

Black and White in Colour
African History on Screen

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Discussing ideologies of filmic histories begins to suggest ways in which these films have been analysed by contributors for their roles *in* history: for shaping attitudes about Africa or Africans, or about national, ethnic or racial identities (both African and non-African), or about specific processes or events (such as slavery, apartheid or the genocide in Rwanda). Some may have achieved intended or unintended political results, though this is not always certain: perhaps *Cry Freedom* played a part in promoting world-wide revulsion that helped end apartheid; more certainly the South African government feared the consequences of its release and intervened to ban its exhibition. In any event, contributors give attention to how their history films were received. Patrick Harries goes further than most by making this a major way in which he analyses the historical significance – ‘as an icon of memory for the left and as a source of division for the right’ – of *The Battle of Algiers*.

Finally, many history films use the past to raise questions about the present – a point made by Marcia Landy and reiterated by Hamilton and Modisane.²² Thus, as Saul asserts, Kaboré’s depiction of an idealised Burkina Faso past was partly meant to lead to comparisons in Burkinabe minds with a considerably less-than-ideal present; or, as Baum argues, Sembène intentionally draws parallels between the role of Islam and Muslim leadership in Senegal’s past and present; and, as Adhikari acknowledges as one ‘well-accomplished’ theme in *Hotel Rwanda*, Terry George’s emphasis on the inaction of the international community has ongoing and recent relevance (most obviously in Darfur). Yet an ‘experimental’ history film like *Proteus* goes further, as Worden demonstrates, and raises questions about the very nature of historical knowledge itself: be it the ‘untrustworthiness’ or ‘instability’ of the historical record or the fact that all history (written and filmic) is merely ‘a construction’. This is a single film that ‘forces us to face the central question of the practice of history: can we ever really know the past?’ Such ‘philosophy of history’ questions are of necessity also raised by the very process of analysing and comparing the often very different approaches to representing the past on film that we have deliberately gathered together in this collection. Most obviously, they include the matter of how and why ‘history’ has been used in the way that it has in each film, and what the films are saying about what the past means or should mean to us.

1

History as cultural redemption in Gaston Kaboré’s precolonial-era films

MAHIR SAUL

Two films produced by Burkinabe director Gaston Kaboré, *Wend Kuuni* (1982) and its sequel fourteen years later, *Buud Yam* (1996), are set in pre-colonial times. They were a major success with West African audiences, won international prizes, and (especially *Wend Kuuni*) had an impact on other filmmakers in the region. This chapter explores the personal and social factors that shaped Kaboré’s filmic representation of the West African cultural past. In order to explore these issues, the films are necessarily situated within the context of the history of West African cinema.

Wend Kuuni opens with a scene where we see a young woman resist her in-laws’ pressure to engage in a leviratic second marriage because they presume her lost husband is now dead. Other villagers accuse her of being a witch and drive her out of the village with her sick child on her back. During the flight she dies of exhaustion, leaving her traumatised child alone in the wild. This section lasts a few minutes and consists mostly of obscure interior shots in the narrow confines of the woman’s room, which help convey her solitude and desperation. Their impact on the viewer is limited, however, because titles and credits separate this sequence from the main body of the film. After the credits we begin anew in a different location. On a bright sunny day a peddler travels on his donkey amidst the luxurious vegetation of open country. He encounters a boy who is unable to speak and takes him to the next village. The villagers make efforts to find the boy’s parents, but they fail. A family adopts the boy and they name him Wend Kuuni (‘God’s Gift’). The viewer is able to establish the connection between this main story and the scene that came before the credits only at the end of the film when the boy recovers his speech. A second trauma towards the end of the film precipitates this revelation. A noisy row between an elderly man and his rebel-

lious young wife (seemingly surprised in a tryst with another man) causes scandal in the village. At twilight, Wend Kuuni runs into the hanging body of the old man, who in his humiliation has committed suicide, and this shock brings back the boy's speech.

In between these events, village life is depicted in an idealised fashion: as harmonious relationships between relatives, spouses and friends; in the extension of kindnesses to outsiders; and in agreeable scenes of harvesting, herding, weaving and sociability in the marketplace. Wend Kuuni's sister (by adoption) is depicted as yearning for gender equality, but her fantasies lack bitterness, and the viewer is impressed mostly with the mutual love between the two children. The film ends with an endearing dialogue between the boy and the girl in an open pasture, and a return to the village where one imagines that calm reigns once again after the ripple of drama.

Throughout the film we see no objects that would locate this story obviously in the present or in remembered colonial times, or that would indicate any contact with European civilisation. The viewers in Burkina Faso identify instead a bevy of objects that are no longer in common use, which point therefore to a more remote past. A voice-over narrator, who is heard a few times during the film and whose comments move the story from one section to the next, announces near the beginning of the film that the story takes place before the White Man arrived, when food was abundant. In this sense, the film is clearly 'historical', an impression confirmed by the promotional literature (which was particularly aimed at non-African viewers).

Buud Yam revolves around the two main protagonists of *Wend Kuuni*, the boy and the girl, now grown up (Wend Kuuni is interpreted by the same actor as in the first film, Serge Yanogo). Yet it is a very different kind of film. Wend Kuuni is shunned by his age-mates and the villagers hold him responsible for the many misfortunes that strike his family. He is tormented for not knowing the identity of his birth parents – the name of the film could be translated, accurately if clumsily, as 'the spirit of the descent group' – and is haunted by scenes from his early childhood (portrayed through shots of his pensive childhood self taken from *Wend Kuuni*). His adoptive sister succumbs to a mysterious affliction, and he is commissioned to travel to find a special medicine that will restore her health, made by a renowned but elusive healer. The feat will also vindicate him from the suspicion hanging over him. A further detail complicates this part of the plot. Before falling ill, the sister has visions of being bitten by a snake. It is possible to believe that she has brought infirmity upon herself in order to give her brother the opportunity to cast off his destiny. Throughout his quest she continues to communicate with him by extrasensory means, guiding and protecting him.

Wend Kuuni sets out from the village riding a chestnut horse, has wondrous

encounters in foreign lands, and manages to bring the healer to his dying sister who is cured by the potion. Thus the plot is a quest, and Wend Kuuni's monologue at the end of the film tells us that successfully completing the quest enabled him to find himself and clear away his self-doubts. The journey is also a way of chronicling – for protagonist and viewer – the eco-cultural diversity of the lands that constitute present-day Burkina Faso.

