery of an "authentically" African cinema in need of constant reaffirmation and reiteration in a global world dominated first by colonial images and later by Hollywood faded. Although it would be illusory to think that this idea has disappeared completely, filmmakers on the African continent and in the diaspora somewhat shifted their views on the relationship with the "external". They have turned their gazes and cameras, at the turn of this century, towards the world in order to be part of it rather than to oppose it. At the same time, the critical gaze upon societies – the "Spectre of Sembène", to borrow Kenneth Harrow's term – still haunts the

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[56] Harrow 2015, p. 14.

films, which have retained the goal of self-reflexivity and self-awareness regardless of genre.

Religions play an important role in these processes. The engaged and critical attitude of filmmakers driven by the view of cinema as a means of education and self-reflection involved questioning the place of religions and religious actors within society's development and identity. The strong presence of traditions and beliefs alongside Christianity and Islam in African societies, to come back to the "omnipresent religious", has created different responses from filmmakers, ranging from criticism to praise, with more nuanced and ambiguous positions in between. Looking at cinema in the sub-Saharan region with this specific focus, as this overview will attempt to do, provides a narrative filled with diverse views on Christianity, Islam, indigenous African religions and the relationships between them within specific contexts.

The aim of the present chapter is to give an account of the cinematic history of religious practices in the sub-Saharan region from roughly 1895 to the present day. If one aim is to map practices and beliefs on the sub-Saharan cinematographic scene, another, related to the thesis' research question, is to unravel the cinematic trends addressing Christianity. It is to map the context from which my case studies arose. This will be done by answering the questions: how were religions portrayed and addressed in film, and in relation to what? as I argue that, in order to gain a better understanding of patterns of representation and interpretation, we need to look at Christianity and the Bible in relation to the wider, religiously plural and cinematic contexts of sub-Saharan Africa. On the one hand, the chapter will describe the presence of cinema on the continent and how the religious played a strategic role in the construction of an idea of Africa, Africans and African religiosity. This is important for understanding how images were crucial in thought, perception and identity formation, as their subversion was the goal for African intellectuals and elites. On the other hand, one aspect that will stand out in the course of this chapter and the thesis as a whole, which relates to the frictions of cinematic representation, is the way films negotiate with the presence of Christianity on the continent. The narratives unravelled through the films cannot be equated to the history of African Christianity. We will not hear stories of the birth of African Independent Churches, for example, but we will encounter prophets. We will not see the rise of Pentecostalism, but we will encounter different strands of political theology.

The overview follows the established chronology in the history of African cinemas: the colonial period and the post-independences: 1960s-1970s, the 1980s-1990s, and the 2000s. The most important exception to this delineation is South Africa, due to its liberation from apartheid in the 1990s. In view of that, most films produced in pre-1994 South Africa had very little to do with the struggles for independence and the post-colonial situation experienced in most countries of the continent, which drove the bigger part of developments in cinema up until the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. In that

sense, the history of cinema in South Africa is an exception to the trends and tendencies in the sub-Saharan region, and it will be explored more thoroughly in the chapter on *Son of Man*.

The three phases after the colonial period are outlined in function of the general traceable trends in narrative, themes and aesthetics. If the first decades clearly saw a didactic cinema, the 1980s witnessed a retreat into the past, in search of a lost African identity. The 1990s were the years of general disillusionment but also witnessed the advent of video, and the 2000s encompassed a multiplicity of voices no longer interested in asserting but rather in experimenting. One should bear in mind, however, that these paradigms or phases do not exclude each other, and the shifts from one decade to the next do not entail a complete break from what preceded.

The Colonial Period

The colonial period is important in this overview as it is when images – photographic and cinematographic – appear. The produced images on and about the continent will be paramount in the decolonisation process as they will constitute the visual material that will be rejected and subverted. Colonial administrations differed and the colonies themselves were very different in terms of resources and populations. As Jean-François Bayart and Stephen Ellis remind us: "Colonization, as a generic term subsumes a vast variety of historical situations, depending on a number of factors: violent occupation or alliances, rivalries between colonial administrators and missionaries, the use of colonial forces by particular ethnic groups to promote their own economic interests."[57] The use and development of cinema in the colonies was linked not only to these different situations but also to developments in European and North American industrial economies, mass culture and audiences' expectations. In these contexts, different actors produced and showed films for different purposes, and religion had a strong presence in both production and imagery. Missionaries, for example, played a considerable part in the creation and dissemination of films emphasising Christian teachings and the good works of the mission; professional filmmakers and entrepreneurs, substantially motivated by profit, supplied images of the mysterious, dark and savage African religions and religious figures.[58]

These images will have a profound impact on the post-colonial and post-colonial cultural productions. It is therefore crucial to explore in what ways film engaged with religions, through themes, genres, and cinematographic practices. In this section, I will look at the image of African peoples and their religions constructed during the colonial period, an image that will later be

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[57] Bayart & Ellis 2000.
[58] Reynolds 2015.

deconstructed but also paradoxically assimilated by filmmakers in the post-colonial states. The material I refer to in the following section consists of films made by missionaries, colonial film units, private entrepreneurs – on the whole, Westerners. I will start a historical account on colonial cinemas and will then move towards decolonisation.

The Beginnings: Practitioners, Genres and Audiences

Cinema started globally. The first kinetoscope was displayed in Johannesburg in 1895, five years after its demonstration in New York and one year before the first film screenings were organised in Russia, Sweden, India, Japan, China and Australia. Through European and American entrepreneurs' initiatives, screenings were organised in Egypt in 1896, in Tunisia and Morocco in 1897, in Senegal in 1900, in Lagos in 1903, in the Belgian Congo in 1910 and in Libya in 1912. At the turn of the twentieth century, one-minute films were made on the continent as the Lumière brothers sent their operators to shoot local views all over the world. The Lumière catalogue of 1905, for example, contains over 50 such reels shot in North Africa.[59]

Cinema became a product for mass consumption in Europe at a time that coincided with the so-called scramble for Africa. The demand for exotic images and reports from unexplored territories at the end of the nineteenth century grew, along with the number of consumers especially from urban industrial centres, and was met by the production of travel and newspaper accounts, lectures, novels, photographs, illustrated papers and picture palaces.[60] The colonies were providers of resources in terms of images and narratives for the growing European and American cultural industries. These fed into the already established tropes of the dark and savage continent in the minds of Europeans, from such accounts of Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone* (1872), *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) and *In Darkest Africa* (1890); H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887); or Joseph Conrad's infamous *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Films provided images to accompany these narratives and contributed to the fixation and reinforcement of these tropes.

What these dates and geographies attest to, in line with my argument, is that cinematic production was from the beginning an endeavour transcending national boundaries in an exchange of images and ideas involving various actors and publics. This circulation across borders is crucial not only to the creation of audiences, in the sense of Warner's publics, but also in understanding that the circulating of images, whether real or imagined, influences how filmmakers and audiences "…think about themselves, and hence how they script social imaginaries, in turn the template on behalf of which much social

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[59] Armes 2006, pp. 21-23.
[60] Short 2012.

and political action is taken."[61] It is in this moment of the social imagining turning into social and political action that filmmakers and their various publics find themselves moulding the very fabric of reality. This moment is the point of departure in understanding the motifs and motivations of African filmmakers in their exploration of Christianity and the Bible on the continent. It started as a conversation with various publics in an attempt to contest specific and established social imaginings that appeared during the colonial period.

To satisfy the curiosity of Western audiences for the unknown and mysterious faraway lands, African colonies became film locations for European and American productions in need of exotic milieus. Since the colonies were economic endeavours entangled in various kinds of missions where Europeans and Americans lived and worked, audiences back home were also shown films documenting the justified efforts of colonial administrations or Christian missions.

Films made on and outside the continent also catered to consumers in the colonies. In the first decades, cinema was entertainment mostly for white audiences and thus the extent of film distribution depended on the settler populations. In Libya, where the European population remained relatively small, from 1912 to 1951 only about 20 cinemas were built. In Algeria, by contrast, where the European population rose from 781,000 in 1912 to one million (with nine million locals) in 1933, there were, by 1956, 307 cinemas.[62] There were some exceptions, however. In Cape Town for example, by 1918, cinema had already established itself as the most popular leisure activity, with a large, diverse, and enthusiastic following, as well as an ethnically undivided audience at that time,[63] who enjoyed all the most famous shorts and features coming from Europe and Hollywood, in over 300 bioscopes.[64] It is difficult to later trace the numbers of Black African viewers, but we do know from scholarly accounts that Westerns in particular were extremely popular among the audiences from the mining compounds of central and southern Africa, so much so that subcultures came into existence; and that comedies, especially the work of Chaplin,were popular in the whole region and could stop riots.[65] Film shows screened by private entrepreneurs in cafes and cinemas or on white sheets outdoors were at first unregulated by colonial administrations. Gradually, this became a concern, on the one hand, because the content of the shows was deemed unsuitable for African audiences and, on the other, European countries were worried that American productions would saturate the markets in

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[61] Hofmeyr 2003, p. 25.
[62] Malkmus & Armes 1991, p. 5.
[63] Such was not the case in Johannesburg, where from the beginning, cinemas were segregated.
[64] Burns 2009.
[65] Reynolds 2015, p. 97. Reynolds recounts an anecdote on how missionary Ray Philips' two-hour program including films by Chaplin, Keaton and Semon, stopped an escalating interracial conflict in the New Primrose mines of Rhodesia in March 1922.

the colonies. Therefore, starting in the 1930s, films were made especially for African audiences, under the auspices of missionary societies and colonial administrations, and censor boards were created. Likewise, regulations were set as to protect national film markets in the colonies.

Practitioners and Genres

Films, we have seen, created and catered to different audiences. They were made by entrepreneurs and entertainers with cameras who travelled all around the colonies. Along with them, professional filmmakers were sponsored by companies to secure exotic footage. Likewise they sponsored adventurers going on expeditions to advertise Citroën or Ford vehicles, or for museums to secure artefacts. The colonial administrations were commissioning educational films, war propaganda films, creating film units. Last but definitely not least missionaries reported to their mission societies via films, entertained church audiences, and paired with colonial administrators to produce educational reels. In their activity, and because of their different motives and target audiences, these practitioners created and developed particular genres.

The most prominent ones at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries were mission or missionary films, ethnographic films, exploration and travelogue films, endurance and scientific expedition films, and adventure melodramas. All these genres contributed to the representation of the African continent and its peoples as a generic space and a vestige of untamed and primitive life, a place which could be hunted – *Chasse à L'hippopotame sur le Nil Bleu* (1908); *La Chasse à la Panthère* (1909); *La Chasse à la Giraffe en Ouganda* (1910); *Roosevelt in Africa* (1910) – or civilised – *La Croisière noire* (1926); *Africa Speaks!* (1930); a continent inhabited by dangerous tribes – *Savage South Africa* and *Landing of Savage South Africa at Southampton* (1899); *Savage South Africa – Savage Attack and Repulse* (1899) – as a place for exploration – *The Upper Nile, The Lower Nile, The Real Streets of Cairo, British Egypt* (1906); *Cameraing Through Africa I and II*, (1919) – and as a subject of study under the sponsorship of museums and for international exhibitions in Paris or Brussels.

In fictional feature productions, along with similar images from documentaries and travelogues,[66] the colonies were portrayed as ripe and ready for conquest or as places where the white man could find redemption.[67] Colonialism as experienced by the peoples was rarely addressed during these early stages,

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[66] These often made use of the same footage but with a different narrative or story.

[67] The following quote by Dina Sherzer is illustrative: "[T]he colonies are represented as territories waiting for European initiatives, virgin land where the white man with helmet and boots regenerated himself or was destroyed by alcoholism, malaria or native women. The films…did not present the colonial experience, did not attach importance to colonial issue… they… contributed to the colonial spirit and temperament of conquest". Sherzer cited in Armes 2006, p. 23.

and when they somehow did, it was to show the futile endeavour of resistance as in *The Rose of Rhodesia* (1918). *Brazza or the Epic of the Congo* (1939), *The Man of the Niger* (1939), *The African Queen* (1951), *Sanders of the River* (1935), the Tarzan films, are prime examples of the temperament of conquest. The glorification of the colonialist endeavour was constructed through accounts and portrayals of the white adventurer, scientist, missionary, teacher or colonial administrator defying the "dark places of the earth", the "land of savagery and dangerous adventure", or working relentlessly for the good of the colony. What was sold on screen, and therefore imagined by audiences, was the incredible bravery and dedication of the European or American. It added to the moral imperative since Africa had to be saved from its own savages and given civilisation, making the continuous colonial presence absolutely justified.

Missionaries, despite the controversy surrounding cinema as to whether or not it was a suitable activity for churchgoers among denominations in Europe and the United States, did use films in the colonies as an evangelising tool, showing excerpts from the latest Gospel and Jesus films. They produced films resembling travelogues to show the works of the mission stations as a way to secure support from the mission societies and church audiences, as for example, the films by the Mill Hill fathers or the Salvation Army. With funds from mission societies and with professional filmmakers, fictional features about missionaries were made – for instance, *Livingstone* (1925) and *Il Est Minuit Dr Schweitzer* (1953) – as were educational films promoting Christian morals, an example being *From Fear to Faith* (1946).

The colonial administrations influenced the construction of the image of the African in a more systematic and propagandist way. They worked with and reinforced the existing tropes with educational films, created specifically for the less gifted colonial subjects. They simultaneously prevented the birth of cinemas by the same colonised subjects who had to wait until the independences. What the colonial administration saw as the ideological purpose of cinema was clear. However, the way the metropoles dealt with the medium differed. Britain, for example, had in 1939 set up the Colonial Film Unit as part of the Ministry of Information to produce films onsite in order to "tell the story of the War with the right propaganda" and explain "the effect of the war on the life of people in England".[68] British colonial film units also controlled the dissemination of American productions on the African market and produced educational films specifically tailored for its African subjects.

The Belgian state also used cinema for educational purposes. It commissioned filmmakers such as Gerard de Boe to work on films on hygiene, industrial documentaries about precious minerals, ethnographic films and films promoting the war effort. *Nos soldats d'Afrique* (1939) was an example of the latter. *Congo* (1945) presented the successes of the colonial rule. *Bongolo* or

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[68] Smyth 1988, p. 285.

Bongolo and the Negro Princess (1952) portrayed tensions between the new modern Africa and the old traditional one. Indigenous cultures and reconstruction of secret leopard men rituals were shown in *L'equateur aux Cent Visages* (1948). A Belgian board of censors always had to approve to what extent the Congolese might get involved in film activities[69] and who could see the films. *L'equateur aux Cent Visages*, for example, was censored in Leopoldville for indigenous audiences because "it might be perceived as belittling African customs."[70] Possibly for the same reason, *Bwana Kitoko* (1955), covering King Baudouin's visit to the colony, appeared in two versions: one for Europeans and the other for Congolese. During World War II, for example, it allowed for the Congolese only war propaganda films against Germans. In 1947, a branch of the Belgian Ministry of Information, the Film and Photo Bureau, set as a policy producing films especially made for the Congolese.[71] It was believed that simply showing European and American films would not satisfy the tastes of African viewers, nor would such features be appropriate for them, since the technique would have to be *simplified*. Interestingly enough, probably subconsciously and unwittingly, the censors, in advocating for different versions of films and restricting audiences, recognised that the minds of African viewers were not so "simple" after all. They also recognised the subversive potential of images.

In the French colonies, film was expected to help, or at least not to undermine, the immediate needs of political control.[72] France did not have colonial film units, deeming them too expensive, but it controlled cinema so as to maintain a maximal degree of economic exclusivity with the colonies and also as a form of high culture that could stem the erosion of France's world influence, especially by U.S. ascendancy.[73] In addition, Africans were legally prohibited from making films of their own by the Laval Decree, implemented in 1934. The purpose of the decree was to control the content of films that were shot in Africa and to minimize the creative roles played by Africans in the making of films.

Germany did not have colonies long enough to form a colonial film unit. Furthermore, the Reichskolonialamt (German Imperial office) generally resisted offering filmmakers direct support in the colonies until World War I. There were, however, societies and companies financing film production and organising screenings in Germany, like the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft – the German colonial society – and the Woermann Company, which encouraged and financed the endeavours of amateur cinematographer Carl Müller in securing footage in Togo, Cameroun and German Southwest Africa in 1904-

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[69] Diawara 1992.
[70] Reynolds 2015, p. 45.
[71] Diawara 1992.
[72] Mahir 2010, p.143.
[73] Ibid.

1906.[74] His travelogues constituted positive images of the colonies, showing the success of the colonial project in bringing civilisation to the African continent. Film was used for the same purposes in Lusophone Africa, emphasizing Portuguese military operations and the construction of the Benguala railway, or to minimise the international outrage over forced labour on São Tomé and Príncipe.

In short, cinema was used in the colonial period as a propagandist tool, as entertainment and for educational purposes, illustrating the justified colonialist endeavour. It was also a growing market in the colonies as it provided images to the cinematic production in Europe and the US. Furthermore, it reflected the protectionist measures European countries had at the time in relation to American cinema and culture.

The Religious in Colonial Cinema

The representation of the religious in colonial cinema will be addressed in more depth in the following chapter, since it constitutes the direct counterpart of *La Chapelle'*s narrative. Suffice to mention here that the religious played an important role in the propagandist educational and entertaining agenda of colonial films. It appears in the films of the colonial period through representations of rituals and ceremonies, and through religious figures and themes. Rituals, dances, rites of initiation, priests and "witchdoctors" are shown in travelogues as well as in educational, missionary, ethnographic and fiction films. The general approach was straightforward and follows the idea that colonial presence was not only justified but was necessary. Local religions are portrayed as strange, dangerous, backward, impeding progress, in contradistinction to the civilised and progressive Christian world. Here, too, the Other is seen as lost and superstitious, in need of the civilising mission with the joined efforts of missionaries, doctors, colonial administrators and even adventurers in need of redemption. Again, these myths will have a profound effect on African identities.

The 1950s: Towards Decolonisation

So far, I have given a rather grim portrayal of the representative apparatus involved in the creation of the African as the Other. The point I am trying to make is that it is this type of representation that will be criticised fiercely by African intellectuals in the decolonisation process. It does not account for a more nuanced situation, where films were enjoyed by African audiences that had converted to Christianity and espoused the new order of life to lesser or greater degrees, an order of life which Christianisation provided, with a smaller family unit to care for, access to medicine and education, access to

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[74] Fuhrmann 2003.

salaried positions and the perspective of a better future for their children within the colonial structure. Nor does it account for locals' feelings and opinions about missionaries, and a more nuanced view of the missionaries themselves. It should be pointed out, however, that, starting in the 1950s, films made by Europeans were becoming more critical of the colonial endeavour and its civilising mission.

The 1950s were not only the golden years of French cinema but were also the years when African colonies start painstakingly gaining independences, when Black African thinkers and intellectuals met at conferences and formed cinema groups, and when the production considered to be the first Black African film – Paulin Soumanou Vieyra's *Afrique Sur Seine* (1956) – came out. Although mainstream cinema continued the perpetuation of its myths, changes in the portrayals of African peoples appeared in parallel productions, also among missionaries. Such were films produced, albeit later, by the Maryknoll Society, which arrived in Tanzania in 1946. Between the early 1960s and early 1980s, various Maryknollers produced films primarily in Tanzania, explaining the role of the church in a changing Africa. Stereotypical images of Africans in loincloths are replaced by Africans in European dress and Afro-Socialism is looked at as a viable option for East African conditions instead of capitalism; African Catholics now occasionally share the microphone. Even polygamy is now reflected upon rather than just downright opposed as an abomination, e.g. in *Sons of Bwiregi*.[75]

Outside mission and missionary-themed productions, anti-colonial tendencies as well as a more "scientifically oriented" approach in ethnographic film, made their appearances. In 1956, for example, the French Laval decree was used against filmmaker René Vautier, who was imprisoned for his account of the bloody repression of popular risings in Dimbokro, Côte d'Ivoire, in his film *Afrique 50*. As an illustration of ethnographic film, Jean Rouch, taking on Dziga Vertov's *kino-eye* and Robert Flatherty's *participant camera*, developed his ciné-trance technique, "a choreography of shooting on the move",[76] in creating a new style for the ethnographic genre, the aim of which is to provide a participatory gaze. He produced his controversial *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955), on the ritual of the Hauka, a confrerie of men living in Accra, who, once a year, are possessed by the spirits of colonial officers. Rouch's camera *behaves* as one of the characters in the film, observing every movement and moving in such a way as to give the illusion of presence. French critics have considered it innovative as the first ethnographic film that does not impose the view of the narrator upon the subjects. African filmmakers such as Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, however, found it "a distortion which was the more dangerous for having all the outward trappings of authenticity",[77] and Med Hondo

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[75] Reynolds 2015, p. 80.
[76] Barlet 2000, p. 6.
[77] Ibid.

stated that "In all his films he brings out an alleged African cultural specificity which makes us appear ridiculous. He is a man who has always regarded us, deep down, as insects."[78]

The controversial views regarding Rouch's work mirror the questions of who owns representation and who can authentically speak of, about and for the peoples. In the decolonisation period, the white gaze was unacceptable. At the same time, the entanglements of cinematic developments, with their constant exchanges of ideas, knowledge and influences, vexed such pure ideals. Regardless of the way we interpret Rouch's ethnofiction, it is evident that he has contributed to African cinemas through his collaboration and forming such African film pioneers as Oumarou Ganda and Safi Faye.

The critique of the white gaze and its created cinematic African myth also appears in academic circles. In 1956, Oladipo Onipede, from Nigeria, published an article entitled *Hollywood's Holy War Against Africa* in the magazine *Africa Today,* in which he fiercely criticises the myth of the "Savage African", which was created, according to him, by "the proselytizing Christian missionaries of the 19th century, who turned anthropologists in the 20th century."[79] Onipede's commentary reflects the general popular imagination regarding the role of missionaries in cultural imperialism. As we have seen, missionaries were only one group contributing to the myth, but the anger and bitterness against "Hollywood's symbolic slaughter of the underdog peoples of the world, especially the African" will be the driving force of the beginnings of African cinemas proper after the independences, the subject to which I will now turn.

Representations and Constructions of the Religious in African Cinemas after the Independences

As mentioned earlier, Kenneth Harrow and Olivier Barlet delineate three main paradigms or phases in sub-Saharan African cinemas: the 1960-1970s, the 1980s-1990s and the 2000s. In each paradigm, specific cinematic trends and developments will emerge and influence the treatments of religions. As the paradigms shift, directed by wider societal and ideological changes, a complete break from tendencies and trends that preceded a period does not occur. These shifts should rather be understood as a continuous discussion, in which thoughts are challenged, developed, contested or rejected.

In the following section, I will attempt to delineate the main cinematic trends in relation to religions in each of the phases. Here, we will see how Christianity has been addressed by African filmmakers in relation to other religions, specific contexts and situations. By the end of the section, I hope to

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[78] Barlet 2000, p. 8.
[79] Onipede 1956, p. 2.

demonstrate that Christianity has been broadly regarded on the one hand with suspicion and, on the other, as incorporated into the religious lives of Africans and the continent in general.

Independences and Emancipation: 1960-1970s

The process of gaining independence started in the mid-1950s, and by 1970 most African countries were declared independent. From the 1950s and after the independences, African filmmakers envisaged that they could truly be independent only if they managed to express their perception of reality in media. In 1952, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Robert Caristan, Mamadou Sarr and Jacques Mélo Kane created the Groupe Africain de Cinéma (The African Cinema group), which would be instrumental in the organisation of the *Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage*[80] (1966) in Tunis and especially in the creation of the first festival of Negro art in Dakar in April 1966. One of the decisions made in Dakar concerned the creation of an African cinematographic organism, which would coordinate and organise regular conferences and workshops and draft measures that would contribute to the development of African cinema. In 1969, the Pan African Film Festival (FESPACO) in Ouagadougou was launched, and in 1970 the FEPACI (the Pan African Federation of Filmmakers) – the much-wanted cinematographic organism – was born. The influence of FEPACI on the developments of African cinemas will be lasting, if only in the ideological sense.[81] It is within its space that the first manifesto of African cinema, *The Algiers Charter*, was drafted and unanimously accepted by filmmakers in Algiers on 18 January 1975. The charter outlined the main objectives of the newly born cinema which were to emancipate, dismantle the images created during the long colonial years, and educate. It also approved a didactic approach with an emphasis on social criticism to reach the outlined goals.[82] The objectives set, filmmakers then strive to apply

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[80]The Carthage Film Festival

[81]FEPACI's idea that cinema was an educational tool – the night school of Africa – with directors like Sembene Ousmane relentlessly criticizing societies' shortcomings, stood for decades as what was considered the core of African cinema's authenticity. In other spheres FEPACI failed as an organization that would provide resources for filmmakers, in terms of funding or education. In addition to this lack of infrastructure and support from governments, filmmakers turned to the former colonizers in order to make films.

[82]"…the economic stranglehold over our countries is increased twofold by a pervading ideological alienation that stems from a massive injection of cultural by-products thrust on the African markets for passive consumption…in the face of this condition of cultural domination and deracination, there is a pressing need to reformulate in liberating terms the internal problematic of development and of the part that must be played in this worldwide advance by culture and by the cinema. To assume a genuinely active role in the process of development, African culture must be popular, democratic, and progressive in character, inspired by its own realities and responding to its own needs…Within this perspective the cinema has a vital part to play because it is a means of education, information, and consciousness raising, as well as a stimulus to creativity. The accomplishing of these goals implies a questioning by African filmmakers of the image they have of themselves, of the nature of their function and their social status, and of

themselves to the task. In terms of educating, informing, and raising the consciousness of the population, their cameras will focus on the shortcomings of societies, and considerable criticism and attention will be directed towards religions and religious figures. In the first phase, the attitudes of filmmakers toward religions can be grouped under three main themes: religions as backward, religions through colonialism, religions and identity.

Religions as Backward: Tradition vs Modernity.

The emancipation process entailed focusing on the development towards what was understood as a progressive and modern society, one rid of backward elements. This building of a modern society was a crucial dimension of the nationalist project in newly independent states. However, as film scholar Ella Shohat points out, the modernisation discourse employed by the newly independent states rested on Eurocentric binary visions of modernity/tradition, underdevelopment/development, science/superstition, technology/backwardness;[83] as well as on the duality of the foreign and the local.[84] African nationalist filmmakers inherited these dichotomies and along with them the view of African traditions, beliefs and religious figures as the main impediments to development and civilisation, the same views that informed the narratives of educational and missionary films made especially for African audiences.

This inheritance would explain a paradox: while the Western gaze was unacceptable, African religious traditions were not reinstated as symbolic authenticity. For film scholar Férid Boughédir, "…the feature films of the first decade 1966-76 almost all witness a 'modernist' will in relation to African traditions, which one often sees from the angle of retrograde superstitions and which are sometimes held responsible for the historical 'backwardness' of the continent in comparison with the developed nations".[85] For Boughédir, the modernist turn explained the cinematic critique of religious figures such as the healer, the marabout or the imam. The futility of divination, charms and magic and unscrupulous marabouts and religious leaders are at the core of the social critique of Oumarou Ganda's *Le Wazzou Polygame* (1971) and *Saitane* (1972/73), Mahama Johnson Traoré's *Njaangan* (1974), Moustapha Alassane's *F.V.V.A (Femme, Villa, Voiture, Argent,* 1972) and Henri Duparc's *Abusuan* (1972). In *Borrom Sarret* (1963), Senegalese director and "father of African cinema"[86] Sembene Ousmane starts his critique of religions by unfolding the hypocrisy and self-centredness of the apparently faithful Muslim

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their general place in society…Moreover, the question of commercial profit can be no yardstick for African filmmakers. The only relevant criterion of profitability is the knowledge of whether the needs and aspirations of the people are expressed, and not those of specific interest groups." The Algiers Charter on African Cinema, 1975 (Cham & Bakari 1996, pp. 25-26).

[83] Shohat cited in Givanni 2000, pp. 116-117.

[84] Adenekan 2021, p. 159.

[85] Boughédir cited in Givanni 2000, p. 115.

[86] Sembène is often called the father of African cinema not just because he was one of the pioneer filmmakers and writers of the period but also because he is considered to be the model

cart driver and main protagonist through his encounters with other members of an urban Senegalese space and introduces us to the newly independent Senegalese society. These include an impoverished father who does not have enough money to bury his child; a well-to-do young clerk who lives in the gated area of the city together with white expatriates and who is completely indifferent to the misery outside the walls; and a griot[87] who earns his living by flattering people instead of telling their histories. The religious figures portrayed work against building the progressive society not only by abusing power but also by reinforcing peoples' futile beliefs in gris-gris, jujus and supernatural forces.

The first decades of sub-Saharan cinema witnessed a process of emancipation from different forms of oppression. An image of Africa entangled in colonialist structures, corrupt African elites, as well as remnants of abusive traditional practices, were no longer acceptable in the newly independent society. If religions lead people into more ignorance and away from development and resistance, they had no place in modern societies. All Ibrahim Dieng's amulets, protective charms and zealous prayers to Allah, in Sembene's *Mandabi* (1968), could not help him receive a check sent from France, since he is an illiterate man without identity papers.

Christianity is absent from these first cinematic narratives. Most features of this period – the heyday of African francophone cinemas – apart from a few exceptions from Congo, Gabon and Ivory Coast, are produced in predominantly Muslim countries, such as Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, which explains why the bulk of the critique is directed towards abusive Muslim religious figures, fraudulent griots and traditional healers. Christianity does surface, however, when, as part of the same emancipatory project, African films critique religions for their relationship to colonialism.

Religions and Colonialism: Answers to Colonial Images
The 1970-1980s were characterised, along with the lingering modernist turn, by the revalorisation of African cultural and religious expressions, and by a denunciation of postcolonial African political power.[88] The critique of indigenous African traditions as part of the modernist project did not only point out the traditions as superstitious but also as powerless in the face of colonization.

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of what an African cinema should be in terms of genre, theme, aesthetics and gaze. More interestingly Sembène is also the director *against* whom some younger filmmakers go in their endeavours. Additionally, Kenneth Harrow has dubbed the influence of Sembène on African cinemas the Spectre of Sembène, as the "African Other" for the video industries of Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya.

[87] The griot is a mediator, educator, storyteller, holder of collective memory and representative of oral tradition.

[88] "De toutes ces tendances évoquées plus haut se dégagent 1) 'la revalorisation des valeurs culturelles négro-africaines' et 'le dénonciation du pouvoir politique africain post colonial'." (Coulibaly cited in Bahi 2013, p. 28). Translations from French in the text are the author's, unless otherwise specified.

Sembene's *Emitaï* (1971), an answer to colonial war propaganda films, portrays the forced contribution to the war effort in a Diola village. The ancestors and gods are invoked to protect the peoples against the French colonisers, but the gods advise passivity. The gods and the local societies have been disempowered by colonialism, but it is again the duty of the newly independent nation to regain control over its own destiny, and this cannot be done by invoking the old gods.

The nationalist and modernisation project of early sub-Saharan films entailed a criticism of religions and their representatives not just from a modernist perspective marginalising traditions but also from the duality of foreign/local thus denouncing religions considered allies of colonialism. One of the key developments in these early films is that Christianity and Islam are portrayed as alien to African societies, which before the advent of colonialism had their own governing systems, beliefs, gods and customs. Sembene again criticises Islam and imams, along with Christian missionaries, in *Ceddo* (1977) by showing these religions as not indigenous to Western Africa but as destructive forces linked to the slave trade and debuts of colonialism.[89]

Christianity and Islam are presented as foreign religions that have robbed the colonised peoples of their identities, creating a schizophrenic world in which one is forced to deny one's civilisation and culture and even one's name. The Christian baptism scenes of Med Hondo's *Soleil O* (1967) are emblematic. The film, though mostly about the diasporic experience in France, begins with shots of a group of young African men, gathered in a cathedral around a French priest, who in turn ask for forgiveness for speaking their respective native languages and their minds. After receiving new Christian names, they march out of the church. Soon their crosses turn into swords, and they attack each other as they obey the orders of a white officer who watches with amusement from a pedestal and who gives money to the last man standing. The latter collapses, and the money returns to the white officer. In less than 15 minutes, Hondo portrays the deadly consequences of colonial occupation, exploitation and the Catholic Church on the body and the mind. Similarly, as we will see in the next chapter, in Jean-Michel Tchissoukou's *La Chapelle* (1980), the abusive Catholic missionary and village teacher – who draws maps of France – causes the ruin of a small community, despite the efforts of the local griot and healer to prevent the catastrophe.

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[89] If Christianity was readily associated with white missionaries, the Islamic tradition in a country like Senegal has deeper roots that could not be readily criticised. The feature was banned in the country for eight years because, according to Mbye Cham, the film is "…the most irreverent rewriting of Islam in Senegal by a Senegalese artist [and] reconstructs [Islam's] history in Senegal in ways that radically destabilized and undo the dominant Islamic myth espoused by the Muslim elite and their followers, who happen to be the majority of the Senegalese." (Cham, cited in Day 2008, p. 136).

Sembene, Hondo and Tchissoukou, according to the set educational objective, attempt to rewrite the histories of newly emerging independent African countries and refute the version of history given by the coloniser in which the African peoples had no culture, political systems, knowledge or civilisation, and where the ancestors are in Gaulle. Within this agenda, Islam and Christianity could not be framed in a way other than as being associated with the slaver and the coloniser and not belonging to the "true African" version of history.

Religion and Identity

The process of decolonising the gaze and regaining history and identity involved a critical reworking of the received heritage. How does one navigate between received Western education, Christianity, Islam, rural communities and customs, and urbanisation with its accompanying aura of modernity?

Many films from this period begin to pose the question of the retrieval of an idealised lost and forgotten identity, hidden under the layers of colonial oppression and falsified histories. Pierre-Marie Dong, in *Identité* (1972)*,* as the title hints, shows the struggle of the main character in finding his cultural and religious roots. Disgusted with his Christian name, Pierre, and the memory of his baptism – a reminder of Hondo's *Soleil Ô* – the hero turns his back on Catholicism and is initiated into the Bwiti cult of his native village. The film, however, does not offer an easy solution, and identity is not retrieved by going back to traditions. Alienation is not resolved by refuting one religion over another. However, and this goes against the earlier modernist will of the religions as obsolete, disregarding traditional religions especially, has severe consequences. For example, it is the refusal to sacrifice to the Vodun that leads to the death of the main character's father in Pascal Abilankou's *Sous le Signe du Vodou* (1974). What we witness then is the acceptance of a plurality of religious practices, which need not be at odds, and the same goes for the tradition/modernity dichotomy. In Daniel Kamwa's *Akum* (n.d.)*,* Christianity and local beliefs coexist peacefully. In Djingareye Maiga's *Nuages Noirs* (1979), divination is as valid a way to get to the truth as the trial around which the plot revolves is. Indigenous beliefs and practices now heal psychological ailments triggered by the alienation and the inability to cope in the new order, as is shown in *Kodou* (1971). In Sembene's *Xala* (1974), the fetishist restores balance by putting the corrupt and greedy Muslim official in his place after casting an impotence spell on him. In *Sur la dune de la solitude* (1964), by Timité Bassori, and *Mamy Watta* (n.d.), by Trahima Diaby, the water divinity is seen as the muse of poets and singers.

The filmmakers of the first paradigm, as societies' guides in the decolonising process, touch upon different issues in their treatment of religions. The three themes I have delineated are in fact intricately related to each other, as one will notice by looking at the dates. They all carry the external burden of colonial ideology, whether by perpetrating its modernist view, by idealizing a

pre-colonial society, with its customs, traditions and beliefs, which are unattainable, disempowered, and in some ways, undesirable. At the same time religions, religious figures and practices, whether Christian, Muslim, or traditional African, are always located in a specific socio-political context, and their critique contributes to the building of a society. Interestingly, the old gods and ancestors, however silent, helpless or mocked, are never really forsaken. Islam, although shown as foreign in *Ceddo*, is profoundly anchored in West African francophone countries. Among these, Christianity in this phase is at best, tolerated.

Parallel Stories: American Global Evangelism in the 1950-1970s.

One way to understand the conceptualisation of African cinemas is to look at developments that were not included in the history of cinema on the continent. The presence of the global Christian film industry on the continent is such an example. The ambivalent views on religions stemming from the account of the first phase or paradigm do not encompass all cinematographic activities on the continent, especially in relation to where Christianity is concerned. As I have mentioned, the shifts in paradigms of African cinemas do not entail a break with previous developments. The same applies to some of the cinematographic practices and trends from the colonial period which have paved their way into independent African nations. If Hollywood continues to portray Africa as the ultimate Other, missionaries and Christian filmmakers have persevered in spreading the Gospel and Christian thought.

In the 1940s-1950s, American producers from the Christian film industry, faced with a saturated market, started to look for other channels outside the country. Inspired by the Great Commission, these producers decided to adapt scripture in other cultures, with varying degrees of success.[90] They used local actors and addressed issues local audiences could relate to in their contexts. Tom Hotchkiss, for example, with his company *Films Afield,* started producing footage in the 1950s in Asia for the Baptist Foreign Mission Society (CBFMS). In the 1970s and 1980s, Hotchkiss and his wife produced a few explicitly evangelistic films in the sub-Saharan region. *Suzanne* (1972), shot in Ivory Coast, featured an all-Ivorian cast, and more than two hundred 16mm prints of the film were used by various mission groups in Africa. Other features like the popular urban ministry film *Pourquoi Moi?* (1974) and *Chidi* (1985) touched upon the subjects of spiritual guidance and African Christian heroes in the Nigerian-Biafra war respectively.[91]

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[90] This is according to religion and film scholars Terry Lindvall and Andrew Quicke (2011)
[91] Lindvall & Quicke 2011, p. 190.

In 1963, Ken Anderson founded *International Films* "to create films that would communicate the Gospel to global audiences".[92] Believing in making films on location for a target audience, *International Films* made between 1965 and 1985 roughly 20 films outside the US. Since *International Films* targeted local audiences, they used local languages. For example, in 1976, *The Book That Would Not Burn,* a feature recounting the attempts of Queen Ranavalona I of Madagascar to destroy Christianity on the island by martyring Christians and burning Bibles was shot. The film's opening credits claim that it is "a true story written by Ken Anderson in consultation with Malagasy Christians". In an interview with Andrew Quicke, Eddie McDougal, who worked for *International Films,* recounted that "[w]hen the first copy came to the censor of Madagascar, the guy had never seen a film in his own language and he just wept", and apparently whenever the film is shown in Madagascar, Bible sales go up and church attendance increases.[93] *International Films* not only used local languages when producing films, they also build a dubbing facility in the 1990s. There, "the most seen film in the world", *The Jesus Film,*[94] produced under the auspices of the Baptist International Mission Board in partnership with the Genesis Film Project, was dubbed in Lingala, Yoruba, Twi and many more languages.

The global Christian film industry's endeavours in the sub-Saharan region are absent from scholarly narratives of African cinemas. Despite targeting and touching local audiences, using all-African casts, involving youth groups and Black African pastors, and dubbing into local languages, none of it seems to have any bearing on the treatments of religion in sub-Saharan African cinemas, as presented in the literature. This suggests that, in a way similar to colonial mission and missionary films, which did not portray the religious realities of local peoples, sub-Saharan African cinemas of the early period did not pay much attention to African Christianities or Christian audiences and instead focused on the agenda of decolonising and modernisng societies. It also suggests that the religious had its place in African cinemas of the early decades only as far as it constituted a marker of socio-political and cultural reality, situation or issue related to the construction of a decolonised African subject.

In Search of an African Heritage: the 1980s and 1990s

Tunisian film scholar Tahar Chikhaoui made the following observation about the history of African cinemas: "The 1960s were years of construction, of putting things in place… [T]he gaze becomes clearly more critical in the 1970s

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[92] Ibid, p. 140.
[93] Lindvall & Quicke 2011, p. 192.
[94] According to its promoters, since 1979, *The Jesus Film* has been seen six billion times and is "responsible for saving some 225,873,100 souls", claiming "every four seconds, somewhere in the world, someone becomes a Christian as a result of seeing the Jesus Film." (Lindvall & Quicke 2011, p. 193.

with the accent out on the social problems of the period; at the same time, cinema acquires greater technical maturity. In the course of the 1980s, the individual takes the upper hand".[95] The didacticism of the first two decades fades gradually, accompanied by a growing disenchantment in the face of social and political conditions. There is a shift from representations of colonialism or neocolonialism to a deeper turn towards the "Old Africa"[96] and a search for authentically African values that would permit a regaining of identity and dignity.

The contemporary situation and critical gaze upon society are, however, not abandoned , as Harrow and Barlet remind us that "[the] second paradigm has not yet left the political frame of the first paradigm, it still operates around figures of oppression, increasingly associated with the older generation."[97] The idealised pre-colonial societies, disturbed by missionaries, slavers and colonisers in *Ceddo, La Chapelle,* or *Emitaï*, take centre stage. Four main developments can be traced during this phase: "re-addressing the colonial past", "religious plurality", "magical realism" and "the video"

Magical Realism

According to Melissa Thackway, the blending of cultural traditions into film that we have witnessed from the 1970s "became increasingly diversified and developed in the 80s… Many such works are strikingly infused with African mythology and supernatural beliefs."[98] Magical realism combines social criticism with descriptions of communities, whether rural or urban, in which characters are in contact with spirits and ancestors, who now take an active part in the lives of the protagonists. The line between the visible and invisible is non-existent, and what can be perceived as supernatural has full access to the natural, so to speak, and vice versa. Magical realism challenges the modernist turn of the first post-independence decades, with its traditional/modernist dichotomy, by reinstating traditional beliefs and rituals into the fabric of rural as well as urban communities. It strongly asserts them as an integral part of African identities and as means of making sense of the world. Works of Malian Souleymane Cissé – *Finyé* (1982) and especially *Yeelen* (1987); Cheick Oumar Sissoko – *Guimba, The Tyrant* (1995); Adama Drabo's *Ta Dona* (1991) and *Taafe Fanga* (1997) use Dogon creation myths and Komo rituals to raise socio-political issues. In *Finyé,* an elder speaks with his ancestors under the sacred tree of the students' strike and the future of the youth. *Yeelen*, praised at Cannes and interpreted as the prime example of African mythology and religious thought on screen, is in fact a strident social critique of the autocratic African rulers, who refuse to leave their acquired places of power, as

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[95] Chikhaoui cited in Armes 2006, p. 87.
[96] Harrow 2017, p. 41.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Thackway 2003, pp. 10-11.

well as an answer to Western ethnographic films. *Guimba, The Tyrant* (1995), by Cheick Oumar Sissoko, takes us back to the Malian empire, where magic and spells are used to overthrow a tyrannical leader. *Guimba,* along with *Yeelen*, uses Malian mythology and rituals to address the issue of African dictators. *Taafe Fanga* criticises power abuse, while *Ta Dona* focuses on political corruption. When asked about the magical in his films Drabo observed:

> I come from a society that lives with magic – not necessarily magic in the European sense of the word. Everything comes down to interpretation in our culture. In Ta Dona, the whole village gathers in the sun to conjure the rain. They all concentrate on the same thing at the same time for hours and it ends up raining. People obviously think that this is magic, but for me, thought is energy. These people think together and create energy. …We are steeped in this atmosphere all our lives, so it seems completely normal to me that my films, which … come from my whole culture, inevitably be tinged with this knowledge that people call magic…[99]

With magical realism, what is considered religious, in the sense of religious vs secular, is taken for granted as an integral and omnipresent part of human existence. It is not an activity done outside of a secular realm but is one of the ways of navigating and negotiating within the world, be it outside of one's house or as part of a coming-of-age story. For example, the importance of history told from an African viewpoint is reaffirmed in Dani Kouyaté's *Keïta! L'Héritage du Griot* (1995), which starts with the Mandeng myth of creation at Wagadu. Although the rulers of Mali are said to have been Muslims from before the days of Sundjata, the story is still imbued with pre-Islamic beliefs, and Sundjata will succeed only because of the occult powers Sogolon has passed on to him.

The modernity/tradition dichotomy is challenged by the presence of the religious or the magical not only in the rural space, to which these are traditionally ascribed, but also in the urban spaces as well. Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Pierre Békolo, in his astonishing *Quartier Mozart* (1992), weaves the magical into the lives of his characters living in a township. Society is put under the magnifying glass while magic is playfully used to tackle gender, transgender and queer issues. The film ridicules the patriarchal, and its protagonists discuss the Black African identity and its place in the global sphere. What these films emphasise is a different kind of worldview and epistemology. They imagine a world that challenges the dualistic understandings of material/spiritual, sacred/profane, natural/supernatural and asserts its own.

If local beliefs in the supernatural or magical are not out of the ordinary but instead are a worldview, an epistemology and a way of life that infuses the socio-cultural environment, the duality of Christian thought seems to have no place in it, although this will be reworked – with a vengeance – later in the

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[99] Drabo cited in Thackway 2003, p. 91.

Pentecostal and charismatic films of Ghana and Nigeria. The search for the "Old Africa" as a pre-colonial ideal renders the presence of Christianity, or even Islam, obsolete in the films' narratives. Filmmakers will focus on unraveling local histories and incorporating mythologies. Again, when Christianity and Islam are not just by-standers, they are portrayed as accomplices of the colonial agenda, or associated with the corrupt elites and hypocritical patriarchs. This view is further developed in the continuous theme of addressing the past.

Addressing the Pasts

In 1989, Ghanaian filmmaker Kwaw Ansah released *Heritage Africa!*, which explores the scars left by the colonial administration and Western education conducted by abusive white missionaries in contemporary urban Ghanaian society. It is now the missionary who is criticised and ridiculed as backward. In *Bouka* (1988), by Roger Gnoan M'Bala, he is shown, in comparison to the local griots and healers, as useless, awkward and out of place in the rural community. Bassek ba Kobhio, in *Le Grand Blanc de Lambaréné* (1995), deconstructs the myth of Albert Schweitzer. The film straightforwardly tackles a specific image from a colonial film, in this case the French *Il est Minuit Dr Schweitzer*. Kobhio criticises the secular saint of the colonial era for not having been interested in local cultures, and for disregarding language or music, during the many years he lived and worked in Gabon and shows him as a ridiculous man obsessed with his mission. *Sankofa* (1993), by Ethiopian Haile Guérima, goes further back in time to the fortress of Elmina in Ghana during the slave trade portrays Christianity as one of the most powerful tools that the oppressor used to justify imperialism.

The turn to the "Old" Africa takes centre stage in the 1980s and witnesses the advent of the so-called "Calabash" cinema. Its cinematic space is characterised by vast and stern rural landscapes, having no apparent contact with cities, and is set for the most part in an indefinite past prior to the arrival of the coloniser. These films have been perceived as reiterations of the myth of an untouched, generic Africa. The idea of a worldview in which the spiritual and natural realms are united in magical realism is here given another interpretation. For film scholars such as Alexie Tcheuyap, the representation of witchcraft or the occult in certain films "suggest[s] that the African is bound up in 'primitive' practices and beliefs".[100] In some ways, these films can be seen as perpetuating the modernist turn of the 1960s.

The films produced by the Burkinabe trio – Gaston Kaboré, Idrissa Ouédraogo, and Pierre Yamaego – are considered by some to be prime examples of such portrayals. Idrissa Ouédraogo's *Yaaba* (1989), for example, "reveal[s] village beliefs and customs that temper any enthusiasm that the modern

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[100] Tcheuyap 2011, p. 213.

viewer might feel about the past."[101] These customs are severely patriarchal, and women are the main targets and victims. An old woman – the grandmother Sana –is accused of witchcraft and rejected by the villagers. With no family left, she lives at the outskirts of the village. In Gaston Kaboré's *Wend Kuuni* (1982), also set in pre-colonial times, a mother is also expelled from her village for having "eaten" the child of another woman. Tcheuyap has criticised these films for their portrayal of sorcery "as mere irrational excuses for empirical anxieties". For him, the films of Gaston Kaboré, Pierre Yamaego and Idrissa Ouédraogo "perpetuate the view that Africa is a prisoner of aberrant concepts… and constitute an intellectual endorsement for colonial anthropology in that they bring together all the elements of that discourse".[102] On the one hand, this might suggest the deep and complex ways in which the tradition and modernity dichotomy and the ideas of the primitive have influenced sub-Saharan African filmmakers and thought; and that the decolonisation project sometimes only reiterates what it is trying to deconstruct. On the other hand, these films do raise the question of patriarchy and demonisation of women in African societies.

Religious Plurality

Feminism and women's issues are tackled in a different manner. For example, women also save from the oppressor. In 1986, Med Hondo comes back with *Sarraounia*, which tells the tale of the witch-queen of Azna, who defeats a French garrison and preaches religious tolerance. This last point reflects the ideological developments influencing African cinemas have opened up for different views on the religious, illustrated in the gradual acceptance of Christianity and Islam in the fabric of African societies. Whether they are *desirable* or authentic is still up for debate, but they are nonetheless present and are no longer so straightforwardly associated with the colonial administrator or the missionary.

