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Bodies in Motion

Physicality, materiality, and decoloniality in the digital age of francophone and lusophone African cinema

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Abstract

The digital revolution in African cinema has prompted fierce debate, particularly concerning the perceived quality of digital filmmaking in the context of Fespaco, the world's largest pan-African film festival. Digitisation is creating an ever-greater blurring of genres, styles, and 'national' cinemas, as well as a sense of a loss: of material film reels, of the grain of analogue film, of a physical connection between film and body. This thesis proposes that questions of physicality and materiality - aesthetics and ethics of the body in film, the dissolving, fractalising body *of* digital film, and the aesthetic techniques of representing texture, touch, and bodily motion in digital film - are in fact critical to consider within the digital age of African cinema.

The thesis argues for the importance of such filmic aesthetics and ethics in the representation and articulation of decolonialities of being in increasingly transnational and multidirectional contexts. It draws upon and reinterprets the work of Frantz Fanon using a body-phenomenological methodology in conjunction with theories of decoloniality. It proposes that aesthetics of physicality and materiality in the digital age respond to decolonial imperatives of re-humanisation and politics of reciprocity and generosity.

Nine films from francophone and lusophone African producing countries/directors, which all featured at Fespaco during the festival's transition to digital submissions (2013-2017), and which engage with the aesthetic considerations outlined, were selected for analysis. Supporting the film analysis, in-depth interviews were conducted with two of the directors, Alain Gomis and Dani Kouyaté, to bring their first-hand perspectives on filmmaking in the transition to digital, and on their own geographies and aesthetics.

The methodological approach also allows for a critical questioning of the categories of 'francophone' and 'lusophone' African cinema. It is a key part of this thesis to address the limitations of binary comparative perspectives and instead bring films together throughout the thesis in close analysis. The films in this thesis complicate attempts at dividing them along colonially-established lines, particularly in terms of language and geography, and represent multifaceted situations of oppression and resistance that point to the need to rethink what decolonising processes mean. These considerations interact with the significance of digitisation on the intermedial aspects of films, and the ways in which intermediality creates transformations of media and productive ruptures for resistance, re-humanisation, and reciprocity in the boundaries between them.

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Details of papers published during the course of writing this thesis that are re-used here with permission:

'Female Bodies on Lisbon's Margins: Space, Embodiment and (Dis)Possession in *Alda e Maria* (Pocas Pascoal, 2011)', in *Gender-Based Violence in Latin American and Iberian Cinemas*, edited by Rebeca Maseda García, María José Gámez Fuentes, and Barbara Zecchi (2020).

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Introduction

The Panafrican Film and television Festival of Ouagadougou (Fespaco), the world's largest pan-African film festival, turned 50 in 2019. It marked 50 years in which the landscape of African cinema has changed dramatically, from the early years of independence struggles and nation-building, in which there was a corresponding emphasis on the development of national cinemas, to the world of digital media and transnational movement. It has not been an easy transition for this venerated institution and its gatekeepers: as late as 2013, all films submitted to the competition had to be on 35mm film – a huge obstruction to the vast majority of filmmakers. It meant that even though films were being digitally shot and produced, they had to be laboriously and expensively transferred to film if they wanted to be considered for the official competition (see Muhammad, 2013). The next edition of the festival, in 2015, marked the first time that the digital format was permitted. In 2017, the festival received over 1,000 submissions, a huge jump from previous years, with the majority submitted digitally. The move to digital was a boon for the younger generation of filmmakers, many of whom would never have imagined submitting their film to Fespaco previously, but it led to claims of a devaluation of the festival: Idrissa Ouédraogo, one of Burkina Faso's leading filmmakers, announced after the close of the 2017 festival, that 'l'acte de décès du cinéma africain a été signé' [the death certificate of African cinema has been signed] (cited in Claude, 2017, para.3).¹

I attended Fespaco in 2017, when these anxieties about digital, and about the future of the festival were bubbling, and it provided the impetus for this thesis. Were digital technologies threatening the future of African cinema? Were the new transnational networks of movement and exchange of both people and films equating to a loss of something essential that defined African cinema? Part of the fear at Fespaco is to do with the apparent 'Nollywoodisation' of the festival: a reduction of quality, cinema-as-art, and an increase in low-budget telenovela-style cinema (see, for example, Diao, cited in Adam, 2017).² It is not that these fears are unique to African cinema, nor even to the digital age: as Stefan Jovanovic wryly notes, 'the cinema has died repeatedly and with great regularity over the course of its relatively brief [...] existence' (2003, para.3). There are distinct considerations relating to the theorisation of African cinema and the impact of the digital revolution which will be examined below, but the central anxiety surrounding digital film, globally, seems to be one of digital media's perceived superficiality and intangibility: the loss of a

¹ Throughout the thesis, all translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

² The 'Nollywoodisation' of Fespaco is discussed in greater detail below.

certain physicality, materiality, and even humanity in film. Director Steve McQueen, for example, has argued that analogue film ‘feels much more [...] human’ (cited in Blakely and Alexander, 2014, para.2).

This question of film’s humanity led to the central questions of this thesis: what happens to bodies, namely the bodies *in* and the bodies *of* films in the digital age? Do they lose their humanity, their physicality? In fact, what this thesis argues, through the analysis of nine films from francophone and lusophone Africa, is not only that these filmic bodies retain their humanity, but that digital technologies can be particularly suited to representing and expressing embodied, lived experiences. Furthermore, at a point in time when there is a great deal of questioning about the future of African film theory, this thesis argues for the need to engage with phenomenology of the body as a method of analysing contemporary African films, which has been of little concern to African film theory thus far. This thesis addresses phenomenology with an awareness of its grounding within Western academic discourse, and the criticisms levelled at phenomenology of repressing difference and over-generalising (see Jeremy Weate, 2001: 169). It therefore draws upon Frantz Fanon’s interrogation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body, and argues that Fanon’s articulation of difference within the phenomenological method is necessary for understanding the specificity of lived experience represented in the films.³ The theoretical model employed here is set out in detail later in the Introduction, after setting out the groundwork.

Thinking and doing decolonially

This thesis situates the digital revolution of African cinema within the broader socio-political context of increased globalisation and, paradoxically, increased moves towards insular nationalisms and ever more brutal bordering processes, which aim to dehumanise and cast out certain bodies in motion, while allowing others freedom of movement. All of the films within this study engage with these issues, looking at what happens to bodies when they come into contact with different borders. Walter Dignolo’s concept of ‘border thinking’ (2011: 273) is significant in

³ In preparing this thesis, the texts I primarily referred to were Fanon’s original French texts (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, 1952; *Les damnés de la terre*, 1961; *Sociologie d’une révolution: L’an V de la révolution algérienne*, 1975), rather than their published translations. This was primarily part of an ethical commitment of going direct to the source, given the in-depth discussion and analysis of Fanon’s work relating to lived experience and phenomenology of the body, and because of certain differences between the original French and the English translation that require some discussion (see, e.g., p.28). Where possible, I have quoted from the published English translations (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1986, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann; *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963, trans. by Constance Farrington, *A Dying Colonialism*, 1965, trans. by Haakon Chevalier) for clarity and simplicity. Some quotes are in the original French with my own translation, because the chosen quotation does not exactly match in the translation and this is significant in terms of the analysis in this thesis. These are noted in footnotes at the relevant points.

this regard: it demonstrates how structures of power and domination, with links to the colonial past, govern bordering processes, but how bodies which suffer in their contact with borders, also work to reshape them and to enact different forms of embodied resistance.

The concept of the body as a locus of knowledge, with a transformative power in its interaction with space and with other bodies, is key to the establishment of a decoloniality of being, a project that all the films analysed in this thesis engage with in various ways. Decoloniality of being is defined here as a way of being in and relating to the world, rather than simply a political process. It is a simultaneous 'theory and praxis', dependent on the 'interdependence and continuous flow of movement of both' (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 7). In this sense it is responsive to Merleau-Ponty's assertions that knowledge, objects, and the world are brought into being through consciousness and perception: act and thought are equally interlinked and co-dependent. 'Attention in motion', he writes, 'gives rise to the 'knowledge-bringing event': that is, 'not merely [...] to elucidate pre-existing data, it is to bring about a new articulation of them' (1962: 30). As will be discussed in more detail below, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception presupposes an agentic being-in-the-world: Decoloniality of being is very much about working towards such a being-in-the-world from haunted zones of non-being. However, Merleau-Ponty's central tenet: that things – everything we perceive – are brought into being in our perception of them, provides a foundation from which decoloniality of being can be conceptualised. Indeed, in decolonial terms, bodily engagement, with the world and with others, is key to achieving a 're-humanized world' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019: 3).

Discussions of decoloniality of being in this thesis trace links from Fanon, and his engagement with Merleau-Ponty, to more contemporary works, some of which are noted above. In so doing, the importance of physical human connection and relationships based on what Maldonado-Torres refers to as 'a decolonial politics of receptive generosity' (2007: 261) comes to the fore. The question of film's humanity in a digital age therefore takes on more urgent significance: the 'humanity' of film, whatever its method of production, has the potential to contribute to decolonial projects that aim to re-humanise and rehabilitate relationships and bodily agency in the world. It will be argued that the consideration of aesthetics that engage the senses and create 'bodily resonance' with the spectator goes beyond the purely artistic and has political and ethical implications. Fundamentally, the thesis argues for the need to focus on aesthetics of materiality, physicality and the body, and on what Tarja Laine has termed 'resonance' between the 'expressive body of the film' and the 'sensate bod[y]' of the spectator (2017: 12) within African film studies and for the need to pluralise discussions of phenomenology within film studies more generally in order to engage with decolonial thinking and doing.

Evidently, there are several different points of inquiry to bring together here, which this introduction will do by putting them into the context of their respective fields of research. It will then set out the resulting methodology which this thesis advances. Firstly, the rationale for the corpus selection will be outlined, explaining why this is a comparative study of francophone and lusophone African cinema, and how films were selected. To provide context to these choices, a brief discussion of the history of both African film theory and of Fespaco is required, including consideration of how the two have been intertwined, and the significance of the ongoing influence of France in both francophone and lusophone African film production. This section will also look at questions surrounding terminology, recognising where terms such as 'African cinema', 'francophone' and 'lusophone' are problematic, and how they are being used here. Attention will then turn to the digital revolution in African cinema and the implications for African film theory, advancing the rationale for a phenomenological method. A critique of phenomenology as it has previously been applied in film theory is necessary here, in order to situate and differentiate the methodology this thesis proposes. Finally, by exploring the relationship of Fanon's phenomenology with decoloniality, the framework for analysis will be set out.

Corpus of films

My main corpus consists of nine films from Sub-Saharan francophone and lusophone Africa, all of which are drawn from the official competition and special screening categories at the 2013, 2015 and 2017 editions of Fespaco (the festival is biennial). This accounts for the period of time in which the digital age made its mark on Fespaco. Although, as mentioned above, films for the 2013 festival had to be submitted on analogue film, all the films included here were originally made using digital technologies.

The decision to focus on francophone and lusophone films in comparative perspective has been made for two main reasons. Firstly, the development of African film theory from the 1970s onwards had a francophone bias, which was also influential in the creation of Fespaco. This approach minimises or negates the importance of distinct filmmaking cultures in anglophone and lusophone Africa, which were already developing at the time, and which demonstrate different routes and approaches towards the uptake of digital technologies. The exclusion of anglophone Africa here is not because of a lack of interesting and vital comparative points to engage with – there are many – but because the film industries there (including Nollywood and other similarly commercial film industries, such as Ghana's) have developed in such a different way, and their scope is so enormous, that it would require an entirely different methodological approach. This comparative approach allows for an understanding of the ongoing influence of France in both francophone and lusophone African cinema, which does not impact anglophone Africa to the

same extent. There are, therefore, interesting interactions between the financial and cultural influence from France and the diverse approaches to filmmaking in the francophone and lusophone spheres, which developed in response to differing needs and a range of other internal and external factors. The focus on francophone and lusophone Africa thus allows for a more individuated study of films which have developed in distinct, but connected, filmic cultures.

Of all the possible films these criteria provided, the corpus was narrowed by selecting films in which sensory aesthetics operate with regards to setting out a decoloniality of being. Some of the films appear once, some twice, across different chapters of the thesis, with three to four films per chapter. Analysing the films this way is done for two key purposes relevant to the aims of this thesis. Firstly, it draws out salient scenes, narrative points, and techniques in the films in close comparison with one another, forging links across filmic, cultural and linguistic boundaries. Secondly, it allows for a deepening of both analysis and theory as the thesis progresses and therefore an increasingly dynamic understanding of how the films resonate, relate and communicate. Each chapter is broadly thematic, but rather than attempting to classify the films within particular thematic categories (some problems with such an approach are outlined below), by analysing films in different combinations across the chapters, it demonstrates a complex interplay of themes and aesthetic modes in each, realised in a variety of ways.

A further influence over the corpus selection was purely practical, and was a question of accessibility. Many African films, especially those made in the more auteurial, less industrial conditions common in francophone and lusophone Africa, encounter difficulties with distribution and some of those shown at Fespaco, like many 'festival' or 'art-house' films the world over, remain only on the festival circuit, meaning that they are difficult to see and impossible to get hold of. The digital age is making that somewhat easier, and about half the films in my corpus were accessed using online links. The others which do already have distribution deals, are available to buy on DVD. It has been an additional challenge working with such new films, as some may well be available in the future, due to their festival success, but are not yet, and it was not possible to get hold of them from the producer. This meant that certain films such as Rahmatou Keita's *Zin'naariya* (2016) could not be included, despite it fitting all the criteria. It is therefore hope that this thesis will promote future research relating to films such as this one. On the other hand, where a director has had more than one film in the official competition and/or special screenings more than once, one of the films has been chosen, which best fits with the considerations of aesthetics and content for close analysis. This was the case for Alain Gomis, whose films *Tey* and *Félicité* won Fespaco in 2013 and 2017 respectively – the more recent film, *Félicité*, has been selected for analysis here.

Of the nine films in my corpus, six are from francophone Africa/by francophone African directors:

- *Félicité*, dir. Alain Gomis, 2017 (Senegal/France)
- *Frontières* [Borders], dir. Apolline Traoré, 2017 (Burkina Faso/France)
- *Medan Vi Lever* [While We Live], dir. Dani Kouyaté, 2016 (Burkina Faso/Sweden)
- *Timbuktu*, dir. Abderrahmane Sissako, 2014 (Mauritania/France)
- *Des Étoiles* [Under the Starry Sky], dir. Dyana Gaye, 2013 (Senegal/France)
- *La Pirogue* [The Pirogue], dir. Moussa Touré, 2012 (Senegal/France)

The remaining three are from lusophone Africa/by lusophone African directors:

- *Virgem Margarida* [Virgin Margarida], dir. Licínio Azevedo, 2012 (Mozambique/France/Portugal)
- *A República di Mininus* [The Children's Republic], dir. Flora Gomes, 2012 (Guinea-Bissau/France/Portugal)
- *Alda e Maria, Por Aqui Tudo Bem* [All Is Well], dir. Pocas Pascoal, 2011 (Angola/Portugal)

This weighting reflects the francophone bias of the festival as well as the relatively low production of films in lusophone Africa compared with francophone Africa (there were no lusophone feature films in competition at all in 2017). There is also a six/three split of male/female directors (the three female directors are Apolline Traoré, Dyana Gaye and Pocas Pascoal) which is representative of the wider gender inequality in film direction, not just in Africa but globally. However, all films have been selected also on the basis of those that engage actively with regard to representations of women. This is of particular significance both in the articulation of difference within phenomenology of the body, especially when considering a decoloniality of being, given the gendered dimensions of colonialism and the symbolic use of female bodies in colonial film, discussed below.

A note on interviews and ethics

This thesis is predominantly based on close film analysis. To recognise the human elements of these films, and to ensure the inclusion of the voices and perspectives of filmmakers, I had planned to interview numerous film directors and associated professionals in Burkina Faso during Fespaco 2017. The rationale for these interviews was to better understand the reception, use, and innovation connected to digital technologies in francophone and lusophone African cinema, and to get an insight into how these technologies are shaping aesthetics, particularly.

However, despite numerous fruitful, spur-of-the-moment conversations that took place, it proved extremely difficult to conduct formal semi-structured interviews, taking into account full informed consent in terms of data use. Therefore, the scope of interviews had to be altered. In the end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Alain Gomis and Dani Kouyaté. Translated excerpts from their interviews are included at relevant junctures in the thesis, and the full interview transcripts in French are included in the appendices. Practically, it was not easy to contact many of the directors whose films are analysed here, due to unavailability of contact details or unanswered emails. However, where possible, secondary interview sources have been used so that their voices are also included in connection to their films.

Contextualising African film theory

1969 marks the birth of not only Fespaco, but also of African film theory as a scholarly field, thanks to the creation of the *Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes* (FEPACI), in Algiers. FEPACI was a unique, cross-continental organisation with clear aims for African filmmaking in the era of early independence and, as evident from the name, was very much a francophone African organisation. Much of the impetus behind this came from Paulin Vieyra, a Beninese-Senegalese filmmaker who, in 1955, made *Afrique Sur Seine*, a 22-minute film shot in Paris, which is widely regarded as the first film made by an African. Vieyra made the film while still living under colonial rule, and in so doing, overcame the Laval Decree, which controlled the content, production and distribution of films in the French colonies, and which made it very difficult in practice for Africans to participate in filmmaking.⁴ He had, by this time, already formed the *Groupe du cinéma africain* while still living under colonial rule, which contributed to the founding of both Fespaco and FEPACI. There was, from the outset of both the festival and the federation, a clear political rationale, necessary for post-independence development and education, and for producing images of Africa which countered both the images produced in the colonial era, and those which were continuing to be propagated through ongoing cultural imperialism. This was made explicit in the 1975 Algiers Charter of Cinema:

Contemporary African societies are still objectively undergoing an experience of domination exerted on a number of levels: political, economic, and cultural [...] 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 stereotyped image of the solitary and marginal creator which is widespread in western capitalist society must be rejected by African filmmakers, who must, on the contrary, see themselves as creative artisans at the service of their people. It also demands great

⁴ For more on the Laval Decree and its impact on Francophone African filmmaking, see Manthia Diawara (1992: 21-23).

vigilance on their part with regard to imperialism's attempts at ideological recuperation (FEPACI, 2010: 166).⁵

There was, thus, a social-realist commitment and an ideology of resistance inherent in the filmmakers' charter, which was carried across to Fespaco. The stage was set, at least in the Francophone sphere, for what African cinema should look like and what it should achieve, and these aims were taken up passionately by a number of filmmakers, including, notably, Ousmane Sembène, known as the father of African cinema.

From this basis of filmic practice, scholars in the 1980s and '90s set about laying the groundwork for the theoretical study of African film, as distinct from existing Eurocentric film theories. This included a break away from psychoanalytic film theory, away from the exoticising gaze of Eurocentric criticism, and moved towards the establishment of a new semiotic system in order to give African film its own 'language'. This was demonstrated most saliently in the works of Ferid Boughedir and Manthia Diawara, who put forward taxonomies for the classification of African film. Boughedir's work outlined both thematic categories, including colonial confrontation, post-independence struggles and migration, and directorial 'tendencies': socio-political, moralist, cultural and commercial. (2001: 112-114). For Boughedir, these tendencies were not of equal value: he linked the commercial tendency to Nollywood, and described the films produced there as 'thrillers of the lowest kind'. The focus for serious criticism and scholarship was very much on the other three categories, which corresponded with the kinds of socially-committed films that were screened at Fespaco.

Diawara, writing at a similar time to Boughedir, outlined three categories, or 'narrative movements' (1992: 140). These typologies build upon his earlier (1988) article, which set out the visual strategies of shot composition, shot length and montage used in African films and their differences to those used in the West: it was a move towards the theorisation of a distinct African cinematic language. This later work does demonstrate recognition of the diversity of African films and differences in the visual language of different films. However, the films he analyses, all of which were Fespaco films of the time, are made to fit neatly into three typologies: social realist, colonial confrontation and return to source, which set up a marked distinction between Africa and The West, and which ignores entirely the films that Boughedir designates as 'commercial'. Between them, these two Fespaco veterans contributed greatly to the academic categorisation and canonisation of African cinema.

⁵ The 2010 publication date refers to a republication of the original 1975 charter.

Arguably, it was necessary, as the field was being developed, to demonstrate distinctions between African and Western cinema. It is not that the typologies identified by Diawara and Boughedir are invalid, and the detailing of differences in cinematic language, such as the length, angle and depth of shots, was certainly important for finding a basis for the study of African films which did not rely on Eurocentric film theory. Keyan Tomaselli and Maureen Eke (1995) and Teshome Gabriel (1989) did much in this vein to use orality as a basis for an African film theory, which accounted for such aesthetic differences, and demonstrated the problems of applying film theories developed in Europe, owing to very different epistemological assumptions. Certainly there are productive points to take from such theories, especially with regard to the fluidity of spatial boundaries that Gabriel identifies, and the different conceptualisation of time and space in the liberal use of long takes and wide shots discussed by both Gabriel (1989) and Diawara (1989); the latter writes that these kinds of shots 'are destined to describe the relation to each other and to time and space' (Diawara, 1989: 126). In this, there are connections to be drawn with slow cinema (discussed below), and such understandings of how time, space and relation are conceptualised differently is a productive basis for considering film phenomenology in the context of African cinema. However, it is difficult to get around the limitations imposed by such theories, namely that they require African cinema to be studied almost in a vacuum. There has always been transference with other cinemas, films do not fit neatly into categories defined by theme and specific shots used, and to essentialise African cinema is more problematic in today's digital age than ever.

Francophone and lusophone cinema in comparative perspective

Another limitation of the models outlined above, and indeed much subsequent scholarship on African cinema, is a clear francophone bias, stemming from the intertwined histories of Fespaco and FEPACI. In Diawara's work, this is explicit, in his statement that 'films directed by Africans in the former French colonies are superior, both in quantity and quality, to those by directors in other sub-Saharan African countries' (1992: 21). This statement entirely negates the prolific production of a then-burgeoning Nollywood and minimises the importance of distinct filmmaking cultures that had developed in parts of lusophone Africa, particularly in Mozambique. Undoubtedly, some seminal works in the field have emerged from the francophone sphere - whether explicitly or implicitly francophone - laying the groundwork for African film studies to be taken seriously as a field of scholarship and shone the spotlight on directors who have had a major influence on the development of independent African cinema (e.g. Murphy and Williams, 2010; Harrow, 2007; Gugler, 2003; Thackaway, 2003). However, the danger lies in conflating the francophone model to represent all African cinema. There is a pervasive notion that 'the existence

of the French “space” remains, at least for the time being, intricately bound to African cinema, if not always as the “real” space at least as “phantasmic” space – the location of hopes, dreams, references, disappointments, uncertainties, divided loyalties’ (Cottenet-Hage, 2004: 121). The centring of France within African film studies is a key reason for bringing francophone and lusophone African cinema into comparative perspective within this thesis, to widen the scope of the discussion around what is considered as ‘African cinema’, especially within an era of such rapid change, enabled by digital technologies. Decentring France in this way is fundamental for considering the decolonialities of being operating in the films.

The comparative model employed here is far from perfect, since it still relies on colonially-imposed divisions. Yet, since African Studies, especially in the arts and humanities, are often divided into their colonially-imposed fields, there is a strong tendency to study francophone, lusophone and anglophone Africa in isolation, ignoring the many points of connection, exchange and difference between them. Looking across these boundaries is a necessary starting point and also a way to find alternative geographic, linguistic and cultural frameworks for such study. The particular francophone and lusophone comparison engaged with here is also important in terms of examining the social, historical and cultural influences acting upon and represented in films from different regions, despite the fact that films from both francophone and lusophone Africa – and feature films in particular – receive a large portion of their funding from France (as is evident looking at the countries of production for each of the films in the corpus outlined above).

One issue with this model arises when considering the spoken language used in the films in this study, the terms ‘francophone’ and ‘lusophone’ become questionable. None of the ‘francophone’ films are predominantly in French, but use Bambara, Lingala, Wolof, Swedish, and Tamasheq, as well as some French, to name but a few of the languages.⁶ Two of the lusophone African films are in Portuguese, but the third, Flora Gomes’ *A República di Mininus* (The Children’s Republic), is mostly in English, with some Crioulo (evident in the title). To use the terms ‘francophone’ and ‘lusophone’ on the basis of the language used in these films, then, is problematic. Kenneth Harrow suggests that the way around this language problem is to use these terms in the sense of ‘convey[ing] a geographical region rather than a linguistic marker’ (2005: 165). Yet the films highlight problems even in this geographical use. Firstly, many of the films have transnational settings and/or are set completely or partly beyond Africa: *Alda e Maria, Por Aqui Tudo Bem* is set

⁶ As far as possible throughout the thesis, direct quotes from the films in languages other than French, Portuguese or English have been transcribed by native speakers (transcriptions of French, Portuguese and English dialogue are my own). For all direct quotes from the films, the English translations are from the film’s subtitles.

in Portugal;⁷ *Medan Vi Lever* in Sweden; *Des Étoiles* traverses Senegal, Italy, and the USA. Secondly, even when limiting the discussion to francophone Africa as a geographical region, this carries the risk of either excluding or subsuming certain modern-day nations, such as The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, which are closely tied – through geographical location, ethnic groups, languages, cultures and patterns of migration – to much of what is referred to as francophone West Africa.

Guinea-Bissau provides a particularly interesting example of this. It is a country which was colonised by Portugal, but which exists in a francophone swathe of West Africa, and which is today a member state of both the *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa* (CPLP) and *La Francophonie*. An example of how this history and cultural difference can be erased is evident in the most readily available DVD version of the film *Po Di Sangui* (1996) directed by Flora Gomes. The film, distributed by the *Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie*, is prefaced by an introduction in French, which states the aim of giving visibility to rarely viewed African films. In this introduction, Guinea-Bissau appears on a map of Africa highlighted as a francophone African country and the film itself is dubbed into French, so apart from the retention of the original title, there is very little indication that the film was originally in Kriol. To a viewer with little knowledge of African colonial history, it could seem as though Guinea-Bissau had in fact been a French colony.

Another reason to account for colonial history is that some of the filmmakers whose films are included in the corpus, notably Gomes in Guinea-Bissau and Licínio Azevedo in Mozambique, have been involved in African cinema from the very start, lived through wars of independence and subsequent civil wars, and contributed to the very foundations of cinema in their respective countries. Their personal history, connected to this collective history, still exerts a strong influence on their work today. A key difference in the colonial histories of the francophone and lusophone worlds is that nearly all of francophone Africa had declared independence by 1960. In the francophone world, the 1950s and '60s were two intense decades in the development of decolonial thought, notably the Négritude movement (two of the most influential works of this movement, Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme* and Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs*, were published in 1955 and 1961 respectively) and the construction of independent nation-states, in which cinema played a vital role, as discussed above. The lusophone African nations, on the other hand, remained as Portuguese colonies until 1975. Independence here was only achieved through violent and deeply destructive colonial wars, which sent Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau spiralling into civil wars after independence, the aftershocks of

⁷ Henceforth *Alda e Maria*.

which are still being felt today. This history reverberates in the lusophone films included in the corpus.

This is not to say that lusophone Africa did not participate in the wider decolonial movements of the 1950s and '60s; quite the opposite. Lisbon, through its *Casas do Império*,⁸ provided, like Paris, an unwitting training ground for future independence leaders and facilitated the development of decolonial thought and transnational collaboration. It was after studying in Lisbon that the Bissau-Guinean anti-colonial leader, Amílcar Cabral, founded the first united independence parties – the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde in 1956, and, with Agostinho Neto, Angola's MPLA in 1957. In 1961, FRELIMO (hereafter Frelimo) was formed in Mozambique.⁹ Across lusophone Africa, it was a long and violent struggle for independence, and it was one in which Frelimo, in particular, saw the potential of film as a revolutionary, anti-colonial tool.

Frelimo's engagement with film began by inviting foreign filmmakers sympathetic to the liberation struggle to film documentaries and, in 1975, the same year that independence was declared, Mozambique's *Instituto Nacional de Cinema* (INC). Frelimo had the aim, still wildly ambitious even by today's standards of African film production, of setting up film production units on Mozambican soil, rather than outsourcing production to Europe. This aim was, quite incredibly, achieved by 1978. Films on 16 and 35mm were being shot, edited, processed and screened, all in Mozambique. In 1978, Ruy Guerra, best-known as a founder of Brazil's *Cinema Novo* movement, became the head of the INC, at the same time as Jean Rouch and Jean-Luc Godard arrived in Mozambique to try out experimental film and television projects in a country where a film industry was just being born, with strong ideas about subverting Hollywood production values and narratives – and with French funding to do so. There were strong political reasons on France's part for doing this: Diawara writes that 'France wanted to establish friendly relationships with Mozambique. [It] did not want to be called a neo-colonialist country in the same manner that it had been labelled in many Francophone countries' (1992: 97). However, France did not avoid criticism for neo-colonial practice in Mozambique either, and neither Rouch nor Godard stayed for very long. The INC remained committed to a national cinema, creating a project called *Kuxa Kanema* (The Birth of Cinema). Also in 1978, Licínio Azevedo, another Brazilian filmmaker, arrived in Mozambique via Guinea-Bissau, to help develop the INC. It was at

⁸ Segregated accommodation provided for lusophone African students at Portuguese universities.

⁹ PAIGC: Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde). MPLA: Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola). FRELIMO: Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Liberation Front of Mozambique). FRELIMO is regularly written in lowercase as Frelimo nowadays, and this stylisation is employed here for ease of reading, as the name appears on numerous occasions throughout the thesis.

this time that one of the key breakthroughs was made in maintaining a national Mozambican cinema: video. As Azevedo explains: ‘começamos a usar o vídeo antes [...] da maior parte da África, principalmente da África francófona [...] procuramos fazer filmes eficientes com muito pouco dinheiro’ (2017, section 6, para.3) [we started to use video before [...] most of Africa, especially francophone Africa [...] we sought to make efficient films with very little money]. This means that there was already a pre-digital shift in film technologies in Mozambique, linked to the development of a national cinema.

This brief example of cinematic history from Mozambique shows not only some of the ways in which France has exerted, or at least, tried to exert, an influence in the cinema of lusophone, as well as francophone Africa, but it also shows some of the differences between the development of francophone and lusophone African cinemas. It also demonstrates the ways in which film technologies can be used as tools of resistance and of decolonisation. Bearing all of this in mind, this thesis applies the terms ‘francophone’ and ‘lusophone’ with recognition of their historical and colonial implications, and of the ways in which postcolonial trajectories of power continue to operate, while considering alternative networks of borders and motion apparent in the films.

There are therefore compelling reasons to consider contemporary francophone and lusophone African films as part of what Lúcia Nagib terms ‘polycentric world cinema’ (2011: 1), allowing for different global interactions, exchanges and influences, which Mozambique’s cinema, as just one example, emphatically demonstrates. The films analysed here cannot help but be transnational: the directors, actors, storylines and film production are all products of various transnational confluences. Rather than flattening this transnationalism into abstract globalisation or unhelpful universalism, however, there is a focus on the *translocal* specificity of each of the films, and the ways in which the experiences of borders and bodily motion play out in each. This approach will open up myriad spaces beyond the ‘phantasmic French space’ (Cottenet-Hage, 2004: 121). Many of these spaces, discussed in depth in Chapter Two, have their own haunting potential and sensory density, most concentrated in the interaction of body and space, and it is in such dense spaces that a ‘de-linking’ from Western epistemologies (Mignolo, 2011) can occur. This approach foregrounds the ‘mobile association’ (Walcott, 2014: 104) of bodies and space - and of humans with one another. France no longer being the centre of African cinema is a key starting point in the formation of a decoloniality of being and, as demonstrated throughout the chapters, engaging local specificity and sensory density of the films is a productive avenue of analysis.

The digital revolution in African cinema

Some in-roads have already been made in re-thinking African cinema. In tandem with the advance of the digital age in African cinema, there was increasing frustration with the limitations of thematic and taxonomic approaches to its analysis. In his book *Postcolonial African Cinema* (2007), Kenneth Harrow wrote:

It is time for a revolution in African film criticism. A revolution against the old, tired formulas deployed in justification of filmmaking practices that have not substantially changed in forty years. Time for new voices, a new paradigm, a new view – a new Aristotle to invent the poetics we need for today (Harrow, 2007: xi).¹⁰

Following this call to arms, Harrow propounded two approaches over numerous texts. The first, in *Postcolonial African Cinema*, was a psychoanalytic re-evaluation of canonical African films, drawing upon Lacan and Žižek. The second (2013) was an exploration of cinema he terms, somewhat controversially, 'trash': the proliferation of popular Nollywood films, and some neo-realist films, dealing with 'déchets humains': the everyday 'low' culture of urban life. Both approaches have attracted their share of lively criticism; the first because the original theories were trying to overcome the problems of applying psychoanalytic theory to African films in the first place, and criticisms of psychoanalytic theory have been raised repeatedly by numerous scholars including Teshome Gabriel (1989), Keyan Tomaselli (1995) and Martial Frindéthié (2009). Tomaselli (2009) does, however, find merit in Harrow's considered application of Lacanian psychoanalysis in this particular text. The second issue was the designation of certain films, particularly those set in African urban centres, as trash. It was not, however, a condemnation of Nollywood, or of neo-realist films, but rather an attempt to approach African cinema from the ground up, rather than from the traditional scholarly heights. Whatever else it has done, Harrow's incitement to scholarly revolution certainly promoted a good deal of discussion and debate and, certainly, he was not alone in thinking it was time for a re-evaluation African film scholarship.

Due, in large part, to the digital revolution in film, which has both opened up Fespaco and sparked anxieties about its future, the parameters of film analysis are being rethought and a re-evaluation is indeed taking place. In his 2010 book, *African Film: New Forms and Aesthetics*, Diawara is far less concerned with establishing distinct themes and differences from the West and is more interested in differences in cinematic language between individual directors and in examining

¹⁰ The mention of Aristotle is a nod to the film *Aristotle's Plot* (1996), directed by the Cameroonian director, Jean-Pierre Bekolo, often referred to as the *enfant terrible* of African cinema. The film, featuring two characters called Cinema and Cineaste, is an allegorical, playful and critical exploration of the tensions in African cinema in the mid-nineties.

the changing and diverse conditions of production. A year later, Alexie Tcheuyap published *Postnational African Cinemas* (2011), which advocates a focus on aesthetics and accounts for popular films such as comedies, crime dramas and dance films, instead of just the intellectual, political films. Such work demonstrates a reconsideration of the films deemed suitable for serious critical study, and the overcoming of some of the long-held binaries.

Film, which, after all, only exists because of technological innovation, has, as Lúcia Nagib and Anne Jerslev point out, 'never ceased to be defined as hybrid, reasons ranging from its power to emulate pre-existing art forms to its mixed supports' (2014: xix). Such hybridity and intermediality means that it is a somewhat unstable art form which has provoked much anxiety throughout its history regarding how to define it, and has led to the frequent and repeated assertions of its death. Gaudreault and Marion (2013) frame the repeated death of cinema in terms of identity crises, which can be applied to the situation in which Fespaco now finds itself: the 1,000 or so submissions of 2017 mark a diversification, albeit a reluctant one, of a traditionally francophone-dominated festival defined by socio-political *auteur* films.

In fact, it is harder than ever to easily separate 'high' and 'low' culture; the distinctions are no longer so clear-cut between the video-film of Angola and Mozambique, as well as of Nollywood, and the 35mm features of the *auteurs*. The films shown at Fespaco in 2017 represented some of that diversity, with Nollywood-inspired dramas and Angolan telenovelas featuring in the programme. Therefore, to continue to call certain types of films 'Fespaco films' (Harrow, 2010) is a label which might not retain its original meaning for very much longer. The claim of lowering quality can seem somewhat elitist, however, given that films made with video technologies, such as in Mozambique, and especially in Nollywood, have been hugely popular, more easily accessible, and have migrated fluidly to digital platforms. It has also given young, would-be filmmakers far more opportunities. Becoming skilled with a camera, learning film editing and screenplay is no longer limited to those who have the means to travel abroad and study in Paris or Moscow. It does not mean that every person now learning filmmaking will be submitting feature films to festivals, but it will allow for the professional development of film directors across the continent, trained on the continent, with new perspectives on African cinema.

The 'Nollywoodisation' of Fespaco, so abhorred by some influential critics and classically-trained filmmakers at the 2017 festival – notably including Olivier Barlet (2017) and Ouédraogo (quoted in Claude, 2017) – is not only due to the appearance of identifiably Nollywood films in competition at the festival, but also films which combine a range of influences, from the classical *auteur* mode to the Nollywood style. Of the films in this corpus, *Frontières* demonstrates most saliently the melding of these aesthetic and production modes: Vincent Bouchard notes the 'slapstick-esque

plot and dialogue' (2019: 14) in a film with some sublime aesthetics and an ethical commitment to on-location shooting (discussed in Chapter One). However, as Bouchard (2019) notes, these aesthetic and narrative choices firstly allowed Traoré to make the film on the budget she had, and secondly, enabled the film to reach a wider audience than traditional Fespaco films often achieve. Bouchard argues that the success of such films does not mean we should give up on film schools and proper training for aspiring filmmakers, but rather, appreciate the convergence of models that respond to practical needs.

Director Alain Gomis, whose film *Félicité* won the *Étalon de Yennenga* (the top prize) at Fespaco 2017, has argued that 'Digital is much better suited to Africa. Europe adapted to digital technologies, but in Africa, it was immediate' (interview with Gomis, 2017, appendix I).¹¹ He discusses the ways in which African cities and homes have been transformed with the digital revolution, such as homes which never had any sort of telephone suddenly had three smartphones, and that technological innovation was now coming directly from Africa. In terms of the impact on cinema, he said: 'it is allowing us to imagine, to restructure, to advance African cinema' (Interview with Gomis, 2017, appendix I). This is not to unproblematically celebrate the digital format: the digital age is hugely complex, and the neutrality of its tools is highly questionable. However, it has changed the possibilities for African cinema enormously, and has led to new hybridities, new ways of working, and new aesthetic and narrative considerations, all of which call for a different approach to African film scholarship.

Embodiment and physicality in the digital age

There are real differences to consider in the response to the incursion of digital technology and the reduction in the use of analogue film in the African context compared to the European and US contexts. One of the major points of contention, especially in the US and Europe, about the move from film reels to digital technologies concerns the loss of film's materiality (see, for example, Cherchi Usai, 2001) and the predicted loss of the physicality of the theatrical experience (Moore, 2017). Like many other material crafts, film evokes strong nostalgic and emotional responses, such as Steve McQueen discussing film's humanity (Alexander and Blakely, 2014). Digital, in its conversion of light into numerical data, can seem much colder, much less human.

According to Kim Knowles, material film is becoming increasingly associated with the Slow Movement, which involves:

¹¹ The full interviews with Alain Gomis and Dani Kouyaté, in French, are included in the appendices. The translations of direct quotations used in the main thesis are my own.

the element of craftsmanship, an embracing of the artisanal, and a corresponding rejection of the speed of capitalist change. Like the slow food movement, slow (analog) cinema can be seen as part of a wider ethics of embodied interconnectedness and a claim for the importance of alternative modes of physical engagement and being in the world (Knowles, 2016, 151).

As Knowles points out, the perception of analogue film has changed in the digital age. In the 1920s, she explains, the then innovative, mechanical technologies of film were perceived as engendering a great sense of speed thanks to fast-paced editing that 'elicited feelings of excitement and exhilaration', whereas now, material film in the digital age is 'refram[ing] the exhilarated speeding body as the dissolving, suffering body' (2016: 150). This, along with numerous other studies of the tactile crafts making a comeback in this digital age of ephemeral, superfast, information and data (e.g. Margetts, 2010; Craig and Parkins, 2006), speaks to the human need for tactile experience, and to analogue film's propensity for eliciting physical, emotional and symbolic responses. Does this mean, then, that analogue film is inherently better suited to producing sensuous aesthetics and eliciting such responses than digital?

There are two main points in response to this question. The first is the purely practical consideration of how useful it is to think in these nostalgic terms in the African contexts this thesis is concerned with. This does not mean that filmmakers themselves are not nostalgic for analogue film (as we saw earlier in the comments about the digitisation of Fespaco), but the possibilities for its preservation simply do not exist in the same way, because film processing was almost always outsourced to a European centre. It is one thing to be a filmmaker in one of those European centres: Tacita Dean, a filmmaker, artist and activist for the preservation of analogue film in the UK, describes her experiences of working with analogue film in romantic terms: 'my relationship with the lab is an intimate one [...] I order countless prints each year [...] and when I make a new film I turn up at the lab and grade every colour in every scene' (2011: para.4). The Soho lab Dean refers to is both very accessible to her, and offers the appropriate conditions: environmental, technical and financial, to store film and produce prints. Compare this to Dani Kouyaté, a Burkinabé filmmaker, who reflects here on the same process of working with analogue film in West Africa:

Our laboratories were in France [...] I was making my films in African villages. It's hot there, and the film can burn. That means that as soon as you've filmed, you put the reel in a black box [...] and you tape it up really well, so that light can't get in, otherwise you won't have any images. [Then] you put it into an icebox, but before that you wrap it up in plastic. As quickly as you can, you send it to the airport in the capital [...] for it to get to the lab. Once it's there the lab will [...] quickly develop the film to see if there are images on it. This isn't to look at artistic aspects, it's just to see if there's an image on the film reel! [...] Once you've done all of that, you arrive in France, and at that point, you view the rushes. It's then that you discover any artistic flaws. You'll say: Damn it! [The actor] messed up there!

But it's far too late. So the arrival of digital technology is a revolution. It's a way for us to take control of things, to have total freedom in expressing ourselves (interview with Kouyaté, 2017, appendix II).

Digital technologies have permitted a certain democratisation of the industry, allowing more people than ever before to pick up a camera, enabling home-grown production houses to start up, and leading to greater plurality of African cinema in festivals and on screens.¹² Digital is not the panacea to the challenges of film production in Africa, but given the issues of access to film labs in the analogue era, and given the environmental conditions in which film needs to be kept compared to the reality of the environmental conditions and state of film storage facilities that filmmakers contend with, there is scant possibility of analogue film re-emerging as a small-scale craft, with independent labs opening for the processing and storage of such film, as is happening in Europe (Knowles, 2016). So there is simply no recourse to relying on material film, whether for nostalgic pleasure, or for representing embodied subjectivities. Ways of adapting the digital tools now available in order to create the sense of physicality and connectedness it seems that humans crave in film, and to do that more and more with African-based production – that is the real task, and where creative energies and financial investment need to be focused.

The second point concerns the crux of the matter: the argument that material film is better suited by its very nature to creating a sense of physicality and sensuousness, and more able to perform a slowness that opposes the speed brought about by late capitalism and globalisation. Certainly, there is something in the material aspect of film as a craft which aligns with the slow movement and with human physicality. However, there is a real risk of conflating material film with embodied subjectivity and sensuous aesthetics on-screen. In their edited volume, *Slow Cinema*, Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge highlight a variety of digitally-made films which demonstrate aesthetics of slowness, and they equally link such films to the same 'sociocultural movement whose aim is to rescue extended temporal structures from the accelerated tempo of late capitalism' (2016: 3). Not only are digital films included in the slow movement here, but de Luca and Barradas Jorge argue that the proliferation of slow film is, in fact, 'inextricably connected to the arrival of digital production [...] as the relatively inexpensive and flexible digital equipment offers the ability to record much longer stretches of time' (2016: 10-11). This is a view echoed by Alain Gomis, whose aesthetics could certainly be considered 'slow': he states that 'digital allows me to do very, very long takes [...] to do takes of 12 minutes, to shoot in bars, or on the street' (interview with Gomis, Appendix I). Not every film analysed here would be considered

¹² For example, Apolline Traoré has her own production company, Les Films Selmon, based in Ouagadougou, a co-producer of *Frontières*. These types of small director-owned production companies are one way of increasing African film production on African soil.

under the 'slow cinema' umbrella, but there is a strong connection between the sensibilities of slow cinema and the physicality of the human body, as demonstrated by Jacques Rancière, (2016), de Luca (2014), and Nagib (2011), among others. All the films in this corpus demonstrate sensitive engagement with physicality, relating to the experience and movement of the body, and with ways of representing and eliciting the sense of the material, the touchable, with film that itself is no longer material.