These summaries of the two films make clear that neither is historical in the conventional sense of depicting 'real' characters from the past or important events known from historical records. In fact they are not listed in a recent survey of African 'history' films by Cham, nor indeed are the other francophone films that are mentioned in this chapter.¹ However, the element of history can be present in a film in other ways: in the sense it might give of past styles, tastes and custom, of 'what it was like to be alive in [those] times and places';² or because the film possesses what Toplin called the 'capacity to pull audiences into the historical environment, to show the distinctiveness of the past'.³

We can start unravelling the presence of these historical elements in our two films by noting that Diawara placed *Wend Kuuni* (along with some films of fellow Burkinabe filmmaker Idrissa Ouédraogo and the Malian Souleymane Cissé) under the rubric 'return to the source' films. Diawara explains that such films display 'the existence of a dynamic African history and culture before European colonization'.⁴ By doing this, they participate in an important undercurrent of public discourse.

The perspective and choices of Gaston Kaboré anchor these stories in the ethos of his place and era, which is of as much interest as the degree of historical accuracy in the films. The director of a film that is set in the past may not be overtly attempting to do 'history' in the academic sense, but he or she is nonetheless expressing an attitude about the past. The explicit and implicit intentions behind the making of a film give us insights of a different nature from the quality of the history lesson we get from it. And of course, as time passes by, the film becomes historical in further senses: it attains the status of a primary document and a force that moulds what comes after it.

Compared to the examples that existed before in West African filmmaking, the framing of historical time in *Wend Kuuni* was novel. From a strictly film genre perspective, *Wend Kuuni* presents too vague a 'durée' to qualify as a true period film. Kaboré himself recognised this. '*Wend Kuuni* takes place in pre-colonial times ... [but] its exact time frame is not important. It could be 1420 or 1850 because the sociocultural reality which I depict remained unchanged for years'.⁵ Some promotional literature is equally imprecise in saying that events take place during 'the climax of the Mossi Empire'.⁶ This imprecision exposed the filmmaker to the criticism that he reproduced the stereotype of timeless Africa.

Perhaps in response, when *Buud Yam* was released it was promoted as taking place 'in the beginning of the nineteenth century', but visual information in the film – especially about material culture – does not peg it to a precise period any more clearly than is the case with *Wend Kuuni*.

We may consider first a factor that may partly explain this situation, although in my opinion it is not the most important one. Representing the remote West African rural past on film presents particular difficulties if a director wishes to attain the same accuracy of detail (especially in respect of costumes, furniture and architecture) evident in many European or American history films. Historical and archaeological research on Burkina Faso or Mali does not yet offer readily available resources for this kind of undertaking. Still, this cannot be the only reason for entirely ignoring specificity of period because (for the nineteenth century at least) a director could consult both oral history and the literature of European explorers.

So what we may deduce is that Kaboré is not concerned with historical faithfulness in the sense of accuracy of material detail. If he were, some of the minor incongruities could have been avoided, assuming that the period is meant to be the 19th century, without much specialised knowledge of history. Let us take the landscape for example. We see in *Buud Yam* a lake with dead trees standing in the middle of it. This slightly surreal feature is almost a signature of the present, because it results from the recent damming of a small river and the permanent flooding of its valley to constitute a shallow reservoir lake, dozens of which have been built in the country since the 1970s in small projects funded by international organisations. Occasionally we make out in the background a mango tree, which people of Kaboré's generation know, as somebody of a younger generation might not, is an introduction of the colonial period. We even see the cherished round Moose houses in versions built with rectangular mud bricks and mortar, a very recent development. Older Moose walls were built (as they still might be albeit more rarely) with layers made of fresh lumps of clay smoothed into one block before drying, to give the buildings the very different look of superposed horizontal bands, and interior spaces with an expressionist-like, off-plumb quality. In the lovingly depicted market scene we see a woman negotiate the price of a piece of cloth, and once the agreement has been reached – in one of the rare close-ups in the film – pay the seller by counting cowries one by one into his palm. The cowries are used here as icons of an exalted past, but the scene appears reasonable only to the uninformed. The haggling over the price is questionable, because it is not part of the trading etiquette in villages and more traditional markets, where prices fixed in the morning by sellers' cartels are maintained at least for the day. More importantly, the cowries were a low-value currency. In the middle of the 19th century the explorer Heinrich Barth reported that at Moose

markets, 700 to 800 shells was a fairly low price for a small shirt and 2 500 to 3 000 shells was reasonable for a simple robe.⁷ The price equivalent for the large quantity of cloth that the boy is selling would be a heap of cowrie shells, not a few, and these would have to be counted on the ground by pulling the shells with the fingers of the two hands – a time-consuming activity that was frequently left to a professional – and handed to the seller in a calabash or basket.

This much established, we can start probing what drives Kaboré to situate his stories in pre-colonial times and why the past represented in his films looks the way that it does. Understanding the context of West African filmmaking and the innovations in this respect in *Wend Kuuni* will be of help. Filmmaking in West African countries that were previously colonies of France began shortly after independence (from 1960). But it became a truly sustained artistic activity only in the 1970s when it came to world attention by having a few of its products win international film prizes in Europe.⁸ The 1960s pioneers had come to filmmaking by various idiosyncratic ways, but in the following decade limited subsidies provided by the French Ministry of Co-operation became critical in getting this fledgling cultural activity off the ground. Technical and financial support from various North African and European Union institutions remains important in keeping it alive.

In the earlier West African films both village life and history were brought to the screen, but not in the style and with the thematic content that we find in *Wend Kuuni*. The Senegalese pioneer Ousmane Sembène recreated in his epic *Emittai* (1971) an episode of colonial resistance during the years of World War Two in a Jola village in the Casamance area. A tense conflict between the army and the villagers later divides the villagers; rituals in the sacred grove and around the body of the dead warrior become expressions of the disposition of the characters and their disagreements, very successfully so even though their ethnographic faithfulness has been questioned.

In *Ceddo* (1976) Sembène took a bolder leap in historical re-creation, presenting a political confrontation between a group of local Muslims and pagan warriors led by a fearless princess, a story that seems to be an amalgam of various episodes that took place in the Senegal basin during the 17th and 18th centuries.⁹ Some symbolic gestures stand out and give the film the quality of a parable: the more sympathetic treatment of the pagan warriors compared to the Muslims and the princess Dior, played by the very dark and beautiful Tabara N'diaye, who in some of Sembène's most arresting images lounges and moves against a sun-drenched savannah backdrop almost naked. She is simultaneously an assertion of the mythical pagan culture and an affront to the bourgeois sensibilities of the Senegalese elite, skin-lightness (often enhanced with beauty creams), fashion consciousness and clothing modesty.¹⁰

In *Si les cavaliers ...* (1981) the Nigerian director Mahamane Bakabe told the story of an actual anti-colonial uprising of 1905, using as physical setting the old buildings that survived from that time, and as props the very weapons and articles of clothing that belonged to the historical characters represented in the film. These had been preserved by their descendants (although the director recognised that his obligations to these people induced him to change some plot details that were politically compromising to the characters).¹¹ In *Sarraounia* (1986), a film of great stage effects that is better known and internationally acclaimed, Mauritanian director Med Hondo also presents an anti-colonial resistance organised around a beautiful pagan princess, this time against occupation forces led by the infamous captains Paul Voulet and Julien Chanoine, based on a novel by Abdoulaye Mamani.¹²

Another pioneer from Senegal, the woman director Safi Faye, is somewhat closer in style to Kaboré's two films. Faye's *Kaddu Beykat* ('Lettre paysanne', 1975) is made up of reportage-like village scenes. But that film, too, depicts disillusion in the ill-fated love of its protagonists, the juxtaposition of city and village and the foregrounding of economic exploitation, which marks Faye as belonging to the anti-colonialist first-generation filmmakers.