   In the late 1980s and 1990s, the religious plurality of African societies is shown in films that portray different co-existing religions or that focus on particular aspects and practices of one religious tradition. Examples of the first category are found in the works of Sembene Ousmane, Roger Gnoan M'Bala and Wanjiru Kinyanjui. In *Guelwaar* (1991)*, we witness, along with social activism, tensions between Muslims and Christians, the loss of identity of the now French-Senegalese son of the activist, and the absolute refusal of foreign aid. Christianity, through the character of the activist, is interestingly portrayed in a more positive light than in Sembene's previous films. Gnoan M'Bala, in the same line as Tchissoukou, emphasises in *Bouka* (1988) and *Au Nom du Christ* (1993) the role of African traditional religions in contrast to

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[101] Gugler 2003, p. 33.
[102] Tcheuyap 2011, p. 213.

dubious Christian representatives. In *Bouka* in particular, Christianity and Islam are portrayed as coexisting in the village setting, but they are devoid of power in the face of traditional Ivorian knowledge, rituals, and fetishists. An apology to Kenyan sacred traditions and the rise of charismatic churches are themes seen in *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* (1994)*,* by Wanjiru Kinyanjui.

To the second category belong such films as Moussa Sene Absa's *Tableau Ferraille* (1997). For Sene Absa, progress can be achieved by remedying through modern Islam the moral failures of African societies, and he uses Islamic symbolism to build his narrative. If Islamic morality is portrayed as a solution to some of the shortcomings of Senegalese society, the Abrahamic traditions gain recognition with Sissoko' interpretation of scriptures, which he applies to the Malian context in his *Genesis* (1999).

African traditional religions are not only hailed as authentic or are used to symbolise lost identities but are also criticised. Sorcery and the occult can also be malevolent as is the case in Muhammad Camara's *Dakan* (1997) where a young Muslim is sent to the village's witch in order to exorcise the evil spirit of homosexuality that has possessed him. In many African societies, homosexuality is perceived as something un-African, as a one of the external influences brought by the West and globalisation. In this sense, it is significant that the exorcism is performed by a tradipractitioner rather than by a priest or imam. In Cameroonian Daniel Kamwa's *Le Cercle des Pouvoirs* (1998)*,* we witness a representation of the occult as a means to achieve political and financial power. What becomes apparent is the growth of different treatments religions receive in the cinematic production of the continent.

The Birth of Video

One site where African religious plurality is vividly shown, especially with regards to the representation of African traditional religion, i.e., sorcery or the occult, is the video industry. Although my thesis does not explore video for the purposes of this overview, I find it necessary to mention this rather important development in the production of images from the African continent.

Ghanaian director and producer of video films Socrate Safo affirmed that video is a blessing for Africa.[103] This is not an overstatement. The pandemic lack of infrastructure capable of supporting cinematic production has served to hamper the work of filmmakers on the continent in significant ways. The now hugely popular video industry has created an avenue for film production and distribution that has bypassed traditional ways of making films. In Nigeria, where it all started, filmmaking was left to the commercial sector, unlike in West African francophone countries where the lion's share of funding for film production came from France. This meant that filmmakers were more or less on their own. Without funds or prospects, they thus started to shoot films

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[103] Safo in an interview from the documentary *Ghanaian Video Tales* (dir. Tobias Wendl, Germany 2005).

with video cameras. This particularity is essential, since the films produced locally were geared towards local audiences in the sense that they were more attuned to the audiences' tastes, aspirations and predilections rather than the director's ideological vision. For example, because of the flexibility of the medium, filmmakers could alter the ending of a picture if the audience was not satisfied with the first version. Ghanaian director and producer William Akuffo related in an interview how his widely popular film *Diabolo* (1988) was at first a flop because the audience did not like that the culprit went unpunished. They quickly changed the ending, and the film acquired an almost cult-like status among the Ghanaian audience.[104] This constitutes a major difference from the films I have discussed so far in this overview and from my case studies as well. These are films that address local audiences as well as, though the festival circuit, global ones and create or fulfill different expectations with different audiences.

In my introduction, I mentioned that the general perception of African films portraying or representing the religious are the products of the video industry, which was born in Nigeria and is commonly known as Nollywood. The creation of the Nigerian home video industry is credited to Nigerian Igbo businessmen, especially Kenneth Nnebue, an electronics dealer and film promoter,[105] although Yoruba travelling theatres were already filming their performances putting their shows on camera in the 1980s. Three main religious groups are represented in Nigeria: Muslims (roughly 50.4%), Christians (48.2%), and followers of other religions, especially traditional African traditional religions (1.4%).[106] These religious and geographically divided groups seem to make their own video films. Frank Ukadike distinguishes between films produced in the north reflecting the Hausa, Islamic, and other cultures of the northern states; Igbo films, which utilise the traditions of Igbo theatre practices; and Yoruba films, which, like the others, mirror the ethnic tradition of the Yoruba travelling theatre.[107] In most literature on Nollywood, it is the Igbo and Christian videos that are implied. In a study from 2003, Akpabio outlines an impressive list of themes from Nollywood[108] of which the most

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[104] Akuffo in *Ghanaian Video Tales.*
[105] Akpabio 2007.
[106] Data from 2014.
[107] Ukadike 2014, p. 234.
[108] Themes: scourge of Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), female genital mutilation, evils of polygamy, extra marital affairs, elopement, betrayal, sibling rivalry, the activities of hired assassins and armed robbers, workplace rivalry, incest, mother-in-law problems, parental matchmaking, conflicts, sexual intercourse with housemaids, landlords and tenants, sickle cell anaemia, barrenness, challenges to love and lovers, widowhood practices, unemployment, street children, search for roots, abandonment of aged parents, teenage pregnancy, preference for male children, "first lady" syndrome, effects of bad upbringing on children, the police, drug trafficking, marriage, campus life, tribal conflicts, conflict between rich and poor, switching of babies at birth, surrogate motherhood, slavery, organised crime, home abandonment, prostitution, cancer, rivalry over titles, smuggling, HIV/AIDS, murder, disabilities, late marriage, history, destiny. (Akpabio 2007, p. 91).

interesting for our purposes are rituals, the spirit world and supernatural beings, witchcraft, religious leaders, the world of twins, clashes between Western and traditional cultures, the proliferation of churches, and the universal battle between good and evil. Nollywood films are extremely popular, and Akpabio attributes this success to "the ability of present-day film makers to emphasise contemporary realities which many Nigerians and Africans can relate to."[109]

A similar video boom occurred around the same time in Ghana, where the video industry is sometimes referred to as Ghallywood. Birgit Meyer, who has studied this phenomenon for over twenty years, dates the rise of video in Ghana to the late 1980s, when the film industry, then still state-owned, virtually ceased production. One interesting aspect of these films Meyer theorises is how religion is mediated in such a way as to (in)form the fabric of reality and the religious. How Spirit and spirits are portrayed infuses the way people believe in them. In a way, these mediations of the religious follow the tradition of magical realism in the sense that the religious is a constitutive element of the cinematic fabric. They, however, go beyond it with threads that weave out of the screen and into the reality of the viewer.

In the case of video, the Charismatic Christian perspective seems to be privileged, and the images have been criticised for their overrepresentation of the occult, perpetuating the image of Africa as a continent ridden with sorcerers. The criticism is also related to the negative portrayals of African traditional religions, especially in contrast with Charismatic Christianity, which always wins the battle and defeats evil. In this sense, the video films are perhaps more suitable material for exploring the religiosity of audiences and how the films feed into that religiosity.

The second paradigm in its exploration of African heritages roots religions in the sub-Saharan societies, whether in pre-colonial kingdoms or contemporary townships. African mythologies, but now also Christian texts and Islamic precepts as well, become the lens through which filmmakers seek to point the attention of the viewer to a very particular situation, be it moral weakness (*Tableau Ferraille*), fratricidal conflicts (*Genesis*) or dictators (*Yeelen, Guimba*). Religious plurality is fully affirmed, although most of the time, except perhaps in Nollywood and Ghallywood, the indigenous religions are still seen as most important in the search for identity and cultural roots. Witchcraft and the occult emerge more forcefully as themes in themselves. This development has been read by some interpreters as indicating Africa's stagnation in primitivism shown in video films[110], in Calabash films where women are branded as witches and exiled by irrational members of the community; or still, as dubious exorcism and barbaric rituals. On the other hand, witchcraft and the occult are also seen in positive terms as the guardians of tradition and

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[109] Akpabio 2007, p. 91.
[110] Video's obsession with these themes is often pointed out as evidence.

African authenticity. In sub-Saharan African cinemas, the occult has been both as the keeper of wisdom, knowledge and strength of traditions; and the disruptive force which explains all phenomena related to crisis or over which one has no control or to which one lacks access or the possibility to access.

A Multiplicity of Voices: the 2000s

African cinemas have developed since the Algiers and Niamey manifestos of the first decades after the independences, when a desire for a unity of voices around the ideology of the Pan African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI) was proclaimed. Nowadays, the movement is toward the appearance of a multiplicity of voices and cinematic styles that are influenced and inflected by the filmmaker's geographical locations in Africa, Europe or America; the politics of productions, intended audiences, festivals and distribution channels, and the filmmaker's individual approaches.[111] The filmmakers of what Diawara has dubbed the African New Wave are no longer interested in the question of "what African cinema" should be. Rather, they explore new aesthetic and narrative possibilities, which are not restricted to one essentialist idea of African authenticity and identity, so understandably cherished by the pioneers. The new wave of African filmmakers are no longer interested in applying an oppositional language to what is known as dominant American and European cinemas but are instead more concerned with taking their place in the arena of world cinemas. To achieve this aim, they do not hesitate to borrow from and to share with other directors.[112] This is not to say that the earlier trends of social criticism and political awareness have been abandoned. Rather, all the trends and tendencies touched upon above: the ridiculing of religious figures, magic realism, witchcraft, traditions vs modernity, religious pluralism and Christian and Muslim communities constitute the multiplicity of voices that are now sub-Saharan African cinemas.

To illustrate this claim, Cheick Fantamady Camara, in his *Il va Pleuvoir sur Conakry* (2006), offers a glimpse into the complexity of Guinean society through portrayals of Muslim and African indigenous religious figures, political representatives and activists; the dialectic between tradition and modernity; and conflicts between generations. In *Timbuktu*, Abderrahmane Sissako denounces fundamentalist Islam, which is choking the life out of this city, a place which against all odds remains a space of creativity and enchantment. *Daratt* (2006), by Mahamat Saleh Haroun, although focusing on post-war times, explores forgiveness, loneliness and father figures. Magical realism is further experimented with by Jean-Pierre Békolo in his *Les Saignantes,* which attempts to transform the very form of film into a ritual in order to be able to

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[111] Diawara 2010.
[112] Ibid.

participate in a strictly female rite.[113] *Safari Obscura* (2009), by South African filmmaker Anton Kotze, superimposes positive and saturated shots of urban and rural life, nature, Christian images and preaching, mosques, fetishes, masks, and dances in dream-like and at times cauchemardesque sequences, and takes on a trance-like journey through a complex and multi-layered Southern Africa. Mansour Sora Wade, with *Le Prix du Pardon* (2001), also ponreflects upon forgiveness through a reinterpretation of Senegalese rites and myths. Mark Dornford-May, in *Son of Man* (2006), contextualises the story of Jesus in Southern Africa, and portrays him as an activist and liberator.

Religious pluralism is reflected upon through films in which religious communities are in conflict with each other, or the story evolves through characters from various religious backgrounds. Such is the case in *Togetherness Supreme* (2010), directed by Kenyan Nathan Collett, where different youths try to navigate through the violence and poverty of the slum. Also from Kenya, *Watatu* (2015) by Nick Reding, gives voice to the minority Muslim community of coastal Kenya. Idrissa Ouédraogo, remains faithful to the precolonial times and forces with *La Colère des dieux* (2003); Sembene Ousmane, also true to himself, in *Mooladé* (2004) raises awareness regarding the appalling practice of genital excision, justified in the film by a local myth, and sanctioned by Islam.

In Nollywood and Ghanaian video, the systematic demonisation of indigenous African traditions and hypocritical, zealous preachers have not gone without critique. False prophets are unmasked in Ghanaian Kwaw Ansah's *Praising the Lord Plus One* (2013), Nana Obiri Yeboa's *The Cursed Ones* and Nigerian Teco Benson's *The Fake Prophet* (2010). Also, along with Pentecostal aesthetics and ethics in video space, a Muslim version of Nollywood, Kanywood (from Kano State), made its debut in the first years of the 2000s in northern Nigeria under the direction of pioneer Baba Karami.

The theme of witches, and child witches in particular, an issue which is taking alarming proportions in African societies, continues to be explored in Burkina Faso by S. Pierre Yaméogo in *Delwende* (2005); in Ghana with Nana Obiri Yeboa's *The Cursed Ones* (2015) and by Zambian-British Rungano Nyonin in *I Am Not a Witch* (2017).

The 2000s give a sense of boundless possibilities in terms of themes and aesthetics in sub-Saharan African cinemas. The straightjacket of FEPACI's manifestos and the decolonsing mission seems to have loosened the grip on the themes, narratives, aesthetics and genres of African cinemas. Religions are ever present in the fabric of the films and societies, as, for example, in Kotze's superimposed layers of dreams and nightmares.

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[113] De Groof 2014.

The Case Studies in Context

In this overview, I have mentioned each of the case studies as part of the general African film history. I attempted to contextualise them in the wider narrative of the religious and African cinemas. This has been done in order to show the trends they illustrate. The expectations attached to African films and their goals as education and/or entertainment are related to a more general creation of the African subject. This African subject, being the primary public, with which the spectator may identify has transformed and gained various facets and identities.

African cinemas endeavour, by educating or entertaining, to create an image of the subject with which the spectator can identify, and use familiar to her, understandings of religions and reproduce religious identities. As we have seen, religions and religious actors have played a considerable role in the histories of sub-Saharan African cinemas. Starting from the colonial period, myths of dangerous African traditions and superstitious beliefs personified in the erratic "witchdoctor" were constructed in contradistinction to Christianity and Christian morals. These myths anchored in the form of modernist dichotomies in the minds of the colonised were incredibly resilient, and the theme of tradition versus modernity is still occasionally explored in film. With the independences, African filmmakers quickly took up the role of recovering histories, beliefs and myths to the benefit of their audiences. The search for identity was in the first three decades to be conducted strictly within the limits of one's traditions and mythologies. When filmmakers turned to Christianity in their films, which, as we have seen, was actually not that often (not taking into account the video industries), they emphasised the role of Christianity as an accomplice to colonialism not taking into consideration the growing African Christian population; viewed African Christian initiatives with suspicion; and portrayed Christian figures as out of place, awkward or abusive. This general suspicious tendency toward Christianity will last until approximately the mid-1990s, with very few exceptions, and can be most clearly traced in *La Chapelle* and *Au Nom du Christ,* as fiction features that are entirely dedicated to the subject.

In the 1990s and especially in the 2000s, the video industry exploded The search for identity took other turns, and more cinematic voices arose. Christian figures started to be portrayed in a more positive light in sub-Saharan African films, and scriptures could now be interpreted from an African point of view, as is the case in *Genesis* and *Son of Man.* Christianity could now be fully incorporated into the African religious plurality by providing liberation (*Son of Man*) and putting the African continent on the Christian world map (*Genesis*).

I have tried to show that what is presented as an authentic image of African religious beliefs is always in relation, conversation or opposition to another image of religiosity, but not necessarily one coming from the African conti-

nent. Political or festival cinema forms its religious subject in contradistinction to the erratic African "witchdoctor" of Western cinema as well as the overzealous Nigerian Pentecostal preacher. In turn, the sorcerer and demons of Nollywood are portrayed on the one hand as a mimicry of Hollywood horror and gore and on the other as the healers, spirits and guardians of a communal order so cherished by magic realism.

The films that will be analysed in the following pages represent the various stages and paradigms explored. *La Chapelle* portrays the arrival of Christianity and its relation with colonial authority. *Au Nom du Christ* and *La Génèse* search in very different ways for an African identity, while *Son of Man* represents one of the many voices of the 2000s. These films illustrate the relational histories that play out on the continent in which Christianity and the Bible have been one of the key parts.

Chapter II: The Chapel and the Flag

The greatest lie colonialism ever told was that it brought God to Africa
Yes, they brought their Bibles but they did not bring God to our lands
Yes, they brought their churches but they did not bring God to our lands
Yes, they brought their guns but they did not bring God to our lands

Mwende "FreeQueency" Katwiwa, 2018[114]

Les cinéastes africains ne cessent de … s'interroger sur les voies et moyens de faire du cinema africain, c'est-à-dire du cinéma authentifiant les réalités africaines... Et ces réalités, ce sont les films qui s'efforcent de rendre le plus authentiques possible des valeurs africaines.

Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, 1969[115]

The story takes place in small village in the 1930s at some distance from the Great Lakes. A white[116] Catholic priest has ordered the villagers to build a chapel and comes in occasionally to check upon the progress. As he does not live in the village, the local schoolteacher and the catechist are in charge of supervision. The villagers are not very enthusiastic about the chapel, whose frame, which lacks solid walls and a roof, stands next to a flagpole bearing French colours. Its construction is seen by the villagers as an additional burden to their daily tasks, and they comply grudgingly. The plot intensifies gradually, through the loss of interest in the chapel, the arrival of a new teacher who attracts the young with his speeches of national emancipation, and the subse-

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[114] *The Gospel of Colonization,* 2018.
[115] African filmmakers keep envisioning ways and means of making African cinema, that is to say cinema that would authenticate African realities ... And in these realities, it is films which strive to make African values as authentic as possible. (Vieyra 1969, p. 201).
[116] It might be more "accurate" to characterize the priest as mixed-race. This has the potential to open avenues of exploring the historical role of mixed-race missionaries in the evangelizing process, as people who were able to navigate with perhaps relatively more ease between the colonial administration, the mission station and the locals. However, the background of the priest is not explored in the film, and we can only speculate when it comes to his position outside the realm of the specific village portrayed. It is clear however that his multiracial origin does not make him closer to the villagers. He is unable to communicate with then in any other language than French, and they refer to him as being "white", and so this is how I refer to him in the analysis as well. It is not about the colour of his skin, rather who and what he represents.

quent growing dissatisfaction of the elder schoolteacher who, driven by bitterness, sets fire to the chapel. The village's healer is accused of the deed. He is captured by the militia, who burn his house and, along with it, all the sacred objects. The film ends with a military march, and the priest, having fulfilled his duties and having restored order, is carried out from the village on a tipoï.[117]

La Chapelle belongs to the category of films that look at Christianity through the prism of colonialism. It associates the presence of missionaries, evangelisation and conversion as intrinsically linked to the colonial endeavour and thus resists the symbols of Christianity. In film, resistance is meant as the negative cinematographic critique of a religious tradition. This negative critique is commonly directed at "the harm [religions] do to human beings or … the false view of the world that they present".[118] The critique may tackle ideas, beliefs, practices, institutions or individuals. It can be one-sided or nuanced. In the case of the latter, a film can attack the politics of the institution but be sympathetic to the tradition's spiritual component, with the Roman Catholic Church or Pentecostal and Charismatic churches as the usual suspects in American and European cinemas.

On the sub-Saharan cinematic scene, the critique of religious traditions often goes in tandem with the critique of colonialism and the postcolonial situation and especially discourses surrounding tradition/modernity, history, heritage and culture. I have written in the previous chapter that the engaged and critical attitude of filmmakers driven by the view of cinema as a means of education and self-reflection involved questioning the place of religions and religious actors within society's development and identity. In this chapter, this engagement will produce a reversed image of the idea of Africa as a Western construct.

La Chapelle focuses on the encounter between Christianity and local practices through colonisation and the main tenets of the civilising mission – evangelisation and education. It tells the story from the points of view of the colonised, reversing the gaze in an attempt to counter the myth of the African continent as being in need of saving. *La Chapelle* reflects African cinema of the first period, which saw decolonisation primarily as a project in which colonial myths are deconstructed in the process of self-definition and expression. Its focus on the missionary endeavour as an accomplice of the colonial administration portrays the proponents of Christianity as uninterested in actual peoples' lives, as erasing established practices, and, most importantly, as providing a view of exclusivist knowledge in comparison to the existing systems of belief and knowledge. The following analysis will endeavour to show how the demythologising process is performed in the film, answering two interrelated questions: what images/myths were associated with the African continent and

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[117] It is a type of litter. In the film, it takes four men to carry the pot-bellied priest.
[118] Blizek 2009, p. 39.

what images does the film provide in counteraction? Concurrently, we will discover in the process that, together with the demythologising, the complicated relation of negation/appropriation will inadvertently surface through the portrayals of the characters, evidencing what Jean and John Comaroff call the "long conversation":[119] The idea that in the encounter between the colonial administrator, the missionary and the local, all the actors are drawn into a conversation, in which they cannot avoid terms, thoughts or forms of discourses that will influence and change their worlds. This encounter is thus better understood in terms of a combination of attitudes that involve challenge, riposte, negotiation, inversion and oppression.

I will start the analysis with exploring which idea of Africa was constructed in colonial mission and missionary films, looking at the themes and devices used to convey that idea. I will then focus on the background and context of *La Chapelle* in order to address the question of publics, transnational circulation and the field of culture. The context of the film is important to understand the addressees and the publics of the deconstruction of the colonial idea of Africa, and how the film creates its own discourse about African authentic religion and culture.

Colonial Films, Religious Traditions and the Idea of Africa

The present section will look at the construction of the African myth. As mentioned in the previous chapter, films of the colonial period portrayed local religious traditions and practitioners as dangerous and backward, impeding progress and civilization

Missionaries were most concerned with the religious growth of local populations. It is therefore not surprising that it is in their work where we find most emphasis on religious representations. However, since cinema was considered a powerful tool for propaganda, the missions' cinematic initiatives were not out of the control of the colonising powers. Films made by missionaries and commissioned by colonial administrations agreed on what was essential – the justified presence of Europeans in Africa.[120] Missionaries organised screenings as a way to attract and evangelise local populations; produced pictures promoting the work of the mission, mainly for the audiences back home; and sponsored and worked with educational reels for the locals. Mission initiatives in cinema on the continent resulted in educational films, missionary films, fiction films with missionary and/or religious themes and films

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[119] Comaroff & Comaroff 1991, p. 213.
[120] Ramirez & Rolot 1985, p. 281.

made by missionaries using the ethnographic and travelogue narrative structure.[121] These genres do not have clear-cut differences but emphasize various themes and target different audiences. By representing colonisers, missions and locals, they played their part in the formation of the ideas of difference, tradition and modernity, which will be on centre stage in the later process of decolonisation, influencing the portrayals of Christianity and traditional African traditional religions in sub-Saharan African films, and contributing to embedding the dichotomy of tradition and modernity, which will haunt, in different hypostases, the sub-Saharan cinematic scene up to this century.

Evangelisation and Missionaries

A reality of the colony appeared in films promoting the mission's work, commonly named "missionary films" and best defined as films shot in the mission field by missionaries and which introduced the mission to a European audience.[122] Evangelisation was shown primarily through the good works of the mission. Missionaries began to film the fruits of their labour as schools and hospitals were built, and these reels were very popular within the congregations back home. In 1926 in England, for example, the Missionary Film Committee (MFC) was launched, with T.H. Baxter as Secretary and with support from five organizations: Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, Church Missionary Society (CMS), London Missionary Society; Society for the Propagation for the Gospel; and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society.[123] Baxter, accompanied by a cinematographer, left in 1927 to produce *Africa To-day*, which "had an extraordinarily successful four weeks' run at the Polytechnic Cinema. Since then it has been shown in about 100 towns meetings with warm appreciation and encouraging results".[124] The London Missionary Society, with two cameras ceaselessly shooting from one colony to the next, sent material back to London and entertained its mainly church audiences with exotic images and proofs of the good work of the mission.

Similar films were made about the French mission, the titles of some of which give already a clear idea of the agenda – *Les Missions évangéliques du Congo Belge* (1920), *Le Vrai Visage de l'Afrique: "Chez les buveurs de sang"* (1930), *Fétichisme* (1922) and *De la barbarie à la civilisation chrétienne* (1929). Even countries that did not have colonies, but which had mission stations, commissioned films to promote the missionary work. The Svenska Mis-

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[121] The Salvation Army had made 13 films in India by 1906, and the Mill Hill Missionaries were making films in Uganda and other parts of the Empire by the early 1920s. In South Africa, the London Missionary Society showed films to its students in their Tiger Kloof School in the 1920s (Reynolds 2015, p. 81).
[122] Gooding 2010.
[123] Reynolds 2015, p. 82.
[124] Ibid.

sionsförbundet (Swedish Missionary Society), for example, employed renowned cinematographer Sven Nykvist, Ingmar Bergman's collaborator and the son of missionaries who worked in Congo. Nykvist filmed *I Fetischmannens spår* (1984), *Natten Försvinner* (1948), *Bisi Congo* (1950) and *Vördnad för livet* (1952), the latter concerning Albert Schweitzer.

One of the main elements common to these produced images, which will be reflected back in *La Chapelle,* is their unambiguous rendering of the colonial realities. For Francis Gooding from the British colonial film project, these films aimed to "enlighten their audience principally about the nature, scope and history of missionary work, and so their ideological content tends not to be driven by any very complex colonial concerns".[125] The goal, along with fund raising, was to show the necessity of the missionary endeavour, and for that to be achieved, the message had to be straightforward. The films portray the missionaries as courageous and hard working in a hostile environment, so the point was not really to educate the audiences at home in regards to the places and people where and among whom the missionaries work but rather to show that more work needs to be done. This partly explains the staged scenes with erratic "witchdoctors" and exotic scenery. These images were also not unreflective of the existing prejudices cultivated by popular culture, travelogues and literature.

Missionaries and mission organisations were also involved in the production of commercial adventure melodramas and were often the main protagonists in such features. The films present similar patterns and trends of representation of Africa illustrating a transnational circulation and influence of images. They show not only stereotypical images but also illustrate how the production of culture was a web of interrelated elements, following cultural, ideological and political trends and attitudes of the colonising countries as well as the fluctuations of the cinematic industry.

The feature *Livingstone* (1925), for example, illustrates how cinema and the mission endeavour in Africa were tied to concerns regarding British morals. It was supported by a few religious organisations, including of course Livingstone's own London Missionary Society and thirteen additional businesses provided supplies and equipment.[126] The film was presented as an attempt to counteract a modernity that was exemplified by American cinema and to reclaim and re-establish both traditional British values and a British cultural imperial industry.[127] Livingsgtone's stance and work against slavery was understood to be at the core of British morality and as a justification of British presence on the continent. The film received generally positive responses from the clergy. The bishop of London commented: "I thoroughly believe that these

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[125] Gooding 2010.
[126] The London Missionary Society gave £200 in exchange for the rights to show the film in Glasgow for several days (Rapp & Weber 1989, p. 3).
[127] Gooding 2010.

films will be more effective than any sermons we ever preached in our lives". This resonated with the growing worry that British youth was led astray by the very popular American films with dubious morals and "half-clothed courtesans", and *Livingstone* was expected to "…fire the imagination of youth as nothing else can do" and bring back traditional British values.[128] Such films not only provided a picture of the colonised but also an ideal of how the coloniser imagined himself.

As I mentioned above, there was no great ideological distinction between the colonial administration and the missionary endeavour in terms of cinema, meaning that the state also funded films and the mission films. In the case of France, as in case of Livingstone, France wanted to portray its heroes, especially after World War II. *Il est Minuit Dr Schweitzer* (*It's Midnight, Dr Schweitzer*, 1953) tells the tale of Dr Schweitzer – a Nobel Prize winner, physician, Bach expert, theologian – who worked relentlessly all his life to build and run a hospital in Lambaréné, Gabon. Directed by André Haguet, with Pierre Fresnay in the lead role, *Il est Minuit* contributes to the pantheon of the colonial apostolate.[129] The feature builds on the familiar tropes and stays within the usual limits of justification, reiterating the necessity of the European presence by underlining the savagery of locals sacrificing children. It also touches upon the idea that, in the West, morals, values and notions of humanity have become corrupted. The European can redeem himself now only in virgin places, where there is real purpose to be found in helping others achieve salvation – physically and spiritually –and to live a moral and ethical life. Africa is not just the "land" of riches and resources necessary for Western growth and progress, it is also the land of redemption, where one could atone for the horrors of the war. Missionaries were portrayed as unsung heroes, akin to explorers but better, who had taken the moral high ground by bringing light into the dark corners of the world.

Peoples, Traditions and Religious Practices in the Colonies

Looking at the *Mill Hill Fathers Uganda Missionary Film* (1920), part of the *Mill Hill Sheds Light on the Dark Places on Earth* series by St. Joseph' Missionary Society, gives an idea of how missionary films were constructed and of some of the themes of interest. Again, the purpose was to show the necessity of continuing the mission's work. The film portrays its mission stations at Nsambya and Nagalama. It starts with shots of missionaries in England and then moves on to show the arrival of new recruits to the colonies where they are welcomed by Bishop Biermans. The film does not show local Christian

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128 Gooding 2010.
129 Bosséno 1990, p. 74.

converts[130] but rather unfolds like a typical travelogue with the main elements: shots of landscapes, villages, cattle, people in their habitats, and men and their customs ("toying" with snakes and drinking blood straight from a bull's neck, in the captions described as "Human Vampire"). For this reason, the films are to be understood not as historical documents portraying the actual processes of Christianisation and colonisation but instead as mirroring the tastes, prejudices, ideals, and morals of the civilising mission.

Educational films constituted another important genre as idealisations of the civilizing mission. Made under the auspices of missionaries, they tackled two of what were considered the main evils of African societies: "witchdoctors" – in *From Fear to Faith* (1946) and *The Story of Bamba* (1937) – and polygamy – in *The Devil Fights Back* (Rwanda) and *Candida* (Ghana), both from the 1950s. These practices and their practitioners were to be stifled all at costs. In South Africa, missionary Ray Phillips, who in the beginning of the 1920s established a small bioscope programme for African children in Johannesburg with his colleague Frederick Bridgman, produced *The African Witchdoctor and the Way Out.* This film was made, according to film scholar Glenn Reynolds, for African audiences and American church groups. It critiqued Zulu medicinal practices and thus by extension promoted Western medicine. Phillips and his crew wanted to film Shangase, a renowned Zulu healer, who lived outside Durban. As Reynolds writes, expecting a Zulu in full regalia, they were disappointed when Shangase emerged from his hut to greet them wearing a t-shirt and pants and later, when demonstrating his skills, used Western objects such as a stethoscope and a blade with which he would make incisions.[131] This incident reveals the discrepancies between cinematic portrayals of Africa and Africans and the realities of the growing industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation of colonies having access to European goods. It demonstrates that Africans were not just "filmed" in their natural habitat, as the French ethnographic films attempted to show the *natural* man.[132] Rather, acting and re-enacting rituals, dances and ceremonies was already common practice.

In the 1930s, despite the scarcity of funds, mission societies actively work on projects involving film production in African colonies. There was interest not only from British, French, Belgian, Swedish missionary societies, but also within American denominations. With the agency of Emory Ross (Disciples of Christ) The Africa Motion Picture Project was created, which produced *Africa Joins the World* (1936) from a collage of 100 amateurish reels,[133] and sent

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[130] There were well-established Christian communities, both Catholic and Protestant in Uganda at that time. It might be enough to mention that the Catholic Church canonized in 1964 the martyrs of Buganda executed in the 1880s.
[131] Reynolds 2015, p. 112.
[132] Bloom 2008.
[133] Reynolds 2015, p. 82.

a professional crew to the Belgian Congo, under the sponsorship of the Harmon Foundation[134] and eight mission boards. This project, led by filmmaker Ray Garner, resulted in films focusing on health and medicine (*Song after Sorrow*), and showing the consequences of witchcraft and superstition, as opposed to Western medicine (*The Story of Bamba*).[135]

Similar goals were pursued in such commercial films as *Common Round* (1935) and *From Fear to Faith* (1946). Both productions were sponsored by Arthur Rank, a millionaire and member of the Methodist Church, who set up the British National Films company in 1934, an organisation, which intended to produce educational and religious films as a counterpart to mainstream cinema. *Common Ground,* directed by Stephen Harrisson, tells the story of the lone missionary fighting against the evil "witchdoctor" for the salvation and lives of his flock. The trope of the courageous and stoic white man dedicated to trying to save the natives from themselves is repeated here. Against this grain, the natives (as no indication of location is given, the generic image of Africa is thus reinforced) are viewed as either helpless or downright murderous. Health and prosperity are restored in the village through the sheer moral force and determination of both the missionary and the doctor.

Education

Also during the 1930s colonial administrations become interested in cinema as an educational tool for African audiences and turned to missionaries for partnership. One of the most well-known projects for such colonial propagandist films was the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE), conducted in Tanganyika, Nyasaland (Malawi), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Kenya and Uganda. Discussions regarding the project started in 1927 and resulted in a report published in 1932 which emphasised the utility of cinema as an educational tool but also warned against showing European material: "The backward races within the Empire … can gain more and suffer more from the film than the sophisticated European, because to them the power of the medium is intensified."[136] BEKE was launched in 1935. Its architect was John Merle Davis from the International Missionary Council. It was supported by the British Colonial Office, the International Missionary Council and the Carnegie Trust. Davis was concerned with the massive labour migration into Northern Rhodesia's Copperbelt area and planned to use films as "a means of bridging and reconfiguring the increasing divisions between young mission educated elite and their unschooled tribal elders."[137] He was also worried about the popularity of what were considered morally suspicious Hollywood films and their

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[134] The Harmon Foundation worked for the promotion of African American art.
[135] Reynolds 2015, p. 82.
[136] Rice 2010.
[137] Ibid.

potential effects on the moral welfare of the local audiences.[138] Davis' aims were to uncover the African's preference for films, determine the technique of film production best suited to the mentality of different types of Africans (the educated, the partially detribalised native, the primitive villager). These social groups appear, as we will see, in *La Chapelle,* and the portrayal of these different characters will work towards challenging the idea that the civilising mission and education bring prosperity to the colonised subject.

BEKE was run by Leslie A. Notcutt and Geoffrey Latham. From March 1935 to May 1937, they produced thirty-five black-and-white films covering topics such as soil erosion, infant malaria, Boy Scouts to taxes. In the first two years of its existence, , the BEKE team travelled throughout East Africa showing these and other educational films to over 100,000 people. When they ceased to secure funding in 1937, Notcutt and Latham "proposed a scheme for putting the production of films for backward races on a permanent footing",[139] and two years later, in 1939, the Colonial Film Unit was established to persuade African audiences to support Britain through World War II.

The idea of educational films produced for specifically African audiences sparked various responses among scholars and commentators. Tom Rice has pointed out that, on the one hand, the experiment has been hailed as an African project, since these were films made for Africans, enacted by Africans, and even sometimes written by Africans.[140] On the other hand, the films, Rice reminds us, followed a method of filmmaking specifically tailored for Africans by William Sellers, who argued that the Africans' cognitive capacities were not developed enough to fully understand European film techniques.[141] For film scholar F. O. Shaka, the educational films, or, as he calls them, instructional films, should be viewed as a separate genre of films produced in Africa. According to him, these were not part of the African colonialist films and African colonialist discourse because of the films' essential goals. The films, he claims:

> [t]each Africans modern methods of social development, hence the emphasis on film as a teaching aid, on modern medicine, modern methods of farming, banking, village and urban planning for hygienic purposes, and co-operative societies. The films do not represent Africans as lacking knowledge of these things; they merely posit them as doing things in the old and traditional ways.[142]

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[138]As Westerns were particularly popular, the dubious morals of the heroes concerned the colonial administration, who saw those portrayals as a potential threat to the moral superiority of the whites that they were advocating.

[139] Rice 2010.

[140] Rosaleen Smyth argued that prizes were given to elite African students at the Makere College for the best script (Reynolds 2015).

[141] Rice 2010.

[142] Shaka 2004, p. 172.

For Shaka, then, the reels might have been paternalistic in their form – the filming techniques tailored to an African mind – but they were not as propagandist and racist as Hollywood and European fiction and documentary productions made at the same time.[143]

BEKE also illustrates the link between cinema and the economic production of the colony, namely, the necessity of justifying the work in the colonies. One idea the films perpetuate is that knowledge and civilisation, with all their benefits, could come only from the European. Similarly, the BEKE project contributed to the indoctrination of the tradition/modernity dichotomy, in which tradition is necessarily wrong or outdated. Those living in urban spaces or mining compounds with access to the goods of civilisation and Christian morals came to see the traditional village settings as backward, superstitious and uncivilised.

Such ideas can be easily seen in the above-mentioned *From Fear to Faith*. The plot builds around the opposition of the Christian and the traditional. The difference now is that the main protagonist is a Southern Rhodesian who grew up in a mission station and goes back to his village to teach and preach. He is the model for the generation of the so-called *évolué*, who, properly educated, can be at the forefront of the nation. *From Fear to Faith* was produced by the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation and was sponsored by Arthur Rank's Religious Films Ltd.[144] The film was shot in Mashonaland (near Umtali, present-day Mutare, Zimbabwe).[145] Missionaries were present in the area already in the 1890s and provided education and sometimes dormitories. According to F. Gooding, until the first government school for Africans opened in 1921 in the area, the only education service available to African children was through the missions. Shoniwa, the main character of the film, is a twin who was saved from certain death at birth since, according to the narrator, in Mashonaland, when twins were born, one was put to death. One of the villagers saved Shoniwa and brought him to a mission station, where he was raised. The film opens with the captions: "Until the missionary came to Southern Rhodesia, the inhabitants were primitive, superstitious and full of fear. But the courage, faith and teaching of the missionary led to many becoming Christians".[146] Again, the suffering village is at the mercy of the erratic and gesticulating rainmaker, whose portrayal takes us back to the footage produced by the Mill Hill Fathers two decades earlier. The opposition between the ignorant-traditional and the educated-Christian is constructed through Shoniwa's flashbacks of a happy life at the mission in sequences portraying clean, singing children neatly dressed in European clothes, and their devoted teachers.

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[143] How tailoring techniques for a special underdeveloped African mind can be considered as less racist than other cinematic representations of Africans as inferior is a mystery to me.
[144] *From Fear to Faith,* 1946.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.

The emphasis on clothing, signalling discipline, cleanliness and orderliness is important and transpires in *La Chapelle* as well. Birgit Meyer, in her study of German missionaries in Togo, has pointed out that "Clothes were an inalienable marker of the new religion"[147] and became a symbol of the modern African with new knowledge, economical means and a smaller family unit. These were desirable things, an aspect that Meyer also considers part of the success of evangelisation. The downside is that, in film, the contrast between the old and new is heightened and again transforms tradition into something primitive and negative. In these features, the opposition between the clean and orderly, and thus desirable, Western dress and the dirty rags and loincloths of the heathens and the uncivilised is obvious. Shoniwa, with determination, resists the actions of the "witchdoctor" and the inhospitable environment and with his knowledge of agriculture and medicine finally becomes a member of the community. All ends well with a wedding and brothers' love, and as a caption shown at the end confirms: "It is the eternal spirit that has done all this".[148]

Mission initiatives and portrayals of missionaries in film on the African continent have contributed to the myth of the African as backward and savage, and whose religions were denigrated. These films present a one-sided perspective, one reflecting the aspirations and ideals of the film producers in relation to Western societies, and should not be taken uncritically as documenting Christianisation. Conversion to Christianity was much more complex and less related to a radical break with traditions than the films would have us believe. Nor do they portray the already established Christian congregations. Furthermore, African priests are never shown independently from the mission stations. The beginnings of African Christianities were not part of the imagery that colonial and missionary films provided. The films did, however, serve to contribute to the indoctrination of the tradition/modernity dichotomy, and these myths will have a profound effect on African identities. The first generation of filmmakers, by reverseing the gaze, sought to debunk them in an attempt to repair the loss of identity. Using *La Chapelle,* by Jean-Michel Tchissoukou (Republic of Congo), as an example, is to this gaze that we will now turn.

The Cinematic Context of *La Chapelle*

Cinema in the Republic of Congo

As mentioned in the previous chapter, cinemas appeared in the colonies as entertainment to cater mainly to the European population. In the French

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[147] Meyer 1997, p. 322.
[148] *From Fear to Faith*, 1946.

Congo, according to film scholar Joseph Soba, the first projections of films in Brazzaville date back to 1916 in a café owned by a Portuguese merchant. Gréadually, permanent cinemas began to appear in the city for the benefit of the European population but also for African officials who could afford it. By the 1940s, cinemas opened in other cities as well, such as Bacongo, Poto-Poto and Pointe Noire. In addition, by the 1940s, the French distribution companies Secma and Cofacico (the latter, part of the Comafico consortium) established their monopoly as in other French African colonies. In 1965, the French cultural centre inaugurated the cinema club of Brazzaville, which would have the promotion of Congolese cinema as its goal. By 1966, there were three cinemas in Brazzaville.

Congolese cinema appeared after the independence in 1960, and, according to filmmaker Sébastien Kamba, its history starts with the introduction of television in Congo in 1962.[149] Congo was the first francophone country to have television, where filmmakers and technicians were formed before the creation of structures such as the CACP (Centre d'Animation du Cinéma Populaire)[150] and the ONACI (Office National du Cinema).[151] By 1969, the Republic of Congo was already represented at the first Festival Panafricain d'Alger (The Algiers Panafrican Cultural Festival) by Sébastien Kamba with two shorts – *Kaka Yo* and *Apea.*

The CACP was created in 1975 to realise the aspirations of the Congolese authorities. The mission of the CACP was threefold: to encourage the creation of a national cinema, with the goal of enabling the Congolese to get better acquainted with their country and history, and to make this history and culture known to other countries; to ensure the distribution of films and the development of a non-commercial sector; and to train Congolese filmmakers and introduce new technologies.[152]

The French companies retained a monopoly on film distribution until the Congolese state, which gradually worked towards taking over the industry, finally succeeded in doing so in 1979 by creating the ONACI. For Soba, the will of the state to take over the cinematic industry was related to the government's sympathies towards Marxism-Leninism (between 1968 and 1990) and a revolutionary ideal that strove to break with economic, political and cultural structures inherited from colonisation.[153] Interestingly, the influence of Marxism-Leninism can be seen in Tchissoukou's film as well as the film's obvious pedagogical stance.

Unfortunately, the state failed to sustain the cinematic infrastructures. Through a history of indifference, mismanagement and nepotism,[154] the

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[149] Kamba 1992, p. 15.
[150] The Popular Cinema Animation Centre.
[151] The National Office for Cinema.
[152] Soba 2020, p. 167.
[153] Ibid, p. 165.
[154] Kamba 1992.

ONACI, hampered by crippling debt, was finally dismantled in 1990.[155] A cursory consideration of the films produced in between the 1960s and early 1980s reveals that films were funded by different bodies, such as the Congolese television, the Congolese Labour Party, the Congolese state – represented by the ONACI, and the French state – represented by the CNC. In fact, all feature films were co-productions made in cooperation with France, which attests to a lack of local infrastructure.

The Film's Background

It is in this context informed by a general willingness to dismantle colonialism's legacies at a national and regional ideological level but also by a lack of funding that necessitated the participation of the French state that *La Chapelle* was produced. In this section, I will look at how, through the example of *La Chapelle,* marked political films were expected at the time to provide a radical message, especially for festival audiences and publics. It will also show that when these expectations were met, films came to adhere to a certain field of culture and could make authenticity claims. At the same time, the modes of production tied films and their filmmakers to movements of global and symbolic capital and, in this particular case, to a multileveled French influence that will threaten the same idea of African authenticity.

La Chapelle was commissioned as a non-commercial film, meaning that it was not to be shown in cinemas as a means to generate profit. The non-commercial exploitation of African films was at the time in question the practice of the CNC, a practice which starting in the 1980s was severely criticised for making filmmakers entirely dependent upon further subsidies and funds from the same agencies.

*La Chapelle'*s rights were sold to the South African M-Net broadcasting company for a period of 25 years.[156] Because the film is little known, information on it is scanty and sometimes incorrect. In the *Africultures* online magazine description of the film, Mbissine Diop writes that "The first production of the Gabonese National Office for Cinema, 'La Chapelle' was a success".[157] Where it was a success is not stated, and we only have the selection of the film at the Festival des 3 Continents in 1980 and FESPACO in 1981 as evidence of screening outside the Republic of Congo. What is now sure, however, with

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[155] For an account of these processes, see Soba 2020.
[156] From a personal email communication with Renée Gagnon, former General Manager at Marfilmes (April 2021). I am greatly indebted to Renée Gagnon, as I came across *La Chapelle* through her. I was inquiring about Roger Gnoan M'Bala's film *Bouka,* and explained my research project. She immediately recommended *La Chapelle* and sent me one of the last DVD copies Marfilmes had in stock. Marfilmes is a Portuguese distribution company that specialises in the diffusion of feature films and documentaries from Portugal and Africa. The quotes from the film are taken from the 2009 DVD version.
[157] "Première production de l'Office Nationale du Cinéma au Gabon, « La Chapelle » fut un succès" (Diop 2002).

the retrieval of two contracts related to the film,[158] is that it is not Gabonese but rather a French-Congolese co-production.

La Chapelle was written, produced and directed by Jean-Michel Tchissoukou. He was born 12 May 1942 in Pointe-Noire. His career as filmmaker started in 1963 when he joined Congolese television as an animator. After admission to the OCORA[159] (Office de Cooperation Radiophonique) in France, he returned to Congolese television in 1966 and worked first as a camera operator and then as chief camera operator and production manager and, finally, as programme director. He gained further qualifications by completing an internship at the National Audio-Visual Institute (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel INA) after which he became director of photography (cinematographer). In October 1979, Tchissoukou became Director of Cinematographic Production at the ONACI. In Sebastien Kamba's rather critical account of the institution, a lot rested on the individual that was in power and the politics of the Labour Party with its Marxist-Leninist inclinations. While it is true that Kamba worked in the same television/film circles as Tchissoukou, one ought take Kamba's critically, especially when it comes to personal relations. For Kamba, Tchissoukou arrived at his post only because he was the "clansman" of Thystère Tchicaya, who had a position of power within party and who decided to promote people from his region. Apparently, a script destined for Kamba was instead given to Tchissoukou, who did a very poor job. This created animosity between the two, and, according to Kamba's account, *La Chapelle* only received an honorary prize at the Carthage Film Festival. There is no mention of FESPACO 1981, for example.

Tchissoukou directed several programmes, both live and pre-recorded, for television. His filmography includes: *Les Illusions* (1971), a short black-and-white film focused on the rural exodus of young people to the cities, and *L'enfant et la Famille* (1979), a 40-minute film shot in colour and produced by UNICEF and the National Committee for the International Year of the Child.[160] *La Chapelle* is his first feature film, and the second, *Les Lutteurs* (1982), seems to have hindered his career. Again, according to Kamba, the film was extremely badly received, by critics and audiences alike. This is what perhaps led to Tchissoukou losing his position as director of production to Bernard Lounda.

La Chapelle's timeline can be traced from the contracts and festival descriptions. The first mention of the project was in August 1979. The script was

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[158] The contracts are preserved in the archives of the CNC housed at the Régistre Public de la Cinématographie, now called Registres du Cinema et de l'Audiovisuel.

[159] A school and studio established in 1962, and successor to the SORAFOM (1955-1962 Société de Radiodiffusion de la France d'Outre-Mer), specialising in both radio and music.

[160] In his book on Congolese cimema, Sébastien Kamba claims that he was originally commissioned by the representative from UNICEF to do the film but, because of the structures based on individuals in power and incentives, Tchissoukou received the project instead (Kamba 1992, p.30).

accepted by the film agencies from the French Ministry of Culture in the autumn, and by December Tchissoukou had transferred the copyrights to the ONACI (Office National du Cinema du Congo/National Office for Cinema of Congo) in Brazzaville. The deadline for the completion of the film was set for May 1980, so both shooting and postproduction were carried out intensively in the spring. The feature was registered at the CNC on 21 November 1980. When the film was released in Congo is unfortunately unknown, but in December 1980 it premiered internationally at the Nantes 3 Continents festival. In the spring of 1981, it received the Prix de l'Authenticité Africaine[161] at FESPACO. Since the film was produced for non-commercial exploitation, it is impossible to know how it fared.

According to Sébastien Kamba, *La Chapelle* was the only feature film to be financed by the national office, although Soba adds that Tchissoukou's subsequent *Les Lutteurs* (1981) and Kamba's own *Le 20ème anniversaire de la revolution* (1983), with funding from the Congolese Labour Party[162] certainly did benefit from the national office's technical support and infrastructure. What co-production with France meant at that time, which can be seen in the contract, was that the French state had complete control over the whole process of shooting, had the right to check at any given time the process of production, and could interrupt or stop altogether production.[163] Being a coproduction also meant that the film could be shown at film festivals under the banner of France,[164] which served to enhance France's status as culturally diverse and its reputation as champion of the arts.