Certainly, digital technologies have helped to facilitate both the representation of movement and the movement of people and filmic products when it comes to the production of the films in this corpus. Alain Gomis' film *Félicité*, for example, simply would not exist without such technologies: the inspiration for the film came from the discovery of online music videos by the Kinshasa-based group Kasai AllStars, before Gomis had a storyline, or had even been to Kinshasa. These technologies also aid in the narrativisation and representation of transnational stories: films including Apolline Traoré's *Frontières*, Dyana Gaye's *Des Étoiles* and Dani Kouyaté's *Medan Vi Lever* use the flexibility of digital cameras to shoot and edit in multiple, transnational, locations; Moussa Touré's *La Pirogue* features lengthy scenes at sea which were shot on location on the St Louis River in Senegal, the portability and ease of digital cameras making such scenes possible. In these films, digital technologies actively contribute to a sense of motion and bodily engagement with the world.

Importantly, there is little evidence that, outside of some of the experimental film that Knowles (2016) discusses (in which the spectator's attention is drawn to the material presence of the film being used), there is much of a difference in experience for film viewers. There are analogue films which are fast-paced and which do not tap into embodied subjectivity in a strong way, and there are digital films which are slow and deeply connected to the physical and material. Indeed, the differences between analogue and digital in film are much more apparent to those involved in making the film than they are to the average viewer. It is immediately apparent to a reader whether a book is paper or digital; it is much less obvious to a viewer whether a film is digital or not. Given the first point, that there is simply little practical way in Africa's digital age to continue using material film, and since it seems that both analogue and digital films can engage in different ways with slow, sensuous aesthetics, then an enquiry into the embodiment and sensuous aesthetics of digital film seems pertinent. Film, even in the digital age, is very much more than a set of data – it still engages on a deep human level.

The Body as Method

It is striking that, as the digital, virtual age took off in the late 90s and early 2000s, there was, as noted by Kathleen Canning (1999), a 'bodily turn' in numerous cultural studies and arts disciplines. This stood in contrast to the body-mind dualism being explored in the rapidly developing digital, online world, based on the idea of 'bodily transcendence' (Gunkel, 1998). It would become known as 'digital dualism' (Jurgenson, 2011): the seeming ability to live a virtual life, a data-driven existence, quite separate to one's physical, bodily life. This echoes the mind-body dualism that dominated psychoanalytic and cognitive film theories (see, for example, Bordwell, 1985; Metz, 1982; Wollen, 1969), especially in the assertion of voyeuristic distance maintained between the spectator and screen. Whether in film or online, the concept of mind-body dualism seems to contradict lived experience, so it is perhaps no surprise that the body has become such a widespread and productive point of enquiry in the digital age.

There are, however, challenges to overcome in using the body as method in the analysis of digital African films. Firstly, the widespread and diverse symbolic and metaphorical use of bodies that has arisen from employing the body as a methodological tool in a wide range of disciplines risks obscuring specificities of particular studies or superficial treatment of the body. Canning observed that, often, 'the symbolic body remains immaterial/dematerialised, as it grows increasingly difficult to conceive of social relations in terms of associations between bodies as specific loci of experience or identity formation' (1999: 501). This has a particular resonance in postcolonial studies, where the bodies of coloniser and colonised stand in for a number of very weighty, very different concepts, including gender and state. In the introduction to *Bodies in Contact*, for example, an edited volume proposing a 'rethinking of colonial encounters in world history', Tony Ballantyne and Anne Burton explain their rationale: 'Why focus on bodies as a means of accessing the colonial encounters in world history? Quite simply, we are seeking a way to dramatize how, why, and under what conditions women and gender can be made visible in world history' (2005: 4). Here, there is a problematic conflation of 'women' with 'gender' and 'women and gender' with the body. Other essays in the volume, as they go on to say, 'use the body as a metaphor for citizenship and the nation' (2005: 5), another collapsing of vast and complex terms. These 'bodies', then, are explicitly symbolic and dematerialised.

Understanding the relation between body, gender and state is important, something that becomes apparent in the Chapter One of this thesis, and an avoidance of conflating these terms is necessary. Anne McClintock's influential book, *Imperial Leather* (1995) did a great deal to advance the importance of the body within postcolonial studies and to highlight the problematic gender relations which characterised empires, but crucially, she rematerialises bodies and

demonstrates very specific bodily traumas, fetishes and experiences in colonial systems. Under the structural violence of colonialism, black bodies, and especially black female bodies, were objectified, fetishised and violated. This violence was enacted both on individual corporeal levels and on symbolic levels – and the two influenced each other. Film had a particular role to play in this. As discussed earlier, policies on film and visual culture such as the Laval Decree in the French colonies and the dictates of the *Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional* (National Propaganda Institution) in Portugal and its colonies, effectively barred Africans from having any involvement in filmmaking and, particularly in the case of Portugal, disseminated specific briefs concerning the promotion of the Empire and its *missão civilizadora* [“civilising” mission].¹³ Patrícia Vieira outlines a key trope of such colonial films: ‘women [...] are associated with the African soil and embody a link that binds the male protagonists to the land’ (2014: 72, my emphasis). European conventions of montage and framing, which Christian Metz refers to as the ‘scopic regime’ (1982: 61), allowed for a voyeuristic distancing between spectator and film. Film using these conventions was, thus, a uniquely well-suited medium to enable the exoticisation, fetishisation and objectification of Black female bodies through the maintenance of voyeuristic distance and offered visually striking symbolic/corporeal links which normalised violence.

Where the body has been explicitly considered within African film scholarship, it tends to be in critical engagement with psychoanalytic film theory and the focus has largely been on sexuality. This is partly in response to the exoticising gaze of colonial film: Tcheuyap points to aesthetic practices involving ‘trompe l’oeil and veiling strategies’ (2005: 145) which mask bodies and frustrate spectatorial voyeurism. It is also a demonstration of cultural differences when it comes to the cinematic representation of sexuality: ‘sexuality is usually expressed subtly through humour, aesthetics, and natural ways of being’ (M’Baye, 2011). However, sexuality is another collapsing of the body to mean something very different again to women, gender, nation, or citizenship. It can also tie the body in film to psychoanalytic interpretations. Elsewhere, Olivier Barlet has outlined different body tropes, such as ‘the dancing body’ and ‘the sensual body’ in African cinema (2011: 142), but only in terms of general ‘trends’. Evidently, much deeper theorisation and much greater nuancing of bodies in African films is required. The method proposed here is a phenomenological method, based on the dialogue between Merleau-Ponty and Fanon, which can account for the ways in which bodies move and engage with the world, feel and express pain and alienation, and relate to one another.

¹³ The Portuguese concept of colonialism as a “civilising” mission was linked to Portuguese exceptionalism and the rhetoric of Portugal as a benevolent coloniser, whilst being underpinned by systematic violence. See Victor Barros (2013) for more on this.

Phenomenology of the body, and the film phenomenology which derives from it, provides a different perspective on the body entirely than the symbolic uses of the body outlined above, and grounds its understanding of the body in corporeal, lived experience. Film phenomenology was advanced most notably in the work of Sobchack in the 1990s and early 2000s – at the height of the more general ‘bodily turn’. She drew upon the phenomenology of the body set out by Merleau-Ponty in the 1940s. A significant contribution of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology was in foregrounding the importance of embodied experience, rather than the search for an absolute truth. This allowed for different narratives, different interpretations, and different truths of the world to be created and exist in the world at the same time; a challenge to traditional, universalist epistemology of Western thought. ‘The phenomenological world’, Merleau-Ponty writes, ‘is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but like art, the act of bringing truth into being’ (1962: xx). Merleau-Ponty argues that our being-in-the-world is, by definition, an act of constant creation and changing of truth: knowing and being are inseparable from one another.

Sobchack drew on these concepts ‘to make explicit the phenomenon of signification in the cinema as it is lived through and embodied in an enworlded subject of vision’ (1992: 27), which is to say that the film, filmmaker, and film spectator all engage in an ‘intrasubjective and intersubjective exchange’ (1992: 13). The idea that not only could spectators take up an active subjective position when watching a film, engaging with it and transforming it based on the experience they bring to it, and experiencing the film in a wholly corporeal way, but also that films themselves could be active in making meaning at the time they were being watched required a real conceptual leap. The accepted cognitive and psychoanalytic theories of ‘classical’ cinema, which had dominated for the previous few decades, relied upon the idea of a fixed set of structuralist, semiotic codes, transmitted through conventions of montage and framing, cerebrally received by a somewhat passive spectator: ‘a monologic [engagement] between a viewing subject and a viewed object’ (Sobchack, 1992: 23). Even Gilles Deleuze, whose *Cinéma 1* and *2* (1983 and 1985 respectively) have been taken up enthusiastically by film phenomenologists, did not think of his work as phenomenological, rejecting the notion of ‘*la perception naturelle*’ in favour of ‘*la perception objective*’ (Montebello, 2008: 18). That is to say, Deleuze understood cinematic signification in terms of signs and images, which did not correspond to the act of perception as a bringing-into-being. Sobchack, however, saw no real contradiction between Deleuze’s philosophy and phenomenology, arguing that allowing for a condition of perception does not entail denying cinematic signification, but rather proposes that the film is a subject *as well as* an object.

The temporality and spatiality inscribed in film by its movement is what sets it apart from photography – and which introduces contingency and subjectivity. A photograph, Sobchack explains, can be ‘controlled, contained [and] materially possessed’ (1992: 63) while film’s movement means that it cannot be. Here, there is an important link to be drawn, as Sobchack does, between Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the lived-body experiencing, making meaning and becoming through movement and interaction in the world, and the quality that film has which allows it make meaning and to *become* through its movement and interaction with the world:

The spectator cannot control or contain a film’s always emerging and ephemeral flow and rhythm or materially possess its animated experience [...] for both ourselves and the cinema, intentionality (the correlational structure of consciousness) inflected in existence is also always a mobile structure, inscribing itself in the world as the agency and movement of the *lived-body* (Sobchack, 1992: 63).

Film, then, seems like a uniquely well-suited medium and art form for presenting, representing, expressing and engaging with lived-bodies moving and becoming in the world, and phenomenology provides insights that can be very productive for questioning and analysing bodies in filmic motion, as well as for exploring how filmic bodies themselves move.

This has renewed and urgent relevance in the digital age, when not only is the issue of borders and migration – the social motion of lived-bodies across geo- and socio-political boundaries - a pressing and divisive global political issue, but film, in its digital form, is also being reconceived in terms of migration. Digital film (the film product itself) is no longer a material reel, or even a physical disc, but a set of ephemeral, highly mobile data. Since all of the films in this corpus are festival films, several without distribution deals, access to some of them exists only in this ephemeral, digital form, via online links, and, in this form, can disappear easily and without warning. According to film conservator Nicola Mazzanti, ‘digital preservation requires constant, regular migrations from one storage medium to another: Data tapes and hard disks are relatively short-lived, and the technologies that support them evolve constantly and obsolesce’ (2015: para.17). Preserving digital film, then, is not about keeping film in an inanimate state, such as for analogue film stored in chilled vaults, but keeping it in constant motion. Movement, it seems, is the very essence of being, for both human bodies and films (this issue of migration, relating to both people and films, is discussed in depth in Chapters One and Four respectively).

Following Sobchack, phenomenology as a method for film analysis was quickly recognised and taken up by a number of scholars as a way of engaging productively with a variety of non-dominant cinemas, including, feminist and ‘intercultural’ cinemas, most notably by Laura U. Marks (2000). This is perhaps unsurprising, since, with the notion of lived-bodies constantly *becoming* and interacting, there is no longer the paradox of trying to speak with a language that

either abides by the fixed (male normative, Western) rules of classical cinema that impose a cognitive, and voyeuristic, distance between spectator and screen, or makes little narrative sense (as in Laura Mulvey's (1975) provocative call for a mode of feminist cinema that would deny spectatorial enjoyment and inhibit identification processes).

Due to the multiplicity, interaction and interconnected relationships between different bodies in relation to film, however, it is easier than it might appear to confuse bodily subjects, and it is therefore important to orient film analysis in relation to these bodily subjects and clarify which are the primary focus. Film phenomenology, until recently, has been more broadly concerned with the spectator as an embodied subject than with any other body (Barker, 2010; Sobchack, 2004; Marks, 2000, Shaviro, 1993). This was important for developing the concept of an active and intersubjective relationality between spectator and film, and as an embodied subjective position, that of the spectator being the one that the majority of scholars and film viewers evidently have the most concrete, experiential access to. However, more recently, the concern has been raised that debates focusing on phenomenological spectatorship risk treating the cinematic text – and the bodies within it – in a cursory, almost abstract way. This is an important point, given that one of the most radical and significant findings of Sobchack's original contribution to film phenomenology (1992) was to position the film itself as a perceptive and expressive body. There has, therefore, been a move towards what Nagib (2011) and Tiago de Luca (2014) respectively term 'ethics of realism' and 'realism of the senses'. Both Nagib and de Luca raise questions about the usefulness of the focus on the subjective experience of the spectator. De Luca accepts as his starting point the concept of the embodied spectator, but 'claims no position in spectatorship debates' (2014: 9), while Nagib argues for a need to 'move beyond spectatorship discussions which endlessly rehearse the active-passive binary' (2011: 9). Both shift the focus from the embodied spectator to the phenomenological realism of the filmic process itself, concentrating on the 'evidence of an actor's physical engagement with the cinematic event' (Nagib, 2011: 19) and the 'hyperbolic application of the long take, which promotes a sensuous viewing experience anchored in materiality and duration' (de Luca, 2014: 9). Central to this particular orientation of film phenomenology is the way in which both actors and directors engage with the phenomenologically real world: shooting on location; performing and capturing bodily movement in real time, connecting the body and its environment; eschewing the conventions of montage and the 'cinematic grammar' it creates in favour of long takes.

This kind of realism is not new in the digital age: it was advocated most fervently and famously by André Bazin (1987) and exemplified in Italian neorealism of the 1940s and in the ideology of Third Cinema, which developed in Latin America in the 1960s and '70s, both of which were

influential and instructive in the development of francophone and lusophone African cinemas. However, embodied subjectivities were given little consideration: Third Cinema in particular, drawing upon the socially-committed mores of Italian neorealism, paid no particular attention to the body; the role of film was to transmit a call to political action to spectators, engaging them on the level of the mind. If actors were used, as in neorealism, they were mostly non-professional, and shooting would involve large amounts of improvisation and spontaneity in order to demonstrate a commitment to presenting, rather than representing, reality. It was an ideological approach to film, in which sensory modes of expression and communication were of little relevance. In the context of the African film theory discussed earlier (that which sprung from, and relates to, the socio-political values of FEPACI and Fespaco) such realist aesthetics became key in the development of a critical framework for African cinema based in orality. In this context, realist techniques were not merely a way of getting a political call to action out into the world (as was the case with Third Cinema), but they demonstrated an alternative cinematic language in which long takes and the framing of characters within the environment indicated a different way of being in the world and a different form of storytelling.

However, in the particular fusion of African oral traditions, Third Cinema political didacticism and French auteur cinema, which converged in both francophone and lusophone African filmmaking circles in the 1960s and '70s, under the direction of idealistic cinema projects by Jean Rouch and Jean-Luc Godard, led to the type of didactic, socially and morally responsible filmmaking exemplified by Sembène, in which the director was the all-powerful *griot*, speaking to and on behalf of his people. The body, if explicitly considered at all in African film scholarship, is thus not treated with the phenomenological engagement that Nagib and de Luca demonstrate. Rather, there is a tendency to confuse bodily subjects, treat actors as passive, and consider the directors as all-powerful in the animation and movement of the on-screen bodies, as this passage from Barlet demonstrates: 'Bodies *extricated themselves* from narrative figuration to prioritize their inscription in the quotidian, the representation of social space. Even today, African filmmakers opt [...] to *inscribe* [a character] in a broader body – that of public space and the community' (Barlet, 2011: 140. My emphasis). There is a confusion here over who is active (the somewhat abstracted body 'extracting itself' or the director 'inscribing it?'), but since the rest of the paragraph deals with the framing and cutting strategies of filmmakers to animate the bodies of their characters in particular ways, the bodies, briefly given subjectivity of their own, are rendered passive, animated only by the filmmaker.

This represents a contrast to the phenomenological reality outlined by de Luca (2014) and Nagib (2011), in which the actors' phenomenological presence and actions within scenes are of equal

importance to the filmmakers' direction, composition and framing of their bodies. Particularly notable in Nagib's work is her inclusion of a film from francophone Africa: Idrissa Ouédraogo's *Yaaba* (1989), which, in her analysis, is framed as part of a 'polycentric world cinema' (2011: 1) which adheres to realist ethics and aesthetics. This changes the dynamics of how African cinema might be viewed and theorised, since *Yaaba* is not considered here in terms of its authenticity to 'African culture' (something Ouédraogo himself deplored, once interjecting at an African film conference: 'stop winding people up, saying some are rural, classifying them. Analyse a film for itself if you like!' (2001: 122)). Rather the bodies of the actors within the film, connected intimately and politically with space and place, emerges as the key point of analysis.

Merleau-Ponty views the connection between body and space as profound and transformative: space is not 'empty' or a passive backdrop to movement: 'I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them' (1962: 140). This understanding of space, time and the body is a productive one to explore in relation to the films in this corpus, as demonstrated throughout the chapters to follow. However, given some of the difficulties with the 'body as method' approaches outlined above, and the assumptions of universalism in Merleau-Ponty's work, there is the risk of eviscerating a phenomenological method of the body of any real meaning if treated as an 'any body, anywhere' concept. Weate (2001) has pointed out, criticisms of universalism and a repression of human difference have been levelled at phenomenology on numerous occasions. It is, therefore, important at this juncture to delineate a particular phenomenological method related to the films in this corpus, which accounts for difference in terms of the agency of being-in-the-world and the assumption of the freedom of movement as essential to the bodily schema set out by Merleau-Ponty. It will be demonstrated how such a method can contribute to a decoloniality of being. Here, Fanon's engagement with phenomenology comes to the fore.

Fanon and Phenomenology

Fanon's questioning of phenomenology has been much overlooked by phenomenologists, and even by some Fanonists: David Macey, for example, writes that 'Fanon is not a terribly sophisticated phenomenologist' (1999: 10). However, Weate, discussing Fanon's contributions to the field, counters: 'I am not sure whether sophistication ought to be a virtue of this discipline' and argues that Fanon provides a profound critique of phenomenology (2000: 170). Engagement with Jean-Paul Sartre may be the most obvious phenomenological influence in Fanon's work, something which has been studied particularly in relation to his writings on violence,¹⁴ but it is

¹⁴ Sartre wrote the foreword to *Les damnés de la terre* (1961).

his interrogation of Merleau-Ponty's work, especially evident in a chapter of *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) entitled 'l'expérience vécue du Noir' that is the focus here.¹⁵ It is in this chapter that Fanon mounts a challenge to some of the most basic tenets of phenomenology by calling into question the bodily schema so central to Merleau-Ponty's theory (underpinned by assumptions of knowledge of the body and bodily agency), arguing against its presumed universality. Fanon writes: 'in the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema [...] assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumble[s], its place taken by a racial epidermal schema (1986: 110-12). Fanon's relationship with his bodily schema, when subjected to encounters with white people and Parisian society-at-large, is one of painful negation and alienation.

It seems logical that describing the painful process of rupture of the bodily schema should cause a rupture in the foundations of phenomenology. It lays bare the privileged and culturally specific assumptions made in the apparently universal concept of 'being-in-the-world', demonstrating that some bodies do not have the same rights to *be* as others. Weate recognises that this is problematic for phenomenology, but argues that these problems 'are not fatal to its future' and that 'an encounter with phenomenology, particularly the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is needed today in order to re-establish a relation between lived experience and thought' (2001: 170). Fanon's encounter with Merleau-Ponty took place some 70 years ago, but it is as relevant today as it ever was, and provides an articulation of difference which reshapes our understanding of the bodily schema – specifically, demonstrating its fragility in its relation with others.

Fanon's personal exploration of phenomenology, which takes place within the painful reality of a white society where racial difference and colonialist mentalities persist, leads to a complete breakdown of his sense of self. Weate writes that '*The Lived Experience of the Black* operates as a non-linear narrative, a scrambled descent into hell' (2001: 172). This 'descent into hell' is precipitated by the apparently banal act of a child, who, when walking past Fanon on a train, says to his mother: 'Look, a Negro!' (1986: 111). Fanon's first reaction is one of amusement, but then the child says: 'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!' (112). It is at this point that Fanon's bodily schema collapses, replaced by the racial-epidermal schema. Amusement dissipates and pain dominates. The child's insistence on defining Fanon negatively based purely on his skin colour, and the associated expression of fear, reverberates with memories of other microaggressions, of

¹⁵ In Charles Markmann's translation of *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1986), 'l'expérience vécue du Noir' is translated as 'The Fact of Blackness', while Weate (2001) uses 'The Lived Experience of the Black', pointing out the significance of 'lived experience'. Fanon, following Merleau-Ponty, is precisely arguing against 'fact' as epistemological and ontological certainty in the elaboration of bodily and racial-epidermal schemas.

the numerous ways in which this society denigrates him. Unable to act with bodily agency, unable to establish his relation with the world as Merleau-Ponty envisages it, Fanon describes the painful experience of the rupture of a bodily schema in visceral terms: 'an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood' (112), and the destructive emotions that result: 'Shame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea' (116). It is a brutal, vivid account of a process that Kristin Zeiler terms *excorporation*: the painful experience of 'how one's lived body breaks in the encounter with others and how this makes one unable *not* to attend to certain beliefs and norms about one's own lived body' (2013: 70, original emphasis). If one instance of excorporation requires painful attention to part of the bodily schema that was previously an unconscious, seamless part of the self, such as Fanon's attention to his skin when the child says: 'Look, a Negro', then repeated or continuous excorporation, Zeiler argues, leads to 'bodily alienation', evident in Fanon's allusions to paralysis and incineration.

A state of bodily alienation seems like a dark and desperate place. Indeed, Fanon describes himself at one point as 'locked into the infernal circle' (116). However, it is from such a place that a new way of being can be established through a process of reincorporation. Zeiler terms this 'embodied resistance', noting that 'in order to be able to criticize beliefs and norms about sexed or racialized embodiment, we need to become reflectively aware of them. Such a critique is what excorporation makes possible' (2013: 80). 'L'expérience vécue du Noir' is an exercise in just such reflective awareness, criticizing a society that views itself as tolerant and enlightened, illuminating the undertones of racism which define it.

Lived experience, then, is not necessarily a positive being-in-the-world. It can mean navigating zones of non-being and dealing with the messy, painful processes of excorporation, alienation and embodied resistance. Fanon does not outright reject Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology: indeed, he draws upon it a great deal to explain his relation to the world. Rather, he adds nuance to it. Merleau-Ponty emphasises bodily agency in the world: 'my body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my 'symbolic' or 'objectifying' function' and it 'inhabits' or 'combines with' (therefore qualitatively altering) space and time (1962: 140). What Fanon demonstrates is that in cases of racialised excorporation, symbolic and objectifying functions obliterate the bodily schema. It no longer understands its world. Having tried to rationalise the world and finding that 'no agreement was possible on the level of reason' (123), he turns to irrationality: poetry, rhythm, emotion. It is a painful, violent process: 'Blood! Blood!... Birth! Ecstasy of becoming! (125), but he works to *reincorporate* his bodily schema in a new form, one more profoundly connected with the world: 'the arteries of all the world, convulsed, torn away, uprooted, have turned toward me and fed me' (125). He draws a distinction between the Black

world and the White: We are in the world. And long live the couple, Man and Earth! (127). He calls it a magical substitution that the White man cannot understand because 'he wants it for himself alone [...] an acquisitive relation is established between the world and him' (128). Here, with the process of reincorporation, Fanon's body once again 'has its world' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 140). The difference is that where Merleau-Ponty sees 'indeterminate horizons which contain other points of view' (1962: 140) in free and easy harmony, for Fanon, those other points of view dominate, reject, and obliterate him, so that he is forced to remake the world for himself.

'L'expérience vécue du Noir' is a personal account situated in the specific context of 1950s Paris, but it seems that these experiences focused Fanon on the need to *act* in order to decolonise the mind and to reshape the world. This line of argument is developed in *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1961, in which he argues that violence, specifically, violent resistance, is the path to decolonisation. The first chapter of this book in particular, entitled 'On Violence', has been much debated and often hotly contested ever since the publication of Hannah Arendt's essay, 'Reflections on Violence', which criticises Fanon's work for its 'irresponsible' calls to violence and its 'rhetorical excesses' (1969: 8), adding that the particular problem with *The Wretched of the Earth* was not so much Fanon's own enthusiasm for violence – she recognises his stance regarding violence as troubled and ambivalent – but that of the students who eagerly took up the message of this first chapter without, she argues, ever reading beyond it. Reading the book as a whole, however, this chapter can be better understood as part of the painful process of excorporation, alienation, and embodied resistance. The key thing Fanon identifies in order to decolonise is bodily action. Colonialism, he argues, works hard to fossilise movement, to rupture bodily schemas, creating 'a motionless, Manicheistic world, a world of statues' (1963: 51). Fanon believes that the way to transform this world is through movement. He uses visceral, bodily language throughout the text – he repeatedly mentions muscles, brains, stomachs, and respiratory systems – to express how liberation can be achieved. Ultimately for Fanon, embodied resistance is violent resistance (1961: 59). However, he sees this as a necessary means to ending colonisation, and thus achieving reincorporation of bodily schemas which allow for freedom of movement and being, not as an ideal state of being.

Fanon's engagement with phenomenology, particularly in the ways he opens up discussions about experiences of excorporation, alienation and embodied resistance, is highly relevant to the films in this corpus, all of which deal with just such painful ruptures of bodily schemas and the ways in which resistance and reincorporation can be enacted. However, reading Fanon's work in the light of the digital age of the 21st century requires reflective awareness of how Fanon's work has been received and used in the years and decades following publication, and of how the world

has changed. Firstly, the promise of borderlessness ushered in by the digital, globalised age has been countered with increasingly extreme forms of nationalism and struggles for domination of particular regions, as well as borders which are more heavily policed and guarded. Secondly, as these films show, Fanon's dream of a free world liberated through violent struggle has not been achieved: rather, such violence, long after supposed independence, continues to damage and traumatise people, perpetuating the process of excorporation, so that neither reincorporation nor decoloniality is ever fully realised. Of all the films in the corpus, this is most explicitly portrayed in the film *Virgem Margarida*, in which the Mozambican independence movement turned ruling party, Frelimo, which believed wholeheartedly in the concept of violent resistance, redirects that violence towards its own citizens after independence. Yet all of the films explore this postcolonial disillusionment in various guises of neocolonialism, jihadism, the daily struggle to survive, the repetition of racial epidermal schemas experienced when migrating, or attempting to migrate, to Europe, and familial violence and re-traumatisation.

Towards a decoloniality of being

Adam Shatz, who also notes Fanon's own deep ambivalence and cognitive dissonance about violence, particularly relating to the FLN in Algeria, writes that 'the utopian dimensions of Fanon's writing have not aged well [...] the dream of liberation from Europe has been supplanted by the dream of emigration to Europe, where refugees and their children now fight for acceptance rather than independence' (2017: sect.6, para.3). Yet he argues that much of what Fanon wrote remains highly relevant:

The boundaries that separate the West from the rest, and from its internal others, have been redrawn since his death, but they have not disappeared [...] The tragedy of Fanon's 'impossible life', as Memmi called it, [was] that his vision of freedom and solidarity lost out to the narrower affiliations of nation, tribe and sect. And that tragedy is not his alone (Shatz (2017: sect.6, para.3).

These sorts of questions, about how borders have been redrawn and are policed and controlled in the postcolonial era, and concerning the disillusionment that has arisen since decolonisation, are significant in the films. Four of the films - *Des Etoiles*, *La Pirogue*, *Alda e Maria*, and *Medan Vi Lever* - all concern the dream and reality of emigration from West Africa to Europe, whilst *Frontières*, *Félicité*, *A República di Mininus*, *Virgem Margarida* and *Timbuktu* all deal with the realities of life in post-independent African states, and all represent different bordering processes and violent encounters. None of these films, however, is prepared to accept the 'tragedy' of the impositions of such borders, nor the supremacy of increasingly insular national, tribal and identity politics. Instead, they look for new ways to address and overcome experiences of excorporation and alienation through new forms of embodied resistance, which do not rely on

violence: on the other side of independence struggles, violence is understood as deeply scarring and traumatising. Rather, the hope is to resist oppression, and to find new ways to reincorporate bodily schemas, and to relate to others in a positive, reciprocal way. The argument advanced in this thesis is that, rather than an understanding of embodied resistance as armed struggle, the forms of embodied resistance represented in the films is based on what Zeiler terms the 'continuous creation of human existence' (2013: 81). The continuous creation of one's own existence – the self - is highly dependent on relation to others. It is this dynamic of human interconnection and shared creation of the world which re-engages with the sort of agentive being-in-the-world Merleau Ponty (1962) describes, and which is productive in terms of a decoloniality of being.

This approach draws upon Walter Mignolo's 'border thinking' (2011) and Nelson Maldonado-Torres' 'coloniality of being' (2010). Mignolo offers the concept of border thinking as a way of 'delinking from [...] territorial and imperial epistemology that invented and established [...] categories and rankings [of people]' (2011: 274). He argues, along similar lines to Merleau-Ponty's being-in-the-world, that there is no universal truth, merely a vested interest on the part of imperialist projects in the 'suppression of the senses and the body, and of its geo-historical location' as a way of endowing their own, regionally-based narratives with the appearance of universalism, and thus implying an ontological reality of superiority and inferiority. Border thinking refutes these assumptions and instead advocates 'anchoring a politics of knowledge that is both ingrained in the body and in local histories. That is thinking *geo- and body-politically*' (2011: 274, my emphasis). This situates bodies within specific geographical, political and socio-historical contexts and flows.

Border thinking was developed along explicitly phenomenological lines by Nelson Maldonado-Torres, in a concept he calls 'the coloniality of being' (2010).¹⁶ Coloniality, he explains, is not the same thing as colonialism, but 'coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism [...] coloniality survives colonialism' (2010: 97). To develop a phenomenology of coloniality, and indeed of decolonisation, Maldonado-Torres draws critically upon Heidegger and his concept of *Dasein*, an abstract, but grounded, 'being', which can only find resolution to 'projecting its ownmost possibilities in death' (2010: 104). Maldonado-Torres argues that 'racialized subjects are constituted in different ways [...] death is not so much an individualizing feature as a constitutive feature of their reality' (2010: 105), something which

¹⁶ The text of Mignolo's I am using is a later essay, but he was writing about decoloniality and ideas related to 'border thinking', if not using that exact phrase, previously to that (see Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006).

Fanon recognised. Death, in this sense could be understood as the complete, painful alienation from one's body, as well as literal death, and to overcome this, Maldonado-Torres proposes a 'decoloniality of being' which is strongly based on human connection and reciprocity, and which recalls Merleau-Ponty's concept of the phenomenological world, which 'is revealed where the paths of my experience intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears' (1962: xx).

Such an approach may seem overly idealistic in light of Fanon's critique of Merleau-Ponty; however, Maldonado-Torres draws upon the hope Fanon expresses. After all his disillusionment and difficulty in reincorporating his bodily schema, Fanon still hopes for a world of equal human interaction and relation. 'Superiority? Inferiority?' he asks, 'Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?' (1986: 231). Where a distinction may be drawn between Merleau-Ponty and a *decoloniality* of being is, firstly, in the experiences of excorporation and reincorporation – rupture, pain, and rebuilding – which accompanied decolonisation, and which remain embedded in decoloniality. This is expressed eloquently by Valentin Mudimbe, reflecting on the decolonisation of his homeland, then the Belgian Congo, as it transformed into the independent Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). He described the 'empty space' left behind, erasing evidence of the rupture which had precipitated the creation of the new state, but argued that 'the body which lives or survives as the transcript of the metamorphosis is that which still testifies to the break' (in Fraiture, 2013: 4). Secondly, present within a decoloniality of being is the explicit terms of the reciprocity of relation: as Mignolo (2011) notes, it must involve giving on the part of the white European lived-body as much as on the part of the black African lived-body. This involves making space for and engaging with the narratives, images and histories of those who have been historically silenced. In terms of the films examined in this thesis, haunted spaces, rich with the density of such narratives, images and histories, become evident through the processes of border thinking and the concept of decoloniality of being. Relying on the relation between body and space, and between individuals, density of space is realised through movement.

One salient example of this can be found in *Félicité*. Set in Kinshasa, DRC's capital, it is a film in which the central characters experience profound excorporation and bodily alienation. Alain Gomis, however, has an ethics of filmmaking based on seeking out deep connections with other people and spaces, and indeed treats the city of Kinshasa almost as another character, rather than the setting. He explained that this was an attempt to 'touch this thing, which is all the while in motion, to reveal a permanent aspect of it that belongs to all of us' (interview with Gomis, 2017, appendix I), a sentiment which very much recalls Fanon's words. It is by understanding the

movement and borders of this city, and how bodies inhabit and transform it, that a sense of reincorporation of bodily schema by individual characters is achieved. The representation of Kinshasa, as just one example from this corpus of films, attests to Mignolo's argument that border thinking means that 'we write with our bodies on the border' (2011: 277), shaping the space and meaning of a place or places through bodily acts of relation. In so doing, it may yet be possible to overcome the 'tragedy of Fanon's 'impossible life'' and move towards decolonialities of being which are more productive in a postcolonial, digital era.

Chapter synopses

Chapter 1. Bodies and Borders: Alienation and resistance in the context of migration

This opening chapter takes migration as its theme to explore in more depth some of the systems involved in controlling borders and the movement of people, and how such systems contribute to ongoing processes of expropriation and bodily alienation for many of those who migrate within or from Africa. It draws upon 'L'expérience vécue du noir' and W.E.B. Du Bois' Double Consciousness as a way of understanding how slavery as an extreme form of alienation, has echoes within modern migration. It analyses four films: *Alda e Maria*, looking at the ways in which Angolan sisters Alda and Maria try to survive in Lisbon, and the ways in which the city tries to expel, or eradicate, them; *La Pirogue*, which represents the journey of a group of migrants from Senegal and Guinea aboard a small fishing vessel on the way to Europe and the horror they encounter; *Des Étoiles*, which has interconnected stories of migration across three continents and highlights the indelible connection to the slave trade; and *Frontières*, which concerns migration within the ECOWAS zone of West Africa, a region of supposed free movement. It thus demonstrates the need for new decolonialities of being that take into account collective histories and memories, while enabling greater freedoms in the future.

Chapter 2. Bodies as Sites of Resistance: Absence, materiality, and decoloniality of being

Collective histories and memories as a basis for the development of a decoloniality of being form the analytical focus for the second chapter. Here, concepts of haunting (Derrida, 2006; Gordon, 1997) come into dialogue with slow cinema concepts relating to sensory density, materiality and physicality to demonstrate how the films establish haunted or 'dense' spaces beyond the visual, relying on bodily resonance with the spectator. Opening with a close scene analysis of *La Pirogue*, which exemplifies the interaction of these concepts in a productive way for developing a decoloniality of being, the chapter then analyses a further three films: *A República di Mininus*, *Félicité*, and *Timbuktu*, drawing out dense sites where there is an interplay between presence and absence, and connection between body and land, finding in those spaces, a way for decolonialities of being to be articulated.

Chapter 3. Bodies in pain: The limitations of violence as a strategy of resistance

Having established the basis for decoloniality of being in the previous chapter, the third chapter questions the role of violence in decoloniality. It engages with Fanon's essay on violence, presented in *The Wretched of the Earth*, as well as interpretations of both his understanding of

violence as a liberating force and his psychiatric work, where the violence of the coloniser proved deeply damaging to the coherence of bodily schemas for individuals. These perspectives on violence are then considered in the close analysis of three of the films: *Medan Vi Lever*, *Alda e Maria*, and *Virgem Margarida*. With the postcolonial perspectives of these films, it is argued that violence fails to establish a lasting decoloniality of being, and highlights the far more ambivalent and destructive situations of violence represented in the films. In the comparative analysis of the films, this chapter also demonstrates the importance of sensory density, materiality and bodily resonance as filmic techniques, showing that where and how such techniques are used can contribute to or conversely, pose a barrier to the establishment of a decoloniality of being.

Chapter 4. Bodies in Other Places: Intermediality and acts of resistance

The first three chapters focus on the diegetic world of each film; this final chapter opens up the scope of discussion to explore the intermedial connections and transformations of three of the films: *Timbuktu*, *Félicité*, and *Medan Vi Lever*. Situating these films in their wider, digital contexts of production and dissemination, this chapter demonstrates how the films themselves move across and reshape borders. Like human bodies, these filmic bodies are fragile in motion, but it is in their motion and transformation of different media that greater spectatorial engagement and bodily resonance is achieved and allows the films to contribute to acts of resistance in meaningful ways, such as the musical resistance to the Ansar Dine regime in Mali staged in *Timbuktu*. It is argued that through such intermedial connections, particularly between film and music video, decoloniality is enacted through distinctly filmic means, based on a reciprocal politics of giving.

Chapter One

Bodies and Borders

Alienation and resistance in the context of migration

Introduction

In the introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon encapsulates the concepts of excorporation, alienation and embodied resistance when he discusses a zone of non-being: 'there is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born' (1986: 10). It is from a state of alienation, in which the bodily schema has been so completely broken that the individual no longer thinks of their body as belonging to them, a precarious position between life and death, that resistance can take root and emerge. Implied here - and discussed more explicitly in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) - is a link between body and specific, localised land and, conversely, the way in which the contours of non-being are drawn where bodily engagement with land is refused. In her discussion of geopolitics in Fanon's work, Stephanie Clare demonstrates this fundamental connection between life and land, and points out how the ocean, specifically the 'Middle Passage' of the Atlantic Ocean 'becomes a non-place [...] a zone of violent suspension' (2013: 74), marked by the trauma of slavery and a brutal break between body and land. This oceanic zone of non-being is a productive starting point for this chapter, which explores zones of alienation and non-being in relation to narratives of migration within four of the films: *Alda e Maria*, *La Pirogue*, *Des Étoiles*, and *Frontières*.

The first three films all involve migration across the Atlantic Ocean. *Des Étoiles* deals explicitly with this Middle Passage and the vestiges of slavery which haunt that trajectory between Africa and the Americas, tying this into a network of cross-Atlantic migrations and patterns of modern migration. *La Pirogue*, meanwhile, recalls the trauma of the Middle Passage in a different way, locating memories of it on the rickety boat of a group of West Africans attempting to migrate to Europe, who find themselves in a similar zone of 'violent suspension' (Clare, 2013: 74). The ocean occupies less screen-time in *Alda e Maria*, but the liminal space of Lisbon's dockyards, where land meets sea, creates for the protagonists a distinct zone of non-being, informed by the legacy of Portuguese colonialism. Finally, *Frontières* takes us on a long, land-based journey within West Africa, departing from one point of the Atlantic Ocean in Dakar and eventually reaching it again in Lagos. What all four films have in common is the way in which migration across these varied

routes can be a deeply alienating experience and one with very real implications for loss of life, when zones of non-being, informed by legacies of both slavery and colonialism, become 'death zones', something which Étienne Balibar discusses in particular relation to migration to Europe (2004: 128). This chapter firstly explores the representations of the routes and processes of migration and the way in which these migratory journeys enable alienation and even death. Secondly, it demonstrates, as Fanon suggests, that in these untethered spaces, resistance begins in the body.

Migration in the age of globalisation

Situations of migration are particularly precarious in terms of the potential for bodily alienation, given that 'migration necessarily means changes in our bodily context – both for those who migrate and for those living in the places people migrate to' (Yolandi Ribbens-Klein, 2020: 78). Fanon's experiences of alienation, discussed in the Introduction, resulted from his own migration from Martinique, where he was born, to France. Albert Memmi explains it was there that Fanon's 'impossible life' (1973: 9) began, because he identified as French growing up in a French colony, and the foundations of his bodily schema were torn away in the encounter with white, metropolitan France. Memmi argues that this provoked a deep and enduring bodily alienation, which was never resolved. Fanon's own story is one which emphatically demonstrates the difficulties of overcoming the state of bodily alienation and achieving healthy reincorporation of a bodily schema.

Merleau-Ponty, in describing the relation between body and space – 'a gearing of my body to the world [...] a general setting in which my body can co-exist with the world' (1962: 250) – takes for granted the agency involved in the bodily schema and a person's bodily interaction with the world. What Fanon shows is that such agency is all too easily taken away, and that there are systems in place which deny, or attempt to deny, such positive co-existence between certain bodies and the world. In place of Merleau-Ponty's bodily schema, in his confrontation with metropolitan France, Fanon identified a schema based solely on skin (*schéma épidermique*), which eviscerated the body. His great hope was to overcome this state of non-being through embodied resistance, directed, in the first instance, towards liberation from colonialism (Fanon, 1961). The tragedy, as Shatz (2017) identifies, is that in the half century since Fanon's death, true liberation has not been achieved; borders have been reshaped but also reinforced. In an apparently postcolonial, globalised world, hierarchies of power based on colonial structures remain. Entrenched within these hierarchies is a system of 'necropolitics', that is, the power of sovereignty exercised in the 'right to kill, to allow to life, or to expose to death', which necessarily inflicts pain and instils terror, and which is inextricably linked with racism and slavery (Achille

Mbembe, 2003a: 12). Short of death, cycles of bodily alienation are perpetuated. Bodily alienation itself is a violent process: it involves stripping somebody of their unified sense of self; and in this context, it is a politically motivated, deliberate process.

Recognising the structures of necropolitics which continue to assert influence on the demarcation and enforcement of borders is vital. The idea that globalisation, bound up with the digital age in what Manuel Castells refers to as the 'information technology paradigm' (2010: 407), erases borders and allows for unconstrained movement, is seductive but dangerous. It is true, as Castells points out, that digital information technologies enable the flows of information, capital, products and people in unprecedented ways, and that the digital revolution has transformed 'space and time in the human experience' (2010: xxxi). Yet, in practice, this enabling of flows also dictates the direction of movement: who is free to cross borders and who must be contained by them. It therefore carries the power to dramatically alter the 'bodily contexts' of individuals and communities in profound and alienating ways.

The context of nation building in which Fanon developed his thought has thus shifted to one of cognitive dissonance, particularly in the West, between the 'promoting and privileging of the idea of an unproblematic global mobility and the [...] opportunities that globalisation holds' while simultaneously warning of 'the threat posed by the 'illegal alien' to the essential integrity of embattled national cultures' (Fran Cetti, 2012: 11). In the postcolonial era, particularly in Europe, the move away from nation-state power to that of transnational, globally mobile capital provokes anxieties about the borders of the nation and requires those borders to be reinforced against those considered as outsiders. Erhabor Idemudia and Klaus Boehnke (2020) demonstrate that the number of Africans migrating to Europe by informal routes reached a peak in 2015 which provoked extreme anxiety and the tightening of border controls and laws in many European nations. However, as Idemudia and Boehnke point out, the rates of intra-African migration are roughly double that of Africa-to-Europe migration (some 50% of international African migrants migrate within Africa, compared to 26% migrating to Europe). Such statistics do little to change the dominant narrative, however. Castells points to the 'global networks connecting major metropolitan regions' (2010: xxxii), which operate on the basis of seamless globalisation, but inherent within that is a politics of exclusion. As Christopher Foster puts it, 'mobility [...] is not a universal attribute of globalism but is reserved for those with resources and light skin, and above all, mobility is reserved *tout court* for capital' (2015: 88). These exclusionary dynamics lead to the imposition of borders, controls and containment for certain groups.

It is part of the 'tragedy' of Fanon's 'impossible life' (Shatz, 2017) that the dream of a truly liberated, decolonised Africa has still not been realised. Globalisation has shifted the dynamics,

but bordering processes imposed by European metropolises continue to dominate. Mbembe (2013) argues that Africa has become, for some, a place of transit, and that, for these people, globalisation does not represent freedom of movement, but rather border controls and containment camps. At their most extreme, processes of control and containment lead to death, and maintain the Atlantic Ocean as a zone of non-being. This is the geographical context which informs *Alda e Maria*, *La Pirogue* and *Des Etoiles*. To counter the necropolitics involved in migration to Europe, Mbembe argues that the challenge in this era of globalisation is 'for Africa to become its own centre [...] a vast regional space of circulation' (2013: 2). One initiative which set out to achieve this was the creation of the ECOWAS region (the Economic Community of West African States), where there is a single currency (the CFA franc) and, ostensibly, the free movement of people between its member states. The fourth film, *Frontières*, however, shows the extent of the challenge involved and the often violent bordering processes within the region, which have the potential to be just as alienating and as damaging.