Kaboré's films under review in this chapter are different from these mostly earlier examples in that they do not touch upon the problems of the colonial period, or on political problems among Africans in pre-colonial times. They do not mention even the pre-colonial history of the Moose chiefdoms, which is a well-researched scholarly topic and, for those who identify as Moose, a source of pride and a central political symbol.¹³ These two films primarily make comments about the cultural order. Importantly, Kaboré was not averse to making a political statement elsewhere; the second major feature film that he made, *Zan Boko* (1988), has as subject matter class conflict in the post-colonial state, and the expropriation of villages through urban zoning that goes along with the expansion of the cities, a serious issue that colours all aspects of municipal government in Burkina Faso at present. But his historical village films are devoid of similar political sensibility.

The main novelty of *Wend Kuuni* was presenting a village life of great serenity. In this film, West African village lifestyle was visualised for the first time as chief protagonist, as the essence of cultural identity. Kaboré's African past is made up of myriad details of daily interaction. By the end of the film these details remain in the viewer's mind to become the real subject of the film. Daily greetings constitute a good portion of the dialogue in *Wend Kuuni*; domestic chores, the gender division of labour, the small gifts and thoughts that sustain kinship and friendship, are all shown at a leisurely pace, without being necessary for the understanding of the simple plot. He is especially fond of depicting scenes of weaving industry, the setting up of the warp, the operation of the loom and

the product of these activities, the beautiful handwoven cloth that everyone in the two films wears as clothing or wraps themselves in as blankets (he does not show the seeding of the cotton and the spinning of thread, which were by far the most time-consuming tasks performed by women and, where they existed, by slaves). The camera focuses on the new calabashes, the goatskin bags, the clay pots, basketry and the mats. The compounds made up of cylindrical clay houses with conical thatched roofs are very prominent, as these are the centrepieces of Moose identity, which gain in strength with nostalgia at the rate at which cement block buildings with corrugated metal roofs replace them in city and village. Very central elements of these two films are the panning shots of spectacular vistas of the red-brown West African savannah.

What drives, selects and shapes this new content is to be found in Kaboré's personal trajectory; and history, or rather training in history, was decisive in it. He brings up this training in almost every published interview he gives, and it is duly recorded even in the shortest biographical sketches about him. After finishing secondary education in a Catholic boarding school, Kaboré earned a two-year college degree in history from the University of Ouagadougou. In 1972 he went to Paris, where in a few more years he earned a master's (D.E.A.) degree, also in history.¹⁴ As he was poised to continue for a doctorate in the same field, he changed his course by turning to visual studies, and eventually to cinema. This is how he explains this development:

During the fourth year of my studies, I became interested in Western representations of Africa and how these representations stereotyped Africans and reflected prejudices against them. I was intrigued by the depiction of Africa in the French press during the period of the late nineteenth century when the European colonial powers re-partitioned Africa; and especially, in the drawings of the French newspaper *Le Petit Journal illustré* from 1885 to 1900. I did research at the Bibliothèque d'Outre-mer in Paris where I studied and photographed the drawings, and became familiar with the colonial iconography of that period.

After completing the research at the Bibliothèque, it appeared to me that in contemporary European television documentaries, Africa was still being misrepresented as an exotic and strange continent without traditions. It was apparent, at the time, that I had to learn the language of film to be able to critically analyze those documentaries. I also wanted to understand how television and film mediated ideologies of racial superiority and how Africa served as a laboratory for their articulation. And as a student of history, I wanted to understand how European representations of Africa affected and structured the mentality of Africans, especially since as Africans, we were unable to escape those stereotypes.

So I studied cinema at the Ecole Supérieure d'Études Cinématographiques (ESEC) in Paris to learn the language of images in order to better understand history, especially the colonial and postcolonial history of Africa. After a year of film studies, I realized I was more interested to tell stories through film than use film as a research tool to record and analyze history.¹⁵

A point worth noting is that Kaboré thinks Europeans misrepresent Africa as being 'without traditions', whereas it could also be maintained that they misrepresent it as having too much tradition, a promising start for a 'working misunderstanding'. In the same interview he also said: 'We are not inferior beings. We have a very rich culture ... We must continue to try to make people understand that Africans have contributed to world civilization and our universal patrimony. And through the medium of film and television we can communicate this fundamental truth to Africans and the rest of the world'.¹⁶ Kaboré's historical references are evocative rather than scholarly, because his vision takes root in his desire to counter a stereotype.

The second element in Kaboré's development as a filmmaker is the play of mutual influences among West African filmmakers of the francophone zone. Kaboré obtained a cinema degree in Paris, but he explains that his cinematographic sensibility developed in the intra-African film milieu. In another interview he said: 'I refused to watch any of the major films that were recommended to us in school. I wanted to learn first how to speak with images before eventually learning to speak like the masters or the professionals do. That is very important. There are many films that most film students cannot even imagine not seeing but which I did not see at all ... I cannot cite a single film director who has had a conscious influence on the way I perceive cinema'.¹⁷ In an earlier interview he conveyed, nonetheless, that he was impressed with African examples, even during his stay in France: 'One day, when I saw Sembène Ousmane's *Xala* at the Champollion movie theater, I realized that the camera could be used as a tool to express African culture'.¹⁸

This curiosity in the few but internationally noted early works of the pioneer West African filmmakers was nurtured by the exposure that the Panafrican Cinema and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO) made possible, and the excitement surrounding this periodic event. FESPACO was regularised in 1971 under the sponsorship of the Upper Volta (after 1984, Burkina Faso) government and soon became one of the most significant cultural events in sub-Saharan Africa. Alternating in odd-numbered years with the Carthage Film Festival (JCC) in Tunis, it provided a forum where aspiring and established filmmakers of francophone Africa could see each other's work and learn of the reactions of foreign critics, festival organisers, film distributors and journalists. In

these intra-African venues the younger filmmakers compensated for their limited knowledge of the 'classics' of cinémathèque history, or of the acclaimed products of avant-garde movements (which the directors of the preceding decade, such as Ousmane Sembène and Souleymane Cissé, had acquired in the intellectual ambience of European cinema connoisseurship). Inspiration flowed particularly freely between the directors of Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso (Niger had sporadic presence despite early on having produced Oumarou Ganda and Moustapha Alassane); other francophone countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon and Congo (Zaire) were more peripheral to this exchange, while anglophone Ghana and Nigeria followed an altogether different development.¹⁹