La Chapelle is a typical example of the complex transnational relationship African films and filmmakers had and continue to have with the French state. In the first post-independence decades, France played the role of main funder of films pertaining to socio-political critique, helping filmmakers to work against the censure of their own governments, a move that simultaneously enhanced its own prestige. Such dependence on French funds exposes the awkward position in which African filmmakers on the continent found and find themselves. The continuous aid based on decentralised funding bodies does not contribute to a sustainable infrastructure and reinforces the vicious circle in which, without the support of French or European funding, there would be a cinematic desert.[165] It explains to a certain degree the inclination of African

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[161] The African Authenticity Prize. *La Chapelle* was the last film to receive the authenticity prize, showing a shift in cinematic developments. Before 1981, the prize had been given three times: to *Hydre Dyama* (dir. Moussa Kemoko Diakité, Guinee, 1972), *Identité* (dir. Pierre-Marie Dong, Gabon, 1973), and *Soleil des hyènes* (dir. Ridha Behi, Tunisia, 1979).
[162] Le Parti Congolais du Travail.
[163] The contract was registered at the CNC on 21 November 1980.
[164] This practice in an ongoing one. For example, the Uppsala French Film Festival has access to the database of the French Institute, which holds a number of films coproduced with France and which can be shown as French films regardless of the film's language or the nationality of the director.
[165] Barlet 2012.

francophone cinemas towards non-commercial, educational cinema. Such cinema was more likely to secure funding. Moreover, the existent production networks and lack of distribution channels geared the consumption of films towards mainly film festivals. This is in turn interpreted as a sign of French cultural hegemony over the film production, which by promoting such films and encouraging their production pushes forward its own culture, and contributes to the formation of a French cultural heritage through the idea of Francophonie.[166] It also opens up for the critique of the "authenticity" of African films made for non-African audiences, which prompts scholars like Randal Halle to view transnational film funding systems as networks of neo-orientalist influences.[167]

Such transnational production processes defy neat categories of the creation and subversion of images and ideas even in the case of such a straightforward film as *La Chapelle.* It echoes V. Y. Mudimbe's reasoning in *The Invention of Africa* (1988) that:

> Africa as a coherent ideological and political entity was invented with the advent of European expansion and continuously re-invented by traditional Africana and diasporan intellectuals, not to mention metropolitan intellectuals and ideological apparatuses, educational institutions, and then attendant disciplines, traveller accounts, popular media and so forth.[168]

The processes indicate and foreground the intrinsic relational character of images and films which, in presenting narratives of subversion, are inextricably bound to the ideas they endeavour to oppose. The same transnational processes create and point to the influence of different actors within the field of cultural production.

In the archives of the CNC, I have found a review from the film journal *Adhoua*, which in 1981, the second year of its existence, published articles related to the films shown at FESPACO 1981. The review is interesting, as it paints a picture in which the criterion for a good feature was at that time the extent of its radicalism and is worth quoting:

> There [in *La Chapelle*] emerged the themes of the acculturation of the African countryside under the combined influence of missionaries and teachers, bearers of colonial culture's values; the themes around the struggle between the ancient powers (the village chief and the "witchdoctor") better adapted to the African realities and the new powers (modern knowledge and imported religion); and around the generational struggle (the younger teacher against the old people of the village), the struggle of oppressors and enlightened and progressive young people (the young teacher).

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[166] The Francophonie is an institution that promotes French language and collaboration between french-speaking countries. The term itself has become a cultural marker.
[167] Halle 2010.
[168] Mudimbe 1988, p. 23.

And suddenly, the film flips and dilutes in a sentimental plot. On stage remain only the actors of a tragicomedy, from which true conflicts are erased. Will the ugly teacher prevail over the young, pure and innocent teacher? To which side will the village turn? Well no, justice will triumph and so will the love between the revolutionary teacher and the pretty schoolgirl.

In the end, we are left hungry. After a promising beginning where the tension of the conflict is in the colonial context, the film is reduced to a sentimental drama, to which only the costumes give a historical character. The initial intentions are unfortunately bogged down along the way into third-class commercial film.[169]

The last paragraph especially illustrates the kinds of film audiences and critics at festivals wanted to see, and in which field of culture African films of that period navigated in. In Congo the film was well received by the public, although historians felt that the rendering of the period – the 1930s – was inaccurate.[170] Notwithstanding the ambiguities surrounding the film, what is of interest for our present purposes is the matter of the endeavours made to rid minds of the coloniser's past, teachings, structures and ideas and the matter of how the film engages with subversion.

*La Chapelle'*s Oppositional Gaze

Senegalese filmmaker Mahama Johnson Traoré stated in an interview "The first films we saw were those projected by missionaries."[171] This utterance shows the potential influence these films had on the new generation of filmmakers. It also points to the ambiguous position missions and missionaries hold in the discourses of emancipation by Africans themselves. We will see in the course of the following section that despite a very firm oppositional stance and critique of the missionary endeavour, traces of the Comaroffs'

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[169] "Là s'esquissaient les thèmes de la deculturation des campagnes Africaines sous l'influence conjuguée des missionnaires et des instituteurs, porteurs de valeurs de la culture colonialiste; les thèmes de la lutte entre les pouvoirs anciens (le chef et le sorcier), mieux adaptés aux réalités africaines et les pouvoirs nouveaux (le savoir moderne et la réligion importée), de la lutte des générations (le jeune instituteur contre les gens agés du village), le combat des oppresseurs et des jeunes gens éclairés et progressistes (le jeune instituteur).
Et tout à coup, le film bascule et se dilue dans une intrigue sentimentale. Restent en scène les acteurs d'une tragie-comédie, d'où les vrais conflits sont évacués à force de simplisme..? le vilain instituteur l'emportera-t-il par ses manoeuvres crapuleuses sur le jeune, pur, dur et innocent? Le village basculera-t-il d'un côté ou de l'autre? Eh bien non, la justice triomphera et l'amour entre l'instituteur révolutionnaire et la jolie écolière aussi. En définitive, nous restons sur notre faim. Après des débuts prometteurs où la tension du conflit s'inscrit dans le contexte colonial, le film se réduit à un drame sentimental, auquel seuls les costumes donnent un caractère historique. Les intentions de départ s'enlisent malheureusement en cours de route en images de film commercial de troisieme zone." (*Adhoua* 1981, p. 30).
[170] Kamba 1992, p. 47.
[171] Interview with Mahama Johnson Traoré (*Le Journal du Cinema* 1995).

"long conversation", characterized by negotiation, and appropriation, will come to the fore in the narrative.

La Chapelle, as mentioned above, provides an interpretation of the civilising mission, exploring it from the point of the view of the colonised and addressing it through the portrayals of and interactions between the missionary, the traditional healer, the schoolteachers, the chief and the villagers. It challenges colonial films' construction of African religions and of European Christianity. As a film that builds oppositionality, *La Chapelle* is grounded on intertexts, quoting or referring to scenes from previous films. Just as the colonial and missionary films built on juxtapositions to delineate "good" practices from "bad" ones, so is *La Chapelle* structured through juxtapositions. These are achieved in a straightforward way through jump-cuts, for example, when a scene involving the liturgy in the chapel is followed without transition to a healing ritual in the nganga's house,[172] and through the portrayals of opposing characters: the missionary and the healer, and the two schoolteachers representing sides of the educational system. Cultural markers, especially music, are used to signal differences between the local and the foreign.

If the films made during the colonial period focused on the justification of the colonial endeavour by showing the good works of the mission, progress in education, modernisation and healthcare and by portraying the heroism and patience of missionaries and colonial administrators, *La Chapelle* uses juxtaposition to show that there is no justification for a European presence. It does so by emphasising local knowledge, culture and beliefs, thereby challenging the exclusivist position of Western forms of knowledge and belief, and by exploring the damaging effects of its civilising mission through the personal experiences of the characters. These experiences circle around evangelisation and the construction of the chapel, local religious practices and practitioners, as well as education. The following analysis will be structured around these three themes.

Evangelisation and the Missionary

The opening scene introduces the village, in which the first juxtaposition sets the tone. We hear music and see a man singing, his song accompanied by the sounds of a string instrument. The camera focuses on the musician – establishing the diegetic nature of the sound – and then shows men and a woman at work. Suddenly, the musician's harp is replaced by non-diegetic organ music, and a man in a white robe, riding a bicycle and wearing a colonial hat, appears on the screen. Throughout the film, the organ will interrupt the musician's playing and the sound of the local drums every time the missionary appears, except at the end when the organ tune is replaced by a military march.

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[172] Nganga is a term for an herbalist and spiritual healer.

As mentioned above, music is a cultural marker signalling difference. The difference is not of a neutral kind, however, nor is it just a matter of style or instrument. The organ's church melody and the military march are non-diegetic. This contrast between the music within the narrative, and that which is, so to speak, voiced-over the village's world and associated solely with the foreign presence suggests a differentiation between what is local, thus organic and authentic, and what is foreign, not only in the sense of coming from elsewhere but also alien and unfathomable.

The organ melody and the military march in the last scenes constitute, together with close- ups of the French flag and the cross of the chapel, shown side by side, the signs denoting the foreigner and his authority, whose presence is as unfathomable as the non-diegetic music in the film. In an interview, Tchissoukou stated, "The problem of Christianity was not so much the philosophy as the extraordinary behaviour of the missionaries in persuading men to belittle themselves with the promise of rewards in heaven…"[173] The film illustrates this by focusing more on the missionary's encounters with the villagers rather than on Christian doctrine itself, which is criticised only once by the nganga.

Evangelisation and conversion are explored in the film through the portrayal of the priest and the construction of the chapel. In *L'Avant-garde Blanche* (1942), a French missionary film, the shots of a White Father riding his bike alone through the difficult terrain, crossing a river and nearly falling are almost identical to second sequence of *La Chapelle*. Although the White Father of *L'Avant-garde Blanche* is a rather stern but overall sympathetic character, the priest, called le curé,[174] in *La Chapelle* is shown in a more ridiculous and pompous light. Not only does he fall from his bicycle, but he also lets children carry the iron horse for him across a bridge, which he obviously is wary of crossing. His far from dignified figure is emphasised by his hairy calves and thighs, of which we get a good glimpse when he descends from the bicycle. Feeling important and stately, without any grounds for it if we rely on the introductory portrayal, he places the vehicle into the care of the catechist before marching towards the chapel. These scenes undermine the heroic characters traditionally portrayed in missionary films.

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[173] Martin 1981.

[174] In the final stages of writing this chapter, certain files on *La Chapelle*'s DVD were corrupted, including the subtitles and the end credits. The film is no longer distributed, and I could not obtain a new copy or stream it. As I wrote in the acknowledgements, I am greatly indebted to Elie Kabwe, who translated the dialogues that are in Lingala. With the loss of the end credits, I lost the possibility to attach the actors' names to their characters, as I do for the other case-studies. In the opening titles, only the actor playing the school teacher Tanganga – Gaston Samba Abéret – is identified. No information on the other actors – Philomène Miakouikila, Germain Loubota, Albert M'Bon, Abel Elion, Alphonse d'Oliveira – was available online or in the retrieved archival material. The quotes from the film in this chapter are my translations from French.

Evangelisation is completely associated with the colonial endeavour in *La Chapelle*. If missionaries were closer to the local communities than the colonial administration was and had possibilities to address issues that worried the local populations, here, the missionary is separated from the village. He lives 30 km away in an administrative post together with the commandant, the representative of the colonial administration. The commandant never appears in the film, but his presence is disclosed through the flag, threats of bringing in the militia together with the whip, and the priest. The commandant represents France, and, as France, he is unseen and far away, rendering his authority all the more incomprehensible. In *La Chapelle,* the religious and the colonial authority converge in the character of the priest, since it is he who performs the duties of the disembodied commandant. The association of the Christian mission with that of the coloniser is made exhaustive and such a representation reaches its summit when, in the last sequences, the priest is carried into the village on a tipoï and is surrounded by the militia to investigate the burning of the chapel.

If missionary and educational films emphasised the gentle, patient, good-willed guiding hand of the educators, *La Chapelle*, on the contrary, focuses on the disciplinary character of the colonial/religious authority. By conflating the colonial administration and the mission, *La Chapelle* constructs the idea of the "missionary imperialist" who borrows the language of command from his fellow colonial administrator for his evangelising mission.[175] I mentioned above that discipline, cleanliness and orderliness in appearance and behaviour were markers of the modern and educated colonial subject. Discipline in particular was required in work. Order and discipline were thus advertised or portrayed as virtues brought by Christian civilisation rather than as a means of control. In *La Chapelle,* supervision and control exercised by the priest and his collaborators are challenged not only by the behaviour of the villagers in the form of passive resistance but are also undermined as motivation for them is never fully given. The whole endeavour is constructed as superfluous and superficial. Winning souls through conversation, persuasion, craftsmanship or by sheltering persecuted or marginalised figures is not what appears in *La Chapelle.* The disciplinary character of the colonial and missionary authority is illustrated not only by the show of force at the end of the film but also by the curé's behaviour towards the villagers and particularly towards the chief, the catechist and the elder schoolteacher, Tanganga.

In *De la Barbarie à la Civilisation Chrétienne* (1929), another French documentary concerning the civilising work of missionaries in Equatorial Africa, a missionary is shown supervising the construction of a chapel, giving orders and checking that everyone is dutifully working. In *La Chapelle,* the supervision of the building process has been delegated to the catechist. He is unable

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175 Comaroff & Comaroff 1991.

to do so, however, since the people are not motivated because it greatly disrupts their lives. The women especially complain about the situation. Instead of taking care of their children or working in the fields, they have to work at the construction site without pay. The curé also surveys the education of the young adults. Just as violence is used to ensure order in the village, the curé does not hesitate to use it on pupils. In one of his visits, he slaps the already crying daughter of the chief for being late. Discipline and order are ensured by threats and scolding, as, stereotypically, the villagers are considered lazy, unwilling and only able to understand guidance through threats of violence. Christianity, personified by the curé, is constructed as alien, a faith that gives orders and requires discipline from its followers but never fully reveals its motivations. It reconfigures the village's space and time[176] but the misses the opportunity to explain why.

Conversion is portrayed through the chief's baptism and wedding and the catechesis. The wedding takes place in the first scenes of the film. The chief is stripped of his traditional festive attire in front of the chapel, is baptised (receiving the name David) and weds Marie, who becomes his sole wife. The Christian names are uttered in the film only in these scenes in the chapel. The chief has been contrived to become monogamous as an example for the villagers. None of these actions – the baptism or change to monogamy – are explained or motivated in the narrative, apart from pleasing and appeasing the priest and the commandant.

An important aspect related to conversion and evangelisation stands out through hymns and prayers in Lingala, denoting a longer presence of Christianity in the region. However, since the curé does not speak Lingala and uses the catechist as translator, the sacrament is performed in French. The presented language barrier adds to the distancing between the missionary and the villagers. The film does not cover the translation of the Bible or catechesis in local languages, as we see from the evening Bible study class led by the catechist. It does, however, challenge Christianity's role. The behaviour of the chief and other converts in relation to the construction of the chapel and the curé can be seen as an attempt to keep troubles at bay. Conversion to Christianity, in the eyes of the chief, seems the most "manageable" part of the colonial endeavour. As long as it is the hymns, the catechesis, the school, one can acclimate. It is when Christianity takes on the language (and weapons) of command that local agency or the potential for negotiation is stifled.

At best, evangelisation in the film leads to a dual belonging. The moment the wedding ceremony is over, and we are presented with a shot of people from within the chapel as if behind bars, some of the villagers go to the nganga's house where a healing ritual is performed. The villagers attend Bible study, sing hymns and pray in Lingala, but they also speak French, receive lay education and seek help from the nganga.

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[176] Comaroff & Comaroff 1991, p. 234.

Peoples and Religious Practices: the Nganga

The erratic, inefficient, dangerous and blood-thirsty "witchdoctor" of such films as *Common Round* (1935), *Il est Minuit Dr Schweitzer* (1952), *From fear to Faith* (1946), *The African Witchdoctor and the Way Out* (1920s?), and *I Fetischmannens Spår* (1948) is absent in *La Chapelle*. Instead, the nganga – Katanga – is portrayed as an indispensable figure in the village.

One of the proudest moments of the civilising mission portrayed in missionary and colonial films was the showcasing of hospitals and sanitary equipment as well as and overall progress in available healthcare. In *La Chapelle*, such elements are non-existent, and the healer, Katanga, is the one successfully performing that function. There are no healthcare facilities or medical personnel in the village or even close by. Even the catechist, whose wife is suffering from a bad tooth, has no other choice but to take her to Katanga. The absence of medicine in the film not only enhances the healer's role but also emphasises once more the presence of knowledge prior to the appearance of the coloniser. The progress in healthcare, put forward in the rhetoric about the indigenous peoples, to the extent that in Hélène Schirren's film *Guérir sous les tropiques* (1946) the narrator affirms that the whites have literalyy saved the Black race from extinction,[177] is undermined in *La Chapelle.*

In terms of behaviour, the idea of the erratic and threatening "witchdoctor" is also challenged. In *I Fetischmannens spår,* there is a scene in which the "witchdoctor" crouches in fear in front of the white, upright-standing, benevolent-looking doctor and runs away in fear. In *La Chapelle,* there is no crouching, nor is there fear. Katanga is the most poised of the characters, never losing his temper, not even when he is taken into custody and his house is burned down. His overall attitude towards women and children seems to be the best among all the men shown, and he has an organic relation with all the villagers, regardless of their faith. As an illustrative example, when asked by the chief of the village, Katanga performs a sacrificial ritual in order to appease the spirits so they will in turn inspire the villagers to continue the construction of the chapel. Perhaps, rather bewilderingly, it works, and the chapel is finally built.

The only time when Katanga challenges the faith of the "foreigner" is at the Bible study class, when he interrupts the catechist when the subject of death is taken up. Death, according to Katanga and the belief in ancestors, is not the result of the original sin but is instead a natural part of life. Nor does death mean the separation of the body and soul. The dead person moves on to the world of the ancestors where he or she would have to pay a price in accordance with how they lived – with a good or a bad heart. What is put forward in this scene is the opposition to the idea of Africa as devoid of culture, religion and knowledge.

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[177] Ramirez & Rolot 1985, p. 135.

Naturally, Katanga's presence threatened the authority of the priest and the commandant, and he is stripped of all his authority and power after the burning of both the chapel and his house. During these scenes, the religio-cultural belonging of the villagers is made clear as they weep and stand in helpless silence in front of their burning sacred building. Although they pray, sing, and follow the precepts dictated by the priest and the catechist, no one sheds a tear when the chapel burns. The villagers' profound beliefs are portrayed as still rooted in the traditional religious practices and faith in spirits and ancestors.

Education

In *La France est un Empire* (1939), the teacher writes on the board: "La France est notre patrie".[178] In *La Chapelle*, a map of France, with its cities and rivers, is drawn on the board. On that particular day, the lesson is about the country's main cities. Then Atchono, the chief's daughter, is called to the board to recite the previous lesson on the basin of the Seine.

Education has a more ambiguous place in the film than the straightforward attitude towards the religious traditions. The educational system and its consequences is represented by two teachers – the so-called *évolués*. They epitomise Tchissoukou's view that education in itself is not an evil. While he finds the opposite to be true in general, the problem lies in the content. Indeed, it is in relation to education that the stark critique of colonialism voiced by African postcolonial thinkers, writers and artists becomes an area of contradictions, as it is education that gave the tools for emancipation. In Comaroffs' terms, the discourses and forms of thought were appropriated in order to engage in the conversation. Missions, as Megan Cole Paustian reminds us, become in anticolonial expressions a "subject of active critique as well as a vexed site of contestation, dilemma, and ambivalence".[179]

The older of the schoolteachers, Tanganga, is a tragic and pathetic character. His portrayal denotes the alienating potential of colonial education. He is a cruel and bossy teacher, who is violent and humiliates his students. He complains to Atchono that he is being neglected by the villagers who do not bring him food or drink. Tanganga exemplifies the strict and disciplinary style of education and is supported by the priest. His role is to supervise and see that everyone behaves properly in line with the wishes of the commandant and the priest.

What Tanganga teaches is presented as useless. The pupils – all young adults – are supposed to memorise the geography of the basin of the Seine and France's cities. The film presents a picture in which the consequences of the civilising mission are disastrous for both the individual and the community.

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178 France is our homeland. *La Chapelle,* 1980.
179 Paustian 2014, p. 8.

Tanganga personifies the civilised colonial subject who, having received European education and religion, is now fit to lead his country towards progress. However, this civilised subject finds himself at an impasse. He basks he thinks, in honour. His work as a teacher and educator entitles him to a certain prestige and puts him above the rest of the community and closer to the white elite. Herein lies his tragedy. The sense of entitlement he feels and his arrogance alienates him from the other villagers, who cease to care for him. Tanganga epitomises assimilation and the social and cultural death that ensues in its wake. At the same time, he is still subaltern to the missionary and will never attain the level of white society, as is shown in the slap he receives in the last scenes of the film.

The idea that the civilising mission will contribute to raising orderly, disciplined, god-fearing and hard-working men and women is undermined through this character. Education does not guarantee the building of a morally sound individual, as is intimated by missionary and colonial propagandist films. The moral character of Tanganga is completely destroyed for the viewer after he assaults Atchono while she bathes. Her rejection, and that of another woman, pushes him over the edge and he sets fire to the chapel in order to incriminate the younger teacher, Adouki.

It is not clear from the outset why such a small village would have two teachers, but it is Adouki's arrival that tilts the balance in the narrative. Adouki's teachings, contrary to Tanganga's, are solely directed towards knowledge about the country. Emphasis is put on the country's natural resources, and he inspires the young. In his first lesson, which takes place in a canoe surrounded by idyllic scenery, Adouki speaks of the riches of the country and incites the young to work:

> Our country is a large country; the wood is very precious and is in great demand in countries where there is not enough of it. In our ground, there is iron, gold, copper and salt. Once extracted, these materials will make our country a prosperous and powerful country. Rains and suns are not uncommon here. The soil is therefore fertile. But you have to dig it, sow it, cultivate it, stir it in order to extract the marrow substance.[180]

The economical component of the colonial endeavour does not seem to have reached the village. Agriculture, which is the villagers' main occupation, is for their own benefit. There are no plantations, no mines, and no factories around, nor are they mentioned. The agrarian state is framed in the words of Adouki as an individual effort that contributes to the good of the community. Adouki's popularity among the young grows, although we learn later that he

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[180] "Notre pays est un grand pays. Le bois est très precieux et est très recherché dans les pays où n'en trouve pas assez. Dans notre sous-sol il ya du fer, de l'or, du cuivre, et du sel. Une fois extraites ces matieres feront de notre pays un pays prospere et puissant. Les pluies et les soleils ne sont pas rares chez nous. Le sol est donc fertile. Mais il faut le creuser, l'ensemmencer, le cultiver, le remuer afin d'avoir la substance moelle." *La Chapelle,* 1980.

never wanted to be a teacher but was forced to become one through threats directed at his father. The young end up gathering at his place in the evenings, completely neglecting the construction of the chapel. The village chief, hearing of these meetings, tries to forbid them, reminding the young of the white man's whip and the need to save the peace in the village by finishing the chapel:

> For peace to reign in this village, the chapel must be completed. There are duties and priorities that we must fulfil quickly. The commandant's anger is to be feared. With the chapel built, the priest will be happy, [and] so will the commandant, and we will be able to sleep in peace.

Adouki then asks:

> Is this living in peace, living constantly under the threat of the whip?

To this, one of the students adds:

> When we are done building this chapel, what will it take to entertain the commander?[181]

This short conversation shows how little the villagers know of the motivations of the colonial endeavour and how little the priest and the *évolué*, in the guise of the schoolteachers, reveal or know themselves. For Tanganga, this is irrelevant, and Adouki can only question. Adouki's education, albeit unwanted, allows him to question the system beyond the religio-cultural paradigm and confrontation of the missionary with the nganga. It allows others to partake in the questioning as well, but the film stops here. The position towards education is thus made ambiguous and illustrates the overall uneasiness of postcolonial thought towards the role missions played in the anti-colonial movements. In *La Chapelle,* the rejection of all things colonial seems to be the main goal, but such rendering erases the complexity of the situation and leaves alternative or room for a way out. The only one Adouki advocates – putting to use his unwillingly acquired knowledge to build a prosperous village and develop agriculture for the good of the community – somewhat echoes a kind of kolkhoz idyll, shedding some light on the film's immediate ideological and political context.

Concluding Remarks

Tragedy reaches the community when the curé enters the village with the militia to investigate the destruction of the chapel. Tanganga and the village chief

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[181] *La Chapelle* 1980.

are questioned. The schoolteacher accuses Adouki, who is looked for everywhere. Atchono, now in love with Adouki, and her mother successfully hide him until the search is over. While they search every household, the soldiers pillage, rape and brutalize. Katanga is arrested as the main culprit, along with other men. His house of healing is set on fire. While it burns, the chief leaves the scene silently and helplessly and goes back to his own house. There Tanganga confesses to the deeds in a full exposure of the colonised's predicament:

> I hate you all without exception. No one loves me here. Everyone neglects me. I am taken for a madman, a possessed man. Nobody, nobody in this village thinks of me. No one rightly appreciates the size of my task. For this cursed chapel, for this white priest, you all tremble. You mobilise. No one is reluctant. Since my wife left, I have been alone. Alone. No one loves me here. No one brings me water. No meat, no fish, no cassava, not even a little Saka Saka. While I sweat blood to educate your children.[182]

While he confesses, the curé silently enters and hears the confession. He then slaps Tanganga and orders the soldiers to take him away. In the end, the film provides no exit. The colonial control deploys its violence, and the villagers are hopelessly and helplessly under its authority.

Missionary and colonial films contributed to the idea of Africa and the identity of the African as being in need of salvation and modernisation. It transposed the dichotomy of the traditional vs the modern, where everything African was considered futile. Christianity in this portrayal attained the universal status of salvation, which needed to be transferred to the unfortunates. In these portrayals, after the "witchdoctor" is finally defeated, extraordinary transformations occur. The virtues of Christian civilisation, signalled by Western styles of dress, a nuclear family household, work, pious behaviour and general orderliness triumph over erratic dances, local dress and even food. In *La Chapelle,* we are left with a community in mourning and desolation.

La Chapelle participated in the reversal of the European construct by mitigating Christianity's status through showing the presence of beliefs, practices and knowledge, all perfectly organic and stemming from specific social realities. The nganga in the film does not deny the Christian faith its existence. In fact, he asks the spirits to help the strangers in their faith. Similarly, the catechist's wife discusses with the nganga the possibility of the existence of wisdom in both practices. Christianity is portrayed as inauthentic in as far as it

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[182] "Je vous hais tous sans exception. Personne ne m'aime ici. Tout le monde me néglige. On me prend pour un fou, un démoniaque. Personne, personne dans ce village ne songe à moi. Personne n'apprecie à juste titre la grandeur de ma tâche. Par contre, pour cette maudite chapelle, pour ce blanc de curé vous tremblez tous. Vous vous mobilisez. Personne ne rechine. Depuis que ma femme est partie je suis seul, seul, personne ne m'aime ici. Personne ne m'apporte de l'eau, pas de viande, pas de poisson, pas de manioc, meme pas un peu de Saka Saka. Alors que je sue eau et sang pour eduquer vos enfants". *La Chapelle,* 1980.

was joined with an oppressive, exploitative system and claimed universality, robbing those who were to follow in its steps of their integrity and humanity.

La Chapelle turned the gaze from coloniser to colonised, showing the complicity of the missionary project in the denigration of local beliefs and practices as well as in the economic destruction of an autonomous community in colonial times. But by doing so, it did not question the categories it was inverting, and the film does not provide any resolution. It, too, simplifies the situation through the same means of juxtaposition. The simplified narrative left out an important aspect of Congolese religiosity, namely the history of the Congolese church, which traces its origins to encounters with Portuguese missionaries in the fifteenth century. The presence of Christianity and the Congolese church intermittently grew and faded through contacts with various missionaries such as the aforementioned Portuguese, the Italian Capuchins in the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, the French White Fathers and Swedish Lutherans. Congolese Christianity was present through such figures as King Mvemba Nzinga, who by the time of his death in 1506 had "built schools for 400 boys and later for girls, led by his sister"[183] the martyr Kimpa Vita – Beatrice of Kongo – who was burned to death in 1706. This long presence gave rise in the 1920s and 1930s to prophetic movements such as the Kingoyi and Matswa movements which were no doubt influenced by the Kimbaguists. The point is that Christianity was not "foreign" to the Congolese context in the 1930s. Rather, the decolonising agenda colours the Congolese religious context portrayed in the film.

La Chapelle in this sense is a cinematic discourse of inversion that "draw[s] [its] fundamental categories from the myths they claim to oppose and reproduce[s] their dichotomies: the racial difference between black and white; the cultural confrontation between civilized peoples and savages; the religious opposition between Christians and pagans…"[184] African Christianity, though audible through songs and prayers in Lingala sounds cacophonic, is presented as an empty shell, a spectacle staged for the benefit of the priest. The slow transformation of the worlds of the chief, or the catechist's wife, is set aside in the process of breaking down Western icons. As Christianity is presented as the religion of the foreigner, the role of African missionaries in the processes of evangelisation is not addressed, constituting a blind spot in colonial memory. *La Chapelle*, then, while challenging colonial prejudices and racist ideas by showing the complicity of the missionary endeavour in the colonial project and by authenticating the local beliefs and practices, does not account for the history of African Christianity. The primary agenda, seen in the decolonising of the mind through inverted narratives, necessarily evades certain aspects of the intertwined and complex realities.

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[183] Sundkler & Steed 2000, p. 51.
[184] Mbembe & Rendall 2002, pp. 257-8.

Chapter III: The Prophet and the Termite Mound

The present chapter focuses on Roger Gnoan M'Bala's feature *Au Nom du Christ* (1993), which deals specifically with Ivorian prophetisms and religious practices. In the previous chapter, we saw a trend of resistance in the critique of the missionary presence. In the present chapter, the engagement with resistance unravels through the film's claims of authenticity and truth by a double movement of rejecting one particular religion while embracing another, a move aligned with the quest for an African authenticity that draws on symbolic systems.[185]

Achille Mbembe relates the quest for authenticity to the quest of the African subject to attain selfhood in the wake of slavery, colonisation and apartheid. These three historical events and the meanings attributed to them are fundamental to the ways African identities have been constructed and as well as the impetus to overcome the alienation, dispossession, humiliation, nonbeing and social death experienced.[186] Mbembe argues that such quest was informed by two currents of thought:

> The first current of thought—which liked to present itself as "democratic," "radical," and "progressive"—used Marxist and nationalist categories to develop an imaginaire of culture and politics in which a manipulation of the rhetoric of autonomy, resistance, and emancipation serves as the sole criterion for determining the legitimacy of an authentic African discourse. The second current of thought developed out of an emphasis on the "native condition." It promoted the idea of a unique African identity founded on membership of the black race.[187]

La Chapelle has shown how African practices and systems of knowledge are being authenticated through the rhetoric of emancipation and are in turn validated by the field of culture. In this chapter, the above-mentioned double move involving the rejection and authentication of religious traditions reflects both currents of thought. Particularly of importance to this chapter is the matter of the kinds of cultural expressions found at the intersection of religious beliefs and practices that result from the polemical relationship to the world based on

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[185] Bahi 2013, p. 15.
[186] Mbembe & Rendall 2002, pp. 241-2.
[187] Mbembe & Rendall 2002, p. 242.

a refutation of Western definitions of Africa, a denunciation of the West's deeds against Africa and the creation of a space within which the Africans can voice their own narratives.[188] *Au Nom du Christ*, I suggest, rests at the nexus of Ivorian post-independence moves towards authenticity, the transnational developments of Ivorian cinema and the Ivorian prophetic tradition. As the chapter unfolds, we will see how prophetic Christianity and Ivorian traditional religions are constructed and represented in a dialectical relationship.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the post-independence moves towards authenticity took shape in the narrative of *Ivoirité* and permeated the cultural, academic and religious fields of the 1970s up until the early 1990s. The term *Ivoirité* was modelled on the term *Francité*, coined in 1966 by Léopold Sedar Senghor, one of the architects of the Négritude movement.[189] Négritude can be translated as "Blackness" and conceptualised as the sum of the cultural values of the Black world as they are expressed in the lives, institutions and works of Black peoples. It saw, in the affirmation of a Black Identity, emancipation and liberation from the alienation suffered by centuries of oppression. Overcoming alienation and constructing the once lost identity required, it was understood, a move backwards towards the retrieval of lost and authentic traditions.

The context from which the concept of *Ivoirité* emerged was characterised first by economic and political demands and then, and simultaneously, by a search for authenticity, a resurgence of memory, and a quest for recognition and dignity, as if there was some "unfinished business" with the former coloniser and through his auxiliaries and heralds.[190] *Ivoirité*, before becoming a full-fledged political endeavour, is first felt as a "national sentiment", a will to find/emphasise one's origins (ethnic) and to affirm one's authenticity.

Ivoirité prompted developments in the cultural field. In Ivorian theatre, oral tradition and griots were (re)instated through the works of Dieudonné Niangoran Porquet – la *griotique* – and Souleymane Koly's *Ensemble Kotéba d'Abidjan*. Writers experimented with folktales while using humour and the absurd to communicate the postcolonial situation, as with Bernard Zadi Zaourou's *le Didiga moderne* and *la Chronique des temps qui tanguent*. The visual arts were represented by the *Vohou Vohou* movement – an assemblage of anything and everything. Popular music, through forms of *sung* speech and styles of dance like the Zouglou, Mapouka and Coupé Décalé, became a kind of *arbre à palabre,* an arena where society was dissected, revealing power imbalances, laughter and jest, and sexuality. The use of African prints and local materials in fashion and daily dress became a statement, as can be exemplified by preferrences of university lecturers and intellectuals for the Ivorian

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[188] Mbembe & Rendall 2002, p. 243.
[189] For this reason, Bernard Zadi Zaourou speaks of *Ivoirité* as a flower from Senghorian gardens (Bahi 2013, p. 16).
[190] Bahi 2013, p. 3.

style of dress when appearing on television or at the university. In the academia, particularly at the department of history and at the Institute of History, Arts and Archaeology at Abidjan University, research on local ethnicities, languages and religions became emphasised. Drummology, of which we will see a denotation in the film as the study of the language of African drums, was created in the 1980s by anthropologist Georges Niangoran Bouah.[191] Another scholar, and scriptwriter for *Au Nom du Christ*, Jean-Marie Adiaffi coined the term *Bossonisme* as the new modern Ivorian religion.

The question of authenticity intersecting with religious beliefs, and articulated by Adiaffi through *Bossonisme*, involves a negotiation between the tradition and modernity dichotomy. I do not presume here to enter in a discussion over definitions of modernity. Very simply put, there is an idea that African traditions are remnants of the past that are incompatible with different dimensions of the "modern" such as processes of commodification, representative democracy, taxation and/or civil service, mass mediatisation, the demise of religion and the rise of secularism.[192] African traditional religion, stigmatised as the Other and labelled as primitive, does not have a space within such understandings of modernity that shape the modern world. Dreams and divination, the worshiping of idols or ancestors, and the merging of the visible and invisible into reality were to be relinquished to the African past since they hinder processes of modernisation on the continent. The reality is far more complex, as different religious practices and figures intertwined with the politics, economics, media and culture of postcolonial African states constantly challenging understandings of modernity.

Discourses of authenticity oppose the idea that African beliefs, practices and imagery should be replaced by more modern religious practices. They attribute to African traditions the unique identity necessary to decolonise African minds. *Au Nom du Christ*, written by Gnoan M'Bala, J-M Adiaffi and Bertin Akaffou, is representative of these discourses and the movements endorsed by Ivorian intellectuals due to its engagement with religious and cultural representations. It conveys the idea of *one* authentic religious tradition, opposing the colonial remnants of Christianity. In this sense, the film endeavours to present the view of a monolithic religion and culture that are to be cherished and rid of outside influences.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the modes of address articulate resistance to a form of African Christianity. In this vein, and in relation to the thesis' research questions, I aim to answer the following: (a) how are religious traditions *and* their critique constructed through the stylistic form, narrative and contexts of the film? (b) Which concepts, aesthetic categories and underlying themes convey the meanings of the film? (c) How are these concepts, aesthetic categories and themes embedded in the transnational dynamics,

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[191] Bahi 2013, pp. 20-21.
[192] Geschiere, Meyer & Pels 2008, p. 2.

which surround and permeate the production context, form and content of the story? The analysis is comprised of five sections, which focus on specific dimensions of the film, and are informed by the mentioned sets of questions.

Setting the Stage

The viewer is introduced to an Ivorian village where beliefs in ancestors, nature spirits, sacred places and practices of traditional medicine are challenged by the actions and teachings of a self-proclaimed prophet of Christ. After Gnamien Ato (actor Pierre Gondo), an outcast pig-herder nearly drowns, he receives a vision in which an angel in the form of a small Black boy names him Magloire the First and announces that he has been chosen to save his people. The villagers' initial scorn turns to awe when Magloire performs miracles and heals members of the community. However, as his power and influence in the village grow, so do the evils he perpetrates in the name of Christ. He pushes his conviction to the point of ordering his followers to tie him to a cross and execute him, believing he will be resurrected. After he is killed, his disciples disperse.

Au Nom du Christ is Roger Gnoan M'Bala's third feature film. Born in 1941 in Grand-Bassam, a town on the south-eastern cost of Côte d'Ivoire, he belongs to the generation of African filmmakers who have experienced colonisation. Both this experience and his southern Ivorian origin will shape his cinematographic work. After studying film at the Conservatoire Libre du Cinéma Français in Paris, he began his career in Côte d'Ivoire in 1968 with a short documentary film on the Koundoun, a traditional dance from Grand-Bassam. Soon after, he moved to television, as there was a lack of cinematographic infrastructures.[193] His works made for television include the fiction shorts *La Biche* (1971), *Amanié* (1971) and *Valisy* (1973) and his first medium-length production, *Le Chapeau* (1976). M'Bala's first films touch upon such aspects of Ivorian society as poverty, opportunism, fraud, mixed marriages and women's emancipation. The common thread of these films is that they have at the centre the character of the swindler or cheat, driven by desire for wealth and power, and the satiric treatment of the subject. M'Bala's first feature film, *Ablakon* (1984), follows the same vein in its denouncement of corruption, poverty and the abuse of authority. In his next feature, *Bouka* (1988), M'Bala returns to south-Ivorian practices and beliefs, juxtaposing their presentations with those of Christianity and Islam. The latter are portrayed as coexisting in the rural setting, but they are devoid of power in the face of Ivorian knowledge, medicine and traditional priests. Explaining the film and its potential role for African societies at the 1989 edition of FESPACO, M'Bala declared:

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[193] Bachy 1982, p. 50.

Each people has a cultural memory, each people has a cultural practice, and Bouka shows a number of things that are not customary even for Ivorians. These are practices that happen in villages, which are not codified, that are transmitted by oral expression and are very lively things ...As far as Africa is concerned, we need the image. The image is the only thing that can be ... read easily. The image can be a means of development, a means of awareness, a means of perception of our customs, of our own values.[194]

M'Bala, being of a generation marked by colonialism, positions himself among the African filmmakers of the FEPACI line, which saw as their main responsibility to educate their audiences and rewrite history. M'Bala's earlier productions, followed by *Bouka, Au Nom du Christ* and his latest *Adanggaman* (2000) are intended to raise awareness and be bearers of knowledge, traditions, cultures and memories. As such, he is a representative of the wider *social criticism* and *cultural heritage* categories of African cinemas described earlier in the overview chapter. But if the serious tones of African *cinema engagé* caused K. Harrow to use the metaphor of a "straightjacket", M'Bala adds humorous and satiric notes, inscribing himself into the Ivorian cinematic scene. In this sense, M'Bala's work speaks to the Ivorian public but also to a broader African audience.

Cinema in Côte d'Ivoire

The history of Ivorian cinema shows contradictions and ambiguous relationships illustrative of the transnational and global cinematic fields. Cinema in Côte d'Ivoire began with transnational cooperation with France involving the same funding bodies, bureaus, consortiums, distribution companies, non-commercial contracts and regulations applied in the West African region more broadly. Right after independence was gained on 7 August 7 1960, a Service Cinema was created within the Ministry of Information. Mainly producing newsreels, it was soon replaced by the SIC[195] and then in 1979 by the CPAAPP.[196] Both failed as commercial endeavours and neither did they succeed in creating continuous and diverse cinematographic production. Apart

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[194] "Chaque peuple a une mémoire culturelle, chaque peuple a une pratique culturelle, et Bouka montre un certain nombre de choses qu'on n'a pas l'habitude de voir, même pour des ivoiriens. Ce sont des pratiques qui se passent dans des villages, qui ne sont pas codifiés, qui se sont transmis de part l'expression orale et qui sont des choses très vivaces… En ce qui concerne l'Afrique nous avons besoin de l'image. L'image est la seule chose qui peut être…lue facilement. L'image peut être un moyen de développement, un moyen de sensibilisation, un moyen de perception de nos coutumes, de nos valeurs propres?" (*Rencontres* 1989).
[195] Société Ivoirienne de Cinéma (Ivorian Society of Cinema)
[196] Centre de Production des Actualités Audio-Visuelles et du Perfectionnement Permanent (Centre for the Production Audiovisual Newsreels and for Permanent Improvement)

from *Les Actualités Ivoiriennes* and promotional shorts,[197] not much was done in terms of the development of a viable cinematographic industry. The production of fiction feature length films was not given as much support, and apart from very few exceptions by Henri Duparc, all films were co-productions involving France. This has led some critics to see such films as "cultural products with an exotic touch"[198] commissioned by France, thus further exacerbating the question of authenticity.

For film scholars Victor Bachy and Michel Koffi, the failures of both the SIC and the CPAAPP were in part related to the absence of a clear idea of what national cinema should be and in part due to "there [never having] been in Côte d'Ivoire, a real political will in terms of developing a cinematographic production, apart from contacts with the West and cooperations".[199] Simultaneously, and contradicting the alleged "lack of political will", Ivorian filmmakers were at the forefront in the process of creating an African cinema that would serve as the ideological counterpart to hegemonic Western images of Africa.

The future names of Ivorian cinema – Henri Duparc, Timité Bassori, Désiré Écaré, Gnoan M'Bala – started their careers at the SIC and CPAAPP after returning, for the most part, from Paris upon completing their studies. Timité Bassori, for example, represented Côte d'Ivoire at the conference on Third World cinema arranged by the Socialist Party of Austria in Vienna in 1966 alongside Sembène Ousmane (Senegal), Gaston Kaboré, Idrissa Ouédraogo (Burkina Faso), Med Hondo (Mauritania) and Souleymane Cissé (Mali).[200] In 1969, Côte d'Ivoire, along with other former French colonies such as Senegal, Upper Volta, Niger and Cameroon – were the representatives at the first film festival devoted exclusively to African cinema – the Semaine du Cinéma Africain in Ouagadougou.[201]

The specificity of Ivorian cinema among other cinematic countries like Senegal, Mali or Burkina Faso, which in a way sets it apart from accusations of making cultural products, was what Bachy calls "the popular phase" of Ivorian cinema. The first two phases (late 1960s – early 1980s), the "intellectual" and "social" phases, were aesthetic, philosophical and then political experiments.[202] These films were not much viewed locally, however, and received

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[197] The shorts touched upon various topics, following the tradition of educational films from the colonial period, that were related to the country and its development: nature, education, urbanization, agriculture, health and hygiene, commercial and economic portrayals, security, ethnography, tourism.

[198] Barlet 2000.

[199] Koffi 2003, p. 139.

[200] Genova 2013, p. 48.

[201] Ibid.

[202] The intellectual phase is represented by Timité Bassori, Désiré Écaré and Henri Duparc, who were all educated at the Parisian IDHEC (Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinematographiques). After returning to Côte d'Ivoire, apart from working for the SIC, they attempted to produce feature films representing their own personal styles and aesthetics and the themes they considered important. In 1969, Henri Duparc produced *Mouna*, partially with the support of the SIC, as did

more praise at international festivals.[203] It is the third phase, the "popular phase that made a greater impact on Ivorian audiences and most likely influenced the way filmmakers like Gnoan M'Bala thought of the use of comedy and satire.[204] While, according to K. Harrow and O. Barlet, the 1980s and 1990s were a period of disenchantment with the independences, a shift from denunciations of colonialism or neocolonialism,[205] the majority of Ivorian filmmakers decided to make their audiences laugh and created a cinema "…marked by the comic genre, except for a few isolated cases".[206]

The exceptional turn to entertainment at the expense of social and political protest was attributed to the so-called "Ivorian miracle".[207] The latter refers to the relative economic success of Côte d'Ivoire and decades of political stability that lasted at least up until the end of the 1980s.[208] This Ivorian miracle, a system of soft dictatorships supported by France, made it unwise to openly criticise either regime, since the main funds for producing films were coming from France. Alessandro Jedlowsky makes the further observation that, with the introduction of analogue and digital technologies in Côte d'Ivoire, producers oriented themselves mainly towards television.[209] They saw in television business opportunities and stopped focusing on celluloid, which required external funding. Abidjan became one of the leading cities for the production of

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Timité Bassori with *La Femme au Couteau*. Désiré Écaré produced *Concerto pour un Exil* and *À nous deux France* himself through his company *Les Films de La Lagune*, in co-production with the Parisian *Argof Films*. None of these films was successful with the Ivorian audience, nor with the wider West African cinematographic scene, but for different reasons. Perhaps the Ivorian audience was not ready for aesthetic and philosophical reflections on artistic struggle, the immigrant experience of Ivorians in France, or Freudian reflections on sexuality and impotence. From the perspective of the other camp, those representative of militant cinema at the time, these were not political enough. The social phase, more or less in line with the ideals of African political cinema, is represented by Gnoan M'Bala and Etienne Vodio Ndabian (Bachy, 1982).

[203] This is not solely because the Ivorian public was not interested in so-called serious films. The problem was distribution. Up until 1979, the French companies Secma and Comacico had a monopoly, which meant that what was shown in the 60 cinemas of Côte d'Ivoire was decided by them. Needless to say, French cinema was privileged. When they finally retreated, independent distributors – not the state – took over. And, as Olivier Barlet points out, "cinema operators in Africa are not patriotic, they prefer Italian westerns". Profit is put before "the promotion of African films which they consider a 'cultural' product". These "cultural" products are then distributed non-commercially through the French cultural centres and embassies, impeding further the creation of a viable cinematographic industry.

[204] In the third phase, Henri Duparc returns as master of comedy with *Bal Poussière* (1988), *Le Sixième doigt* (1990), *Rue Princesse* (1994) and Couleur Café (1997). He is joined by filmmakers such as Jean-Louis Koula with *Adja tio* (1980) on healing practices, Western vs traditional medicine, law and justice; Fadika Kramo-Lanciné with *Djeli* (1981) on caste systems; Moussa Dosso with *Le Koussi* (1979) on a female initiation ritual, and *Dalokan* (1982) on arranged marriages; and Yeo Kozoloawith *Petanqui* (1983) .

[205] Harrow & Barlet 2017, p. 41.

[206] Koffi 2003, p. 146.

[207] Ibid.

[208] The crisis exploded in 2002.

[209] Jedlowski 2019, p. 295.

visual popular culture in francophone sub-Saharan Africa. The popularity of TV series such as *Les Guignols d'Abidjan* or *Faut pas Fâcher* in the 1990s gave filmmakers a clear idea of what their audiences wanted to see. As Kramo Lanciné Fadika told Olivier Barlet in an interview: "Why would we make highly reflexive works, when Louis de Funes makes people laugh in African cinemas?"[210] With the growing economic and political crisis, audiences' desire for entertainment increased. The turn to entertainment did not mean that aspects of Ivorian society such as polygamy, patriarchy, opportunism, power imbalances were not addressed. Rather, they were ridiculed through satire and comedy instead of overt political critique.

Ivorian filmmakers were thus juggling between the developments of political cinema in West Africa, economic dependency on France, the production of their subversive images, the introduction of new technologies, and trying to please their audiences.

M'Bala's career as a filmmaker reflects these acrobatics of survival. Of his works, *Au Nom du Christ* is the most representative of the ambivalent position of filmmakers willing to follow the political and educational line among the various tendencies permeating the films of the period. The production of *Au Nom du Christ* was made possible through the cooperation of the French and Ivorian states, as well as private Swiss and French production companies. The script for *Au nom du Christ* was presented for a grant to the French Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Cooperation in 1989 received approval in November of the same year. However, due to embezzlement of funds from the first production company involved, the author's and director's contracts were only signed in 1991 in Paris, and it took another two years for the film to finally be released. As a representative of the "social phase" of Ivorian cinema, trained in one of the most prestigious French film schools, working with celluloid, wanting to raise awareness and perpetuate traditions and cultural memory through images, M'Bala was also aware of his target audience and its predilection for humour. He thus chooses satire to present, subvert and also authenticate some of the Ivorian religious practices, thereby creating an allegory of power. As he confided in an interview during FESPACO in 1993:

> We cannot say directly: sir you are an idiot, or you are a dictator… There are other more subtle methods of saying it.[211]

For his indirect critique, M'Bala infuses his satiric film with a grotesque aesthetic, pointing to the absurd, ridiculous, and ambiguous aspects of the postcolonial situation. Demonstrating how historical interpretation is inseparable from stylistic mediation.[212]

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[210] Barlet 1997, p. 147.
[211] "Nous ne pouvons pas dire directement, Monsieur vous êtes un imbecile, ou vous êtes un dictateur, c'est pas possible." (Dufour 1993).
[212] Shohat & Stam 1994, p. 271.

Au Nom du Christ: the Realm of the Grotesque

In terms of genre, *Au Nom du Christ* has been labelled a satirical fable or a tragicomedy, and rightly so as it is governed by the aesthetics of the grotesque, signalling madness and spectacle through the portrayals of violence conjoined with omnipresent laughter. The grotesque is exaggeration, excesses and obsession with "lower" parts of the body through imagery or language, and it thrives on ambivalence and paradox. Leaning on Wolfgang Kayser, Harpham writes that the grotesque works as a structure for estrangement (defamiliarisation), which is achieved by the arousal of laughter, astonishment, disgust or horror. These responses illustrate the two poles between which the grotesque oscillates – the dark, terrifying and macabre, and the bright, jovial, and ridiculous.