Migration and gender

There is a further consideration in terms of the necropolitics of migration when gender is taken into account, and there have been calls in recent years to treat migration as a 'feminist issue' (UNFPA, 2018). Despite migration, particularly migration from Africa to Europe, being considered a largely male endeavour, women not only migrate, accounting for 48% of international migrants globally in 2020 (Migration Data Portal, 2021), but also face distinct risks. These include the risks of human trafficking and other forms of gender-based and sexual violence. While women account for a much lower percentage of those migrating on sea routes from Africa to Europe, Kate Dearden and Marta Sánchez Dionis (2018) suggest that women are at greater risk when crossing bodies of water (particularly the Mediterranean) due to a number of factors, including where women tend to be positioned within boats, that they are often travelling with children, and may have weaker swimming skills and/or more cumbersome clothing than men. They argue that 'a lack of reliable sex-disaggregated data perpetuates the invisibility of female migrant deaths' (2018: para.4). There are, then, distinct factors in terms of the zones of non-being, alienation and necropolitics that govern women's migratory journeys.

Of the four films in this chapter, *La Pirogue* demonstrates the intense masculinisation of certain routes and forms of migrating, and the discrimination women can face on those routes. It is set on the West African Atlantic Route (WAAR), which is a route between Senegal and the Canary Islands. According to the most recent data from the International Organization for Migration

(IOM) (2021), 97% of migrants on this route are men, and 1% are women.¹⁷ The film represents this heavily male-dominated environment aboard the pirogue: there is a sole female character, Nafy, who disguises herself as a man in order to get on. When she is first discovered, the fixer, Lansana, wants to throw her off, but is persuaded by the captain, Baye Laye, to let her stay, on the condition that she cooks all the meals for the group. Nafy is subject to the threat of sexual violence, and even of death, when some of the group blame her presence for the misfortune befalling them. Nafy is thus doubly alienated: there is already the alienation inherent in her status as a migrant travelling irregularly in abject conditions, but secondly is the alienation she experiences among this group of migrants; rather than solidarity, she is othered and dehumanised by the men. She does not, however, cede easily to victimhood, and her bodily presence on-screen in and of itself is an important example of embodied resistance that refuses to maintain the invisibility of women on this route. In all the other films, women are centred in the narratives. In these films women 'write with [their] bodies on the border' (Mignolo, 2011: 277) and thus connections between women's body, land, and borders are formed. These women are not destined to be invisible or left behind.

Embodied Resistance

How, from a zone of non-being, a place of such alienation, with death at its edges, is resistance embodied and enacted? Ultimately, both Fanon (1952) and Zeiler (2013) argue, it requires a 'questioning mode of existence' (Zeiler, 2013: 82) based on relationality, understanding of the other, and human exchange. It is this which allows for the reincorporation of the bodily schema in one, cohesive self to achieve the kind of agency and positive interaction with the world required by Merleau-Ponty's model (1962). However, as Fanon's own life suggests and as Zeiler points out, such a complete reincorporation is often a very difficult thing to achieve, and embodied resistance is a process of continual construction of identity. In the context of migration, where existential threat looms large, it begins simply with survival. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Fanon places emphasis on physiological functions of life: muscular action, respiration, heart beating, as the most fundamental form of embodied resistance. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, he writes: 'To live means to keep on existing. Every date is a victory [...] a victory felt as a triumph for life' (1963: 308). In all of the films in this chapter, survival is the most basic form of resistance enacted by the characters, and this allows for embodied resistance to be understood within a zone

¹⁷ More generally, women make up about 11-18% of irregular migrants arriving in Europe from Africa. The remaining 2% in the figures given for the WAAR are accounted for by minors (gender not specified).

of non-being, not simply as the triumph over it. These are still bodies in states of alienation and pain.

It is through the expression and representation of alienation and pain that embodied resistance as a process of contact and exchange becomes possible. Gladys Francis writes that 'the suffering body is more than a zone of passage; it is most importantly a zone of contact' and sets out a concept she calls 'corpomemorial tracing' (2015: 57) which brings together text, the body, and territory to 'generate cartographies of bodily pain and subversive agency that help de-commodify the body' (57).¹⁸ This comes into dialogue with the connection between body and land in Fanon's work that Clare (2013) identifies and which influenced Mignolo's (2011) border thinking. The process that Mignolo outlines anchors the body within a sociopolitical, geographical and historical context from where dominant paradigms and epistemology can be challenged. It therefore re-establishes the body in space and engages with ways of being and sensing that open up new points of contact and connection. To 'write with [...] bodies on the border' (2011: 277) then, is to stake a claim to existence connected to land; it is a 'body-political' stance which constitutes an act of resistance. It is a critical act in the context of migration represented in the films, where territory and borders are highly controlled and violent, and operate with a system of necropolitics that seeks to untether, alienate, control and obliterate certain bodies.

Embodied resistance does not just take place at the level of visual representation. There is another border to consider, that between the film and spectator. The concept of 'corpomemorial tracing' relies on an interaction between text and audience, or more specifically in this case, between the bodies on screen, the filmic 'body', and the body of the spectator. The filmic 'body' may not be readily evident in the digital age, but the analysis in this chapter advances the argument that through the aesthetics of the films, particularly in the use of embodied camerawork (for example the use of handheld digital cameras to achieve particular effects of bodily motion), in multisensory engagement, especially in auditory and haptic techniques, and in the editing, the human body is invoked and incorporated. It establishes the body beyond visual representation and gives bodily weight to digital ephemera. This creates a more immediate, sensory connection with the spectator's body, and, as will be demonstrated below, engages their ethical participation.

There has been much work done within film phenomenology on establishing the notion of reciprocity between the lived bodies of film and spectator (see, for example, Laine, 2017; Barks,

¹⁸ For Francis (2015), 'text' denotes the Caribbean literature of her analysis, but it is equally productive applied to filmic texts here.

2009; Sobchack, 2004) which Laine refers to as the 'active embodied entanglement of the spectator with the [film]' (2017: 10) and which provokes simultaneous feeling and thinking; affect and cognition. Laine argues that bodies in pain within film are particularly powerful in establishing the immediacy of this encounter. Similarly, Sobchack argues that an 'ethical stance' can be achieved based on the 'lived sense and feeling of the human body [...] as a material subject [...] that has the capacity to bleed and suffer and hurt for others because it can sense its own possibilities for suffering and pain' (2004: 178). It will be demonstrated here how the films themselves inscribe the body at this border, and thus facilitate the conditions for reciprocity and connection, and of ethical engagement based on both feeling and thinking.

Containment and Survival in *Alda e Maria*

Alda e Maria (2011), directed by Pocas Pascoal, is the only one of the four films discussed in this chapter which has a historical rather than contemporaneous focus; it is set in the early 1980s, shortly after the violent end of Portuguese colonialism in Africa. It focuses on two teenage sisters, Alda, aged 17, and Maria, a year younger, who have fled from their native Angola to Portugal to escape the war and are waiting for their mother to join them. They have no idea where their father is, or if he is even alive. In the representation of two black, Angolan girls in Lisbon, the film does not only represent a particular historical and sociocultural moment, but also reflects on continuities of globalisation and the ongoing legacies of colonialism which continue to inform state structures and border controls up to the present day. It gives these bodies presence and visibility within a European space that would rather continue to make them invisible.

The moment of the historical setting and the representation of these characters has particular significance in the Portuguese context, as the very bodily presence of Alda and Maria is a form of resistance and of making visible bodies that the Portuguese state would rather remain invisible, if not altogether eradicated. There is real complexity in Portugal's postcolonial narrative, involving a politics of forgetting surrounding the end of empire: Elsa Peralta describes it as a 'memorial vacuum left by the collapse of the Portuguese empire' (2019: 1). Much of the scholarly and cultural reclamation of this 'forgotten' period focuses on the experiences of the *retornados*, the half a million Portuguese settlers who had been living in Portugal's African colonies until the moment of revolution (see, for example, Peralta, 2019; Ana Cristina Mendes, 2017; Marilda Monteiro Flores, 2016). However, there remains a pervasive silence surrounding black African Immigrants (rather than returning white Portuguese settlers) : they are almost entirely missing from discussions of Portuguese immigration in the postcolonial era. This silence, masked and enforced by a narrative of Luso-tropicalism (the exceptionalism of Portugal as a particularly

tolerant, non-racist coloniser)¹⁹ creates ideal conditions for the existence of a necropolitical system. This is because, despite the official discourse, as Ricardo E. Ovalle-Bahamón explains, 'race and culture remained central in informing the construction of nationness' (2003: 156) as Portugal configured itself as a post-imperial state. For the majority of black Angolans, no matter their connections to Portugal, 'the exit to Europe option was nonexistent' (156), especially by any formal means. *Alda e Maria* is thus an important film for challenging the silencing and erasure of black bodies in Portugal - something which continues to create 'death zones' (Balibar, 2004: 128), and it is telling that the dominant images of Lisbon in the popular imagination, many of which glorify Empire while concealing slavery and the most brutal aspects of colonialism, are absent from the Lisbon of the film.

Indeed, less than ten minutes into the film, Alda and Maria find themselves expelled from the centre of Lisbon to its undesirable, peripheral industrial wastelands. Thomas Nail defines expulsion as the 'deprivation of social status' (2016: 35) as well as physical removal from a particular space. Both these markers of expulsion define Alda and Maria's situation, and with little in the way of the resources to survive. With their mother detained in Angola, they do not have the maternal protection and economic support that might otherwise shield them in this new environment; instead they are subject to violent alienation that is difficult to survive. Considering this in terms of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003), this is no accidental or unfortunate situation: it is the result of a systematic process enacted by the state. To maintain the illusion that colonialism is consigned to the past, 'largely benevolent, marginal [...] and without negative repercussions for the present' (Fatima El-Tayeb 2011, xxii), a narrative that the Portuguese state is invested heavily in, bodies such as Alda and Maria's must be expelled to the margins of society.

The sisters, having tried various options, end up in a dockyard. It is here, among the towering shipping containers and barbed wire fences that Pascoal ratchets up the tension, creating a scene that simultaneously incorporates and subverts horror and thriller narrative conventions. The position of the camera is such that it creates the feeling that Alda and Maria are being watched. The spectator sees them from behind a metal lattice as they walk through one of the narrow alleys and finds them again as they enter the dark interior of one of the containers, giving rise to the expectation that something or someone might be lurking in there (figure 1.1. below). The only soundtrack is the creaking of metal: a haunting sound. The suspense is momentarily reduced, but returns again when, having found and broken into a small dockworker's cabin, Alda and Maria are sleeping, intertwined on a narrow camp-bed. They are woken suddenly by a security guard's flashlight. Grabbing their belongings, they flee into the darkness, just as a storm breaks,

¹⁹ Luso-tropicalism is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three.

tremendous thunderclaps echoing around the containers. A passing train roars by, adding to the dense auditory confusion. The girls run through the dark alleys, the man in pursuit. Yet any expectations of an act of violence are subverted: there is a cut to a scene where dawn is breaking and the girls emerge from the dockyard onto a beach, breathing heavily, but with no sign of their pursuer. Somewhere, an alarm is sounding, but it seems unthreatening, distant. All the sounds, the spectator now realises, were just the ambient noises of a dockyard at night, and the terror of it fades with the arrival of morning.



Figure 1.1. *Alda e Maria* (2011: 00:11:57).

Avery Gordon posits that haunting is a way for “organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us [to] make their impact felt” (1997, 19). El-Tayeb employs Gordon’s work to discuss how “colonialism haunt[s] the presence of minorities of color in Europe” (2011, xxii). It is not, then, a single perpetrator that is really threatening the girls in the dockyard, though that may be more conventional, but the haunting remainders of colonialism and the violence and alienating potential such structures entail. Pascoal introduces a sense of trauma that, to use the terms employed by Alan Gibbs, is “insidious” rather than “punctual” (2014: 15). That is to say, the trauma the girls experience here is not the result of a solitary violent event or individual (punctual trauma), but of what Stef Craps has described as “collective, ongoing, everyday forms of traumatizing violence” (2015: 4).²⁰ This almost intangible violence, the aftershocks of colonialism, is what the girls encounter in the dockyard, more than any punctual, threat.

The use of a dockyard as the space in which remainders of colonial violence come to the fore is no accident. The significance of the dockyard in this context becomes apparent through an examination of the ways in which shipping containers are theorised and used by those migrating and those seeking to control migratory movement. David Harvey, discussing the concept of ‘containerization’, explains that it promotes the idea that “you can just ride across the surface [of the sea] in an unruffled way and that you can bring the world together in a unity of production and consumption” (2011). As he shows elsewhere (2014; 1989), the technologies of

²⁰ *Postcolonial Witnessing* by Stef Craps was originally published in 2012 and Gibbs makes reference to it. The second edition (2015) is the one cited here.

containerization enabled the mass, globalised production and consumption of fashion and goods from the 1960s onwards. Others have noted how containers function to eliminate boundaries between land and sea and offer new methods of control of the seas (Craig Martin 2011; Frank Broeze 2002). The dockyard, then, is an ambivalent, liminal space.

In this system of mass production and consumption, and of neo-imperialist control, bodies too become disposable objects. For those people who see shipping containers not as a way to freely skim across the globe's oceans, but as a last resort for migrating to Europe, the ones whose lives, according to necropolitical systems, are not worth anything, the dockyard becomes a graveyard: people have been found dead in shipping containers on failed migration attempts (see for example, Reuters, 2017). Even when it does not become a site of death, the dockyard acts as a border beyond which such 'disposable' people are not permitted to travel. Those who do survive the journey are routinely rounded up by port security and sent to detention centres – sometimes, these detention centres are formed from shipping containers. This is the case in Hungary, where a shipping container camp was opened in 2017, the explicit purpose of which, according to the Ministry of the Interior, is 'to prevent migrants with an unclear status from moving freely around the territory of the country and the European Union' (Pintér, 2017). A similar shipping container camp existed inside the Calais migrant camp in 2016. Sophie Watt describes the levels of securitisation, technological surveillance and physical containment that existed this site, arguing that it 'pushes state violence to a new level and reveals an unending cycle of identification and containment' (2020: 100). Shipping containers are thus used systematically at European borders to contain, control, and dehumanise. Dockyards are imbued with colonialism, tracing lines from imperialist seafaring to the necropolitics of modern migration. In short, bodies like Alda's and Maria's are not supposed to emerge from the dockyard once they have been contained there.

In the Portuguese context, containing bodies like Alda's and Maria's and rendering them invisible, is part of what maintains certain official narratives: that of Luso-tropicalism, and the glorification of the era of discoveries (such as the *Padrão dos Descobrimentos* monument in Lisbon). Such narratives and celebratory monuments form a key part of national identity and discourse. The Lisbon Alda and Maria navigate is a complete contrast to this, one of repressed memories and invisible bodies in terms of the official Portuguese narrative. To assert this alternative narrative is therefore to question and subvert the official narrative and is thus a powerful act of resistance.

Alda and Maria do emerge from the dockyard, onto a filthy beach, where the water lapping the shore is so polluted that it is impossible to wash in. Maria resigns herself to this fact, sitting down on the sand, but Alda, a quiet rage bubbling within her, marches back to her suitcase and takes off her top, using it to clean herself as best she can. The camera maintains a fixed position in wide

shot throughout and, as Alda pulls out a bright orange mini dress, this positioning and shot again give the impression that the girls are being watched. Alda dresses hurriedly, with quick, nervous looks around her. She tells Maria to help her zip it up. Though frightened, and still with threat hanging over them, Alda uses this change of clothes to write with her body at this liminal border. No great monument to the discoveries here, but two Angolan girls performing resistance through their mere presence and will to survive, presenting an alternative narrative of Portuguese coloniality and postcoloniality. Their bodies are young, vital, and capable of resisting the repeated expulsions of a system that would rather they did not exist. For all the horror tropes provided in the dockyard, they have survived. The necropolitical potential of their situation, and their alienation in Lisbon has been established, but they find, in those depths of suffering, ways of using their bodies to resist. As will be demonstrated, they engage in 'corpomemorial tracing' (Francis, 2015: 57) to establish a bodily presence within Lisbon.

Distanciation and ethical engagement

For much of the film, but particularly for the first 20 minutes or so, Alda and Maria are in almost constant motion, on foot and by boat, carrying the heavy bags containing everything they own. In her analyses of running in films, Nagib emphasises the use of the tracking shot to 'preserve spatiotemporal continuity [and] the link between character/actor and a particular land' (2011: 28-29). In the early scenes of *Alda e Maria* especially, despite the constant motion of the girls, Pascoal makes infrequent use of tracking shots. More notable in the sequence in the dockyard, and in the scenes prior to that, when the girls are wandering around the peripheries of Lisbon, trying desperately to find somewhere to stay, is the use of shots which start wide and allow the characters to approach the camera from a distance. The digital, handheld camera used here regularly takes up a position at the end of a passageway or street, capturing the girls first as distant figures in a wide shot, and they approach the camera until they are in close-up. This creates the dual effect of causing the spectator to focus on the girls' weary, unrelenting motion, and again creates the unsettling feeling that the girls are being watched: a sense of the uncanny created by these techniques of distanciation. Though mainly static in position, the handheld camera regularly shakes, and there are frequent cuts between the wide shots in front of the girls to shots taken from behind them, which show them continuing to walk away from the camera, and occasional, brief tracking shots which follow alongside them. This shaky, embodied movement of the camera and the editing of the shots causes the spectator to take up the point of view of the camera, engendering bodily resonance with the space, but refusing identification with the girls. The lack of tracking shots here emphasises the disconnection between body and land, the dislocation of these bodies, and the alienation they are experiencing.

Furthermore, given that the haunting in the dockyard is insidious and systemic, this identification of the spectator with the camera's point of view has a yet more powerful function. Craps (2015) writes about the biases in trauma theory in postcolonial contexts, which can, in fact, perpetuate ongoing subtle, structural racism, and explores how readers of trauma literature are often positioned vis-à-vis the text so that they respond 'by showing empathy and vicariously experiencing [the] trauma, a reaction which supposedly obviates any need for critical self-reflection regarding his or her own implication in ongoing practices of oppression and denial' (2015: 42). Instead, Craps advocates for trauma narratives in which 'the narrator speaks as an expert about his or her own experience, making political claims and actively intervening into power relations' (42). This prevents what E. Ann Kaplan refers to as 'empty empathy' (2005: 87) and instead demands critical reflection. In this context, the editing and digital camerawork in *Alda e Maria* becomes a tool of political engagement between the film and spectator, which provokes reflection on the very issues of structural racism and alienation discussed here. Pascoal makes explicit in interviews (e.g. with Sophie Torlotin, 2013) that this narrative, though fictional, is based on her own experiences of fleeing Angola as a teenager and struggling to survive in Europe. At times, the camera works to produce close bodily connection with the characters, as will be examined below, but in these sequences, distance is maintained to encourage critical thought.

Proximity and bodily resonance

As Laine (2017) suggests, bodily resonance between spectator and screen necessitates an active way of interacting with the film which includes both thinking and feeling, and the balance of cognition and affect shifts throughout this film, enabled by techniques of distancing at first, and then of proximity. Once the girls establish a place for themselves in an abandoned apartment, there is much greater sensuousness and proximity in the camera work, allowing the spectator to identify with the protagonists for the first time. Upon first entering the apartment, Maria is overwhelmed by exhaustion, anger and fear. Kicking some rubbish, she cries: "eu não quero ficar aqui! Eu não gosto disto!" (00:26:23) [I don't want to stay here! I don't like it!]. Alda pulls her sister close, wrapping her in a tight embrace. They end up intertwined on the floor, body pressed against body, so close that it is as if they are one, and fall asleep curled up together, without breaking their embrace, echoing the scene in the dockyard cabin. There is an abrupt cut in which the camera shifts by just a few inches to the right; the change in light and the sound of cicadas indicating that some hours have passed. (00:27:25). In low light and with a warm, natural palette, the camera pans back towards the girls, right to left, taking in some of the debris littering the room: a large sheet of crumpled packing paper, a paintbrush and a cloth, eliciting the textures of

these objects (figure 1.2 and 1.3 below).²¹ The low light and limited contrast and colour range somewhat inhibits normal vision, requiring greater attention, and attention particularly on shapes and textures.



Figure 1.3 (00:28:00) Alda and Maria waking.



Figure 1.2 (00:27:28). Panning across different textures.

Thus the panning across different, tactile surfaces back towards the sleeping bodies invokes Marks' concept of 'haptic visuality' (2000: 22). Instead, it invokes a multisensory understanding of cinema, which proposes that vision cannot be disassociated from the body's other senses, is particularly potent in the context of Marks' suggestion that in its haptic aspects, 'cinema is able to evoke the particularly hard-to-represent memories of people who move between cultures, by pointing beyond the limits of sight and sound' (2000, 129). This is suggestive of memories not contained within the audiovisual scope of the film, but operating on an affective level. Haptic vision, attuned by the camera panning across the discarded, highly textural objects in the apartment, is heightened when the camera reaches the sleeping bodies. The camera continues to pan across skin touching skin, intertwined limbs, which are animated by the girls' gradual waking (see figure 1.5 above). 'Corpomemorial tracing' (Francis 2015: 57) is evident in this sequence, as the bodies of Alda and Maria are inscribed with unvoiced memories and trauma, and simultaneously inscribe themselves within the space. Embodied resistance is created through their will to survive, and in their bodily presence within the apartment, and within Lisbon. A connection between body and land, absent in the dockyard, is established here, and through the aesthetics of touch, bodily resonance with the spectator is enhanced.

The concepts of 'haptic visuality' and 'corpomemorial tracing' come to the fore most strongly in a powerful scene towards the end of the film, which realises the full potential of the protagonists' agency and ability to possess both the space and their own bodies. In the scene in question, Carlos, with whom Maria has an uncertain romantic relationship, turns up at the apartment. In the bedroom, he tries repeatedly, and increasingly forcefully, to kiss her, but Maria is stony in her refusal, with closed body language, eyes down, turning her face away from him. Before we can

²¹ The two shots are presented here chronologically from right to left, as they are in the film. A similar technique (and in fact colour palette) is used in *Medan Vi Lever*, analysed in Chapter Three.

see what happens next, there is a cut to Alda, on the other side of the door, sorting the laundry. Along with Alda, we hear Maria's moans, which quickly become faster, rhythmic. We might assume that Carlos is raping her: her moans are impassive, quiet, not indicating any particular pleasure. Yet our attention shifts to Alda, who suddenly abandons the laundry and rushes to her sleeping bag, pulling a white sheet over herself, so that she is covered from head to toe. There is a close-up of her hand, which runs over the sheet where it covers her leg until she reaches her pelvis, once again engaging with the 'haptic visuality' that the spectator has already been attuned to. The sense of touch is already aroused, then, when Alda plunges her hand inside her jeans. The camera pans up to her face, and her own breath starts to quicken and grow more forceful, as Maria's breath, clearly audible from the other side of the wall, does the same. With a certain disjuncture between the audible and the visual – the camera remains steadfastly on Alda's face, which moves very little – it becomes difficult to tell whose breath is whose. Carlos' deeper moans can be heard only briefly: it is the relationship between the sisters, via their breathing, and the way in which Alda takes control of her own sexual pleasure that is emphasised. This is embodied resistance realised in a profound and sensuous way.

Some minutes later, Maria emerges and lies down on Alda's sleeping bag. Alda joins her, resting her head on Maria's stomach, and the girls discuss Maria's sexual experience. Despite Maria saying at first: "acho que não gosto fazer amor com ele" (01:19:38) [I don't think that I like having sex with him], it is clear that for Maria, it was a consenting, exploratory, and somewhat pleasurable act, that she had some power in – and that it was also not the first time. As Maria gives in to Alda's prying for information, she takes on a playful tone and the girls dissolve into laughter, and thus the potential threat of rape, violence and victimisation that arrived with Carlos into the apartment, is subverted.

This is an elliptical representation of sex and sexuality, not uncommon within African cinemas, as Olivier Barlet (2011), Babacar M'Baye (2011) and Alexie Tcheuyap (2005) all point out, and employs what Tcheuyap calls "trompe-l'oeil and veiling strategies [...] to move sex away from the screen" (2005: 145). However, in the case of *Alda e Maria*, this does not seem to be because sex is being treated as a taboo subject, but rather as a technique to refuse voyeurism. Barlet argues that 'the natural representation of sexuality and the inscription of desire in the quotidian overtly and subversively confront exotic and reductive projections concerning the black body' (2011: 142). This seems to be the case in this film: neither Alda's nor Maria's body is available to be the object of a voyeuristic gaze, therefore confronting and subverting the 'commodity racism and fetishism' that Anne McClintock (1995: 16) traces in colonial encounters. The veiling of their bodies, however, does not reduce the sensuality of the scene; quite the reverse. By engaging the sense of

touch, a mode of sexuality and sensuality is developed which is felt on and in the body, rather than seen, and in the characters' embodied performance of their sexual acts, it is they who are the agentive subjects of those acts, rather than their passive objects.

By combining aesthetic strategies of distancing and haptic proximity in this way, Pascoal intertwines deep, sensory affect and cognitive, critical thought, and allows both to play out in the body of the spectator. In the use of the camera to explore textures and sensorial bodies (here at least, it seems digital is equally capable as material film in communicating texture and physicality) in a way which refuses the voyeuristic gaze, 'haptic visibility' is attuned, which allows for the consideration of embodied, non-visual memories to come to the fore. Easy victimisation of the girls is subverted: Alda and Maria are humanised individuals, rather than symbolic tropes, which is essential for contesting the alienating narratives of migration.

Bodies at Sea in *La Pirogue*

Entre 2005 et 2010, attirés par les miroirs de l'occident, plus de 30 000 Africains de l'ouest ont entrepris de braver l'océan Atlantique à bord de simples pirogues. Plus de 5 000 d'entre eux y ont péri. Ce film est dédié à leur mémoire. [Between 2005 and 2010, attracted by the mirrors of the West, more than 30,000 West Africans braved the Atlantic Ocean on simple pirogues. More than 5,000 of them died en route. This film is dedicated to their memory] (*La Pirogue*, closing credits, 01:16:48).

Moussa Touré is something of a specialist when it comes to films with people in motion, traversing vast distances, but crammed together in small spaces. His debut feature film, *TGV* (1999), concerned a transnational journey from Dakar, Senegal to Conakry, Guinea, in a bus known as the TGV. His most recent film, *Bois d'ébène* (2016) is a docu-fiction about the slave trade, with the central section of the film set on a 19th century slave ship as it crosses the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic takes up even more of the screen time in *La Pirogue* (2012): for more than 50 minutes of a film that lasts a little over an hour, the vast ocean and the comparatively tiny wooden pirogue bobbing over the waves is the only setting. On board is a group, nearly all men, from Senegal and Guinea, all heading to Europe after running out of options at home. The film, as the words of the closing credits demonstrate, has a strong sense of purpose in representing and remembering bodies and lives that are all too easily dehumanised, alienated, and made to disappear.

Like *Alda e Maria*, through the film's aesthetics, there is a commitment to 'ethical engagement' (Craps, 2015: 124) which avoids vicarious victimhood, but the strategies for achieving this are different. Rather than initially creating distance, which makes the spectator conscious of watching the characters, as in *Alda e Maria*, here distance is almost entirely abolished at times, bringing the spectator into the thick of the human activity aboard the pirogue. This is achieved,

once again, through embodied digital camerawork, meaning that the frame moves with the swell of the waves. This is enhanced by shots which regularly pan slightly up and down, left and right, creating a constant sense of motion, and establishing a bodily connection between the spectator, the characters, as well as the pirogue and sea (they are almost characters in their own right). The connection between spectator, screen and characters is strengthened by the editing, which here prioritises fast cuts between close-ups of individual characters, medium shots of different groups, and establishing shots of the pirogue alone in the ocean that inspire awe: the film is shot in 2:35:1 aspect ratio, wider than standard widescreen, which increases the sense of vastness (figures 1.4 and 1.5 below). This editing sequence continues almost rhythmically through the entire length of the 50 minutes that the characters are on board the boat, so that the editing itself adds to the sense of marine motion, which is felt in the spectator's body, and deepens the spectator's engagement with the characters on board. On the level of aesthetics then, Touré establishes bodily connection based on a 'questioning mode of existence' (Zeiler, 2013: 82) and thus enacts embodied resistance on-screen: these are no longer people that can be made invisible.



Figure 1.4. *La Pirogue* (2012: 00:26:19). Medium shot.



Figure 1.5 (00:28:38). Establishing shot of the pirogue.

The inscription of bodily testimony is produced precisely from the combination of shots: together they work to produce collective testimony of WAAR migration. Space – though here removed from land – and bodies combine in these shots, creating intense bodily presence in the contained setting of the pirogue, and creating a visible, bodily representation of those who travel this route. Figure 1.6 above demonstrates a characteristic medium shot, in which the gaze of several of the characters connects directly with the camera, encouraging active engagement from the spectator, and again, as in *Alda e Maria*, refusing empty empathy. These characters demand to be seen. Such medium shots, in combination with close-ups of individual characters, thus have both a narrative and ethical function, where relations are drawn and engagement with people on both individual and collective levels demanded. Linguistic, cultural and ethnic differences are quickly established, with the Senegalese, Guineans and Peuls occupying different parts of the boat, but the close-ups function to develop relations between individuals, sometimes across these divisions, as well as with the spectator. The simplicity and contained nature of the single setting, and the sense of abandonment from the solid world that the sea and aesthetic motion provides, helps to implicate

the spectator within the affective relationships being forged between the characters. As in *Alda e Maria*, the shots in which there is intense focus on human bodies - expressive, responsive, and suffering bodies - contribute to the production of 'cartographies of bodily pain', which, Francis proposes, is a way 'to historicize a collective space of testimonial' through bodily performance (2015: 57-58). The characters in *La Pirogue* are quite literally at sea, removed from land, but in the cartographies they produce, their bodies are mapped, as Mignolo (2011) suggests, inscribed in the borders of liminal spaces.

Francis argues that 'movements, rhythms, and sensorial and tactile aesthetics also give opacity and conscientiously subversive subjectivities to the represented bodies in pain [which] disrupts the voyeuristic gaze and reconceives spectatorship' (2015: 58). In *La Pirogue*, through the techniques discussed above, the spectator is not invited to merely watch, but to deeply engage. Narratively as well as aesthetically, reciprocal exchange with the characters on-screen is encouraged, 'to feel the other', as Fanon puts it (1986: 231). The editing and narrative support and inform one another in building connections between the spectator and screen so that there is a sense of getting to know individuals on board. There are varied motivations among the group: the waters around Senegal have been overfished, leading to a loss of livelihood, some explain. Others have stars in their eyes, dreaming of careers in Milan or Paris as musicians or footballers. Another needs an artificial leg after losing his in a boating accident. This is explicit testimony woven into the narrative which forges connections between the spectator and individual characters, reinforcing the aesthetic strategies. Much as Francis (2015) suggests, these individual performances also function on a collective, historicising, testimonial level. Not all the characters on board the boat speak as a way of inscribing their testimony; indeed for many it is a bodily performance of pain. The packed bodies in the cramped space of the pirogue, at the mercy of the sea, recalls, in certain compositions of the frame, the bodies packed below the decks of the slave ships, which will be discussed below. This parallel becomes particularly evident when considered in light of Touré's follow-up film, *Bois d'ébène* (2016). Meaning is therefore created in both the narrative content of the sequence, and in the aesthetics of the film, recalling Laine's (2017) argument that there is reciprocity between bodily performance and the film's aesthetics.

Laine employs the term 'resonant aesthetics' (2017: 9) to sum up cinema's reciprocal, dialogical and affective capacities, in which spectators are figured as 'active, (co-)creative, sensuous agents' (9). To think of cinema as a truly bodily event necessitates going beyond the visual bodily performances and what the spectator *sees* to also consider the audio of this audiovisual media and how that interacts with the spectator's body. *La Pirogue* is exemplary in this regard, because the sounds and soundtrack it employs are profoundly resonant and interact with the spectator's

body. Once again, in the auditory sphere, it is possible to see how narrative and aesthetics are bound together in a multisensory, dialogic performance.

Heartbeats and Silence: Auditory Resonance

From the moment the pirogue sets sail from the Senegalese coast, the boat's motor, a low, whirring drone, is a constant part of the soundscape. Other sounds – voices, soundtrack, music – come and go, but the motor persists, uninterrupted, for a full 25 minutes of the film. It is a sound consigned to the background, soon tuned out because it is simply repetitive, unchanging. It is only really noticeable when it stops. The auditory void it leaves behind is a physical jolt, a sensory disruption, which creates a feeling of uncertainty. The mood of the characters suddenly changes, creating a palpable, bodily performance of that uncertainty. On this occasion, the problem is quickly solved by engaging the back-up motor and the mood becomes jubilant once again. Yet this sudden quiet, in which the lapping waves can be heard clearly for the first time, marks a turning point in the film, and the same auditory stability proves impossible to recover.

Just a few hours later, in narrative terms, and just a minute and a half later for the spectator, the auditory stability is overthrown completely with the arrival of a violent storm. This results in complete disorientation and sensory disruption for both characters and spectators, in a lengthy, unbroken 4-minute scene. The waves no longer lap gently, but roar, crashing over the sides of the pirogue and filling it with water. Constant lashing rain makes it difficult at times to see or hear exactly what is happening. Layered over this are the shouts, cries and prayers of the passengers. Dressed in green and yellow rain macs, it is now difficult to tell individuals apart, as many hands flail, ostensibly reaching for the tarpaulin to pull over the boat, but also appearing symbolically as a plea for mercy (figure 1.6 below). The motor is barely audible above the roaring of the storm. The editing is equally disorienting, cutting from shot to shot in a way which matches the dense auditory confusion. Midway through the scene, Kaba, the first mate, is knocked overboard while trying to secure a rope. Baye Laye, the captain, who until this point has maintained his composure, starts screaming Kaba's name. By the time we move to the next scene, where sunlight has returned, the violent sounds of the storm have ceased, and the characters are dealing with the aftermath, the spectator has witnessed the deaths of three of those on board, but, like the characters, has barely had time to register them.



Figure 1.6 (00:55:20).

Yet, as in *Alda e Maria*, empty empathy is not given much recourse here and, fitting with the moral purpose of the film, the deaths do not go unregistered. Kaba's death is registered in Baye Laye's immediate, vocal grief. Then, in this following scene, the sounds of the storm are replaced with an emotive, richly orchestrated piece of music, led by kora strings. A prayer is gently intoned, and the two remaining bodies, wrapped in sheets, are lifted overboard. The music continues as the group set about starting to empty water from the boat, and mourning those they have lost as they find the traces of their lives – papers, a crutch – which identify those lost. Then the music gives way to the ambient sounds of the water. People work in silence, filling or emptying buckets, or just sit in shock. The motor has been switched off. Time is given, through the interplay of multisensory aesthetics, to identify and remember those who died.

This, it turns out, is just the start of the swathe of death that the passengers are to suffer. Complete desperation sets in when, moments after Baye Laye restarts the motor, it starts to sputter and then gives out completely. Both Baye Laye and Lansana, the captain and the trip's overseer, who until this point have been the figures of authority, both shout, cry and physically lash out in desperation. This time, the spectator has a heightened awareness of the sound of the motor and its loss. This time, the sound of the motor is replaced almost immediately by a low, repeating bass note, that not only echoes the drone of the motor, but does so in a way which is cinematic shorthand for menace and threat, reminiscent as it is of the opening of the *Jaws* (1975) theme music. This low, bass note soon takes on a more distinctive, recognisable rhythm, one which cannot fail to resonate bodily with the spectator: it is the sound of a heart beating.

It is no accident that this rhythmic heartbeat, which resonates with and creates self-awareness of the spectator's own beating heart, introduces the film's final section, in which unrelenting death and increasing silence overwhelms. Like Pascoal in *Alda e Maria*, here, Touré plays with auditory convention, using the *Jaws*-like bass notes and heartbeat rhythm to produce a sound that deliberately conjures up horror themes, and in this case, ones distinctly related to the ocean. Again, these conventions are subverted: the horror of *La Pirogue* is not the punctual horror of an errant shark, but the insidious, structural horror of the systems that create the conditions to make

this type of voyage necessary for thousands upon thousands of people, and which condemns many of them to a horrifying death. The sound of the heartbeat is thus also an act of embodied resistance, transmitted from the filmic body to the spectator's body.

By the final scenes, the pirogue, once crowded with people, is increasingly empty. As daylight breaks after one quiet, lonely night, the camera pans across dead bodies lying in the water at the bottom of the pirogue. The dead outnumber the living, and the living continue to die. This is accompanied by a pervasive silence, broken only by the increased, incessant creaking of the fragile vessel, which itself seems to be in mourning for those lost, and by the lapping of the water, both inside and outside the boat. The few who remain are themselves on the edge of death, listless, sleeping for most of the time, barely able to speak. At one point, Abou, Baye Laye's younger, once-impetuous brother, the only member of the boat who still seems able to function to any degree, rouses Baye Laye, who struggles to sit up. 'Mor a plongé, Lansana est mort,' he tells him, 'certains des Guinéens et Hals Pulaars aussi' [Mor drowned, Lansana is dead, some of the Guineans and Peuls as well] (01:11:16- 01:11:23). There is nothing more to say.

Yet it is into this deathly silence, that voices come to the fore. First, relatively early on in this sequence (01:06:40), before the true scale of death is apparent, when desperation is just beginning to set in, the camera cuts between several close-ups of individual characters we have come to know, lingering on these shots whilst character voice-overs, rendered as thought, provide testimonials of hopes, reasons for travelling, and the current state of despair. Later, when there seems to be little voice left among any of the remaining passengers, perhaps the most evocative and affective scene of the film takes place (01:12:15). As night falls on another hopeless day, Abou starts to sing. Slowly, the others begin to join in. There is a wide shot of the pirogue, lost in darkness, barely visible. This shot seems to vibrate with the energy of the voices, however, and all attention is thus on the auditory, rather than the visual at this moment. They ask not to be forgotten; they call to their villages. They denounce the conditions they face in the simple search for a livelihood. It is a powerful example of embodied resistance born out of a zone of non-being in the sense Francis proposes: in their testimonies, these characters create 'cartographies of bodily pain' (2015: 57) which re-anchor them in space and provide a connection to their lands, much like the use of kora music and ritual for the first passengers who died. As Laine (2017) suggests, cognition is hard to disentangle from affect: the spectator is simultaneously caught up in the emotion of the raw voices and is called upon to actively listen to (or read through subtitles) the words being sung.

It is thus in its auditory sensibilities, entirely entangled with the visual, that *La Pirogue's* aesthetics are able to create bodily resonance with the spectator and enhance both cognitive and

affective engagement with the narrative. It is both because of the way the camera invokes a sense of movement and the way that the auditory resonates with bodily rhythms that the spectator is immersed in the narrative, only to have spectatorship disrupted and more critical, cognitive engagement activated, especially in connection with the links with slavery that continue to influence contemporary migration. Secondly, *La Pirogue* uses both narrative and audiovisual aesthetics together to enact embodied resistance from the depths of non-being, countering and making the spectator bear witness to the necropolitics of this migratory route. Simply by representing the bodies of individual humans, both of those who die and those who survive, *La Pirogue* demonstrates, through sensuous, bodily interaction with its spectators, that these bodies matter, these lives matter.

Multidirectional Motion in *Des Étoiles*

If the first two films in this chapter have demonstrated the realities of the camps, cordons and borders which form barriers to migration as highlighted by Mbembe, the third, Dyana Gaye's *Des Étoiles* (2013) explores some of the possibilities to do with recentring Africa in migration narratives, and of making it not only a regional space of migration, but also a dynamic space of immigration and emigration, a place where multidirectional, global paths cross. This is not to suggest that the film shies away from the realities often faced by Africans attempting to migrate – indeed it explores the difficulties involved in migration from Africa to Europe, as *Alda e Maria* and *La Pirogue* do, but this forms one of several intertwined narratives of migration. Unlike in *La Pirogue*, some of the characters do manage to cross borders and to find their place, to varying degrees, in new societies. The film also reflects on migratory trajectories to Africa, and how American and European citizens of African descent might also be able to find a place for themselves in Africa.

In the intertwining of characters, trajectories and histories, *Des Étoiles* invokes embodied resistance in the sense of relationality and exchange that Fanon appeals to at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), and which Zeiler (2013) argues is essential for overcoming alienation. Towards the very end of the film, Italian character Ada looks up at the night sky and says to her companion: 'Guarda il cielo. Se osserviamo una stella in particolare ci sembra sola. Ma non lo è ; ce ne sono un'infinita. Quello che ha senso è il disegno che formano insieme' [Look at the sky. If you observe a particular star, it seems to be alone. But it's not; there is an infinity. What makes sense is the design that they form together, one next to another] (*Des Étoiles*, 01:11:15).²² There is a wide shot of the night sky dotted with stars: a motif repeated throughout the film in its various

²² Italian transcription and translation by Valentina Caruso.

settings. She thus sums up the key message of the film, expressed in its narrative structure and rhythm. The first 30 minutes of *Des Étoiles* is a breathless traversal across continents and through local spaces, experienced through the bodily motion of three young characters on three different trajectories. Despite occupying and moving within geographically diverse and distant spaces, the characters and their trajectories are inextricably linked to one another, together forming a greater design. The three characters in question are Sophie, a young, married woman who has just arrived in Turin from Dakar, expecting to join her husband, Abdoulaye, who migrated there several months before. Abdoulaye, however, has left Turin for New York in the hope of finding work there. Sophie's cousin Thierno, meanwhile, is an aspiring pianist who has just left New York for Dakar with his mother to attend his father's funeral.

Like *La Pirogue*, *Des Étoiles* brings remnants and memories of the slave trade into the film's contemporary temporal setting through the film's aesthetics. Once again, the rhythm of the editing and auditory resonances of the film help to create multisensory points of contact, both between the narrative strands and with the spectator. In so doing, the film responds productively to Fanon's critique of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the bodily schema and the notion of looking at oneself through the eyes of the other. Fanon's thoughts on this relate closely to the concept, introduced by Du Bois, of 'double-consciousness'. Du Bois used the term with specific reference to African-Americans in the early 1900s, but the echoes of what he writes are clear in Fanon's work. What links them is the notion of only being able to look at oneself through the eyes of the other, and the tension that can exist in a body between states of alienation and resistance. Du Bois writes:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (1905: para.3).

While for Du Bois, double-consciousness is primarily focused on the experience of African-Americans in America, the concept has been applied and used in a wide variety of contexts, and thanks to Du Bois' own travels in Africa, it has inspired further thought on the interrelationality, or conversely, apparently insurmountable differences, between African-Americans and Africans, and the crises of identity that can sometimes emerge upon migration and contact.

The paradoxes that such migratory journeys and encounters can sometimes provoke led Paul Gilroy to ask: 'are the inescapable pluralities involved in the movements of black peoples, in Africa and in exile, ever to be synchronised?' (1993: 30). Gilroy's answer came in the establishment of an alternative framework for conceptualising modernity which he famously called the black

Atlantic, using the Atlantic space 'as one single, complex unit of analysis in [...] discussions of the modern world [...] to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective' (1993: 15). *Des Étoiles* is a film which embodies the 'fractal patterns of cultural and political exchange and transformation' (Gilroy, 1993: 15) that are one of the hallmarks of this framework: it mediates between such exchanges and transformations through its triangle of migratory narratives.

Île de Gorée and Double-Consciousness in African-American Migration

The relevance of Du Bois' African-American double-consciousness is especially evident in the narrative relations and transformations between Abdoulaye's interactions with African-Americans in New York, and Thierno's interactions with Africans in Dakar. Of note here is the way in which Du Bois' concept has been rethought in terms of African-American experiences in Africa. Tyler Parry, for example, offers a reconsideration of 'how 'double consciousness' resonates with those who engage in transatlantic tourism' (2018: 249), with particular reference to the Île de Gorée, an island just off the coast of Dakar which has strong symbolic and emotive associations with the slave trade. The island is the location for a key scene in *Des Étoiles*, which provides powerful links across time and space and offers a visual and bodily manifestation of double-consciousness at this charged site. The scene is a turning point in Thierno's narrative, as he struggles with his sense of identity and belonging in Dakar, in a place which, due to his close family links could be considered home, but culturally, is entirely foreign to him. He goes with his cousin Dior to visit Gorée, and afterwards, his sense of identification with his family and with Dakar is transformed.