The younger directors who started making films in the late 1970s also found openings in different kinds of settings, the newsrooms of national TV or educational video projects. In Burkina Faso, the latter were especially formative because the country was a frequent recipient of development aid and NGO projects. In lieu of experimental shorts of the film training school, the filmmakers of Kaboré's generation shot documentaries on rural development or education, commissioned by international organisations or government ministries. The early filmography of Kaboré indicates no graduation project completed during his two years in film school in Paris but several documentaries after he returned to Burkina, produced with the help of his students and with funding from various national and international agencies.²⁰ Idrissa Ouédraogo, now the best-known Burkinabe director in the world, who was trained in Ouagadougou in the now defunct film school INAFEC where Kaboré was teaching part-time, also started producing educational documentaries for the government. He explained that this experience set in him habits of image and setting that later characterised his fictional work.²¹

This entry to cinema through village documentaries provides the key to the way 'history' eventually acquired shape and plot in Kaboré's films. Parsimonious dialogue; slow pace; wide-angle landscape shots that dwarf solitary characters; the use of existing villages, buildings and nature as location; the casting of unschooled villagers, including very old people, as significant characters in the plot – all hallmarks of Kaboré's style of filmmaking – were worked out in these earlier projects. These elements do not exist in the Senegalese and Malian films that provided the first models.

Kaboré's particular way of imagining and giving filmic form to historical reality could be called ethnography purified of modern clutter. It is achieved by filming the villages of today, but creating the illusion that they represent the past by cleansing the area framed by the lens of the objects that saturate the present rural environment: bicycles and motorcycles, enamelled bowls and basins, transistor radios, two- and four-litre plastic oil containers, sundry articles of attire made

available by the international second-hand clothing trade, insecticide sprayers on an increasing scale, TV antennas, car batteries to power the TVs and cellphones, and so on. This manner of filming was not invented by Kaboré. The elimination of modern contamination is an old convention of ethnographic film (although these days it draws criticism as a betrayal of the promise to document the world as it is, in order to cater to the dream world of affluent audiences). For example, Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Naked Spaces: Living is Round* (1985), which was in part filmed in Burkina Faso, presents villages recognisable to anyone who has lived in them, but with an aestheticised exoticism achieved by removing all the objects that connect the place to our time. Kaboré used this technique not with the more common aim of beautifying ethnography, but to create an image that could stand as the past. This was original. Sembène's *Emitai*, on the contrary, had emphasised colonial presence. *Ceddo* created pre-colonial times as a quasi-fantastic world, partly, as Rosenstone remarked, by the theatrical nature of the staging and acting, which work upon the viewer like a Brechtian distancing effect, very different from the soft, earthy, pastoral realism of *Wend Kuuni*.

One wonders whether in the development of history film as rural ethnography there was an influence of Jean Rouch, the innovative French director who fathered the movement called *cinéma-vérité*, a spontaneous style of filmmaking that blurred the boundaries between ethnographic, educational and fiction film. I would like to leave this question open. Rouch filmed in many West African countries, where he trained actors, directors, cameramen and technicians. He was, for example, one of Safi Faye's first mentors. The African filmmakers that Rouch promoted did not in the end become avant-garde *cinéma-vérité* directors, largely because they could not afford to take ten or twenty hours of rushes to produce a 45-minute feature, but he may have had an effect in other ways. When Rouch set out to produce history he adopted a version of ethnographic realism. In 1975 he filmed a story situated in the late 19th century, *Babatou, les trois conseils*, with a crew of technicians from Niger and on the basis of a script written by the historian Boubou Hama. Following his work habits, he developed only minimally the dialogue, which the actors fleshed out by improvisation on location. The team travelled around to find a suitable location. 'The problem was', Rouch explains, 'to find places that had not changed in a hundred years, without corrugated metal roofs or plastic containers.'²² Without further safeguards this solution is illusory, because the sun-baked clay houses of the savannah rarely survive one hundred years and what appears old now may be an environment radically transformed during the colonial period. Rouch's search still reveals more concern for historical authenticity, compared to the shortcuts that Kaboré takes, but is inspired by the same supposition that in Africa the actual looks like the historical once you remove from it what is of ostensibly European origin.

Despite such parallels a major difference exists between Rouch's cinema and the style initiated by Kaboré, and that is the purpose of the final product. Rouch's aesthetic is guided by the effort to produce ethnographic estrangement; whereas Kaboré's ethnographic realism tries to create the opposite effect of attachment. Rouch's celebrated film *Les Maîtres fous* (1955), filmed in Ghana among migrant workers from Niger who undergo a possession ritual, is very much a display of radical difference, even if recorded with humour and respect. As such, it goes very much against the grain of how most West African intellectuals would like to see their cultural heritage presented to outsiders, the main reason, I think, why many of them do not like Rouch's films. West African films look different and show the culture in a different way. They are statelier in rhythm and style, and less adventurous in form; they present their characters as likeable, not wild.

Restricting our discussion to visual representation, we can contrast two attitudes toward history. One is to think of the past as radically different from the present and visualise it in such a way as to shake the viewer's sense that the habitual is natural. This inclination is unconnected to the different question of how faithful the representation may be to the knowable past. The past as 'other' can be created with meticulous attention to the remains of the period represented, but can also be imagined in total disregard for them. To illustrate the latter possibility Pier Paolo Pasolini comes readily to mind, a director whose historical imagination shares something with Rouch's 'ethno-fiction'. In Pasolini's *Medea* (1969) incongruous elements – a harsh nature, ethnographic titbits selected opportunistically for their effect rather than their historical appropriateness, a scene of human sacrifice invented with Frazerian imagination – are blended together to create a fictionally plausible but perplexing mythological Colchis that sharply stands against Jason's own classical Greece and, by extension, against modern Europe.

The opposite, the sense of the past as similar to the present, can also be created either by dismissing historical details or being faithful to them. Many Hollywood history dramas, for example (and even more so, programmes dramatising the Holy Family that appear on our TV screens on the eve of Easter), display an elaborate search for period realism when it comes to costumes and settings, but lack of imagination in staging cultural patterns and human relations not identical with the habits of American suburban life or college campus.

In this divide I think Kaboré, like most African intellectuals who reject the strange presentation of African history and ethnography, is situated closer to the second pole. The past is a different country, for some, but not for him. On the contrary it is the same country where he lives today, the very same village where his father came from, only cleaner, more presentable, with attractive people, abundant food and security from want. This past is primarily a rhetorical figure of the present, an argument hurled against the ghost of colonialism.