The village of Bali-Ahuekro, in which the action takes place, is portrayed as a desensitised community. Roger Gnoan M'Bala weaves in the aesthetics of the grotesque by carefully creating an unsettling atmosphere from the first shots of *Au Nom du Christ,* which begins with laughter. The starting long shot moves the camera from the luscious palm trees and slowly focuses on the riverbank where four women are doing their laundry. As the camera moves closer, the younger women giggle, while the older woman (actress Naky Sy Savané) smiles benevolently. The three teenagers suddenly burst out laughing when the fourth woman leaves her laundry, disrupting the idyllic scene. No words are exchanged, and the viewer is not given any logical cue for what could have been the cause of the outburst. The desired effect is the puzzlement of the viewer attained via the element of surprise. Laughter, or more specifically mockery, is one of the main characteristics of *Au Nom du Christ*'s world. Disgust, horror, madness and ambivalence follow promptly. The mocked woman goes into the forest where she is attacked by a being in a raffia skirt and a mask. Whether the being is a male human or a spirit is not clear, nor is it clear whether the attack is a rape, since we do not see the act but only hear her screams. What is clear is that the woman is driven to insanity by the violation.

All these scenes last about two and a half minutes, and it is only the prelude to the film itself. However, the structure of estrangement is by this time established by the nonsensical laughter, madness, violence, surprise and sound – the long scream, lasting almost a minute. The following sequences in which M'Bala introduces the village will firmly ground these elements into the diegesis. Still with no dialogue, M'Bala shows the scale of violence and gratuitous cruelty that reign in the village through scenes of attempted murders, indifference and laughter in the face of death and mental illness, and perpetual mockery, coming even from children.

Bali-Ahuekro is a miniature presenting the characteristics of what Mbembe calls the *postcolony*:

> …the specific identity of a given historical trajectory: that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization … The postcolony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion, as well as by distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation. But the postcolony is also made up of a series of corporate institutions and a political machinery that, once in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence.[213]

In Bali-Ahuekro, the excess, lack of proportion and the potential for identities are expressed throughout the film. What drives the religious identities and institutions is power, or rather the spectacle of power. Power in the postcolony is violent, excessive and spectacular. It is conceptualised by Mbembe as *commandement.* My reading of the film, and especially of its main character – the prophet Magloire the First- is infused by the idea of *commandement.* I suggest that Magloire represents the *commandement,* and Bali-Ahuekro is the locus in which such exercise of power is possible.

The *commandement* can be perceived as a mode of exercising power in the colony and subsequently in the postcolony. In the colony, the *commandement* was based on a particular relation of subjection in which the subject (the dominated) had the status of an animal – as radically other than human or as being part of the master's world in which he/she could even experience love but where they would never attain full humanness. The *commandement* rests on the supreme right to deny anything to the subject and on violence, violence that establishes it, violence that stems from the absolute right to grant or deny, to be the law, and violence that is necessary to maintain its state (discipline). The *commandement* lacks justice or legitimacy, rendering it arbitrary and unconditional. Through its exercise of power and violence, the *commandement* creates the image, the spectacle of legitimacy and authority. It is constantly engaged in projecting an image of itself and of the world – a fantasy it presents to its subjects as a truth beyond dispute, a truth to be instilled into them so that they acquire a habit of discipline and obedience.[214] For Mbembe, postcolonial state forms have inherited this unconditionality and the regime of impunity that was its corollary.[215]

Bali-Ahuekro is, then, a place where the logic of such violence and subjection is familiar and is a constitutive characteristic of how people identify themselves and others. The figure of the prophet and the village are not just direct indications of the prophetic tradition in Côte d'Ivoire, they are also allegories for the postcolony and its autocrat.

Such a reading is suggested by the aesthetics of the grotesque woven into the form and content of the film. For Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, following

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[213] Mbembe 2001, p. 80.
[214] Ibid, p. 85.
[215] Ibid, p. 25.

Mikhail Bakhtin in their seminal *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, "…'grotesque realism' turns conventional aesthetics on its head in order to locate a new kind of popular, convulsive, rebellious beauty, one that dares to reveal the grotesquerie of the powerful and the latent beauty of the 'vulgar'".[216] The subversive function of the grotesque is geared towards countering dominant narrative forms and aesthetics in oppositional art forms. Therefore, in Third world, postcolonial or political cinemas, the grotesque can become a means to challenge hegemonic discourses of representation. At the same time, Shohat and Stam remind us that "…carnivalesque artistic practices are not essentially progressive or regressive; it depends on who is carnivalising whom, in what situation, for what purposes, and in what manner."[217] The point-of-view from which the grotesque is presented and the matter of to whom it is presumably shown inform the meanings conveyed in the work and the effects it will achieve. In addition to motives, the use of grotesque elements is intrinsically linked to context.

In African cinematic representations of the expressions of modernity, the separation between the sacred and the profane and the natural and supernatural worlds is challenged. The aesthetics of the grotesque cannot be understood as simply breaching borders between dreams and reality. Furthermore, Mbembe argues, contrary to Bakhtin, that the grotesque is not the prerogative of the dominated layer of society. In the postcolony, all actors – dominant and dominated – play a part in the spectacle of power that cannot be neatly put in categories of oppression and submission. The grotesque and the obscene are essential characteristics of postcolonial modernity.[218] In *Au Nom du Christ,* the grotesque permeates dream and reality, which coexist in the spectacle of madness, ridicule and the exercise of power.

Not only has M'Bala created a grotesque and estranged world – a mirror of a postcolonial situation where the people have lost their sense of community –he has also prepared the ground for the arrival of a much-needed saviour.

Magloire the First – The Last Prophet

> I want a religion that gives reason back to mad men and sight to blind men. A religion that ends misery and suffering, a religion that liberates.[219]

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[216] Shohat & Stam 1994, p. 302.
[217] Ibid, p. 304.
[218] Mbembe 2001, p. 81.
[219] *Au Nom du Christ,* 1993. The quotes from the film in this chapter are the author's translation from French.

Introducing M'Bala's Prophet of Christ

Au Nom du Christ's plot is constructed around the rise and fall of prophet Magloire the First[220] in Bali-Ahuékro. The exact film location is unknown, but, from the appearance of the landscape, one can venture a guess that it was filmed in the south-eastern part of the country, in the lagoon area near Grand-Bassam. The names of the village and of the main protagonist – Bali-Ahuékro and Gnamien Ato, respectively – point to the Akan group of Côte d'Ivoire, which includes such ethnic groups as the Baoulé and the Anyi, also living in the south-eastern region of the country. Furthermore, most important Ivorian prophetisms such as the Harrist, Gbahié, Deïma, Adaé, have been located in the south of Côte d'Ivoire.

> Prophetism is a religious phenomenon that involves an individual who is supernaturally endowed with extra-sensory capabilities that enables him/her to perform supernatural functions. It involves the supernatural ability to gain spiritual insight of spiritual matters and the use of the knowledge thus gained to improve the human situation in the material realm[221].

A prophet is a charismatic figure but, more often than not, also a marginalised one.[222] Gnamien Ato (in Anyi – honest creator/sky)[223] the pig-herder is, just as the mad woman, a marginalised figure in the village. The community mocks both, him because of his occupation, which makes him "reek of shit",[224] and her for her insanity. Amidst the villagers' cruelty, however, Gnamien Ato is the only character in the beginning of the film who displays attempts at kindness and care, albeit silent and indirect ones. He tries, for example, to secretly provide food for the woman but instead is almost drowned and left for dead by the gang of men responsible for beatings and for the burning of the woman's house. If prophets are righteous individuals chosen by God, Gnamien Ato, as his name indicates, is the right candidate for the job.

Following the traditional pattern of vision, authority claims and miracles involved in becoming a prophet,[225] Gnamien Ato experiences a vision prior to identifying and revealing himself to the community as their new prophet. On the morning of his presumed death, he receives a vision in the forest, away from prying eyes. While in a trance, he walks around a bamboo cross decorated with flowers. An angel in the guise of small Black boy materialises, dressed in garments associated with traditional ceremonial attire: a white skirt covered/held together with red and white pearl belt, a gourd rattle wrapped in

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[220] It literally means "My Glory".
[221] Quayesi-Amakye 2009.
[222] Duncan & Kalu 2005, p. 293.
[223] "Gnamien", meaning creator, divinity or sky, and "Ato" – honest.
[224] *Au Nom du Christ,* 1993.
[225] Duncan & Kalu 2005, p. 294.

a net of beads, a headband made of cowrie shells, pearl necklaces and a fly-whisk. The boy gives Gnamien Ato his prophet name and tells him his mission:

> You will be Magloire the First, chosen amongst all to save this cruel world. You will be the prophet of Christ.[226]

The trance resumes. The angel makes the sign of the cross, blesses Gnamien Ato, a white light bursts out of his forehead and he disappears. Gnamien Ato accepts the mission and the name:

> Yes, Lord. I will be Magloire the First. I will accomplish for your glory the mission that you have bestowed upon me till the very end. In thy name, in Mine, the Holy Spirit, and the salvation of the people.[227]

This scene not only constitutes the first step in the legitimisation process of the prophet but also brings in the supernatural. The film's world is filled with spirits that make themselves known or are invoked. They appear through special effects, and their existence is a matter of fact, established through the relationship they have with the characters. By witnessing the vision and the child angel's apparition, Magloire's claims of authority are made legitimate for the viewer. Moreover, the angel's local dress hints at an African prophet. This legitimisation process is not only done through the narrative but also through the cinematography and mise-en-scène. The narrative presents elements associated with prophets, such as Magloire's vision and reception of a prophetic title, his claims to authority and his performance of miracles. The cinematography[228] supports these moments, as illustrated in the next sequence, during which Magloire reveals himself to the villagers. In this sequence, Magloire walks into the village and, carrying his newly acquired first prophetic attributes – the cross and the gourd, summons the villagers. After the vision, Magloire proclaims the authority bestowed on him by God through the vision and declares that he is filled by the word of Christ, and speaks only through his mouth:

> Me! Magloire the First, Prophet of Christ! Only my speech is inspired by the word of God. Every other prophet is only a liar, a thief and an impostor.[229]

According to theologian Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, "In prophetism, the individual … is extra-sensitive to the operations, will, intentions and directions of

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[226] *Au Nom du Christ*, 1993.
[227] Ibid.
[228] The main categories of the language of cinematography are the frame, light and color, the lens, movement, texture establishing, POV (point of view)
[229] *Au Nom du Christ,* 1993.

the possessing supernatural power that in this context, is the Holy Spirit".[230] This would explain Magloire's insistence on being the sole prophet inspired by the Spirit, but it is also an affirmation of authority.

At first, the villagers greet him with derision and accuse him of being an impostor, but Magloire shows the power bestowed on him by God. This scene constitutes the first act of Magloire's spectacle of legitimacy and authority. Indeed, his first act is a violent one. It is to blind a man. When the latter, crawling on the ground, acknowledges Magloire's power, he regains his sight. Such demonstrations of power can be traced to Ivorian prophets. Historian Claude-Hélène Perrot, for example, in her account of prophet Gbahié, noted a constant defiant behaviour towards virtual adversaries. The power of the prophet cannot be proved without the unmasking and disempowerment of these adversaries.[231] When the man, who is to become one of his closest disciples, regains sight, he (and the viewer) sees the cross and hears Magloire's speech as coming directly from it. It is made very clear that salvation and participation in the new era are possible only through obedience and recognition of Magloire's status.

The second miracle Magloire performs is the healing of the mad woman, which can be seen as a kind of exorcism. He stands in front of her, chews the leaves and spits them in her face. He uses tree branches and beats her with these while uttering incantations. After performing this miracle, the crowd cheers and Magloire is almost unanimously recognised as the new prophet. The viewer is, however, given a different stance, and, as we follow Magloire's legitimisation process, certain elements distance us from the character.

While the cinematography apparently legitimises Magloire's status as prophet through the close-up of the cross, it also subverts it. During the sequence, the camera moves back and forth from the rooftops to the crowd, giving the viewer intermittently an omniscient view of the scene as well as a presence in the crowd. The change of point-of-view (POV) disrupts the flow of the sequence, hindering the full immersion of the viewer as a direct witness of the miracles, as the constructed nature of the scene becomes more apparent. This sequence distances the viewer from the temptation to believe in Magloire, especially when the narrative naturalised the supernatural in the vision scene.

Aside from the cinematography, Magloire himself remains a doubtful character. He wears a raffia skirt, which takes us back to the "rape scene" in the prelude to the film, and which, because it is never resolved, maintains the sense of doubt and the ambivalent relation to this character.

Throughout the analysis, Magloire's character, infused by the logic, rhetoric and attributes of the *commandement*, will grow in extravagance to achieve the full-blown status of potentate of Bali-Ahuékro. The obscene, the grotesque and the theatricality of his expressions of power will accompany his road to

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[230] Quayesi-Amakye 2009, p. 24.
[231] Perrot 1993, p. 226.

madness. The body, and particularly the mouth, belly and phallus, is the "principal locale of the idioms and fantasies used in depicting power",[232] and Magloire's rhetoric echoes the grotesque obsession with orifices - mouth, nose, anus and ears:

> Sons of slaves! You will eat through your anuses!

> My dear brothers of Bali-Ahuékro! Labour your ears! Swipe off them every bad word that has been planted in them before me! Tear away from your brains the intoxication caused by sin and marabouts! Block your nostrils from the stink of sin! Quench your thirst at the spring of the new faith I am the incarnation of![233]

His healing methods involve blessing his followers by spitting out impressive jets of liquid on them[234] and smearing potions on their faces. In both instances, characters in the film flinch in disgust.

As the nature of Magloire is made more apparent, some of his practices and attributes refer to portrayals and descriptions of the works of actual Ivorian prophets. The relationship between the cinematic rendering of the prophetic figure and the prophetic tradition of Côte d'Ivoire would provide a partial answer to the ways in which the religious traditions are constructed in the film.

Magloire in the African Prophetic Tradition

When asked in an interview why he chose Christianity as a starting point for the film, M'Bala replied:

> Firstly, it has to be said that we are constantly aggressed [sic] by this phenomenon in West Africa, and perhaps even in the world … In Côte d'Ivoire … you get prophets in every household. There are prophets everywhere. There are prophets in the parks, in our lifts. It is a phenomenon that surrounds us, that permeates our environment and which forces itself on us.[235]

This quote suggests that M'Bala was inspired for his portrayal of Magloire by Ivorian prophets. As creative works, films are not pure fictions. They have a claim to everyday evidence, to existence; they suggest a space, a history, a language, a way of looking at the world.[236] One could ask, then, on which accounts, images and personalities do the filmmaker and scriptwriters base their portrayal of the prophet? What are the features reproduced? How does the portrayal of Magloire reflect the role prophets play in Ivorian society?

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[232] Mbembe 2001, p. 83.
[233] *Au Nom du Christ,* 1993.
[234] Although the Gospels describe Christ healing through his spittle, which in a way links Magloire to Christ, these descriptions are not as flamboyant.
[235] Armager 2002.
[236] Augé 1994, p. 90.

In this section, I would like to create a background for two points, which form part of my argument that the way the film portrays Magloire's religion is infused by the immediate Ivorian context and by the filmmaker's preferred meanings, which position him as a transmitter of knowledge. First, the portrayal of Magloire is a mishmash of various characteristics and types of prophets, inspired by Ivorian prophets' attributes, attire, theologies and practices. Second, the strong link between prophetisms and the political sphere in Côte d'Ivoire[237] can be a source of interpretation for Magloire's portrayal as not only the critique of a religious practice but also as an allegory of power in the postcolony. These two aspects place the film firmly on the Ivorian scene but also relate it to the wider question of religion and modernity in Africa.

In African Christianity, the prophetic tradition is considered one of the five types of revival movements.[238] Each types is characterised by an intense religious experience, a vision, a dream that may prompt prophetic speaking and actions, healing and community building.[239] Most scholars of African prophetisms agree that they appear in periods of crisis and transition, of cultural, economic, and political upheaval, and that part of their appeal is the immediacy of the prophets' messages in such times promising relief and providing hope. Linking crisis with the rise in prophetic movements, theologians Graham Duncan and Ogbu Kalu find that most of the earlier prophetisms occurred during the period between 1914 and 1950 when missionary control strengthened, colonial power and white settlers consolidated, and labour problems and racial exploitation predominated. After the independence, the same feelings of insecurity, triggered by further circumstances, will perpetuate the rise of prophetic movements.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the first prophet of the country's renowned tradition was William Wadé Harris, who arrived from Liberia already in 1913. The theme of prophet picked for the film is thus not surprising, and the creators of the film had ample material to build their prophet on. The prophetic tradition of

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[237] See for example, Perrot 1993; Mbembe 2001; Duncan & Kalu 2005; Bayart 1993; Dozon 1995, 2006; Gadou 2004; Duchesne 2000.

[238] According to Graham Duncan and Ogbu Kalu, the first type is associated with a diviner or religious healer from the traditional context who appropriates some aspects of Christian symbols and message to create a new synthesis or emergent religious. The second type is the prophet, who often comes from a Christian tradition but emphasizes particular ethical and pneumatic components of the canon. The third type consist of African indigenous churches. The fourth type is a puritan or fundamentalist expressions of mainline denominations. The fifth type encompasses contemporary Pentecostalism on the continent. (Duncan & Kalu 2005, pp. 281-283).

[239] Duncan & Kalu 2005, p. 283.

Côte d'Ivoire is diverse with itinerant prophets, so-called church prophets creating more or less syncretic cults,[240] healer-prophets who transform their villages into therapeutic places, and even minister-prophets.[241] One of the figures which inspired Magloire is Harris, the Grébo Wesleyan Methodist who came to the south of Côte d'Ivoire with a six-foot-long bamboo cross.[242] Harris was much more successful than the Catholic and Protestant missionaries present in the region.[243] He demanded the burning of fetishes and idols, regarded polygamy as acceptable and advocated for Western education. He carried a staff-like bamboo cross, an English-language Bible, a gourd rattle wrapped in a net of beads and a small gourd bowl used as a receptacle for baptismal water.[244] Despite the fact that Harris' teachings were in line with the main objectives of colonial authority, in view of the growth of his popularity and the fact that populations were more prone to follow Harris' teachings of liberation rather than the colonial authorities, Harris was expelled from Côte d'Ivoire in 1915. He had followers who created their own churches and communities, such as the prophetess Marie Lalou (the Deïma movement) or the prophet-healer Albert Atcho (the Bregbo community).

With Harris begins the history of a close relationship of religious prophetic movements to the economic and political situations of the country and its omnipresence in the public sphere. According to anthropologist Jean-Pierre Dozon, Ivorian prophetisms are linked to the country's socio-economic transformations and its political and ideological fields. They should be understood as political responses to developments started in the colonial period and are in close relation to the rise and fall of the "Ivorian miracle". The driving force of the country's economic growth – the cultivation of cocoa and coffee during the colonial period – triggered modernisation and the relative prosperity of the

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[240] An example of a church prophet was "Papa Nouveau" – real name Dagri Najva – founder of a dissident Harrist Church but who was rather aligned to the same ideas of modernisation and collaboration with the French during the colonial period. He was considered to be the last "pure prophet" by Houphouet-Boigny, who played a certain role in the reconciliation process started in 2001 in the country, where he urged the politicians to come to a common accord for the development of Côte d'Ivoire. He died in September 2001.

[241] André Mary in his *Prophètes-pasteurs: La politique de la délivrance en Côte d'Ivoire* (2002) provides an example of a minister-prophet is Kacou Séverin, who was affiliated with the American Pentecostal Church "Foursquare". He was part of a new generation of prophets influenced by American Pentecostals and televangelists. Starting as a prayer group in Bouaké, his association soon became an international enterprise with its headquarters in Paris. For him, Côte d'Ivoire had "eaten too much", and could be delivered only through Christ, since it had been corrupted by politicians, homosexuality, pedophilia and the practice of fetishisms by businessmen.

[242] Sundkler & Steed 2000, p. 196.

[243] B. Sundkler and C. Steed write that not only did he manage to convert about 100,000 people to the Methodist Church across Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana in seventeen months, but he also as a "broad-minded leader free to bring some of the converts to the Catholics or the Protestants" (2000, p. 703) managed to increase the number of Catholics from a few hundred to 8,000 in 1917 and 20,000 in 1922.

[244] Walker 1983, p. 39.

country. These developments all contributed to the idea of an independent Ivorian civil society capable of liberating itself from the clutches of colonialism. Prophet Harris, with his emphasis on education and preaching of the day when "Blacks will be equal to the whites", and later his followers, inscribe themselves in that modernisation and liberation narrative.

When Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Catholic "champion of decolonisation",[245] became president of the independent Côte d'Ivoire in 1960, the idea that the country had managed to *literally* chase away its demons, be they French colonialists or evil spirits, by following the Word of God, reached its apotheosis. Many of the prophets and religious figures hailed him as one of their own. Houphouët-Boigny became one of the prophets evidencing to "the politico-religious nature of the Ivorian Power",[246] with the Basilica of Yamoussoukro becoming its ultimate symbol.[247]

The modernisation of Côte d'Ivoire did not chase away the evils, however. The perception that the Christian president[248] had, with the intervention of the prophets, defeated the evil forces by ridding the country of its idols and oppressors was fed by the numerous interventions, speeches and appearances of religious leaders along with the representatives of political power. What this discourse did was to imply that the evil forces are never far away, and consequently, the number of prophets did not stop growing. The signs of modernity – the school, the city, the state, jobs and consumer goods – did not escape the powers of magic or evil sorcery.[249] Soon enough, the economic crisis, felt already in the 1970s, manifested itself more forcefully in the 1980s with the fall

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[245] Houphouët-Boigny played an important role in anti-colonial struggles, as did many of the African intellectuals. Later, however, he became, in the words of Jean-Francois Bayart in his *Politics of the Belly* (2009) "the uncontested master of 'transformism'". Transformism is a term coined by Antonio Gramsci designating "the absorption of the 'intellectuals' by the dominant class, who are politically and ideologically capable of leading the subordinate classes". The "champion of decolonization" intermittently suppressed and exonerated potentially subversive educated individuals, and with the help of the French administrative and commercial sectors, managed to secure a "quasi-monopoly of the distribution of power and enrichment". His leadership of a seemingly prosperous and pacifist Côte d'Ivoire earned him cultic status.

[246] Dozon, 1995, p. 45.

[247] The basilica surpasses in size Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.

[248] The whole country was perceived up until the early 2000s as being Catholic. For Marie LeBlanc, this religious identity was more a political construction rather a demographic reality, derived from the religious affiliation of Houphouët-Boigny, again, the privileged contacts maintained with France, and the building of the Yamoussoukro Basilica in the 1980s (LeBlanc 2003, p. 88). Indeed, according to the 2014 census, the population was comprised of 42.9% Muslims, 33.9 % Christians (with 17.2% Catholics), 3.6% practitioners of folk religion, 0.5% of other and, surprisingly for the region, – 19.1% non-affiliated. The idea that the prophet is closer to The Prophet – Mohammad – is a valid one in terms of representation and would not be surprising in view of the numbers of Muslims. However, as Perrot writes in the 1990s, Islam was predominantly practiced in the North. With the idea of *Ivoirité* and the publication of the Chartre Du Nord, Islam was ousted from the idea of the religion of *Ivoirité*. Islam was for the northern migration workers, and so the Islamic influences are ideologically kept at bay.

[249] Dozon 2006.

in world market prices on coffee and cocoa, the implementation of the structural adjustment programs of the IMF and the World Bank, and the increase in school-dropout rates.

The growth of insecurity and suspicion and the steady advance towards a full-blown crisis in 2002 was accompanied by an increase in the number of prophetic movements designed to fight the demons of witchcraft. Another prophetic figure, Gbahié Koudou, in contrast to Harris, was contemptuous of almost all religions, including Christianity in general, the Ivorian prophetic churches and Islam. For him, the country needed a new religion to be able to tackle the omnipresence of fetishes, and, for that, one had to return to one's rural origins. Koudou started his work in the 1980s and specialised in healing. According to D. Gadou, he received between 500 and 600 people per week to be healed.

C. H. Perrot, following the arrival and work of prophet Gbahié in the Eotilé village of south-eastern Côte d'Ivoire in July-August of 1985, names three reasons that have forced the villagers to invite the prophet. What she subsequently calls a religious and cultural revolution was triggered by a general sense of insecurity caused by a fear for their lives (witchcraft); a deterioration of their livelihood caused by the overexploitation of fish in the lagoon through modernised fishing methods; and a general sense of vulnerability in the seeming absence of the state. Koudou's follower, Zredji, revitalised the "sacred forest" in Dida country as a place of healing at which, in August 1994, 12,000 people gathered.[250]

Magloire, as we will see more closely in the next section, has the attributes of a Harrist-type of prophet: the robes, the bamboo cross and the gourd. He condemns traditional religious practices; advocates, among other things, polygamy; and is the leader of Bali-Ahuékro, which becomes a place of healing.

The tight relationship between the prophetic churches and political figures as power holders and discourses of modernity closely related to the supernatural are reflected in Magloire's world. Together with beliefs, the insecurities brought by the various crises and insufficient resources, but also pragmatism, create a conditions for prophets as healers and community builders.[251]

M'Bala does not explain the appearance of Magloire or, by extension, the proliferation of prophets through the socio-economic and political crisis. Rather, beliefs are the focus of the film. The film puts emphasis on the *commandement* as a set of perceptions, an image that became reality through the fact that "people acted from and in accordance with what they took to be real – and by acting, produced a materiality".[252] The film's didactic overtones aim at debunking that image. The materiality that stemmed from that image – the social, economic, political and religious institutions and the fluctuations of the

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[250] Gadou 2004, p. 6.
[251] Yoro 2012, p. 52.
[252] Mbembe 2001, p. 50.

world market – are not directly addressed. We only see its signs, not its effects. What is left, then, are the expressions of beliefs and ideology.

M'Bala's Magloire is inspired by Ivorian prophets which appear in periods of crises in Ivorian society but transcends them by creating the image of a prophet that can be recognisable and relatable in contexts outside of Côte d'Ivoire. Perhaps, following the shift of focus in African cinemas from denunciations of colonialism or neocolonialism, M'Bala does not overtly point to the socio-political causes of the appearance of Magloire. Rather, with the aesthetics of the grotesque, he presents a society affected by the crises and becomes a *spectacle* of power.

Magloire's Theology

> God has abandoned all the religions of the Earth because they did not respect his law. That is why they lost their healing powers. I, Magloire the First, have this power. The mission entrusted to me by Christ is to write the Last Testament, to bring a new holy light, which will guide the souls.[253]

Not all causality is abandoned, however. The quote above is an excerpt of the speech delivered by Magloire in front of a large congregation, where he explains why his coming was needed and how he can achieve the salvation of his people. The previous section sketched the prophets' prototypes on which M'Bala arguably based his representation of Magloire. Along with these, M'Bala extensively presents the practices and outlines the doctrine the prophet brings. The focus on practices and doctrine serve a double purpose in *Au Nom du Christ*. First, the film once more creates parallels with the teachings of Ivorian prophets by incorporating their healing practices, divination, their use of scripture and the liberation discourse. Second, as verisimilitude is attained, the film "reveals", through flashbacks, the illegitimacy of the teachings, the characters' behaviour and dialogue, questionable commandments, and unorthodox interpretations of scripture. The film serves as an illustration of the *spectacle* of prophets, and undermining their practices and teachings is one way to achieve that purpose. In the following pages, I endeavour to show how M'Bala meticulously unravels Magloire's theatre of power through the use of Scripture and its misreadings as well as his performances of healing.

Scripture and Teachings
Scripture plays an important role in the film as a means of authentication of institutionalised religions. In this case, the text is the Bible, albeit one that needs to be rewritten, and it serves as the connecting link between the prophet and Christianity, providing Magloire with an authoritative status.

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[253] *Au Nom du Christ,* 1993.

In prophetic movements, the Bible occupies an important role to a greater or lesser extent, implying that prophetic Christianity is "at least 'implicitly literate'".[254] The connection to the Bible also presupposes that Christianity is at least nominally known in the context before the appearance of the prophet and has a certain status. Although this might sound rather obvious, how could Magloire claim to be prophet of Christ if he, and the people to whom he is preaching, did not know who Christ is? It is nevertheless worth stressing in order to understand of M'Bala's critique. The film's preferred narrative of return to the sources necessitates the deconstruction of the prophetic movement on screen to reveal not only its shortcomings but also the roots of the movement, the *origins* of Christianity in Côte d'Ivoire. For M'Bala, Christianity, along with Islam, is an imported religion,[255] and he ties Christianity with missionary endeavours, the Bible and colonisation. The following section in which I analyse scenes involving preaching and practices will illustrate this point.

The film's narrative does not unfold through continuity editing.[256] Rather, M'Bala uses crosscutting[257] to present parallel elements of the story, breaking the linearity of time.[258] The story is constructed through sequences and scenes, presenting the different stages of Magloire's ascension and demise. Two movements can be traced through these stages: as the congregation grows in number and resources, the practices and teachings become more sophisticated but also less believable.

Two scenes illustrate the use of Scripture in Magloire's congregation. The first presents the early stages of the movement and shows the small congregation sitting on the ground outside in what seems to be a Bible study session. The blinded man, who has now become a teacher, is leading the class and answers questions from the congregation.[259] He speaks to them, with no book in hand, of Jesus' apostles, with rather unusual emphases. For example:

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[254] Duncan & Kalu 2005, p. 294.

[255] "Islam…Roman Catholic and Christian Churches … are sent, imported religions." (Armager 2002).

[256] This is part of the Hollywood classic style of editing where there is a clear beginning, a middle and an end, and when the end comes, no questions are left unanswered.

[257] In crosscutting, the shots of two or more scenes are intermingled to suggest PARALLEL ACTION. It presents different sets of action that can be occurring simultaneously or at different times.

[258] An aspect lamented by a French reviewer: "A Beautiful subject ruined by a total absence of mise-en-scène. The sketches succeed each other without any link. And we give a sigh of relief when, after an hour twenty minutes that seem endless, the credits of the film appear." (*Télérama* 1994).

[259] One is reminded of the Harrists' *First Booklet of Religious Education* for use in the Harrist mission (Premier livret de l'éducation réligieuse à l'usage des missions Harristes), in which questions concerning the religions, the community, the acts and the commandments are answered. Sheila Walker writes that for example, "why can't we represent God?" is answered thusly: "no one has ever seen or ever will see God. God is pure spirit…to make a material representation of God, whatever may be the intention, is a diabolical practice." (Walker 1983, pp. 87-8).

Judas! He is the mightiest of all! Thanks to his betrayal that I would describe as exceptional, the prophecy was fulfilled. Even if he can be considered a slaver. Yes, he is the one who sold Christ.

When a member of the congregation asks about doubting Thomas:

- Why did Saint Thomas only believe when he touched?
- Because he was short-sighted.

And more
- I heard that Saint Peter lied three times.
- It was purely strategic. It was necessary to distract the vigilance of the Roman soldiers to allow Peter to become the stone.[260]

The humorous tone of the Bible lesson demonstrates a nominal knowledge of Christianity and the implicitly literate character of the movement. It also places the Bible as the core of what M'Bala constructs as African Christianity. It also illustrates the limits of interpretation that such knowledge has, a knowledge that is then passed on to believers. The teachings may have the makings of a genuine doctrine, but they are limited to form and are open to misreadings.

The second preaching scene shows a more established church. It takes place in a bamboo church. The congregation is still sitting on the floor, but they are all dressed in the colour red– one of the attributes of the congregation. In this scene, the preacher enumerates Magloire's eight commandments,[261] which were received in a revelation from God the day before. The conditions for salvation and for remaining in the community are outlined, with emphasis placed on reproduction, absolute devotion to the prophet and substantial material contribution to the church. All these elements – the church building, the

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[260] *Au nom du Christ*, 1993. This is a play on words. In French, the name Pierre (Peter) and pierre (stone, or rock) are homonyms. A similar example can be found in the context of Congolese popular paintings. Congolese artist Cheri Samba, in his painting entitled *Préducation orale* (1995), plays with words in a similar way. "Preducation" is formed from the words *predication* – preaching, and *éducation* – education. The illiteracy of the preacher on the canvas is shown by the written French on the top left corner of the painting, which is nothing but a transcription of the words' sounds in the Latin alphabet. Bubbles from the preacher's head, as in a comic strip, show the Jesus he has in mind - a man, with a cone head standing on fish bones, instead of water. Homonyms in the French language make it possible to write words with different meanings but which sound the same, and so "les eaux de la mer" (the waters of the sea) become "les os de la mer" (the bones of the sea). Jesus is painted standing on fish bones from the sea, instead of water.

[261] (1) Come to Magloire the First and multiply; (2) Work of the flesh you will perform twice a day for the love of your God; (3) You will submit to the will of your lord by marrying nine women; (4) To your prophet you will give back half of your crops; (5) To your prophet you will devote one week's work per month; (6) You will pray to your God 13 times a day; (7) You will bear at all times and in all places the object of your faith; (8) To no authority but your prophet's will you submit.

congregation's clothes and the commandments – signify a new phase in Magloire's prophetic movement – its institutionalisation and growth. They also illustrate the point that the *commandement* does not make a distinction between ruling and civilising (or educating). The theology preached by the disciples and the behaviour they dictate in the form of the Eight Commandments are not directed towards the salvation of the people as Magloire claims but only serve to consolidate his rule and to enforce obedience.

The syncretic nature of Magloire's movement is also signalled. If the Harrists, for example, are iconoclastic, Magloire's church has Catholic remnants of Western iconography and symbols of inculturation. The statue of a white Jesus is now surrounded by Black saints in Ivorian clothing: Saint Afoué (the feeding mother, the patron saint of the hungry, the sick and the orphans), Saint Kofi (patron of musicians and artists) and Saint Chadon (patron of nurses and midwives). The liturgy begins with the reading of the Last Testament, the Gospel according to Saint Koudou.[262] With still no physical evidence in the form of a book, Magloire's revelation and miracles are related. As the preacher tells the story, we realise that the fable about Magloire's exploits and the narrative of his power grow in extravagance. As viewers, we have witnessed that Magloire did not raise his arms to the sky and drop on the band of unbelievers and pagans a rain of ashes, nor were any who were paralysed healed. None of the villagers' cultic objects burst into flames, although this is a common narrative among Ivorian prophetisms, where objects of witchcraft are said to suddenly combust when a prophet arrives in a village. The miracle healing of the married barren woman – Mahouamba (actress Akissi Delta) – is described as a "gesture full of love". In the flashback that presents this gesture, we witness the coercion of the woman to have sexual intercourse with Magloire in order for her to "be blessed with child" and, after the act, Magloire declaring that – "this infidelity is holy".[263]

References to Scripture in the film establish a nominal authority and continuity with missionary Christianity symbolised in these scenes by the statue of a white Christ. The final breaking of Magloire's spell, in addition to the discrepancies, hermeneutics and commandments, is an establishing shot in Magloire's chambers. In a close-up of Magloire holding a massive book which we assume is the Bible – the only time when Scripture comes to the screen – we realise that he is illiterate, for he holds the book upside down. Through this didactic intervention M'Bala shows that Scripture is just a prop for Magloire, an element of his mise-en-scène, his spectacle. Magloire's illiteracy is not what stages him as a "fake" prophet. Indeed, not all prophets are educated or literate, nor is it a requirement in prophetisms. Rather, it is pretence, his use of the Bible as a means to claim authority, and the fact that authenticity and

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[262] This is probably a reference to the prophet Gbahié Koudou.
[263] *Au Nom du Christ*, 1993.

the continuity with missionary Christianity is signified through the use of the text, that ultimately discredit him in the eyes of the viewer.

Practices and Revelations

Along with the use of the Bible as a material symbol of religious authority, the film presents baptism, healing, divination, witnessing and dreams/visions as practices in Magloire's repertoire. These elements show the origins Magloire's prophetic movement in Ivorian prophetisms, and by extension in the various religious traditions informing these prophetisms.

The baptism scene illustrates the syncretic nature of the church and its use of various imagery. Baptism is performed in the evangelical tradition by immersion.[264] The follower pronounces the baptismal vows and is immersed thricely, with the Trinitarian formula "In the Name of Christ", "Of Magloire the First", and "The Salvation of the People". Only after that are they blessed by Magloire. The baptismal vows, along with the commandments, reinforce obedience to Magloire and contribute to the economic growth of his church. One should:

> Recognise Magloire the First as the cousin of Christ; get rid of their material goods; agree to give half of their salary for the radiance of their church; get rid of the idols; and devote themselves body and soul to Magloire the First.[265]

Once again, the rhetoric is geared towards reaffirming the power of the potentate, a potentate who has inherited Western religious symbols. If baptism by immersion is often associated with an Evangelical tradition, statues of a white Jesus and Mary are Catholic signifiers, similar to the statues of saints described above. The two statues signal the link between Magloire's church, mainline Christianity and Western iconography. The statues are placed in a royal-like setting standing respectively next to Magloire and Mère Sopie – the former mad woman – who has been promoted to mother of the church. The baptism scene, with its royal imagery, has established Magloire as a definite authority.

The next step is his works, seen through healing. It is also here that the first elements of ridicule and derision on the part of the disciples appear, illustrating the point that the relation between the master and the disciples is more complex than the dichotomies of dominant vs dominated allow for, especially in the postcolony.

Healing in the film is focused on female fertility and pregnancy. Female fertility is frequently discussed in traditional narratives.[266] It is regarded as a *sine que non* for the attainment of the full development as a complete person

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[264] An actual choir from the Ivorian Church of the Twelve Apostles, which has its own prophet, Prophète Supreme Kacou Isaac, sings during the baptism scene.
[265] *Au Nom du Christ,* 1993.
[266] Holter 2014.

to which all aspire;[267] and for the Akan people, it is paramount, as they have a fertility cult.[268] Mahouamba is scorned by other women for her infertility and believes she has been bewitched. She and her husband - Mouta (actor Martin Guédéba) - come to Magloire's now healing village to seek help. The healing process starts with divination or diagnosis. As in accounts about the prophets Koudou and Zredji, the healing takes place in an intimate space, and access to the prophet requires preparation and special permission. The couple is dressed in white robes and they kneel in front of the seat. Magloire's appearance in the chambers has all the makings of theatricality: he enters, solemnly surrounded by his entourage, through a door illuminated by a cross in the background. A brown liquid is smeared on Mahouamba's face (which causes the husband to feel disgust), and, after the liquid is dried from her face with a white cloth, Magloire "reads" the smears on the cloth. He declares that she will have a child, but for that to happen she must to stay and live with them in the same compound, which brings an ironic smile to Mère Sopie's face.

The need to stay and live with a prophet is not an uncommon practice. For example, the priest from the Church of the Twelve Apostles recounts that he stayed for a year with the prophet during the healing process and then decided to stay indefinitely.[269] The practice of divination, with the use of herbs, leaves and brews, is used among some African Instituted Churches in their healing practices. They consider its source to be traditional religion.[270]

Along with the use of healing elements, dreams are essential in African systems of representation,[271]and for African independent churches.[272] Just as for the members of independent churches, who "see dreams as vehicles of divine communication and revelation."[273] Magloire considers his dreams to be revelatory. He dreams of a white Christ standing on the water next to a cross calling for him. Christ blesses him and pours water over his head. This becomes a turning point for Magloire, who, when he awakens, becomes the Messiah and is no longer just a prophet. Magloire has, in this senseless outgrowth of proportion, reached the ultimate phase of his transformation and madness.

Another aspect in line with elements of various African Christian traditions is witnessing and liberation discourse. Salvation and liberation have been present in Magloire's rhetoric from his Trinitarian formula in the vision and baptism scenes: "in the name of Christ, of Magloire the First, and the Salvation of the people". As Magloire's last preaching takes place outside, because of the multitude of followers who have come to be saved and liberated, he utters

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[267] Meyer 1978.
[268] Abe 2013.
[269] He has been working with the prophet for 30 years at the time the documentary was made. Interview in the documentary *Eglise des 12 apôtres de Côte d'Ivoire: Histoire du prophète suprême*. YouTube.
[270] Holter 2014.
[271] Augé 1999.
[272] Mbiti 1986.
[273] Ibid, p. 144.

the usual tropes of liberation – "People of hunger, people of thirst, people of misery, cripples of the earth. God has seen your sufferings grow." This rhetoric is picked up by the people: "Save us Magloire!" "Deliver us Magloire!" In between Magloire's preaching and the crowd's shouts: Mère Sopie and Mahouamba testify. They speak of their predicament as mentally ill and barren women and provide the living proof of healing.

The prophetic tradition meticulously portrayed in *Au Nom du Christ* is firmly engrained in the Ivorian context, having affinities with particular movements, referring to prophets, and even incorporating actors from a contemporary prophetic tradition, as is the case with the choir of the Church of the Twelve Apostles and its red robes. With the emphasis on healing and liberation, it inscribes itself into the socio-political realm. It shows continuity with mainline Christianity while, at the same time, signalling inculturation. In other words, the writers of the film managed to capture some essential elements of African prophetic Christianity.

Prophetism and Modern African Religion

> As artists, as filmmakers, I feel that we have to take a stance in relation to history.[274]

If the previous sections concentrated on the prophet and prophetisms in the context and content of the film, in this section I would like to show how M'Bala contrasts prophetism with an Ivorian religious tradition and signifies it as *the* authentic religion, a religion that will bring spirituality back to the people and become a solution to the threat of prophetisms in the postcolonial situation. M'Bala, through cinematography and dialogues, has been signalling the ambivalence of Magloire. The theme of the film – the deceptive nature of prophets and their expression of power as *commandement* – is amplified by sub-themes. Ivorian religious practices, castration, fertility and power are woven into Magloire's spectacle, in the continuously grotesque atmosphere, equally accentuated by M'Bala's use of lighting, as a way to signify the darkness and light of these varying religious traditions.

The Way to an Authentic and Modern Ivorian Religion

Ivorian society in the film is allegorically presented by the twins' characters.

> Twins are considered to be beings endowed with a supernatural power, the power of Genies ... The twins are a terrifying couple. One embodies the good;

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[274] Armager 2002.

the other evil. The evil twin transgresses taboos, totems, prohibitions. It is not a simple opposition of opposing forces – of the Manichaean type – but a dialectical couple: the dialectical opposition of opposites. The principle of life and death.[275]

Twin is *N'da* in the Anyi language and it often replaces the twins' real names. In the film, only one twin is named N'da. We learn later that it is the good one. The other twin is given no name at all. During "the miracle" scene in which Magloire proves his power, one of the twins leaves the gathering in disbelief. The brothers meet afterwards in a sacred spot[276] and argue over the prophet's arrival. They argue about which religion is to foster the spirituality of the people. During the exchange, the sacred bowl is knocked over and its content spills out. From this moment, the twins' paths separate (actors Lacina and Lauceni Hassane). The unnamed twin joins Magloire, while N'da subsequently tries to help Mouta and his wife in the face of Magloire's violence.

M'Bala portrays the division of Ivorian society in those who believe in the new religions which appear in the place of the old ones that have failed to protect their people from, among other things, slavery and colonisation and in those who believe that the traditional religions, the ones that were present before the advent of Christianity, are the repositories for a people's culture, knowledge, history and, again, spirituality. The misery of the village and the rise of Magloire are understood to be the consequences of spiritual alienation brought by Christianity and other foreign forms of thought. The alternative proposed is a recuperation of the lost tradition.

African traditional religion in the Ivorian context is signalled by sacred places, statues of divinities and ancestors, sacred clans, sacrifices to spirits, and traditional medicine. The preferred narrative of the director and the writers through the slow unveiling of Magloire is on the side of tradition African religion. The process of the authentication and legitimisation of Ivorian practices is different from that of Magloire's prophetism through miracles, healing and apparent use of Scripture. Ivorian practices are presented as the *true* ones when it is revealed that Magloire, for his miracles actually uses herbs and remedies N'da uses. Authenticity is connoted through N'da's empathy, and in Mouta's successful appeal to the spirits of the water. The discrediting of Magloire elevates the Ivorian tradition personified in N'da's character.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the scriptwriters' representation of Ivorian practices and their role is modelled on the aforementioned *Bossonisme* coined by Jean-Marie Adiaffi.

Bossonisme stems from the word *boson* in the Anyi language, which designates spirits, but those different from ancestors. Adiaffi studied at the Institut

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[275] Adiaffi 1992, p. 24.
[276] The sacred spot is signified by a bowl placed on three forked branches, erected in front of a termite mound. John Mbiti describes such a sacred place as an Akan altar, where offerings are made to God in his *African Religions and Philosophy*.

des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC) and he also studied philosophy at the Sorbonne. His decolonising project, seen in the presentation of the colonial situation with the brutality of the military administration, the fight against the white coloniser, the confrontation between the religion of the coloniser and the colonised, and the struggle between divine representations[277] can be traced throughout his novels (*La Carte d'identité*, 1980, and *Silence, on développe* 1992), as well as his manuscript on *Bossonisme*. Adiaffi was a popular public speaker and was close to Henri Konan Bédié, the successor to Houphouët-Boigny, which places *Bossonisme* in the same public and political sphere as other religious traditions of Côte d'Ivoire.

Adiaffi was not the creator of this particular religious practice and belief, but he started collecting the myths and symbols used and told by the *kômian* – the boson priests and priestesses. His objective was to rejuvenate these traditions, a project he wanted to achieve through the creation of a centre for Animist research, whose purpose would be to study, produce knowledge that would promote the recognition, rehabilitation and modernisation of animism, under the name of *Bossonism*e.[278] The centre was not created, nor was the manuscript on *Bossonisme* published. According to anthropologist Véronique Duchesne, who had access to the manuscript, bossonist theology focuses on the construction of a new African religious identity. She summarises its main traits in terms of opposites: a monotheistic religion, which categorically refuses any closeness to polytheism, a liberation theology that struggles against spiritual alienation, an Afrocentric doctrine against Eurocentrism, and an ideology of modernity, which strives to break with an obscurantist past.[279]

In *Au nom du Christ*, most of these characteristic traits are presented as opposing Magloire's prophetism and are positioned as the only option for fighting against cultural alienation and spiritual death. *Bossonisme* is conceived as a "religion for the liberation of people from all oppressions, to complete mental decolonization, to invent our religious modernity".[280] With *Bossonisme*, Adiaffi worked to rehabilitate in the eyes of the Ivorians their ancestral religion long depreciated under the name of fetishism and easily amalgamated with witchcraft or the occult. Duchesne writes that, for Adiaffi, following the missionaries, many Ivorian prophets (among others, Gbahié Koudou) have worked for the destruction of fetishes and cultic objects and have fought against kômian priests. Since "spiritual alienation is the source, the root of other alienations",[281] Ivorians must be reconciled with their religious heritage too long denigrated by the colonisers, more generally by Westerners, and by Ivorians themselves. For Adiaffi, as for the partisans of a mod-

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[277] Bahi, 2013, p. 23.
[278] Duchesne 2000, p. 302.
[279] Ibid, p. 303.
[280] Ibid, p. 304.
[281] Duchesne 2000, p. 305.

ern Côte d'Ivoire, modernity supposes at the same time progress, reason, science and technology. In accordance with *Bossonisme*, modernisation must also take place with respect and in continuity of African traditions, as he does not consider African religious traditions as an impediment to modernity or modernisation.

In *Au Nom du Christ, Bossonisme'*s precepts come through as a tradition that fosters community and the idea of a cultural heritage devoid of Western influences. It is summarised in N'da's words:

> What kind of people are we? In our history, suffice that anyone comes and tells us any kind of ridiculous story for us to follow them like sheep. Tomorrow we will be emptied of all our substance. There is no worse death for a people than spiritual death. My brother, I am telling you, we are agonizing.[282]

Light and Darkness

The contrasting of the two religious practices in the film is achieved not only through the actions and dialogue of the characters but also through form. Using elements of the grotesque – laughter, madness, violence, language, excess and theatricality in the use of foods – is supported by the particular care the director and cinematographer (Mohammed Soudani) have accorded to lighting. Both Magloire's and N'da's worlds, although sharing the same space, are coloured and composed contrastingly. M'Bala's "preferred meanings" are constructed through lighting, camera angles and space. All scenes involving traditional rituals and the use of herbs or sacrifices are shot in the open, basking in sunlight, in opposition to the crammed spaces of Magloire's realm. Nature and natural light are the background for the traditional practices and beliefs. In a sense, M'Bala reverses the dark/light binary, where dark is associated with pagan forces and light with Christianity.