Gorée gained huge prominence as a site of pilgrimage, particularly for African American visitors, thanks to the long conservation and curation of the site by Boubacar Joseph Ndiaye, who oversaw the *Maison des Esclaves*, and its transformation into a museum, from 1962 until his death in 2009. Ndiaye made it a custom to come out of his office at regular intervals and give a dramatic oral performance, recounting the horrors of the slave trade, perpetrated by successive European empires that had used Gorée and other Senegambian ports to transport slaves across the Atlantic. Since Ndiaye's death, the tradition of oral performance at the site has been continued by his successor, Eloi Coly. In the appeals for reconciliation that the performance includes, it brings the past into the present and demands action from listeners, much in the same way as the filmic narratives discussed here invite critical reflection as well as affective response. It is this dynamic of remembrance and reconciliation through oral performance that has made Gorée such a compelling place.

Gaye's decision to film on Gorée, and specifically at the *Maison des Esclaves*, thus creates a scene imbued with political, historical and spatiotemporal meaning. The voice of the orator is audible in the background, though no other dialogue is provided for context; instead, the significance of the location, and of Thierno's bodily presence there, is communicated through the visual aesthetics, in the framing and editing. Filming at this highly charged site, Gaye maintains a sense of phenomenological reality. The camera first tracks the characters, face-on, as they make their way from the boat to the *Maison des Esclaves*. Outside, the scene is naturally brightly lit. Then there is a cut to inside one of the main cells. The entire shot is black, apart from a narrow view of the sea in the centre of the shot, which just casts enough light to illuminate the door framing it. This is the evocative *Door of No Return*, where the enormity of the journey undertaken by slaves, and indeed of the enormity of the slave trade, hits home. The camera moves towards the door, then Thierno and Dior step into the frame, their bodies silhouetted against the view outside (figure 1.7 below). It is a striking shot which captures the essence of 'corpomemorial tracing' (Francis, 2015: 57) as these two bodies are imbued with history and testimony, and a deep connection is created between body and land. The next shot is a close up of their faces, once more illuminated by the sunlight, as they look out at the sea. No words are spoken; their expressions are hard to read. Before there is much time for the spectator to process the scene, there is an abrupt cut to Abdoulaye in New York, where he is being harassed for payment from the relative who arranged his travel.



Figure 1.7. *Des Étoiles* (2013: 01:01:38). Door of No Return.

As *La Pirogue* mediates between memories of slavery and contemporary migratory journeys, so too does the juxtaposition of scenes here: Thierno contemplates the trajectories of slavery and his own diasporic identity in relation to it, while Abdoulaye resists indentured labour in New York and the demands to pay for his passage. The echoes of slavery, left from the previous unfinished scene in the *Maison des Esclaves*, ring with new significance in contemporary New York. In Abdoulaye's narrative, there is some sense of history repeating itself; for Thierno, there is a strong feeling of the collapsing of time, space and identity, and there is an intrinsic connection made between the two seemingly disparate narratives and spaces.

Parry emphasises, and evidences from interviews with African-American tourists, that there is no singular African-American response to Gorée, or indeed to travels within the Senegambian region, noting that there is no homogenous diasporic experience with encounters in Senegambia. While some of his respondents 'were emotionally transformed and obtained an altered sense of self', for others it increased their sense of 'Americanness' and some degree of alienation from Africa, while yet others felt comfortable with the 'double-consciousness' of being African-American (2018: 249). Thierno has a very different lived experience to many African-American visitors to Gorée, with only a single generation separating him from Senegal, and with close relatives there. Thus, a Senegalese identity seems more accessible for him than for many tourists. This is demonstrated on the boat on the way to Gorée: Thierno and his cousin Dior meet an African-American couple, who announce that it is their first time in Africa. The man wears a shirt emblazoned with stereotypical, tourist-oriented images of Africa: mud huts, stick figures, maps of the continent. In his choice of clothing, and in the way he and his wife are taking pictures and marvelling at their first sight of Gorée, the couple are presented very much as tourists, in contrast to Thierno. It is the first time that Thierno's outsider status in Dakar is lessened.

Thierno exemplifies the way in which embodied resistance to an alienating experience (for him the encounter with his African heritage and identity) is realised through shared humanity and exchange. Until this point in the film, he has had a somewhat difficult relationship with numerous members of his family, but following his trip to Gorée, he goes to find his young half-siblings. At first, the conversation is awkward. The children focus on their homework, answering Thierno's questions reluctantly, monosyllabically. But when Thierno helps the youngest, Bakary, with his handwriting, taking the child on his knee and guiding his small hand on the page, he establishes a bodily connection between them which transforms their relationship. For the entire film, he has been searching for a piano to practise his music. Now eager to please their new-found brother, the children take him to a hotel where a neighbour works, and Thierno is given permission to play the piano in the lounge. 'T'as vu? C'est beau ici!' [You see? It's beautiful here!] exclaims Bakary, the youngest. 'Chez toi c'est aussi beau?' [Is it as beautiful where you live?] Thierno replies simply: 'différent' [different] (01:11:05-15). As he begins to play the piano, the transformation that the visit to Gorée set in motion is evident, in both a transformation of Thierno's performance of identity, and in the way he transforms the space around him. He has become comfortable in the rhythms and ways of life in Dakar, and he has found his place in it. Conversely, he transforms the space with his African-American jazz music. Double-consciousness, initially a burden with which Thierno struggled, has become something with which he is now more comfortable: in 'writing with [his] body on the border' (Mignolo, 2011:

277) in his musical performance, he is able to reincorporate a bodily schema that accounts for a sense of self lived in multiple places, with multiple histories, across borders.

Alienation in New York

For Abdoulaye, the double-consciousness that migration has produced in him is more profoundly troubling and less easily resolved. Perceived as an African migrant first in Turin and then, when we meet him, in New York, he has none of the privileges of coming from a rich, Western culture that Thierno does: while Thierno's presence in Dakar is at first something of a curiosity, he is treated with respect and increasingly included within the family and society. Abdoulaye, on the other hand, faces the same structural necropolitics that were evident in the first two films. After a period of crisis, in which he is homeless and jobless in a New York winter, on the precarious edge of elimination, his fortunes appear to change when he meets Sydney Poitier Sy, a charismatic African-American shop owner with a penchant for the performing arts. Sydney takes Abdoulaye under his wing, giving him a job in his shop, and professes that he feels like an uncle to Abdoulaye. It seems to be a place of belonging in a city which would otherwise anonymise him and care little for his life or death. For the first time, in the company of Sydney and his friends, Abdoulaye appears to relax a little, smiling, joking with them, and he at last has a place to stay and a way to earn a living.

However, in one of the film's final scenes, Sydney goes to the shop one morning to find the till empty and a note saying: 'Merci pour tout' [thanks for everything] (01:03:59). Abdoulaye has disappeared. This seems inexplicable: Abdoulaye seemed to have finally found a place for himself, with people who treated him like family – he has betrayed their trust and given up the security he had. Unlike Thierno, Abdoulaye's encounters and exchanges with an African-American community in New York do not lead so much to a transformation of his identity and sense of belonging, but rather seem to increase his sense of alienation in New York. In Fanon and Du Bois' terms, migration has led Abdoulaye to be forced to see himself through the eyes of others, losing his sense of selfhood within that. A corporeal schema of being-in-the-world seems hard to achieve. Abdoulaye's traversals through immigrant districts of New York demonstrate how others have transformed space and established a place for themselves, but he seems unable to do this. His relationship with the city seems to be peripheral and fragile.

Yet Abdoulaye remains. In one of the final scenes of the film, set in Luna Park on Coney Island, right at the edge of New York. The camera pans first across the Luna Park entrance, with its rides and bright fast-food stalls. It then turns a slow 180 degrees across the mostly empty, out-of-season boardwalk to find Abdoulaye sitting alone on a bench in a hooded jacket, his back to the

fairground attractions, looking out at the sea. There is a cut to an intense close-up of his face, despondent, unsmiling, framed by the hood (figure 1.8 below). It is a striking representation of alienation. Abdoulaye's resistance is one of putting up a wall, shutting out both other characters, including his wife, Sophie, and Sydney Poitier Sy, as well as the spectator, who is given little access to his inner world. However, although it is less positive than Thierno's, Abdoulaye too offers a performance of embodied resistance, born of deep bodily alienation; the 'arid' zone of non-being that Fanon (1952: 6) refers to. The close-up emphasises his bodily presence and pain, creating a clear 'cartograph[y] of bodily pain' (Francis 2015: 57) which is itself an act of embodied resistance and connects his body with the land, and indeed sea. It is across the vast ocean that relationality between Abdoulaye's body and place is established: soft jazz music, for the moment extra-diegetic, plays in the background. In the very next shot, and in a change of scene, the music becomes diegetic, part of Thierno's piano performance, half a world away in Dakar. Again, with a juxtaposition of scenes in New York and Dakar, connections are created between the spaces, across the Middle Passage, and Abdoulaye's longing for home can be sensed.



Figure 1.8 (01:12:26). Close-up of Abdoulaye looking out to sea.

The link with Gorée, with slave journeys to the Americas, is emphasised in the choice of a New York island location for this final scene of Abdoulaye's. There is a certain symmetry and poetry in Abdoulaye's gaze over the Atlantic Ocean which connects directly with the Door of No Return at the *Maison des Esclaves*. Abdoulaye, his body inscribed at this oceanic border, his bodily schema is entangled within this transatlantic web of movement, oppression, violence and migration, across time and space. The seafront bench clearly offers no permanence for him; he seems destined to keep wandering, to keep suffering, with the possibility of a return home seemingly impossible, recalling that other double-consciousness experienced by many African-Americans visiting Africa: the realisation that their imaginary of Africa as the homeland is just that – imagined – and that a return 'home' is impossible.

Complicating the narrative in Turin

Sophie's narrative in Turin does not fit into the Africa-America double-consciousness frame examined so far: with the intersectionality of Sophie's female experience of being African in Europe, the idea of 'triple consciousness' comes to the fore. It is a concept which accounts for and critically questions the intersections of gender, race and migration, departing from the double-consciousness framework (see Mohamed, 2017). Additionally, the European location and visual lack of the sea complicates the balanced aesthetics which exist between the Dakar and New York settings. Yet this is an essential narrative for exactly those reasons: to complicate not only the notion of double-consciousness through a female gendered experience, but also to avoid any simplistic, binary conclusions that south-north migratory trajectories necessarily lead to alienation and elimination, while north-south migratory trajectories allow for productive renegotiations of identity and reincorporating a bodily schema.

At first, Sophie does indeed struggle in Turin, like both Abdoulaye and Thierno in their first encounters with New York and Dakar. Indeed, this is one of the ways in which the film achieves relationality and synchronicity between its narrative threads, in the rhythmic cuts between all three locations, and in the narrative parallels. Sophie goes to Turin expecting to join Abdoulaye, her husband, who migrated there some time ago, and it is only upon arriving that she discovers that Abdoulaye has left for New York without telling her. Sophie's experiences are at first marked by disorientation, loss and alienation. Waiting for Abdoulaye, she enrolls in Italian lessons and takes a room in the apartment owned by the school's director, Ada. Her body language throughout these sections of the film is closed and resistant: she is almost always in her coat and scarf, as if she is not staying, and in her first interactions with Ada and Vadim, she refuses offers of coffee, tea and food. It is a form of embodied resistance, much like Abdoulaye's: springing from the depths of alienation and a zone of non-being. She resists through bodily refusal rather than interaction. However, one evening, Ada and Vadim are in the kitchen. Their easy familiarity is emphasised by a shot/reverse-shot sequence of their conversation, in which they discuss Abdoulaye, his unfaithfulness to Sophie, and that he has gone to the US. They speak in Italian, but there is a cut to a shot of the doorway, where Sophie is just visible, listening. Compared to the cosy environment of the kitchen and the relationship established between Ada and Vadim in the editing, Sophie is contrasted in the dark, empty setting of the hallway, all alone. She hears everything. It is a devastating blow, but it is an event which forces her to renegotiate her sense of identity, to work out who she is without her husband. At first, when she learns the truth, her first reaction is to return home. However, Ada convinces her to remain in Turin, and tells her that a woman can live there quite happily without a husband. Furthermore, Sophie understood what

they were saying: she is becoming competent in Italian. Without realising it at first, she is learning how to be in this place, without Abdoulaye.

The next scene in which we encounter Sophie starts with an establishing shot of the interior of a multi-level building. There is jaunty Italian music playing, and the spectator's eyes are drawn to distant figures, who give motion to an otherwise still shot. There is a cut to a medium shot of one of these figures: it is Sophie, dressed in a uniform, cleaning an office space (at the university, we learn later). The manager speaks to her in Italian, giving her a pay-packet and reassuring her that she will soon have all the necessary documentation. Sophie smiles, and responds in Italian. Her job may be perceived as a low-ranking, typical 'migrant' position, which Thomas Nail argues maintains migrants in a state of constant motion; 'actively maintaining the material conditions of extensive motions in general (such as construction workers, janitors, or maids)' (2015: 31). Both Abdoulaye (who is working on a building site when we first meet him) and Sophie could be said to have jobs which fit these criteria, and Sophie might have easily been represented as being subject to the same alienation and continual movement as Abdoulaye. However, Tam O'Neil, Anjali Fleury and Marta Foresti (2016) point out that, although women face distinct challenges and risks when migrating, migration can also be a source of empowerment for them. For Sophie, the cleaning job offers her a sense of place, of stability, of respectability, demonstrated by the way in which her presence is established within the building (figure 1.9 below). She is earning her own money, which she can use to pay for the room of her own in Ada's apartment, and to spend the rest on what she chooses to. It is a representation of the kind of embodied resistance that Zeiler (2013) argues can lead to reincorporation of a bodily schema: here Sophie is no longer shutting down and shutting others out, but engaged in relationships of exchange and reciprocity, and in both the way she moves and by her use of Italian, it is clear that she is reaching a point of reincorporation that makes sense of a new way of being in a new place.

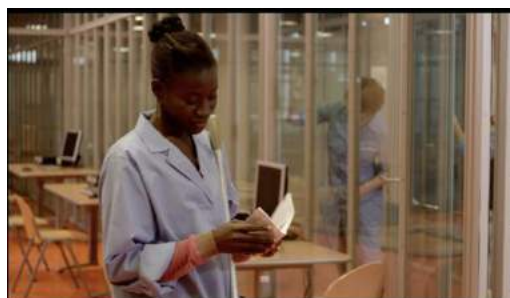


Figure 1.9 (00:54:53) Medium shot of Sophie opening her pay packet

Sophie's positive being-in-the-world is emphasised in the next sequence of shots, a montage in which the music from the previous scene continues. Sophie leaves work, meets Vadim at his place

of work, a small restaurant, and walks home with him, stopping off to buy herself a drink in the local convenience store. The sequence is indeed one of continual motion, in which Sophie's moving body gives life to the space around her, yet, for the first time, she seems to be free. The rhythm of the music and of the editing responds to Sophie's own more upbeat movement. She smiles, her hands are casually in her pockets, and there is a sense of comfortable routine about the whole sequence. Sophie is establishing herself in Turin, and shaping the city space around her in a way which works. Sophie has been forced into a position of double, or even triple, consciousness, deeply alienated at first in Turin, but like Thierno in Dakar, she is able to find new ways of being, achieving a new corporeal schema within Turin which helps her to belong. Like Thierno, she has not given up one identity in favour of another, but found a way of incorporating both into her being-in-Turin.

Parry points to a 'triangulation between memory, history, and imagination in [...] transatlantic exchanges' (2018: 249), which is what *Des Étoiles*, in its triangulation of transatlantic narratives, deftly offers. In the way that it invokes questions around double- and triple-consciousness, it complicates narratives of migration to and from Africa, and builds a multidirectional web of movement. In its rehabilitation of memories and histories of the slave trade, its links to present migration, and the ways in which different characters respond to the challenges of alienation and resistance, it points productively towards decolonialities of being, remembering and rehabilitating colonial history from an African centre, representing migratory narratives that encompass circulation and movement to and within Africa, and allowing for multiple, complex, and highly individual trajectories and experiences of migration.

Borders and Motion in *Frontières*

Frontières (2017), by the Burkinabé director Apolline Traoré, offers a very different take on migration centred in Africa. It concerns migration within the ECOWAS zone (Economic Community of West African States, or CEDEAO in French). Made up of 15 member states, the bloc was set up in 1975 under the initial ECOWAS Treaty, based upon the movement of people, goods, and finance within the region. In 1979 a protocol on the Free Movement of People was introduced, giving citizens of any member state the right to movement throughout the region without visas. However, as a report from the ICMPD notes, 'Mobility in the region [is] still being hampered by the different levels of economic development, inadequate infrastructure, and differences in migration and customs laws' (Devillard, Bacchi, and Noack, 2016: 14). *Frontières* explores the ways in which mobility in the region is facilitated and hampered, and does so through a feminist lens, following the intertwining journeys of four women from Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso

and Nigeria, brought together whilst travelling along a route from Dakar to Lagos, all engaged in itinerant transnational commerce. The border checkpoints along the way, which should facilitate the passage of West African citizens, are represented here as threatening zones of gender violence and corruption. If, as Mbembe suggests, 'Africa is to become its own centre [and] vast space of regional circulation' (2013; 22) *Frontières* represents some of the existing conditions of alienation and violence, particularly relating to gender violence, that need to be overcome in order to achieve this in a way that centres people and does not reproduce necropolitical structures. The problem is that ECOWAS, like any economic community, is first and foremost a trading bloc and freedom of movement is a byproduct of that, recalling Foster's assertion that mobility is reserved primarily for capital (2015: 88).

Frontières demonstrates the link between gender violence and the privileging of capital over the human body in the context of migration. Numerous scholars have noted women's use of their bodies as a form of payment to smugglers, traffickers, or border guards (e.g. Mary Kaldor, 2006; Cynthia Enloe, 2000; Claudia Card, 1996). This is a phenomenon which, in the context of Mexican migration, Oscar Martinez has termed 'cuerpomático' (2014: xiv), a term which divests the body (cuerpo) of agency and turns it into a payment machine (mático, from automático): a clear form of bodily alienation. In the same digitised, global economy where money flows freely across borders in automated transactions, women, if they wish to circulate, can be forced into using their bodies as equivalent payment systems. In a West African context, John K. Anarfi, Ernest N. Appiah and Kofi Awusabo-Asare have argued that 'itinerant women traders appear highly vulnerable, as women and as highly mobile people [who are] exploited for the sexual gratification of the men with whom they come into contact.' (1997: 225). This body-transactional system is represented in *Frontières*. Thomas Nail, in his theory of the border, argues that borders are social and political processes, marked on bodies, 'made and remade according to a host of shifting variables' (2016: 6). Borders thus allow the free movement of certain members of society, while impeding and redirecting the movements of others. Such dynamics are represented in *Frontières*: a wealthy businessman shown crossing national borders with ease and comfort, while the female bodies with much less economic power are used as *cuerpomáticos* and suffer violence, almost as punishment for circulating at all.

In an interview with Léo Pajon, Traoré explained her rationale for the film: 'on parlait énormément des difficultés des migrants africains qui voulaient se rendre en Europe, mais très peu des personnes qui cherchent à se déplacer sur le continent' [we talk a great deal about the difficulties faced by African migrants wanting to reach Europe, but very little about the people who are looking to move around the continent] (2018: para.2) Her ethical engagement with her

subject matter was such that she made the journey herself, over the course of three weeks, to better understand the conditions of women involved in itinerant commerce, where, she says, she discovered the systematic 'racket' at the borders. A commitment to shooting documentary-style, on location, in constant transit, meant real danger as well as technical difficulty, including terrorist threats that necessitated army protection whilst filming. It is, then, a film which engages with physical involvement with the journey taken by the characters.

Transactional bodies

Motion in *Frontières* is immediate and constant. The opening shot of the film, which is on-screen immediately, before the opening credits, is a close-up of one of the protagonists, Adjara, leaning out of the window of a bus, sun on her face, wind in her hair. She is elegant in an embellished orange outfit and headwrap, and coordinating jewellery. The camera shifts slightly, indicating the cruising motion of the bus. It is a brief moment of bliss which sums up the joy of movement. The music is immediate and strongly evokes a sense of motion (in fact, this music is used repeatedly throughout the film, helping to maintain unrelenting motion throughout). The opening credits are interspersed with establishing shots of the bus as it motors along a dusty highway. Within a few seconds though, the sense of motion, of the freedom of the open road, of simple happiness created in these opening shots, is brought to a halt. First, Adjara turns her attention to the interior of the bus, suspiciously eyeing the man sitting next to her, and tucks her purse out of sight, under her top. This brings a note of unease into the frame, and with it comes the announcement that they are arriving at the Senegal-Mali border, so all passengers must get off, proceed through immigration and board another bus on the other side.

At this point, to use Nail's (2016) terminology, motion is stopped, corralled and redirected through border control. In so doing, multiple networks of trade and circulation are made visible, both the formal and informal, and this sets up the dynamics for the entire film. As Adjara descends, the man who had been sitting next to her is now hiding between two parked buses. He gets her attention and asks for her help in transporting his large holdalls, full of pirated CDs, undetected through the border zone to his smuggler contacts, circumventing customs. Adjara is understandably reluctant, but — in a nod to the machinations of globalisation — she agrees to help in exchange for a Barbara Streisand CD. It is clear, as they escape the hubbub of the border control zone, that there is no physical border: they leave the bags with a group of men on bicycles waiting under a tree. The border is rather a process of directing and controlling movement, which this informal network subverts. Adjara and the CD salesman have to rejoin the throng at passport control, and here, Adjara finds herself detained, not because anyone has witnessed her actions, but because she does not have a vaccination certificate, and she refuses to pay the resultant fine.

Here, Adjara uses her body as a *cuerpomática*; she enters the chief's office to appeal the fine and, with a doe-eyed expression and sensuous, swaying movements, gets his attention. There is a close-up of her leg as she puts it on his desk, sliding her skirt up at the same time. The chief smiles. Adjara, through facial expressions alone, puts on a performance of a damsel in distress. There is a cut here to a wide shot of the smugglers riding away from the border at full pelt, and when it cuts back to Adjara, she is emerging from the chief's office, a subtle smile on her face. She collects her papers and proceeds to customs. The customs desk is the epicentre of dizzying bodily movement, where some people are able to continue on their way but others are violently stopped and arrested by border police. Adjara passes through this chaotic scene easily. Her orange dress stands out here, vibrant against the dusty backdrop and the blue camouflage uniforms of the officers. The effect of the combination of these scenes: Adjara's bodily performance and implied sexual favours in the chief's office, the smugglers escaping across the border with the CDs, and the arrest of others at customs, illustrates the transactional nature of border processes and the conditions by which people may be permitted to move. At this point, Adjara's transactional use of her body seems totally within her control. She does not seem upset by it and is certainly not in a state of alienation. She boards the new bus, finds her seat next to the CD salesman, and as the bus pulls away, joining the Malian highway in a cloud of dust, the music denoting their onward motion reprises. However, the camera is fixed at this point and as the bus leaves, the spectator remains momentarily left behind at the border, where, in the corner of the shot, a goat is having its legs tied together by its owner, its movement physically restricted. It is a brief hiatus in movement, and a striking symbolic image to be left with, one which reinforces the power of the border to restrain and dictate movement. Thus in the first ten minutes of the film, motion in the ECOWAS zone is defined by these bordering processes.

Adjara is the character that the spectator is invited to most closely identify with. A novice businesswoman who, we later discover, has left an abusive partner, she sets out alone on this journey from Dakar to Lagos to earn an income and provide for her daughter. In this early part of the film, she is full of hope, naivety and the confidence that she can overcome any difficulties that arise in the journey. She is a character with an expository function, repeatedly explaining the rights of people to circulate under the laws governing the ECOWAS zone, whilst encountering a very different reality. Her confidence is rapidly called into question when she meets Emma, a veteran of this West African route, who boards the bus in Bamako, Mali. Emma trades in large quantities of polypropylene fabric, the kind used to make heavy-duty bags. During a brief rest stop just before the Mali-Burkina Faso border, Adjara spies Emma piling swathes of the fabric onto her body, secured with a tie around her waist. At customs, Emma declares only two small bags of fabric, but is clearly struggling to walk and breathe. Emma's body thus becomes

transactional in a different and - perhaps surprisingly - more damaging way than Adjara's does in the scene discussed above. Emma uses her body as a way of subverting border controls, and this allows her to earn enough of a livelihood to survive, but it comes at the cost of a body in pain.

From this point on, the litany of suffering bodies grows, and the border controls, checkpoints, and policing of those travelling proliferates and becomes exhausting. Traoré contrasts these many stops, checks and border crossings with the borderlessness of the natural landscape, employing tracking shots to do so. John Duncan Edmond argues that tracking (or travelling) shots can be used to 'emphasise duration and contemplation and to reverse modernity's collapse of space through evoking the localised particularities of regions' (2015: 3). In *Frontières*, this is certainly one aspect of the use of tracking shots: the entire film, set as it is on the series of buses that connect Dakar to Lagos, indeed emphasises the sense of temporality of the six-day journey, and encourages contemplation of local specificity as the scenery changes through varied terrain. The tracking shots have another function, however, and that is to demonstrate the existence of sociopolitically defined borders completely separate from any physical boundary.

One sequence is particularly evocative in this regard: as the bus travels through Burkina Faso, there is an expansive overhead tracking shot, giving an overarching perspective of the highway, now a sandy ribbon cutting through a vast expanse of forest. This shot removes the spectator from the perspective of the passengers and gives them a privileged view that the characters do not have access to. Here the camera shifts away from the road, so that the forest fills the screen, and for a few seconds, tracks a herd of giraffes as they bound freely through the forest. It is a majestic shot which engages the spectator in contemplation of place and motion. Figure 1.10 below gives some sense of this, although it is the motion of the tracking shot which is most powerful – and which makes the giraffe more visible – in the film. The shot is accompanied by rousing, emotive music which emphasises the sense of travel and freedom. There is a cut to the interior of the bus and there are brief shots focusing on a couple of the passengers gazing out of the window as the music continues, reinforcing the contemplative atmosphere and creating a connection between the travelling bodies of the giraffe and the humans as they move through this landscape. As Lucia Nagib comments, tracking shots can form a link between a 'character/actor and a particular land' as the camera is dragged 'through the territory of their actions' (2011: 29). This is the effect created here: a connection between body and place, and the rights of those bodies to be in that place; an agentive being-in-the-world. However, almost immediately, while the giraffes continue unimpeded, a police checkpoint appears on the road up ahead and, as the bus pulls in, the music stops suddenly (see figure 1.11 below). An officer boards the bus and two of the passengers are ejected and detained; one for stealing jewellery, and the other for trying to

sell jewellery undeclared at customs. It is a reminder of the transactional nature of the border and the repercussions for circumventing it, and of the risks faced by Adjara and Emma, each concealing their livelihoods on their body (Adjara's hidden purse and Emma's hidden fabrics). The sequence as a whole emphasises the violence of artificially-imposed boundaries and the alienating potential of such boundaries, preventing natural, agentive bodily motion.



Figure 1.10 *Frontières* (2017: 00:24:43). Tracking shot of giraffe.



Figure 1.11 (00:25:06). Checkpoint comes into view.

Bodily alienation and embodied resistance

In Burkina Faso, Adjara and Emma are joined by Sali, a very young woman who is dropped off at the bus station in Bobo-Dioulasso by her boyfriend. Dressed in fashionable jeans and bright, tightly-fitting tops, and glued to her smartphone, Sali at first appears somewhat superficial. Micha, the fourth of the protagonists, is introduced soon after. A Nigerian restaurateur living and working in Burkina Faso and a veteran of the route like Emma, Micha arrives on the back of a moped at a checkpoint outside the city. This a subversion of the rules on where and when to board. She is brash and abrasive; a large woman who demands two seats on the bus, forcing Sali to move out of her way. She is entirely unapologetic for her body and its place in the world. The manner in which Micha arrives and the way in which she takes up space is a powerful performance of embodied resistance to the system we have witnessed thus far. Sali, on the other hand, is a novice in this world and - it transpires - transporting a large quantity of (prescription) drugs at the behest of her boyfriend. At the point at which these four characters arrive at the Burkina-Faso - Benin border, they have been presented in broad strokes, almost as caricatures that lead the spectator to quick judgements about them. However, this border marks a turning point in the entire mood of the film, and these early judgements are quickly subverted: a reminder that these itinerant women traders are not here to be objectified and judged. It is here too that the necropolitics of these border systems becomes visible, and they operate on the same principles governing trade and globalisation everywhere.

This change of mood comes with the witnessing of a horrific car accident between the immigration and customs borders in Benin. Catching sight of the crash, Emma screams for the

driver to stop the bus and rushes off to help the victims. Embodied camerawork here adds to the sense of bodily shock and visual confusion: a handheld camera follows Emma down the bank, jolting and shaking, to implicate the spectator within the scene. The other passengers, most of whom were asleep on the bus, stand dazed, looking on. It is a brief pause in which the shock is registered, before the passengers begin hurtling down the bank. It is a joint effort on the part of the passengers to move bodies, to lift the truck, to help the walking wounded to safety, all except for Adjara, who seems immobilised by shock. She remains by the bus, looking on in horror, her body unresponsive. The scene is a dense confusion of bodies, pain and death, emphasised by the camera panning amidst it all. A woman holding a motionless child is led away. Badly injured bodies are pulled from beneath the wrecked truck, shortly before it explodes, sending up swathes of black smoke which fill the screen momentarily. It is a sequence that exemplifies 'active embodied entanglement of the spectator with the [film]' (Laine, 2017: 10). Those who move informally and lack economic power are easily dehumanised, and they can simply disappear.

As the bus pulls away, the passengers are subdued. Adjara rests her head on Micha's shoulder. Behind them, Sali tries to comfort Emma. There is a close-up as these two women take each other's hand, Sali's fingertips, with brightly-painted nails, pressing gently into Emma's skin (figure 1.12 below). As in the sensory close-ups of the intertwined sisterly bodies in *Alda e Maria*, 'haptic visibility' (Marks, 2000: 22) is attuned here. It is a bodily connection forged in shared pain, and the camera stays on their interlaced fingers as Emma says that her mother died on the same route, also working as an itinerant trader. There is a close-up of Emma's face, filled with pain. Sali's face mirrors this pain and drawing out a photograph of her younger self with her parents, she explains that they too are dead, the auberge that they ran had to be sold, and hence she has found herself in this line of work. All of the shots here are close-ups, focusing on the women's faces, hands and Sali's photograph as they provide their testimonies. The effect of this scene directly after the bodily horror of the car-crash scene is to create a 'cartograph[y] of bodily pain', (Francis, 2015: 57) where bodies are quite literally inscribed at the border, similar to examples of such inscription in the other films. It is a sequence in which pain is witnessed, voiced and felt. It is, in Mignolo's terms, 'epistemically disobedient' (2011: 277), offering physical, bodily responses to the official claims of ECOWAS as a zone of free movement; bodily inscription at sites where those bodies are deemed not to matter. It establishes the bodily connection with the spectator, engendering a response based upon simultaneous thinking and feeling (Laine 2017).



Figure 1.12 (00:49:24). Emma and Sali's clasped hands.

At Benin's customs border, where they are to spend the night before getting another bus to Lagos the next day, Sali is detained on drug trafficking charges. As night falls, the other three women, sitting outside, catch sight of Sali being led away by one of the officers. What follows is another scene of dense bodily pain as Sali is raped by the officer in a dark storehouse. The entire rape scene is captured in one shot and there is no extradiegetic soundtrack, only the sound of Sali screaming. It is all in medium-shot, the bodies of Sali and the officer taking up the screen. There is a tangle of limbs as Sali tries to fight and escape, but the officer holds her down and, as the camera pans down, he pulls down her trousers. As he rapes her, the camera pans back up to Sali's face as she screams and bites down on the officer's hand. He hits her, and at that moment, Adjara, Emma and Micha arrive, hit the guard over the head, and pull Sali away into the darkness. The scene is one of both intense bodily pain and resistance. In the way that the camera remains focused on Sali and acts in a testimonial capacity, there is an ethics to the scene which again, provides a 'cartography' of pain inscribed on the border, making visible the violence of border controls on particular bodies. The incident comes with profound implications for Sali's body: the bodily alienation she experiences in the storehouse is compounded by the requirement for her to wear a niqab and full body covering so that she can continue the journey undetected. She has not just been violated, but also robbed of a large part of her identity.

The final, almost inevitable, act of violence on the route comes in Nigeria, the destination country. Finally, the four women are close to Lagos, to the end-point of their journey, but the bus is held up at gunpoint by bandits, and one of them, pointing his pistol at Adjara, demands she hand over the purse tied to her waist. Adjara, sobbing, refuses. The purse, it seems, is not just her livelihood; it is an intrinsic part of her body, incorporated into her bodily schema and almost talismanic in its symbolism. To lose it would be profoundly, perhaps irreparably, alienating. Micha steps in and pushes the gunman, who shoots her dead. The women fall next to Micha, screaming as she dies. Then despondently, as Micha's body is taken away in an ambulance, they get up and continue their journey, the relentlessness of it at this point deeply painful. The slowness of their walk back to the bus, the droop in their shoulder, and the sadness on their faces is a performance of pain and bodily alienation which marks the effect of repeated and worsening violence and bodily trauma at every border and checkpoint encountered.

In Lagos, there is a moment to breathe. Adjara, Emma and Sali sit silently on the beach, surrounded by their bags. Pain is etched on each of their faces as they gaze out to sea. There is a cut to wide shot of the three women, facing out to sea with their backs to the camera (see figure 1.13 below), and here, *Frontières* connects with the other films of this chapter. Like *La Pirogue*, it is a film seeking to represent those who travel on dangerous routes with the hope of providing for their families, and to expose the systematic violence and necropolitics of such routes. There is a strong compositional link here with the scene in *Des Étoiles* of Abdoulaye gazing out to sea, dealing with his own sense of bodily pain and alienation. And in the proximity of the women's bodies, creating a shared testimonial of suffering, there is a connection to *Alda e Maria*.



Figure 1.13. (01:21:20). Wide shot of Emma, Sali and Adjara.

Conclusion

In representing zones of non-being and illuminating the necropolitical systems which govern migration in different times and spaces, each of the films comes into dialogue with Fanon's work, his hopes for liberation, and his 'impossible life' (Memmi, 1973). They demonstrate how, in this era of globalisation, the structures of colonialism confronted by Fanon continue to exert influence in an apparently postcolonial world, and determine which bodies may move freely and which are subject to controls, containment, and death. The alienation experienced by the characters as a result is profound, violent and damaging to their bodily schemas (and therefore to their ability to interact with the world in the way that Merleau-Ponty's theory suggests). Yet, as Fanon suggests, from such 'arid and sterile zones of non-being', resistance is born. This chapter has demonstrated the creative tension in each of the films between alienation and embodied resistance, expressed through the production of 'cartographies of bodily pain' (Francis, 2015: 57), which reconnect body with land, in spite of the dynamics of deterritorialisation and dehumanisation.

These cartographies of pain: Alda and Maria facing violence and elimination in the Lisbon dockyard; the litany of death and loss in *La Pirogue*; Abdoulaye homeless and freezing in *Des Étoiles*; the rape of Sali in *Frontières*, to give a few of the examples discussed - transform alienation into acts of resistance within the body. In their function of providing testimony, such acts provide

a link between individual and collective experiences, which do not seek to essentialise an African experience of migration; rather, they involve the 're-telling of history of humanity and knowledge from the vantage point of those epistemic sites that received the 'darker side' of modernity' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:15). It is from this starting point, rather than a celebratory notion of globalisation, that the bodies in these films are brought into being.

In the establishment of what Laine terms 'a reciprocal and co-creative process' (2017: 9) between film and spectator, each of the films advances resistance from its starting point of visceral pain to create a bodily connection and a politics of reciprocity with the spectator. As discussed above, empty empathy is refused by each of these films and instead the spectator's ethical engagement, requiring both cognition and affect, is enlisted. The film analyses above demonstrated the range of strategies and sensory aesthetics; of particular note are the auditory and haptic modes of expression employed in each of the films, which resonate with the spectator's body. Whether the haunting sounds of the dockyard and Angolan music in *Alda e Maria*, the jazz piano in *Des Étoiles* connecting Thierno and Abdoulaye across the Atlantic Ocean, the relentless, rhythmic music in *Frontières*, or the powerfully resonant sound of a heartbeat in *La Pirogue*, none of the soundtracks are incidental. Rather, they function in combination with techniques of 'haptic visuality' (Marks: 2000: 22), that stimulate the sensation of touch to re-anchor bodies in space and to attest to their existence through bodily connection. Thus the films themselves, by inscribing the body into the filmic border, enhance the embodied resistance at the representational level and activate a 'questioning mode of existence' (Zeiler, 2013: 82), which is capable of resituating bodies within contexts of migration.

The project these films carry out is one focused on the grounding, in Mignolo's terms, 'of sensing and the body, and of its geo-historical location [...] dwelling and thinking in the borders of local histories confronting global designs' (2011: 277). In the films such border thinking is evident both in the diegetic representation and in the 'entanglement' (Laine, 2017) of the bodies of film and spectator. For Mignolo (2011), such projects are decolonial, and necessarily entail epistemic disobedience. Here this can be understood in the way that the films counter underlying systems of necropolitics, account for those people who suffer alienation or death as a result of migration, and connect contemporary conditions of migration with histories of colonialism and slavery. In this sense such decolonial projects have the potential to be 'redemptive and liberatory' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 15) and thus continue and rework Fanon's hopes for liberation. This is a discussion which will be continued and developed in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Bodies as sites of resistance

Absence, materiality, and decoloniality of being

The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life
– Avery Gordon (1997: 8).

Introduction

This is a chapter of absent objects and phantom limbs, of erased scars and disappeared bodies. It will be argued that these absences and trace elements paradoxically work to illuminate the physicality and materiality of bodies and to heighten corporeal and sensory connections between spectator and film. Four films are brought into comparative analysis here: *La Pirogue*, which provides a link from the previous chapter; *A República di Mininus* (Flora Gomes, 2012); *Félicité* (Alain Gomis, 2017); and *Timbuktu* (Abderrahmane Sissako, 2014). The concept of haunting was introduced in the previous chapter, with reference to the ways in which ‘organized forces and systemic structures’ (Gordon, 1997: 19) haunt racialised and gendered bodies in postcolonial spaces of migration, and conversely, how those bodies can haunt those migratory spaces (such as Alda and Maria’s refusal to be eliminated in the dockyard, and the ways in which memories of slavery return to haunt in *Des Étoiles* and *La Pirogue*). There, the movement of bodies between zones of being and non-being was analysed, and it was demonstrated how, from a sterile and arid zone of non-being, to paraphrase Fanon (1952), resistance could surge within the body and be expressed in bodily performances of pain. This chapter deepens and extends the concepts of haunting and trace and explores how, from ambivalent ‘dense sites’ mediating between presence and absence, being and non-being, such expressions of resistance can lead productively towards the reincorporation of bodily schemas (that is, a reincorporation of a coherent bodily objectivity and subjectivity), predicated on a decoloniality of being.

Decoloniality of being - while that precise term may not be used - is a concept that can be traced through the work of Fanon, developed by scholars including Mignolo (2011; 2009), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2011; 2007), Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019; 2013), and Rinaldo Walcott (2014). Maldonado-Torres points out that the ‘decolonial turn’ is not a ‘single theoretical school’ but rather a ‘family of diverse positions’ (2011: 2). What connects them is that, firstly, these positions recognise ‘modernity/colonialism/coloniality as a foundation of some of the major

problems *haunting in the modern world*' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019: 202, my emphasis). Secondly, they all consider decoloniality as an ongoing project: the proposal of the failure and violence of apparently universal epistemologies emanating from Europe and the US in the works cited above illuminates continuity between colonialism and the globalisation of late capitalism (as demonstrated in the first chapter), hence the need Mignolo (2011) identifies for epistemic disobedience. Secondly, what unites these decolonial positions is the insistence on relationality between people, and between people and the earth. Mignolo and Walsh call this 'decolonial conviviality' (2018: 3). Finally, it involves a simultaneous process of 'theory and praxis' (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 3). Ndlovu-Gatsheni sums it up eloquently: decolonization is a much more profound activity and process than simply obtaining political independence; it is a condition of possibility to start a new thinking and doing aimed at a re-humanized world' (2019: 203). Ndlovu-Gatsheni calls it re-humanizing; for Mignolo and Walsh it is a process of figuring 're-existence' (2018: 3) - a term they use rather than resistance. Throughout this thesis, and particularly in this chapter, it is proposed that re-humanisation and re-existence are forms of embodied resistance.

Decoloniality of being is a necessary concept for resisting processes of excorporation and bodily alienation. Zeiler (2013) explains that it is the coherency of the bodily schema that is threatened through the process of excorporation (i.e., when a person is forced to pay conscious attention to parts of their body or to bodily actions and gestures that are usually seamless, unconscious). It is this process, repeated over time, that leads to a complete breakdown of the bodily schema, and therefore, to bodily alienation. This is what Fanon called the 'racial epidermal schema' (1986: 112): the reduction of a bodily schema, of humanity, to skin colour, and the denigration of a human being based on this. Along similar lines, Walcott argues that 'the ongoing workings of coloniality have produced for Black people a perverse relationship to the category of the Human in which our existence as human beings remains [...] mostly outside the category of a life' (2014: 93). Yet resistance enacted within a body navigating zones of non-being and, attesting to the re-humanisation and re-existence of that body, also possesses a haunting power. Walcott argues that 'Black people's legacy as a commodity has thus been haunting the very status of the Human [...] in the present' (2014: 95-96). By haunting, being is asserted. Out of a politics of absence and alienation, it creates a presence.

Zeiler emphasises that reincorporation and embodied resistance does not imply a reversal to a previous state but is a process of continual creation of the self, enabling 'smooth and seamless interaction' with the self as both subject and object, and in relating to others and to the world. As Zeiler points out, for Fanon, this process of reincorporation involves the 'continuous creation of human existence' (2013: 81) and in which interaction and relationality with other humans is of

the utmost importance. It is, in other words, a process of re-humanisation and re-existence. The idea of continual creation of the self through bodily movement and interaction with others (a simultaneous thinking and doing), and the navigation of bodies between zones of being and non-being, is key to the analysis of all four of the films in this chapter.

The mediation of excorporation and embodied resistance through the movement of bodies attests to a decoloniality of being present in each of the films. *A República di Mininus* offers an explicit decolonial project, dealing as it does with the ongoing struggle of nation-building and the sort of governance by national bourgeoisie that Fanon (1961) warned could take the place of colonialism after independence. *La Pirogue*, in the scene to be analysed here, offers a remarkable act of embodied resistance, which aesthetically contrasts with the rest of the film, and in which interrelationality is established between physical human bodies, the land, and a haunted zone of memory, testimony and spirits. *Félicité* and *Timbuktu* are both films sensitive to the environments of their narratives, pluralising and adding nuance to different communities, and in so doing offer what Walcott has termed a 'politics of thought' which is able to critique 'the knowledges of bodies 'in' and 'out-of-place' and the 'death-worlds' that have resulted from such epistemological assumptions (2014: 103). Walcott here echoes Balibar's 'death zones' (2004: 128) discussed in the first chapter in relation to migration. Here, though, such death zones can remain 'at home', and as such, Walcott also advocates a move away from the 'happy story of progressive liberation of indigeneity', and instead, greater critical thought about how to change the dynamic of human relation, arguing that 'a *pure decolonial* project works the ruins of catastrophe to shape an other human intimacy based on [...] mobile association, not on pre-ordained belongings to place or gradated identities' (2014: 104, original emphasis).

Human intimacy, wrought from catastrophe, and based on mobile association with one another, speaks to both Zeiler's (2013) argument that re-incorporation of the bodily schema is a continual process of creation and interaction, and Fanon's belief that it is through the most visceral movements of the body and the ability to touch and communicate with others that true decoloniality of being is possible. All of these ideas come into dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's central premise when he writes: 'I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them' (1962: 140). Therefore, 'space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged [...] that means instead of imagining it as a sort of ether in which all things float [...] we must think of it as the universal power enabling them to be connected' (1962: 243). The way that we perceive, relate to, and combine with the world, is formed of associations that are perpetually mobile. These mobile associations make us and the world: a constant process of mutually constitutive thinking and doing, of making and

remaking, of bringing into being. In each of these films, it is a mobile association of bodies with each other and combining with space that establishes decolonialities of being in cinematic form.