What guides this idealisation is a concern with European opinions, and we perceive this clearly in the matter of clothing. In Kaboré's films even children or poor villagers make a great display of it, somewhat exaggerated by historical (and ethnographic) standards. To take a few simple examples: in most places in the savannah, women's breasts are not subject to erotic curiosity and, in the absence of pressure from outsiders' judgement, are (or were, until recently) left exposed. Not in these films. The 'true past' and the 'idealised past' are two different things. In other words, although it might have been true that people traditionally wore very little clothing, it is not true of the idealised past, i.e. this 'true' past does not fit with a European audience's understanding of an 'idealised' past. Young men and women working in the fields also used to wear very little clothing. In some situations (e.g. unmarried girls in Moose villages) people may even express embarrassment at covering themselves. As missionaries and administrators have for decades berated village and city people for these practices, members of the younger generation developed an acute awareness of proper dress by assumed European standards and it is increasingly common to find that they will not let anyone photograph them if they do not feel as well dressed as the photographer. We find the same attitude in Kaboré's films. The Burkina people's idea of the negative attitude of Euro-American audiences toward nudity shapes what is presented in this self-proclaimed window on national culture.

Only the desire to display a world that meets European approval, however, would hardly have given Kaboré's cinema its emotional power. *Wend Kuuni's* success with the critics and audiences of Europe and America is also due to his skill as narrator, the lyricism of his film language, the compelling screen personality of its young actress Rosine Yanogo and, important for the present discussion, Kaboré's ability to satisfy foreign audiences' craving for the foreign and the uncommon. This last objective Kaboré accomplishes by bringing together carefully selected images of landscape, architecture, stylised cultural icons and, to some degree, by the use of the Moore language in the dialogue.

The use of African languages in West African films was pioneered by Sembène, with his Wolof version of *Mandabi* (1968). He explained, as is well known, that he took this step because he wanted to address the common people of his country, although we can imagine that cultural nationalism and anti-colonialism also played a role in this far-sighted decision. Later, the use of national languages became standard and a distinguishing mark of films made in Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso, as opposed to those made in Central Africa or even in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, which still rely on French or English dialogues for wider communicability (at the expense of verisimilitude). What the 1980s productive filmmaking in Africa revealed, which is not self-evident, is that the use of African languages can also give particular films an exotic appeal in the export

market, because the audience for these films in Europe is a self-selected group of cultural sophisticates. It is no coincidence that West African films are invariably promoted in Europe and the USA under their original foreign name (also true currently for some films made in the Middle East), and not under a translated title, which is the common procedure for foreign films made in European and Asian languages. One of Kaboré's achievements was developing a fluent visual language that does well with spare dialogue and overcomes the difficulties that might have resulted from using a national language with foreign audiences.

Outside some physical objects which are given synecdochic value, the language, and a few hints at quaint rituals that would not alienate any audience, genuine cultural elements have very limited presence in *Wend Kuuni's* history. We encounter no elaborate ceremonies or dances, nothing in fact that could direct a foreign viewer to associations commonly made with Africa. The most glaring exclusion is magic. *Wend Kuuni* can be contrasted in this respect not only with what, say, the European gaze of Rouch sees, but also with the hyperimaginative craft of the booming film and video industry of Nigeria, which caters exclusively to a local audience. Magic is the master trope of European thinking about Africa, and Kaboré's earnest patriotism can find no room for it in any form – not in the form it takes in Sembène's *Emitai* (a staged kind of anti-colonial defiance), nor in that found in Djibril Diop-Mambety's superb *Touki-Bouki* (1973) (as unmarked reality in a humour that runs with equanimity) – and of course, least of all, as the commonplace currency of ethnographic realism/voyeurism.

A gentle form of magical realism enters Kaboré's world in *Buud Yam*, after Souleymane Cissé had shown how to do it in *Yeelen* (1987). Of a generation older than Kaboré, Cissé had become known in the 1970s with films depicting urban social problems and labour conflict. Simultaneous with the success of *Wend Kuuni*, Cissé discovered the Sahelian landscape and ethnographic historicity, including, when he turned to history, an approach to chronology as carefree as that of Kaboré's ('I chose to set my story ten centuries ago,' he said about *Yeelen*).²³ Cissé's innovation was to add the thaumaturgic element to village culture, which had a reciprocal influence on Kaboré. Férid Boughedir explains how Cissé turned to the esoteric.²⁴ Cissé's 1982 film *Finye* included a dialogue between an old initiated man and spirits living in a sacred tree. This scene had stunned European critics and many of them encouraged him to further develop his description of 'African spirituality'. *Yeelen* was the talented reply, but Boughedir observes that the supernatural that transpired was not simply an escapist journey offered to the European spectators, nor a nightmarish metaphor for an unlivable economic situation; Cissé makes the supernatural instead an essential component of African cultural identity and specificity.

Malian films seem to have inspired Kaboré's *Buud Yam* also with the theme of

quest and the episodic narrative structure that goes with it. The quest scheme is found, besides *Yeelen*, in Adama Drabo's *Ta Dona* (1991), which includes a long sequence of the hero searching for a magic pot that will heal a young woman. *Buud Yam* consists mostly of a long journey by the hero in search of the cure that will save his sister, whereas in *Wend Kuuni* most action was confined to one village. *Buud Yam*'s hero encounters contrasting climates, physical environments and groups recognisable as representative of some of the major ethnicities that make up the present population of Burkina Faso. The juxtaposition of cultural differences, the white cotton shirts and thatched houses of the Moose, the veiled and dark robed Tamashek, the multi-storey Bobo villages crowded with excitable inhabitants exhibiting their naked torsos, accompanied in each instance by bits of dialogue in the corresponding language, diversifies the visual and aural content of the film, and also projects the nation-state back into the past. This gallery of costumes and ethnic signifiers is intended for the enjoyment of local audiences who can recognise most readily and appreciate the distinctions. The message is also of political import because the hero's quest recapitulates the modern nation-state as cultural plurality (even if it takes account of only part of it; the eastern third of the country falls by the wayside in this reconstruction).

In the travel episodes *Buud Yam*'s laxity extends from history to geography. The journey's eco-cultural variety is achieved at the cost of common sense. The hero travels north first and reaches the driest part of the Sahel; then he continues his journey and arrives at a river flowing in a green valley. As everyone watching the film in Burkina Faso knows, if you continue in the same direction, after the Sahel you arrive not at a green valley but at the desert. What *Wend Kuuni*, in his search for the healer, has done is take a long curve to the west, and then to the south, extending his trip several times, instead of taking the most direct route to his destination, the active 19th-century caravan road connecting Moose country to Bobo-Dioulasso, rebuilt today as a major highway in the country. Audiences in Europe and the United States wouldn't mind (although I hope some students in my class do know the difference) but the problem is not only with historical accuracy. Thom Andersen says in his recent *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (a documentary on how over the decades films visualised Los Angeles) 'silly geography' makes for a less engaging film, even if that film is a thriller.