If Bali-Ahuékro is the realm of the grotesque, and Magloire's preaching a careful exuberant and dramatic performance within it, M'Bala adds baroque elements to light up this world of ambivalence and contrasts with *chiaroscuro*, literally "light/dark". Chiaroscuro is a painting technique, which had its renaissance in the seventeenth century, mostly with Italian painter Caravaggio, starting the Baroque period in European art. Its use of strong contrasting light enhances the dramatic effect on the canvas. In film, chiaroscuro is the angular alternation of dark shadows and stark fields of light across various on-screen surfaces in films,[283] which, adding drama, also conveys claustrophobia, paranoia, and an unsettling feeling. It is thus not surprising that chiaroscuro is a

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[282] *Au Nom du Christ,* 1993.
[283] Manon 2007, p. 2.
Film noir and German expressionism are notorious for their use of chiaroscuro. But perhaps one of the most famous examples of chiaroscuro in popular film is *The Godfather, Part II*, in which Vito Corleone (Marlon Brando)'s office, a place where evil dwells, and Vito himself are

companion of the grotesque. Magloire's space, when he is not shown as the personification of power outside in front of the multitudes or performing miracles, is dark, crammed and claustrophobic. Most of the action happens at night, and his private chambers are dimly lit. In the scenes with the women – Mahouamba and Mère Sopie – only their faces are shown, with the source of light coming from the cross and the enormous bed taking all the space. Although the cross is the source of light, always accentuated in the night scenes and inside spaces, it is also a lit cross around which Magloire's disciples' form the lynching party that gathers to search for Mahouamba's husband before castrating him.

Chiaroscuro in the film thus connotes evil, and the only time when the cultic objects are shown in a dark light is when they are repudiated in favour of Magloire and then burnt. The "fetish scene" represents, first, a rejection of one-self, of one's identity, and, second, the embracing of a "new" identity with its own rituals, myths, dreams and imageries.

Castration and Infertility

I have mentioned that the world of N'da is one of open spaces, sunlight and nature. The link between Magloire and N'da, through which light and darkness battle, so to speak, is personified in Mouta – Mahouamba's husband. As Mahouamba stays with Magloire, Mouta's eyes are opened by N'da. This happens literally as N'da performs the same blinding "miracle" and metaphorically as well. After Mouta goes secretly to his wife and tries to convince her to come with him, he is captured and castrated by the disciples.

If power is the main theme of the film, castration and (in)fertility are its manifestations/sub-themes. Castration is connoted in the very beginning of the film when Gnamien Ato tries to cut off the testicles of a piglet. It signals one of the driving elements of the plot. By ordering that Mouta be castrated, Magloire shows the extent of his violent power and the impunity he enjoys. He also renders Mouta not just impotent but also powerless, for he can no longer play the role of a husband or man in the community. Mouta becomes the castrated object, the passive instrument of the Other's enjoyment[284] and the splendour of the commandement's exercising of authority. Similarly, Mahouamba, who could not be a "complete" woman before giving birth, now that she has been "fertilised"[285] is unable to go back to her husband. She becomes, in a sense, a totem of Magloire's power.

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dark and somber, in contrast to, for example, the dazzling scene of the wedding outside. Similarly, Michael Corleone's transformation in the film is signalled by the darkening of the light around him.

[284] Mbembe 2002, p. 252.

[285] She uses the term herself in the film – "je suis fécondée", not "je suis enceinte" (I am pregnant).

Mouta, on the other hand, is nursed back to life by N'da, and has embraced the traditional religion, signified by the sacrifice he gives to the water spirit and his white clothes. The white, which is on the one hand the dress colour of the Kômien (a *boson* priest or priestess) and on the other hand can be interpreted as a colour of passage, a transition between death and rebirth, or the mutation of a being. He prays:

> To you Songon, spirit, do me justice. In the absence of power and dignity, give me at least new health. Wipe the mud-sweat from my face. With your potter's hands, reshape my mutilated features so that I recognise in your mirror my own face. May my enemies suffer the same fate as me, the shame and humiliation of the impotent.[286]

Despite appearances, the place of women is crucial in the film. Undoubtedly, they are props in the construction of masculinist cosmogony of the power in the postcolony that requires the production of women either as waste or as a lamenting spectator.[287] Magloire surrounds himself with women. He forces them to have intercourse with him. They feed and fan him while he sits on his throne. Regardless, women are not without a voice. At first glance, one could interpret the passivity of women as utter powerlessness and their lack of agency in society. The only way they can become full subjects in society is either through motherhood or through marriage, which would explain why they remain loyal to Magloire. At the same time, they are the only characters who denounce Magloire, who understand him for what he is – a man lusting for power but who will never be able to fully attain it. This is perhaps where the pragmatism of the postcolonial situation is most seen. Regardless of Magloire's status, he is for one the healer and for the other – the father of her child; belief in him, in God, Jesus Christ, or in the ancestors seems irrelevant in the face of pragmatism. It also points to the idea that, in the postcolony, domination and subjugation are not absolute but play a part in the same spectacle. Mahouambe and Mère Sopie denounce Magloire's theatre, but they play their parts next to him until the very end.

Magloire's Death

If we understand castration as related to power, then, Magloire, as the personification of the postcolony's potentate, is not exempt from castration anxiety. This is presented through a dream sequence. The dream in which he is being blessed by a white Christ quickly turn into a nightmare where he himself is castrated. Seen through the African system of representation in which the continuity between waking life and dreams is conserved, the plurality of the self

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[286] *Au nom du Christ*, 1993.
[287] Butler 1992, p. 72.

and the material intimacy between the body and the elements that inhabit it[288] *are* reality. The fact that his castration was dreamt, but did not materialize, Magloire sees it as proof of him having overpowered adversity. He truly fought against his adversaries during the dream sequence, but they did not prevail. He perceives it as Christ giving him, through dreams, the power to be the new Messiah. Thus, resurrection can happen.

According to Duncan and Kalu, "[Prophets] in varying degrees each manifested a form of messianic status… The concept of resurrection was taken over by prophets. It was believed that Shembe rose from the dead and Nxele predicted his rising again…"[289] Magloire, assured of the power bestowed upon him by Christ through the revelatory dream, delivers a last speech to his closest disciples on a termite mound.

This space is significant as the termite mound is an important symbol for the majority of sub-Saharan societies and is considered a dwelling place for supernatural and mystical forces, a place inhabited by spirits.[290] It figures in the myths of the origins of the world of the Dogon (Burkina-Faso, Niger and Mali), the Béti (Cameroun) and the Luba (DRCongo). It is the birthplace of an entire people's ancestors, as for the Bekyuabe (Benin). It is also a place that "radiates transcendental energy susceptible to change a man's destiny",[291] as for the Toura of Côte d'Ivoire. The termite mound is often associated with fertility and power. Standing on a giant termite mound and pronouncing himself immortal, Magloire the First reaches the summit of his influence and disproportionate power. The very act of his standing on the termite mound is sacrilegious, ultimately disrespecting the dwelling place of forces he claims to have conquered. It is there that he orders his disciples to put him on the cross and shoot him.

The postcolony is not just a spectacle or mirror of self-reflectively imagined power[292] characterised by an obscene and grotesque excess. It also creates institutions and political machinery, which then ensure the circularity and replication of the system of violence. This means that the postcolony's potentate as an individual is vulnerable to the rise of another powerful figure, since the conditions of appearance – lack of legitimacy, systems of privileges, allocations and corruption – are replicated. In *Au Nom du Christ,* M'bala seems to provide an alternative in the form of the physical, symbolic and spiritual annihilation of the *commandement* by authentic and autochthonous forces. Magloire's self-staged execution is performed by the hunters' clan – the Dozo.[293]

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288 Augé 1999, p. 27.
289 Duncan & Kalu 2005, p. 294.
290 Iroko 1996.
291 Holas cited in Iroko 1996, p. 196.
292 Mbembe 2001, p. 80.
293 According to cultural anthropologist Sten Hagberg, the term for hunter is donso, donzo, or dozo - in Dyula/Jula or Bamana. He mentions a couple of explanations for the origins of the term, referring on the one hand to Joseph Hellweg, for whom dozo comes from the verb ka don, "to enter", and the noun so, "home, village", and signifies the coming back to the community;

The clan plays an important role "protecting communities from crime and other malevolent forces" as they are considered to possess "mystical powers and potent amulets".[294]

The history of hunters' clans in the region encompassing present-day Burkina Faso, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinée-Conakry is traced to the tenth-eleventh centuries. In historian Youssouf Cissé's descriptions, the hunter is a:

> …great initiate, geomancer, clairvoyant, miracle worker, witch-fighter, healer and his double belonging to the universe of Sanin and Kontron [the virgin mother and the chaste son to which the dozos trace their lineage] and the world of men proves his superiority.[295]

The dozos have their myths and epics, hierarchy and rites and are associated with knowledge, wisdom and traditions.[296] They are protectors against spiritual forces and act as soldiers in times of war.[297] The last bullet fired by the dozos hits Magloire's genitals, and perhaps Mouta's prayers have been answered. Mahouamba and Mere Sopie stand in front of the cross in silence while all the other disciples run off.[298] Magloire does not come back to life, and Mère Sopie screams. The narrative has come full circle. The tragedy of the film lies not only in the spectacle of power. Rather, for the filmmaker, it is the illusion that a new religious and cultural identity, brought from elsewhere, can save. For the creators of the film, this newly acquired identity is based on a false premise, a premise of inferiority, which now permeates the imagination of a whole society. The new identity is hollow, with no real roots, and the horror of it is expressed by the screams of Mère Sopie in the last scene as she experiences the crushing realisation that there is nothing behind the image and there is nothing else to do but scream and flee.

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and, on the other hand, to Syna Ouattara, who considers donso to originate from door gundo, "secret, knowledge", and so "family, domain". (Hagberg 2004, p. 53).

[294] Bassett 2003, pp. 1-2.

[295] "[Le chasseur] est à la fois grand initié, géomancien, voyant, thaumaturge, contre-sorcier, guérisseur, et sa double appartenance à l'univers de Sanin et Konton et au monde des hommes prouve à elle seule sa supériorité" (Cissé 1964, p. 188).

[296] For more on dozos' myths and rites, see Cissé 1964, 1994. Hunters also feature in film. In *Soleils* (2013), filmmakers Dani Kouyaté and Olivier Delahaye recount the initiation story of a young contemporary woman into the hunter's clan, an initiation process that can take up to seven years.

[297] Contemporary dozos, retaining their status as bearers of autochthonous values, have extended their functions and work as associations providing security to populations. They presently have an ambiguous status and are entangled in ethnic, cultural and religious identity politics. For more on the involvement of dozos in politics in Côte d'Ivoire, see Hellweg 2001, 2004.

[298] In one of the descriptions of the film at a festival, the writer states that the disciples run to spread the word. I highly doubt that this is a fair interpretation of the action in the film, unless it is to spread the word of fakery.

Who Sees?

Au Nom du Christ premiered at FESCAPO in 1993, where it received a number of prizes: the main prize – the Étalon de Yennenga; the *Africa in Creation* prize, given by the French Ministry of Cooperation; the *Écrans du Sud* Prize; and a special mention by the International Catholic Organization for Cinema. [299] FESCAPO is a space where filmmakers are validated, not only by the audiences but also by all actors engaged within the African cinematic sphere – other filmmakers, set designers, scriptwriters, producers, funders and critics. Interestingly enough, both the *Africa in Creation* and the *Écrans du Sud* prizes received by *Au Nom du Christ* were given by the same agencies that participated in the funding of the film. FESCAPO is perhaps still the cultural production space *par excellence* for African cinemas, although other international African film festivals are claiming its status, since diasporic cinema and Nollywood are presently at the fore. To receive the main prize, especially in that period, meant that the work, as well as its subject matter and representation of it, was accepted. *Au Nom du Christ* was admitted to the heritage phase of African cinemas in which a certain African modernity was being evaluated by its relation to history and tradition, where history meant either a countering of Western hegemonic images or a creation of images pertaining to be devoid of other cultural influences.

Throughout the analysis, the film's representation of religious traditions has been firmly tied to Côte d'Ivoire and perhaps even more locally to the lagoon people of the south-eastern region of the country. Nevertheless, *Au Nom du Christ* has equally universal claims, related to what the filmmaker, producer and distributor call the global phenomenon of proliferation of sects. M'Bala traces parallel stories of "prophets" in an interview: "In the United States, there was a guy who shut himself in a farm, where he claimed to be awaiting a message from God. He claimed to be a reincarnation of Christ. Look at Jim Jones and his mass suicide in Guyana. It's a worldwide phenomenon". [300] Coproducer Tiziana Soudani from Amka films, when answering the question "why produce the movie *Au Nom du Christ"*, makes a similar comment, stating: "When we read the script, we said to ourselves: this film must exist. Africa is not the only one suffering from the proliferation of sects; the West suffers too."[301] Finally, the distributor enthusiastically writes: "Happily, it sometimes happens that Africa is ahead when it comes to reflection on the universal. The strange coincidence of the subject of this film with what is currently happening confirms that, in cinema, if the means of making a film can

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[299] OCIC, nowadays SIGNIS
[300] Armager 2002.
[301] "À la lecture du scenario on s'est dit: ce film doit exister. L'Afrique n'est pas la seule à souffrir de la proliferation des sects, l'occident souffre aussi". Orisha Distributions, *Au nom du Christ,* Catalogue, 1994.

vary according to the space one occupies, the projection capacity of our troubles as of our joys remains fundamentally and humanly a truth for all."[302]

Perhaps "coincidence" is here overstated, but the attempt to put the film on the global map is transparent. *Au Nom du Christ,* by accentuating the abuse of power ,and madness of Magloire sets him within cultural codes outside Côte d'Ivoire or West Africa and can thus be in dialogue with other audiences. The film has entered in dialogue with a global audience through a number of festivals all over the world.[303] It has of course been shown in Côte d'Ivoire and France.[304] The dialogue has produced for the most part positive reviews, both on the African continent and in Europe.

Dialogue between film and audience necessarily brings out questions of address, which are as crucial as questions of representation. Who is speaking through a film? Who is imagined as listening? Who is actually listening? Who is looking? And what social desires are mobilised by the film?[305] One scene in *Au Nom du Christ* hints at an answer and perhaps better illustrates the aim to reach a global audience more than the creators' uttered claims to universality. After Magloire performed his miracles, the word of a new prophet goes out through a talking drum, juxtaposed with a shot of the translated message being typed on a typewriter.

African drums, in early films and often in Hollywood films, have been aural signifiers of frenzy, be it murderous, ominous or sexual. They convey the restlessness and irrationality of the *African soul,* perceived as such by the rational white mind. In this scene, drums are shown as a medium of communication, having the same function as a typewriter.[306] Simultaneously, M'Bala indirectly establishes the equality of "aural" tradition and the written one. My

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[302] "Il arrive heureusement parfois à l'Afriqe d'être en avance sur la réflexion universelle. L'étrange coincidence du sujet de ce film avec l'actualité, confirme qu'au cinema, si les moyens de faire un film peuvent varier selon l'espace qu'on occupe, la capacité de projection de nos troubles comme de nos joies reste fondamentalement et humainement une vérité pour tous. La foi est un besoin incontournable. Mais l'Afrique doit aujourd'hui gérer la foi, la faim et la trahison. *Au nom du Christ* de Roger Gnoan M'Bala aide à comprendre." Orisha Distributions, *Au nom du Christ,* Catalogue, 1994.

[303] In 1993– Locarno International Film, Chicago international Film Festival, the International Francophone Film Festival of Namur, the London film festival; in 1994 – Journées cinematographiques de Perugia, Milan African film festival, Khourigba Festival, the Vue d'Afrique Festival in Montréal; and in a number of other African film festivals in such countries as Germany, South Africa, Australia, the US, Finland, Israel, Norway, Switzerland, Zimbabwe and others.

[304] To add some numbers, the box office in France, for example, for *Au Nom du Christ* from 1994 to 2010 is around 8,000 EUR, with a total of 1,413 entries – not a box office success if one considers that it took, with all the challenges, almost a million euro to make it.

[305] Shohat & Stam 1994, p. 205.

[306] I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that part of the project involving the retrieval and revival of tradition was accomplished in academia by creating new disciplines. One such discipline was drummology, the study of drums' language, and texts as a fundamental archival source, which would enable the in-depth study of oral tradition in precolonial times. The first course in drummology was given in October 1980 at the National University of Côte

point is that not all audiences will understand the cultural codes and functions carried by the termite mound, the hunter's clan, the sacred pots and so on., and nor is it necessary, for these codes are addressed to the "preferred" audience, the African one. However, all will share the meaning of deceit, the abuse of power, and madness.

Concluding Remarks

M'Bala and his collaborators have been, to use again Marc Augé, involved in the process of resisting to a replacement in the collective imagination and memory, of old Ivorian images, by new images brought by colonisers and missionaries. They take source in their own individual imagination and memory, woven by philosophy and aesthetics, and ultimately externalise these process in fiction. Resistance to Christianity is here presented as resistance to the replacement of Ivorian religious imagination and memory, encouraged by prophets by the burning of cultic objects, by Christian imagery, through the individual imagination and memories.

Prophetism is seen as a remnant of the missionary past, exacerbated by the violent and alienating postcolonial situation. The filmmakers do not see it as a way to face that same postcolonial situation, a means to overcome the sentiment of insecurity, and as a characteristic element of Ivorian modernity. Nor do they see prophetism as a form of modern African Christianity.

Ivorian modernity is to be achieved by sticking to the origins, exemplified in *Bossonisme*. Such discourses have sparkled controversial responses. For Bahi, the attempts of Adiaffi to reform/transform Anyi religious traditions into a religion à la Christianisme with its own liberation theology,[307] as an affirmation of Ivorian authenticity and independence in the sphere of the sacred and symbolic, is actually an attempt to model African traditions on the western model. He considers it the myth of the fighter fascinated by his adversary with who he finally identifies; or perhaps he has never been able to overcome his alienation.[308]

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, such projects as *Bossonisme* raise the problematic of the autochthonous, where authentic identity is con-

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d'Ivoire. It was an attempt at decolonising education at the university level (Niangoran 1989, pp. 41-54).
[307] In terms of liberation theology, Bossonism has nothing to envy from Christianity. One can use the Attié, Gouro or Nzima myths to form a liberation theology.
[308] Bahi 2013, p. 30.

flated with the local. With all its attempts at creating an Ivorian religion, *Bossonisme* in fact essentialised Akan religious traditions[309] as *the* Ivorian religious tradition. Thus playing a part in localising and putting ethnic accents of Ivoirité[310]. Bossonisme inscribes itself in the political conceptualization of *Ivoirité*, which emphasized ethnic origins, rather than the cultural Ivoirité which had its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s. As a religious project, it is the third axe along with culture and politics, intertwined in Ivorian society. This return to the sources will be projected in the Ivorian crisis of 2002, starting with the construction of the North as alien and Muslim, by the Charte du Nord of 1991. Later, the inauguration of the Basilica in Yamoussoukro in 2001, will give Côte d'Ivoire the status of a Catholic country, when in reality the numbers are very different. This exacerbated the view of Muslims predominantly from the north of being second class citizens. The problematic of identity, seen in the concept of *Ivoirité* and the discourses it entail, and to which *Au Nom du Christ* subscribe attests to the limits of representation. *Au Nom du Christ,* with the objective of emancipating the viewers, does so in line of a very specific agenda.

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[309] Interestingly, according to Duchesne, Bossonisme has acquired certain New Age characteristics such as emphasis on spirituality, natural medicine and environmental accents. She continues that the idea of an Ivorian religious identity both African and modern is embraced mostly by urban educated Ivorians as well as Europeans living in Côte d'Ivoire.
[310] Duchesne 2000; Bahi 2013.

Chapter IV: Genesis in Mali

The present chapter explores the reception of the Bible in the Malian context through a close reading of Cheick Oumar Sissoko's *La Génèse* (*Genesis*, Mali, 1999). The film contributes to the explorations of African heritage characteristic of African cinemas in the 1980s and 1990s . As a film that moves in transnational/transcultural flows, however, the heritage that Sissoko puts on screen through oral tradition, koteba theatre and costumes is weaved in a canonical text of Abrahamic traditions, putting African heritage on a universal plane. At the same time, the Bible becomes contextualised into the West African world.

La Génèse tells the tale of Dinah, Jacob, Hamor and Esau, based on the Book of Genesis. The driving idea of this chapter is that the cinematic adaptation or cinematic reception of such canonical text as Genesis is an ideological and cultural statement. Such a statement works on a number of levels involving and addressing multiple contexts. On the levels of film and text, the process of adaptation requires from the filmmaker a number of decisions regarding the source for adaptation, the interpretation of the text in terms of content, but also regarding form and aesthetics pertaining to textual and cinematic language.

The film, which is an interpretation of an already known text, is addressed to an interlocutor, an audience, a context. The decisions made at this level will influence the reception of the film, informing the meaning-making process and ultimately the message the filmmaker tries to convey. Speaking of his film in numerous interviews, Sissoko has emphasised his desire to illustrate the richness of Malian heritage and culture, together with the potential the biblical text has for conveying a universal message pertaining to human relations. By adapting a canonical text, Sissoko enlarges the world of the text and challenges the idea of an overwhelmingly Western biblical iconography.

I suggest, then, that *La Génèse*, by adapting the Book of Genesis, does a number of things. It contextualises the text into Malian society, appropriating and Africanising the text, so to speak. It does so through the themes it tackles and the cinematic forms it uses. The text is infused by oral tradition and is used as a lens to address the place of women in patriarchal societies and fratricidal conflicts. Moreover, by adapting the particular passages and stories of Genesis, *La Génèse* is part of the process of creating imagery and constructing identities, simultaneously directed to local and global audiences. *La Génèse*

addresses its various audiences at different levels, creating relational histories and exemplifying transnational and transcultural mobility.

The analysis of *La Génèse* is at the intersection of adaptation and reception of the Bible – adaptation because, from a film theory perspective, the use of a canonical text such as the Bible is more of a polemic issue in a postcolonial context and needs to be addressed, and reception of the Bible because *La Génèse* illustrates the mobilisation of tools and approaches applied in feminist, postcolonial and inculturation African hermeneutics in the process of adaptation. These methodological and theoretical considerations will guide the analysis. The driving questions are: What are the implications of using the Bible as source material in a postcolonial context? How is the text adapted? What are the issues emphasised, and how does the text provide an interpretative lens for the context? How does the critical reception of the film further contribute to the discussion surrounding the reception of the Bible in film?

In order to answer these questions, I first look at the cinematic context of the film and the overall work of its director, Cheick Oumar Sissoko. This is done in order to ground *La Génèse* as a marked political film. Second, I explore the relation between Malian oral tradition and biblical narrative. This relation shows the tensions that arise from the use of the Bible as a source for adaptation in a postcolonial context and how oral tradition is mobilised as the cinematic language to contextualise the text. Third, I use insights from feminist and postcolonial biblical interpretation to read the film. In the present analysis, the context and cinematic language of the film become the channels of a political reception of the Bible in Mali.

La Génèse: Malian Cinema, Sissoko and the Biblical Narrative

Malian Cinema

Mali is one the West African countries, along with Senegal and Burkina Faso, known for its filmmakers, such as Souleymane Cissé (1940-),[311] Cheick Oumar Sissoko (1945-) and Abderrahmane Sissako (1961-).[312] The history of

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[311] *L'aspirant* (short film, 1968), *Source d'inspiration* (short film, 1968), *Dégal à Dialloubé* (1970), *Fête du Sanké* (1971), *Cinq jours d'une vie* (1972), *Den muso* (1975), *L'homme et ses idoles* (short film, 1975), *Baara* (1978), *Chanteurs traditionnels des Iles Seychelles* (1978), *Finye* (1982), *Yeelen* (1987), *Waati* (1995), *Min Ye* (2009), *O Sembene!* (2013), *O Ka* (2015). Among the most prestigious awards, Cissé received two Étalons de Yennega at the Fespaco for *Baara* (Work) in 1979 and *Finye* (The Wind) in 1983. *Yeelen* got the special Jury prize at Cannes in 1987.

[312] *Le Jeu* (medium length, 1989), *Octobre* (medium length, 1993), *Le Chameau Et Les Bâtons Flottants* (1995), *Sabriya* (medium length 1996), *Rostov-Luanda* (1997); *La Vie Sur Terre* (1998); *Heremakono* (2002); *Bamako* (2006); *Timbuktu* (2014). He received numerous prizes

Malian cinema starts in 1962, with the creation by the Ministry of Information of a national film organisation, – OCINAM –[313] with key technical assistance from Yugoslavia.[314]. In 1967[315] the production unit was separated from OCINAM to become SCINFOMA[316], which produced a dozen shorts before being in turn absorbed into the CNPC[317] in 1977.

Malian cinema presents a number of trends, not uncommon to West African francophone cinemas, which intertwine and are accented differently by filmmakers. These trends include the incorporation of oral tradition and griots, a particular attention to cultural heritage and political engagement. The cinematic genres and styles bear the influence of developments in oppositional (to mainstream) cinemas, for example, Soviet social realism or Italian neorealism.

The first short and medium length films portrayed elements of what Victor Bachy, in the vein of tradition vs modernity categories, called *le Mali d'hier* (Yesterday's Mali). These were films showing Malian traditions: dances, ceremonies, rituals and folklore and were touristic reels directed towards external audiences. For Bachy, the *Le Mali d'aujourd'hui* category (Today's Mali), starts with a film of the same name, a medium-length co-production with Filmske Novosti from Belgrade made by Djibril Kouyate and Branco Segovic and released in 1978. The film is an economic, social and cultural presentation of contemporary Mali by two griots who travel around the country, as a symbolic union between the ancestral tradition and contemporary progressivism.[318]

The griot is an emblematic figure in West Africa. The griot is a mediator, an educator and a holder of collective memory and in films often stands as the narrator. He or she is usually a member of a specific family or caste, as, for example, the Kouyaté families in Burkina Faso and Mali, illustrating the words of Sotigui Kouyaté, who plays Jacob in *La Génèse*, that "One does not become a griot, one is born griot".[319] In a sense, the griot personifies oral tradition, which in turn, as an integral part of the cultural heritage, is understood as "not only a vehicle, but also an accumulation of techniques and philosophical thinking constituting an ideology".[320] It informs the cinematic vision of African filmmakers and in some cases becomes a foundational block of their

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in various European film festivals and FESPACO and has represented the African continent five times at Cannes.

[313] Office Cinématographique National du Mali (National Cinématographic Office of Mali)

[314] Bachy 1983, p. 11.

[315] According to some sources, the separation happened already in 1966 (Bachy 1983).

[316] Service Cinématographique du Ministère de l'Information (the Ministy of Information's Cinematographic Service)

[317] Centre National de Production Cinématographique (National Centre of Cinematographic Production)

[318] Bachy 1983, pp. 32-3.

[319] *Le Cercle de Minuit*, 1999.

[320] Vieyra 1989, p. 89.

cinema's narrative structure and aesthetics. Using griots as narrators and characters, inserting specific modes of communication and language, and performances, filmmakers create a cinematic language in order to link their audiences to their socio-political and cultural realities.

Linked to these are the political and social themes of Malian cinema, constituting a leitmotif in the films of, to name but a few, Djibril Kouyaté, Alkaly Kaba, Souleymane Cissé, Abderrahmane Sissoko, Adama Drabo, Sadio Simaga and, of course, Cheick Oumar Sissoko. They are informed by the postcolonial situation and deal with its issues in various ways, from a purely didactic tone to lyricism and poetics of alienation. In the case of Cheick Oumar Sissoko, a certain didacticism and political activism take centre stage.

Cheick Oumar Sissoko

Cheick Oumar Sissoko was born in San in 1945. He studied in Paris, starting with mathematics. He later opted for African history and sociology and then went on to study film at the École Louis Lumière. Sissoko, who positions himself as an activist filmmaker, explains the switch to film as a means to raise awareness and educate audiences and as a way to fulfil his political ideals. His activism will take him to various leading positions both in cinematic structures and in Malian politics.

Back from France, Sissoko joins the CNPC in 1981, where he directed and produced various kinds of films – documentaries and fiction as well as short, medium and feature-length films.[321] Sissoko worked for the promotion of Malian and African cinemas as the leader of the CNPC and later, from 2013, as Secretary General of the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI). Along with his role as filmmaker and engagement in cinematic infrastructures, Sissoko is also a prominent political figure in Mali. In 1996 he, founded together with Oumar Mariko, the SADI political party,[322] the most radical opposition party in Mali. In 2002, he entered the government as Minister of Culture and served briefly as Minister of National Education in 2007 before withdrawing from the government altogether in October of that same year. As a member of the Mouvement du 5 Juin – Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques (M5-RFP), Sissoko is also one of the main actors in the latest Malian crisis. The movement and protests which began in June 2020 called for the resignation of president Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK). Sissoko also was the initiator of Espoir Mali Koura (EMK), a civil society movement created in May 2020 and which is one of the three main components of M5. He takes

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[321] *L'école Malienne* (1982); *Les Audiothèques Rurales* (1983); *Sécheresse et Exode Rural* (1984); *Nyamanton, la Lecon des Ordures* (*Garbage Boys,* 1986); *Finzan* (1989); *L'Afrique Bouge* (1992); *Etre Jeune à Bamako* (1992); *Guimba, un tyran, une époque* (1995); *La Génèse* (*Genesis,*1999); *Bàttu* (2000) and *Rapt à Bamako* (2014).
[322] Solidarité Africaine pour la Démocratie et l'Indépendance (African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence)

part in the ongoing negotiations between the military, the ECOWAS, and Malian political actors. In an interview conducted as part of TV5 Monde's programme "*Et si…vous me disiez toute la verité*" in October 2020,[323] he announced the title of his new film project, *La Ligne Rouge*, which will portrays the injustices and crimes committed by president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, signalling his intention to continue his work as political filmmaker.

Sissoko makes his ideological and political statements through the thematic and aesthetics of his films. When it comes to cinematic influences and his formative years, Sissoko mentions Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* and Sembene Ousmane's *Borom Sarett* and *Mandabi*, but also the films of Eisenstein, which were shown in Parisian cinemas.[324] The verismo of Italian neorealism and revolutionary cinema's characters take shape in Sissoko's at times documentary style and character development. *Sécheresse et Exode Rural, Nyamanton, Finzan* and *Battu,* all portray Malian contemporary society and its people's tragedies in the face of poverty, lack of education and health infrastructures, the indifference of authorities, patriarchal structures and dehumanising practices. Sissoko's characters, exemplifying class and ideals common to revolutionary cinema, rebel. *Finzan*'s two heroines, for example, representing the "traditional" and the "modern" woman, resist against the oppressive patriarchal structures in which they find themselves. As we will see, *La Génèse* joins together with *Finzan,* other sub-Saharan films in which women's struggles play an important part in the activist tradition. These films focus on women re-defining their identities in the context of global turmoil in contemporary African culture and champion the cause of justice.[325]

In *Guimba,* the abuse of power in contemporary Mali is addressed through experimentation with form, by applying oral storytelling and Malian myths.[326] As we will see, the narrative structure of *La Génèse*'s narrative structure relies in a similar manner on oral tradition and theatre performance. Political power and democracy are also taken up in Sissoko's latest and rather, for him, unconventional, action film – *Un Rapt à Bamako* (2015). For Sissoko, then, film is a means to achieve social and political change and to address the specific problems of the continent. In doing so, he actively employs the Malian cultural heritage by incorporating oral tradition in order to create his film aesthetic.

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[323] Époté 2020.
[324] *Africultures* 2020.
[325] MacRae cited in Harrow 1999, pp. 241, 252.
[326] Slome 1996.

Oral Tradition

> Orality can be defined in the African sociocultural context as a knowledge production and transmission mechanism from one generation to the next. Collective knowledge is produced and disseminated through songs, short stories, tales, incantations, dance, and performances.[327]

Oral tradition is considered by some scholars to be the quintessence of African cinema,[328] the conscious or unconscious influence of the mise-en-scène of African films,[329] or even the criterion of authentic African cinema.[330] While these positions are essentialist in terms of what African films have to offer in form and content, auteur filmmakers such as Sissoko have explicitly affirmed their use of oral tradition as a constitutive part of their aesthetic and ideology.

In 1987, a number of scholars and writers met at the FESPACO project *Tradition orale et nouveaux medias*[331] to discuss the various ways in which orality and elements of oral traditions can, and have been, adapted on screen. From these discussions, African film scholars Mbye Cham, Francoise Pfaff, Manthia Diawara and Paulin Soumanou Vieyra delineated a number of characteristics orality brought to the content and aesthetics of African films.

At the centre of orality, the scholars agree, stands the griot, the transmitter of that knowledge. Along with the figure of the griot, they highlight the linearity of the narrative; modes of communication and specific uses of language through proverbs, sayings, aphorisms and repetition; moralising and didactic tendencies; and character types.[332] Furthermore, dances, songs and performances can serve as narrative tool and signify a deeper critique rather than the usual exotic value with which they are attributed.[333] Similarly, theatre performances and their mise-en-scène, i.e., the placement of the actors, the slow pace and the abundance of speech, influence both the cinematic form and mise-en- scene.[334] The incorporation of orality's elements and devices in the films through the content, themes, local languages and aesthetics comes to play a specific function, which surpasses the primary objective of creating a specifically African cinematographic language. Orality in film becomes a cultural and political statement,[335] an identity-marker as well as a criterion of claimed authenticity.

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[327] Sawadogo 2018, p. 13.
[328] Ukadike 2002, p. 194.
[329] Vieyra 1989, p. 93.
[330] Zacks 1995, p. 9.
[331] Oral traditions and new media
[332] Cham 1989.
[333] Diawara 1989, p. 192.
[334] Vieyra 1989, p. 93.
[335] Pfaff 1989, p. 219.

As mentioned above, Sissoko uses orality extensively in his films. When asked about *Guimba*, for example, and how he developed the characters, Sissoko explained that he uses the narrative structures of Malian fables and tales rather than adhering to the classic (Western) style of cinematic narration.[336] The following pages will explore the ways in which Sissoko incorporated elements from oral tradition in *La Génèse*. Before that, however, we need to address the relationship between the film and text.

La Génèse and the Book of Genesis

La Génèse is one Sissoko's most well-known films and has been shown at FESPACO, Cannes and Milano. It was written by Jean-Louis Sagot-Duvauroux[337] in French and translated into Bambara (or Bamana)[338] by Balla Moussa Keïta (who plays Hamor in the film) and Drissa Diakité. *La Génèse* recounts the conflictual story, caused by the rape of Dinah, of Hamor, Esau and Jacob.

The choice of the Book of Genesis as source for adaption raises a number of intricate questions. When it comes to the adaptation of canonical texts by African artists, film and literary scholar Lindiwe Dovey has pointed out how postcolonial scholars have theorised it in terms of "repudiation", "appropriation" and "going mainstream".[339] Repudiation entails the abandonment of any non-African source; appropriation involves the rewriting of a canonical text by changing the oppressive racial and gender dynamics present in it; and going mainstream is the alteration of old canons by new canons, which incorporate postcolonial literature.[340] Dovey is right, in relation to the perennial discourses on African authenticity, to affirm that contemporary African artists have been subjected to a tremendous amount of pressure to (re)turn to the stance of repudiation and by doing so reject all use of foreign sources and/or languages in African writing and filmmaking. From this perspective, an activist filmmaker's use of the Bible as source for adaptation may seem problematic choice, and critics have been quick to point that out.

When such a self-proclaimed auteur and activist African filmmaker as Sissoko announced his intention to adapt the Book of Genesis for the screen, he received criticism for working with a canonical Western text – one identified with French Christian colonialism.[341] Such critique plays its part in the authenticity problem for African auteur films and their audiences made up of

[336] Sissoko cited in Ukadike & Gabriel 2002, p. 194.
[337] Sagot-Duvauroux is a philosopher but has also studied theology.
[338] Bambara, or Bamana, designates a Mande people, along with the Soninke and Mandinka, and is also the French name for a local dialect of Mandinka, the language of the people from Mande, which was widespread in the Empire of Mali between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Since Mali's independence, Bambara has become the nation's vernacular language (JP Colleyn, LA Farrell - African arts, 2001).
[339] Marx cited in Dovey 2009, p. 199
[340] Ibid.
[341] Burnette-Bletsch 2016.

African intellectuals and Western film connoisseurs, and issues involving having Western festivals as the main target market. It also points to the broader question of a universalist tendency within film criticism and regarding the place African films funded by Europe have within that field of cultural production.

The question of authenticity is partly related to the idea, similar to the aforementioned "repudiation" stance, that African artists with a decolonising agenda must solely utilise so-called traditional sources in their artistic expression. In the previous chapter, we have seen how religious traditions can be employed in this process. The filmmaker is vulnerable to critique when such requirements are not met, and a text associated with Western colonialism is adapted on screen. Furthermore, when the film is a coproduction and a result of European funding strategies for cinemas outside Europe, as in the case of *La Génèse*,[342] it is open to critique of being a site of an Orientalising vision – telling stories that offer to European and North American audiences the tales they already want to hear.[343] These films please European film critics because they can relate to them or find within them a universal humanist message.[344]

Film critics, festivals and the field of cultural production from which they stem certainly contribute to the themes and aesthetics of films. They also determine which films become the part of the cultural canon. Filmmakers strive to screen their films at such venues in order to acquire a market and secure further funding as well as to make a statement, as Sissoko himself has pointed out.[345] The world of film is thus a complex web of interests and aspirations, which are an integral part the cultural production. Without setting aside such critique as irrelevant, or making judgements based on various criteria of authenticity, it is perhaps more helpful to look at the film as an illustration of this complexity. I suggest that *La Génèse,* while addressing a global audience, complicates the aforementioned approaches to adaptation by, on the one hand, challenging the Western status of the canonical source itself, and, on the other hand, by linking it to the further exploration of oppressive gender dynamics and constructions of the Other. In this regard, the questions of source remain: What were Sissoko's motivations? Why the Bible and why these particular stories? What are the implications?

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[342] *La Génèse* is the result of a collaboration between KORA films (Sissoko's own company), the BALANZAN production company, the CNPC (Centre National de la Production Cinématographique, nowadays the CNCM: Centre national de la Cinématographie du Mali), and Cinéma Public Films, with the participation of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Centre National de la Cinématographie, the Fonds Sud Cinéma, the European Union, the Agence de la Francophonie (ACCT), and the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation (Switzerland).
[343] Halle 2010, p.317
[344] Serceau, 2010.
[345] Sissoko 1997, 1999, 2019.

In a masterclass given at FESPACO 2019, Sissoko claimed that he did not choose to make *La Génèse* for its own sake but, motivated by a sense of urgency, [346] instead was looking for a script to make a film about fratricidal conflicts:

> When I finished filming *Guimba* in the town of Djenné in January 1994, a hundred kilometres away, two tribes were fighting each other and there were about twenty deaths.[347]

The Rwandan genocide and the general global spike in ethnic/nationalist conflicts in the 1990s heightened that sense of urgency. It is significant, for the question of adaptation that Sissoko chose to work with the biblical passage primarily as a known illustration of fratricidal conflict, and not as a text related to a specific religious tradition. Furthermore, for him:

> The Bible is linked to the three major religions in humanity: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For this reason, everyone will be able to find a bit of themselves in this film, and it is an ideal vehicle to speak about this problem of nationalist conflict.[348]

The question of the canonical Western text is here challenged on a first level on a first step as the chosen passages for adaptation are linked to the Abrahamic traditions rather than solely to Christianity. The critique that sees the Bible as a Western text still holds, however, as the Bible does occupy an ambiguous position on the African continent for the part it played in the colonial venture as the conveyer of Western civilisation.[349] It is this aspect Sissoko challenges the most through *La Génèse,* by contextualising the text. From a reception studies perspective, what the film does is akin to methods and approaches employed by African biblical hermeneutics that strive to appropriate and reinterpret the text.

African theologians and biblical scholars have developed a number of approaches in the process of Africanising the Bible. Justin S. Ukpong has outlined three phases of biblical interpretation in Africa. First, the reactive and apologetic phase (1930s-1970s) focused on legitimising African religion and culture and was dominated by the comparative method, endeavouring to show similarities between African religions and societies and those depicted in the

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[346] Sissoko explains that the themes for his films are always taken from immediate societal and political issues: "I am committed to pushing further the reflection on the obstacles to development. I made *Sécheresse et Exode Rural* (Drought and Rural Exodus, 1985) at the time of the great drought; *Nyamanton* (*Garbage Boys* in 1986) on the problem of education and children's health; *Finzan* in 1989 on the emancipation of women, *Guimba* in 1995 on the question of the power which regulates all these questions and which was essential after the fall of the dictator Moussa Traoré" Interview with Olivier Barlet on the set of *La Génèse*. (Barlet 1997)
[347] *Africultures* 2020.
[348] Sissoko 1996.
[349] For an overview of the Westernisation of the Bible, see Dube 2000 and Sugirtharajah 2002.

Old Testament. Second, the reactive-proactive phase (1970s-1990s) used the African context as resource for biblical interpretation and was dominated by the inculturation-evaluative method and liberation hermeneutics. Inculturation hermeneutics strove to read the text by infusing it with local terminology, traditions and practices, making it more relevant and understandable to the local contexts and their worldviews. Liberation hermeneutics accented the oppressed and marginalised status of the African peoples. The third is the proactive phase (1990s-) which recognises the ordinary reader[350] (in contrast to Western biblical interpretation, according to Ukpong) and the African context as subject of biblical interpretation, dominated by liberation, feminist, and inculturation methodologies.[351]

I suggest that Sissoko in *La Génèse* uses similar approaches. Another impetus for adapting the Book of Genesis can serve as an illustration. Aside from the sense of urgency, the other reason for adapting the Book of Genesis is the affinities between the Malian context and the world of the Old Testament. As mentioned above, the script for *La Génèse* was written by French philosopher Jean-Louis Sagot-Duvauroux, who taught in Mali in the 1970s. He found in the Malian culture affinities with biblical elements such as the importance of ancestors and genealogies, the patriarchal society, levirate marriages and ethnic divisions of labour,[352] The idea of the film was, according to him, to show the Bible in all its archetypal force, far from Western moralisations, and to play on the closeness of the text to the socio-cultural and religious realities of African societies, which perhaps no longer have the same practices but still remember them.[353]

This is reminiscent of the search for similarities between the text and socio-cultural, religious realities that constituted a specific project in the 1930s-1970s.[354] Such a project sought to legitimise African religion and culture as part of the wider decolonisation process. Attempts have been made to build parallels between the religio-cultural life of the Israelites of the Old Testament and the traditions and religious beliefs of pre-colonial Africans.[355] The importance of this project informed by the comparative method lies in that it shows common trains of thought, blurring ideas of patterns of evolution. In this light, Sissoko's use of the story of Jacob, with its emphasis on ancestry, community, land and family ties is not alien to African communities.

The film adapts roughly chapters 24-28, 32-35, 38 and 42 of the Book of Genesis. Not all stories are included, nor do they follow the chronology of the text. The main stories/events through which the structure of *La Génèse* unfolds

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[350] In African biblical studies, the term "ordinary reader" designates users of the Bible who are not scholars of the Bible and who do not have an academic degree in biblical studies.
[351] Ukpong 2000, p. 12.
[352] *Grand Angle: Filmer l'Afrique* 1997.
[353] Ibid.
[354] Ukpong 2000, p. 12.
[355] In proverbs, beliefs in spirits, ancestors, rituals, concepts of God.

are the following: Jacob mourns his son Joseph (Gen 37:34); Esau proclaims his thirst for revenge (Gen 27); Dinah is raped by Shechem (Gen 34:1-4); her brothers trick and massacre Hamor's clan (Gen 13-28). During the toguna sequence, in which attempts to resolve the conflict are made, the stories of the nameless wife of Judah (Gen 38:1-5) and that of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38:6-26) are told and acted out. Jacob, later in the night, tells the stories we see as flashbacks: the wedding of Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 24); Jacob tricking Esau (Gen 25); Jacob wrestling with God (Gen 32); and the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau (Gen 33). In the final scene, Jacob's sons leave for Egypt (Gen 42). Rebekah does not help Jacob when he tricks Isaac. Rachel is not present, as Benjamin is already born, nor are Bilhah or Zilpah.

Jacob becoming an unusually monogamous patriarch in the film and disrupting the chronology of the narrative are not the only radical changes the text undergoes in the process of adaptation. As an ideologically driven endeavour,[356] which emphasises the Malian cultural heritage and is directed towards identity construction,[357] the adaptation of Genesis creates a new kind of imagery, Africanising the text, so to speak, and thus challenges the predominantly Western iconography of the text. The following pages will explore the ways in which these processes unfold through the narrative.

The Beginning

Three hundred years after the flood, two clans are torn apart:
The nomad clan of the herder Jacob and his sons
The sedentary clan of farmers headed by Hamor.
A third clan, the hunters led by Esau, are preparing revenge.
Esau has a deadly hatred for Jacob, his younger brother, ever since the latter stole his birthright.
A recluse in his camp, Jacob mourns his son, whom he believes dead.

To all victims of fratricide around the world
To all who make peace.[358]

These lines, with which the film begin, set the chronology, plot and message of the film. Jacob and Hamor are fighting, Jacob and Esau have not yet met and Joseph is presumed dead, but reconciliation is ultimately the goal.

The story of reconciliation begins, as all such stories do, with grievance, grief and violence. In total silence, the film opens with an extreme long shot of a camp with a young woman standing at its centre. She moves to one of the tents on the right and retrieves something from it. She then returns to her initial

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[356] Tcheuyap 2007.
[357] Dovey 2009.
[358] *La Génèse,* 1999. Throughout this chapter I cite the English subtitles from the 2003 DVD version.

spot and bends down. The viewer is given ample time to take in the desert landscape, which, with its aridity, unforgiving sun and austere nature, contribute to the atmosphere of desolation. The absence of sound and the length of this establishing shot set the slow pace of the film. Through a jump cut, we get close to the young woman and realise that she is washing a piece of fabric. The fabric is dark blue, almost Black, as are the clothes of the young woman. They are reminiscent of the Blue Men of the desert, the Tuareg herders of the Sahara, with the colour blue symbolising their perpetual search for water and shade.[359]

   Still in silence, apart from the diegetic sound of the young woman's washing, the camera slowly introduces three other characters: a young boy, an older woman and a man sitting in his tent. None speak, and only the young ones exchange gazes, but the tension, anger and sadness exacerbated by the austere landscape and the silence are palpable.

   A second establishing extreme long shot follows, this time with non-diegetic music, and it shows a man with a staff leading others on the rocky slopes. We are introduced to Esau the hunter (actor Salif Keïta), who addresses God, and grounds the narrative in the Book of Genesis:

> Oh Lord, Creator of Heaven and Earth,
> Hear me, son of Isaac, son of Abraham, son of Adam.
> Hear the tale of Esau the hunter,
> Elder brother of Jacob.
> Lord you created the world,
> And there was no water.
> Then you created Man,
> And still no water.
> The dry wind made him cry: I thirst!
> Then, you created woman, unquenchable thirst.
> But why then, did you create brothers?
> Must we live forever, with this drought and thirst?
> And as brothers, be condemned to hate one another?
> Esau, Esau, do not forget, your duty to take revenge.[360]

The sequence in which Esau speaks to God not only confirms the biblical narrative as source but also links the latter to the particular cultural space and geographical landscape the film portrays. In this scene, the changes the text undergoes in the process of interpretation are already visible. The first two establishing shots show the desert landscape common to biblical epics, creating a realistic historical space. However, the background in front of which Esau sits in these first scenes is the recognisable Mount Hombory (Hombory

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[359] Kandioura Coulibaly, the costume designer, envisions the herders as a nomadic people who continuously search for water, shade and night in the desert. Their colours are reminders of that search. (*Grand Angle: Filmer l'Afrique* 1997).
[360] *La Génèse,* 1999.

Tondo), located in the Mopti region of central Mali. Further contextualisation is achieved through the symbolism of Esau's clan.

Just as the young woman's clothes connote the Tuareg, Esau and his clan point to Dogon culture and mythology. Esau and his clan, in dark brown and blending in with the landscape, carry a turtle addressed as the daughter of Noah. The symbol of the turtle[361] is also sewn on the clan's clothing. In Dogon culture and mythology,[362] for example, the turtle can symbolise the ancestors, all animals, the sun of Nommo, the original twins, and the head of the family. Esau himself is an important figure for Mandinka hunters.[363] Although in northern Côte d'Ivoire rather than in Mali, but still pertaining to the Mandinka group, some hunters' clans trace their founder's ancestry – Manimory – to Esau, the first hunter and the first man, according to Muslims, to acknowledge Allah as God.[364] It is thus significant that, in the film, Esau is the first one to address God.

After these initial scenes that set the story, we are back at the camp with the young woman. The following dialogues between the different characters appearing in the scene reveal that the young woman is Dinah (actress Fatoumata Diawara). She is washing Joseph's tunic at the bequest of her mother, Leah (actress Maïmouna Hélène Diarra). She is watched suspiciously by her brother Benjamin (actor Mohamed Toutou Diabaté), who then relates what is happening to his father, Jacob (actor Sotigui Kouyaté). Upset, Jacob runs out of his barely lit tent and declares that his mourning is not over and that no one shall touch his beloved son's tunic until he has received the body. The film has put Dinah at the centre from its first establishing shot, and it is starting with her rape that the narrative unfolds.

Dinah

Dinah is one of the central characters of *La Génèse*. This aspect inevitably prompts the question of the place women are given in Sissoko's film, especially compared to the biblical text. It also invites a reading of the film through African feminist hermeneutics. If biblical scholarship sometimes overlooks Dinah, feminist and postcolonial biblical scholars have brought her character to the fore.

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[361] It averred tricky to establish whether it is a turtle (water dwelling), or tortoise (land dwelling). As the "daughter of Noah", it would seem to point to the turtle. However, the desert landscape would imply the land-dwelling tortoise.