The 'dense sites' of haunting

The first chapter demonstrated how cognition and affect, operating simultaneously in the body of the spectator, helps to establish ethical engagement with the films. Haunting and absence, it is argued here, when used as aesthetic and narrative techniques, are powerful in establishing bodily, sensory connections between film and spectator, and enhancing this ethical engagement. This is because absence and presence, as the above discussion indicates, are not opposite states, but are interwoven, ambivalent, and part of one another. Vivian Sobchack, discussing the phenomenology of film, argues that 'many people [...] understand from their own experience the ambiguous [...] play of the lived body's double-sidedness, its capacity to be both immanent and transcendent, opaque and transparent, 'here' and 'there', present and absent' (2010: 53). It is in this ambiguity and ambivalence of the lived-body experience that haunting can take place, something which Derrida refers to as the 'haunted community of a single body', or the 'phenomenology of the specter' (2006: 166-7). Where bodies come into contact with haunting and absence is precisely where zones of being and non-being can be created, experienced and negotiated. Haunting, in the political sense suggested by Gordon (1997) reveals the structures that work to determine such zones, and how zones of non-being are negotiated and resisted. In the film analyses below, it is the *something missing* in key scenes that draws attention to the 'dense site[s] where history and subjectivity make social life' (Gordon, 1997: 8) and to the interplay of body and space that such 'dense sites' produce.

These 'dense sites', operating between zones of being and non-being, are made apparent in the use of different sensory aesthetic modes and techniques in the films. Marks argues that films which engage with 'haptic visuality' - often frustrating visual and audiovisual coherency in the process - 'work at the limits of what can be thought, by referring to the memories of objects, the body, and the senses' (2000: 29), as discussed in relation to the analyses in the previous chapter. The interplay of memory, body, and the senses creates spaces beyond classically theorised cinematic language for 'cultural knowledges [to be] lost, found, and created anew' (24) and to 'make visible the colonial and racist power relations that seek to maintain [the separation between cultures]' (xii). Thus it is in film's haunted spaces, where visual representation is questioned and frustrated - whether through obstructive strategies such as the use of intense close-up, the layering of images, or through the disjoint between auditory and visual - that different sensory responses and haptic connection between film and spectator can emerge, and thereby where different narratives, marginalised memories, and alternative versions of history

that challenge official narratives, can find self-expression. This enables ethical engagement: rather than inviting passive consumption of the narrative spectacle, such aesthetic techniques connect sensorially with the spectator and promote new understandings which can break down constructed cultural boundaries.

It is therefore the contention in this chapter that the moments of visual absence or haunting trace in the scenes to be analysed here nevertheless resonate bodily with the spectator and engender deeper sensory affect. It may, for example, be hard to imagine how a game of football can be played without a ball, but this makes for the most mesmerising scene in Abderrahmane Sissako's *Timbuktu* (2014), while it is the absent limb of an amputee which seems to take up space and sensory attention in Alain Gomis' *Félicité* (2017). In *La Pirogue*, the very first scene is haunted by absent bodies, while in *A República di Mininus*, haunted bodies occupy a liminal space between presence and absence, which frustrates straightforward visuality. Indeed, it is precisely through the bodily negotiation of haunting and absence that the bodies in the scenes analysed here assert their being-in-the-world, even as they 'learn to live', to paraphrase Derrida, in the interstices between life and death. Derrida argues that if 'learning to live [...] remains to be done, it can happen only between life and death *alone*. What happens between the two [...] can only *maintain itself* with some ghost' (2006: xvii, original emphasis). It is in this between-zone of life and death, presence and absence, that haunting takes place and layers of meaning, of history and of memory, are revealed.

Haunting, materiality and slow cinema

Daffyd Jones, Robinson and Turner argue that 'places become 'haunted' through the convergence of time – past and present – at a particular site' (2012: 258). To conceptualise the ways in which such convergences of time in space are represented in film, there are cues to be taken from 'slow cinema' theory. It should be noted that the films discussed here are not model examples of slow cinema: in place of some of the defining features identified by Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge (2016), such as extremely long takes, little action, and a certain aesthetic austerity, in the films analysed here, there are examples of frequent cuts, relatively short scenes, and sometimes chaotic, fast-paced bodily motion. Nevertheless, it is argued that they share some of the aesthetic sensibilities of slow cinema, in terms of their materiality, corporeality and sense of temporal distention. Because of the 'dense sites' of absence and trace within these scenes, time takes on different qualities. A few of the scenes in question operate beyond the scope of the main narrative, providing a pause within the film and time for reflection. Secondly, the ways in which these aesthetics and the on-screen bodies work together is particularly potent, because it is in their

rhythmic and sensory interplay that the underlying presence of these dense sites and haunting traces can be sensed by the spectator.

As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, slow cinema is a theory which has developed with the progression of cinema's digital age, but it is difficult to say whether the temporalities in these films is a 'reaction to an increasingly fast world and cinema' (de Luca and Barradas Jorge, 2016: 10) or the reworking of aesthetic principles long established within the auteur model of African cinema. There are nevertheless productive points of exploration for these films within slow cinema theory. Given that, as Crary (2014) proposes, a sense of overwhelming speed is a key characteristic of the contemporary global capitalist system, conceptualising and representing time in other ways is not just aesthetic, but also political, and could contribute to a decoloniality of being. De Luca and Barradas Jorge argue that 'slow time [...] is often resorted to as a medium to actualise and negotiate conceptually different temporalities and competing visions of time' (2016: 15). Time, in slow cinema terms, is thus phenomenological before all else, and therefore inherently open to multiple visions and conceptualisations. So different visions of time in film allow for the presentation and negotiation of 'the co-existence of multiple temporalities' (de Luca and Barradas Jorge, 2016: 15). Reconceptualising time in this way would seem a crucial component of any decoloniality of being.

Furthermore, as Jacques Rancière notes, there is a 'sensory presence and density' created through the material interaction of actors and space in slow films, which turns the act of walking, for example, from a temporal transition into a 'material activity' (2016: 249), again altering perception of time. Such corporeal engagement – the commitment to filming such transitory episodes, and the commitment of actors to walking, running, or, as we will also see in this chapter, wrestling and playing football, in the phenomenologically real spaces of the filming locations – also works to affect perception and engage the spectator's senses. Discussing films in which key characters run across and within landscapes, Lúcia Nagib explains how 'their run, enacted in reality, gives material life to the virtual medium of film and testifies to an ethics of realism' (2011: 19). By altering the temporal rhythm of a film through the filming of walking and running in particular, perceptions of the landscapes/settings themselves are altered: Nagib argues that such scenes are as much about the actors 'engagement with a real context' as about 'narrative mimesis' (2011: 32) and provide a way of linking characters to particular lands. This interconnection between body and space sets up the possibility for absences and traces, located both within the body and space, to haunt the scene.

All the films in this chapter play with classical cinema's temporal conventions of forward, linear motion and sense of closure: they do not operate within a closed temporal frame; instead, they

haunt the edges of the frame with ambiguous, open endings. The foreclosure of satisfying endings, frustrating of linear time, and adjustment of temporal transitions to material activities are again established conventions within the auteur model of African cinema (see Diawara, 1989; Gabriel, 1989; Boughedir, 1988). However, such aesthetic choices have new resonance in the digital age, since digital cinema is itself marked by absence: haunted by its lack of materiality, haunted by the ways in which time and space can be manipulated in ever more flexible and spontaneous methods of reshooting, manipulating and editing. Yet these haunted zones of digital cinema, between the material and the virtual, allow for digitally-made films that draw upon slow aesthetics and sensibilities to create a sensorium of material life. This provides a fertile ground for creating haunted spaces and traces within digital films to facilitate the opening up of multiple possible temporalities, and therefore to contribute to decolonialities of being.

The haunting aspects of laamb (Senegalese wrestling) in *La Pirogue*

The opening scene of *La Pirogue* (2015) is striking in its difference to the rest of the film, set not on the pirogue but on Senegalese soil, in a wrestling, or laamb, arena. At first, we see nothing but a black screen emblazoned with the first of the opening credits, but the film has already started. For a few seconds, while watching the credits start to roll on this black screen, the hubbub of a crowd clapping, cheering and singing can be heard, overlaid by the amplified wail of a griot, creating noise that seems to surround the spectator and that draws them in. Subtly then, the auditory takes precedence over the visual at the very start of this scene and the start of the film, skewing the usual dominance of the visual, and opening up other sensory routes. Indeed, while the start of the film lacks the classical establishing shot of setting, or a shot of a key character, it immediately creates context through the auditory. Though the Wolof words being sung are not clear (and are not subtitled, in any case), they form part of the rich ritualisation of laamb, which attests to the film's haunting traces.

When the cut comes to the visual spectacle, still overlaid with the opening credits, the focus is immediately on the body of a wrestler crouched on the sand. The spectator is given little time to take in this shot – and thus to establish the precise context of this body in space – as this is the first in the sequence of fast editing which makes up this scene. There are rapid cuts between the wrestlers and their marabouts as they perform elaborate pre-match rituals, and the huge crowd occupying the raked seating around the arena. This scene thus establishes the rhythm of the entire film, as the spectator's attention is constantly shifted between viewpoints. Extreme wide shots of the crowd (thanks to the extra-wide aspect ratio of the film) overwhelm the screen with bodies that move with a collective energy, clapping, cheering, and dancing in response to the wrestlers' rituals and the griot's performance (figure 2.1 below). Some of them call out with

messages of support to their wrestler and appeals to show no mercy to the opponent. At one point, masked, costumed figures emerge into the arena, to a huge cheer from the crowd, and they perform and instigate dances. Such wide shots are interspersed with bodily close-ups of the wrestlers, emphasising their leather rope and cowrie-shell gris-gris, and the physical, visceral way in which potions are used to imbue the wrestlers' bodies with their power (poured over the head; gulped and showily spat out; slathered on the body, inhaled as steam). In these close-ups, there is an intense focus on the material, the corporeal, on the different textures and sensations that play on the skin. Furthermore, this materiality and intense bodily physicality is dependent on the trace of the spiritual and magical (figure 2.2. below).



Figure 2.1. *La Pirogue* (2012: 00:01:12). Wide shot of the crowd



Figure 2.2 (00:02:09) close-up emphasising physicality and ritual.

The camera moves with an energy too, one which seems to respond to the bodily motion represented in the scene. The pace of cuts between the wrestlers and crowd is relentless, as is the continual change of shot distance, with a montage of close-ups, medium-shots and wide-shots. Panning shots showing the wrestlers and their entourages in motion – running around the arena and dancing – add to the overwhelming sense of constant movement. This works to tether the fictional spectacle to phenomenological physicality and movement enacted in reality, recalling once again Nagib's ethics of realism and her assertion that such physical, embodied activity 'gives material life to the virtual medium of film' (2011: 19). The physical motion of both the actors and camera, in combination with the vocal, corporeal soundscape sustained throughout the scene, appeals to precisely the embodied and tactile sensory modes that feature in Marks' 'haptic visuality' (2000: xii) and that go beyond the limits of the visual.

Ostensibly, this scene has the function of introducing us to the film's main characters: reluctant captain Baye Laye and his friend sit on one side of the arena; Baye Laye's younger brother sits on the other side, next to Lansana, the voyage's manager, and his boss, the man who keeps trying to recruit Baye Laye. At various points in the scene, their faces are shot in sharply focused close-ups, and brief snippets of dialogue provide initial context about this very situation. In a shot/reverse-shot sequence, Baye Laye looks over at the other three and, when his friend suggests he talk to them, he responds abruptly: 'Ça fait dix fois que je lui dis non' [I've said no ten times now]

(00:02:53), setting the context for the scenes which follow. However, the brief glimpses of these key characters seem almost incidental in this scene, and the senses are instead assaulted with its main focus: the wrestlers and the match. Indeed, other members of the crowd are picked out in close-up, albeit more briefly, who have nothing to do with the main narrative. This editing helps to build a sense of collective experience and testimony in light of how the film develops.

Laamb as an act of resistance

Evident in the density of sensory expression and symbolic meaning in this scene is the fact that it has a much greater purpose than simply introducing the main characters and the narrative, and it is a purpose which can only be discerned by paying attention to the scene's absences and haunting aspects. Firstly, Marks' assertion that it is by 'referring to the memories of objects, the body, and the senses' (2000: 29) that films can reshape and rethink cultural knowledges is significant in terms of analysing the sensory aesthetics in this scene and for unpacking the density of memory and knowledge it contains. The highly ritualised, spiritually-connected nature of laamb makes it much more than a sport and spectacle; it is a way of performing deep-rooted cultural knowledge – bodily, verbally and symbolically. Bojana Coulibaly writes that 'its visual, kinetic, and choreographic dimensions are highly remarkable' and attest to 'the omnipresence of magic, the spiritual and the virtual aspects of laamb' (2015: 149). This scene offers those same multisensory dimensions through the medium of film. It is in the feeling and sensing beyond the visual that this scene invites – in the vocal performance of the griot, the responses of the crowd, the close-ups of skin and textures, and the way in which the 'body becomes a tool for cultural and creative expression' (Coulibaly, 2015: 153) – that the very notion of a linear narrative is contested, allowing for different conceptualisations of temporality to be introduced.

This apparently incidental opening scene actually works to alter the filmic narrative altogether and opens up alternative temporalities. It is this focus on temporality which brings certain 'slow' cinema aesthetics to bear. Clearly, this scene cannot be described as 'slow': it does not employ the temporal slowness of extended takes, nor audiovisual austerity, but spectatorial senses are so attuned by the haptic, the auditory and the corporeal in this scene that there is an almost hyper-awareness of every detail of the laamb arena and rituals, despite the speed of the cuts and the constant motion. The fight, when it happens, lasts mere seconds. This is a reflection of the phenomenological reality of Senegalese wrestling: matches are often of a very short duration, and indeed last for a much shorter time than that devoted to pre-match rituals. But this pacing of the scene – the lengthy rituals and very brief match – also achieves the effect of seeming to slow and then speed up filmic time. With heightened spectatorial awareness of temporality, and a sense of

experiencing the build-up and match in almost real-time, the haunting traces underlying the laamb rituals can be drawn out, and linear temporality can be questioned.

M'Baye argues that laamb is 'permeated with complex narrative [...] strategies' (2013: 188), one of these being the practice of *bàkk*, a kind of verbal jousting between wrestlers who appropriate griot techniques to boast about their own prowess and draw upon 'a mythical world in which the Western linear notion of time is disrupted' (194). While *bàkk* in the strict sense is not present in this scene (verbal jousts occur between members of the audience, as noted above, but not between the wrestlers themselves), the primacy given to the verbal and musical performance of the griot also alludes to a mythical world in which present, past and future are bound together. Thomas Hale, in his study of griot performance, expresses this as the griot's ability to 'time-bind' (1998:23), emphasising the relevance of the past on the events of present and future, and the ways in which griots juggle tenses and refer back to mythical worlds in which time is more layered and circular than linear. M'baye calls these 'improper stories', in that they are 'narratives that are never fully articulated in performance but that implicitly cross-reference a larger body of myth and historical narratives held in common by a community' (2013: 195), which recalls Gordon's definition of the ghost. In many ways, this scene does the same thing; it is its own 'improper', or haunted, story. Through the sensory focus on the rituals, the wrestlers' bodies and the griot's performance, it draws upon collective knowledge of myth and historical narrative about laamb. This is the 'logic of haunting', to use Derrida's term (2006: 10), that the scene possesses: it does not fully explain the significance of the laamb rituals portrayed; the griot's song is not particularly clear to make out; the editing offers a montage of snippets rather than an overview of the whole. Instead, it relies on collective, cultural knowledge, drawing on centuries of tradition, richly constructed myths and rituals, and the meaning laamb has taken on in the contemporary era of mass migration to Europe. None of this is explicitly present, but it is there in trace form in every shot, and this has profound significance on the filmic narrative as a whole, and in the context of the film, contributes to a decoloniality of being.

Laamb, as noted above, links past present and future in complex and non-linear ways. One of the functions of the combining of temporalities through haunting – by referring back through ritual to a 'dense site where history and subjectivity make social life' (Gordon, 1997: 8) – is to bring the past to bear on the present and future and to offer alternative life trajectories, particularly for young men. In the postcolonial era, laamb has become an important part of cultural decolonisation in Senegal. Coulibaly explains that this 'purely local activity which has survived through colonization [has become] an important tool of cultural resistance and revival' (2015: 155-156), in explicit resistance to European colonial and neo-colonial practices. The use of laamb

in this way is portrayed notably in Aminata Sow Fall's novel, *L'Appel des arènes* (1982) and in the film adaptation of the same name by Cheikh Ndiaye (2005), in which the European education of Nalla, a boy just coming of age, is set in contrast with the spiritual and kinaesthetic teachings he finds among the local wrestling community. Here, laamb becomes an act of embodied resistance against one form of persisting colonial dominance: that of a middle-aged elite, Europeanised by their own education, conditioned into thinking that European education is somehow superior, and wanting it for their own children. Laamb, in *L'Appel des arènes*, offers an alternative to this, grounded in local knowledge, history and practices.

Coulibaly also proposes laamb as a tool of resistance for young Senegalese men, an alternative to crossing the Mediterranean on exactly the type of pirogue seen in the film, something that Coulibaly, like Touré, recognises as 'an experience which very often leads to tragedy' (2015: 158). This is because laamb is a highly aspirational sport. The country's elite wrestlers earn huge sums of money per match, as well as the glory of asserting their physical prowess. It is therefore a hugely popular sport among Senegalese boys and young men, who dream of achieving the same levels of success, and thus it provides an alternative to migration to Europe in search of a better future. As such, laamb can be seen as an act of resistance against European domination, and against the drain of young men in particular leaving Senegal for Europe. This is not to deny the obvious fact that the vast majority will never achieve the great success of Senegal's celebrity wrestlers, but it is no less likely than achieving wealth and success in Europe, and in the practice of laamb at whatever level, young men remain in Senegal rather than dying at sea, and cultural knowledge, stretching deep into the pre-colonial past, can survive in the present and can contribute to the cultural formation of the future.

In a film about that very migration route, and about the death zone it becomes for so many, this scene thus takes on very particular significance and stands out as a potent act of resistance so that the film not only represents the horrors of the journeys across the sea on rickety pirogues, but confronts what Touré calls, in the film's closing credits, 'les miroirs de l'occident' (01:20:45), to which so many are fatefully drawn. This opening scene, then, does much more than set the scene of departure for the rest of the film; it is a rallying cry against the deaths, against the feeling of inevitability that migration to Europe is the only option. It is an assertion of Senegalese culture, history, knowledge and pride. Above all, it becomes a scene haunted by those absent bodies Touré dedicates the film to, those drowned at sea attempting to migrate, whose lives could have been so different. It recognises, and represents in subsequent scenes, why people feel forced to migrate, and touches on the threats to so many livelihoods in Senegal brought about by globalisation. Yet, by opening the film with this intoxicating, immediate portrayal of laamb, Touré

also advocates change, for the ongoing need for decolonial being and thinking that would allow for aspirations to be fulfilled on Senegalese soil. Such a decoloniality of being could be produced from the type of local cultural knowledge and practice that underpins laamb.

This short scene from *La Pirogue* is instructive for understanding the haunted sites of the other films analysed in this chapter. In the way that bodies combine with space here, altering one another in a mutually constitutive process, and in the way that multiple temporalities, coexisting, as de Luca and Barradas Jorge (2016) suggest, can be sensed through the rituals of laamb, this scene demonstrates some of the mechanisms by which a decoloniality of being can be put into practice. It establishes an understanding of haunting as a site where an immensity of knowledge and memory is concentrated into specific material acts and/or bodies. By drawing out the dense and material aspects of such haunted sites, alternative knowledges can be accessed and, in the way that humans relate bodily to one another, and to such sites, processes of reincorporation, using this knowledge, can begin. This is the type of decoloniality of being, born out of the negotiation of presence and absence, and of immensity and specificity evoked in this opening scene of *La Pirogue*, that all the films address, in one way or another.

Childhood and decoloniality in *A República di Mininus*

Like *La Pirogue*, *A República di Mininus* (2012) introduces haunted spaces that mediate between zones of being and non-being that provide space in which the continual creation of the self, through bodily movement and interaction with others, can be realised by the film's characters. Fulfilling young people's aspirations and potential, and connecting them to their native land, is also a central and explicit aim of this film. The film's director, Flora Gomes, is Guinea-Bissau's leading (and one of its only) filmmakers. The film's dialogue is in English, the first of Gomes' films not in Crioulo. With the exception of the Hollywood actor Danny Glover, this does not make things easy for the cast, largely made up of non-professional child actors and a few professional Mozambican actors. The dialogue is often stilted and, in addition to the setting of an imagined Children's Republic in which children take on all adult job roles of a functioning society, from government officials to healthcare and council workers, it creates the feeling of watching children play-acting. Yet it brings together the themes of civil war, neo-colonial socioeconomics, and identity struggles. It portrays a youthful nation struggling with the legacy of colonialism and war and the trauma it has wrought, a nation in which the revolutionary politics of the Bissau-Guinean independence leader are still trying to find their place. In this sense, despite employing Glover's star power, making a film in English with a soundtrack by the Senegalese superstar Youssou N'Dour and shooting it in Maputo, Mozambique, *A República di Mininus* is very much a film about Guinea-Bissau.

The apparent play-acting, rather than merely being a product of foreign-language dialogue and putting children into adult roles, has real-world significance. Guinea-Bissau has suffered through much disillusionment and violence in its building of a postcolonial nation, something which Gomes has shown extensively in his films. It would be an understatement to say that nation-building has not come easily: serious divisions in the PAIGC led to the assassination of Amílcar Cabral in 1973, a year before independence was even achieved. Gomes, however, has been a passionate advocate, through his country's civil wars and political unrest, of bringing the country together in Cabral's vision of unity, overcoming ethnic and linguistic divides. It is a concept he calls *Guinendadi*: 'Um grito de desespero do querer sermos o que somos' [A cry of desperation of wanting to be who we are] (in *Guinendadi Reportage*, 2015). *A República di Mininus*, then, is a film with a mission, which contributes directly and explicitly to the ongoing nation-building process in Guinea-Bissau, of a bringing-into-being of national identity, and speaking to its youth in an international language. Danny Glover's participation is much less incongruous and more deliberate with this understanding of the film: a well-respected advocate of, and contributor to, African cinema, and a Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF, Glover has used the film to highlight youth issues in Guinea-Bissau.²³ The film has even inspired an organisation in Guinea-Bissau called *A República di Mininus Hoje*, an organisation which Glover has publicly given his support to (Unicef, 2014).

Seeing beyond the visible

Though aesthetically a very different film to *La Pirogue*, the creative imagining of *Guinendadi* in *A República di Mininus* produces similar 'dense sites' of memory and knowledge. It too aims to renew society based on resistance to continuations of colonialist epistemology and instead seeks to reclaim indigenous cultural values to inform an alternative vision of the future. The first such haunted space is apparent in the film's opening scenes: the palatial, colonial building serving as the headquarters for the country's president and his cabinet. The scene opens with Dubem, the president's advisor, standing by a window. This is a medium-shot, focused on Dubem (played by Glover) and the material of the layered net curtains obscuring his view to the outside world. He can, however, hear the gunfire and bombing taking place beyond the gauze, apparently the only one who can. The cabinet members, for the moment out of shot, argue about policy in vague, almost nonsensical terms. Dubem, throughout the film is simultaneously a narrator and character. Here his narrating function comes to the fore, with words he thinks, rather than speaks, intoned to the spectator as a voice-over. His voice overpowers those of the cabinet for the moment

²³ Danny Glover also makes a cameo appearance in Abderrahmane Sissako's *Bamako* (2006); this is briefly discussed in Chapter Four.

as he narrates: 'what hangs over our heads is going to destroy us and make us fall like rotten fruit from the tree'. He pauses briefly, in contemplation, then adds: 'except only if there is a dream to rescue us can ever come true' (00:08:22-08:39). Now the angry voice of one of the politicians berating his colleagues, calling for more factories to be built, comes to the fore. Dubem turns slowly from the window and the camera pans, while simultaneously zooming out, to take in a wide shot of the whole room, the cabinet seated at a grand table in the centre. The sound of bombs and gunfire continues, but the visual image is one of cocooned elitism: a huge chandelier hangs above the table, and the room's wedding-cake architecture is finished in gold drapes.

In this single shot, sensory density is achieved through the layering of voices and sounds, in the attention to the textures of the room. Dubem's words, thought rather than spoken, foretelling the downfall of this bourgeois regime, and the sound of encroaching destruction from beyond the frame, haunts this space. The scene illustrates exactly the type of national bourgeoisie that Fanon (1961) warned about: the leaders of independent African nations, who, rather than liberating the people, instead continue to manage Western interests. It demonstrates the situation of socioeconomic neo-colonialism which has created the perfect conditions for disillusionment and violence. There is, therefore, the haunting presence of colonialism here, exerting its influence still over state governance and, on the other hand, the haunting presence of Dubem, who sees much more than is apparently visible.

Dubem, though practically blind without his glasses, is able to see more than anyone else because he has not forgotten how to. Now seated at the table beside the president, he takes his glasses off and, in a humorous act of embodied resistance, starts spinning them around and pinching the bridge of his nose in exaggerated despair, signalling the ridiculousness of this elitist government. In so doing, he drops his glasses and has to slip under the table to retrieve them. Here, the camera takes up position at the end of the table, at floor level, as Dubem blindly searches for his glasses, which are being kicked around by the politicians. He is right underneath the table when the first bomb hits the building, to the sound of smashing glass and screams. As he re-emerges, without his glasses, the second rocket hits. With a wide shot of the room here, the destruction it causes is visible to the spectator this time, and everyone flees, except Dubem, now alone and unseeing in the deserted, destroyed room.

As the shelling of the building continues relentlessly, Dubem takes shelter in a storage room where he finds Nuta, a terrified child who has taken shelter there. Shot in close-ups in this confined space, here there is a bodily density and proximity established as Nuta clings to Dubem. 'I don't have a future!' she tells him in terror. But she finds some glasses for Dubem in an old cabinet, and when he tries them on, a look of wonder comes over his face. He tells her they were

once glasses of wise men, but ‘they fell into the hands of a man who didn’t want to see’ (00:14:05-00:14:23). With these glasses, Dubem can see the future, and tells Nuta that she is going to have a future as a doctor, to heal not only people, but this broken nation. As in *La Pirogue*, albeit in a more didactic way here, almost setting out a blueprint for Guinea-Bissau’s future, this enclosed, dense space relies on haunting traces that recall ‘the memories of objects, the body, and the senses’ (Marks, 2000: 29), referring back to an ancestral past and using this cultural knowledge to inform the future. Thus, in an opening sequence which tears down a bourgeois elite strongly connected to colonial power, Gomes dramatically clears the way for a new way of being, decolonially, based on mobile association between the young and old, of altering space and time based on bodily interaction with space and time.

The opening sequence culminates in a powerful shot that encapsulates the ideas it has raised so far. Dubem and Nuta have emerged from the store room and cautiously left the building to discover a ruined, abandoned city and, at this point, following a series of snapshot wide shots of the city that demonstrate the extent of the destruction and the scale of abandonment, there is a sudden contrast with a cut to an intense close-up. The shot is first focused on a large basket of fruit, and the camera slowly pans down to reveal Nuta’s face, inch by inch. She has a glazed, shocked expression and seems rooted to the spot. As her face is fully revealed, taking up the entire frame, the melons begin to fall from the basket, slowly at first (figure 2.3 below). As the camera continues its inexorable, slow pan down Nuta’s body, the melons fall faster and faster. There is a cut to a wide panning shot, now taken up by hundreds of melons and mangoes, tumbling down a set of steps, some breaking on impact. Close-ups can produce a ‘jolting and excessive’ effect, according to Tom Gunning (1994: 294), and an “intense phenomenological experience of presence’ according to Mary-Ann Doane (2003: 94). The panning close-up of Nuta induces both these effects, and in the excessive presence created, alludes to the ‘haunted community’ of Nuta’s body, tasked with a decolonial project far beyond her individual vision and desires. The rotten fruit has fallen; Nuta remains.



Figure 2.3. *A República di Mininus* (2012: 00:17:15). Close-up of Nuta as the fruit falls.

The haunted space of the Children's Republic

This interaction between body, space and time comes to the fore in the establishment of the *República di Mininus* (Children's Republic). The adults have abandoned the city, but the children remain, and with the support of Dubem, they set up their own republic from the remains of the destroyed state. Some children, however, remain outside this space, victimised and violent, armed child soldiers and children who have survived mass killings in their villages. While using digital effects and some surreal aesthetics to demonstrate these two different worlds, 'slow time' is activated here for the reasons set out by De Luca and Barradas Jorge: 'to actualise and negotiate conceptually different temporalities and competing visions' (2016: 15) of both time and space, visions established by the children's bodily engagement. At various points, the two worlds, that of the child soldiers and victims, and that of the Children's Republic, collide. Gomes represents this visually, superimposing images on top of one another, and using blurred overlays to portray the porous division between the two worlds (figure 2.4 below). Most of those outside of the Republic cannot see it, much as Dubem could not see without the glasses of the wise men. It is thus rendered as a haunted space. Within the site of the Republic, there is an interplay of presence and absence, and a purposeful *bringing into being*: a 'mobile association' (Walcott, 2014: 104) of bodies with one another, and with space, in a way that produces transformations in both bodies and space, and therefore opens up potential ways of being decolonially.



Figure 2.4 (00:24:54). Superimposition of images.

Amílcar Cabral haunts quite literally here - the first scene set in the Children's Republic opens with an establishing shot of a street where a boy is pushing a bike along, on the back of which is the head of a statue of Cabral in a plastic crate. A tracking shot follows the boy, the bike and the head through the streets, until they disappear into the crowd at an intersection. The head of Cabral is part of a larger bust that appears in Gomes' previous film, *Nha Fala* (2002). In that film, the bust played a key comedic role as two 'madmen' tried to find a place to put it in Bissau, and were shooed away by various residents. Here again, it seems that Cabral, and his vision of unity, is trying to find a place to be.

Perhaps Cabral's memory has a greater chance of being reinstated here: the Children's Republic is a fantastical space, set apart from the real world. It is a place where the repeated failures and traumas of civil war, authoritarian leadership, frequent military coups d'état, and rampant capitalism – which destroys both ecosystem and cultural heritage – can be left behind. Society can be reset and Cabral's revolutionary ideals can at last be properly implemented. The Children's Republic offers space and time for the country's youth to rethink how things are done. Indeed, they quickly discover that they have stopped growing. It is a unique form of excorporation: the children actively and consciously attend to their bodies, having them weighed and measured frequently to confirm a complete lack of growth. At first, they are happy with the status quo. The state functions well, with a radical form of democracy in place: a new president is elected every day, heading up a cabinet to debate the issues of the day and make decisions. The children have taken over and restored the palatial room we saw in earlier scenes, but now the grand table is a chaos of balloons, streamers and multicoloured paper. Citizens are no longer kept out, but are invited to attend the debates and meetings to have their voices heard, and by working with a spirit of collectivity and unity, where power is never concentrated in one person's hands, the republic seems harmonious. However, the children are worried about not growing up, not having the chance to have children of their own, and not being able to develop and renew their society.

Mon-de-Ferro and bodily alienation

For much of the middle section of the film Dubem is not visible, but his voice haunts the frame at regular intervals, explaining how he is bringing a group of children from the outside, the only ones he has been able to save, into the republic. At moments when Dubem is narrating, completely black shots, or shots that disorient, are used, giving primacy to voice and sound and frustrating visual coherency, similar to the effect created in the opening of *La Pirogue*. In many ways, *A República* is a parable with Dubem as narrator, drawing upon an oral mode of address, which reinforces the delinking from colonial continuities and instead uses the body as locus of production, drawing upon ancestral knowledges. It is thanks to Dubem, an omnipotent figure, that this dishevelled group of children arrive and disrupt the harmony of the republic. The key character among this group is Mon-de-Ferro, who exemplifies an extreme example of bodily alienation. His face is slashed diagonally by an angry raised scar, and he has committed heinous acts of violence. In contrast to the openness and warmth of the citizens of the republic, Mon-de-Ferro is closed off, radiating anger that comes from deep within. Somewhere, in his encounters with others, he must have experienced such painful breaks in his body schema that he is no longer the child, the person, he once was. He is, to use Elaine Scarry's term, a 'body in pain' (1985). This

term was introduced in Chapter One; here it is employed in the specific context of war that informs Scarry's discussion.

Scarry demonstrates how bodily alienation so easily occurs during war, where the purpose is to injure, on a massive and reciprocal scale: 'to alter (to burn, to blast, to shell, to cut) human tissue as well as to alter the surface, shape, and deep entirety of the objects that human beings recognize as extensions of themselves' (1985: 64). This is an example of extensive and repeated excorporation that Zeiler (2013) posits leads to a complete breakdown of the body schema and, therefore, bodily alienation. The alienating experience of war is not complete with the injuring process, however. Scarry points out that in order to perpetuate war, 'injuring must be disowned [and] neutralized' through the use of euphemisms and by referring to the destruction of weaponry of war, rather than of the humans operating the weapons. Scarry explains: 'although a weapon is an extension of the human body (as is acknowledged in their collective designation "arms")' and therefore incorporated into someone's body schema, 'it is instead the human body that becomes in this vocabulary an extension of the weapon' (1985: 67). This is a point made saliently in the film, both in terms of Mon-de-Ferro's name, which translates as 'hand of iron', and visually: the first shot we see of Mon-de-Ferro is a close-up of the rifle slung around the midsection of his body. The focus is entirely on the weapon; the parts of his body we can see: his hands and torso, appear as extensions of the weapon. This is the shot that first establishes Mon-de-Ferro's character, before the camera pans up to his face (figure 2.5 below). In contrast to the close-up of Nuta, which establishes her presence, here Mon-de-Ferro's alienation is what comes across most strongly. The following sequence, of Mon-de-Ferro indiscriminately shooting landmines, creating huge explosions, killing many of the villagers that his band of soldiers has captured, wildly toting his gun and leaving a vast trail of destruction and bloody trauma in his wake, only serves to reinforce this image.



Figure 2.5 (00:02:50). First shot of Mon-de-Ferro.

Once within the Children's Republic, however, a process of coming to terms with the trauma and pain he has suffered can begin. As Mon-de-Ferro lies, injured, on a hospital bed after his arrival, there is a close-up of his face at this point, slashed as it is by the diagonal scar, before cutting to black and re-focusing on younger Mon-de-Ferro, no more than five or six years old. There is an

intense close-up of his eye, and of the blood congealing on his face, so we learn that this is the moment he got his scar, and a visceral, bodily connection is made with the spectator through the proximity and intensity of the image. There is a cut to a wider shot of the room, in which bodies lie, almost piled on top of one another. It seems as if they are sleeping, but as Mon-de-Ferro clammers over them and shakes a woman we take to be his mother, it is clear that he is the only survivor of a brutal attack. Mon-de-Ferro slips the wedding ring off his mother's finger and conceals it just before a soldier enters the room, roughly grabs Mon-de-Ferro, and leads him out into bright, white light. Not a single word is spoken, but the horror of what Mon-de-Ferro has experienced is palpable. In the earlier scene featuring Mon-de-Ferro discussed above (Figure 2.5), we also see him putting the ring, strung on a chain, around his neck. We can understand the ring to be significant in some way at that point, but it is only in this later flashback scene that the full traumatic significance of the ring is made clear. Mon-de-Ferro's body, then, seems almost secondary to the objects of trauma and violence which weigh it down. His body is a 'haunted community', and finding a way to overcome the traumatic memories while retaining the history of his family and his people, is central to Mon-de-Ferro's project of 'learning to live'.

This project is not a straightforward one. While the other new arrivals settle into life in the peace of the republic, Mon-de-Ferro cannot. He rampages through the hospital's pharmacy and ends up high on drugs on the roof of the building. He refuses any offers of friendship and is generally destructive. Finally, when invited by some of the other children to join them in a game of football, it is revealed that Mon-de-Ferro has no idea how to play. All he knows is being a soldier and being a body in pain. His human vulnerability becomes apparent. Encouraged by the others, he does eventually join in, and finds some joy in the game, but as soon as he does, he is visited by a frequent vision, that of a large Alsatian dog, who does not move or make any sound, but seems to judge Mon-de-Ferro with his eyes. It is a vision which has tormented Mon-de-Ferro on numerous occasions, but this time, it becomes too much, and he falls to the ground, unconscious. This vision can be understood as part of the 'haunted community' of Mon-de-Ferro's body. The dog, with its wise eyes, tethers Mon-de-Ferro to life, and to a humanity that is not completely lost.

Redemption, running and reincorporation of the bodily schema

Indeed, this episode is a humbling experience for Mon-de-Ferro and elicits real concern for him from the other children: the first time there has been a sense of strong human connection involving Mon-de-Ferro. In the next scene, an increasingly elderly and frail Dubem agrees to help Mon-de-Ferro, and all of the new arrivals, to deal with their trauma. In a tangle of trees by the beach, he instructs them to collect one stone for each time they have hurt someone, and for each time someone has hurt them. The scene is dark and closed, and the colours are washed out, almost

black-and-white. It is difficult to gain any perspective on the setting: the shots are mainly medium and close-ups, emphasising the claustrophobic elements of the undergrowth as the children collect their stones. It is accompanied by Youssou N'Dour's evocative soundtrack: here employing heavy, synthesised bass notes and an urgent rhythm. The aesthetics attest to the deep sense of trauma being re-lived in each of the children's bodies. When the children have collected their stones, they emerge onto the beach, and there is an immediate sensory contrast: now there are wide shots of the beach, suffused with sunlight. The dark, forbidding trees now appear green and lush in the background. The soundtrack has faded away, replaced with only the natural sounds of the beach as the waves rhythmically hit the sand. Dubem gestures for the children to start hurling the stones into the sea, one by one. Mon-de-Ferro is reluctant, but eventually he too approaches the water. As he throws his stones in, he shouts: 'free me from this weight!' (01:10:18). Dubem explains – ostensibly to Mon-de-Ferro but more in his function as narrator – that everyone has a stone at the bottom of the sea. 'The history of the Children's Republic,' he says, 'is recorded in the depths below' (01:10:35). It is a country built on a traumatic past, but it is a trauma that the citizens are learning to free themselves of, while not entirely forgetting their history. Freeing themselves from trauma, from bodily alienation, whilst retaining traces of memory and history, is a process of re-humanisation, and points towards a more sustainable decoloniality of being, one in which the children, and all their ideals, may be allowed to grow up.

As Mon-de-Ferro throws his last stone into the sea, he asks, aloud, to be freed of his scar. He begins to walk towards the sea. A cut to a close up focuses on Mon-de-Ferro's army-issue boots, which he removes, followed by his camouflage jacket and vest as he begins to run towards the sea. Divested of the accoutrements of war which have dominated him and alienated him from his own bodily schema, Mon-de-Ferro runs, a triumphant, physical act which reconnects him with his human, bodily identity and which, as Nagib's concept proposes, allows him to connect with and take possession of a territory. Body and land are intertwined. In this scene, the run, experienced bodily by Hedviges Mamudo, the actor, and expressed in the fictional body of Mon-de-Ferro, takes precedence. The phenomenological reality of the run is emphasised with the use of tracking shots, which cut between medium shots of Mon-de-Ferro's upper body and of his legs and feet as they pound the sand beneath him (figures 2.6 and 2.7 below). It is a choice of shot which Nagib notes is a 'common companion of cinematic runners as they [...] drag the camera through the territory of their actions' (2011: 29). As discussed above, *A República di Mininus* is a theatrical, fantastical and in many ways, unreal film. However, this does not preclude it from engaging with an 'ethics of realism', as is most evident in this running scene. Indeed, Nagib argues that it is in the merging of fiction and fact that the act of running in films takes on such significance. 'Fictional, at times mythic, [the] run, enacted in reality, gives material life to the virtual medium of film' (2011: 19).

In this scene, *A República di Mininus* produces both its own reality, in Mamudo's running body across the sand and into the water, and its own mythical story: Mon-de-Ferro disappears in a bit of digital trickery, only to re-emerge, his scar having vanished from his face. For the first time, he is able to smile with pure happiness, and his face is that of a child, not a battle-hardened soldier.



Figures 2.6 and 2.7 (01:11:15 – 01:11:54). Interspersing upper and lower body shots of Mon-de-Ferro's run

It is through this act of running, of physical, bodily exertion, and in the mythic renewal provided by the sea which holds the secrets of the Children's Republic, that Mon-de-Ferro is able to enact embodied resistance to overcome the bodily alienation and traumatising he has suffered. At the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1952) advocates for relation and connection, one human to another, rather than maintaining a status quo built on narratives of superiority and inferiority. Re-humanisation seems just as important to Fanon, and indeed connected bodily to, the violent resistance proposed in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The essential thing in any form of resistance, after damaging processes of alienation, which causes a sort of paralysis, as Fanon sees it, whether wrought by colonialism or the authoritarian 'bourgeois' regimes which followed, is the animation and rediscovery of the body, refusing it to become merely a passive object, but instead, through movement of the body, finding 'a new rhythm of life and [...] forgotten muscular tensions (1963: 241), which can develop the imagination.

Developing imagination in this way seems to be the overwhelming aim of the film. In its combination of fantastical elements, a didactic, moral narrative and, at the culmination of the film, the emphasis on a body in motion, running, rediscovering, and reclaiming territory, *A República di Mininus* intends to affect change in Guinea-Bissau, to stimulate imagination and to encourage decolonialities of being, especially among the youth. That it has inspired a movement focused on the rights of the child in Guinea-Bissau is testament to its mission. Mon-de-Ferro's redemption is at the heart of all of this, because it is through his act of running that bodily alienation is overcome, embodied resistance begun, and imagination sparked.

Silence, trauma and damaged bodies in *Félicité*

Aesthetically and narratively, *Félicité* (2017), directed by Alain Gomis, is a very different film to *A República di Mininus*. Gomis favours techniques common to many 'slow' films, such as improvisation and the flexibility afforded to him by the use of digital cameras to shoot scenes as they unfurl; including scenes in which not much happens; and incorporating the phenomenological reality of the location, in this case, the urban environment of Kinshasa, DRC. As will be discussed below, such techniques transform the concept of linear narrative development and help to open up new temporalities. After success at the Berlin Film Festival and with Oscars buzz around it, *Félicité* won the *Étalon de Yennenga* at Fespaco 2017. With good reason, much of the critical response to the film has focused on the eponymous character who occupies a good deal of the screen time: Félicité, a bar singer and single mother in Kinshasa, played by first-time actor Véro Tshanda Beya. Her onscreen presence captivated audiences at Berlin, Fespaco and beyond (see, for example Vikram Murthi, 2017; Peter Bradshaw, 2017). However, like *A República di Mininus*, at the heart of this film is a young man who is suffering very deep, very painful bodily alienation, and for whom the processes of reincorporation are hard-fought. This is Félicité's son, Samo (Gaetan Claudia), whose motorcycle accident at the very start of the film drives the plot, as far as there is one. As Samo lies in hospital, Félicité tries desperately to raise the money necessary to save his leg from amputation, ultimately unsuccessfully.

It is easy to view Samo as simply a minor character providing the motivations for Félicité's actions throughout the film, particularly given that his onscreen time is brief and he is mostly silent and immobile during those scenes. However, Samo, in his state of physical and emotional trauma, provides a complex example of bodily alienation within an urban environment where the human body is often in a state of precarity and can be easily erased. In fact, Samo's extreme case of bodily alienation is echoed in the more subtle excorporation and alienation experienced by Félicité and Tabu, a drunk from the bar where Félicité sings, who becomes an unexpected ally to both Félicité and Samo.

For a music-dominated film, silence paradoxically pervades it, both a way of expressing a deep bodily disconnect, for both Samo and Félicité, and as an act of resistance against the attempts of others to control and manage their bodies. Félicité, when she is not singing, says very little. Additionally, Gomis employs lengthy shots, uncomfortably so, at times, in which there is no dialogue. This kind of silence, where not much is happening and nothing is being said, is characteristic of slow cinema: it changes perceptions of cinematic time by creating uncomfortable pauses, and the spectator has to attend to the corporeal, sensory communication of the characters instead. It is the refusal to speak, something enacted by both Samo and Félicité to varying degrees,

which makes their silence more potent, especially when contrasted with the musical soundtrack and the cacophony of Kinshasa's streets. This analysis focuses on key scenes from the film in which there are dense sites of haunting. All the scenes here deal with the aftermath of Samo's amputation, the absence of his leg, and the characters' politics of silence.