As we reach the end of this discussion I would like to consider briefly absences that are also relevant to what has been presented so far. *Wend Kuuni* and *Buud Yam* are silent on some broad social and historical themes, and I think this is because these themes may generate unease in national audiences and break the poetic charm of the films for international ones. Pfaff pointed out that political stratification and polygyny are left out of Kaboré's historical films.²⁵ Pre-colonial Moose chiefs remain invisible in them, unlike the corrupt politicians and their

businessmen acolytes, who occupy the centre stage in the post-colonial world of *Zan Boko*. For historians another notable silence is slavery. Would a boy abandoned in the wilderness be kindly collected and left in a village so that his parents could be searched for? In the 19th century the area where the film takes place, the Moose kingdom of Ouagadougou, was known as a purveyor not only of simple slaves, but also of eunuchs, who were ultimately conveyed to the Mediterranean market through Hausa trade networks. Would a trader venture alone on his donkey in unfamiliar territory, without connections to political authority and the relative safety of a caravan? For me one of the most fantastic features of both films is images of boys mounted on beautiful horses darting out of the village. In the past cavalry was the equivalent of heavy artillery and horses were strictly military gear. As for European knights, a horseman in the West African savannah might have had two or three servants just to care for his mount. In the last decades of the 19th century in the Volta basin, the exchange value of a horse varied between five and seven slaves. Taking account of such information would have necessitated selecting different images. They would have made these films more useful for some of my classes, but perhaps not as enjoyable to watch in the cinemas of Ouagadougou, or of Brussels and Paris.

Recapitulation

I suggested that Kaboré's two films under review respond to three major imperatives, and that knowing this helps understand why he chose to set his stories in the past and what he includes or leaves out when he visualises this past.

The first imperative is the desire to counter a view of Africa that is presumed to be common in Europe. This is a typically post-colonial urge linked to the injuries of the colonial past. Kaboré reconstructs his own transition to cinema in the light of this urge and it is no coincidence that his first feature film, *Wend Kuuni*, undertakes a restoration of pre-colonial history. It presents a society of ideal forms, universal human nature, innocent of political conflict and class rivalry. Any element that might lend support to commonly held but objectionable images of Africa has been eliminated from it. The attitude that rules in this respect – and that sharply contrasts with the impulses that gave us the early films of Sembène and Cissé – is similar to the characteristic Trey Ellis identified as the New Black Aesthetic in the United States, the concern over 'what white people will think'.²⁶

The second imperative takes root in the material conditions of film production. Most West African countries have a very narrow market for film; the sale of

films abroad is the hope for recouping the outlay made for them, and for profitability. The way francophone West African cinema has developed since the 1970s means that filmmakers rely on European funding for capital, on international festivals for visibility and on European audiences to recover their production costs. This state of affairs affects the form and content of the films they make, as has long been recognised in Africa and among African film fans elsewhere.²⁷ *Wend Kuuni* in particular was successful in international venues because it blended a poetic realism with the display of a foreign way of life, which mostly consisted of outward appearances (architecture, clothing and language use), rather than the more inaccessible and difficult-to-appreciate aspects of the culture. The apprenticeship in making documentaries on contemporary rural life served Kaboré well in imagining a way to visualise African history responding to these constraints.

The third imperative is Kaboré's need to communicate a message about dignity and self-reliance to his own countrymen. The revelation of traditional culture in film affirms the sense of pride and the resolve to change things for the better. Kaboré expressed on many occasions the African artist's duty to edify fellow citizens with a positive lesson from the past: 'To me, cinema and television are tools that we can use to investigate our culture and history, in order to understand the past and the present, and to imagine a future in which we have a role ... my principal audience is my community ... You cannot renew the present without the experience of the past.'²⁸

This vision met its right moment. First it resonated with a cultural reawakening that took hold of Burkina Faso in the wake of Captain Sankara's revolutionary government (1983–87). New fashions emerged celebrating traditional textiles, including indigo and *bogolan* dyes, and intellectuals started wearing embroidered 'bubu' gowns to formal parties. I saw young people with straw hats, or carrying knives forged by local blacksmiths, or dodging through city traffic on their mopeds with skin bags of the type shown in *Wend Kuuni* on their shoulders. On the music scene, songs with lyrics in Manding performed or inspired by famous singers from the Wasulu region of Mali started displacing the pop music of Congolese inspiration. It is remarkable that this trend spontaneously manifested itself across all strata of society. At the same time village senior men began purchasing shrouds made of handwoven local cloth for when they died, instead of the imported white percale, which had become the custom before.

Wend Kuuni slightly anticipated this trend, and became its emblem and one of its models. According to reports, when the film was first released it drew huge crowds to the cinemas. Subsequently it was shown numerous times in theatres and on the television channels of the country. In the cities especially, it is hard to find an adult of any age who has not seen it. It is the most watched domestic film in Burkina Faso.

But *Wend Kuuni* also became a signpost and the inspiration for a broader drift in the same direction in Africa. Kaboré is the wellspring of the 'return to the source' films, all situated in that vague terrain between ethnography and history. His impact on fellow Burkinabe director Idrissa Ouédraogo, who has made a larger number of films and was given the opportunity to make films outside of Burkina Faso, is well recognised (where these two directors differ from each other would provide insights complementing the present discussion). The mutual influences between Kaboré and Souleymane Cissé have already been mentioned.

More unsuspected is the mark that Kaboré left on the legendary Ousmane Sembène. Sembène's last film to date, *Molaadé* (2004), was produced in Burkina Faso, a serendipity that helps draw attention to the significant influence of Kaboré's style on it. Sembène combines in this film an aestheticised and personified ethnographic rural world, which is not characteristic of him, with the exploration of social issues and of women's worlds, which is.

Further proof of Kaboré's impact comes from far away: South African director Darrell Roodt's *Yesterday* (2004), nominated for Best Foreign Film Academy Award, is impregnated with Kaboré's filmic features. The way the characters are fashioned in this film, the slow pace, spare dialogue, the overriding of tragedy with a soft optimistic ending, the landscape photography and the uncommon use, for a South African film, of the African language Zulu, are all unexpected from the perspective of the various styles Roodt used in his previous films. They find an explanation in a comment from Roodt, that he wanted to give this film an African look.²⁹ African in this case means to a very large extent *Wend Kuuni*-like. Could there be a greater tribute to Kaboré? By inventing a particular vision of the African past, and combining several elements of drama and photography to communicate it to African and foreign audiences, he has defined what counts now as African style.