[362] The Dogon are a people living in the central plateau region of Mali, near the Bandiagara escarpment. The area is close to the Mopti region where Mount Hombory lies, the setting of the film. The Dogon are famous for their masks and rituals. Their mask dances, for example, was one of the first filmed dances featured in various early French ethnographic films and fiction films.

[363] The Mandinka people are found in southern Mali, eastern Guinea and northern Côte d'Ivoire.

[364] Hellweg 2004, p. 10.

Dinah is the only woman in the text that has the permanent status of a daughter[365] who is never cared for, as no one is interested in her mindset, feelings, wellbeing, or physical or emotional state.[366] Dinah is the raped one, and her "incident" is merely used as a commentary on the political situation of Canaan. For Botswanan biblical scholar Musa Dube, Dinah is equated with the land conquered by the coloniser, gendering the discourse of domination and subjugation. From a feminist and postcolonial perspective, Dinah, along with other female biblical figures, is the doubly oppressed and marginalised. She is so first as a member of a patriarchal society and second as a pawn in the power struggles and political dominion that constitute the narrative of the Covenant. She is, along with the women in the biblical text that come after Rebekah to whom God still speaks directly (Genesis 25), an unwitting caretaker of the promise.[367]

The focus I would like to take presently concerns the possible feminist reading of Dinah in Sissoko's film. I suggest that *La Génèse* transgresses both text and context through its rendering of Dinah's character. In relation to the text, the transgression operates on the level of fidelity, since Dinah is made central to the plot and is given a voice, disregarding the silence of the biblical text. In relation to the cultural context, Sissoko inserts that same voice in the diegetic performances of the koteba theatre,[368] which traditionally does not allow for female performers. Sissoko challenges the androcentric Old Testament and West African theatrical tradition by placing a female character at the centre of the performance.

The Dinah Incident

Two interrelated elements are crucial in the rape sequence of the film: the act itself, and the film's leitmotif – the construction of the Other. The film's Others are constructed through the relationships between, on the one hand, the marginalised women, and, on the other hand, the warring clans.

Dinah, while tending to her animals, calls for Shechem (actor Oumar Namory Keïta). The latter, who is farming, smiles as he hears her voice. Their amorous behaviour is witnessed by two giggling boys standing by a well. They tease the adolescents with comments like "Shechem, are you well, my honey?" Unable to contain himself any longer, Shechem runs after Dinah,

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[365]As Naomi Graetz writes, "the only acceptable role for a girl is wife and mother, whereas 'daughter' is a temporary and dangerous status." (Graetz 1993, p. 306).

[366] Brenner 2005, p. 26.

[367] Nolan, Fewell and Gunn cited in Dube 2017, p.50.

[368] Sissoko, in his search for a specific cinematic aesthetic and language, has experimented with elements of koteba in his previous films, such as *Nyamanton* and *Finzan*. The theatrical performance is for Sissoko a tool that can be used to illustrate societal problems just as koteba does in its use of satire. Issues need to be performed to be absorbed (Sissoko cited in Ukadike & Gabriel 2002, p. 185).

grabs her and runs away. The children run after them, with one more suddenly emerging from the well, naked, asking: "Has he finally done it?! Wait for me!"

We are far from the biblical text, where one can read "Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her" (Gen.34:1-2). The characters of Dinah and Shechem personify their clans through their occupations. The film portrays Dinah as a herder and Shechem as a farmer. She is not out visiting the women of Canaan, as an exceptional event described in the text, but lives and works in the proximity of Shechem. The scene portrays a flirtatious moment between two young people who know each other beforehand, as is implied by the child asking if "he finally done it". The presence of the children and their humorous comments imply a more playful relationship between young lovers rather than the rape that will occur.

The next sequence opens with a long shot of silent and solemn children, women and men gathered in a compound, seemingly waiting for something. The encounter with and construction of the Other is invoked in this scene on two levels: through the camera work, and in the discussion between several characters. In the long shot, the camera slowly moves around them, almost painstakingly forcing the viewer to engage with each of the faces present, to really *see* them and recognise their presence. It first stops at a blinking eye seen though a crack in a wall (the viewer is a child peeking through) and then moves on to show a group immersed in conversation. The people, dressed in yellow and orange – the colours of the earth– signifying Hamor's farmer clan, are discussing Dinah and her peoples. They describe Jacob's clan as untrustworthy, lazy, and lacking customs, echoing cultural differences and stereotypes common to farmer-herder conflicts.[369] The effect of this discussion, which in a sense undermines the camera work in its Levinasian attempt, puts an emphasis on the complexity of encountering the Other as well as signals its importance for the film's narrative. Hamor's clan is thus introduced.

After the conversation, a woman emerges from one of the houses. She is holding a white sheet stained with blood and starts singing and praising the vigour of Shechem, with the crowd answering her verses. Her singing is abruptly interrupted by the arrival of an angry Hamor (actor Balla Moussa Keïta), Shechem's father and head of the clan. He accuses Dinah of provoking the whole affair:

> There aren't enough jackals to satisfy your bitches. You come sniffing around our houses, and rouse the blood of our princes.[370]

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[369] I will come back to this in a later section. Suffice to say here that Sissoko, while travelling in Mali to show the film, comments that the audiences attested to these stereotypes.

[370] *La Génèse,* 1999.

Common to characterisations of the Other, it is emphasised that the women of the other clan are not only perceived as lazy and lacking customs, but they are also sex-crazed. Although this dialogue is absent from the biblical text, its tone is certainly not foreign to it. Following Randall Bailey, Dube, in her analysis of Genesis 34, points out that "the denigration of the Other often depends on characterizing the Other as sexually deviant or morally lacking".[371] But Dinah's sin in the film is not only her sexuality, to borrow Mercy Oduyoye's expression.[372] She also has a voice, starkly departing from the text. Not only does she look for Shechem in the first scene, affirming her affections and desires, she also talks back. She replies to Hamor's insults, reminding him of the ass Shechem is: [373]

> Princes carry gold to their in-laws. They speak softly at their weddings. But if the ass requests a wife, his father-in-law covers his ears, and his brothers-in-law flog him… When the baby ass mates with a gazelle, that doesn't cure his braying.[374]

Hamor strikes Dinah for her impudence and leaves. A guilty Shechem, who has now fallen in love and wants to marry her, follows him. In the next scene, Hamor leads a delegation, walking in the desert. As they pass, the voice of the narrator takes over and quotes Gen 34:2-4. The story we have just seen is repeated orally, as we follow Hamor and his entourage on their way to Jacob's camp.

Interpretations of Genesis 34

The readings of Genesis 34 are pertinent to the overall cinematic rendering of the character of Dinah in the film, as she is a central figure from the beginning until the end. It is also through her that the mechanisms of othering unfold. Feminist and postcolonial biblical scholars, in their discussions regarding rape, have emphasised the oppressive and imperialist nature of the text. Various interpretative avenues are opened by the ambiguity brought by the novel elements in the film: the flirting, the children's teasing, the celebration of the stained white cloth, Dinah's words to Hamor, and, finally, the reminder in the voice-over of the text itself, straightforwardly pointing to rape, affirming it by means of repetition.

In her analysis of *La Génèse,* literary and film scholar Lindiwe Dovey focuses on the violence perpetrated.[375] For her, the rape of Dinah is the second

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[371] Dube 2017, p. 53.
[372] Oduyoye 1994, p. 26.
[373] "Shechem … in Hebrew means "heass," a hint at the lack of esteem in which the men of Israel held the Hivites" writes Dianne Bergant in her *Genesis: In the Beginning* (2013, p. 65).
[374] *La Génèse,* 1999.
[375] Dovey 2009.

act of violence, after the death of Joseph alluded to in the beginning, which sets off the action of retrobution. This act, she writes, would seem to be a reference to the universal tendency, on the part of warring parties, to use rape as a physical and psychological strategy to destroy the Other.[376] Indeed, as in the biblical text, the rape is the immediate cause for the massacre of all males in the clan of Hamor. As the film seems ambiguous, Dovey's interpretation of the rape scene is worth mentioning.

The film does in effect downplay the rape scene. As Shechem and Dinah meet, the suggestion of emotional attachment is obvious. Furthermore, the children's presence adds humour to the whole situation. However, the stark contrast in the next scene with the assembled clan outside Shechem's quarters points to violence, as do Dinah's anger and tears. Similarly, Dinah is no longer dressed in her blue clothes of the previous scenes. She is now all draped in white, alluding to bridal attire, and so the celebration of the stained cloth could be part of a marriage ritual. Finally, the narrator's voice at the end of the sequence, quoting the text, and clearly stating that Shechem raped Dinah before falling in love with her, reminds us of the violence.

For Dovey, although the rape itself is not shown explicitly, it has occurred and is celebrated by the exhibition of the stained white cloth and the singing. She is joined in this interpretation by Old Testament scholar Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, who writes that the rape in *La Génèse* is made almost more horrible … by Hamor's clan, which sits outside the house awaiting the outcome.[377] For these two scholars, the rape has not only happened but is *celebrated* by the clan members as a symbolic victory over their enemies.

This emphasis on victory over the other clan echoes Dube's reading of Genesis 34, which links the underrepresentation of women and the violence they experience to the imperialist imperative of gaining the land. Women, tied to the land, are mothers, daughters and wives, only so as to fulfil the promise God has given to Israel, and do not exist outside this imperative.

Not only does the text underrepresents women, but Susanne Scholz, having surveyed feminist analyses of Dinah's rape by biblical scholars[378], comes to the conclusion that most scholars, also those adhering to a feminist view, interpret the text with assumptions complicit with a contemporary belittlement of rape.[379] Interpretations that put emphasis on love and on the redemption of violence through marriage do not do justice to the victims. Readings of Genesis 34 as a reflection of tribal conflict or as a marriage ritual similar to what one finds in other ancient Near Eastern texts also avoid the question of rape.

In relation to *La Génèse,* Scholz asks "whether the film coalesces with the centuries-old convention and sidelines the rape of Dinah in order to address

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[376] Dovey 2009, p. 258.
[377] Burnette-Bletsch 2016, p. 706.
[378] Scholz 2017.
[379] Ibid, p. 235.

androcentric-postcolonial concerns in biblical-visual storytelling."[380] Here, too, she concludes that the story of Dinah is only used as the immediate trigger for the conflict between the clans. Although she agrees that the very fact that the film starts with the rape and that, contrary to the biblical text, Dinah stays a central character throughout the film, she nonetheless considers her a powerless character whose only function is to accentuate the patriarchal order in the film, which leaves the narrative androcentric and misses the opportunity for a feminist interpretation.

I mentioned above that the rape scene is of importance for the reading of the character of Dinah, but only as a starting point. Dinah, as previously stated, is one of the central figures of the film in contrast to the biblical text in which she is cut off without ever raising her voice. The fact that Dinah, after the rape, albeit downplayed here and belittled, talks back is significant. I argue that it opens up other aspects for a feminist reading, which pertains to African women's experiences and provides liberating avenues.

*La Génèse'*s Dinah – The Liminal Space of Resistance

The aforementioned analyses of the Dinah character in *La Génèse* agree on the fact that her presence in the film from beginning to end is remarkable for an adaptation of Genesis.[381]. However, since Dinah gradually slips into insanity and then speaks only in cryptic phrases and proverbs, the overall interpretation is that she becomes a powerless and marginal character. Only Dovey writes of "a subtle kind of symbolism … a suggestion that Dinah is capable of representing, through her insanity and outcast status, an alternate mode of knowing". I would like to develop this argument further, borrowing insights from African feminist/womanist thought and theologies as well as from feminist perspectives in African cinema. I would like to suggest that, through his transgressive use of koteba theatre in the film and Dinah's performance in it, Sissoko opens up for a space where women's voices are heard. Their performances embody and point to their struggle.

It is perhaps telling that South African Lindiwe Dovey hints at a possible different reading of the character, since it illustrates the different emphases feminist scholars, artists and theologians have on the African continent. Suzanne Scholz, who is from the US, argues that Sissoko, through his androcentric perspective, portrays only male suffering and silences the women.[382] The

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[380] Scholz 2017, p. 238.
[381] One can mention Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent* (1997), also a Netflix mini-series (2014), which tells the story from Dinah's perspective. Furthermore, Athalya Brenner has, as an illustration of a hermeneutics of imagination, voiced female biblical characters, including Dinah, in her *I Am: Biblical Women Tell their Stories* (2005).
[382] Scholz writes that "The observation that an androcentric perspective permeates La Genèse explains why violence, killing, and massacres are depicted as exclusively male suffering, even though African conflicts regularly include mass rapes of women, often with ensuing murder." It should be noted that Sissoko's genocide scene does include multiple rapes, but they are veiled

question is not whether the film portrays a patriarchal society and follows the text's androcentric perspective on conflict. It does. The question is if can feminism can be articulated within these oppressive structures. If so, can we interpret the role of Dinah and other women in the film differently, rather than just brushing them off as marginal and powerless figures?

This issue is related to adherence to a specific feminist stance. The feminist readings in African cinema and theologies have one premise in common: "… feminism is more a concern over gender equality and social or economic justice".[383] Feminisms (some prefer the term womanist), are concerned with the diverse experiences of African women due to the differences in race, culture, politics, economy and religions.[384] For women theologians Teresa Okure and Mercy Oduyoye, the emphasis is put on mutuality, replacing hierarchies for the well-being of the community as whole,[385] in contrast to, for example, 1970s French feminist thought in which oppositionality dominates. One of the characteristics of African feminist thought is that it is open to, and articulated through, a wide variety of modes of expression, from everyday spontaneous songs to academic opera.

This discussion is equally reflected in the conceptualisation of cinema. Laura Mulvey, famously writing on the male gaze,[386] planted the idea that mainstream cinema, by definition and by its nature embedded in production modes reflecting the *status quo,* that being the objectification of women, cannot provide a platform for radical thought. Mainstream cinema, with its insistence on representation, assumes the position of the neutral and natural. Opposition to the "natural" sifted through performances of madness, marginality, silence or art without control as in experimental and avant-garde cinema.[387] Feminism grounded in mutuality rather than oppositionality might be considered by the French feminists as sustaining the patriarchal order, and the use of realism or cinema vérité to tackle feminist issues might likewise be seen as an ultimately futile exercise. Representing women's possible emancipation on screen, then, is not disrupting the system but only makes space for the women in that system.

For African filmmakers and the theologians mentioned above, making space *is* a feminist approach. In *La Génèse,* the women's suffering and voices are articulated especially through the performance of koteba theatre incorpo-

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under smoke from fires and dark lighting. Violence permeates the film, but it is not the kind of pornographic violence one is accustomed to see in Hollywood narratives.
[383] Harrow 1999, p. 226.
[384] Phiri cited in Kasomo & Maseno 2011, p. 155.
[385] Kasomo & Maseno 2011, p. 156.
[386] Mulvey 1975.
[387] Harrow 1999, p. 226.

rated in the narrative of the film. The koteba is inserted after the film's rendering of the massacre in the toguna sequence[388] during which the clans gather to resolve the conflict.

Koteba is the indigenous performance tradition of the Bamana.[389] The word koteba literally means "big snail" and is the generic name for all forms of indigenous Bamana performances. The metaphor of the snail is used because koteba's staging formation is made up of concentric circles of spectators, dancers and actors, and singers and musicians, which resemble the shape of a snail's shell, starting with the larger circle at the bottom and rising to the smallest at the top. There are three types of koteba performances: the masquerades, the satiric sketches and the puppetry performances, called Sogo Bo. The masquerades and Sogo Bo are performed on special occasions and during the day. Furthermore, masquerades deal with sacred themes, ancestors, folk heroes, deities, spirits and myths, while the sketches concentrate on secular and social themes.

In *La Génèse,* Sissoko uses the satiric type of performance. The theatrical performance is for Sissoko a tool to illustrate societal problems, just as koteba does in its use of satire. This type's major feature is that women are excluded as performers. Although it is women, along with male elders, who are usually on trial in these performances, they do not participate in the theatre-making process. Female roles are performed by male actors. For Okagbue, the sketches are "a means of publicly taking on the elders and playfully keeping the women in check".[390] It enables the young male performers to blow off steam in the face of the authority of the elders and to reinforce the patriarchal structures in the representation of women. Furthermore, femininity, as performed in koteba sketches, is, according to Okagbue, passive and submissive and contrasts sharply with the active femininity which women themselves enact in their everyday lives and in other forms of performance.[391]

Sissoko's use of koteba in the film transgresses the satiric type of performance. The women become both active as audience and actors and play both female and male characters. Dinah's and other women's performances are active and turn the attention of the audiences to their respective situations and overall show their oppressed and marginalised status. Dinah in particular shakes the status quo through her performance of liminality.

Dinah, no longer the daughter of Jacob but now the daughter of Hamor, arrives with Hamor's clan at the toguna. She incongruously chuckles all the way to the meeting ground, signalling a disturbed state of mind resulting from trauma. This state opens up for more than just passing insanity, however.

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[388] The toguna is a shelter that the Dogon build first when forming a village and which subsequently serves as a meeting place.
[389] Okagbue 2007a, 2007b.
[390] Okagbue 2007b, p. 121.
[391] Ibid, p. 128.

Dinah dwells in a liminal space not due just to her state of mind but also to her status. As the perpetual daughter, she remains a dangerous character because of her uncertain status.[392] She is marginalised, but she also poses a threat to the order since she has not fulfilled her sole role in society as wife and mother. Dinah's uncertain status as daughter makes her a potentially subversive figure outside established societal categories. Additionally, the weight of trauma gradually pulls her down into a state of "enlightened insanity",[393] as she mumbles to herself, bursts into sudden fits of laughter, cries, dances and rolls around in the dust.

Within this liminal space, or the performance of it, Dinah acquires sight. She becomes a figure that *sees* –not unlike a fool or a "holy fool"[394] – and her performance is meant to break the rigid boundaries of clan law and customs. Her disturbed state paradoxically opens her mind to the reality of her marginalised state as a daughter and woman. She utters:

> My steps leave no traces. How is that possible?
> Like the passing night! Does the passing night leave traces on the earth?
> No, that is not possible.[395]

She says these words as she follows the male children that are "given" to Hamor as proof that he has not lost all his descendants. Contrary to the "sons", Dinah's steps leave no traces. She recognises her incomplete status in the lineage. The realisation of the lack, the absence, turns her into a subject. She is no longer the object of sexual violence or trade as a means to achieve political rest. However, her turning into a subject is insufficient for gaining the equal status and justice she deserves. That will come at the end, when she stands next to the patriarchs who have made peace. The men have to acknowledge her as a subject. She asks and then laughs:

> And what about day? That too passes, but it cannot wear night's mourning.[396]

If she cannot be considered part of a lineage, she is the one carrying its suffering. Dinah echoes here the words of another of Sissoko's heroines – Fili – who, in *Finzan*, as she leaves her native village, says:

> The world comes from our wombs. It mistreats us. We give life, and we're not allowed to live. We produce the food crops, and others eat without us. We create wealth, and it is used against us. We women are like birds with no branch

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[392] Graetz 1993, p. 307.
[393] Dovey 2007, p. 259.
[394] The tradition of the *Holy fool* is well documented, especially in relation to such figures as Symeon or St Francis of Assisi, as well as in Russian literature. See for overviews of the latter the works of Thompson (1987, 2015) and Hunt & Kobets (2011).
[395] *La Génèse,* 1999.
[396] Ibid.

to perch on. There's no hope. All that's left is we must stand up and tie our belts. The progress of our society is linked to our emancipation.[397]

The first step to emancipation, then, is recognition of one's marginalised status. Dinah's performance during the koteba scenes is interjected by successive bouts of laughter and lamentation. The juxtaposition of lamentation and laughter further attests to Dinah's liminal position in which she acquires the characteristics of the fool. It is important to note that this laughter is not for comic relief, nor is it the laughter of the insane. Dinah's laughter reminds of the "aching-heart laughter".[398] Her lamentations and laughter do not only address her marginalised position but also represent the suffering, anger and grief felt by all the participants of the toguna. The externalised grief epitomises the atmosphere but is also the first step in the process of reconciliation, pointing towards the desire to move forward.

As the fool, Dinah is in a position to express the injustices and, through that, make space for resistance. While she is not in a position of power, her laughter and dances are subversive, however, as they disrupt the fixed solemnity – the seriousness – of the whole procedure. The rigid laws and customs the elders speak of and upon which they base their attitudes and unrealistic solutions are disrupted by the performance of the koteba troupe and the incongruity of Dinah's behaviour. Laughing and dancing, Dinah attempts to reach the toguna to sit alongside the elders, but she is rejected every time. She is even rejected by her little brother Benjamin as she tries to comfort him. In her performance, she forces the men to enact their blatant behaviour towards the suffering and the marginalised in front of the audience, undermining their "rational" authority, their palaver on fixed oppressive customs and law, through the cognisance of her status and the performance of it. The lamentations, but more so the laughter in its incongruity and misplacedness, bring the attention of the audience and viewer to Dinah's situation.[399] It *makes us look* and acknowledge the absurdity of her status as a second-class human.[400]

Women in the koteba performance, modified by Sissoko, have agency and voices. They narrate their experiences, as we will see in the next section, through the stories of Tamar and Judah's nameless wife – who incidentally in the film has a name - Ada. Their stories and actions reflect the injustices of the patriarchal society but also show how they work for the well-being of their communities. "Issues need to be performed, to be absorbed",[401] Sissoko reminds us. In performing their pain and powerlessness, the women draw the attention to their experiences, thus participating in the feminist project.

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[397] *Finzan,* 1989.
[398] Bussie 2015, p. 174.
[399] Just as Sarah's laughter brought God's attention to her predicament, according to Bussie.
[400] Bussie, 2015. p. 175.
[401] Ukadike & Gabriel 2002, p. 185.

Hamor, Jacob and Esau

Interlude

We left the narrative at the scene where Hamor was heading to Jacob's camp to ask for Dinah's hand on behalf of his son Shechem. In the text (Gen 34:5-17), Hamor and Jacob meet first, since Dinah's brothers were away, but Jacob does nothing. When the brothers come back, they are outraged. Hamor and Shechem try to appease them, with Shechem ready to pay any price. Dinah's brothers "replied deceitfully" (Gen 34:13) and agree to the marriage on the sole condition that all males in Hamor's clan be circumcised. Hamor and Shechem agree and leave Jacob's camp. Once back in their city, or, rather at its gates, they convince their menfolk by pointing out the economic benefits such union would bring.

The film divides the conversations between Hamor and Jacob, and Hamor, Shechem, Jacob and the brothers into two separate sequences. They reflect the affinities between the text and the Malian context, reinforce the androcentric nature of the society portrayed, and provide an illustration of oral tradition through the use of repetition. The first sequence – the conversation between Hamor and Jacob – reveals the parallels between the world of the text and that of the film. When Hamor first arrives with gifts, Jacob sits in his tent and speaks from within it without meeting the delegation. During the extensive greetings, both parties recognise their kinship through common ancestors, emphasising their shared genealogy. The latter, an important part of the biblical text, is here reproduced through dialogue as an element of everyday conversation in the Malian context. Sagot-Duvauroux, the scriptwriter, found it important to incorporate it into the film as an element that inserts the text into the context, simultaneously reviving the biblical genealogies, whose purpose, he reported, is often lost on the contemporary European reader.[402]

The conversation then departs from the text as Leah – Jacob's only wife of in the film – takes centre stage since Jacob refuses to deal with the situation. The scene illustrates two things. First, the animosity towards the Other, articulated in the scenes with Dinah, is reciprocated. Leah spills the gifts and cries

> Daughters are raised to honour their mothers…and all Canaan has trampled on my honour…My sons! Where have you gone? Your father Jacob is powerless, and his daughter Dinah is the whore of Canaan...Oh God hear me! The gazelle's milk will not be mixed with the hyena's droppings.[403]

Second, the androcentric society is depicted as Jacob, not able to stand the affront Leah has caused to the guests, finally comes out and faces her threateningly, and she runs into the background. The patriarchal society is not only

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[402] *Grand Angle: Filmer l'Afrique,* 1997.
[403] *La Génèse,* 1999.

shown through women having a specific role, it is also illustrated through the women's internalising of the power dynamics. Leah is the only female character in the film that is construed in a negative light. She is not only the mother of murderous sons, but, by repudiating her only daughter, she also personifies the woman who *knows her place* and who has internalized the oppressive patriarchal structures. She is also reminiscent of women in Sissoko's earlier film *Finzan,* but of those who contribute to oppressive practices.

The influence of theatrical mise-en-scène and the use of repetition common to orality can be traced in the second sequence. All the male parties are away from Jacob's encampment. Both clans' representatives sit on the ground facing each other in a circle. The circle, as we saw earlier, is the form used in the staging of koteba. Hamor and Shechem reiterate their request, but Judah and Reuben refuse to grant it unless they agree to be circumcised. Jacob, covered by a small tent on the back of a camel,[404] agrees to the condition. As Hamor and Shechem give their consent, Judah utters a warning:

> If you refuse to be circumcised, it will be said that you had something else in mind and that you made a whore out of Judah's sister.[405]

Then, one by one, each of the brothers stands up, adding his name and repeating the pledge, affirming thus the whole clan's resolution.

Back in Shechem, the circumcision takes place and is accompanied by salacious common from an elderly woman, which provides comic relief:

> Be careful, don't cut it all off, that's my medicine! Don't go, dear heart. You are a tiller of the soil, and you need a nice long plough to dig deep in the furrows and reap a nice fat harvest.[406]

In *La Génèse*, as in the text, Dinah is kept in Hamor's chambers. In the film, she watches Shechem, who is standing in line waiting for circumcision, through a window. Shechem lovingly looks at her, but she does reciprocate his feelings. Rather, she laughs at the old woman's jokes and mockery. As the latter finally curses everyone, Shelah, Judah's son, brings a token of kinship to the village as a ruse to check whether the men are being circumcised. He then rides back to his father and uncles, who are fully prepared for battle. Judah leads the attack.

From the massacre, which occurs about 40 minutes into the film, the narrative departs completely from the text. In Genesis 34, after the massacre, Jacob leaves for Bethel after receiving a commandment from God. In the film, measures are taken to seek justice and reach peace. Back in Jacob's camp, his

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[404] The description of Jacob as "dwelling in tents" (Gen 25:27) is taken rather literally.
[405] *La Génèse,* 1999.
[406] Ibid.

sons, who have brought Dinah back, are resting after their deed. Jacob, overcome by more grief and anger, takes Dinah with him and finds Hamor, who has survived because he hid under the skirts of a woman during the massacre. Hamor decides to assemble the nations, and Jacob agrees but wishes to be represented by Hamor and not his sons.

The quotes and commentaries from the text are no longer added on top of the visual narrative by the voice-over or told by Esau, who surveys the scenes and prophesises. Now they are performed within the diegesis. The nations are represented by members of Hamor's and Jacob's clans: Hamor, with the women and children left after the genocide; Jacob's sons and Dinah, who is now descending into madness. They are later joined by Esau and Jacob when resolution reaches a dead end and war seems inevitable.

The Toguna and Conflict Resolution

> Seek out why death followed the path of his life.
> Seek out and tell him why.[407]

In relation to the question of source for adaptation and biblical hermeneutics, I mentioned the trend within African biblical studies to find affinities between the world of the Old Testament and the socio-cultural and religious realities of African societies, as well as the inculturation approach. The latter involves reading the biblical text through the cultural components or philosophical concepts pertaining to the context, in this case, koteba, the construction of dialogues, the repetitions forming the narrative structure, and the aesthetics of the film are illustrative examples. Inculturation also involves translating the biblical texts into situations that would be understandable for the ordinary reader in his/her contemporary context. In relation to cinema, these processes involve a change in the text itself and in its interpretation. It involves a creation of new imagery both appropriate and understandable to the local population.

The causes of conflict and attempts at resolving it are played out in the same toguna sequence through the performances of the sons of Jacob, Hamor and the remaining of his clan, and the mediators – the elders from Hamor's clan. The text is transformed in order to explore the matter of conflict more deeply. As with the performance of Dinah, which points to her marginality, the men play their part in an attempt to resolve a conflict. This section presents Sissoko's way of grappling with an ethnic/political issue, namely fratricidal conflicts.

I mentioned earlier that the construction of and encounter with the Other is the leitmotif of the film. The Other is not only the marginalised women but is also the other clan, tribe and nation. In the toguna sequence, Dinah's (and the

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[407] *La Génèse,* 1999.

other women's) otheringis made apparent. It is also here that the clans must face each other. Because this encounter is fraught with tension, the social function of koteba satiric sketches is employed.

Earlier I showed how Sissoko's transgression of koteba makes space for women's voices and how Dinah's incongruous laughter works to subvert the status quo. With the attempt at conflict resolution in the film, koteba's satire provides relief. Koteba sketches are based on many facets of life that include a wide range of characters.[408] In Sissoko's film, the recognisable character that leads the performance is the fool – Onuku. I have written that characteristics of the "holy fool" can be seen in Dinah's performance. She is not, however, the designated fool of the performance, the figure who is to tell the tale of conflict. That part is reserved for the Onuku, who has, unlike Dinah, the unconditional right of expression. The fool, like the griot, is at once privileged, marginalised, admired and loathed. He or she can express truths without retaliation and is admired for his or her skills, but, because of that same privilege to be the critical voice of society, he or she is despised.

The Onuku – called *the slave* in the film– is the immodest voice who plays a number of characters. He is the storyteller – the griot – but he also plays Judah's wife, taunting him with exaggerated mannerisms and sexual moves.[409] His performance causes laughter that is crucial for the conversation to proceed, as laughter suspends, even if only temporarily, the official system with its characteristic prohibitions and hierarchical barriers.[410]

Mockery (and mock performance) is used not only as comic relief but also to uncover the deeds of various protagonists to elucidate the underlying reasons for the massacre. Events are slowly recounted through descriptive dialogues, performed and shown through flashbacks. The discussion between the elders is interjected with performances by the koteba troupe who support, with dance and song, the stories of Tamar and Ada (Judah's wife)[411] performed by the women themselves.

Koteba also enables Sissoko to explore the possibilities of oral tradition in relation to film narrative, aesthetics and language. Because koteba's uncluttered stage leaves narrative gaps, which the spectators fill as they imagined

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[408] Okagbue writes that well-known physical, psychological, cultural or ethnic characteristics often define the characters, such as the Leper, the Polygamist, the Cuckold, the Unfaithful Wife, the Blind Man, the Stranger or Foreigner, the Con Man or Smooth Talker, the Been-to, the Corrupt Policemen, the Boastful Coward, the Clumsy Hunter, the Lazy Man, the Rogue Marabout and so on… She adds that koteba's repertory of characters and sketches has grown to reflect changing times and concerns. In the colonial period for example, new characters emerged such as the ubiquitous Interpreter, the Native Policeman, the White Colonial Officer or Soldier, and the Missionary or Evangelist. Today, one encounters characters such as the Boastful City Boy, the Been-to or Johnny-just-arrived." (2007a, p.137).

[409] As Okagbue writes, in koteba performances, the fool, in the beginning, promptly started to chase all the young boys around and humped or simulated copulating with whomever he caught.

[410] Campbell, Cilliers & Cilliers 2012, p. 139.

[411] She is named in the film, contrary to the biblical text.

the worlds being suggested through the descriptive dialogue and stylised actions,[412] in the film,Sissoko inserts flashbacks. The narrative gaps to be filled by the plays' audience are now materialised through flashbacks for the film's audience. What the audience around the toguna can only imagine, we as the viewers of the film can actually see. The stories – Ada's and Tamar's – serve to reinforce or contradict a point made by one of the parties. For example, to show the absurdity of the peace treaty proposed by Jacob's sons – that there should be no exogamous marriages – the mediator orders Judah's son to be cut in half, as his mother, Ada, is daughter of Shuah – and thus of Hamor's clan. Another illustration is provided when Tamar tells her story of prostitution to Judah, once more to contradict the claim that women are responsible for the conflict. The stories of Tamar and Ada appear in an order different from the initial sequence in the text to illustrate the foolishness and duplicity of men in power. Sissoko thus uses oral tradition and challenges the chronology of the biblical text in order to reinforce the moral or the point and to provide potential explanations for the conflict.

*La Génèse'*s Fratricide Conflicts in Context

There is a temptation to interpret the conflict between Hamor, Jacob and Esau through the issue of land. I have hinted earlier that the combination of feminist and postcolonial approaches equate Dinah's rape to conquest of land, gendering the imperialist agenda. Walter Metz, in a slightly different approach, is right in his analysis of *La Génèse* to highlight the patriarchs' association with different ways of using land: the nomadic hunter, the semi-nomadic herder and the stable farmer.[413] His further argument that conceptualises these uses of land as phases in post-colonial liberation[414] poorly reflects the Malian context, however. Metz understands Hamor 's brick buildings as the acceptance of colonial land use; Esau's primitive hunters as a return to pre-colonial experience; and Jacob's semi-nomadic land as the fighting phase, the synthesis of purely nomadic living and the reliance on permanent structures.[415] Farmers, herders and hunters are all active political and social actors in contemporary Mali, whose coexistence is indeed at times marked by conflicts over land use and resources. Their sedentary, nomadic or semi-nomadic state are determined by their different ways of using land in terms of production rather than as phases in pre- or post-colonial history.

I have mentioned that Sissoko's film career builds upon a reaction to situations of urgency. Around the time the film was in production, ethnic/nationalist conflicts were a pervasive and salient dimension of political and social

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[412] Okagbue 2007a, p. 160.
[413] Metz 2007.
[414] Metz relies on Franz Fanon's positions in the process of post-colonial liberation in *The Wretched of the Earth*.
[415] Metz 2007, p. 232.

conflict in several countries globally and as a trend reached its peak in 1993-1994.[416] In his own Mali, these conflicts took place in the same period, involving herders and farmers in various areas, including the Mopti region where the film was shot. Ethnicity is politically mobilised in these conflicts as well as in the film where the distinction between the clans is signalled through their dress and dwellings.[417]

The farmer-herder conflicts in the central region of Mali concern a combination of identity-based factors and wider perceptions of economic and social injustice regarding the distribution or means of sharing economic, social and political resources within the state.[418] They are the result of a complex set of aspects around management and the use of resources: land, pasture, wood and water.[419] For example, Malian national policies and laws giving priority to agricultural development at the expense of pastoralism have exacerbated the tensions between farmers and herders.[420] Hunters are not absent from these conflicts but are at times hired as watchmen.[421]

The subject of the film is clearly taken, as is the case with most of Sissoko's films, from the immediate context and political situation. The scarcity of the desert landscape or the scene with the child jumping out of the well, completely dry (!), in the beginning of the film may hint at tensions over resources. The context of the conflict pertaining specifically to Mali is addressed during the massacre scene when the cattle invade and destroy the fields and when Esau's clan members decimate the cattle. I would like to suggest, however, that Sissoko's treatment of the ethnic conflict is not solely tied to the Malian context, nor should it be addressed only through the question of land in terms of resources or of an imperialistic agenda. Rather, *La Génèse* takes a deliberate "human condition" approach to the issue.

In postcolonial biblical hermeneutics, the Jacob cycle and the Exodus narrative are interpreted as illustrations of a colonial, imperialist agenda seen through the coloniser's contact zone. This contact zone is the meeting and clashing of two different cultures that were geographically and historically separated, and it is an unavoidable stage of colonialism.[422] The coloniser's approach at the contact zone is distinguished by a desire to take control of a

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[416] Jinadu et al. 2007, p. 8.
[417] Just as a reminder, Jacob's clan, representing the semi-nomadic herders, are dressed in blue; Hamor's clan, who are dressed in earth colours and who live in stone houses, represents the farmers; and, finally, Esau's clan, in dark brown, represents the hunters, who blend in with the landscape and who are completely nomadic.
[418] Harris & Reilly cited in Jinadu et al. 2007, p. 7.
[419] Ethnic conflicts are the subject of studies from multiple approaches and disciplines, and I do not presume to have thenecessary knowledge. Suffice to say here that ethnicity is mobilised as a result of numerous factors. See, for example, Jinadu (2007); Beeler 2006; Benjaminsen & Ba, 2009, 2019.
[420] Benjaminsen & Ba 2009, p. 71.
[421] Hagberg 2006, p. 791.
[422] Dube 2000, p. 67.

foreign land – culturally, economically, politically and geographically.[423] What Sissoko tries to convey and what we see in *La Génèse* through the processes of othering is the portrayal of the contact zone, where different people meet without, however, necessarily having the desire for control. This is what I mean by taking a "human condition" approach. The conflicts are not triggered by specific imperialistic endeavours or by land use or by resources, as is the case in Mali. Rather, they are interpreted as universally inevitable consequences of peoples coexisting.

The contact zone is visualised as a place of mutual interdependence, which has been disrupted when the world "was turned asunder"[424] by previous events such the disappearance of Joseph and the conflict with Esau. The conflict that follows is between sovereign clans and is caused by diverse escalating factors, with Dinah's rape being the final trigger. The film does not point to the struggle over resources. The scene when Shechem and Dinah flirt shows complementarity rather than competition. Furthermore, during the toguna, for example, the elders use the metaphor of a "dish without a sauce" to refer to a herder without a farmer and vice versa. Within this type of symbiotic relation, intermarriages are practiced, as the stories of Ada and Tamar illustrate. As is shown, each side has grievances, and each side is portrayed as condemning the other. The narrative of the Bible is not necessarily viewed as an imperialistic text because of the multiple perspectives of each of the protagonists.

The approach Sissoko takes in his interpretation of the text as an illustration of a universal human condition can be explained in the necessary distanciation with the immediate context. The complexities and specificities surrounding the ethnic conflicts in Mali are glossed over in the film in favour of a more universalist take on fratricidal conflicts. Sissoko does not treat the issue as a Malian problem *per se*, although local audiences did certainly relate as he toured with the film in different areas.[425] What the film raises is not the question of resources or the structural, political and institutional elements of ethnic conflicts. Rather, the Malian story becomes, through the use of the text, part of the fratricidal history of humankind, which can be traced back to Cain and Abel. This is a deliberate move, one that endeavours to show that the Malian, and by extension the African context, is no longer the illustrative example or locus of fratricide.

Since these are universal fratricidal conflicts, the solutions proposed will carry a similar tone and can only be resolved through the idea of sincere encounter, responsibility and forgiveness. Since God is very much absent from the film's narrative, it is up to men to resolve their issues. The solution Sissoko

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[423] Dube 2000, p. 67.
[424] *La Génèse*, 1999.
[425] Dovey provides an account of how Sissoko travelled in the region with film, showing it to local herders and farmers, and the audience would relate to it and recognise themselves in the characters (Dovey 2009, pp. 268-9).

suggests comes through the genuine confrontation with one's Oher and one's self.

Jacob and Esau

Reconciliation at the toguna fails as Hamor's party demands the lives of Jacob's sons as a sacrifice to appease the gods. Benjamin runs to fetch his father and announce that war is imminent. Jacob finally decides to join the toguna. From this moment, events unfold at a rapid pace in comparison to the first two-thirds of the film, with a number of flashbacks inserted amidst the chaotic action. When Jacob arrives, the crowd calms down a little and everyone sits once again to to hear the tale of the ancestors told by Jacob and supported by Hamor through the first flashback. Here, Jacob and Hamor endeavour to present a nostalgic vision of a harmonious past through the retelling of Isaac and Rebekah's initially arranged, but subsequently love, marriage – the "time before the rift". The illusion is suddenly broken by the arrival of Esau who denounces such accounts as lies:

> Since the dawn of time, children have been into rift and discord.[426]

Esau takes us back to his prophetic words at the beginning of the film and alludes to the perennial sibling rivalries in the book – Cain and Able, Isaac and Ishmael, and now Jacob and himself. In the confusion that follows, the toguna is burnt and Jacob's cattle are slaughtered by Esau's clan. Amidst the chaos, Jacob recounts to Benjamin (second flashback) the incident with the lentil soup and Esau's humiliation. After the episode, Jacob is finally ready to face his brother who awaits him with a sword in hand.

The ultimate confrontation between Jacob and Esau is a complex episode, in both text and film. In the text, Jacob wrestles with a being face-to-face: possibly God, an angel, Esau's spirit, a river or night spirit, his own fears, or all of the above. Only after this episode can he face Esau. In the film, as they face each other, a child dressed in white – probably an angel – comes to Esau and tells him that justice is for God alone to will. God, who has been absent so far, intercedes for Esau, and the latter retreats.

I side with interpreters who understand the encounter with the being or God as an image of the encounter with the self as Other, involving an experience of loss and recovery achieved through a dual and conflictual relationship.[427] This is made clearer in the film as a group of children encircle Jacob and force him to confess and face his actions. Jacob has so far been the only patriarch of the three whose background limited itself to the mourning over Joseph. For

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[426] *La Génèse,* 1999.
[427] Wilkinson 1998, p. 62.

reconciliation to be possible, all have to face their actions and take responsibility, as Hamor tried to do after Dinah's rape, or in Esau's long-lasting humiliation over his own mistake. Jacob finally faces himself and confesses that he has chased nations and has abused power.

In a surprising twist, as Jacob is faltering, Dinah appears and helps him. With her assistance, Jacob overpowers the being and the children scatter. The reconciliation that follows seems genuine. All the patriarchs have faced hardships and they all have encountered themselves through others. Reconciliation seems to be possible only under these conditions and can be only achieved with the help of others. In the final sequence, all three patriarchs stand together with Dinah. They order Jacob's sons to go to Egypt and find there a prince. The film ends with the patriarchs watching as the sons of Jacob leave. The tale is not over, but its message is universal.

Concluding Remarks

Sissoko decided to screen *La Génèse* first at Fespaco in Ouagadougou in 1999 and then at Cannes. Fespaco gave *La Génèse* a lukewarm reception, deeming the film too "hermetic". Baba Keïta did, however, receive the prize for best set design. At Cannes, *La Génèse* was part of the official selection in the *Un certain* regard category. It won first prize at the tenth Festival Cinema Africano in Milano in March 2000.

The reception in Mali is a slightly different story. In 2012 Sadio Simaga made a middle-length documentary, *Les 50 ans du Cinéma au Mali* (The 50 Years of Cinema in Mali), in which she describes the hardships faced by the industry. The problems Malian cinema faces are on all levels: production, distribution and exploitation. From 1986 to the 1990s, all the national movie theatres were sold by the government, and there is no space for African films. In Mali, 40% of the young population is unacquainted with movie theatres and with African movies. There seems to be lack of communication between film directors, producers and distributors, despite the fact that Malian TV says they are more than happy, and ready, to take on African "quality" cinema. There are practically no cinemas left in the country. In Bamako, only the Babemba and the French cultural centre regularly show films. The existing theatres are not supported by the CNCM. The owners of small, really low budget and "under the sky" cinemas are bitter. They are more so because the audiences that come seem to enjoy the films. On the other hand, next to more pressing socio-economical problems like healthcare or education, the capital necessary for cinema seems indecent. In such circumstances, filmmakers take upon themselves the role of producer, director and distributor. Indeed, Sissoko has not limited himself to film festivals in terms of screening the film. Dovey writes

that he took it upon himself to exhibit his film throughout Mali and conduct post-screening discussions with Malian audiences,[428] which were a success.

The reception of *La Génèse* adds to the complex world of the film. As I have hopefully shown, the reception of the Bible in African marked political film does not provide us with a straightforward answer in terms of decolonising agendas. The ideological statement Sissoko makes is addressed to multiple audiences who will relate to the film in very different ways. The contextualisation and distanciation the film operates with in terms of narrative, aesthetics and message open various avenues of interpretation, sometimes contradictory ones. The use of the Bible as source can be seen as an attempt to reach a global audience to showcase African film and challenge Western iconographies but also as a remnant of colonialism. The film's interpretation of the fratricidal conflict as a human condition similarly addresses global audiences but also points to a universalist tendency in the field of cultural production more concerned with liberal values than structural issues. The aesthetics of the film, carefully weaving in oral tradition and signalling context, coupled with the success with Malian audiences, would suggest a grounding in African culture and society. However, the "too much aestheticism"[429] of the film has contributed to its lukewarm reception at Fespaco. *La Génèse* is an illustration of the complexity of the field in which the film dwells as well as of the continuous anxieties found in relation to the legacy of the Bible on the African continent.

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[428] Dovey 2009, p. 268.
[429] A critique of *La Génèse* by filmmaker Dani Kouyaté in a personal communication 9 September 2020.

Chapter V. Black Jesus, Townships and *Motherfuckers*

> When you are told, and you will be, that people just disappear, you must say we have been lied to. And evil will fall.[430]

Jesus, dressed in a flannel shirt and jeans, utters these words inside an over-crowded informal settlement, with people crowding around windows, listening in. While he speaks, two women carrying a child walk on the precariously thin roofs made of corrugated iron and other metal sheets in the Khayelitsha township,[431] risking a fall with each step. As he finishes the sentence, the sick child is handed to the people inside the shack through the roof for Jesus to heal. The evil Jesus speaks of in the quote above manifests itself in the pre-carity and vulnerability the scene conveys through the fragility of the settle-ments and that of the child. The key point Jesus is making is that truth – sur-facing through the recognition of lies – is necessary to win the battle against evil. Jesus' words encompass the framework around which the film *Son of Man* is built, namely truth and the necessity of continuous struggle.

Son of Man (2006)[432] recounts the story of a person called Jesus, set in the imaginary Kingdom of Judea in Africa. Filmed partly in the Khayelitsha town-ship of Western Cape, with an entirely Black cast, *Son of Man* is the produc-tion of the theatre, opera and film company Dimpho Di Kopane (nowadays the Isango Ensemble), formed by opera and theatre director Mark Dornford-May.[433] As a cinematographic reception of the Bible, *Son of Man,* as we will see in the course of this chapter, has attracted the attention of biblical scholars and theologians alike, who have used a number of hermeneutical and theolog-ical lenses to read the film. My approach to the film differs and is an illustra-tion of the tilt of the thesis I mention in the introduction. I look at the film in

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[430] *Son of Man,* 2006. The quotes in this chapter are taken from the 2009 DVD version.
[431] Khayelitsha means "new home" in isiXhosa. The population is estimated up to 800,000 inhabitants in 2011 up to 2 million in 2020.
[432] The dates of *Son of Man* can be confusing, as the title appears with 2006 or 2009 in different sources. The film was released on 22 January 2006 (Spier Films). It premiered at the Sundance film festival in 2006 and one of its DVD versions came out in 2009.
[433] Mark Dornford-May (b. 1955) is a British-born, naturalised South African. He is married to South African opera singer and actress, Pauline Malefane, and was officially inducted into the Sotho community in 2007. Dornford-May and Malefane are artistic partners working collabo-ratively in both theatre and film. She has starred in all of his films (Giere 2017, p. 721). Male-fane is the co-writer of *Son of Man* and in it, she plays the role of Mary.

the context of South African cinema to unlock the ways in which it mobilises memory and in turn embeds the biblical text into the narrative of the nation. In the overall thesis' narrative, *Son of Man* illustrates the profound and deep-seated place the Bible has come to occupy in African political imaginaries.

The truth framework and the immediate context of the film – South Africa – point to the history of the country, the collapse of apartheid and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In 1994, apartheid officially ended, and the TRC was appointed by the new Government of National Unity to help deal with the legacy of the regime.[434] The commission worked from 1995 to 2001 under the supervision of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and its role was to recover an as accurate as possible picture of past injustices for the ultimate goal of reconciliation between victims and perpetrators.[435] The Truth Commission was to help transcend the divisions of the past, and for that it needed to address the unsaid, to uncover the silences about the marginalised and the dehumanised and to emphasise the universality of humanity.

The Truth Commission, televised and broadcasted worldwide as the country's confessional, attested to the different racial and class experiences of apartheid, illustrating that "the public articulation of memory, specifically with regard to trauma has come to occupy a privileged position within national efforts to deal with and make sense out of the past".[436] It triggered the process of recovering and uncovering memories of the country, and in its wake the post-1994 South African cultural field witnessed the growth of discourses of introspection, critique, excavation and evaluation of the traumatic past and adjusting to the present.

In this chapter, I suggest that *Son of Man* participates in these excavations of memory, which constitute an "act of immense imagination to bring [the nation] into existence and to maintain it, often in the face of insuperable diversity".[437] As a film that relies on tropes specific to South African cinematic (re)constructions of memory in the wake of 1994 and the TRC, *Son of Man* inserts the Gospel into the very fabric of the nation's narrative. It does so by employing the iconography and imagery of characters, places and aesthetics that were politically and historically significant to the struggle against apartheid. *Son of Man* contextualises the story of Jesus into another grand narrative, that of the activist and militant struggle against apartheid. Additionally, the re-enacting and *feel* of memory in the film is brought to the fore by the cinematography, which builds on constructed documentary and newsreel footage and the video aesthetic, echoing images, stories, testimonies, witnessing and evidencing that have circulated around the TRC and in the South African cultural memory.

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[434] Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2021.
[435] The TRC worked through three committees: for human rights violations (HRV), for amnesty (AC) and for reparations and rehabilitation of victims (R&R).
[436] Moseley 2007, p. 101.
[437] Saks 2010, p. 2.

In the course of this chapter, my argument will unfold at the nexus of the cinematic history of South Africa, the representation of the Black experience, the role of art in the struggle against apartheid, the TRC and the question of memory, and the contextualisation of the Gospel in the narrative of the nation. The argument also stems from the theological scholarly response *Son of Man* has received as primarily a Jesus film that can be read through inculturation, liberation, postcolonial or feminist approaches to the Bible. These responses have prompted me to have a different take and to start from the context of the film rather than the relationship between film and text. It is with these responses that I would like to start the analysis.