The interplay of presence and absence

When we first see the result of Samo's amputation, a musical interlude segues into the scene, and contrasts with the silent performances of Félicité and Samo. The way in which Gomis blends phenomenological, almost documentary-style, reality with the fictional poetics of his characters is exemplified in this sequence. It starts in the blue-hued rehearsal space of the Orchestre Symphonique Kimbanguiste, a symphony orchestra based in Kinshasa. Against the sound of mournful strings, a soprano sings, in monotone, the words to Robert Burns' poem: 'My Heart's in the Highlands'. The first two lines, repeated several times throughout the song, sets up the conditions of absence and dislocation that pervade the film and the following scene in particular: 'My heart's in the highlands/my heart is not here'. The song continues even as there is a cut away from the orchestra to brief vignettes of daily life in motion around Kinshasa, from a grey, smog-coated highway to a side street with a fire burning, to fields being tended, and eventually leading us to the hospital. Here, the music merges into the sound of a bell being rung. A panning shot draws the spectator's gaze to the woman ringing the bell and, following her along the hospital's walkways, we are led to the hospital bed where Samo lies motionless. By this time, the music has faded, but the sound of the bell remains, and the words of the song linger in the air. A link is thus established between the 'not here' of the song and the bodily/spiritual disconnect being experienced by the characters.

The scene as a whole is far from silent: it opens with the doctor already in full flow, explaining Samo's treatment and how to care for him at home. However, we experience her speech largely from Félicité's perspective, who does not say a word. The doctor switches fluidly between Lingala and French: some of the Lingala is subtitled, but not all of it, and the sense created is that Félicité is not fully present. Tabu is there to help Félicité get Samo home. Normally loquacious, he too remains silent, though he engages slightly with the doctor, with brief nods. Samo does not respond or even move at all, not to the doctor's words, nor to his mother's actions: his alienation from his own body is apparently so deep that he can no longer use it to communicate or relate to anybody else. The camera cuts between the three main characters, with close-ups of their faces, while the doctor remains largely in the background, and speaks continuously and with very little variation in intonation. The speech washes over both the characters and the spectators, rather

than being fully listened to or responded to: it becomes background noise to the silent performances of the protagonists.

The absence of Samo's leg in this scene is striking: the spectator has previously seen him lying on the bed with his leg injured but intact. Now it is gone, and Gomis uses close-ups to emphasise its absence: his now unnecessary second shoe, which Félicité picks up and puts down again, and the excess material of his jeans, which she folds back, revealing the nothingness within (see figure 2.8 below). The emphasis here on 'haptic visuality' is strong, evoking the sense of touch in relation to the materials surrounding Samo's absent leg. It creates a strong bodily resonance, even while Samo remains somewhat beyond identification. He does not show the slightest hint of movement or attention: his eyes remain averted, looking up, his arms are splayed above his head. The 'not here' of both Samo's leg, a violently corporeal absence, and of his spirit, is palpable. He appears in this scene as a body only, and not a complete one at that. When Tabu lifts him up, Samo's head falls back, as if he is lifeless. Tabu has to put him down and pick him up so that he is vertical in his arms. Nothing in Samo's expression so much as flickers, and he offers no co-operation. He now seems rigid, doll-like. It is as if he has removed himself from his new bodily reality entirely.



Figure 2.8. *Félicité* (01:06:08). Close-up emphasising absence.

As they leave the hospital, the camera gives motion to Samo, bobbing up and down while trained on Samo's upper body, visually echoing Tabu's gait as he walks with Samo out of the hospital. The sense of motion, in contrast to Samo's bodily stillness, continues in a cut to the next scene, in the taxi home. For a brief moment, nothing at all is said, and there is just the faint sound of the traffic around them. However, Tabu feels the need to fill the vacuum and, as they approach the city's new robot traffic warden, he begins an enthusiastic monologue. Inspired by the fact that the robot was made there, in the Congo, Tabu sees the sky as the limit for his own ambition. He tells Félicité:

Jour oko sutuka kaka boye, na teve pan! Na bimi, sanza penza likolo ya sanza. Donc nazo kota kota ba etoile ya mi' ba etoile, donc nazo sote etoile oyo , etoile oyo, etoile oyo lokola nde' bayo tambola na ba moto awa. Ponga naza Munene, ngai Tabu, na Munene ko leka ba etoile nyoso! (01:08:18 – 01:08:48). [One day you'll be amazed to see me on the TV,

literally standing on the moon! Jumping from star to star, from one to the other, like those guys on their motorbikes, because I am the great Tabu! I am greater than all the stars!].²⁴

It's a sequence shot in close-ups inside the car, interspersed with establishing shots of Kinshasa's highways, with the robot at the centre, through the car windscreen. A sense of motion is maintained throughout with the camera's position inside the moving car: it brings the spectator on the journey, foregrounding Kinshasa and the relation between bodies and space: a geo- and bio-political act. Tabu's words are fantastical and over-the-top but daring to dream is a way of coming back from a place of alienation, re-imagining not just the relationship of both an individual to the world, and also a nation. Tabu asserts a deep sense of Congolese pride, of personal pride, and within the close confines of the car, he opens up space for Samo and Félicité to *be*. He repeats Félicité's name slowly, savouring the sound of it, almost willing her back into being. The close-up of her face reveals the merest hint of a smile.

There are frequent cuts between close-ups of Tabu, Félicité and Samo in this sequence. Samo still does not respond at all, and the close-ups of him are blurred, in contrast to the sharpness of Tabu and Félicité: he remains somewhat unreachable and 'not there'. However, there is something in this brief scene which provides a sense of hope. Samo has lost a leg, a devastating event, particularly within the harsh environment of Kinshasa, but this is a place where robot traffic wardens with moving limbs can be built, so maybe there are possibilities for an amputee. Tabu's imagery of jumping between stars as if on a motorbike also offers a world of imagination in which Samo can ride a motorbike again. This scene sets up the conditions by which Samo can begin a process of re-incorporation of a much-altered bodily schema.

In these scenes, Samo's amputation casts into sharp relief the interplay of presence and absence of the body that Sobchack (2010) refers to. Reflecting on her own experience of having a leg amputated, she describes 'a sort of vaguely bounded band of 'unfilled' space, a no-man's land separating two different perceptions of my body that would admit no trespass' (2010: 57). It is within this 'unfilled' space, vacillating between presence and absence that Sobchack identifies a kind of 'corporeal self-absorption' (57) in which 'the body is reflexively directed away from its ordinary and transparent being-toward-the-world, its primary state of absence. Rather, the body 'folds back upon itself', its corporeal self-presence experienced [...] dysfunctionally' (56). It seems that Samo's body, in the sense that he knew it, is no longer there. This is a salient example of

²⁴ Lingala transcription provided by Diyo Bopengo.

Zeiler's (2013) proposition that reincorporation is a work of the creation of the self: for Samo, there is no going back to his previous schema.

All three characters experience this interplay of bodily absence and presence in different ways. Félicité, who has such a vibrant, corporeal being-in-the-world when performing, seems to disappear within herself at other times. Indeed, her presence is repeatedly rejected by family and community as she traverses the city with increasingly desperate, maternal cries for help as her son lies in hospital. At numerous intervals in the film, she disappears from the phenomenological world of everyday Kinshasa altogether, instead losing herself in an alternative space which seems to exist outside of time. This is a dreamlike night-time forest, the scenes are shot in such a pitch-black palette that, at times, it is hard to make out anything at all. It is a place of calm which connects, like the wrestling scene in *La Pirogue*, with a wealth of history, memory and mythology. Félicité's bodily motion in the nighttime forest offers a way for her to enact resistance against the constraints on her body that apply in everyday life – whether she is being dragged from the house of her wealthy ex-partner, or induced to dance and sing in the bar to try to earn enough money to save her son's leg – she escapes into an imagined world of altogether different movement.²⁵

Tabu, meanwhile, loses himself in drunkenness, his body becoming excessive within space, uncontrolled, undirected and uninhibited. All three of them, therefore, experience a kind of dysfunctional corporeal self-presence, to use Sobchack's phrase, in which they are 'not there', but somewhere within the haunted zones created from the combining of their bodies, absent and present, with different spaces. They are characters on the edges of society – of a society itself which seems to be at the edges of life, where daily negotiations of absence and death, presence and life, make up the rhythms of the city, where bodily alienation and 'death-zones' are a constant risk. Among the wandering, naturalistic shots Gomis includes, filmed in the streets of Kinshasa, there is a shocking scene in a marketplace, in which a man is brutally attacked for having stolen some small item. He is left lying on the ground, bleeding heavily from the head. This scene comes out of the blue, with no context and no relation to the main narrative, but it is one example among many of the ways in which the city, almost a character itself, haunts and jeopardises life. The Kinshasa of *Félicité* is one of complex contradictions, of life and death, of presence and absence. This characterisation of the city resonates in the bodies of the characters, as will be demonstrated below.

²⁵ These forest scenes are analysed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

Mobile association and human connection

It is the interrelation between the three characters, set up in the scenes discussed above, particularly with the use of close-ups to engender affect and emotional connection, which saves them from themselves. It is through their relationships with one another that they are able to reincorporate their own bodily schemas. This recalls Walcott's idea that a 'decolonial project works the ruins of catastrophe to shape an other human intimacy based on [...] mobile association' (2014: 104). By representing a complex and underrepresented place, in its fidelity to using Lingala, the lingua franca, and to the musical rhythms of Kinshasa, it opens up a decoloniality of being, in which individual destinies are interwoven into the fabric of the city, and which are brought back from spaces of alienation to re-existence based on interconnection with both other people and with the land.

Catastrophe, in this film, is at once highly individual and personal – Samo's amputation – but also reverberates collectively in the city space where individual catastrophes are multiplied and play out daily. The relationships of Félicité, Samo and Tabu are certainly created through mobile association rather than fixed structure: while appearing at certain points as an almost traditional family unit, they are far from it. While Félicité and Tabu come gradually, over the course of the film, to build a romantic relationship, Tabu never stops his womanising, and Félicité does not attempt to stop him. They do not seem designed for conjugal life. Likewise, while Tabu protects Félicité and Samo when they are at their most vulnerable and when nobody else will, he hardly takes on the role of a father figure to Samo. Instead, to aid the boy's recovery, he gets him drunk, acting more like a wayward friend than responsible guardian. For these characters though, their unconventional relationships, created according to the shifting needs of their situations, work.

In their 'mobile association' with one another, deep human intimacy is indeed created. In a scene immediately following Samo's return home from the hospital, visitors descend on the house to offer words of support to Félicité and prayers of thanks for keeping Samo alive. These are the same people who were nowhere to be found when Félicité was trying desperately to save her son's leg. In the first shot, as the visitors pile into the house, Gomis uses a visual layering of images, with the faces of the visitors faded and superimposed over Félicité's, as she allows them to greet her without offering any expression or response. It creates the arresting impression of her not engaging with what is going on in the phenomenological world around her, but retreating to her inner world. There is an added effect of double-vision, so that it is unclear what is materially real and what is the secondary image: the spectator's visual perception is thus distorted and distanced (figure 2.9 below). The same techniques are used in the next shot, where Samo lies on the bed: we see him through the double-vision lens – it is not clear exactly where he is and where he is

not. The visitors appear in Samo's room like ghosts: translucent, spectral figures incanting their prayers. Yet it is Samo and Félicité who are actually more ghost-like, alienated, whose being in and towards the world is ambivalent – and the spectator is transported to that dense haunted space with them, looking back out at the world. The visual confusion and disturbance created in this scene transmits a strong feeling of dislocation. Audiovisual coherency is frustrated and, to return to Marks' concept of haptic visuality, the scene refers to 'the memories of [...] the body and the senses' (2000: 29). The effect of this leaves the spectator attempting to discern the materially, phenomenologically real bodies from their ephemeral, digital traces on the screen, unsure which is the 'real' presence. Amid this visually chaotic scene, Tabu finds Félicité and, with great tenderness, pours her a glass of water and holds it to her lips, bringing her back from wherever she has gone. He thanks the visitors, now solid, corporeal presences, and asks them to leave 'so that we can breathe a little' (01:06:55). It is thus the resistance of the characters to socially-imposed structure and rules, and their ability to form free-flowing, unconventional relationships that brings Félicité, Samo and Tabu back from the haunted spaces of their own bodies, and which allows them to reconnect with the world.



Figure 2.9 (01:09:32). Distortion and double vision.

In one of the final scenes, Samo leaves the house on crutches and with a curious, active gaze, begins to explore the city anew. Panning shots here make it seem as though the city is whirling around him – a sensory overload for both character and spectator. However, amid the chaos of the traffic and people at a busy intersection, Samo appears serene. Kinshasa no longer feels full of threat and danger as it has for much of the film, but ripe with possibility. He has found a way back toward the world: in that haunted space between life and death which he occupied for the majority of the film he has learnt to live again. Samo's body does not run, but in its movement through the city, an 'ethics of realism' is certainly present. Samo, immobile for so long, demonstrates a reclamation of territory and land. Despite using digital enhancement and greenscreen elsewhere in the film, Gomis chose to avoid such techniques to represent the amputation and instead used physical and material techniques in order to hide the actor Gaetan Claudia's leg. In the hospital scene, this was done with the creation of a hole in the mattress, while

special trousers were used to keep his leg hidden in other scenes (interview with Gomis, Appendix I). This requirement on the part of the actor to engage corporeally with the represented amputation again attests to an 'ethics of realism': the actor had to navigate his post-amputation scenes with his leg physically bound and unavailable for walking on. There is, therefore, a greater interaction between the bodily experience of the actor and that of the character than might have been achieved with digital effects.

This scene, with its panning shots creating a sense of breathless motion and wonder, echoes the 'mobile association' set up between the characters: such a connection is established here between this mobile, fast-moving world and Samo's bodily presence, clearly defined amidst it all, breathing it in, seemingly comfortable *being*. The association here between Samo and Kinshasa hints at a decoloniality of being in a more expansive sense than limited to an individual. It pulls together ideas from elsewhere in the film, such as the shots of the robot traffic officer, Tabu's fantasy of jumping between stars, and the central characters' project of 'learning to live' (Derrida, 2006: xvii), to point towards a decoloniality of being for Kinshasa. In this whirling scene, bodily resonance between spectator and film encompasses not just Samo, but also the city, which attests to Gomis' ethical commitment to the representation of Kinshasa. It is a way of delinking, to use Mignolo's (2011) term, from epistemological assumptions about Kinshasa, a line of argument which will be developed further in Chapter Four.

Absence and presence in the haunted spaces of *Timbuktu*

In *Timbuktu* (2015), directed by Abderrahmane Sissako, much as the name suggests, a city-space is also central to the narrative, and is interwoven in the embodied resistance of the characters, creating a multitude of 'dense sites'. In fact, this space is what holds the film together: Sissako's films have long defied easy classification, with Manthia Diawara describing his style as less narrative cinema and more 'poetic cinema' (2015: 78). The weaving together of beautiful images in highly sensory scenes, which may relate only tentatively to one another, and the frequent lack of any clear linear narrative are techniques he has refined over several films, and they culminate in this film. As with previous films *Heremakono* (Waiting for Happiness, 2002) and *Bamako* (2006), *Timbuktu* deals incisively with pressing social issues, but there was a good deal more at stake with *Timbuktu*. Indeed, on its first festival releases, the film achieved worldwide renown as much for the controversies surrounding it as for its artistic merit. In its portrayal of the Jihadist group, Ansar Dine, which took control of northern Mali in 2012, the film dares to humanise the Jihadi militants at the same time as it condemns the regime and builds a picture of resistance against it. In France and Burkina Faso, two countries which, in 2015, had very recently experienced Jihadi terrorism and instability, *Timbuktu* set nerves jangling. It was briefly banned

in parts of Paris, and, at Fespaco in 2015, where it should have been a serious contender for the *Étalon d'Yennenga*, the top prize, it was almost withdrawn altogether and eventually shown with enhanced security measures in place.²⁶ *Timbuktu*, however, has achieved the greatest global success of any African film in recent memory, being shortlisted for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2014, and was even distributed on Netflix and Amazon Prime Video on its release in 2015, a rarity for Fespaco films.²⁷

It is a fragmentary, constantly shifting film, set in a single yet intensely transnational space permeated by global influences. Originally conceived as a documentary, *Timbuktu* turned into this work of poetic fiction because, as Sissako explains in an interview, making a documentary was simply too risky (interview with Leigh, 2015). Incursions and terrorism by extremist groups remain rife, and this made filming, mere months after Ansar Dine had lost control of the region, very difficult. Sissako ended up shooting in Mauritania, rather than Mali as originally intended (see interview with Saito, 2015). *Timbuktu* nevertheless maintains an integrity linked to phenomenological reality in its presentation and representations of bodies in space, demonstrating what Nagib terms 'ethics of realism' (2011).

Like *Félicité*, *Timbuktu* has many 'slow' aesthetics, and the narrative is certainly not hurried: it barely asserts itself at all. Generous time is given to the spectator to take in the small details, so that a picture of the city, its surroundings, and its inhabitants is gradually, almost organically, built, engendering the sense of community and the fractures within it. Many of the characters appear for only one or two scenes throughout the film, but each one contributes profoundly to the complex picture that is gradually constructed. A good percentage of the film is devoted to exploring the extraordinary mundanity of the situation: the bored recruit who is tasked with publicising new, punitive laws via loudspeaker, eventually condensing the litany of interdictions into the tired statement: 'il est interdit [...] de faire n'importe quoi' [it is forbidden [...] to do any old thing] (39:18); a senior foreign jihadist being taught how to drive in the desert by his mild-mannered, young aide; a Tuareg woman washing her hair outside her tent, ignoring the romantic advances of a jihadist. However, it is thanks to this gentle touch in the filmmaking and the exploration of the many facets of everyday life under extremist rule that the representation of

²⁶ Fespaco 2015 was marred by the uprising against President Blaise Compaoré, who resigned and fled the country in October 2014. Given the rise in Jihadism across the region and the period of instability in the country, Fespaco officials were worried about inciting terror by showing the film.

²⁷ I refer here to Fespaco rather than African films because popular Nollywood films, as well as being streamed nationally and internationally on a variety of dedicated platforms, also get regular distribution (on a much smaller scale) on major streaming sites such as Netflix.

oppression, violence and resistance, which is part and parcel of that mundanity, has a deeper affective power.

This gradual building and layering of characters and stories creates the kind of 'sensory presence and density' that Rancière (2016: 249) refers to, and sets up Timbuktu as a dense site where past and present converge. The entire city seems to exist in the film in a sort of suspended state, despite the urgency and specificity of the subject matter. For some critics, the lack of clear narrative structure and the many ellipses of the film are seen as an abstraction from reality: 'presenting human characters who are abstracted them from their context (no mention of the Tuareg rebellion and so on)', making it a more 'universal' story of human struggles. (William Brown, 2015: sect.3, para.4). It is true that the complex political situation in Northern Mali is only alluded to, but by investigating the absences, ellipses and dense haunted spaces of the film, the interpretation that the film is abstracted from or suspended outside reality falls away: rather, the film situates Timbuktu and its inhabitants in a precarious zone of non-being deeply related to the context, where the development of a decoloniality of being connecting people and place through the body, its memory, and the senses, is essential to survival.

A game of football with an absent ball

Such embodied resistance and sensory density is realised most affectively in a scene capturing a game of football played with an absent ball. The contexts of catastrophe in *Félicité* and *Timbuktu* are very different, but here too, the characters use catastrophe to build new ways of relating to one another, as Walcott (2014) suggests. In a short preceding scene, there is a close-up of a young man's face, defiant but afraid. He has been caught playing football, which is forbidden under the regime's newly-imposed Sharia law, and he is sentenced to 20 lashes. There is an immediate cut from his face to the next scene, which opens with a wide shot of a group of the boys on a football pitch, in the midst of a game. The tension is palpable, not only because of the threat hanging over the boys (as made explicit in the preceding scene) but also because of the music, which begins immediately with the start of the scene, with a single, dominant, drawn-out note. There is a cut to a medium shot of a boy in a red top who moves forwards and bends down, shaping his hands around the absent ball, positioning 'it', and placing 'it' on the ground. This brings the spectator's attention firmly to the absent ball, before cutting back to the wide shot, taken from behind the goal. All the players are positioned in anticipation, their bright football shirts standing out in vibrant contrast to the beige of the dusty sky and sand. The single note continues, maintaining the feeling of tension as the boy in red prepares to kick the absent ball. This tension is broken suddenly by a donkey wandering into shot and across the path between the striker and goalkeeper, accompanied by a break in the musical tension as a series of almost comedic, bouncy

notes replace the single, strained note. It is an incongruous moment that transforms this from a merely risky act into one of resistance, in which there is a refusal of fear, and which acknowledges the ridiculousness of the rules being imposed by the regime.

The rest of the scene is one of elegant motion, focused on the trace of the absent ball and the running bodies of the players. The scene recalls Nagib's assertion that the bodily experience of actors running in real landscapes in film is a way of 'conquering hostile, harsh and even extreme environments [and] experiencing, demarcating and taking possession of a territory' (2011: 19) – and the stakes could not be higher here, as these young boys use a game of football to reclaim land forcibly and violently taken from them by Ansar Dine. The camera and the bodies of the actors move in harmony to create a kinetic energy, much as in the laamb scene of *La Pirogue*. As the football game gets underway, the shots vary between wide tracking shots of the players running up and down the pitch and close-ups of their legs in fast-paced motion across the sand, creating connections between body and land, and recalling Merleau-Ponty's assertion the body does not merely exist within space and time, but rather it 'combines with them and includes them' (1962: 140). The experiences of painful excorporation that so many have experienced at the hands of the regime – the constant attention that everyone must pay to their own body, the agonising and violent punishments for any perceived infraction of the rules – form the impetus for each of these boys to reclaim a being-in-the-world through bodily connection with others and with the land. What is most remarkable is how the camera keeps focus on the absent ball, demarcated by the sand kicked up by the players and by their bodily gestures (figure 2.10 below). Whereas the motion of the players is emphasised with the use of tracking shots, following alongside them as they run, much as the referee does, the absent ball is captured with panning shots, which create a palpable and exhilarating sense of motion, drawing the spectator's gaze rapidly across the frame. This engenders a feeling of bodily dislocation due to the speed of movement, almost too fast to take in, and the notable absence of the ball itself.



Figure 2.10. *Timbuktu* (00:42:09). Wide shot mid-way through the football game.

The sense of motion is elevated by the music, an original composition for the film by Amine Bouhafa. It is a rich composition that lends a certain gravity and depth to the scene, as if compensating for the lighter-than-air trace of the ball. The piece works to choreograph the movements of both the players and absent ball, culminating in a triumphant crescendo and a percussive burst which gives sound to the shower of sand we see onscreen as a goal is scored. Thus, while the ball lacks visual materiality, it has an aural presence. Immediately after this, the music changes, introducing ominous bass notes in a minor key, and with it the whole atmosphere of the scene alters from one of jubilation to apprehension. This marks the appearance of a group of militants on mopeds, but once again, the threat they pose is subverted. Without missing a beat, the players stop where they are and start to perform stretches on the spot, any hint of the ball vanishing completely with their change in motion. Their movements are accompanied by the same upbeat, bouncy notes that accompanied the donkey's wander across the pitch. The sense of the subversive, resistant, and humorous is deftly increased through these two contrasting layers of music. The pace of the editing slows too with the introduction of more static shots and slower tracking shots, following the militants as they ride around the pitch. Unable to locate any evidence of football playing, they circle around and ride off again. Before the militants are out of shot, but while their backs are to the pitch, the boys leap up to retake their positions, reinstating their game and demonstrating an unbowed appetite for resistance, subversion of the rules, and a reclaiming of territory.

The ball is created from collective meaning-making and, as such, even in its material absence, it has a haunting potential and thus poses a threat to the authority of the extremists. The jihadists attempt to reassert their control of the space and enforce a zone of non-being through the physical remapping of borders on their mopeds, which temporarily changes the nature of the sandy space, stopping it from being a football pitch. Yet since the ball is created in the collective mentality of the boys, it cannot be requisitioned nor controlled, and the moment the militants ride off, the ball reasserts itself. The jihadists have been unable to have any lasting impact on the meaning of the space or on the bodily motion of the boys. Thus, the boys are able to reclaim the contested territory in the way that Nagib's realist ethics suggest: by performing bodily motion in a real landscape and taking possession of this most extreme and hostile of environments. Marks' concept of 'haptic visuality' (2000: 22) can be applied here: the absent ball occupies a liminal space between thought, memory and the senses, imbuing it with much greater meaning and sensory interaction than its visual representation would create.

Resistance, alienation, and the death of GPS

Contrary to Brown's assertion that 'there is no mention of the Tuareg rebellion' (2015: sect.3, para.4), the complexity of the Tuareg situation within the crisis unfolds in a rich and poetic way.²⁸ Some of the film's key characters: Kidane, a cow herder, his wife Satima, their daughter, Toya and Issan, the orphaned son of another herdsman, are Tuareg, but are opposed to the jihadi incursion. They are seemingly the only Tuareg family who have not either fled or joined Ansar Dine, and are now isolated in a landscape of sand dunes outside the city: Satima talks about missing her friends; Kidane recognises one of the jihadists as an old family friend, but the young man, his face obscured by a scarf, denies all knowledge. Issan and Toya, playing in the dunes, discuss their fathers; Toya tells Issan that the reason her father is still alive is because he plays the guitar and sings, whereas Issan's father was a warrior. Then she seems to realise that being a musician is no longer conducive to remaining alive in this place, and tells Issan: 'ⵓ ⵓⵎⵓ ⵓⵎⵓ ⵓⵎⵓ, ⵓⵎⵓ ⵓⵎⵓ ⵓⵎⵓ ⵓⵎⵓ ⵓⵎⵓ ⵓⵎⵓ' (Adinata tamaten chik khourh wartiallah, Nak abba wanine itiwī assahag, wah tane tined ya wadime) [Whether he's here or not, I know he sings but don't tell anyone] (00:38:29).²⁹ Their situation is a haunted one, very much on the edge of life. Absence, alienation and disconnection abounds. We never see the 'before' scene, one of community and friendships, of many homes among the sand dunes, but in these brief interactions and half-articulated memories, it can be sensed, much like the absent ball in the football game. *Timbuktu* thus works beyond the limits of vision, much as Marks' 'haptic visuality' suggests.

Alioune Sow (2016), in his reading of the film, makes the suggestion that Kidane may well have been involved in the separatist movement (hence why this otherwise gentle, guitar-playing cow herder, and devoted father to a young daughter, has a pistol stashed away) but now finds himself at odds with the regime. Instead, this family remains, asserting resistance to the regime in the small acts of humanity that connect body, land and culture. Kidane enacts resistance when he plays the guitar (music is banned under the regime, something explored in greater depth in Chapter Four). Satima, who is being romantically pursued by Abdelkarim, one of the foreign jihadists, performs an act of resistance simply by continuing to wash her hair in his presence - an act which must be understood in the context of the regime's control and policing of women's

²⁸ Hussein Solomon (2013) provides a thorough overview of the history and various political rivalries which contributed to the 2012 crisis in Northern Mali, involving struggles between the Malian government, the Tuareg Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNL) and Ansar Dine. As Solomon explains, the MNL formed an uneasy coalition with Ansar Dine, but were soon overpowered by Ansar Dine and its network of foreign Islamist groups.

²⁹ Tamasheq transcription by native speakers who preferred to remain anonymous. The transcription is first given in Tifinagh, the written script used for Tamasheq, then a phonetic Tamasheq transcription. The Tifinagh had to be inserted as an image, owing to MS Word not supporting Tifinagh characters.

bodies, which requires them to be fully covered. When Abdelkarim approaches, Satima does not pause in her hair-washing. He tells her to cover her head; she retorts that he does not need to look. Like the boys playing football, Satima refuses to be bowed by the presence of the jihadists. Haptic visuality is attuned here through close-ups of Satima's face and hair, the rhythmic combing of her hair, the sound of water trickling back into the bowl. It creates sensory resonance between Satima and the spectator, enlisting the spectator in her resistance. It is an example of the 'symbolic participation of the spectator in taking Timbuktu back' (Diawara, 2015: 77), something which is achieved by the layering of small, individual acts of resistance into a collective picture.

Kidane's prize cow is named GPS. This cow is the focus of Kidane's hope for a better future: if GPS produces a male calf, he will give it to Issan, he says. It is their hope for prosperity. This cow is also interwoven with Kidane's identity, his steadfast will to remain in Timbuktu, to maintain his way of life and his livelihood. GPS, then, establishes Kidane's geolocation more profoundly and materially than any satellite technology. Thus, when GPS wanders off from the herd as Issan drives them across a lake and gets tangled in fishing nets, it is an allegory which makes visible the sensory density of this site on the edge of the city, where, instead of human interconnection, and connection between body and land - necessary for any decoloniality of being, necessary for maintaining life - there is disconnection and alienation. Relations have been strained for some time between Kidane and Amadou, the fisherman, who is not Tuareg. Amadou, seeing GPS in his nets, launches a spear and kills the cow. A set of extreme close-ups of different parts of GPS's body as she dies create shock, affect and a visceral sense of suffering. The death of GPS represents not just the loss of a prize cow and the economic significance of that, but also an untethering of Kidane, an unravelling of his bodily schema and of his ability to continue to exist in Timbuktu.

The death of GPS is enough to cause a total breakdown in human connection, and for this gentle guitar-player to pick up his pistol and head to the lake to confront Amadou. There is an argument, and a tussle ensues in which the pistol is fired, seemingly by accident. Their bodies fall away from each other and into the water. It is not clear at first who fired the shot, or who has been shot. With a jolt, Kidane jumps up, checks himself for injuries, and in panic, starts wading through the lake to the shore. At this point, Sissako cuts from a medium shot to an extreme wide shot, which encompasses the entire lake (figure 2.11 below). The men appear as two tiny dots in the vast landscape. The camera is entirely still; the only thing moving is Kidane. The spectator, rather than the camera, tracks his movement across the lake. Only when he is almost at the other side is there slight, sudden movement from Amadou, who tries to get up but immediately falls back down. As Kidane wades through the lake, he leaves a trace of his movement in the water, which creates a line that visually connects his body to Amadou's across the expanse of water. Slowly, as Kidane

gets further away, this trace connection to Amadou fades. The spectator is left to linger over the enormity of what has just happened and the encroaching dread of what rough justice will be meted out to Kidane. It is a violent tragedy, borne of complex and fragile political alliances, disputes, and the existential threat of diminishing resources, amplified and weaponised by the newly arrived, foreign jihadists. There may be no explicit mention of the Tuareg rebellion, but these characters are not abstracted from the sociopolitical context: it is all there in the film's sensory density.



Figure 2.11 (00:45:15) Kidane is just visible as a tiny speck in roughly the middle of the lake.

Toya and Issan's run

Timbuktu constantly contrasts the violent, destructive force of jihadism with the humanity of individuals - both citizens and jihadists. The Timbuktu of the film remains an ambivalent, haunted space, between being and non-being, where a decoloniality of being is both necessary for re-humanisation and re-existence, and for reconnecting body and land. The final shots of the film emphasise the wearying, destructive, self-perpetuating nature of the violence: after Kidane is sentenced to death for killing Amadou, without the privilege of being allowed to see his wife and daughter for a final time, Satima defies the order and rushes to him on the back of a motorbike ridden by a masked dissident. As Satima runs towards Kidane, both of them are shot to death, and a group of jihadists takes off in pursuit of the masked rider. Toya and Issan, now both orphans, begin to run, separately, through the dunes.

Here, there is fast-paced editing, cutting between shots of the masked rider and the jihadists hunting him down, of Toya running, of Issan running, and of the same images as at the beginning of the film, of an antelope running through the same landscape, also being hunted down. The film ends in this state of motion and uncertainty: the threat of violence hanging over Timbuktu, a perpetuation of this zone of non-being. Yet Toya and Issan's run provides testimony of their presence in Timbuktu. There is once again bodily resonance created, not least in the audible sound of breathing, and of both children murmuring to themselves, maintaining their voices as evidence that they still exist. Much like Mon-de-Ferro's run in *A República di Mininus*, these runs

demonstrate the bodily engagement of the actors, Layla Walet Mohamed and Medhi A.G. Mohamed, with the landscape, reclaiming territory in the way Nagib (2011) proposes. This is all the more significant given that Layla Walet Mohamed is a first-time actor who was living in a refugee camp in Mauritania, having fled the violence in Mali, when Sissako met her (interview with Rena Silverman, 2015).³⁰ Her run, through the dunes of Timbuktu, is itself an act of liberation that Fanon would recognise: the animation and motion of her body, the connection with the breath, the movement of the muscles - but it is one which refuses violence. It is on this basis that Sissako seeks the 'symbolic participation' (Diawara, 2015: 77): of the spectator: to bring an end to the exhausting and devastating cycle of violence in Timbuktu which does little to liberate, and to indicate the need for a different kind of liberation; a decoloniality of being based on human connection.

Conclusion

These films work at the limits of vision and incorporate other senses, and in so doing, they create bodily resonance with the spectator. This can be found, for example, in the focus on texture, touch and materiality in the opening scene of *La Pirogue*; in the physical, material qualities of bodies and land enhanced by bodies in motion in *A República* and *Timbuktu*; and the ghostly figures layered on top of each other in *Félicité*. In this employment of 'haptic visuality' (Marks, 2000), they reveal haunted spaces, the 'dense site[s] where history and subjectivity make social life' (Gordon, 1997). It is in these haunted spaces that a mediation of presence and absence, of being and non-being takes place. They are thus ambivalent spaces from where decolonialities of being can emerge.

Each film's treatment of a different and specific place allowed for the development of such 'dense sites', where haunting could be sensed, and each film represented places and people in varying states of being and non-being, where the interplay of absence and presence was realised in different ways and with different specific aims. *La Pirogue* demonstrated the need for a decoloniality of being to stem the loss of life in migratory journeys, and the importance of connection between body and land in a specific Senegalese context, which also accounts for the mythological and spiritual in the 'haunted communit[ies]' (Derrida, 2006:166) of bodies. *A República di Mininus* foregrounded the urgency of the creation of national identity- *Guinendadi* - and the process of embodied resistance necessary to overcome past trauma. *Félicité* imagined different ways of being and of connections between body and land, encapsulated in the haunting

³⁰ This may also be where Sissako met Medhi A.G. Mohamed, but there is very limited information on him compared to Layla Walet Mohamed; she became something of a breakout star on the film's release.

absence of a limb. Finally, from *Timbuktu* was a plea for humanity, for resistance in Timbuktu, and for the interconnection between people, and with the world. What unites these films is the importance placed, in each of those distinctive narratives, on the 'continuous creation of human existence' (Zeiler 2013: 81).

It has been argued in this chapter that the haunted spaces where presence and absence, life and death, is interwoven, is where re-humanisation can be realised. The analyses of the films demonstrate that reincorporation of a coherent schema is not easily achieved and is never a finished process: the aim is that the body's interplay of presence and absence is no longer uncomfortable, painful or damaging, but exists in a coherent schema that allows for a productive, co-creative being-in-the-world. Such reincorporation is more evident in *A República di Mininus* and *Félicité* and is more ambivalent in *La Pirogue* and *Timbuktu*, but, as has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, the focus is on *bringing into being*. What each film insists upon, as decolonial arguments propose, is finding different ways of being, dependent on the interconnectedness of body, memory, land, and of people, one to another, on a very human level.

Taking cues from slow cinema theory and from Marks' concept of haptic visuality, particularly in the way both approaches emphasise materiality and the senses, as well as the particular temporal considerations of slow cinema, it was argued that these films use a range of aesthetic and narrative techniques to engage the senses and to create bodily resonance with the spectator and to offer an 'ethics of realism' (Nagib, 2011) in the connection between actors' bodies and the particular localities in which they move. This means that the films not only represent routes to a decoloniality of being, but actively work towards achieving it, with the participation of the spectator a necessary element. These films thus bring together thinking and doing; theory and praxis, in a dynamic, lived, and sensed way.

Finally, what this chapter has begun to show, and what will be developed in the next chapter, is the destructive nature of violence for any project aimed at achieving a decoloniality of being, and of reincorporating bodily schemas effectively. What emerged in this chapter was the power of violence to disconnect, to alienate, and to prevent any 'continuous creation of human existence' (Zeiler, 2013: 81). The next chapter explores this idea in much greater depth, bringing a different set of films into the dialogue.

Chapter Three

Bodies in pain

The limitations of violence as a strategy of resistance

We don't know how to deal with the messy moral and political quandaries caused by the violent action of victims. When the line between guilt and innocence wavers [...] when we are overwhelmed by compassion or pity for the victim who victimizes, we can be unsettled by the ambiguity of events and our resulting ambivalence
– Diane Enns (2012, 1).

Introduction

The last chapter argued that decoloniality of being is based on embodied resistance to processes of alienation, achieved through human interconnection and exchange, what Mignolo and Walsh term 'decolonial conviviality' (2018: 3). It also pointed towards the ways in which violence can prevent such a mode of being. This chapter delves more deeply into the question of violence, alienation and resistance. The intersections here between violence and decoloniality are complex and often deeply ambivalent, creating the sort of 'messy moral and political quandaries' that Enns (2012: 1) refers to. These quandaries and ambiguities of violence are explored here in relation to three of the films: *Medan Vi Lever* (2016), *Alda e Maria* (2011) and *Virgem Margarida* (2012) taking, as a starting point, Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1961). One of its chapters, 'Concerning Violence', has been repeatedly singled out for both celebration and criticism due to the argument Fanon sets out: that the only way to overcome the conditions of violence imposed on colonised bodies is also through violence, but a 'struggle for liberation' (1963: 48) against the coloniser. This liberating violence has the aim of achieving both the decolonisation of nations and a decoloniality of being for individuals – that is, a freedom of bodily expression and a reincorporation of a healthy, coherent bodily schema, one no longer controlled and undermined by violent practices of domination. It is Fanon's call to arms that has attracted so much controversy and attention; far less examined in this context is his understanding of the way in which mind and body are connected, and the need for bodily movement and articulation as a way of reclaiming both body and mind post-colonisation. Engaging in armed struggle, he writes, 'le colonisé découvre le réel et le transforme dans le mouvement de sa praxis, dans l'exercice de la violence, dans son projet de libération' [the colonised discovers reality and transforms it in the praxis of movement, in the exercising of violence, in his liberation project] (1961: 64).³¹ It is with

³¹ I have used the original French text here and my own translation, to preserve the emphasis here on 'movement' and 'praxis'.

this understanding of violence as connected to bodily movement, and the transformation of reality through such movement, that Fanon viewed violence of liberation as a way of achieving a decoloniality of being.

This chapter, through its analysis of the films, questions whether any kind of violence can actually achieve this aim. The films, in dialogue with Fanon's understanding, attest to the link between violence and the damaging effects of bodily alienation and psychological distress or serious mental illness that can result. They advocate, in different ways, for the need to resist such conditions of violence, to reincorporate bodily schemas, and to use the body movement and connection to articulate such resistance and reincorporation. In this dialogue, however, the films act almost as postcolonial postscripts to Fanon's work: with the perspective of hindsight, they demonstrate how misguided violence of liberation can be, and how it can perpetuate states of bodily alienation, oppression, and an inability to fully incorporate a decolonised, healthy, and coherent bodily schema.

In all three films, as in Fanon's understanding of violence, the violent action of individuals is irrevocably connected to a much wider socio-political situation – this is most explicit in *Virgem Margarida* in its portrayal of Frelimo's training camps in Mozambique, but equally applies to *Alda e Maria* and *Medan Vi Lever*, as will be explored below. The films, then, require an analytical approach which encompasses a broad understanding of violence as both personal and structural, or, as Hanafy Youssef and Salah Fadl summarise: 'any relation, process or condition by which an individual or a group violates the physical, social and/or psychological integrity of another person or group' (1996: 528). With this understanding, the disconnecting, alienating power of violence that was proposed in the previous chapter can be better understood: a violation of physical and social integrity, which inflicts damage on the bodily schema of an individual and on their ability to relate to the world.

To define violence in this way, Youssef and Fadl draw upon a much more expansive discussion of violence as it occurs across human societies, as set out in a 1985 work by Hussein Bulhan entitled *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*. Bulhan in fact identifies three levels of violence: personal (relating to a specific, identifiable incident between a perpetrator and victim), institutional (which he classifies as violence within 'microsocial systems', such as psychiatric hospitals, prisons and families), and structural (which operates at a societal level, in which violence can be subtle, embedded into the norms of society, and is ultimately associated with necropolitics) (1985: 136). Both Bulhan and Youssef and Fadl explore violence in relation to Fanon's work, bringing together his politically-motivated work on violence and oppression with

his psychiatric work, which is often overlooked and downplayed as a serious contribution to the field of psychiatry.

Indeed, when studying Fanon's work, it is difficult to separate these two domains, though one is given far more attention than the other. For Fanon, however, there was no disconnect between the individual suffering of someone with mental illness and the wider social system of violence and oppression. As François Maspéro explains: Fanon 'accomplit un remarquable travail médical [...] profondément, viscéralement proche de ses malades en qui il voit avant tout les victimes du système qu'il combat' (2001: 12) [accomplished a remarkable medical work [...] deeply, viscerally close to the patients who he viewed, above all, as victims of the system he was fighting against]. In this work, he analysed the alienation wrought by colonial systems, seen through the lens of the mental illness of individuals. Jean Khalfa, who provides a close analysis of Fanon's psychiatric papers, argues that Fanon demonstrates a sustained focus on the 'impact of social and cultural factors on the development of mental illness' (2015: 53), which also contributes to his broader work on alienation. Fanon himself never separates the psychiatric and political aspects of his work: almost a third of *The Wretched of the Earth* is dedicated to psychiatric case studies of Algerians suffering various forms of mental and psychosomatic illness, which he links to the conditions of colonial war and torture. Furthermore, Fanon viewed the intervention of psychiatric treatments in hospitals, run by French and other international psychiatrists, as another, more insidious form of oppression: '« guérir » correctement un colonisé, c'est-à-dire à le rendre homogène de part en part à un milieu social de type colonial' [to properly "heal" the colonised means making them fit seamlessly into the colonial social structure] (1961: 239).³² It is because of Fanon's clinical work, and the links he draws between the mental illness of individual Algerians and the conditions of colonialism and colonial war, that he concludes that the only way to overcome both individual suffering and alienation and colonisation is through armed struggle.

Violence in Fanon's work is both nuanced and ambivalent: it operates at the personal level, as in the torture of an individual; on an institutional level, specifically the colonial psychiatric institutions he encountered in Algeria, and which use different techniques to oppress and to get colonised people to conform; and on a structural level, through colonial administrations. It can have sudden physical impact, such as in the injuries of war and torture, or it can be insidious, leading to experiences of bodily alienation, and ultimately severe mental and physical illness. For Fanon, such widespread, multifaceted violence can only be countered with violence in order to liberate a nation and its people. He argued that the colonial world was split in two, geographically

³² Here I have used the original French and my own translation to maintain the grammar, and to translate 'colonise' as 'colonised' rather than 'native', as it is more in-keeping with the discussion thus far.

and culturally, creating often physical borders between the colonial and indigenous districts. He writes of the bodily alienation that can result from these violent divisions and imposed borders: 'at times this Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal' (1963: 42). The reclamation of humanity in these circumstances of extreme alienation - is bound up with armed struggle. He continues: 'it is precisely at the moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure [...] victory' (43). By engaging in armed struggle, he argues, people suffering alienation to the point of complete breakdown or paralysis can begin a process of reincorporation and resistance, reconnecting with their breath and muscles, the many movements of their bodies, and can begin to incorporate a decolonised bodily schema.

Figuring violence in the films

It is from the assertion of the necessity of armed struggle to achieve re-humanisation, and therefore a decoloniality of being, that the films depart from Fanon's rationale of violence. The context in which Fanon was working and writing is important to note in comparison to the contemporary context of the production of the films: Fanon's work and his experiences in Algeria inspired armed struggles across Africa as the continent decolonised, and Fanon himself died in 1961, just at the point of mass decolonisation of Francophone Africa and well before the decolonisation of Lusophone Africa. The films engage with the realities of decolonisation: armed struggles, wars of liberation, and the turbulent, often highly violent, postcolonial aftermath. They therefore offer different perspectives, with the benefit of hindsight. The films in this chapter break with the dualistic world set out in Fanon's work and, in particular, problematise gendered assumptions around violence and women's roles in its perpetration.