- of Minnesota Press, 2002). Sharon A. Russell's *Guide to African Cinema* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998) is a valuable reference guide to African filmmakers and to African films, including some discussed in this volume: *Battle of Algiers*, *Emitai*, *Ceddo*, *Keïta*, *Yeelen*, and *Camp de Thiaroye*. Regional studies include studies of South African cinema, a region which is particularly well represented in the scholarly literature. See, for example, Keyan Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film* (London: Radix, 1989); Johan Blignaut & Martin Botha (eds.), *Movies Moguls Mavericks: South African Cinema 1979–1991* (Cape Town: Showdata, 1992); Isabel Balseiro & Ntongela Masilela (eds.), *To Change Reels: Film and Culture in South Africa* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2003).
14. For an early contribution, by a popular writer, see Kenneth M. Cameron, *Africa on Film: Beyond Black and White* (New York: Continuum, 1994). Particularly recommended is Peter Davis's pioneering venture into South African 'film and history', *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996).
 15. A selection of the conference papers was published in a special section of the *South African Historical Journal* (vol. 48) in May 2003, co-edited by the editors of this volume. Unlike this book, the selected contributions, with a couple of exceptions, focused mainly on film as evidence rather than on film as a means of historical representation. For a full listing of the papers presented at this pioneering conference, plus the text of many of these, see the conference website, www.uct.ac.za/conferences/filmhistorynow.
 16. For the published version of this paper, see Mbye Cham, 'Film and History in Africa: A Critical Survey of Current Trends and Tendencies', in Françoise Pfaff (ed.), *Focus on African Films* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 48–68.
 17. Josef Gugler, *African Film: Re-imagining a Continent* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003).
 18. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, especially chapters 3 and 4 and *Visions of the Past*, especially chapter 8. For an extended account of the defining characteristics of Hollywood history, see also Toplin, *Reel History*, pp. 8–57.
 19. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, p. 9 includes Sembène in a list of filmmakers 'whose major work centers on historical questions'. On pp. 178–180, Rosenstone expands on his reasons for this inclusion in exploring Sembène's innovativeness and desire 'to dramatize history and to teach it so as not to let others teach it to us'.
 20. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 70, cited in Rosenstone, *History on Film*, p. 26.
 21. For other analyses that are revealing about this stereotype of Africa, see William Beinart, 'The Renaturing of African Animals: Film and Literature in the 1950s and 1960s', in *Kronos: Journal of Cape History* (November 2001), pp. 201–226 and Lauren van Vuuren, 'The Great Dance: Myth, History and Identity in Documentary Film Representations of the Bushmen, 1925–2000' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 2006).
 22. Marcia Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

Chapter 1

1. *Wend Kuuni*: Gaston Kaboré, 1982, Burkina Faso, 75 mins, Moore. *Buud Yam*: Gaston Kaboré, 1996, Burkina Faso, 97 mins, Moore. Mbye Cham, 'Official History, Popular Memory: Reconfiguration of the African Past in the Films of Ousmane Sembène', in Samba Gadjio (ed.), *Ousmane Sembène: Dialogues with Critics and Writers* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), also provides a list of early historical films made in West Africa.
2. David Herlihy, 'Am I a Camera? Other Reflections on Film and History', *American Historical Review*, 93, 5 (1988), p. 1191.

3. Robert Brent Toplin, 'The Filmmaker as Historian', *American Historical Review*, 93, 5 (1988), p. 1223.
4. Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 160.
5. Françoise Pfaff, 'Gaston G. Kaboré', in Françoise Pfaff (ed.), *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers: A Critical Study, with Filmography and Bio-bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 177.
6. Michael T. Martin, 'Interview. "I am a Storyteller, Drawing Water from the Well of my Culture": Gaston Kaboré, Griot of African Cinema', *Research in African Literatures*, 33, 4 (2002), p. 163.
7. Henry Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, vol. 4 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1858), p. 290.
8. For an overview, see Diawara, *African Cinema*. Also Claire Andrade-Watkins, 'France's Bureau of Cinema – Financial and Technical Assistance 1961–1977: Operations and Implications for African Cinema', in Imruh Bakari & Mbye Cham (eds.), *African Experiences of Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996).
9. Mamadou Diouf, 'History and Actuality in Ousmane Sembène's *Ceddo* and Djibril Diop Mambety's *Hyenas*', in Bakari & Cham, *African Experiences of Cinema*.
10. For detailed analysis of *Emitai* and Sembène's *Ceddo*, see chapter 3 in this volume by Robert Baum.
11. Victor Bachy, 'Un Film à caractère historique: si les cavaliers ... Un interview de Mahamane Bakabé', in Centre d'Etudes sur la Communication en Afrique (CESCA) (ed.), *Camera nigra: le discours du film africain* (Brussels: OCIC, 1984), pp. 93–100.
12. We should add to this little survey a film released the same year as *Wend Kuuni*, Christian Richard's *Le Courage des autres*. Richard was a Frenchman who taught for several years in the film institute in Ouagadougou (INAFEC). His film, sponsored by the government of Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) and produced with local crew and technicians, tells the story of a fictional uprising in a convoy of recently enslaved people driven to a distant port. It is told at a slow pace, with beautiful images and sound, and almost no dialogue. The film was not admitted to the FESPACO competition because its director was not African (see Victor Bachy, *La Haute-Volta et le cinéma*, 2nd ed. (Brussels: OCIC, 1983), pp. 41–43). This film, in limbo between being African and European, has not been screened very often and it is not clear how much influence it exercised on other Burkinabe and African directors. Its theme is not one of those Gaston Kaboré admits in his presentation of history.
13. The major works for Moose political history are: Elliott P. Skinner, *The Mossi of the Upper Volta: The Political Development of a Sudanese People* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964); J.D. Fage, 'Reflections on the Early History of the Mosi-Dagomba Group of States', in J. Vansina, R. Mauny & L.V. Thomas (eds.), *The Historian in Tropical Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Michel Izard, *Introduction à l'histoire des royaumes mossi* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1970); Michel Izard, *Le Yatenga précolonial: un ancien royaume du Burkina Faso* (Paris: Karthala, 1985); Michel Izard, *Gens du pouvoir, gens de la terre: les institutions politiques de l'ancien royaume du Yatenga (Bassin de la Volta Blanche)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Michel Izard, *L'Odyssée du pouvoir: un royaume africain: état, société, destin individuel* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1992); Michel Izard, *Moogo. L'Émergence d'un espace étatique ouest-africain au xvie siècle: étude d'anthropologie historique* (Paris: Karthala, 2003); Junzo Kawada, *Genèse et évolution du système politique des Mosi méridionaux (Haute Volta)* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1979); Junzo Kawada, *Textes historiques oraux des Mosi méridionaux (Burkina Faso)* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and