The Film and the Text

The Bible on Film

As previously mentioned, *Son of Man* is a production of the theatre, opera and film company Dimpho Di Kopane formed by Mark Dornford-May. The troupe specialises in, amongst other things, Passion and Mystery Plays, which they started performing in the townships, and adaptations into Xhosa of such classic operas as Bizet's *Carmen – U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2005), Britten's *Noye's Fludde – Unogumbe: Noye's Fludde* (2013) and Puccini's *La Bohème – Breathe – Umphefumlo* (2015). *Son of Man* is the group's second fiction feature film, after *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*.

Produced by Spier Films in South Africa, but without state funding, *Son of Man* is an exception in my case studies as it is not a transnational production in the sense of implying different production companies or funders, although postproduction did occur in Cape Town and London. *Son of Man* does undoubtedly join the marked political film category and the festival circulation the other three case studies represent, as it premiered at the Sundance film festival and has received attention from a more global audience rather than only a South African one.[438] The film has been critically acclaimed and has been nominated for awards at a number of international film festivals.[439] Most of the reviews are positive, with critics appreciating the originality of its interpretation of Scripture as well as the contemporary *African twist*.

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[438] From a cursory check in 2021, Rotten Tomatoes has a rating of 83% from critics (from a total of seven reviews, six where positive); 86% of audience viewers and an average rating of 4/5. IMDB has two positive reviews from users, a list of 18 external critic reviews, and a rating of 6,5/10. From these 18 external reviews, only one is from a South African site. Others come from such sources as The Guardian, The Los Angeles Times, the BBC, and a few independent film bloggers, illustrating the film's wider audience outside South Africa.
[439] Such as Sundance, L.A. Pan African Film Festival, BFI London Film Festival, Warsaw International Film Festival, and others.

The film's reception evidencing continuous interest in the Jesus story makes sense in view of Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch's affirmation that: "Far from being a transparent text that transcends the culture in which it is understood, the Bible has been proved by its history of reception to be a multi-voiced, dialogical text, which lends itself to being endlessly rethought."[440] Indeed, the Bible has been transferred to the screen in all genres and supports. It has also gone through "the full spectrum of intertextual possibilities between direct adaptation and indirect appropriation."[441]

As filmmakers use not only specific texts and stories but also characters, events and themes, scholars within the field of religion and film have looked at the reception of the Bible through a combination of three approaches. The first focuses on the film as a text with religious significance; the second adds to this the role of the audience in its attempt to understand film-viewing as religious experience; and the third combines the two with additional attention to the broader cultural context in which both film and viewers exist and act.[442] We have seen an illustration of this equally in the previous chapter. Indeed, my reading of *La Génèse* is more conventional in reception studies. *Son of Man,* as a "radical actualization or re-contextualization of the entire Gospel narrative"[443] has induced most scholars to adopt the third approach and look more thoroughly at the film's contexts as well as the contemporary implications of its message.

Son of Man is the most representative fiction feature film of the Bible in sub-Saharan Africa in the sense that it has received most scholarly attention. Illustrating this is the volume edited by Richard Walsh, Jeffrey Staley and Adele Reinhartz – *Son of Man: An African Jesus film* – published by Sheffield Phoenix Press in 2013, comprising sixteen analyses of the film.[444] The interest, as partially touched upon above, resides in the radical re-interpretation of the character of Christ (his words, deeds, death and resurrection) and the re-locating of the story to a (post)apartheid (South) Africa, incorporating its traditions, dance and songs, but also the violent context. Furthermore, Jesus' message resonates with liberation theology, Black Consciousness and critique of neoliberalism.

Most scholars in these analyses label *Son of Man* a Jesus-film, putting it under the category of biblical epics and biopics or what Adele Reinhartz calls the *Bible on film*.[445] Jesus movies are defined as historically realistic portrayals of the Jesus story, in contrast to Christ-figure movies, which displace the Jesus story behind another character/story, usually situated in another place

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[440] Burnette-Bletsch 2016, p. 2.
[441] Sanders cited in Burnette-Bletsch 2016, p. 4.
[442] Knauss 2020.
[443] Baugh 2013, p. 126.
[444] In addition to these, see also essays by Gilmour 2009; Baugh 2011; Malone 2012; Zwick 2011 and 2012; West 2014; Sison 2016; Eklund 2017; Giere 2017; Mokoena 2017.
[445] Reinhartz 2013.

and/time.[446] According to this definition, the labelling of *Son of Man* as a Jesus film seems to be problematic. *Son of Man* moves the story into twentieth-century South Africa and completely disregards the genre of historical realism associated with the Jesus story. Nor does it claim historicity, as Mel Gibson's *Passion* does, for example. On the other hand, *Son of Man* keeps the characters and the basic chain of events and sometimes directly quotes the text.

Putting definitional complications aside, commentators have looked at the film from the perspective of genre and agree that *Son of Man* continues the tradition of screening the story of Jesus, albeit providing a more radical version.[447] *Son of Man* takes its structure from Passion Plays,[448] specifically the Chester Mystery Plays linked to Mark Dornford-May's background in the small town of Chester (close to Welsh border). Dornford-May's birth town has a Mystery Play tradition dating back as far as the fourteenth century. Growing up, he played various roles in the these plays – from child angel to Jesus. After moving to South Africa, he adapted this tradition for the Mystery Plays staged in Khayelitsha.[449] *Son of Man* furthermore inscribes itself into the Jesus film tradition since Dornford-May follows "most filmmakers [who opt] to harmonize all four Gospels into a single narrative".[450] For example, in *Son of Man*, as in many other versions, Jesus's birth story combines Matthew's shining star and magi with Luke's manger and shepherds, and the film also contains popular episodes like the Sermon on the Mount and the raising of Lazarus.

That said, *Son of Man* enlarges the tradition of the gradually produced, mainstream, recognisable type of white, and sometimes blue-eyed, Jesus. The film contributes to the iconography of Jesus produced by Christian communities globally. The Gospel narratives and characters have been addressed by different cultures making them relevant for their contexts through imagery or media. Describing, for example, the Telugu production *Karunamayudu* (1978),[451] religion and film scholars Darren Middleton and Brent Plate write

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[446] Walsh 2013, p. 192.

[447] *Son of Man* is usually placed alongside more liberal, aesthetically and ideologically, interpretations of the Jesus story such as Martin Scorcese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) or Denis Arcand's *Jesus of Montréal* (1989).

[448] According to W. Barnes Tatum (2017), Cinematic Passion Plays appear practically simultaneously at the beginning of commercial cinema in the 1890s in Europe and the US. Although the American production *The Passion Play of Oberammergau* (dir. Henry C. Vincent, 1898) is usually hailed as the first of the kind, Tatum mentions writes the French production *La Passion* (by Léar) from 1897 and the second American production, *The Höritz Passion Play* (prod. William Freeman, 1897), as first known cinematic passion plays.

[449] For a detailed description of adaptations of the Chester tradition into the stage production of Mystery Plays and *Son of Man*, see Zwick 2011.

[450] Reinhartz 2007.

[451] *Man of Compassion*, directed by A. Bhimsingh around the same time as David Greene's *Godspell* (1973); Norman Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar;* the mini-series *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977); John Kirsh's *Jesus* (1979); Terry Jones's *Life of Brian.* Overall, the 1970s seem to have been a very fertile decade for Jesus stories.

that, while the film adheres to fairly orthodox Christian depictions, its style resembles the long tradition of Hindu devotional and mythological films, fitting Jesus into the Hindu pantheon.[452] The authors argue that, along with these examples, *Son of Man* actualises the story's relevance from an African perspective, in a way similar to how Haitian-American Jean-Claude LaMarre's *Color of the Cross* (2006) and its sequel *Color of the Cross 2: The Resurrection* (2008) do for the wider Black experience, emphasising Christ as the Oppressed One.

Synopsis

The tradition *Son of Man* follows, but most importantly enlarges, has prompted scholars to look closely at its rendering of the text in relation to the context. Lloyd Baugh has pointed out a number of difficulties the filmmaker faces when transposing the Jesus story on film. The challenges relate to the choice of Gospel, the stories within the different Gospels, the characters to include, the treatment of the death and resurrection, and, not least, the fact that we know how the story ends.[453] The process gains complexity when the driving idea is not limited to making the text relevant to the context by emphasising certain aspects or issues. The film is undoubtedly open to such readings, as it has been analysed from postcolonial,[454] feminist,[455] inculturation,[456] and liberation theologies.[457] I want to argue that *Son of Man,* while incorporating elements from these approaches to theology and biblical reception, adapts the text *to* the context in such a manner that it becomes part of the national ethos.

The repercussions of such an approach will affect the adaptation of the text, its structure, chronology and theological/biblical interpretation. The general view is that Son *of Man* is "an exegetically unsound and in many ways an uncritical harmonization of the Gospels which deals with the biblical traditions in a one-sided and selective manner".[458] The chronology of the film does not follow that of the Gospels. Rather, the story starts with the temptations of Jesus in the desert by Satan at his side. This character will be ever present throughout the narrative as a precursor or underlying cause of all evil. The presence of Satan throughout the film is important, as it is a building block of the film's theology of incarnation that is not a corrective for the original sin but a response to evil in the world.[459] The Incarnation does not occur because

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[452] Middleton & Plate 2013, p. 139.
[453] Baugh 2000.
[454] See Adejumobi 2013; Runions 2013.
[455] Nadar 2013.
[456] See Giere 2013; Nkadimeng, & Baugh 2013.
[457] Sison 2016.
[458] Zwick 2013, p. 118.
[459] Gilmour 2009, p. 158.

of human action in history. It comes as the solution to contemporary evil, setting the following actions of Jesus exclusively in the space and time the film depicts. Evil in *Son of Man* is the all too real structures of oppression.

Satan is present in the next scene, when Mary is introduced, as she runs into a classroom filled with slaughtered children. She hides from soldiers among the little bodies, pretending to be dead. In that same classroom, she receives the Good News by an adolescent Gabriel who recites the passage from Luke's Gospel (Lk. 1.26-36). Mary, having received the message, sings the Magnificat, looking straight at the camera.

The next act of the film is dedicated to the nativity and Jesus' childhood. After the visit of the Magi (possibly from Lesotho), when Jesus is about three or four years old, he witnesses the massacre of infants, which happens on the road as people are fleeing from the rebel forces. To be precise, Mary *makes* him witness it by turning his head towards the deeds of the soldiers. Following the massacre, Gabriel invites the small Jesus to come with him, leave this world and join his heavenly father. Jesus refuses, saying "This is my world", turns his back to the angel and follows his mother into the "World of Men". In fact, Jennifer Rohrer-Walsh and Richard Walsh state that it is "Mary – rather than God or prophecy/scripture – [who] deserves the credit for inspiring his ministry and, by extension, contributing to a better world".[460] In this scene, the creators of the film not only established Jesus' destiny as a political activist but also lay the foundations for a feminist reading of the Gospel by placing Mary at the core of that political struggle and resistance.

The following sequence shows a grown Jesus who leaves the safety of the rural world where he grew up with his mother.[461] On his journey to the city, on foot and by train, he meets his disciples: Peter, James, John, Thomas, Bartholomew, James the Younger, Matthew, Simone, Philippa Thaddea, Andie, and Judas. These men and women are Jesus' neighbours, fellow *abakwetha*,[462] factory workers, gangsters and township residents. Their identities as disciples, apostles or traitors to the struggle are tied to their environments and backgrounds. Judas, for example, works on the coal train – the *motherfucker,* according to jazz artist Hugh Masekela. The train as a symbol of dislocation, loneliness and hardship is constitutive of Judas' character. Moreover, as a former child soldier, Judas is the most traumatised character, and his betrayal of Jesus is interpreted through the impossibility of getting past the trauma, thus perpetrating the cycle of violence.

Jesus' teachings are mainly concentrated in the township community. The miracles – the raising of Lazarus, the healings and exorcisms, his "Sermon on the Mount" pronounced from the top of a VIP – Ventilated I latrine – in the

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[460] Rohrer-Walsh & Walsh 2013, p. 169.
[461] Joseph disappears completely from the narrative after the massacre scene.
[462] Those who have undergone the *Ukwaluka* – the adult male circumcision, which here replaces Jesus' baptism.

middle of the township, all are recorded on film. The video images, as part of the meta-mediatic language and aesthetic choice of the filmmakers, are used by Judas as proof of Jesus' revolutionary tendencies. The Last Supper, where the disciples sit in a circle, is at the outskirts of the township and is where Jesus' arrest take place. There is, however, no trial, no Calvary, no crucifixion. Jesus is beaten to death, put into the back of a truck, driven to the countryside and buried. It is Mary, who after unearthing the body of her son, puts him on the cross for all to see. Without her action, there would be no redemption. In the spirit of non-violent resistance, the film conveys that one's voice is the weapon to use in the face of oppression and that with silence there can be no liberation. The cross becomes the symbol of that message, around which Christ's followers gather and take inspiration to continue the struggle; "Redemption happens because of the believing community's actions rather than the singularity of Jesus' pain, suffering, and death."[463]

Son of Man's story does not end with the resurrection, where Jesus, followed by the laughing child angels, is running on the hill of Khayelitsha towards the cross. As they stop and turn to the camera, a laughing Jesus raises his fist in the air as a sign of victory.[464] The biblical narrative has ended, but we are left with scenes from the everyday life in Khayelitsha, with children, women going about their daily occupations.

A Different Take

The scholarly reception of *Son of Man*, briefly sketched above through the synopsis, especially its analysis through the Jesus-film genre, has perhaps unwittingly pulled the film into the global academic sphere to such an extent that it is more often compared to Pasolini's *The Gospel According to Matthew* than discussed in the context of South African cinema.[465] Such an approach is foreseeable, as the representation of religion or biblical figures in film has been tackled mainly by theologians and biblical scholars interested in the ways theology or scriptures can be *seen* in the films, rather than film scholars.

The present analysis is an attempt to ground the film within the South African context from a slightly different perspective. I suggest that the film does not just transpose the text to the South African context by incorporating historical and socio-cultural elements, as has been amply and justly explored. I

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[463] Gilmour 2009, p. 159.
[464] Interestingly reminiscent of Rocky Balboa's punch on the stairs of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in *Rocky II* (1979) with the children jumping around him.
[465] This is not entirely surprising, first because out of the eighteen contributors five are African scholars; and second, in view of the position of South African cinema has held within academia and discussions around film. South African film scholar Martin Botha writes that only in July 1990, at the Zabalaza Film workshop and Film Festival in London, was South African cinema discussed for the first time within the historical context of Africa. Botha's observation echoes other South African film scholars such as Keyan Tomaselli's and Lindiwe Dovey who advocate the "Africanisation" of South African film scholarship.

want to show that looking at *Son of Man* through the history of South African cinema and collective remembering opens up for another dimension in the reception of the Bible in film. It shows how Scripture, through the film, becomes embedded in the narratives of the nation. It suggests that the biblical text can serve as symbolic narrative through which the country (and the continent by extension) can perform memory and re-enact trauma. The argument builds upon the view that the immediate post-apartheid South African cinema was a race for representation,[466] a race prompted by, among other processes, the TRC's moral imperative to uncover the truth and to give voice to narratives that have been stifled, ignored or misrepresented during the years of apartheid, with the goal to rewrite the nation. *Son of Man*, I suggest, participates in this race by emphasising the Black activist stance against apartheid, using activist figures as its avatars for Christ, tapping into South African Black theology as well as events and practices signalling the history of resistance. In order to understand that history of resistance, we need to look at the history of repression.

Son of Man in the Context of South African Cinema

In *Son of Man,* the Africanisation of the Gospel happens at the nexus of narratives and histories in the light of the memory of apartheid on the one hand and the broader African context of violence and conflict on the other. The latter is seen through the narration around violence associated with interim military governments, child soldiers and rebel forces. These are reminiscent of generic media images about wars and conflict in Africa and seem to dissociate themselves from the main context, which is the specific South African one. It is with the former that I presently concern myself.

The film signals the segregated life of the township (both past and present), the killings of pupils in Soweto in 1976, the riots with the *toyi-toyi* (one of the most recognisable forms of anti-apartheid struggle) and protest songs, and the disappearance of anti-apartheid heroes and their unearthing. These elements and events belong to the narratives that constitute the collective memory of the anti-apartheid struggle. The *overnight* transformation of the country from a segregated, institutionally racist state to a democratic nation demanded, as South African film scholar Lucia Saks has pointed out, a rewriting of its history, an imaging and imagining of the nation in its diversity. The marginal voices needed to be unearthed in order for the nation to come into existence.[467]

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[466] To use the title of Lucia Saks' book, *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa: the Race for Representation* (2010).
[467] Saks 2010.

In its early history and during the apartheid years, South African cinema, at the hands of white filmmakers and producers, participated in the construction of South Africa as a white nation. This led to a crisis of legitimacy the industry faced especially after 1994, triggering the appearance of multiple images and narratives, just as prompted by the TRC hearings. *Son of Man,* is part of the movement in South African cinema to counteract the preceding images in a balancing act of representation that could ultimately lead to reconciliation. To have an understanding of the necessity of narrating other voices, one should explore the image of the nation under apartheid and how it related the Black experience.

Black Experience and South African Cinema

During apartheid, the experience of the majority Black population of the country was not part of the representational apparatus in power, meaning that the Black population appeared in and was represented by a culture grounded in racist stereotypes. Representation was conditioned by a psychology of maintenance in which prejudice is the standard mode of perception,[468] and the obsession of the apartheid regime had for stifling and misrepresenting Black experiences was evidently reflected in the history of South African cinema.

South Africa has an exceptional position in the history of African cinemas. First, it has one of the world's oldest film industries. Already in 1898 and 1899 Edgar Hyman produced *Rickshaw Ride in Commissioner Street* and *The Cyanide Plant on the Crown Deep.*[469] Second, South Africa also has a booming film culture and the necessary infrastructure[470] for further development, unlike most countries on the continent. However, most films produced locally in pre-1994 South Africa had little to do with the independence struggles and the post-colonial situation experienced in most countries of the continent. Therefore, the common chronology used by scholars of African film that follows the colonial period and the post-independences (1960s-1970s, the 1980s-1990s, and the 2000s) does not apply to the country's cinema. South Africa's

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[468] Enwezor 1997, p. 23.
[469] Maingard 2017, p. 243.
[470] South Africa after the collapse of apartheid was hailed as the future of African cinema, having the necessary resources to build an industry and facilitate inter-African co-productions. This, however, has not happened. South African film scholars Keyan Tomaselli and Nyasha Mboti show in their article as government structures and funding, through the NFVF (The National Film and Video Foundation).. seems to be crippled by bureaucracy, stifles creativity by favouring certain projects, perpetuates the apartheid pathways by proposing initiatives that clearly demarcate the population. Filmmakers resort then to co-productions with France, Canada, Germany, and Australia. Furthermore, most of the population cannot afford cinemas, showing an overwhelming amount of Hollywood productions.

long history of struggles involving different parties – the British, the Afrikaners, the coloured – "makes it problematic to impose theories of colonialism and postcolonialism on the history of cultural production".[471]

South African cinema is a complex field having global and transnational ties and dependencies as well as local agendas conditioned by ideological and political processes, but which is also concerned with obtaining commercial viability together with creating an indigenous, specific aesthetic and cinematic language. My present concern with the Black experience and the more radical strand of anti-apartheid resistance will necessarily overlook some of the complexities and nuances of the South African cinematic field.

As mentioned, the cinematic representations of and in South Africa were directed by various interests, illustrating the power struggles between various political factions, and reflected the ideological and political developments of the country. The three main events of South African history,[472] namely the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1901, the institutionalisation of the apartheid state in 1948 and the first democratic elections in 1994, also constitute the landmarks of the country's cinema.

In 1913, Isidor Shlesinger founded the company *African film Trust* and then in 1915 the *African film Production*, which determined, for the next 43 years, the rules by which the national cinematographic industry was to work. It also held a monopoly on distribution, showing exclusively Hollywood movies. These became the models for local films, filled with stereotypical representations of Black South Africans, illustrated in the *Allan Quaterman* films or Jamie Uys' infamous *The Gods Must Be Crazy*.

Schlesinger's company produced short and feature-length films of various genres. The films produced targeted different audiences and serving different purposes, illustrating already at that early stage the split and fragmentary character of South African cinema.[473] One of its first successes that subsequently acquired cult status was the feature-length *De Voortrekkers* (1916).[474] The film, a direct outcome of the newly founded Union of South Africa, took reference from D.W. Griffiths' *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and became the bearer of the creation myth of the South African nation. It put the Voortrekkers – farmers of Dutch descent, who left the British Cape colony and defeated the Zulus at the Battle of the Blood River – as its centre. Schlesinger was primarily a businessman, however, and supported those in power. He balanced "between

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471 Dovey 2009, p. 39.
472 Saks 2010, p. 5.
473 See Saks 2010; Botha 2012.
474 The film tells the story of the Great Trek and the 1838 Battle of Blood River, in which about 3,000 Zulus, led by their chief Dingaan, were killed by 464 Boers. The annual screening of the film in December became a national tradition (Gutsche cited in Dovey 2009, p. 36). The film also takes reference in profoundly racist D.W. Griffiths' *Birth of a Nation* (1915).

the interests of … politically powerful Afrikaans-speaking farmers and economically strong English-speaking industrialists".[475] Therefore, at that early stage, although his company produced the creation myth of the Afrikaner nation, it also made instructional and propaganda films for the Native Recruiting Corporation directed to Black audiences.[476]

The 1930s saw the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. By 1930 censorship was introduced in South Africa, and by 1934 differential censorship based on racial categories was implemented. Furthermore, films that were likely to be offensive to the people of any friendly nation or to the British Empire ran the risk of being banned.[477] In 1948 the apartheid state was instituted and with the three parliamentary acts of 1950, 1954 and 1955,[478] segregation was completed. South African cinema conveyed split images of the country, which grew out of the apartheid policy – subsidy system and censorship – and the different audiences the cultural production catered to. Different films were made for so-called *Bantu* and Afrikaner audiences. For example, films made for the Afrikaner audience conveyed, in the spirit of escapism and entertainment, a positive, one-sided image of the Afrikaner, juxtaposing it with a negative image of the Black servant.

Furthermore, for decades,[479] Black cinemas were not allowed in urban white areas, as it would challenge the status of the Black population as non-citizens. Moral and political censorship determined which films could be screened to the four major race groups: whites, coloured, Asians and Blacks. Films that would portray law enforcement in a negative light would not be shown in popular Black cinemas, as it was thought that they might entice so-called terrorism and hatred towards the white population. Others would be deemed (in 1963!) too nuanced for an audience that had not reached a particular level of civilisation.[480] Needless to say, the majority Black population was perceived as being at the lowest level.

The fragmented nature of South African cinema made little room for any representation of the socio-political reality of the country as a whole. With the exceptions of a few anti-apartheid films, made either in exile or by European

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[475] Tomaselli cited in Parsons 2009.

[476] Maingard 2017, p. 244.

[477] Botha 2012, pp. 30-31.

[478] According to Lucia Saks, the Group Areas Act of 1950, established spatial segregation of the population defined into racial groups under the Population Registration Act. The second, the Natives Registration Act of 1954, gave the state the right to transfer residents to racially zoned areas – "homelands", or segregated satellite townships. Finally, the Urban Areas Act of 1955 permitted the removal of black people who were living as servants in white areas and in the central cities to the townships.

[479] According to Botha from 1948 to the 1980s (2012, p. 52).

[480] Keyan Tomaselli quotes the Minister of Interior Jan de Klerk (?) in parliamentary proceedings of 1963: "[We] know what sort of film it would b to show to a race that has not yet reached the level of civilization that we have reached… things they cannot understand should not be shown to them and … there are some films which can be exhibited much more safely to a white child of fourteen years than to an adult Bantu." (Tomaselli 2014, p. 22).

filmmakers or in Hollywood, and a few initiatives in the 1980s, the larger developments in cinema on the South African Black experience or more radically oriented political cinema did not begin until the 1990s. The majority Black South African population was excluded from the cinematic industry's representational apparatus, which was imbued with colonial and apartheid ideology.

The films that were made for Black audiences only reinforced the present stereotypes. During the 1940s and 1950s, a few films targeting Black audiences and featuring Black casts were made. The first one, *African Jim* (aka *Jim comes to Joburg,* 1949), was directed by British Donald Swanson, who also later made *The Magic Garden* (aka *The Pennywhistle Blues* (1951). These two films show sequences of the urban life of the Black community and the featured music – African jazz – representing the modern Black, which especially appealed to audiences. Schlesinger's AFP quickly understood the profit potential of Black audiences and produced *Zonk!* (1950) and *Song of Africa* (1951).[481] According to Dovey, such films as *Jim Comes to Jo'burg/African Jim*, *Zonk!* and *Song of Africa*, although made by liberal whites, are musicals that valorise the image of the smiling, singing, dancing, unthreatening Black person and end up confirming racist stereotypes.[482]

In the 1950s, the South African government became more involved in cinematic production, aiming partly to create a more positive image of South Africa in view of increasing international embargoes[483] and to counter such portrayals as *Come Back Africa* (1959), by American Lionel Rogosin. With the appearance of a regulated system of subsidies in 1956, the government as well as large private companies united to gain full control over cinematic production and the creation of a national cinema that would picture the South African society of Verwoerd's regime. The subsidy scheme gave preference to Afrikaans-language films, resulting in virtually no opportunities for Black filmmakers in South Africa,[484] and any film portraying friendships or romantic relationships between Blacks and whites was censured, since interracial relationships were illegal under apartheid law,[485] as was the case with *Katrina* (1969).

In the 1970s, the government included B-films in its subsidy scheme (1972-1973), which were also directed towards Black audiences and were somewhat akin to the Blaxploitation films produced in the US. As Jacqueline Maingard writes, "these B-films are primarily located in township locales, denuded of political or historical contexts, and contained within an apparently 'Black'

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[481] Maingard 2017, p. 246.
[482] Dovey 2009, p. 46.
[483] Dovey 2009, p. 46.
[484] Dovey writes that only two films were made by Black South African filmmakers during apartheid: Simon Sabela's *U-Deliwe* (1975) and Gibson Kente's *How Long?* (1976) (2009, p.47).
[485] Maingard 2017, p. 247.

world that operates independently of the wider society governed by apartheid".[486] The regime was thus sustaining the production of split images of the nation.

It should be stressed that despite the state control of cinema, countering voices, from which *Son of Man* takes its references in terms of aesthetics and iconography, through images of uprisings, violence, activists and songs, were heard. Music, for example, will became an important conveyer of resistance in films imaging the Black experience, an aspect fully employed in *Son of Man* through protest songs. Indeed, despite the *Jim comes to Joburg's* stereotypes mentioned above, Dovey and Impey (2010) noticed how one song managed to slip through the script and censorship:

> *Abelungu* Goddamn! (White people Goddamn!)
> Abelungu Goddamn! (White people Goddamn!)
> They call us Jim!

The British producers, not understanding the lyrics but wanting to capture *real scenes* of Black South Africans, unwittingly inserted *hidden transcripts* that would resonate with Black audiences. In 1951, *Cry the Beloved Country,* by Hungarian born British filmmaker Zoltan Korda, was released.[487] *Cry the Beloved Country*, together with *Come Back Africa*, illustrate the nascent interest of the international community in the South African situation, subsequently resulting in more collaborative productions of anti-apartheid and resistance films, as well as Hollywood portrayals,[488] in the 1970s and 1980s.

During the violent repressions of the 1960s, a few films looking at the issues of race were made by white South African filmmakers who adapted novels and stories by such writers as Nadine Gordimer and Athol Fugard. It is the 1970s, however, that witnessed significant shifts, as they saw the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement and the death of Steve Biko, the appearance of such organisations as Black Community Programmes, and of course the 1976 uprisings in Soweto.

In the 1980s, anti-apartheid and ground-breaking films like Darrell Roodt's *Place of Weeping* (1987) and of course Oliver Schmitz's *Mapantsula* (1988) were released. South African film scholars have hailed the years 1987 and 1988 as a turning point after which the complexities of South African society

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[486] Maingard 2017, p. 252.
[487] The initiative for the film was suggested by Orson Welles and involved such American stars as Sidney Poitier and Canada Lee. An anecdotal account states that Sidney Poitier, Canada Lee and Korda cooked up a scheme where they told the South African immigration authorities that Poitier and Lee were not actors but were Korda's indentured servants to avoid complications.
[488] *The Wilby Conspiracy* (1974), also with Sidney Poitiers, *Cry Freedom* (1987), *A World Apart* (1988), and *A Dry White Season* (1989).

become more apparent on screen.[489] The documentary, evidencing history, becomes, after that point, prominent. Similarly, short films in the second half of the 1980s began to portray events, such as removals of communities or destruction of indigenous cultures, that were left out of the country's official historical narratives.[490]

South African Cinema Post-1994

I sought to show in the previous section that the institutional segregation and racism of South Africa was reproduced in the country's cinematic industry. In this environment, the country narrated a version of history that excluded the majority of the population and sustained racial prejudice. After the collapse of the regime, new modes of narration had to surface in order for the country to become what it set out to be – a democratic nation. The emphasis on histories and memories of the previously marginalised members of society had to be made.

The cinema of the post-apartheid period is thus characterised by the emergence of new voices and a diversification of themes.[491] South African cinemas evolved into cinemas of marginality, confronting the past and the present not just through narratives about the apartheid past but also the Anglo-Boer War. They challenge stereotypes of Afrikaners; tell contemporary stories of Black lives; and paint a portrait of contemporary South Africa, in which segregation is still present. They experiment with form, explore oral storytelling and animation. They raise queer voices.[492] This emergence of voices is driven by the imperative to address the imbalances in the representational apparatus.

Among the aforementioned themes of post-1994 South African cinema, *Son of Man* fits best into the cinemas of marginality and confronting the present categories. Botha understands marginality as describing "the poor, economic and social conditions of individuals within a society, social classes within a nation, or nations within the larger world community".[493] Cinemas of marginality deal with homelessness and poverty, AIDS, cultures under threat, xenophobia, institutionalised violence during apartheid, colonial racism, child rape, discrimination, and drug addiction. *Son of Man* for its part points to the victims of institutionalised violence during apartheid through the massacre of children, the revolt of mothers, the death of activists, the township and migration. In a broader fashion illustrating the transnational and the multiple addressees and publics, the film also confronts the present violence in African

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489 For a detailed account of that period, see Martin Botha (2012).
490 Botha 2012.
491 Ibid, p. 203.
492 Ibid.
493 Ibid, p. 204.

contexts perpetrated by military interim governments, the issue of child sol-
diers, and extends its critique to imperialistic Western tendencies and neolib-
eralism. Jesus preaches against political leaders and global powers:

> All authority is not divinely instituted … When those with imperial histories
> pretend to forget them and blame Africa's problems on tribalism and corruption
> while building themselves new economic empires, I say we have been lied to.
> Evil did not fall.
>
> When I hear someone was beaten and tortured in the Middle East, I say we
> have been lied to. Evil did not fall. When I hear that in Asia child labour has
> been legislated for, I say we have been lied to. Evil did not fall. When politi-
> cians in Europe and the USA defend trade subsidies and help to restrict the use
> of medicine through commercial patents, I say we have been lied to. Evil did
> not fall.[494]

Acknowledging the focus in *Son of Man* on apartheid narratives makes it pos-
sible to look at the film as taking part in the recovery of South African popular
memory by "reclaiming history and telling stories that could not be told pre-
viously [and which] became a significant part of the national ethos",[495] a prac-
tice that arose particularly with the worldwide broadcasting of hearings by the
Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Commission became a staged
event, a drama where actors performed their memory and truth by confessing
to trauma and crimes, establishing in front of the whole world their humanity
– monstrous, stolen or broken – with the ultimate goal of creating a redemptive
narrative, a redemption that was imperative for the Rainbow Nation – the term
coined by Desmond Tutu – to come into existence.

The Commission had tremendous repercussions for the nation and its cul-
tural expressions. Documentary and filmmakers began experimenting with
narrative techniques and genre – from court dramas to personal and intimate
essays. Feature films about the TRC started to appear. In 2004 four feature
films about the TRC were released: Ramadan Suleman's *Zulu Love Letter*, Ian
Gabriel's *Forgiveness,* Tom Hooper's *Red Dust* and John Boorman's *In My
Country*. These examples as well as subsequent films evaluating the past and
present illustrate the different experiences and expressions of peoples, at times
at a more intimate level and at times through the eyes of the collective and
community. *Zulu Love Letter*, for example, portrays what the main protagonist
personally experiences as a phenomenon she understands as collective amne-
sia. She is not reconciled with her past, nor with how everyone around her
seems to have moved on, as she watches her daughter grow. The daughter was
born deaf and mute as a result of the beatings her mother endured while preg-
nant from police officers. The daughter's presence is a constant reminder of

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[494] *Son of Man,* 2006.
[495] Pichaske cited in Botha 2012, p. 211.

the injustice and does not allow for redemption. *Forgiveness* also emphasises the anger and the desire for revenge rather than for reconciliation.

These divergent narratives express the anxieties and frustrations of unresolved anger or forgotten struggle. They constitute part of the criticism the TRC received as it was perceived that the commission did not allow for a language that said, "I am not reconciled", or "I do not forgive you", or "I want you to be punished", or "I do not confess or apologize for what I did", or "I do not recognise this process".[496] Indeed, the 1993 interim Constitution of South Africa and the commission advocated for understanding instead of vengeance, reparation instead of retaliation, and Ubuntu – universal humanity, reconciliation, togetherness – instead of victimisation.[497] Nevertheless, however we understand the victories or failures of the TRC, it did provide a platform where narratives and experiences could be heard and further negotiated in the cultural sphere. *Son of Man*, taking truth as its conceptual framework and imperative for redemptive justice – in line with the ideas of the TRC, nevertheless points out, along with more critical works, especially in its last *toyi-toyi*, that the struggle is nigh and reconciliation is far from attained.

South African films in the wake of 1994 reflect the process of engaging with the "irrationalities of memory"[498] constituting the representational discourse. The emerging narratives are complex, divergent and contradictory; as one of Jyoti Mistry's films is aptly titled, *We Remember Differently* (2005). In this film, the question of race in South Africa is addressed through the juxtaposition of photographs and 8mm footage of an Indian family with the narrated memories of a white mother and daughter. The racial dissonance that ensues calls attention to race and challenges perceptions of separation and difference. *District 9* (2009) is another example that manipulates the representational discourse that surrounds the nation, invoking both township South Africa and apartheid South Africa without ever depicting contemporary South Africans as existing within those discourses.[499] *Son of Man* makes similar manipulations by building on South African cultural memories of past and present and uses the Gospel to broaden the reach of its rendering of struggle, oppression and redemption. It does so by focusing on the Black experiences that were censured and misrepresented by the state apparatus and which came out during the TRC.

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[496] Moseley 2007, p. 105.
[497] Stuit 2010, p. 87.
[498] Dovey 2018, p. 183.
[499] Meir 2018, p. 222.

Son of Man as Memory

> 'Where were the whites?' I wondered aloud as soon as the final credits of Son of Man had finished. Surely a story set in more-or-less contemporary South Africa should reflect our racialized landscape?[500]

South African biblical scholar Gerald West's incredulity over what a film set in South Africa should reflect takes us back to the question of representation. In the sections above, I have touched upon the representational apparatus, the place it accorded to the Black majority of the South African population during apartheid, and how filmmakers took upon themselves the process of the re-covering of memory triggered by the TRC. It is partially through the workings of memory that the undoing of the under– and misrepresentation of the Black population takes place. Memory becomes an essential conceptual frame through which the discrepancy West notes can be articulated.

Memory is contained by a particular space and a dialogic relationship between past and present, relying on experience and which complicates perceptions and understandings of history. The workings of memory entail a blurring of time, where "now" and "then" defy linear history. In *Son of Man,* this process is evidenced by the presence of apartheid and post-apartheid signifiers that occupy the same cinematic space.[501] For example, Judas' past as a child soldier and as a worker on the *motherfucker* train signals, on the one hand, the commuting misery of mining workers and, on the other hand, an aspect of more contemporary African conflicts, two elements that do not belong together in the same time or space.

In 1974, a conversation between Michel Foucault and *Cahiers du Cinema* questioned what popular memory entails through the narratives of World War II in such films as *Lacombe Lucien* (1974) and *The Night Porter* (1974). These films destabilised the official narratives of resistance to Nazism and the relationships between different actors under the regime.[502] For Foucault, the question revolves around the struggles of popular memory trying to surface. Popular memory must replace the official accounts of power, but these accounts from memory can be surprising.

One of the results of the TRC was precisely this surfacing of narratives on the level of the political and societal but also the extremely personal and intimate. These narratives form the creative process of collective memory, which is a selective process, one that grows out of "complex… power relations that determine what is remembered –or forgotten– by whom, and for what end".[503]

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[500] West 2013, p. 2.
[501] West notes this in his analysis, but he sees it as a rather confusing shortcoming of the film.
[502] In the same vein as archival photographs of smiling women exercising in a Nazi-German camp from *Respite* (2007) by Harun Farocki are not the expected images of unfathomable death and suffering. (Katz Thor 2018).
[503] Gillis cited in Moseley 2007, p. 101.

The TRC provided the stage on which such establishment could be possible. To use archaeological metaphors, artefacts surfaced here and there during the apartheid era, after which in 1994 a full-blown dig was commissioned, creating the necessary conditions for different narratives to emerge later as well. In the process of replacing official accounts, *Son of Man* follows the anti-apartheid struggle narrative rather than the individual stories of *Zulu Love Letter*, for example. The memories that surface do not, and in fact cannot, show the same historical reality. Rather, since the act of remembering is a pedagogical practice,[504] they involve the same process of cutting/editing of history present in the previous narratives. The absence of whites, then, in the possible post-apartheid era of the film is a result of such cutting/editing. The marginalised voices have found the power to express their realities, and their saviour will live among them in the majority Black townships.

Memory and Anti-Apartheid Struggle in Art

In the film, then, the Gospels become part of the visualised collective memory through characters, heroes, histories, and murals and are revealed by the cameras. The film does not only use the biblical story to account for, explain or find parallels with contemporary situations as in *La Génèse*, for example. This is where I suggest reception studies can take different turns. Here, the Gospel becomes an element of the creation of the past-present situation/narrative/history. As a South African film, it follows the trend of visualising and (re)enacting events in the archaeological diggings of history and participates in the post-apartheid construction of community.

In *Son of Man*, it is the literal unearthing of South African history that we see on screen through Mary's digging of Jesus' grave and his being put on display on the cross for all to see. It draws on elements of South African cultural memory from the media and the arts by re-situating characters, recreating motifs, music, and atmosphere.[505] South African artists, writers and filmmakers have played the important role of what Botha calls in regard to the short documentary films of 1980s guardians of popular memory.[506] *Son of Man* taps into these guardians of memory, some of which are the icons of the struggle.

Son of Man is not the only film and artistic piece that draws on the religious thematic in South Africa. It should be noted, however, that religious themes do not appear to be addressed in non-propagandist films as markers of identity or authenticity as they were in West African cinema. Explorations in South African religious identities and indigenous cultures will come to the fore

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[504] "Whatever its site and social form, remembrance is an inherently pedagogical practice in that it is implicated in the formation and regulation of meanings, feelings, perceptions, identifications, and the imaginative projection of human limits and possibilities." (Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert cited in Moseley 2007, p. 101).
[505] Grainge 2003, p. 9.
[506] Botha 2012, p. 166.

through experimentation in form and oral tradition only at end of the 1990s and in the early 2000s, when the marginalised voices gain access to the representational apparatus, constituting yet another illustration of the difficulty to apply postcolonial approaches to South African cinematic history as suggested by Dovey.

Christianity in South Africa was far from presenting a united front during apartheid, with the Dutch Reformed Church providing the theological justification for apartheid; South African Black theology accusing missionary Christianity of the wilful racial, class and gender marginalisation of Black peoples; the uncompromising stance against inequality of Dr Beyers Naudé's Christian Institute; the work of the South African Council of Churches; Ubuntu; the publication of the *Kairos Document* in 1985, and so forth. Extensive research on the divergent roles of the churches in the apartheid struggle is available, and a review of that would lay outside the scope of the present analysis. One can provide, however, an illustration of these contradictions.

The history of Donald Harrison's painting the *Black Christ* (1962) epitomises the diverse positions of the church, since it was considered, on the one hand, blasphemous by the Dutch Reformed Church and the Afrikaner media and, on the other, fully supported by other denominations such as the Anglicans, the Evangelicals and the Methodists. Harrison has written that he wanted to participate in the anti-apartheid struggle and show the suffering of Black people through his art. The canvas presents the crucified Christ, surrounded by Mary, St John and two Roman centurions. What made this painting world famous was that Christ is Black and has the face of Albert Luthuli, while the Roman centurions have the faces of Hendrik Verwoerd and John Vorster. Verwoerd pierces the side of Christ, while Vorster stands with the sponge of vinegar and gall. On the other side of the cross, a coloured Madonna and an Asian St John complete the scene.[507]

The question Harrison asked himself, and which prompted the creation of the painting, was "How could a government that professed to be Christian perpetrate such immoral deeds and inflict so much pain and suffering on its own countrymen?"[508] Portraying Christ as Black would show the extent of the suffering, and who better to represent Christ than "Chief Albert Luthuli, who had just been awarded the Nobel peace prize and who subscribed to a philosophy of nonviolence? Luthuli was a revered icon of the struggle against oppression, and had endured much suffering and persecution at the hands of the apartheid regime".[509] Portraying Christ as Black, together with recognisable oppressors, would give the South African population hope for continuing the struggle. It shows that they, too, are part of the Kingdom of God, they have dignity and humanity and, like Christ, they need to resist.

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[507] Harrison 2006, p. 26.
[508] Ibid, p. 25.
[509] Ibid.

The first public exhibition of *The Black Christ* was at a Sunday morning mass at St Luke's Church in Salt River, a suburb of Cape Town. Very quickly, the Censor Board decided that the painting is offensive to religious convictions and a section of the population and declared that the painting could not be exhibited in public. Harrison, in his twenties then, was incarcerated a number of times and was tortured while in custody of the Woodstock police. The painting was kept in turn by a number of activists until it was smuggled out of the country and arrived in Britain on 27 November 1962, where it was exhibited for the whole world to see.[510]

The story of *The Black Christ*[511] illustrates the division of Christian churches when it came to apartheid. This division is possibly at the core of the ambiguous portrayals members of the clergy, for example, were given in South African films, especially in the more radically minded anti-apartheid ones. Already in Harold Shaw's *Rose of Rhodesia* (1918), the character of the benevolent and conciliatory priest or pastor emerges. He preaches patience in the face of adversity and advises his listeners to always follow the precepts of the "Chief of all chiefs – Black and white". Such portrayals of clergy, as mediators, will appear over the years in various films. But perhaps the idea of hope, resilience and endurance conveyed by the Christian faith did not go in line with the more radical side of the struggle portrayed in resistance and anti-apartheid films. *Cry the Beloved Country* (1951), based on Alan Paton's liberal novel, follows the unhappy quest of Reverend Stephen Kumalo as he searches for his son and sister in Johannesburg. He discovers the harsh conditions of the city, which have driven his loved ones to prostitution and crime. Helpless, he goes back to his rural home and builds a church. In Lionel Rogosin's *Come Back Africa* (1959), the actions of Reverend Kumalo are criticised. The characters Modisane and Nkosi find him "slimy, sickly", one who says "yes baas" to everyone, one who "never grew up", still "thinks the world of whites", and builds a church when he ought to revolt.[512]

Similarly, Gibson Kente, a theatre producer and filmmaker, was criticised by the South African Student Organisation (SASO) and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) for conveying into the townships a cautious message of endurance, patience, a need for the Christian faith, and hope through his plays.[513] Despite the fact that Kente had been imprisoned for his work, his play *How Long?* was banned in 1976 and he remained under the radar of apartheid officials, even when making later less political theatre.

Cinematic portrayals of the clergy in these films are more representative of the frustrations experienced regarding apartheid rather than of the impact of churches or the Christian faith on the everyday lives of people. Nor do they

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[510] Harrison writes that the Swedish, Norwegian and Danish governments were also prepared to smuggle in the painting.
[511] A documentary by Damian Samuels on the work and its creator was released in 2015.
[512] *Come Back Africa,* 1959.
[513] Barber, 2018.

reflect the presence of a market for religious films, some of which made attempts to present interracial stories. I have mentioned in the overview chapter that in 1963 Ken Anderson founded *International Films* to create films that would communicate the Gospel to global audiences.[514] Believing in making films on location for a target audience, *International Films* made between 1965 and 1985 about 20 films outside the US including in South Africa. Terry Lindvall and Andrew Quicke relate that, while working for *International Films,* Don Ross made two films with the help of South African Youth for Christ: *Little Lost Fisherman* (1974) and *Love is a Quiet Thing* (1975). The former was an interracial film for children made with the help of a Black African pastor, Andrew Ballentine, and his congregation in Cape Town. The latter was the story of how a Black African's heart was transplanted into a white man. The theme, unsurprisingly, proved to be unpopular with supporters of apartheid, and the film was unsuccessful.[515]

Son of Man, in a way similar to Harrison's painting, interprets the Gospel through the militant history of the country rather than through personal daily humiliation and trauma. It taps into the truth and Ubuntu frameworks of the TRC as well as the non-violent stance of Albert Luthuli, but it also emphasises the necessity of continuous action and struggle. The memory of the nation is invoked and presented through the life and death of Steve Biko, protest songs, township murals and testifying through video.

Icons of Struggle

Memory functions in *Son of Man* through the assemblage of carefully selected elements of South African visual culture, imagery of spaces and sound. This assemblage is fashioned around the integration of the biblical story, creating a visual narrative, which works as belonging to the collective memory of the past-present South Africa.

*Son of Man'*s Jesus draws on a number of icons of the struggle. He undergoes, like Nelson Mandela, the circumcision ritual – *Ukwaluka* – the rite of passage into adulthood of the Xhosa, which replaces the traditional baptism in the film as an illustration of the inculturation of the Gospel.[516] He speaks like Albert Luthuli, emphasising the non-violence stance. In one scene, as his sermon is interrupted by armed forces, Jesus prevents his disciples from attacking. In another, he asks his disciples to give up their arms – knives and guns –, which are gathered in a bag. He continuously emphasises the need for truth as Desmond Tutu, and subsequently the TRC framework, did.

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[514] Lindvall & Quicke 2011.
[515] Lindvall & Quicke 2011, p. 191.
[516] For more on the baptism in the film, see the chapter by S.D. Giere in *Son of Man: An African Jesus Film* (2013)

172

Most importantly, however, Jesus dies as Steve Biko. It is Biko, who, as mentioned earlier, has been established as the main avatar for the character of Jesus, with the famous last words *"how long will it take you?"* that Jesus utters in the film[517] and his death. This is not surprising since Biko himself acquired a prophetic, Christ-like characteristic, incarnated in the South African people, illustrated in the words of Nthatho Motlana: "Biko has not died in vain. There are hundreds of Bikos around."[518] Furthermore, Biko saw Black Consciousness as a foundational approach for black theology, which in turn, would be able to re-examine Christianity.[519]

In the film then, it is a very specific image of Biko that is invoked. In *Biko's Ghost: The Iconography of Black Consciousness,* Shannen Hill distinguishes between three types of portraits circulating in the press in the immediate aftermath of his death in September 1977 and which have affected his legacy in visual culture. The first portrait is the Drum magazine's November 1977 picture presenting him as "the embodiment of Black Consciousness. Shown in a work shirt, he is Everyman and promises others that they too can live proudly and 'stand tall'".[520] This portrait subsequently appeared in papers with a majority Black readership. The second type of portrait shows Biko in suit and tie as the Fallen Statesman, the intellectual who was the primary spokesman for South Africa's majority. This image was particularly favoured by the Afrikaans press over the Black Consciousness Biko. The third type of portrait, that of Biko's corpse, "became an emblem of state abuse and forceful resistance to it".[521]

Son of Man invokes two of the three portraits. Presenting Jesus in a blue flannel shirt and jeans when he teaches and performs the miracles in the township, the film favours the Black Consciousness hero, with his intellectual might and dignity. *Son of Man's* Jesus embodies ideals of Black Consciousness which he preaches on the top of the VIP – Ventilated I latrine – in the middle of the township:

> My people, we have deliberately chosen to operate openly. Let us work together, because through collective dialogue we can penetrate the deafest of ears. It feels like we are defeated. We need to act as a movement to ensure each of us is treated with dignity. Let us unite! Solidarity! Unity![522]

These words exemplify what Biko perceived a Black Consciousness approach could do for Black theology, and turn it together with its Christology, into a manner of thinking that "seeks to relate God and Christ once more to the black

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[517] Noted by Mokoena, Walsh and West (2013).
[518] Motlana cited in Hill 2015, p. 67.
[519] Biko 2014, p. 245.
[520] Hill 2015, p. 47.
[521] Hill 2015, p. 48.
[522] *Son of Man,* 2006.

man and his daily problems."[523] Biko envisaged God and Christ as continuously present and active in the community, providing inspiration for the struggle against oppression. *Son of Man*'s Jesus is, as Katleho Mokoena rightly points, a Biko Christ-figure "…that is not keen on addressing personal morality but is focussed more on institutional morality."[524] The unearthing of the truth for "evil to fall" is the way towards achieving a moral society.