Medan Vi Lever (dir. Dani Kouyaté, 2016) is set in a contemporary postcolonial context in Sweden and The Gambia and offers nuance and ambivalence to Fanon's documenting of mental illness within colonised communities. The film explores complex experiences of identity negotiation and bodily alienation in a world of increasing globalisation and multidirectional migration, through the relationships of an extended, geographically separated, biracial family. Here, the focus is on the psychosomatic illness of Ylva, the white Swedish grandmother of the protagonist, Ibbe, who is half-Swedish, half-Gambian. Through the decline of Ylva's health throughout the film, Kouyaté develops a complex portrayal of guilt, familial discord and microaggressions on institutional (family) and structural levels, including the undercurrents of racism which still produce the structural violence encountered by Kandia, Ibbe's Gambian mother, in the course of her everyday life and work in Sweden. Ylva's illness exemplifies the deep-rooted disease of racially-motivated structural and institutional violence, which continues to exist. Ylva, like all the characters in this

film, is very ambiguous: she both perpetrates and is subject to microaggressions which, though they can seem incidental and unimportant if taken individually, add up to create conditions of violence with devastating consequences, leading ultimately to the complete breakdown of a body and bodily schema. By untangling these strands of violence and acts of microaggression, the analysis of *Medan Vi Lever* demonstrates the depth and scope of 'geo and body-political' doing and sensing (Mignolo, 2011: 274), relying on human interconnection, that is required to produce a more effective decoloniality of being.

Both *Alda e Maria* and *Virgem Margarida* are set shortly after wars of liberation in Angola and Mozambique respectively. Fanon's message of armed struggle was enthusiastically taken up by the independence movements in both countries, and Portugal, which hung onto its African colonies until the mid-1970s, engaged in bitter, bloody warfare to try to keep them. The results of these colonial wars were catastrophic, unleashing civil wars in their wake and perpetuating various levels of violence and oppression on the very people supposed to be liberated. *Alda e Maria* is set in Portugal, away from the immediate violence of Angola's civil war. The girls have strong beliefs in the project of liberation and the need for continued resistance. However, the unexpected violence they encounter in Lisbon demonstrates the ambivalent reality of postcolonial situations of violence, where violent liberation has not led to effective decoloniality. There is the structural violence of Portugal acting against them, its colonial mentalities and Lusotropicalist mythology not fully broken, and the unexpected institutional violence they experience at the house of a compatriot, the Angolan dressmaker Dona Alice. It is argued below that Dona Alice is an unsettling character because her violence is so unexpected and, as Enns' (2012) concept of ambiguous violence suggests, she vacillates between victim and victimiser. Traumatized by the violence in Angola, and by the death of her son in particular, Dona Alice embodies the dissonance between Fanon's idea of liberating violence and the realities of personal and institutional violence emerging in the aftermath of the liberation struggle in Angola. Fanon writes that 'at the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force' (1963: 94). In *Alda e Maria*, as will be demonstrated, the repercussions of the violence of liberation are entirely the opposite: the ongoing violence that results is poisonous and damaging both to an individual's bodily schema and to those they are in contact with. Dona Alice exemplifies how the outcome is not decoloniality, but the perpetuation of violence.

Virgem Margarida, meanwhile, demonstrates the hypocrisy and deeply embedded structural, gendered violence within the Frelimo regime immediately after the liberation of Mozambique and how the conditions of colonisation, for women in particular, were maintained, rather than eradicated. *Virgem Margarida* is particularly notable here for the way it demonstrates the

consequences of some of Fanon's key ideals for women's participation in revolutionary armed struggle, outlined in *Sociologie d'une révolution: L'an V de la révolution algérienne* (1975), transposed to the Mozambican context through Pan-African revolutionary collaboration in the independence era and shared Marxist thought. *Virgem Margarida* portrays Frelimo's female revolutionaries, but rather than their violence being a powerful tool of decolonisation, here it violence is perpetrated against compatriots, rather than against the coloniser. The key perpetrator is Comandante Maria João, the female soldier who runs the camp. Like Ylva and Dona Alice, she is a very ambivalent character for the reasons Enns (2012) suggests, a character who, on the one hand, seems to gain agency and autonomy through violence, but is carrying out the orders of male superiors and trapped in her role, both mentally and geographically, given the remoteness of the camp. She undergoes a process of questioning that ultimately leads to her rejection of 'liberating' violence and the dismantling of the camp. Such a 'questioning mode of being' (Zeiler, 2013) is a productive starting point for a decoloniality of being, as we have previously seen. However, the film has been criticised (see Owen, 2016) for perpetuating the problematic binary trope of virgin/whore. It will be argued that the foregrounding of difference between Margarida as the crux of the whole film maintains certain barriers to decoloniality that are not so straightforward to dismantle.

Levels of violence in *Medan Vi Lever*

Of all the films in this chapter, violence is least obvious in *Medan Vi Lever*, and it also seems far removed from Fanonian views of violence, armed struggle and decoloniality. However, by unpacking the various microaggressions that underpin familial relations among the main characters and setting them into Bulhan's schema of violence – with its levels of structural, institutional and personal – this section will contend that the film in fact enters into dialogue with Fanon's views on violence, bodily alienation and reincorporation in surprising and sensitive ways. It is a Swedish-produced film (Kouyaté has lived in Sweden for the past 20 years) which focuses on the intergenerational, interracial drama of an extended family in Sweden and The Gambia, dealing with issues of identity, belonging, prejudice and guilt. Kandia (Josette Bushell-Mingo), originally from The Gambia, made her home in Sweden as a young woman after falling in love with a white Swedish man, who, we learn, died a long time ago. Ibbe, the son she had with him, has grown into a tempestuous 20-year-old, with dreams of becoming a hip-hop star (played by Swedish hip-hop artist Adam Kanyama). From the opening scenes of the film, it becomes apparent that Kandia feels alone and increasingly unhappy: she has an estranged relationship with Ibbe's Swedish grandparents, Ibbe no longer seems to need her, and she wants to return to The Gambia for an extended period to rediscover her roots and to reconnect with her family. Ibbe,

however, does need his mother, and, after she leaves, he is encouraged by his adoptive Gambian uncle to join her. The Swedish-set scenes focus on Ibbe's immediate family: his mother, his uncle Sekou (Richard Sseruwagi), and his grandparents, Ylva (Marika Lindström) and Olof (Sten Ljunggren), with whom he spends a great deal of time. Ylva in particular is bereft when Ibbe leaves, and his departure awakens repressed memories of violence that affect all the ties between the family members, and which begin to haunt her, leading to a mysterious illness and, eventually, the complete breakdown of her body.

Alienation in the context of structural, institutional, and personal violence

Two distinct incidences of personal violence rip holes in the façade of family unity and precipitate the events which unfold in the film. The first, explicitly shown, concerns Ibbe pushing his mother over in the course of an argument. It is not a major act of violence and does not cause physical injury to Kandia, but it shocks her deeply. It is a physical manifestation of the struggle in their mother-son relationship, as Ibbe reaches adulthood and wants greater independence – he is both literally and figuratively pushing her away. For Kandia, this single act of personal violence is the last straw in her decision to leave Sweden and return to The Gambia, and it shows the fragility of her sense of belonging and identity within Sweden. If her son no longer wants her, there is nothing else to stay for, because the structural and institutional violence she faces subjects her to repeated experiences of excorporation that remind her of her status as an outsider, and as a black woman in a predominantly white society.

On a structural level, the violence Kandia faces involves numerous microaggressions which take place in the course of her everyday life and work. In the opening scenes, for example, we see Kandia rushing for the bus to work, relief on her face as she spots a vacant seat. As she reaches it, an older, white woman approaches. Kandia moves to allow her to sit down and offers a smile. The woman does not even acknowledge her presence – it is as if Kandia is not there. This 'not-there' feeling, or sense of non-being, is the kind of excorporation Fanon describes in 'L'expérience vécue du Noir' (1952), and it has echoes in this sequence when Kandia reaches her workplace and welcomes in a patient, a middle-aged man who has come to have blood taken. As Kandia sets about the task with professional efficiency, the man asks her where she is from. Exchanging a glance with her friend and co-worker, Eva (Anna Blomberg), Kandia responds that she is from The Gambia. The man then asks whether she has children and, on learning that she has a son, tells her that she must make sure her son knows his heritage and that he should learn 'Gambian'. Eva dissolves into laughter and informs the man that 'Gambian isn't a language!' (00:14:09). This experience of excorporation is somewhat mitigated by the close friendship between Kandia and Eva. As a white, Swedish woman, Eva is not subject to the man's excorporating gaze, but is able to

support her friend, and reveal the idiocy of the man's comments. However, the exchange still causes Kandia to consciously attend to her body and specifically to the colour of her skin because of the man's inappropriate personal questions and patronising assumptions. These incidents, while they seem minor and, in the second instance, ameliorated by her friend's solidarity, have a deep and lasting impact on Kandia. As Zeiler (2013) points out, it is the repetition of experiences of excorporation which leave deep and damaging impacts on the integration of the bodily schema, and the sense from these very early scenes is that this kind of subtle structural violence is routine for Kandia. It leaves her feeling utterly out of place, to the point of bodily alienation.

Even more damaging to Kandia are the conditions of institutional violence which govern her familial relations in Sweden. Within the family structure she has, comprised of Ibbe, Ylva, Olof, and Sekou, she faces yet more repeated excorporation, from Ylva and Olof in particular, who accept Ibbe unconditionally, but barely have a relationship with her and treat her as an outsider. They have a more cordial relationship with Sekou, who is not strictly family to them, than they do with her. Again, on the institutional level, the microaggressions that Kandia faces – the repeated and emphasised lack of acceptance from her in-laws – wear her down and damage her bodily schema. Being-in-the-world, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) posits, is predicated on a positive, agentic understanding of one's relationships, experienced through and by the body, with the world and with others. Kandia, facing frequent excorporation and rejection both on structural and institutional levels, is thus in a very difficult position vis-à-vis a positive sense of being-in-the-world. It is only the few close personal relationships with Ibbe, Sekou and Eva that sustain her bodily schema and sense of identity within the Swedish context.

Ibbe's seemingly minor act of personal violence is therefore devastating and deeply damaging, prompting a deep sense of bodily alienation within Kandia. This is expressed visually and sensorially at the start of the scene where Kandia tells Ibbe that she is leaving. Until this point, their apartment has been shot in a bright palette infused with natural light and a Scandinavian ambiance: plants fill the kitchen countertops; a pot of coffee brews on the side; white, pastel and green tones dominate (figure 3.1). In this scene however, the palette and lighting is much darker, dominated by earthier hues of orange and brown, bringing West African tones into the Swedish apartment. This change in colour and light alludes to Kandia's break with a Swedish identity, a sense of bodily alienation in the place she calls home, and a search for another context in which she can reincorporate a more healthy bodily schema. It is the start of a process towards a decoloniality of being.



Figure 3.1. *Medan Vi Lever* (00:01:22). Light, bright, Scandinavian palette.

The sense of alienation is reinforced by refusing, at first, to let the spectator see Kandia's face. The opening of the scene is shot in medium close-up, but from behind, so that her face is not visible. This is significant because cinematic close-ups are strongly associated with the face: film scholar Mary-Ann Doane argues that 'close up and face are equivalent, interchangeable', and that a close-up thus produces an 'intense phenomenological experience of presence' (2003:94). The refusal to show Kandia's face, then, emphasises the sense of absence and alienation rather than presence: the breakdown of the coherency of her bodily schema. The shot begins at her right shoulder, with her face almost in profile but with no features visible. The camera pans around her back, from right to left, a cinematic delinking from Western norms of going from left to right. Midway is a more extreme close-up at the back of her head, where orange light filtering through the curtained windows catches the tiny hairs on the back of her neck. This produces a haptic, sensory connection, rather than a purely visual one: we become attuned to her human, bodily fragility at this moment of alienation. The camera continues to pan, and zooms out a little, ending on her left side in medium shot, so that she is now fully in profile, but the expression on her face is neutral, unreadable (figures 3.2-3.4 below). Though this opening to the scene may seem designed to prevent spectatorial identification – by not allowing us to see to Kandia's face, or any expressions that we could interpret – it in fact operates on the basis of a sensory and bodily connection between spectator, screen and actor. It palpably transmits the sense that Kandia's is a body lost between places, in a zone of non-being.



Figures 3.2-3.4 (00:26:49 – 27:10). The frames are presented here as they are in the film: chronologically the first frame is farthest on the right.

The ripple effect of violence

The second act of personal violence central to understanding the dysfunctional family dynamics is not explicitly shown, but slowly revealed through snatches of conversation and allegorical

dream sequences: the apparent suicide of Ibbe's father, Ylva and Olof's son – an extreme example of bodily alienation, which is not resolved with the reincorporation of a coherent bodily schema, but death. The ripple effect of his death, and the institutional violence which may have led to it, has perpetuated an ongoing state of violence and microaggressions within the family, which affects all of them: it is part of the reason behind Ylva's rejection of Kandia, it poisons the marital relationship between Ylva and Olof, it creates Ylva's suffocating and jealous love for Ibbe. It comes to light through another, unknowing, act of violence by Ibbe, who is distraught at his mother's departure, to the point of shutting himself off completely, even from his grandparents and uncle. Worried, Sekou turns up at the apartment one day to find it littered with dirty dishes and takeaway boxes, but no sign of Ibbe. He contacts the police and informs Ylva and Olof that Ibbe is missing. When he eventually resurfaces a few days later, Sekou is enraged to find out that Ibbe had in fact been in the apartment all along. He advises Ibbe to go to The Gambia to make amends with his mother, and explains to Ylva and Olof that he needs to go – he had been close to suicide.

The notion that history may be repeating itself is a devastating blow for Ibbe's grandparents and reveals the depth of the cracks in their apparently stable marriage. These cracks have not been hidden exactly: though the couple maintains a respectable façade, doting on their grandson and filling their days with the domestic leisure activities of middle-class pensioners, from the first scenes of the film, they are shown bickering or sniping at one another. However, it is after the devastating news that Ibbe was having suicidal thoughts – reinforcing, in Ylva's mind, her failure to replace Kandia in a maternal role – that a real argument blows up, in which Olof accuses Ylva of driving their son to suicide, and of driving Ibbe to the brink of it. Olof towers over his wife, this genial old man transformed into an intimidating figure. Here, Kouyaté employs medium close-up shots again, but in contrast to the earlier example discussed, in which Kandia's face is not visible, here the shots demand that the spectator look, really look, at Olof's face – at the disgusted curl of his lip; at the anger, hatred even, in his eyes; at the flecks of saliva as he spits angry words at Ylva. (See figure 3.1). Doane writes that the close-up becomes 'a sign, a text, a surface that demands to be read' in a way which takes up space in the film and 'embodies the pure fact of presentation [...] of showing' and in so doing, becomes excessive: 'the scale of the close-up transforms the face into an instance of the gigantic, the monstrous: it overwhelms' (2003: 91-94). The close-up of Olof's face here indeed seems somehow monstrous and excessive: his expression encapsulates the deep-rooted conditions of institutional violence underlying this family structure. It is a way of bringing this somewhat subtle violence to the fore, cutting through the respectable façade. Ylva, who in previous scenes seems a composed, physically and mentally capable woman, is now a seated, hunched figure, pressing her hands to her head in a state of extreme distress and vulnerability. The shot/reverse-shot technique employed here emphasises the uneven balance of

power, with Olof looking down at Ylva (see figure 3.5 below) and Ylva looking up at him, before withdrawing her gaze altogether (figure 3.6). There is no physical violence, but the damage they inflict on each other's bodies – most evidently here on Ylva's body – is palpable, and reinforced by the dialogue. The words that the pair exchange are flinchingly violent and deeply affective. When Olof says that he agrees with Sekou that Ibbe should go to The Gambia to be with his mother, Ylva responds: 'Där ser man hur mycket du älskar ditt barnbarn' [I guess we now know how much you love your grandchild]. It is a comment which fuels Olof's rage: Och du som älskar honom så mycket. Vad kunde din kärlek ha lett till? Självmord, ju strålande! Perfekt! Då hade du varken haft någon son eller någon sonson. Bravo! [...] Du har ju förgiftat hela vår tillvaro med dina förbannade mardrömmar' [And you, who loves him so much, what could your love have led to? Suicide, that's what! That's great! Perfect! Then you wouldn't have a son or a grandson. Well done! [...] You've poisoned our whole life with your goddamned nightmares!] (00:57:09 - 00:57:38).³³The exchange is brief, but devastating – accusations of institutional violence, and words that themselves inflict violence – the effects of which are evident on Ylva's body: it is from this point on that she enters a dramatic downward spiral in her health.



Figure 3.5. (00:57:43).



Figure 3.6. (00:57:29).

This scene is made all the more poignant by the next, which cuts to Ibbe, nonchalantly eating a plate of chicken and rice while Sekou does the drying up behind him: a scene of contented, banal domesticity. Ibbe, without turning around, says casually: 'Jag hörde att du sagt till farfar att jag försökte ta självmord. Varför sa du så. Det är inte ens sant' [I heard you told Grandpa I tried to kill myself. Why did you say that? It's not even true']. Sekou responds: 'men det var väl du som sa att du vill försvinna från den här jävla planet' [you said you wanted to disappear from this freaking planet' (00:55:52 – 00:56:01). Ibbe rolls his eyes in exasperation and explains he was not serious. The conversation moves on, Ibbe and Sekou make amends and joke with each other, completely unaware of the damage their words have unleashed on Olof and Ylva. Ibbe's throwaway comment is an unintentionally violent act which causes great suffering. In the complex family dynamics represented in these scenes, there is no one perpetrator, nor any clear and easily definable violence. Rather there is an atmosphere of interconnected, often unintended, institutional violence which damages all those within. This is much as Bulhan's (1985) theory of violence as

³³ Swedish transcription by Sindija Franzetti.

relation and process suggests, and while violence may be identified as structural, institutional and personal, the family dynamics and the effects on individuals, particularly Kandia and Ylva, demonstrate how interconnected these processes of violence are, and how all of them can be expressed and articulated.

Ylva: linking violence through dreams and bodily breakdown

In addition to identifying the three levels of violence discussed above, Bulhan also sets out three key domains in which violence may be enacted: 'physical, social, and/or psychological'. Again, these domains are not easy to separate out from one another, and indeed Bulhan argues that 'violence in any of the three domains [...] has significant repercussions in the other two domains' (1985: 136). This is evident in Kandia's case, where one minor act of obvious physical violence had extensive psychological repercussions. In Ylva's case, the psychological violence of Ibbe, Sekou and Olof's words, as unintentional as it may have been, has profound physical repercussions, in the form of a severe psychosomatic illness which ends up with her motionless in a hospital bed. The term 'psychosomatic' is one often charged with negative connotations: Monica Greco notes that it has associations of an illness that is 'all in the mind', or of a failure to 'manag[e] the situations of one's life' (1998: 2). Yet, as Fanon certainly understanding in his experience treating patients in Algeria – and which became central to his interpretation of phenomenology – physical, bodily symptoms that had a psychological or social origin were not evidence of some failing, but demonstrated the indissociable nature of body and mind, and the centrality of a coherent bodily schema to both physical and mental wellbeing.

Bulhan, in noting that the three domains, physical, social and psychological affect one another, suggests that violence which is not physical in nature may still have physical, bodily effects. Ylva's illness encompasses these concepts: she expresses, through her body, different processes and relations of violence: some of which she has inflicted on others and for which she feels guilt; some of which have been inflicted on her, and which are framed for her by the institution of family, something which is all-important for Ylva. Its gradual breakdown, with her son's suicide, and then Kandia and Ibbe's departure (and Ylva's recognition of her own contribution to its breakdown) is reflected in the way in which her body breaks down. It is an affective, physical representation of the way in which mind and body structure one another, and what happens when a bodily schema no longer makes sense. In a later scene, at Ylva and Olof's house, following the argument, Ylva is slumped in a chair on the veranda. Olof approaches and asks how she is. She refuses to look at him, and when he asks where it hurts, she responds 'everywhere', which could mean in every domain, physical, social and psychological, as well as simply everywhere in her body.

The institutional framework of violence in which Ylva's illness plays out is indissociable from personal and structural violence, a linking which is achieved through visions and dreams that Ylva has (which Olof refers to as her 'nightmares'). These are very fragmentary, but over the course of the film, they build towards a bigger picture through which West African mythology is woven. These dreams and visions are a striking and intriguing aspect of the film and is a way in which Kouyaté both demonstrates the subtlety and insidiousness of the structural violence which discriminates against black bodies (and how it implicates and affects Ylva, her son, Kandia and Ibbe) and works to decolonise the lens, in that he puts West African images, myth and narrative structure into the mind of a white Swedish woman.

Indeed, these visions are examples of the way in which the film operates with a certain politics of border thinking which, in Mignolo's terms, entails 'anchoring a politics of knowledge that is ingrained both in the body and in local histories' (2011: 274). It is a way of thinking and of producing knowledge grounded in the body and in a particular geographical space, which is productive for negotiating a decoloniality of being. *Medan Vi Lever* may be Swedish-produced and have many of its scenes set there, but through a politics of border thinking, it shifts the production of knowledge to West Africa. This is evident in its use of West African music and percussion as the dominant soundtrack, including in the scenes set in Sweden; in the way in which it weaves West African traditions, sayings and cultural reference points (such as a kola nut that Ibbe gives to his mother by way of apology after pushing her); and in the way it demonstrates the potential for spaces such as Kandia's apartment to be geo-politically transformed from Swedish to West African simply by altering the colour palette and light. The sequence of visions and dreams alters the narrative structure and brings this border thinking to the fore. In a similar way to the close-ups discussed, the visions demand the spectator's attention and illuminate otherwise hidden aspects of the processes of violence that operate on institutional and structural levels.

Ylva's first two visions are accompanied by oppressive, percussive music and the uncomfortable sound of mosquitos buzzing. There are certain similarities to Félicité's inner world in Alain Gomis' film (see Chapter Two): a bucolic setting; the sounds of nature buzzing; the slow, reveal of this world through brief snippets that interrupt the main narrative; and the inclusions of water as a key element. Ylva's first vision lasts a mere couple of seconds, as Ylva tells Ibbe that she has not slept much. There is a glimpse of a mermaid's tail, splashing out of the water, against a backdrop of rocky cliffs. The next vision is slightly longer and offers more context. It happens as Ylva and Olof are arguing about Kandia, Ylva saying that she should go back to The Gambia, that Ibbe no longer needs her. Now the mermaid reveals her face – a young Kandia's face - surfacing from the water, and a close-up shot emphasises her demand to be seen, to be recognised, and it is as if she

is reaching out from the past to challenge Ylva's words in the present. From beneath thick, black hair, she gazes intently at something in the middle distance, and the reverse-shot reveals a young man, who we take to be Ylva's son, pushing away a younger Ylva as he jumps into the water. In contrast to the mermaid, Ylva and her son are shot in wide-angle, from high above. It is only when the son jumps into the water and grabs onto the mermaid that there is a close-up of his face, looking back at his mother as they swim away.

This mermaid version of Kandia can be understood as a representation of Mami Wata, a spiritual symbol that appears throughout West African mythology, which emerged in the context of early trade and contact between Africa and other parts of the world, and which is intertwined with religious and seafaring mythology from a wide diversity of cultures. Here, Mami Wata constitutes a mysterious and threatening presence, symbolising Ylva's belief that Kandia took her son from her. The close-up of the young Kandia as Mami Wata emphasises her presence, expressing the demand of a body and history deserving of recognition. The reaction that Ylva has to this presence is one of fear and a visceral dislike. In the combination of these perspectives, Ylva's visions encapsulate not only the body politics of Kandia's cultural history, but also the conditions of structural violence which constitute her body and history as a deeply threatening presence. These are the conditions of violence which permeate her life in Sweden, and which are so ingrained and invisible (much like the assumption of universality in Western epistemology to which Mignolo (2011) refers, something in itself, which is profoundly violent on a structural level) and Ylva has internalised them, believing Kandia to be a danger and a threat, someone who is intent on destroying her family.

Ylva's later vision comes in the form of a dream. Weak and in her hospital bed, she tells Sekou that Ibbe is not coming home, which she knows because she went to Banjul, looking for him in a dream. The dream sequence takes place in the same setting of grassland, cliffs and water, which we now know is located in The Gambia. Each vision or dream allows the spectator to see and know a little more: the production of geo- and body-political knowledge grows each time. The scene is almost a repeat of the previous one, only this time, it is an older Ylva and Kandia, and they are both trying to stop Ibbe from jumping into the water. Ibbe pulls away from them, dragging them through the sand towards the cliff-edge as they try to pull him back. There is an emphasis on their bodies and physicality here: the camera tracks slowly, emphasising the bodily movement, and cuts to a close-up of Kandia's legs as she falls to the ground and is pulled through the sand. These corporeal aesthetics emphasise the viscosity of the relationship between mother and son, the stretching and then breaking of an invisible umbilical cord, as Ibbe jumps onto a waiting pirogue. The same shot/reverse-shot sequence is employed here as in the previous

vision: Ibbe sailing off on the pirogue, waving back at Kandia and Ylva, who now stand together, Ylva's hands on Kandia's shoulders, watching Ibbe disappear. This vision marks a transformation in Ylva's entire worldview: Kandia is no longer the threatening West African mermaid who spirited her son away, but a mother with whom she can identify, experiencing the same difficulty in letting go of a child who has become an adult. The visions are thus a journey of understanding for Ylva, of painful breaks with her assumed knowledge, and a reinterpretation of events through bodily connection with Kandia. Ylva now, finally, seems at peace. After asking Sekou for confirmation that she is not crazy, a look of calm comes over her, and she tells him that she is glad that Kandia is coming back.



Figure 3.7 (01:24:23). Bodily resonance and connection.

The final scene of the film shows Kandia in Ylva's hospital room. Ylva is no longer speaking, her eyes are closed, and she barely moves. But as Kandia sits beside her and reaches for her hand, Ylva responds to her touch. There is a close-up here of their hands, one black, one white, clasped together, as Ylva's breathing grows shallow (see figure 3.7 below). The close-up here is not employed in a way which seems excessive, unsettling, demanding, as in the previous examples of Kandia and Olof, and there is not the same complexity and overwhelming affect of a human face. It is a rather more gentle taking up of space, of simple presentation, showing a connection between two bodies. It uses the close-up to attune the spectator's sense of touch in particular: tactile details such as the loose threads of Kandia's cardigan and the creases of Ylva's bedsheets enhance the sensory impact of the skin-on-skin contact of the two hands touching. Not a word is spoken, but this haptic, bodily connection attests to compassion being exchanged between the two of them, finally understanding one another. It can be understood as an act of embodied resistance, born not of violence but of compassionate interrelation and the 'continuous creation of human existence' (Zeiler 2013: 81) necessary for a decoloniality of being. It is a shot that sums up the importance of re-humanisation and human connection.

Ylva's bodily breakdown, which runs like a thread through the film, demonstrates many of the characteristics of bodily alienation which Fanon notes in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963): the sense of paralysis, stasis, a complete disconnect with one's body. Her paralysis, however, is caused as much by the guilt of perpetrating forms of emotional and psychological violence as it is on being the victim of such violence. There is nothing to be gained for either Ylva or Kandia in channelling bodily movement into yet more acts of violence. What emerges in this final moment between Kandia and Ylva is simply a connection with the breath, a connection of two hands, and a peaceful connection of bodies, bodies that in the past have been victimised and have perpetrated forms of violence. The way to overcome the structural violence in this multicultural, postcolonial society, Kouyaté proposes, resonating with the decolonial positions discussed in the previous chapter is to connect on deep, human levels and to find shared points of understanding. The perpetuation of violence of any kind, *Medan Vi Lever* contends, simply poisons lives and relationships, and leads to damaging states of bodily alienation.

***Alda e Maria*: Structural violence and ambivalent aggressors**

The first chapter discussed the necropolitics encountered by Alda and Maria in Portugal and mentioned the politics of forgetting surrounding immigration from Africa and the structural silencing of black histories and voices in Portugal, which, by its very nature, is violent. To silence voices and memory is the antithesis to a decoloniality of being, operating on the basis of disconnection between people and the maintenance of violent zones of non-being. This forgetting and silencing is enabled by the pervasive myth of Luso-tropicalism, a concept first expounded by Gilberto Freyre in a Brazilian context, famously in *Casa-grande & senzala* (1933)³⁴ and later developed in *O luso e o trópico* (Freyre, 1961), a project commissioned by Salazar in order to justify continued Portuguese colonialism. Luso-tropicalism, in its use by the Salazar regime, laid claim to a distinctive 'benign, humanistic, and nonracist [...] Portuguese character' (Bastos, 2019: 243), and as Miguel Cardina (2016) explains, sought to justify Portuguese colonialism in its difference based on notions of cosmopolitanism, conviviality, and miscegenation (the idea that the Portuguese 'mixed' better with other races than other colonisers). Despite this concept being forcefully criticised at the time, notably by Charles Boxer (1963), Luso-tropicalism has proved to be a pervasive myth, long outlasting the Portuguese Empire and perpetuating structural violence. Cardina (2016) and Bastos (2018) demonstrate how Portugal's role as a coloniser continues to be justified in these terms by successive Portuguese presidents, including Marcelo Rebelo de

³⁴ *Casa-grande e senzala* is entitled *The Master and the Slaves* in its English translation (1986); a more literal translation is 'The Great House and the Slave Quarters' as in a contemporaneous review by Percy Alvin Martin (1934), which is helpful for understanding the key contention that 'miscegenation [...] served to bridge the gap between the great house and the slave quarters' (Martin, 1934: 325).

Sousa who, during a visit to Île de Gorée in 2017 (the significance of this site was discussed in the first chapter), praised Portugal's early abolition of slavery, a statement requires extensive qualification, as Bastos (2018) elucidates, and is part of Luso-tropicalist mythologising.

The effect of this in contemporary Portugal is to make race, and therefore critical engagement with colonial history and present-day racism, unspeakable. This has real, violent, necropolitical consequences, as represented in *Alda e Maria*. In July-August 2020, amid a wave of global Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd in the USA, Lisbon became the epicentre for a uniquely Portuguese version of similar events that demonstrate how structural and personal violence can be interlinked. There, *Vidas Negras Importam* (BLM) protests were sparked by the murder of Bruno Candé, a 39-year-old Black Portuguese theatre actor, by Evaristo Marinho, a White veteran of the colonial war in Angola. According to Marta Vidal, witnesses heard Marinho telling Candé to "go back to the *senzala*" (2020: para.2), a racist insult that not only evokes the language of Freyre, but also belies the myth of Luso-tropicalism: the gap between the great house and the slave quarters never was bridged. The protests that followed have, for the first time, opened real questioning about Portugal's claims of nonracism, and present a major challenge to the politics of forgetting that is so deeply embedded in the national psyche and state structures (see reports by Vidal, 2020 and Ana Naomi de Sousa, 2020). However, the work of undoing '[a] rasura do processo anticolonial' [erasure of the anticolonial process] (Cardina, 2016: 36) and dispelling the Luso-topicalist myth to reveal Portugal's modern-day racial structural violence, born of its colonial past, has barely begun. It is work mostly left to individual artists, scholars and grassroots activists, as documented by Naomi de Sousa (2021).

Coming amid the 'postcolonial turn' that Mariana Liz and Sally Faulkner (2016) identify in Portuguese arts and culture from the beginning of the 21st century, *Alda e Maria* contributes to the project of questioning the non-racist rhetoric of Luso-tropicalism, advocating for a decoloniality of being in the Portuguese context, which works to overcome zones of non-being implemented by Luso-tropicalist discourse. In Pascoal's depiction of racist personal and structural violence encountered in Lisbon, she not only reflects upon a mostly invisible history, but also contributes to the ongoing work of challenging official history and provoking a reckoning with racism and colonialism in Portugal. The film enacts violence in distinct spaces within the version of Lisbon - patently not the official one - that Alda and Maria navigate: the dockyard and apartment were already discussed in Chapter One; here a phone booth and sewing room come to the fore. The analysis below argues that the phone booth is a space particularly open to transformation by its user and is a space in which personal and structural violence is made visible and disrupts the myth of Luso-tropicalism. The sewing room operates with a different type of

ambivalence: here the notion of liberating violence as a way to counter Portuguese colonial/structural violence is questioned. Bringing a situation of institutional violence into play, this space reveals a damaging, self-perpetuating cycle of violence and alienation, similar to the dynamics discussed in relation to *Medan Vi Lever*. Taking these two spaces together, what emerges is a deeply ambivalent portrayal of violence, which points towards the need for a decoloniality of being: connection, relation and exchange, conditions which allow for a visible, agentive being-in-the-world, in place of silencing, amnesia, and violence, conditions which maintain zones of non-being in which alienation and death abound.

Racist violence and resistance in a phone booth

Recalling the discussions of absence and haunting in the previous chapter, the phone booth is a frequent, recurring space in the film and a particularly ‘dense site’ (Gordon, 1997: 8), used by the girls to phone their mother in Angola. It not only helps to shape the filmic narrative, but also acts as a haunted, contingent space open to transformation. El-Tayeb uses the term ‘translocality’ to refer to the ‘interaction of the urban and diasporic space’ and the ‘increasingly localized border zones’ (2011: xxxvii) that characterise such space. In the environs of the immigrant Lisbon neighbourhood depicted in this film, the phone booth is an example of a highly specific translocal space, which, by virtue of the telephone, connects its users with remote but often emotionally charged sites beyond the boundaries of Lisbon and Portugal. When Alda and Maria use it, the phone booth brings Angola into contact with Portugal in a way that it cannot be ignored or ‘forgotten’. It is the space in the film in which Angola can be sensed, and where family relationships are sustained and tested.

In one early scene, while Alda and Maria are still in the dockyard, unable to find anywhere else to stay and becoming desperate, they find a phone booth just outside the dockyard’s limits to call their mother. We join the conversation partway through, as a tearful Maria is imploring her mother to come soon: “não temos quase dinheiro nenhum!” she cries (00:14:30) [we’ve hardly any money]. Alda grabs the phone from her and immediately reassures their mother, contradicting Maria by saying “sim, sim, nós temos dinheiro suficiente” [Yes, yes, we’ve got enough money], as Maria helplessly listens, with a look of betrayal and confusion on her face (figure 3.8 below). The camera cuts to a close-up of her tear-streaked face as Alda, out of shot, continues to talk reassuringly to their mother, telling her that they are still in a guesthouse and that there is nothing to worry about. The disconnect between the visual and aural here provides a sensory jolt: Maria’s suffering contrasted with Alda’s reassuring words demonstrates the pathos contained within the film’s subtitle, *Por Aqui Tudo Bem* [All is Well]. Maria’s ‘cartography of bodily pain’ (Francis 2015: 57) emphatically demonstrates that all is not well.



Figure 3.8 *Alda e Maria* (00:14:40). cartography of bodily pain in the phone booth.

In their mother's physical absence, the phone booth becomes an essential link to her, and once settled in their apartment, the girls wait outside the phone booth nearby each Sunday morning, awaiting their mother's call. Their usually co-dependent relationship is replaced with competitiveness, vying to be the first to snatch up the receiver and hear their mother's voice. From the responses they give and fragments of reported conversation, it seems that the mother is doing her best to reassure her daughters too: one conversation ends in ecstasy for the girls upon hearing the news that she will be arriving in two weeks' time. But this exchange is followed by several unfulfilled periods of waiting and watching the phone box for the next call, which never comes. It is on one of these occasions that the phone booth's haunting potential as a translocal space is realised in a violent way. Alda and Maria are sitting and waiting when a man arrives to use the phone. The girls race to the booth and occupy it, saying that they are waiting for a call from their mother. He responds by physically pulling them out of the way, calling them "suja pretas" [dirty blacks] (00:56:24) and telling them to go back to where they came from. After his brief phone-call, the man looks at Alda and Maria, then spits into the receiver, leaving it hanging limply in the booth. It is an act which shocks in its viscerality, and which demonstrates the double haunting inscribed in the phone booth. As an ambivalent space given specificity by the user, rather than by its geographical location, it demonstrates instability and openness to be transformed by the performance of those within it.

El-Tayeb (2011) discusses how performative strategies can create cracks in the dominant narratives of European identities. This scene attests to those cracks, created here through postcolonial movement and points of contacts within Lisbon. Anne McClintock, meanwhile, reminds us that 'colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance' (1995: 11) and she warns against drawing temporal binaries between the colonial and postcolonial. Indeed, what we find in this scene is the colonial returning to haunt within the supposedly postcolonial era, something which, as in the dockyard scenes analysed in chapter one, makes itself felt frequently within the film. Here, Alda and Maria are confronted directly with racist violence, their right to be in the Portuguese space rejected, their bodily schemas reduced to a racial-epidermal schema (Fanon, 1952). The inclusion of a scene representing an example of such racist personal violence

refuses a politics of forgetting and challenges Luso-tropicalist discourse. Significantly, the girls are not presented as passive victims. Just as they survived the necropolitical structural violence sensed in the dockyard (see Chapter One), they again refuse to disappear or to be silenced. When the man leaves the phone booth, the girls rush back to it. Alda gingerly picks up the receiver and wipes it clean with the bottom of her cardigan, returning it to its cradle, and they resume their waiting. The liminal space of the phone booth brings the issue of colonial haunting into focus; it creates cracks in the urban Lisbon landscape, from which memory and testimony from Angola can flow.

Angolan solidarity and liberating violence?

The notion of liberating violence as a type of cleansing and rehabilitation (Fanon, 1961) is a seductive one in this context, especially in the recent aftermath of Portuguese colonialism portrayed in the film. This is shown in one key scene, which engages in a thorough questioning of Luso-tropicalism. The scene in question takes place on a polluted beach, complete with a vista of factories belching out smoke, the myth of Luso-tropicalism and miscegenation as an equaliser is denounced by Alda and Maria. It begins as an awkward moment for Alda, somewhat displaced by Carlos as he and Maria cavort about the beach, enjoying the first flush of romance. Maria and Carlos flop down on the sand together, bodies entwined as Alda and Maria's previously were, and Carlos announces his grand plans to make a home in the centre of Lisbon, and make lots of money, declaring a wish to become Portuguese. As his fingers interlace with hers, he notices the lightness of her skin against his, and comments on her 'whiteness'. Maria explains that her maternal grandfather was Portuguese, but that her mother's mixed heritage was never recognised. Carlos responds that this is a shame, as they could have claimed Portuguese citizenship.

At this point, Alda, who has been out of shot, reappears, though first with just a glimpse of her skirt as she stands in front of Maria and Carlos. She retorts forcefully: 'antes morrer do que ser portuguesa!' [I'd rather die than be Portuguese] (00:47:06). There is a cut to a reverse-shot, a close-up of Alda's face, set against the sea and sky. Subtly, the staging of these shots, Maria and Carlos lying on the beach, Alda standing, and here dominating the scene, gives Alda power, and the sense that she occupies the moral high ground. She denounces Portuguese colonialism in Angola, but here, Carlos takes up the narrative of Luso-tropicalism, which he has apparently internalised, arguing that colonialism wasn't so bad, and that the Portuguese 'já até se misturaram com nós, povos angolanos' [even mixed with Angolans] (00:47:37). Alda and Maria share a smile, and Maria disentangles herself from Carlos, once again on her sister's side. The two of them educate Carlos on the myth of miscegenation, relating how the Portuguese colonists impregnated Angolan women, and then returned to their wives and families in Portugal, the Portuguese state

refusing to recognise their mixed-heritage children in Angola. Alda expresses that her wish was always to remain in Angola, continuing the fight for freedom. This causes both girls to break into song, invoking the rallying cry of Angolan independence that recalls Fanon's view of armed struggle: 'A luta continua até a vitória final!' [the struggle continues until the final victory!] (00:48:35). Now they dance along the beach together, denouncing capitalism, imperialism and neocolonialism, and it is Carlos who is left to look on awkwardly.

In this scene, the Luso-tropicalist myth is directly and openly challenged in a way that cannot be ignored. It thus asserts Alda and Maria's presence in Lisbon, and suggests a potential being-in-the-world, based on liberating violence as Fanon understood it. However, both within this scene and, as will be discussed below, elsewhere in the film, this liberating violence is made much more ambivalent and problematic than Alda and Maria's rousing song suggests. Carlos says that he and his brother were sent to Portugal by their parents to avoid becoming cannon fodder in Angola's civil war; Maria admits that their mother sent them for similar reasons. The fight to final victory in Angola, far from being a cleansing force capable of allowing true decoloniality, has turned Angolans against one another, citizens into collateral damage.

Dona Alice's Sewing Room: The violence of victimhood

Dona Alice is a particularly evocative example of how destructive and damaging the ongoing violence in Angola is. She is an Angolan dressmaker, who, like Alda and Maria, had to flee to Portugal to escape the violence of the civil war. However, she has established a business and a relatively comfortable living environment for herself. Alda and Maria's struggle for survival leads them to her sewing room, an inherently gendered, feminised space filled with fabrics of frothy chiffon and floral print. Though both her home and sewing room are housed within an informal, less-than-salubrious housing block on the city's periphery—the same place where Alda and Maria find their apartment—her clients include white Portuguese women. When Alda and Maria first meet her at one of the factories near the dockyard, she appears as a maternal figure, her femininity emphasised by the fact that she is carrying a wedding dress. After the girls help her to bundle the dress into her car, she takes them to her neighbourhood, and tells them that they are likely to find an empty apartment to live in. That first night, after waking from their embrace on the floor of their apartment (see Chapter One), Alda and Maria go out to find something to eat. They are chased down the street by a pair of white men. The men constitute a threatening presence which corresponds to the postcolonial frame of reference we might expect: that matrix of racialized, gendered violence that was realised in the phone booth. Dona Alice, in conversation outside with one of her clients, shoos the men away with a maternal ferocity, and invites the girls into her apartment for dinner. Over the course of dinner, she tells the girls that they can stay with

her overnight, and that she has a lot of work and could use some help. Thus, Alda and Maria begin working in Dona Alice's sewing room.

Here, there is a surprising subversion of the narrative: far from being a place of safety, gainful employment and female solidarity, the sewing room becomes an unexpected site of violence. Dona Alice refuses to pay the girls, keeping them in a state of indentured labour. One Sunday, when she is preparing to go to Mass, she leaves Alda with a pile of sewing to do, and Maria with the ironing (Figure 3). When Maria tries to protest, she turns on them, saying: 'Quem não trabalha, não come' [s/he who doesn't work, doesn't eat] (00:44:57). This is a corruption of a biblical reference: it appears that Dona Alice's religious faith is one of the things that enables her to justify her treatment of the girls. The emotional, and occasionally physical, violence she perpetrates against Alda and Maria is subtle, complex and 'insidious', to use the term that Gibbs (2014) and Craps (2015) employ to describe ongoing, quotidian forms of traumatising. As well as refusing to pay the girls, Dona Alice performs small but continual acts of abuse, such as belittling Maria as she sweeps the courtyard and forbidding Alda to use the sewing machine so that she is forced to spend hours sewing tiny stitches by hand. Institutional violence here, as in *Medan Vi Lever*, is thus characterised by many microaggressions which add up to create an environment of deep and damaging bodily alienation.

Dona Alice is not the expected aggressor, and therefore she is a character who raises questions about tropes of gendered and racialised violence. The sequence of the two white men chasing Alda and Maria becomes subversive: the threat of violence from these characters is never realised, but in seeking safety from them, Alda and Maria run right to the woman who will come to abuse them. Yet Dona Alice is not presented as a wicked, manipulative woman; rather, she is a complex, conflicted character who cannot escape her own sense of victimhood. She is thus a discomfiting character for the reasons that Enns (2012) sets out, notably that the spectator is invited to feel some compassion for Dona Alice, a woman who has suffered immense loss and who has found herself alone in Lisbon, not even connected to the diasporic community there. There are moments where she recounts some of her personal history as a grieving mother and of her struggle to get by, promoting a degree of spectatorial sympathy. Her testimony is brief and fragmented, but it is clear that she too is a victim of the structural violence playing out in Portugal enacted against recent immigrants from its former colonies: a once highly successful businesswoman in Angola, she is now relegated to the margins of society in Portugal, scraping together a living and maintaining façade of propriety by making dresses for middle-class white women.