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- Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1985). A large colonial historical and ethnographic literature is critically incorporated in the works of these authors.
14. Bachy, *La Haute-Volta*, p. 35.
 15. Martin, 'Interview', pp. 164–165.
 16. Martin, 'Interview', p. 166.
 17. Nwachukwu F. Ukadike, 'Gaston G. Kaboré (Burkina Faso)', in N.F. Ukadike (ed.), *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 111.
 18. Pfaff, 'Gaston G. Kaboré', p. 174.
 19. For the phenomenally profitable video film industry of Nigeria, sharply contrasting with the art-house cinema tradition of francophone Africa, see Françoise Balogun, 'Booming Videoeconomy: The Case of Nigeria', in F. Pfaff (ed.), *Focus on African Films* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).
 20. ATM and FESPACO (L'Association des Trois Mondes and Le Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou), *Les Cinémas d'Afrique: dictionnaire* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), pp. 248–250; Bachy, *La Haute-Volta*, pp. 35–36; Pfaff, 'Gaston G. Kaboré', p. 174.
 21. Josef Gugler, *African Film: Re-imagining a Continent* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), p. 31.
 22. René Prédal, 'Babatou, les Trois Conseils', *CinémaAction*, 17 (1982), pp. 97–105.
 23. Olivier Barlet, *African Cinemas: Decolonizing the Gaze* (London: Zed, 2000), p. 89.
 24. Férid Boughedir, 'African Cinema and Ideology: Tendencies and Evolution', in June Givanni (ed.), *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 119.
 25. Françoise Pfaff, 'Africa from Within: The Films of Gaston Kaboré and Idrissa Ouédraogo as Anthropological Sources', *Society for Visual Anthropology Review*, 6, 1 (1990), p. 237.
 26. Clyde Taylor, 'Searching for the Postmodern in African Cinema', in Givanni, *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema*, p. 140.
 27. Françoise Pfaff, 'Impact de la co-production sur les composantes socioculturelles de cinéma d'Afrique francophone', in *Cinémas et liberté: contribution au thème du FESPACO 93* (Paris: Présence Africaine), pp. 43–48; Boughedir, 'African Cinema and Ideology'; Taylor, 'Searching for the Postmodern in African Cinema'.
 28. Martin, 'Interview', pp. 165, 167, 169.
 29. In a presentation at the University of Illinois, April 2005.

Chapter 2

1. *Keïta!*: Dani Kouyaté, 1994, Burkina Faso, 94 mins, Jula and French.
2. *Yeelen*: Souleymane Cissé, 1987, Mali, 105 mins, Bambara.
3. This despite the distributor's placement of it in the 13th-century era of Sunjata (see DVD cover), for which there is absolutely no reference in the film.
4. For more on this issue, see chapter 1 by Mahir Saul in this volume.
5. Orthography is a constant issue here not only for the usual reasons of late and inconsistent efforts at standardisation but also because of French spellings (Ouagadougou, Sundiata/Soundyata, Dioula/Dyula) vs. English ones (Wagadugu, Sunjata, Juula/Jula).
6. This issue is, again, better pursued in the chapter by Mahir Saul.
7. In this role he inspired the Cape Town theatre director Mark Fleischman to mount his own version of 'Sunjata' (Mark Fleischman, personal communication).
8. e.g. Samba Diop, *African Francophone Cinema* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2004), pp. 36–37.
9. Josef Gugler, 'Keïta! 1995: Transmitting the *Sundjata* to the Next Generation' in Josef Gugler,

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- African Film: Re-imagining a Continent* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), pp. 41–42. (This article is otherwise one of the best published analyses of this film that I have found.)
10. D.T. Niane, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* (London: Longman, 1965), p. vii.
 11. Jan Jansen, 'An Ethnography of the Epic of Sunjata in Kela', in Ralph A. Austen (ed.), *In Search of Sunjata: The Mande Epic as History, Literature and Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 297–312. 'Traditional' griots are also presented more as court mouthpieces than repositories of 'tradition' in Dani Kouyaté's next feature film, *Sia: The Myth of the Python* (2001) as well as such earlier works as Ousmane Sembène's *Ceddo* (1977) and Cheikh Oumar Sissoko's *Guimba the Tyrant* (1997). For the changing role of griot patronage, see Clemens Zobel, 'Clients or Critics? Politics, Griots and Gender in Postcolonial Mali', *Mande Studies*, 4 (2002), pp. 45–64.
 12. Dani Kouyaté's *Sia* is based upon the Wagadu legend but here again he links the empire of this story to Mali by naming its ruler (also played by his own father) Kaya Maghan Cissé.
 13. Stephan Bulman, 'Sunjata as Written Literature: The Role of the Literary Mediator in the Dissemination of the Sunjata Epic' in Austen, *Sunjata*, pp. 231–251.
 14. Gugler (p. 39, n. 9) thus appears misguided, and not even entirely historically accurate, in pointing out that cowry shell divination and the types of cloth depicted in these portions of the film are out of place for the 13th century.
 15. Denise Bouche, 'Autrefois, notre pays s'appelait la Gaule ... Remarques sur l'adaptation de l'enseignement au Sénégal de 1817 à 1960', *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, 29 (1968), pp. 110–122. (The title of this article closely echoes the original phrasing of the teacher's question in *Keïta!*: 'Comment s'appelaient autrefois les habitants de la France?')
 16. Bulman, 'Sunjata as Written Literature', pp. 240–241.
 17. Marcel Guilhem, *Précis d'histoire de l'Ouest Africain* (Paris: Liget, 1961), pp. 30–37. (I thank Mahir Saul for calling my attention to this text.)
 18. Jean-Louis Triaud, 'Haut-Sénégal-Niger, un modèle "positiviste"? De la coutume à l'histoire: Maurice Delafosse et l'invention de l'histoire africaine', in Jean-Loup Amselle (ed.), *Maurice Delafosse entre orientalisme et ethnographie: l'itinéraire d'un africaniste (1870–1926)* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998).
 19. *La Genèse* (*Genesis*) is the title of a 1999 Mande film by Cheick Oumar Sissoko, but its subject matter is the affairs of the biblical patriarch Jacob.
 20. Walter van Beek & Jan Jansen, 'La Mission Griaule à Kangaba (Mali)', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 40 (2000), pp. 363–376.
 21. Another well-regarded film that makes this assertion under a similar title is Kwaw Ansah's *Heritage ... Africa* (Ghana, 1988); here James Aggrey, a key protégé and instrument of British adapted education, is presented as a suppressed nationalist hero.
 22. Suzanne H. MacRae, 'Yeelen: A Political Fable of the Komo Blacksmith/Sorcerers', *Research in African Literatures*, 26, 3 (Fall, 1995), pp. 57–66 cites Cissé's earlier films and interviews to argue that the critique is directed against the then current Mali dictatorial regime of Moussa Traoré.
 23. There is also some confusion caused by changes in the man pursuing Nianankoro between his father, Soma, and a second uncle, Baafing. This is the result of the death, during filming, of the actor originally playing Soma, Ismaila Sarr. Cissé was apparently very close to Sarr, having used him in earlier films and as an intermediary to learn about the Komo ceremony prior to shooting *Yeelen*. He thus changed the script to retain the one scene that Sarr had completed; see Manthia Diawara, 'Souleymane Cissé's Light on Africa', *Black Film Review*, 4, 4 (1988), p. 14.
 24. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon, 1949).
 25. Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 23.
 26. Dominique Zahan, *Sociétés d'initiation Bambara: le N'domo, le Korè* (Paris: Mouton, 1960).