The second portrait the film invokes is that of Biko's corpse. The photograph from the autopsy and his funeral served as reminders and evidence of the torture he suffered. It has further inspired visual artists such as Sam Nhlengethwa's with his *It Left Him Cold,* which explores the vulnerability of the body. That same vulnerability is conveyed in the *Bakie Pietà* of the film. After unearthing her son, Mary sits on the back of the truck driving to Khayelitsha with her son in her arms in the exact same pose as Michelangelo's *Pietà.* Such imagery constitutes the iconography of the film, which appropriates Western images of the Holy Family and transforms them into South African heroes struggling in the townships.

Son of Man instrumentalises the past by using South African icons as well as Christian icons traditionally perceived as Western. It contributes to a memory of the nation that is, in the words of Jan Assmann, "…interested in the past not for the past's sake but for present claims and arguments."[525]

The Township Space

As the representative of Black Consciousness, Jesus teaches mostly in the township. The township is represented here in a traditional and unproblematic[526] way as a space of poverty with informal dwellings and shacks, lacking amenities,[527] similar to images in *Tsotsi* (2005) or *The Wooden Camera* (2003). Such representation grounds the necessity for the struggle and protest in the narrative. On the other hand, the township is also the space where the marginalised revolt, a place of inspiration.

Mapantsula (1988) has been mentioned earlier as one of sources of imagery *Son of Man* draws on in its perpetuation and participation in the remembrance ritual of South Africa. Both films draw on the country's Black Consciousness, and its birthplace in the townships. *Mapantsula* was co-written by Oliver

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[523] Biko 2014, p. 245.

[524] Mokoena 2017, p. 2.

[525] Assmann 2015, p. 345.

[526] It has been noted, and not without reason, that such representation perpetuates a miserabilist imagery and does not allow for more dynamic voices. Such representation has been traced to the previously mentioned B-films of the apartheid regime, portraying the township locales, the violence and the *tsotsis* (gangsters).

[527] There is, however, a scene, where appliances such as stove, microwave and a laundry machine, do sneak in!

Schmitz and Thomas Mogotlane, who plays key character Panic. Maingard writes that Mogotlane drew on his real-life experiences of township gangsterism when writing the script.[528] Similarly, *Son of Man* is co-written and performed by people who had first-hand experience of apartheid and township life. Pauline Malefane, co-author and the actress playing Mary in the film, was born in 1976, the year of the Soweto uprisings, and was 18 in 1994. As one of the members of Isango states, "We are showing what the townships can bring".[529] To zoom out of the film narrative for a moment, it is significant to note that the township has been a constant space for the Isango's ensemble, both as the locus of all their dramas and of their work. Khayelitsha is present in all of their films. *U-Carmen* shows criminality as well as police brutality. In *Son of Man*, it is the site of rebellion against oppression. In *Noye*, it is a metaphor for the inhumanity of man as well as a commentary on global warming. In *Breathe*, it is the site of tuberculosis, which is rampant in the township. But it is also present as a character of its own. Both in *U-Carmen* and *Son of Man,* the township is filmed without obstructing the everyday activities of its inhabitants, who often seem to be extras, but in reality they are bystanders curious about the filming process.

Another conveyer of memory, which functions intertextually between the films, is music and protest songs, conveying the violence, oppression and resistance. As mentioned earlier, music, from the beginnings of Black South African cinema, plays a major role in the narratives, an element essential later in the anti-apartheid films and ultimately in *Son of Man*, which reproduces these songs. They work as links of the separate episodes of the struggle across time and space.[530] Karin Barber calls these "kernels of historical memory", which are embedded into songs, for example, and can travel from massed gatherings of protestors to popular recording artists, to the radio, and back to the people.[531] A similar movement occurs when the protest songs move from the streets to images, documentary and fiction, as memory sites, and are reproduced in subsequent films for new audiences. *Mapantsula* starts with *toyi-toyi*, and *Son of Man* ends with it. Films, through these songs, engage their audience into rituals of remembrance, which is one of the functions of the intradiegetic music in *Son of Man*.

Murals and Video

The township space is also the gallery of resistance mural art. In *Son of Man*, paintings[532] appear on the walls of the informal settlements, representing the

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[528] Maingard 2017, p. 254.
[529] *Isango Ensemble,* 2021.
[530] Barber 2018, p. 110.
[531] Ibid.
[532] By the artist Barnard L. Msindo

raising of Lazarus and the Crucifixion. The miracles and the cross are documented through vibrant murals. As illustrated through the *Black Christ* painting, visual art has been an important protest tool during apartheid as well as a medium for negotiating trauma in the aftermath. If *Black Christ* is a more traditional painting, exhibited in galleries and so forth, the murals of the townships are as informal and as ephemeral as the settlements on which they are painted. This last factor perhaps explains why very little is documented about wall painting activity in the townships in the 1970s and 1980s. However, according to Mzongwana (1999), they represented educational content and overtly political imagery, such as caspirs in townships, police with guns and the portrait of local combatants or heroes of the struggle.[533] The murals were part of the political struggle and constituted an affirmation of South African identity and, once more, humanity. The artwork in the film should be seen as a "public forum for cultural expression, apart from creating a sense of place and ownership of the building or public space",[534] also affirms ownership of the story.

The visual is conveyed in the diegesis not only through murals but also through the camcorder. It performs a similar function as the murals in documenting events, as does the use of the video footage in the film. Jesus' sermon, exorcism, last moments in the "garden", and Judas' kiss are all recorded. Judas uses the video footage to provide evidence to the elders of Jesus' powers and revolutionary tendencies, which finally seals his fate. After Judas kisses Jesus on camera, Jesus is taken in for interrogation and is subsequently beaten to death.

Peter Malone, looking at a number of films outside the Hollywood trend, emphasises the use of the hand-held video camera as a means for "small groups in the 1990s to make the Jesus story relevant to their own cultures".[535] There are a number of Nigerian Jesus movies shot with a hand-held camera, and congregations in Zimbabwe are known to have shot short Jesus films.[536] In the case of *Son of Man*, reviewers have interpreted the use of video – showing things as they are – as a means to hide the hagiography of the film, a way to create a moral tension between the "real" and the Gospels, as tension between diegesis and mimesis. Richard Walsh, for example, notes that "the news camera imbues the movie with a documentary character and hides the movie's camera behind the news' illusion of simply offering 'what happened'",[537] and, for George Aichele, the "camcorder seems to record the same reality that the movie depicts. The recordings do not admit to being "performances", and the

[533] Marschall 2000, p. 49.
[534] Ibid, p. 56.
[535] Malone 2012, p. 189.
[536] Shreve 2016.
[537] Walsh 2013, p. 197.

footage creates an illusion of reality that is all the more deceptive because of its apparent honesty."[538]

The reading of the use of video footage and camcorders within the fabric of the film[539] as a way to fool the viewer into believing that the images are "real" in contrast with the rest of the narrative, since they have the documentary aesthetic, is relevant only if we consider the film to play with ideas of truth and reality and as a deceitful attempt to blur fiction and reality. The framing of the film as memory, as constituting the imagining of the nation, suggests that this distinction or tension is irrelevant. Rather, the video is a reference to a mode of evidencing, a narrative device that signals the mediatisation (construction) of events. This mediatisation plays once more into the process of constructing the collective memory, started with the broadcasting of the TRC hearings, which used the same footage continuously. Within the formation of memory, the camera and video footage as reality, truth and especially evidence acquire greater significance. They become part of evidence of the narrative, the nation's ethos.

Concluding Remarks

In the course of this chapter, I have tried to show how *Son of man* participates in this process of imagining the post-apartheid South Africa, by invoking specific modes of narration, visual imagery, and icons of struggle. The film is driven by the utopian impulse that with representation, with presenting the Black experience, transformative justice can occur. With putting a human face onto the Black, and Black onto Jesus, one can lift the population to the equal level of humanity it has been denied. The film does not have claims to present a true, whole south African situation, and I think here, the film is open to criticism of reversing the representational apparatus, but to unearth the voices that have "disappeared", or perhaps, never appeared until then.

Through memorialisation and the use of the biblical text, *Son of Man* performs a rite of passage in a sense. Before South Africa can become a country where Black and white can live without fear, the oppressed group has to be extracted from that position. Film can mediate the passage to self-realization and assertion. Birthing Jesus among the oppressed of the townships is such a way to achieve the ultimate goal of reconciliation.

Although the exceptional position of South African cinema in the cinematic context of the continent is evident, memory and memorialisation are present throughout the history of African cinema. Indeed just as *Son of Man* retrieves stifled narratives, so does *La Chapelle* in presenting a memory of colonisation.

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[538] Aichele 2013, p. 212.
[539] It also appears as newsreel commented upon by a female journalist, whose voice seems to come to us from the BBC, in the beginning of the film.

What has changed from these two accounts is the position of Christianity and the Bible.

Conclusion

La vérité est image, mais il n'y a pas d'image de la vérité.[540]

I wrote in the first chapter that cinematic representation is a construction, a mode of address and a discursive formation with truth claims about the reality it records. It is up to the different publics then to accept, reject or negotiate with these claims. The films I have analysed are, as I intimated in the introduction, distinctly political and transnationally embedded. This positionality defines the conversations in which they engage, as well as their conversation partners. Steve Biko described with great perceptivity what I understand the films do:

> As people existing in a continuous struggle for truth, we have to examine and question old concepts, values and systems. Having found the right answers, we shall then work for consciousness among all people to make it possible for us to proceed towards putting these answers into effect.[541]

The filmmakers in this thesis have examined and questioned the African religious past with their minds on the present and future. In this process, their marked political and transnationally embedded films have created and performed specific expressions of Christianity. It was with this premise in mind that I asked how these films address Christianity and represent the Bible; how they frame the religious in relation to specific historical, cultural and political contexts; and what the potential implications of a transnational framing and circulation of the films might be.

Question of Address

The films have addressed Christianity and the Bible in varied ways, all of which participate in the creation of an image of African religions. They have dug into the archives of colonial pasts to show their traces in the present. *La Chapelle* has conjured images from missionary films, reappraised them from

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[540] "Truth is image but there is no image of truth." Translation by Bruno Latour (Mondzain cited in Latour 2002, p. 2).
[541] Biko 2014, p. 244.

the perspective of the colonised and presented a version of Christianity conflated with the colonial administration in the character of the "missionary imperialist". Similarly, *Au Nom du Christ* has denied the prophets their place in African modernity by pointing to their missionary colonial origins and complicity through the common image of a white Jesus. The films have refashioned images of the "witchdoctor" and have presented a version of African traditional religions as guardians of sanctity and knowledge.

La Génèse has bypassed addressing Christianity specifically by interpreting the biblical text as one common to Abrahamitic tradition, which is not a surprising direction to take in a predominantly Muslim context. In so doing, the film interrupts the trajectory of the discourse that connects Christianity in Africa to the colonial and missionary endeavour, as well as the discourse that imagines the continent as the birthplace of oppressive systems. The issues brought up in *La Génèse* are inherent to the Malian context and the biblical text serves as a tool for social analysis.[542] However, the contextualisation of the biblical text does not only imply processes of inculturation. In a reverse movement, it also projects the Malian context onto a universal plane. The Malian story becomes a human story, in which patriarchy and fratricide conflicts cease to be *African* problems. *Son of Man* uses the biblical text to put Christianity into the memory of political struggles by invoking South African icons of struggle, "filming" testimonies, and by using South African cultural imagery. It shows the world the continuous presence of injustice and makes the Gospel part of the nation's collective memory.

The films therefore can be broadly divided into what Antonio Sison has labelled the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of liberation in the reception of religion and the Bible in film.[543] The first "tendency", as he calls these hermeneutical approaches, is critical of religion and the Bible as protectors of the status quo, while the second focuses on its liberative potential. Acknowledging that such delineations are not mutually exclusive nor neatly demarcated: Sison argues that they can serve as "heuristic touchstones that allow for a more lucid analysis of the reception of the Bible".[544] These divergent hermeneutical tendencies provide us with a starting point for looking at the social analysis engaged in the films, and help to identify how religion and the Bible are positioned vis-à-vis these social issues. In the course of my analyses however, the demarcation between these tendencies blurred. This is especially the case in *La Chapelle* and *Au Nom du Christ,* where the critical stance of the filmmakers towards Christianity's colonial legacies does not account for the resistance/negotiation at play and visible through the beliefs of some protagonists, elements pointing to conversion, or to the particularities of certain strands of Christianity. Alternatively, the liberative potential of the text

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[542] Sison 2016.
[543] Sison 2016, p. 739.
[544] Ibid, p. 740.

should be steadfastly rooted in the context as well as in dialogue with others. The highly amvivalent position of the Bible as a text with colonial baggage cannot be taken away from the discussion of textual interpretation in a post-colonial setting, even when the text is used as a liberation narrative. *La Génèse*'s liberative potential is not only related to the postcolonial and feminist readings the film conveys. It is liberative also because it points to *and* interrupts the discourse surrounding the Bible as a text of Western imperialism both for the colonised *and* coloniser. Similarly, *Son of Man* may be a clear example of liberation theology, but it also unearths the unease with which race is still imagined and experienced of in South Africa.

Moreover, the films Sison identifies in his analysis as representatives of the hermeneutics of suspicion were released in 1976 – *The Last Supper* by Cuban Tomas Gutiérrez Alea, and *Perfumed Nightmare* by Filipino Kidlat Tahimik. His category of the hermeneutics of liberation includes films from 2006 – *Guadalupe* by Mexican Santiago Parra and *Son of Man.* The relation between the periods in which the films were made and their relative hermeneutical tendencies must be acknowledged. My own timeline points to a shift from suspicion to liberation. I consider this development to be related to a change in the emphases of the decolonisation/decolonial discourses, the space of the political, as well as the growing position of Christianity on the continent. This is not to say that African filmmakers are no longer critical of religion or the Bible. Indeed, as in the case of *La Génèse* or *Son of Man,* the fact that the Bible is still considered, in some intellectual as well theological circles, to be an ambivalent source attests to the ongoing complexity of this matter. There is a need to assess further the position of marked political films in relation to religious expressions and practices. What has transpired through the analyses is that the connections and disjunctions between cultural expressions and religious developments are not always solely bound to broad discourses of decolonisation or liberation, but can be tied to a very particular expression of African modernity at a specific time and place, as the cases of *Au Nom du Christ* and *Ivoirité* have shown.

As mentioned above, although I did not start with African Christianity or African Christians, the developments of Christianity on the continent and the central place the Bible holds in African Christianity have gradually become more apparent in the narratives. Not only was the Bible present throughout the four analyses, as a material object and as text, but various movements and theological traditions became important interlocutors in the conversation. This illustrates the embeddedness of Christian symbols and texts in the political histories and imaginaries of the continent's intellectual, philosophical and religious thought, an embeddedness that in turn opens exciting avenues for future research.

Question of Frame

The political framing of Christianity and the Bible in the analysed films bring out specific contexts and attitudes. Although I have placed them in a chronological order, the films do not present a neat linear account of the history of Christianity and the Bible in African film. What can be argued from an African film theory perspective does not readily find its reflection in African Christianity scholarship. Indeed, the films are not to be taken as historical portrayals of Christianisation. Instead, they interpret historical reality from their own political and social contexts, and in doing so they mirror discourses, ideals, but also blind spots, surrounding political and religious developments on the continent. Thus, to gain a better grasp on how the political framing of Christianity and the Bible of each film affects their treatment, one could explore the connections and disjunctions between the filmmakers' agendas and the developments of African Christianity and theology.

Film as an artistic expression has been a late comer in African decolonisation and decolonial thought. Its primary agenda, as has been emphasised throughout this thesis, has been to create *African images,* which would not be subject to external influences or control. This straightforward goal found fitting, when it comes to Christianity, the "anti-missionary sentiments that underpinned the African understanding of decolonisation".[545] The varied African Christian responses to the Gospel – such as loyalty to the missionary and mainline churches; the growth of African voices within these structures through Bible translation, liturgical changes, music; or the exit from these institutions in the forms of prophetisms, politically inclined movements such as Ethiopianism, charismatic movements and the creation of African Instituted Churches, are not addressed. Or rather, they are present, but need to be specifically fleshed out, as they do not fit neatly in the films' political scope. This is particularly visible in *La Chapelle* and *Au Nom du Christ.* In the first case, the attitudes of the catechist, the chief, and the teachers, point to the growing presence of Christianity, to the influence of education as tooling decolonisation, and to the ways African Christians navigated in precarious colonial waters. Nevertheless, the overall message of the film remains that the missionary and colonial presence had devastating effects on communities that were helpless in the face of this ordeal.

Similarly, Ivorian prophetisms are read in African Christianity scholarship as one type of response to missionary Christianity and as evidence of the work of the prophetic Spirit, which has the potential and ability to lead communities as it responds more directly to their needs and insecurities. In *Au Nom du Christ,* this potential is presented as a dangerous and opportunistic misreading of the Christian message. It is a form of spiritual alienation triggered, once more, by missionary and white presence.

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[545] Kalu 2005, p. 349.

It would seem that Christianity was not considered an ally in the decolonisation process. In his review of the developments of African Christianity and the churches in the period spanning from the World Wars to decolonisation, scholar Ogbu Kalu is reticent to respond in the affirmative to the question of whether Christianity contributed to the temper of the political and social stirrings of these days, or if Christianity provided the impetus for African nationalism.[546] Rather he ventures that for the majority, the Gospel represented the good news for individuals and communities, rather than a tool for political resistance. That said, African nationalists were products of missionary schools. Moreover, the aforementioned exit of African Christians from the missionary churches could be read as resistance. So can the more dissident movements, later repressed on the grounds of stirring political unrest, such as the Kimbanguists or Harris's prophetism. The point is, decolonisation in churches did not have the same pace or intensity as it did in intellectual or political thought and expressions. It also rested on various circumstances:

> the size and ecclesiastical organization; the vertical spread and social quality of adherents; the inherited pattern of colonial relationship; and the theological emphasis and international relations. It also depended upon the manner of disengagement, the weave of neo-colonial fabric and the dosage of Marxism in the political mix.[547]

Herein lies a disjunction between what African filmmakers of the first waves sought to do, and how they understood Christianity's role in the decolonising process. For them, Christianity in Africa did not provide a sufficient potential for decolonisation at the time. Thus, the importance of Christian institutions and education in African radicalism, anti-colonialism, nationalism and Pan-Africanism is downplayed or inexistent in *La Chapelle* and *Au Nom du Christ*.

Moreover, in relation to *Au Nom du Christ,* the strong presence of prophetisms in the Ivorian public space, alongside ruling powers could be put forward as an argument for their negative portrayal in the film. Félix Houphouët-Boigny's rule was based on strong neo-colonial relations with France, and we have seen how gradually the country was driven to a full-fledged crisis in the beginning of the 2000s. The fact that he surrounded himself with prophets may have coloured their portrayal as complicit in the problems the country faced.

African Christianity continued to grow, fuelled on the one hand, by charismatic agency, and on the other, by the process of indigenization that occurred after the missionary period.[548] In the mainline churches, the reappraisal of the mission in international and ecumenical circles, illustrated by decisions taken at Vatican II and Uppsala in 1968, and articulated in mission documents such

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[546] Kalu 2005, p. 344.
[547] Ibid, p. 354.
[548] Kalu 2005, p. 336.

as *Mission and Evangelism – An Ecumenical Affirmation* (1983) which took the directions towards a more culturally embedded Christianity, have greatly affected developments in African Christianity. African theological education grew exponentially, and African theologies with emphases on inculturation, liberation, feminism, decolonisation, and reconstruction have developed. Similarly, in art and cultural expressions, Christianity acquired a culturally specific iconography and sound.

It is within these developments that *La Génèse* and *Son of Man* place the political frame. It should be stressed that *La Génèse* presents a unique case, since, as I mentioned, the "Christian" nature of the text is bypassed in favour of a more universalist take. The film can be read through a Christian theological lens, but the overall message goes beyond this frame. Here again, the contexts of the film, and the different publics with which it engages in conversation, come to the fore. *Son of Man'*s contexts are paramount as my reading of the film as an insertion of the Gospel into the collective memory of political struggle is only possible in a setting where Christian and church figures played an active part in the struggle, and where political activists, such as Steve Biko, inspired theologies.

Question of Movement

The movements of films and filmmakers around the continent, and between continents, through festivals, production and post-production, are an integral part of the conversation. The premieres at international film festivals allows us to substantiate the idea of the films' potentially multiple publics and addressees. The filmmakers' backgrounds indicate the cinematic and political influences the directors have incorporated in their works. The multiple funding bodies together with the fields in which the films circulate demonstrate the underlying currents of transnational and global capital, and point out the precarious situations in which the filmmakers find themselves.

In some measure, the requirements attached to the modes of productions of marked political African films serve to explain the engagement of filmmakers, their aesthetics and the social emphases. Film scholars have continuously pointed out how, for example, African Francophone films are more inclined towards non-commercial and educational cinema, as such foci are more likely to get funding and access European markets. It has also been indicated that France and film festivals are the main consumers of such cinema. This is seen as a sign of French cultural hegemony over international film production. France, by promoting such films, and encouraging their production, pushes forward its own culture and contributes to the formation of a French cultural heritage through the idea of Francophonie. Moreover, the idea of France as a patron of the seventh art does not limit itself to the French-speaking world. Christopher Meir, writing on South African transnational cinema, mentions in

passing the treaty signed between the South African National Film and Video Foundation and France. He qualifies France as "an extremely attractive coproduction partner",[549] precisely because of its history as the patron of what he refers to as prestigious Black African cinema.

The modes of production and fields of circulation are necessary to understand the movements of films and their varied publics, because they point to the dialogues and discourses that are being conducted and constructed. They are also necessary in contextualising the cinematic production, and in analysing influences of style and narrative. Finally, they play a crucial part in the reproduction of images and fantasies of Africa, as they pull the viewer's gaze towards the power imbalances at play. In themselves, however, they should not be used as sole justification for the narratives or aesthetic choices of filmmakers. Such instances can be restrictive, describing the films as "neo-orientalist visions."[550] There is a danger that a more nuanced narrative of power within the films becomes undermined in favour of a clear-cut dominance/subversion dichotomy.

The transnational is helpful in as much as it gives a perspective that opens up for connections, links and influences, without losing the contextual footing. I have argued that the films I have analysed have a primary public – the African subject – whom they strive to shape, and as political films, they want this subject to be seen and recognized by others. In this endeavour, they have used a number of devices –rejection, appropriation, denunciation, resistance, negotiation, and embrace. Each of these attitudes and devices will meet its counterpart in the various publics in the viewing process. After all, the transnational field is an arena of cultural clashes.[551]

The shaping of African subject(s) is a question of "national-cultural identity aris[ing] in response to a challenge posed by the other".[552] Paul Willemen has warned that the position taken and created through this engaged discourse is not always progressive. This is perhaps what filmmaker Jean-Pierre Békolo alludes to when writing, "If the activists and intellectuals of the African cause have failed so far, it is because they did not see in the image the real problem of Africa. The image that we have of ourselves, the image that others have of us."[553] Oppositionality entails a rejection of oneself, whether it is in identifying with the dominant or dominating culture, returning to the sources, or essentialising and elevating certain aspects of culture.[554] The latter position is exemplified in *Au Nom du Christ*'s version of *Ivoirité* that dangerously conflates the Akan tradition with the national-cultural identity of Côte d'Ivoire.

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[549] Meir 2018, p. 220.
[550] Halle 2010.
[551] Maasilta 2007.
[552] Willemen 1994.
[553] Bekolo 2009, pp. 45-6.
[554] Willemen 1994, p. 192.

The quest for truth, its unearthing and exposure has been the driving force in the presented cases. As marked political films, *La Chapelle, Au Nom du Christ, La Génèse* and *Son of Man* claim truths and demand an active participation on the side of the viewer, a reappraisal of what she might have previously considered to be Christianity and the Bible on the African continent. These films reaffirm, interrupt, test, complicate, and vex our understandings of religious expressions. In doing so, they break certain images, consolidate others, and build new ones on the ruins of the old. In this sense, they are complicit in forming unapologetic accounts of African religious history. But as Mieke Bal writes, complicity in political art is inevitable.[555] There is no neutrality, although there is a claim to objectivity. The complicity in which these films engage is one that should be viewed positively. It permits us to approach reality from different sides and corners in an effort to collect as many images as possible to attain objectivity.[556]

Future Directions

In addressing the African encounter with Christianity and the interpretation of the Bible, the films that I have discussed in this thesis take up issues that go beyond religion. Similarly, my approach has negated the idea that *religion is everywhere in Africa.* Indeed, sometimes, religion is not considered, nor is it a priority or a characteristic feature. However, when it is, religion is not shown divided between the public and the private. All the films discussed here point to how Christianity and the Bible can be used for or against the benefit of the community. Even when individual religious identity is invoked, as for example in the case of *La Chapelle*'s various characters, or the twins in *Au Nom du Christ*, they are symbolic of the fissures in the community. Such an emphasis on the societal and communal is related to the fact that "marked political films, more often than other types of film, focus on a collective protagonist: an ethnic community, a nation, a class, or even a country, sometimes understood not only as a people living on a specific land, but also the land".[557] Dinah in *La Génèse* stands not only for the oppressed Malian women as she transgresses socio-cultural boundaries in her performance, but also for any woman oppressed by patriarchy. Likewise, *Son of Man*'s Mary represents the struggle of women, as does she carry the memory of her tortured nation. Such an understanding of the political is also perhaps why African filmmakers of the earlier waves did not see a mobilising potential in Christianity, as it provided a personal, rather than communal or national salvific message.

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[555] Bal 2010, p. 246.
[556] As Bruno Latour puts it in his reflection on icons, "…the pattern of interference may allow us to rejuvenate our understanding of image making: the more human-made images are generated, the more objectivity will be collected." (Latour 2002, p. 21).
[557] Mazierska 2014, p. 41.

The space of the political has shifted in African contemporary discourses and cultural expressions. Recent developments in cultural, literary and film studies on the continent have veered from a focus on "big political" and "topical issues", wrapped in the fixation "of trying to disabuse the outside world of a Conradian perception of Africa",[558] to studies of more popular expressions of culture. The video and digital media have drastically changed the rules of the game of cultural production, allowing artists, writers, filmmakers, poets, unprecedented access to means of addressing a world-wide audience, projecting their everyday realities, in intimate visions and portrayals. They have brought about the feeling of having a more democratic cultural flow, one that is not dependent on the caprices of European funding agencies, production or publishing companies. Related to this idea of democratisation of culture is the conviction that at last, through the accrued visibility and dynamism of its popular culture, one can *see* what makes Africa, without using the lens of policy makers and development experts. This is what I referred to earlier as the domination/subversion narrative. Such developments have unearthed new exciting material and new methods are being explored, redefining what it means to study cultural expressions.[559] When it comes to film studies, this shift has breathed new life into a field that seemed forever entangled in oppositionality, and I think this should be the direction to take.

To provide an illustration, in one of the films screened at the 2021 edition of CinemAfrica – the Stockholm African film festival – a smoking drag queen declares her heartbreak at Nairobi's train station. Although she has not yet left, the character already mourns the city. Through her poetic speech, we hear how "Revelations and rosaries; Qurans and weddings; nuns at the museum walking in single file"[560] were part of her quotidian, and formed the fabric of her beloved city. The film is a short entitled *Fluorescent Sin* (2011) by Amirah M. Tajdin. It provides us with an in-depth glimpse of lives that struggle for absolute recognition, making the political intimate. More importantly, the film illustrates how religions have come to be portrayed in distinctly political African films. *Fluorescent Sin* is an example of the multiplicity of voices addressing religions and religious identities and that have emerged from the continent to the screen in the twenty-first century. In this multiplicity, the complexity and relationality of discourse takes over oppositionality. This is not to say that unequal power relations are forgotten, or that such multiplicity should be celebrated as the multicultural, multivoiced dream. Rather we should think of cultural, as well as religious identities, not through either/or dichotomies, but as complicated, interrupting, and vexing relations shaped by discourses that

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[558] Adenekan 2021, p. 144.
[559] In literary studies for example, see the work by Ashleigh Harris and Nicklas Hållén on African Street literature in relation to form, method, material.
[560] *Fluorescent Sin*, 2011.

address the other, consequently unearthing our own visions of the other, and our intrinsic relation to the other in all its relational difference.

I would like to conclude with a reflection by Jacques Rancière "The visible is not … the seat of palpable illusions that truth has to dissipate. It is the place where energies that constitute the truth of a world are made manifest".[561] Throughout the thesis, we have seen expressions of discourses and struggles that constitute images and ideas of African religious realities. Regardless of the fact that each film carries, in a varying degree, a truth-claim, they should be understood as manifestations of the multi-layerdness of African religious and cultural-historical formations.

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[561] Rancière 2014, p. 29.

Appendix: Religion and Film Selection 1964-2017

This list figures only fiction films in chronological order. The criteria of choice are based on William Telford's taxonomy which includes films that: make use of religious themes, motifs or symbols in their titles; have plots that draw upon religion (broadly defined to include the supernatural and the occult); are set in the contexts of religious communities; use religion for character definition; deal directly or indirectly with religious characters (e.g. the Buddha, or angels), texts, or locations (heaven or hell); use religious ideas to explore the experiences and transformation or conversion of characters; or, address religious themes and concerns, including ethical issues.[562]

Religion in African films

Akum. n.d. [film] Directed by D. Kamwa. Cameroon.

La Mamy Watta. n.d. [film] Directed by T. Diaby. Côte d'Ivoire.

Sur La Dune De La Solitude. 1964. [film] Directed by T. Bassori. Côte d'Ivoire.

La Noire de... .1966. [DVD] Directed by O. Sembene. Senegal: Arté Video, 2008.

Soleil Ô. 2013. [DVD] Directed by M. Hondo. France: Cinématheque afrique: Ministère des affaires étrangères et du développement international.

La Femme Au Couteau. 1969. [film] Directed by Timité Bassori. Côte d'Ivoire.

Emitaï (Dieu du tonnerre). 1971. [DVD] Directed by O. Sembene. Senegal: La Médiathèque des Trois Mondes.

Kodou. 1971. [video] Directed by A. Samb. Senegal: Institut français, Département cinéma.

Le Wazzou Polygame. 1971. [film] Directed by O. Ganda. Niger.

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[562] Telford cited in Wright, 2007, p.19

Abusuan. 1972. [video] Directed by H. Duparc. Côte d'Ivoire: Organisation internationale de la francophonie.

F.*V.V.A, Femme, Villa, Voiture, Argent*. 1972. [video] Directed by M. Alassane. Niger: Institut français, Département cinéma.

Identité. 1972. [video] Directed by P-M. Dong. Gabon: Institut français, Département cinéma.

Lambaaye. 1972. [film] Directed by M. J. Traoré. Senegal.

Saitane. 1972. [video] Directed by O. Ganda. Niger: Institut français, Département cinéma.

Njangaan. 1974. [DVD] Directed by M. Traoré. Senegal: S.L.: Organisation internationale de la francophonie.

Sous le Signe du Vodou. 1974. [film] Directed by P. Abilankou. Benin.

Xala. 1974. [DVD] Directed by O. Sembene. Senegal: La Médiathèque des Trois Mondes.

Ceddo. 1976. [DVD] Directed by O. Sembene. Senegal: La Médiathèque des Trois Mondes.

Tiyabu-Biru. 1978. [film] Directed by M. Bathily. Senegal.

La Chapelle. 1980. [DVD] Directed by J-M. Tchissoukou. Republic of Congo, France: Marfilmes.

Nuages Noirs. 1979. [film] Directed by D. Maiga. Niger.

Adja Tio. 1981. [film] Directed by J-L. Koula. Côte d'Ivoire.

Yeelen. 1987. [DVD] Directed by S. Cissé. Mali: Kino on Video, 2003.

Bouka. 1988. [film] Directed by R. Gnoan-M'Bala. Côte d'Ivoire.

Héritage Africa! .1989. [film] Directed by K. Ansah. Ghana.

Guelwaar. 1991. [DVD] Directed by O. Sembene. Senegal: Médiathèque des 3 Mondes.

Quartier Mozart. 1992. [film] Directed by J-P. Bekolo Obama. Cameroon.

Au Nom du Christ. 1993. [video] Directed by R. Gnoan-M'bala. Côte d'Ivoire: Institut français, Département cinéma.

The Battle of the Sacred Tree. 1995. [DVD] Directed by W. Kinyanjui. Kenya: Birne Film.

La Génèse. 1999. [DVD] Directed by C. O. Sissoko. Mali: Kino on video, 2003.

100 days. 2001. [video] Directed by N. Hughes. Rwanda: Kanopy Streaming, 2014.

Highway to the Grave. 2002. [video] Directed by T. Benson. Nigeria: Lagos : Liberty films.

Le Prix du Pardon. 2001. [DVD] Directed by M. S. Wade. Senegal: Tiger Releases, 2001.

La Colère des Dieux. 2003. [DVD] Directed by I. Ouedraogo. Burkina Faso: POM Films, 2008.

God is African. 2003. [DVD] Directed by A. Omotoso. South Africa: Tranxafrica Films and TV production, 2003.

Moolaadé. 2003. [DVD] Directed by O. Sembene. Senegal: Les films du paradoxe.

Les Saignantes. 2005. [video] Directed by J-P. Bekolo Obama. Cameroon: Institut français, Département cinéma.

Shooting Dogs. 2005. [DVD] Directed by M. Caton-Jones. Rwanda, UK Film Council: Metrodome, 2006.

Daratt. 2006. [DVD] Directed by M-S. Haroun. Tchad: Cinéart, Twin Pics, 2009.

No Time to Die. 2006. [film] Directed by King Ampaw. Ghana: Infobase, 2006.

Il va Pleuvoir sur Conakry. 2006. [DVD] Directed by C. F. Camara. Guinée Conakry: Cop films; Les Films djoliba.

Juju Factory. 2007. [video] Directed by B. Bakupa-Kanyinda. Congo, Democratic Republic: Institut français, Département cinéma.

Kyazze Tekizzikayo. 2007. [video] Directed by K. Kasozi. Uganda.

Le Poids du Serment. 2009. [video] Directed by S. Kollo. Burkina-Faso: Institut français, Département cinéma.

Safari Obscura. 2010. [film] Directed by A. Kotze. South Africa.

Elmina. 2010. [DVD] Directed by E. Apea Jr. Ghana: British Film Institute.

The Fake Prophet. 2010. [DVD] Directed by T. Benson. Nigeria: Stepping Stones

The Figurine. 2010. [video] Directed by K. Afolayan. Nigeria: Kanopy Streaming, 2015.

My Father's Son. 2010. [DVD] Directed by J. Haikali. Namibia: Joe Vision Production.

Un Homme qui Crie. 2010. [DVD] Directed by M-S. Haroun. Tchad: Trigon-Film, 2011.

Togetherness Supreme. 2010. [DVD] Directed by N. Collett. Kenya: Hot Sun Films

Kinyarwanda. 2011. [DVD] Directed by A. Brown. Rwanda: Breaking Glass Pictures, 2012.

Une Couleur de Vie. 2012. [film] Directed by H. R. Beninga. Central African Republic.

Tall as the Baobab Tree. 2012. [video] Directed by J. Teicher. Senegal: Kanopy Streaming, 2015.

Soleils. 2012. [film] Directed by D. Kouyaté, Olivier Delahaye. Burkina Faso, France.

Things of the Aimless Wanderer. 2014. [DVD] Directed by K. Ruhorahoza. Rwanda: Moon Road Films, 2015.

Watatu. 2015. [DVD] Directed by N. Reding. Kenya: Juno Films, 2018.

The Cursed Ones. 2015. [film] Directed by N. O. Yeboa. Ghana.

I Am Not A Witch. 2017. [film] Directed by R. Nyoni. Zambia: Film Movement, 2018.

Filmography: Other Cited Films

À Nous Deux France. 1970. Directed by Désiré Écaré. Côte d'Ivoire.
Ablakon. 1984. Directed by Roger Gnoan M'Bala. Côte d'Ivoire.
Adanggaman. 2000. Directed by Roger Gnoan M'Bala. Côte d'Ivoire.
Africa Joins the World. 1963. Africa Motion Picture Project. USA.
Africa Speaks!. 1930. Directed by Walter Futter. USA.
Africa To-day. 1927. Directed by T.H. Baxter. UK.
African Jim .aka *Jim comes to Joburg.* 1949. Directed by Donald Swanson.
South Africa.
Afrique 50. 1950. Directed by René Vautier. France.
Afrique sur Seine. 1955. Directed by Paulin Soumanou Vieyra. France.
Amanié. 1971. Directed by Roger Gnoan M'Bala. Côte d'Ivoire.
Apea. 1969. Directed by Sébastien Kamba. Republic of Congo.
Baara. 1978. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.
Bal Poussière. 1989. Directed by Henri Duparc. Côte d'Ivoire.
Bamako. 1988. Directed by Abderrahmane Sissako. Mali.
Bàttu. 2000. Directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Mali.
Birth of a Nation. 1915. Directed by D.W. Griffiths. USA.
Bisi Congo. 1950. Directed by Sven Nykvist. Sweden.
Bongolo. *Bongolo and the Negro Princess*. 1952. Directed by André Cauvin.
Belgium.
Borrom Sarret. 1963. Directed by Sembene Ousmane. Senegal.
Brazza ou l'épopée du Congo. 1939/40. Directed by Léon Poirier. France.
Breathe – Umphefumlo. 2015. Directed by Mark Dornford-May. South Africa.
Bwana Kitoko. 1955. Directed by André Cauvin. Belgium.
Cameraing Through Africa I and *II*. 1919. Directed by Clarence Lyon Chester.
USA.
Candida. 1953. Produced by the White Fathers. Ghana.
Chanteurs traditionnels des Iles Seychelles. 1978. Directed by Souleymane
Cissé. Mali.
Chasse à L'hippopotame sur le Nil Bleu. 1908. Directed by Alfred Machin.
France.
Chidi. 1985. Directed by Tom Hotchkiss. USA.
Cinq jours d'une vie. 1972. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.
Color of the Cross. 2006. Directed by Jean-Claude LaMarre. Haiti-USA.

Color of the Cross 2: The Resurrection. 2008. Directed by Jean-Claude La-Marre. Haiti-USA.

Come Back Africa. 1959. Directed by Lionel Rogosin. USA.

Common Round. 1935. Directed by Stephen Harrisson. UK.

Concerto Pour Un Exil. 1968. Directed by Désiré Écaré. Côte d'Ivoire.

Congo. 1945. Directed by André Cauvin. Belgium.

Couleur Café. 1997. Directed by Henri Duparc. Côte d'Ivoire.

Cry the Beloved Country. 1951. Directed by Zoltan Korda. UK.

Dakan. 1997. Directed by Muhammad Camara. Guinée Conakry.

Dalokan. 1982. Directed by Moussa Dosso. Côte d'Ivoire.

De la Barbarie à la Civilisation Chrétienne. 1929. Director unknown. France.

De Voortrekkers. 1916. Directed by Harold M. Shaw. South Africa.

Dégal à Dialloubé. 1970. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.

Delwende. 2005. Directed by S.Pierre Yaméogo. Burkina Faso.

Den Muso. 1975. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.

Diabolo. 1988. Directed by William Akuffo. Ghana.

District 9. 2009. Directed by Neil Blomkamp. South Africa.

Djeli. 1981. Directed by Fadika Kramo-Lanciné. Côte d'Ivoire.

Etre Jeune à Bamako. 1992. Directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Mali.

F.V.V.A .Femme. Villa. Voiture. Argent. 1972. Directed by Moustapha Alassane. Niger.

Fête du Sanké. 1971. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.

Fétichisme. 1922. Director unknown. France.

Finye. 1982. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.

Finzan. 1989. Directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Mali.

Fluorescent Sin. 2011. Directed by Amirah M. Tajdin. Kenya.

Forgiveness. 2004. Directed by Ian Gabriel. South Africa.

From Fear to Faith. 1946. Directed by James Swackhammer. UK.

Ghanaian Video Tales. 2005. Directed by Tobias Wendl. Germany.

Godspell. 1973Directed by David Greene. USA.

Guérir Sous Les Tropiques. 1946. Directed by Hélène Schirren. Belgium.

Guimba the Tyrant. 1995. Directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Mali.

Heremakono. 2002. Directed by Abderrahmane Sissako. Mali.

Heritage Africa!. 1989. Directed by Kwaw Ansah. Ghana.

I Fetischmannens spår. 1948. Directed by Sven Nykvist. Sweden.

Il est Minuit Dr Schweitzer. 1952. Directed by André Haguet. France.

In My Country. 2004. Directed by John Boorman. UK.

Jesus. 1979. Directed by Peter Sykes and John Krish. USA.

Jesus Christ Superstar. 1973. Norman Jewison. USA.

Jesus of Montréal. 1989. Directed by Denis Arcand. Canada.

Jesus of Nazareth. 1977. Directed by Franco Zeffirelli. Italy.

Kaka Yo. 1969. Directed by Sébastien Kamba. Republic of Congo.

Karunamayudu. 1978. Directed by A. Bhimsingh and Christopher Coelho. India.

Katrina. 1969. Directed by Jans Rautenbach. South Africa.

Keïta! L'Héritage du Griot. 1995. Directed by Dani Kouyaté. Burkina Faso.

L'Afrique bouge. 1992. Directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Mali.

L'Aspirant. 1968. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.

L'Avant-garde Blanche. 1942. Directed by Noël Ramettre. France.

L'Ecole Malienne. 1982. Directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Mali.

L'Enfant et la Famille. 1979. Directed by Jean-Michel Tchissoukou. Republic of Congo.

L'Equateur aux Cent Visages. 1948. Directed by André Cauvin. Belgium.

L'Homme du Niger. 1939. Directed by Jacques de Baroncelli. France.

L'Homme et ses Idoles. 1975. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.

La Biche. 1971. Directed by Roger Gnoan M'Bala. Côte d'Ivoire.

La Chasse à la Giraffe en Ouganda. 1910. Directed by Alfred Machin. France.

La Chasse à la Panthère. 1909. Directed by Alfred Machin. France.

La Croisière Noire. 1926. Directed by Léon Poirier. France.

La France est un Empire. 1939. Directed by Jean d'Agraives. France.

La Vie sur Terre. 1998. Directed by Abderrahmane Sissako. Mali.

Lacombe. Lucien. 1974. Directed by Louis Malle. France.

Landing of Savage South Africa at Southampton. 1899. UK.

Le 20ème Anniversaire de la Revolution. 1983. Directed by Sébastien Kamba. Republic of Congo.

Le Cercle des Pouvoirs. 1998. Directed by Daniel Kamwa. Cameroon.

Le Chameau et les Bâtons Flottants. 1995. Directed by Abderrahmane Sissako. Mali.

Le Chapeau. 1976. Directed by Roger Gnoan M'Bala. Côte d'Ivoire.

Le Grand Blanc de Lambaréné. 1995. Directed by Bassek ba Kobhio. Cameroon.

Le Jeu. 1989. Directed by Abderrahmane Sissako. Mali.

Le Koussi. 1979. Directed by Moussa Dosso. Côte d'Ivoire.

Le Sixième Doigt. 1990. Directed by Henri Duparc. Côte d'Ivoire.

Le Vrai Visage de l'Afrique: Chez les buveurs de sang. 1930. Directed by Jean Choux. France.

Les 50 ans du Cinéma au Mali. 2012. Directed by Sadio Simaga. Mali.

Les Audiothèques Rurales. 1983. Directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Mali.

Les Illusions. 1971. Directed by Jean-Michel Tchissoukou. Republic of Congo.

Les Lutteurs. 1981. Directed by Jean-Michel Tchissoukou. Republic of Congo.

Les Maîtres Fous. 1955. Directed by Jean Rouch. France.

Little Lost Fisherman. 1974. Directed by Don Ross. USA.

Livingstone. 1925. Directed by M.A. Wetherell. UK.

Love is a Quiet thing. 1975. Directed by Don Ross. USA.

Mandabi. 1968. Directed by Sembene Ousmane. Senegal.

Mapantsula. 1988. Directed by Oliver Schmitz. South Africa.

Min Ye. 2009. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.

Monty Python's Life of Brian. 1979. Directed by Terry Jones. UK.

Mooladé. 2004. Directed by Sembene Ousmane. Senegal.

Mouna. 1969. Directed by Henri Duparc. Côte d'Ivoire.

Natten Försvinner. 1948. Directed by Sven Nykvist. Sweden.

Njaangan. 1974. Directed by Mahama Johnson Traoré. Senegal.

Nos soldats d'Afrique. 1939. Directed by André Cauvin. Belgium.

Nyamanton. 1986. Directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Mali.

O Ka. 2015. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.

O Sembene! . 2013. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.

Octobre. 1993. Directed by Abderrahmane Sissako. Mali.

Perfumed Nightmare. 1976. Directed by Kidlat Tahimik. Philippines.

Petanqui. 1983. Directed by Yeo Kozoloa. Côte d'Ivoire.

Place of Weeping. 1987. Directed by Darrell Roodt. South Africa.

Pourquoi Moi?. 1974. Directed by Tom Hotchkiss. USA.

Praising the Lord plus One. 2013. Directed by Kwaw Ansah. Ghana.

Red Dust. 2004. Directed by Tom Hooper. UK.

Rickshaw Ride in Commissioner Street. 1898. Produced by Edgar Hyman. South Africa.

Rocky II. 1979. Directed by Sylvester Stallone. USA.

Roosevelt in Africa. 1910. Directed by Cherry Kearton. USA.

Rose of Rhodesia. 1918. Directed by Harold Shaw. South Africa.

Rostov-Luanda. 1997. Directed by Abderrahmane Sissako. Mali.

Rue Princesse. 1994. Directed by Henri Duparc. Côte d'Ivoire.

Sabriya. 1996. Directed by Abderrahmane Sissako. Mali.

Sanders of the River. 1935. Zoltán Korda. UK.

Sankofa. 1993. Directed by Haile Guérima. Ethiopia.

Sarraounia. 1986. Directed by Med Hondo. Mauritania.

Savage South Africa – Savage Attack and Repulse. 1899. UK.

Sécheresse et Exode Rural. 1984. Directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Mali.

Song after Sorrow. (n.d) Directed by Ray L. Garner. USA.

From Fear to Faith. 1946. Directed by James Swackhammer. UK.

Song of Africa. 1951. Directed by Emil Nofal. South Africa.

Sons of Bwiregi. 1976. Produced by the Maryknoll Society.

Source d'inspiration. 1968. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.

Suzanne. 1972. Directed by Tom Hotchkiss. USA.

Ta Dona. 1991. Directed by Adama Drabo. Mali.

Taafe Fanga. 1997. Directed by Adama Drabo. Mali.

Tableau Ferraille. 1997. Directed by Moussa Sene Absa. Senegal.

The African Queen. 1951. Directed by John Huston. USA.

The African Witchdoctor and the Way Out. (n.d.) Produced by Ray Phillips and Frederick Bridgman. South Africa.

The Book That Would Not Burn. 1976. Directed by Ken Anderson. USA.

The Cyanide Plant on the Crown Deep. 1899. Produced by Edgar Hyman. South Africa.

The Devil Fights back. 1953. Produced by the White Fathers. Rwanda.

The Godfather Part II .Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. 1974. USA.

The Gods Must Be Crazy. 1980. Directed by Jamie Uys. South Africa.

The Last Supper. 1976. Directed by Tomas Gutiérrez Alea. Cuba.

The Last Temptation of Christ. 1988. Directed by Martin Scorcese. USA.

The Magic Garden .aka The Pennywhistle Blues. 1951. Directed by Donald Swanson. South Africa.

The Night Porter .Directed by Liliana Cavani. 1974. Italy.

The Passion Play of Oberammergau. 1898. Directed by Henry C. Vincent. USA.

The Rose of Rhodesia. 1918. Directed by Harold M. Shaw. South Africa.

The Story of Bamba. 1937. Directed by Ray L. Garner. USA.

The Upper Nile. The Lower Nile. The Real Streets of Cairo. British Egypt. 1906. Directed by Burton Holmes. USA.

The Wooden Camera. 2003. Directed by Ntshaveni Wa Luruli. South Africa.

Timbuktu. 2014. Directed by Abderrahmane Sissako. Mali.

Tsotsi. 2005. Directed by Gavin Hood. South Africa.

U-Carmen eKhayelitsha. 2005. Directed by Mark Dornford-May. South Africa.

Un rapt à Bamako. 2015. Directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko. Mali.

Unogumbe: Noye's Fludde. 2013. Directed by Mark Dornford-May. South Africa.

Valisy. 1973. Directed by Roger Gnoan M'Bala. Côte d'Ivoire.

Vördnad för livet. 1952. Directed by Sven Nykvist. Sweden.

Waati. 1995. Directed by Souleymane Cissé. Mali.

Watatu. 2015. Directed by Nick Reding. Kenya.

We remember Differently. 2005. Directed by Jyoti Mistry. South Africa.

Wend Kuuni. 1982. Directed by Gaston Kaboré. Burkina Faso.

Yaaba. 1989. Directed by Idrissa Ouédraogo. Burkina Faso.

Zonk!. 1950. Directed by H. Kirstein. South Africa.

Zulu Love Letter. 2004. Directed by R. Suleman. South Africa.

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