The sisters have each other as constant arbiter of their own behaviours and emotions, but Dona Alice does not have this safety net. She makes no mention of any other family, does not seem to have any real friends, and has been left deeply embittered by her experiences. She has a tendency to blame both her own problems and those of Alda and Maria on external forces: the war in Angola, the poor living conditions for immigrants in Lisbon. There seems to be a genuine disconnect in her mind between Alda and Maria's increasing poverty and desperation and her own actions. In the most potent example of this, one evening, Alda and Maria turn up at her apartment, hungry to the point of malnutrition, and with no money left to call home to find out what has happened to their mother. As Dona Alice, seated at the centre of the table, devours meat and bread, Alda and Maria cut two desolate figures either side of her (figure 3.9 below). Maria explains that they would like to call their mother, but they have no money. Dona Alice responds by discussing the political situation in Angola: the increasing disappearances, the unlikelihood of a peace deal. Alda and Maria seem too defeated to even respond. Seeming to notice their desperation for the first time, she exclaims: "Pobrezinhas!", adding, "eu perdi o meu filho, e vocês os vossos pais" [Poor little things! I lost my son and you lost your parents] (01:00:16). But when the girls finally ask her to pay them what they are owed, she becomes angry, calling them ungrateful and ordering them to leave.



Figure 3.9 (01:00:20) Dona Alice eats as the girls go hungry.

The complex and ambivalent processes of violence and victimhood which take place in Dona Alice's sewing room and home are instrumental in the narrative subversion of tropes of gender, violence and victimhood. Like Yvla in *Medan Vi Lever*, Dona Alice's acts of violence are not spectacular, nor directly physical (although the girls experience the physical effects of her violence through their domestic labour and malnutrition), but which are evidently borne of a complex set of circumstances and her own experiences of psychological damage, meaning that her own perpetration of emotional, institutional violence on the girls is not an unnatural aberration which needs intensive and simplistic justification, but precisely the result of violence to which she herself has been subject to, leading to a deep sense of bodily alienation from which she is finding it impossible to recover. She is a quasi-maternal figure, but a deeply dysfunctional one, a damaged person perpetuating a cycle of violence and victimisation that she is caught up in.

It should be emphasised, however, that the compassion and ambiguity that the spectator may feel in relation to Dona Alice does not mitigate the devastating impact of her actions on Alda and Maria. Throughout the film, the girls overcome numerous instances of extreme danger, making their mark on precarious spaces within the city that they can claim, however temporarily, as their own. Dona Alice's sewing room is where, of all the threatening and violent spaces they traverse and inhabit, they are at their most vulnerable. The complexity of victimhood and agency is most fully realised in the scenes which occur within this space, and in the relationship between Dona Alice and the girls. What these scenes in the sewing room demonstrate emphatically is the failure of a liberatory form of violence. What 'a luta continua' represents is not a righteous armed struggle ending in decolonisation and freedom, but perpetual violence which inflicts damage on massive physical, psychological and social scales.

Linking levels of violence

Towards the end of the film, this reality is brought home to Alda and Maria in the most uncompromising way: the death of their mother. After not hearing from her for weeks, on a routine trip to the phone booth, the girls manage to contact their cousin. Nothing explicit is said; everything is communicated through bodily performance and the 'haptic visuality' attuned throughout the film. The girls' faces are pressed close together, the receiver between them. Their expressions register shock and, almost robotically, Alda hangs up the phone. They collapse against each other, drawing sharp, sobbing breaths. There is a cut from the phone booth then to a scene in which we see their mother clearly for the first time; a portrait photo of her in a frame Alda has cut out from old cardboard. Candles surround the picture, and a kind neighbour recites a prayer. Maria then goes to look for Carlos but cannot find him. 'Mataram a minha mãe' [they killed my mother] (01:22:27), she tells his friend, through sobs. With these words, Maria connects the evidently non-liberatory violence of Angola's civil war squarely with her mother's death: she did not simply die; she was killed. Her death cannot be written off as anonymous and accidental. The photo of her, coming at this point in the film, is an act of resistance, of memory and testimony: as Portugal claims amnesia and a disconnect to this Angolan war, the visual presence of a mother, a half-Portuguese woman, killed in the conflict, haunts the Portuguese space.

Alda, for her part, enacts the only bodily resistance she can muster, occupying the phone booth and refusing to be moved, anchoring herself to the last material link to her mother that she has. She curls up inside it, the phone cord providing a symbolic umbilical connection that she is not ready to cut. Both the photo of their mother and Alda's bodily presence in the phone booth are resonant, sensory images which demand the spectator's engagement, and potent examples of 'corpomemorial tracing' (Francis, 2015: 57) in the way that they establish being and carry the

weight of testimony. In this way, at the end of the film, a certain border thinking emerges which points towards a decoloniality of being based on relation. This is emphasised when Maria returns and forcibly drags Alda out, wrapping her maternally in her arms as Alda did for her at the start of the film (figure 3.10 below). It is only through such loving connection that violence, in all its forms can be resisted and alternative ways of being made possible.



Figure 3.10 (01:24:58). Close-up as Maria comforts Alda.

The material and human relations established within these scenes, both in the photo of their mother and in Alda and Maria's presence in the phone booth, also have the function of drawing a link through Portuguese colonialism, the structural violence experienced in Portugal, and the ongoing war in Angola, perpetuating further alienation, disconnection, and death. It thus refuses a 'politics of forgetting' predicated on a Luso-tropicalist myth by illuminating the ways in which the gap between the *casa grande* and the *senzala* is maintained: the refusal to recognise Angolans of mixed heritage, the expulsion of black immigrants to the peripheries, the acts of personal violence legitimised by structural violence. Above all, in nuanced representations of ambivalent violence and victimhood, the film points to the failure of violence of any form to be truly liberatory – and to the need for a different kind of decoloniality.

The violence of re-education in *Virgem Margarida*

The opening scene of Lícino Azevedo's 2012 film, *Virgem Margarida*, focuses on a truck filled with jubilant members of Frelimo, the new Marxist-Leninist ruling party of Mozambique, fresh with the victory of hard-won independence, as it makes its way through the muddy, pitted streets of a district in Maputo, the capital. The camera pans up from the ground to the triumphant banner adorning the truck, which proclaims 'A luta continua': the same rallying call of the liberation struggle heard in *Alda e Maria*, and which draws direct inspiration from Fanon's call to armed struggle in order to achieve liberation. Just behind it, another banner can be made out: 'Unidade, trabalho e vigilância' [unity, work and vigilance] (00:00:42), Frelimo values which are, as the film demonstrates, enforced with brutal zeal.

The film concerns the forced exile of women, enacted by Frelimo in the earliest days of independence. The film, set in 1975, is Azevedo's first feature film, and the development of an earlier documentary he co-directed with Isabel Noronha, entitled *A Última Prostituta* (The Last Prostitute, 1999). The documentary interviewed numerous women about their experiences in Frelimo's *campos de reeducação*: 're-education' camps used as a way exiling those considered to be at odds with the *Nova Sociedade*, and training them in to be model citizens in the country's remote northern province of Niassa. *Virgem Margarida*, based on the stories told by some of the women in the documentary, is a fictionalised representation of women's experiences at one of these camps, and the narrative centres on Margarida, the film's eponymous 16-year-old virgin, who has been mistakenly rounded up with Maputo's prostitutes and nightclub dancers.

The film raises interesting questions about the role of violence in decolonisation, and the place it has with regard to the decoloniality of being, particularly with reference to women. Fanon certainly took a radical approach in this regard. It is not so apparent in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where the male experience dominates, but in *A Dying Colonialism*, he sets out in detail the active role he sees for women in the Algerian revolution. He argues that 'the women had to show as much spirit of sacrifice as the men' (1965: 48). Women's involvement in liberation struggles, however, when taken to the extreme, views them less as human beings and more as strategic assets. Fanon writes later: 'The Algerian woman is at the heart of the combat. Arrested, tortured, raped, shot down, she testifies to the violence of the occupier and to his inhumanity (66), while suggesting that women who participate have greater agency – and a chance to restructure their bodily schemas. It is hard to see how putting women in the position of being raped and tortured is not profoundly damaging to their bodily schemas and agency in the world.

The model Frelimo used looks a lot like Fanon's ideas in practice, transposed from Algeria to Mozambique, actively involving women in the frontlines of the revolution and in the creation of the *Nova Sociedade*. This seemed radical and emancipatory, much as Fanon argues, and for some women, it certainly seemed to be (see, for example, West, 2000; Machel, 1977). However, as represented in *Virgem Margarida*, those women deemed to be living in ways incompatible with the values of the *Nova Sociedade* were subjected to some of the worst violence and abuse in the re-education camps. In this case, it is no longer the coloniser torturing, raping and beating the women; it is soldiers of the revolution, including women.

As Patrick Chabal explains, Frelimo's overarching aim was the creation of a new, unified nation, with emphasis on 'unity at all costs' (2001: 227). Violence was thus used by Frelimo against dissidents and those supporting the Portuguese, but also against those, like the women in *Virgem Margarida*, deemed unsuitable subjects for the *Nova Sociedade* and was framed in terms of re-

education. What *Virgem Margarida* does is firstly to show how decolonisation and violence under Frelimo were interconnected due to this drive for unity, and secondly to question the limits of violence as a tool for achieving decoloniality, for cleansing and renewal both on personal and structural levels. It demonstrates that, to achieve a decoloniality of being, the violent response fails dramatically, and emphasises the difference that Ndlovu-Gatsheni notes between decolonisation as a structural, political process, and decoloniality as way of being in a 're-humanised world' (2019: 203).

Frelimo has retained unbroken control of Mozambique since independence in 1975. Throughout that time, it has been in an almost constant state of political and violent struggle with both neighbouring countries and with Mozambique's opposition party Renamo (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana). Victor Igreja argues that 'violence both enabled the Frelimo elite to rule officially but also seriously endangered their political project and brought great suffering to the people' (2010: 781), a point underlined by the elections in 2019, which Frelimo claimed to have won resoundingly after a campaign marred by assassinations, violent intimidation and widespread fraud (see M. Anne Pitcher, 2020). It is within this context of state-sponsored violence that the re-education project was launched in 1975, and an official narrative surrounding it continues to be maintained, based on the ideals of the *Nova Sociedade*: Joaquim Chissano, president of Mozambique between 1986 and 2005, lamented the end of the re-education project in a 2012 interview, as reported by Glória Sousa: "foi pena que nós não [continuássemos] a ter campos de reeducação. Porque não eram campos de tortura, eram realmente de reeducação. A pessoa regenerava-se" (2013: sect.7 para.8) [it is a shame that we did not [continue] to have re-education camps. Because they were not torture camps, they were truly about re-education. People were renewed]. As a result, many individual stories of abuse and violence experienced within re-education camps remain shrouded in silence.

When these camps are discussed, in scholarly research or in news reports of the time, the focus tends to be on male experiences of these camps, and largely those of the political dissidents declared to be 'inimigos do projeto revolucionário' [enemies of the revolutionary project] (Omar Ribeiro Thomaz, 2008: 190). To make a film about women's experiences of these camps, then, is to engage with a much marginalised and silenced history, challenging a 'politics of forgetting' (in a similar way to *Alda e Maria* in the Portuguese context). Indeed, for Maria Tavares, the film's 'retrieval of such an obscure moment allows for the emergence of marginalized micro-histories' (2016: 157). It also demonstrates changing perspectives on the early period of post-independence, particularly for Azevedo himself, once a committed Frelimo supporter. In an interview with Marta Lança, he explained: 'Cheguei a acreditar que, através da revolução, era

possível purificar o ser humano, criar uma nova sociedade. Agora quero compreender o lado humano destes processos, a contradição dos grandes ideais que, por vezes, se transformam em tragédias' [I came to believe that, through the revolution, it was possible to purify human beings, to create a new society. Now I want to understand the human side of these processes, the contradiction of grand ideas which sometimes become tragedies] (2012: para.4). Azevedo does this through the filmic narrative, and through the representation of the fight for agency and control over women's bodies.

Creating the *Nova Mulher* (New Woman)

Of particular interest here is the way in which the film probes the question of a decoloniality of being following the end of official colonial rule and explores the hypocrisies of the decolonising programme operated by Frelimo. Much as *Alda e Maria* forms a work of resistance challenging the Luso-topicalist myth in Portugal, *Virgem Margarida* also challenges official state history and the narrative of re-education and renewal. Comandante Maria João, the Frelimo soldier tasked, somewhat against her wishes, with re-educating the women who arrive at the camp, shouts repeatedly at the group that they are there to overcome their 'mentes colonizadas' [colonised minds] (00:47:55) and to become the type of New Women who can contribute to a decolonised society. The way this is done, however, is through punishment and violence, directed at any woman who tries to demonstrate individuality or speak her own mind. As Tavares writes, there are 'continuous attempts to strip the detained women of their identities and force them to accept their new reality through humiliation, torture and punishment' (2016: 162). Thus, the women, far from escaping the colonisation of their bodies and minds, face repeated and brutal forms of bodily alienation.

The women's individuality and rights to their own bodily expression – their rights to define the ways in which they engage with the world – are methodically stripped away at the camp, a formalised type of institutional violence, informed by the structural violence that led these women to be brought here in the first place. At first, the women are all dressed in the clothes they were wearing when rounded up. Those from Maputo are dressed in bright mini-skirts or evening dresses and high heels: the clothes they were wearing for their work. Those from the North are in traditional dress with painted faces, and these obvious visual differences are exacerbated when Rosa, a particularly outspoken and resistant individual from the capital, starts a fight with Ancha, one of the Northern women. The deep cultural differences between the groups, however, do not sit well with Frelimo's nationalist ideology, and soon the women are dressed identically, in the same khaki uniform, and forced to share the same sleeping cabin, which they themselves have to build from scratch. Rosa is deeply unimpressed by all of this, declaring, 'somos putas, não somos

camponesas' [we're prostitutes, not peasants] (00:32:29), an act among many others that results in a physical punishment. Rather than this apparent process of decolonisation being 'redemptive and liberatory [...] de-link[ing] from the tyranny of abstract universals' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 12), it simply replaces one tyranny with another.

Frelimo symbolism is visually inscribed into the women's bodily labour and suffering throughout the film. The national flag of Mozambique is formed of five colours: green, black and yellow in horizontal bands, separated by thin lines of white, and a red triangle. Within that triangle is the five-pointed yellow star of Marxism, overlaid by a book, hoe, and rifle, representing education, agriculture and defence. These symbols abound in the film. There are numerous shots of the women using hoes to dig the land, both to build their shelter and to plant crops. Their uniforms are the khaki green of the flag, creating an association between their bodies and the Mozambican land. Maria João is rarely shown without her rifle, and one scene shows her lovingly cleaning it.

Education, symbolised by the book, is a key tenet of the camp, and of Frelimo's ideology. It is the rationale behind forcing all the women to dress and act the same, erasing ethnic and cultural differences. Samora Machel, Frelimo's leader at independence and first president of Mozambique, pledged to 'kill the tribe to build the nation' (see Kimani Njogu, Kabiri Ngeta and Mary Wanjau, 2009: 6), a slogan which summed up the fervently nationalist aims of the party. Chabal explains: 'they [Frelimo] were supra-ethnic nationalists. Their ambition was to fashion in Africa a modern secular nation-state on the (western or eastern) European model' (2002: 5). This absolutist style of nationalism is strikingly represented in a scene of *Virgem Margarida* when one of the women, Laurinda, becomes ill after eating a stolen chicken. Due to the sound of clucking emanating from her stomach, the others believe that the chicken was cursed and that she needs a witch doctor to cure her. Maria João refuses to accept the women's explanation and instead proclaims Frelimo's scientific values. Laurinda soon dies, her body an allegory for Frelimo's rejection of pre-colonial knowledge and beliefs in favour of European ideas of science and progress: hardly a delinking from colonialist epistemology. Laurinda's death symbolises the purge of traditional practices and ways of life, and the literal killing of those who opposed this aim, renewing the country for its *Nova Sociedade*. It is possible to see how killing the tribe to build the nation could be interpreted within Frelimo as the type of cleansing, rehabilitating violence Fanon (1961) refers to, but in Laurinda's illness and death, *Virgem Margarida* alludes to its poisoning and destructive implications in practice.



Figure 3.11. *Virgem Margarida* (2012: 00:54:51). Figure 3.12 (00:54:59).

In one scene, the symbol of the star becomes particularly prominent and violent. After noticing small acts of resistance among the women, Maria João imposes a group punishment on a number of them; a striking example of institutional and structural violence combined. The women are forced to lie on the ground in rows, their arms and legs parted wide, tied to stakes. Each of them appears as a five-pointed star. Maria João walks among them, forcing them to keep their eyes open so that they are forced to stare at the blinding sun, and refuses to allow them to get up to go to the toilet. It is one of the few moments of the film when the spectator is able to identify with the perspective of some of the women: there are frequent cuts between overhead shots of the star-like pattern the women's bodies create, and inverted shots, showing Maria João's face looming, upside-down, providing the women's point of view as they lie on the ground (figures 3.11 and 3.12 below). In this brief moment of spectatorial identification with the women and the repeated shots of their bodies as star symbols, there is an indictment of one of the fundamental aspects of the re-education programme: that the Socialist-Marxist values on which the *Nova Sociedade* is predicated are inculcated through physical torture.

The disconnect between the decolonial values Frelimo promotes and the reality experienced by the women is most evident in scenes with Felisberto, Maria João's superior officer. Early in the film, the women are taken into the village to be shown to Felisberto, who sits at a shaded table, eating a hearty meal from European crockery. The women, meanwhile, are surviving on handfuls of rice or dumpling each day. When he has finished his meal, Ancha is called to bring him a bowl of water and soap so that he can wash his hands. Crouching before him and looking up at him, in a shot/reverse-shot sequence of high and low camera angles, Ancha uses her submissive position to transform her body for material gain. The sleeve of her top slips from her shoulder, revealing her breast as she tells him plaintively that they have no soap at the camp. Felisberto says that he can get her some: despite enforcing the re-education of these women and punishing them for prostitution, he is more than happy to accept this transaction. Yet, when the soap is discovered at the camp, Ancha is punished, because soap is viewed as a colonial imposition. In her analysis of the film, Tavares notes that 'only women are to be punished for persisting in a colonial mindset',

such as using soap, while ‘the sexual exploitation of the women by African rather than European men gestures towards the colonial continuities of post-independence’ (2016: 166).

Margarida’s difference

Felisberto’s lusting after numerous women at the camp culminates in his rape of Margarida. Of all the women, it is with Margarida that the spectator is given the most opportunities to sensorially identify. Early on in the film, while they are travelling to the camp, there is a close-up of Margarida’s hands as she embroiders a piece of material. It is Margarida who asserts her bodily difference most frequently and vocally, claiming again and again that she does not belong there because she is a virgin, not a prostitute. She uses embroidery again, later in the film, to differentiate one of the other women’s uniforms with a small, pink bow, angering Maria João (but no individual punishment is given to Margarida, again, marking her difference). Greater sensorial affect is created in relation to Margarida than to any of the other characters, which comes into play most forcefully when she is pinned down by a number of the women so that a female elder from the nearby village can prove that she is a virgin with a physical examination. It is an uncomfortable moment: Margarida screams and writhes in protest, and there is a dense shot of the multiple bodies holding her down, filling the screen. While not technically a close-up, there is an immediacy of phenomenological presence here created by the density of bodies (figure 3.13 below). While this particular scene ends in whooping joy that she is indeed a virgin, and Margarida is venerated by the other women, it is a prelude to the unseen rape that occurs shortly after and attunes the spectators’ senses for this later scene in which Margarida can only be heard, but in which affect is palpably transmitted.



Figure 3.13 (01:04:45). Many bodies pinning Margarida down.

After it is proved that she is a virgin, the women campaign for Margarida’s release, and bargain with Maria João that they will present themselves as model ‘New Women’ for Felisberto’s visit to the camp, if Margarida is freed. Thus, Margarida leaves with Felisberto, who is purportedly going to take her back to the city. However, they are only a short distance out of the camp when he rapes her. We do not witness the rape; instead, the shot is of the empty truck, Felisberto’s deputy standing uncertainly beside it, as Margarida’s visceral screams ring out. Felisberto walks

triumphantly into shot, doing up his trousers as he approaches his deputy. He tells him: 'ela era mesmo uma virgem! Aproveite!' [She really was a virgin! Go and make the most of her!] (01:16:22). It is an act that potently combines structural, institutional and personal violence, using one form to legitimise another, much as we saw in *Alda e Maria*. Before the reluctant deputy can act, however, there is a cut to a shot of Margarida fleeing through the forest, reminiscent of a hunted animal: the camera is on the other side of dense foliage, capturing glimpses of her through the leaves as she runs.

When Margarida arrives back in the camp, utterly distraught, Rosa confronts Maria João, declaring, 'Ele é pior do que colono' [He is worse than the coloniser] (01:18:36). With this damning line, Rosa gives voice to the hypocrisies and paradoxes at the heart of the re-education programme: Frelimo's use of violence has prevented the achievement of a decoloniality of being and has been hugely damaging for the women. The rape transforms Maria João from loyal Frelimo soldier into a female ally, and she organises a mass escape from the camp. It is the final of the many acts of embodied resistance launched by the women but, for Margarida, the experience has caused profound bodily alienation from which she cannot recover. She believes that she is now ruined for her fiancé, and in the last scene of the film, in which the long line of women moves through the jungle, there is a focus on Margarida as she knowingly picks some poisonous fruit. She looks around to make sure that none of the other women have noticed and, in a cut to a wide shot, taken from above, Margarida looks backwards and her gaze connects directly with the camera, implicating the spectator both affectively and cognitively. It is an act of embodied resistance, a final act of bodily agency which refuses Frelimo's 'unity at all costs' (Chabal, 2002: 227) by decisively opting out. The connection of Margarida's gaze through the screen at this crucial moment, means that the violence and alienation imposed on women by Frelimo cannot be ignored or explained away in terms of liberation, and Margarida's final act points to the need for a more productive decoloniality of being.

Decoloniality of being?

If we understand decoloniality as embodied resistance to alienation, as re-humanisation and as re-existence dependent on relation, the definition which has been developed thus far, there are specific questions that arise for *Virgem Margarida* concerning its use of women as tropes. While there are certainly numerous examples of embodied resistance, discussed above, that challenge the official narrative and open routes to decoloniality. The on-screen representation of 'marginalized micro-histories' (Tavares, 2016: 157) of women in a re-education camp, and the 'corpomemorial tracing' (Francis, 2015: 57) enacted to provide testimonials of suffering and resistance certainly allows for dialogue to open up and to challenge the politics of forgetting

surrounding these camps. However, there are certain barriers to a decoloniality of being that are retained, both by the filmic aesthetics (particularly in the use of distanciation and where and for which characters spectatorial affect is activated) and by the representation of women.

The film predominantly operates with an aesthetic of distanciation, with the camera mainly taking on an observational perspective. This is perhaps partly due to Azevedo's long career as a documentary filmmaker, and partly to encourage critical thought about the histories and memories of the re-education camps. Since the film engages critically with questions of decolonisation and violence under Frelimo, and the human tragedies of those policies, and given that this remains such a taboo subject, these techniques of distanciation could also be understood as politically prudent. As discussed above though, at certain key moments, mostly concerning Margarida, this distanciation is broken in favour of sensory proximity, which is somewhat problematic in its establishment of a division between Margarida and the other women in the camp. Owen (2016), drawing on Florence Stratton's work on the trope of 'woman as "pot of culture" or "sweep of history"' (Stratton, 1994: 51), argues that Azevedo uses the female characters to serve as the visual index of his (male) view of the nation, which is not contradicted by Azevedo's own statements about using the film as a way to work out his perspectives on historic Frelimo policies. However, Owen argues that this visual index relies on re-establishing the unhelpful binary of virgin and whore. She points out that the narrative tension depends precisely on the division and difference between Margarida, 'a *virgem eponima, inocente*' [the eponymous, innocent virgin] and the '*mulheres de má vida*' [women of ill-repute] who must accept and even defend this difference, which accords special treatment to Margarida (2016: 300). This limits the agency of being of the characters on-screen, forcing them instead to correspond to archetypes, and to serve as symbols, much as in the reduction of women's bodies to symbols by Frelimo, which the film critiques.

Maria João is a more ambivalent and potentially productive character: as outlined above, at the start of the film, she is thoroughly indoctrinated into the Frelimo system and values, believing that her position demonstrates the emancipation that is possible with violent re-education. She continually moves between all three levels of violence to impart this re-education, and personal acts of violence she enacts against individual women are entirely informed by the frames of structural and institutional violence. She is deeply militarised, and in that sense, masculinised, representing the overriding assumption inherent in the idea of the *Nova Sociedade* that women are equal as long as they comply with male norms. Nevertheless, having a woman in the position of camp commander introduces deep ambivalence: Maria João both symbolises what women 'should' be under Frelimo - compliant, prepared to fight for Frelimo's values - and is a discomfiting

figure for the same reasons that Ylva and Dona Alice are, because as a woman victimising other women, she is an unexpected source of violence. She therefore demands greater engagement from the spectator.

The assumption of equality, which Maria João has internalised, is undone bit by bit through the film, first by highlighting Maria João's subordination to Felisberto and other male officers, and the fact she has been given this thankless task in a remote, isolated location, while the men continue to enjoy all the benefits of bourgeois civilisation. Slowly, her belief in the system, and the need for liberating violence, begins to crumble. As much as she attempts to break down and remake the women under her command, they exert a similar effect on her. Maria João's re-evaluation of her own position, and of the entire re-education project, which ultimately ends in mutiny, represents Azevedo's own questioning, and the re-evaluation he is advocating with this film.

However, the key turning point for Maria João, and for the whole film, is the rape of Margarida. Maria João has presided over the death of other women in the camp and the torture of many more. It is Margarida's difference, emphasised again and again, which emerges as the crucial factor. As has been argued throughout this thesis so far, demarcating difference and sowing division between people fundamentally precludes any decoloniality of being, based as it is on human connection and relation. The difference that is set up, narratively and aesthetically, between Margarida and the other women has the effect of creating barriers to nuanced bodily agency and relation. We can appreciate the acts of resistance enacted by the women throughout the film and use these as starting points to further interrogate Frelimo's use of violence under the pretext of liberation, thereby opening dialogue, and it is certainly a film which addresses an important, much marginalised moment of Mozambican history. However, by returning to female tropes relying on othering, true decoloniality of being is hampered here.

Conclusion

In a diverse range of postcolonial contexts, the films show how perpetuating violence can impede the achievement of a decoloniality of being, and instead maintain states of painful excorporation or alienation, which contribute to the ongoing cycle of violence and suffering. The analyses in this chapter have demonstrated how all forms of violence, even those that are apparently liberatory, in reality do little to liberate. Most evidently in *Virgem Margarida*, in the portrayal of Frelimo policy linked to Fanonian ideals of armed struggle and cleansing violence, but also inherent in *Medan Vi Lever* and *Alda e Maria*, all types of violence, no matter the ideology or intention, are shown to have far-reaching, often unpredictable, and highly damaging consequences. All the films also point to the violence inherent in deliberate forgetting and silencing, and how punctual,

shocking acts of violence burst forth from such repression, whether from the silence that governs family dynamics in *Medan Vi Lever*, the cultural amnesia of Lusotropicalism seen in *Alda e Maria*, or the pervasive silencing around violence enacted by Frelimo in the re-education camps as explored in *Virgem Margarida*. Taken together, these representations of violence, repression, and forgetting emphasise the imperative of recovering memory and history, and of using these marginalised or long-repressed memories as a basis from which to form new points of connection and 'decolonial conviviality' (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 3), which do not depend on violence.

This negotiation of memory and history creates layers of ambivalence - haunted spaces, to recall the previous chapter - embodied here by complex characters who require deep engagement, cognitively and affectively, on the part of the spectator, and therefore create new connections beyond the limits of the screen. Characters such as Ylva in *Medan Vi Lever*, Dona Alice in *Alda e Maria* deny easy tropes and objectification, and therefore deny voyeuristic distance, instead relying on the 'entanglement' of spectator and screen, to return to Laine's terminology (outlined in Chapter One). They occupy ambivalent, constantly shifting positions in relation to violence, victimisation and victimhood, and therefore pose productive questions about violence and decoloniality.

However, where *Medan Vi Lever* and *Alda e Maria* foreground sensory aesthetics that establish loving human connections, most affectively through the sense of touch, in order to overcome the multiplicity of violent situations discussed, *Virgem Margarida* concludes with a preservation of division and distance, and it points to the need to continue thinking and doing decolonially, to find new 'mobile associations' allowing for 'human intimacy' (Walcott, 2014: 104) and connection - in this context, through filmic media. It is this need that forms the basis for the final chapter, which focuses on the intermedial connections in the films, and how those connections can lead to human relation and resistance.

Chapter Four

Bodies in other places

Intermediality and acts of resistance

Introduction

The last chapter argued that the efficacy of violence as a liberating force and path to decoloniality of being is limited and demonstrated that where alternative types of embodied resistance are proposed within the filmic representations, routes to decoloniality are opened up through nonviolent human connection and exchange, once again foregrounding the 'continuous creation of human existence' (Zeiler, 2013: 82) necessary to achieve decoloniality of being. This chapter picks up this argument as a starting point to explore how the films themselves, as digital products in networks of media, engage with a decolonial politics of giving and exchange that goes beyond the frame, and in so doing, expand the scope of decoloniality of being in relation to film. By looking beyond the diegesis of the films to their intermedial qualities - the ways in which they interact with and are transformed by different media - this chapter demonstrates how bodily acts of resistance work in digital spaces. It is argued that, in their motion across both media and geographic borders, the films have both an affective power and an ethical commitment to what Mignolo terms the 'decolonial option', referring to the grounding of the body within local geopolitical knowledge (2009: 162). The digital, even fractal, nature of these films, and their interconnected media, does not inhibit a grounding of knowledge within the body and within particular localities. This chapter considers how the conditions necessary for decoloniality of being previously discussed - resistance to alienation, re-humanisation, conviviality, human touch and exchange - are articulated in the intermedial connections of the films. The argument is advanced that in the combination and transformation of different media, the films open up spaces for decoloniality based on what Maldonado-Torres has termed 'receptive generosity' (2007: 261), a reciprocal giving and exchange that relies upon human relation. Thus, the intermediality of the films allows for projects of resistance to emerge that re-centre interconnected human existence.

As previously discussed, Fanon understood the limitations of violence and saw its use as necessary in only a specific set of circumstances, namely for the liberation of nations from colonial rule. It is perhaps unfortunate that a single chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* has been the subject of so much scholarly critique and debate at the expense of others in the book. Here, a different chapter of the book comes to the fore, one entitled On National Culture (1963: 206), in which Fanon focuses his attention on the role of intellectuals, poets, and artists in the liberation

struggle. It is clear that Fanon views the decolonisation of mind and body through artistic and cultural means to be as important as violence, and an essential long-term strategy for nation building and decolonisation. He devotes time to analysing the role of poetry in particular, advocating for 'a poetry of revolt; but [...] also descriptive and analytical poetry (1963: 226), and sets out the ways in which decolonial thinking and being might be achieved by intellectual and artistic means. Much like the call to arms in his chapter on violence, Fanon emphasises the primary importance of involving the body: for the writer to have any authenticity, to give visions of hope any weight, he must take part in action and throw himself body and soul into the national struggle [...] collaborate on the physical plane' (1963: 232). In conjunction with the phenomenological enquiry set out in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), this insistence on the bodily engagement of artists and intellectuals offers a productive starting point.

The contours of resistance and liberation, of decoloniality of being, are different in the postcolonial settings of the films: they are not tied to the urgency of nation building, nor to the need for a prescriptive approach to art suggested in Fanon's poetry analysis. However, the fundamental aspects of physical, bodily engagement are critical, and Fanon's understanding of the importance of art, poetry and culture for achieving decolonisation remains instructive: each of the films deals with a situation in which a decoloniality of being is still being realised, hampered by ongoing expropriation and domination, whether in the extreme example of the existential threat posed by jihadists in *Timbuktu*, the more subtle but pernicious racism encountered by Kandia in *Medan Vi Lever*, or the vast inequality and struggle for survival in the streets of Kinshasa portrayed in *Félicité*. The films operate with a variety of poetic, musical and theatrical modes of expression and representation, drawing in and transcending borders of different art and media forms to create ellipses, hybridities, and spaces in which resistance can be enacted and the engagement of the spectator enlisted. This has real-world implications because each film represents a situation in which oppression is ongoing and demonstrates the lack of resolution to struggles of liberation in the apparently postcolonial era.

For Maldonado-Torres, what defines a 'coloniality of being' is 'a subject from whom the capacity to have and to give have been taken away' (2007: 258), and decoloniality therefore relies on the restoration of giving; 'a decolonial politics of receptive generosity' (261). This can seem a questionable concept in that it requires generosity on both sides, invoking a sort of demand for forgiveness without paying reparations. However, in the sense of an 'invitation to dialogue [and] desire for exchange' (261) and noting the power that exists in the act of giving which colonisation takes away, it is one productive way of getting beyond the ire and violence discussed in the previous chapter, which is ultimately only the first step in processes of decolonisation, and which

does not on its own lead to the reincorporation of a decolonised bodily schema. Fanon invokes a similar sentiment in his impassioned plea at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*: 'make of me a man who always questions!' (1986: 232). By asking to be someone who questions, Fanon too is extending an invitation to dialogue. Zeiler frames this as a 'questioning mode of existence' (2013: 82). Such acts of questioning and dialogue recall Mignolo's argument for the need to 'delink body-politically [...] from the colonial matrix of power', engaging in 'epistemic disobedience' (2011: 278) to challenge the notion of an objective, neutral observer of 'truth' (2009: 162). Rather than objective 'truth' being dictated, the concepts of being, sensing, and doing on the border, previously encountered in this thesis, open up space for exchange and dialogue. This politics of generosity and reciprocity is represented in different ways, some of which we have already discussed, such as the final moment between Kandia and Ylva (see Chapter Three) but is realised most potently in the intermedial dimensions of the films.

Intermediality

An intermedial approach to film has burgeoned with the digital age and has been proving particularly productive within the lusophone sphere of postcolonial studies, opening up new ways of interrogating images, history and representation. Maria do Carmo Piçarra frames the concept of intermediality as one that 'abarca fronteiras flexíveis e permeáveis entre as artes e os média, cujo campo foi sendo reconfigurado pelas tecnologias digitais' [encompasses flexible and permeable borders between arts and media, and which has been reconfigured by digital technologies] (2020: 2). Intermediality as a term is strongly associated with digital technology and the innovations such technologies offer for combining art and media, though its history can be traced back to the 1960s, when it was coined by the artist Dick Higgins (1966) to describe works of art that used multiple types of media to create new hybrids. It is in this sense that intermedia differs from multimedia: as Jürgen Müller explains, media products become intermedia rather than multimedia when, rather than presenting different media side-by-side, they are blended together to fundamentally change the coding system of each form, and thus 'les ruptures et stratifications esthétiques ouvrent d'autres voies à l'expérience' (ruptures and aesthetic stratifications open up alternative routes to experience, 2000: 113). This does not mean that the differences between different media are altogether erased, as Müller goes on to say, but rather than being conceptualised as fixed forms, it is an understanding of media as 'processus où il y a des interactions constantes entre des concepts médiatiques' [processes where there are constant interactions between media concepts] (2000: 113) that actively engage spectators. Ken Friedman and Lily Díaz explain that Higgins' manifesto behind intermedia was taken up by a number of artists at the time and aimed to 'erase the boundaries between art and life' (2018: 28).

Intermediality, then, similarly to the dynamic process of intertextuality, cannot be understood as simply a combining of art and media forms divorced from socio-historical contexts.

Within film studies, Lúcia Nagib and Anne Jerslev's book, *Impure Cinema* (2014) draws on Bazin's 1952 essay 'Pour un cinéma impur' to argue that cinema's 'impurity' comes from both its inherent intermediality and its intercultural dimensions, and that intermediality cannot be considered in isolation from its intercultural context. In alignment with Higgins, they argue that 'tearing down the walls between fiction and life is indeed the aim of many intermedial and intercultural projects' (xxv). Furthermore, as Nagib (2020) and others, including Vicente Sánchez-Biosca (2020) and Afonso Dias Ramos (2020) have shown, intermediality offers a way into films and other forms of visual culture that foreground distinct absences, voids, missing pieces, which recall the absences and haunted, dense sites discussed in Chapter Two. In the below analyses, it is argued that these productive ruptures and spaces created with intermedial aesthetics and ethics allow for politics of generosity and reciprocity, based on the questioning, interrelational mode of resistance and existence, to take shape.

Embodied resistance in digital intermediality

All three of the films discussed in this chapter employ digital media and technologies to transform and reimagine the filmic material and in each, there is a dynamic between music, film, and music video in which space is created for embodied resistance to emerge. It was noted in Chapter Two that *Timbuktu* received some criticism for its ellipses, poetic nature and 'humanising' representation of jihadists. Here, once again, it becomes apparent that there is more to Sissako's poetry than meets the eye. Fanon's insistence on the power of poetry and art within struggles of liberation has implications for how *Timbuktu* can be interpreted, taking into account the Malian context at the time of its production, and this chapter argues that it is in its intermediality that it can be understood as not just a representation of resistance to the Ansar Dine regime in Mali, but an act of artistic resistance. In the film's inscriptions of other cinematic and musical codes, particularly the inclusion of Italian Western aesthetics and Wassoulou music, as well as the transformation of cinematic codes in a YouTube music video by the artist Fatoumata Diawara (who also appears in the film), it creates the kind of ruptures and stratifications Muller discusses. In those ruptures, it enlists spectatorial engagement in a project of resistance.

Félicité is a film inspired by a music video and which has a particularly complex relationship with bodily alienation and resistance. Resistance in *Félicité* is evident in the will and physical determination of both Félicité and Samo to survive in an often hostile environment (as discussed in chapter 2). Here, however, an intermedial analysis illuminates an altogether different situation

regarding excorporation, alienation and bodily schemas, in the way that the body of the actor Véro Tshanda Beya and the voice of the singer Mua Mbuyi are combined in the character of Félicité. It is one of the ways in which Gomis combines cinematic fiction with phenomenological reality in this film which attests to the breaking of boundaries between art and life, and which raises questions about ethical realism. Secondly, the intermedial analysis allows for an interpretation of the film's orchestral scenes, somewhat removed from the main narrative, which demonstrates how these scenes are integral to the film's representations of embodied resistance and are grounded in an ethical realism.

Medan Vi Lever, with its theatrical aesthetics, offers a very different hybridisation of art forms and is quite distinct from the aesthetics of *Timbuktu* and *Félicité*. It has a youthful, playful quality, but just as the last chapter showed that there is an insidious, damaging violence running through the film, the analysis in this chapter demonstrates that in the film's intermedial connections, including in Adam Kanyama's associated music video, there is space created for embodied resistance against that violence, a vibrant, vital reclamation of roots and a reworking of identity in a process of reincorporation. What all three films demonstrate is that in these workings of creative resistance, a politics of reciprocity and generosity, of human exchange and connection, is necessary, and is realised through each film's intermedial connections and transformations. This chapter argues that each film's acts of resistance, born of intermedial creativity, is how decoloniality of being - new ways of being-in-the-world - are articulated and communicated.

Once Upon a Time in Timbuktu

As discussed in Chapter Two, *Timbuktu* is a poetic film full of ellipses, which, it is argued here, can only be fully understood by interrogating its intermediality. In its transformation of different media, including news media and music video, and in the points of dialogue and exchange that such intermedial connections facilitate, *Timbuktu* actively engages the spectator and emerges as an act of resistance in its own right, contributing to a movement of artistic resistance which developed in response to the crisis in Mali. The analysis here focuses on two key points of intermedial and intercultural influence which converge in the film: the Italian Westerns of Sergio Leone, reworked and given local specificity, and the Wassoulou music of Southern Mali.

Sissako has been inspired by the Western genre his whole life and cites Spaghetti Westerns as a key influence on his filmmaking (interview with Olivier Barlet, 2003). In his previous film, *Bamako* (2006), which imagined putting the IMF and World Bank on trial in a Malian courtyard, Sissako included a film-within-a-film, entitled *Death in Timbuktu* starring Danny Glover. It was presented as a Western that a group of children watch on TV one evening. It is a very obvious,

isolated inscription which has been understood as ‘a pointed comment on the dominance of Western culture and ideology’ (Dennis Lim, 2007: para.6). The Ghanaian leader and intellectual, Kwame Nkrumah, once said “One only has to listen to the cheers of an African audience as Hollywood’s heroes slaughter red Indians [...] to understand the effectiveness of this weapon” (1970: 246). Sissako echoes this point, showing one of the cowboys indiscriminately shooting civilians in Timbuktu, then laughingly boasting about it to the others. There is a close-up of the cowboy laughing, and then a cut to the children watching the film, who echo his laughter. It is another close-up shot, this time of the children’s faces in the glow of the TV screen, enraptured by the glorification of violence. However, Sissako adds another layer to this Western narrative with Danny Glover’s character, a black African lone ranger, who shoots that cowboy dead, and it is with Glover that the spectator of *Bamako* identifies. Therefore, the spectator simultaneously engages with the Western via the lone ranger character, while being led to critically notice how the children identify with the ‘bad guy’.³⁵ It is a very short sequence within *Bamako*, but it shows the potential of the Western to be reworked in a West African context.

Indeed, the Spaghetti Westerns, as Maignard (2020) explores, have long had a much-loved place within popular culture and imagination across Africa. Furthermore, the place of Westerns in Africa is not simply as foreign products to be unthinkingly consumed, but as a genre already imbued with a degree of subversiveness that has been reappropriated in different ways. Christopher Frayling has demonstrated that rather than being simple adoptions of the Hollywood genre, many Spaghetti Westerns ‘share a loose allegiance with Fanonism [...] underpinned by a coherent social and political analysis’ (1981: 238), while Christopher Robé (2014) unpacks the links between neorealist third cinema and political Spaghetti Westerns, arguing that the genre offers a productive dynamic of intercultural and transnational exchange and transformation.

The potential subversiveness of *Death in Timbuktu* in *Bamako* provides a starting point for, and is more fully realised in, *Timbuktu*. In this film, the influence of Italian Westerns permeates the entire film in a less explicit, but more profound, way. As Sissako commented in an interview:

Timbuktu partage un espace commun avec le western. Une ville dans le désert... L’idée de justice et de justiciers aussi. Un espace où combattent le bien et le mal [...] je voulais faire un remake de Il était une fois dans l’Ouest. En le plaçant en Afrique. [Timbuktu shares a common space with the Western. A town in the desert... the idea of justice and administrators of justice as well. A space where there is a fight between good and bad [...] I wanted to do a remake of Once Upon a Time in the West. Placing it in Africa] (Sissako, in an interview with Picard, 2017).

³⁵ For more on *Bamako* and specifically the function of *Death in Timbuktu*, see Jacqueline Maignard (2020).

This is no simple remake: Western tropes are reappropriated, localised and incorporated into this urgent, would-be-documentary film. It thus works the border between the local and global, much in the vein of border thinking. The colour palette throughout the film is composed of sandy, earthy tones and certain features recall visual aesthetics of *Once Upon a Time in the West* (dir. Sergio Leone, 1968), which is notable for its far slower pace compared to the *Dollars* trilogy. Like that film, slowness in *Timbuktu* is not necessarily due to the length of the take. In fact, the shots are often short, lasting no more than a couple of seconds in duration. However, the combination of wide shots of vast landscapes with intense close-ups of characters' faces, again, a similarity to Leone's film, produces attentiveness on the part of the spectator: Both types of shot in *Timbuktu* produce an 'intense phenomenological experience of presence' (Doane, 2003: 94) common to close-ups. Here, the wide shots contribute to this experience by engendering a sense of awe at the vastness of the landscape, something much capitalised upon by Westerns. It is this intensity of presence - including aspects of the materiality that is key to slow cinema - that works to create the sense of time slowed, and to encourage the spectator to be an active participant in the film's meaning-making, rather than a passive voyeur. Attuning the spectator in this way, as we will see, is what allows *Timbuktu* to stage its resistance to terrorism in Mali.

The trope of the 'fight between good and evil', reworked in *Timbuktu*, is not the simple binary opposition that the quote from Sissako might suggest: it is rather a potent starting point, relying on knowledge of Western genre conventions, which is then made far more nuanced in the film's handling of the representation of jihadists in Timbuktu. Indeed, much of the fear about screening the film in various locations (see Chapter Two) and some criticism for the way in which Sissako 'humanises' the jihadists (see, for example, Sabine Cessou, 2017) is due to this play on genre convention: the jihadists represented in the film are very human, full of complexity, shades of light and dark, with their own hopes, desires, and interests. They do not fit neatly into a good/bad binary. As Sissako has pointed out, this humanisation is important because 'to portray a jihadist as simply a bad guy, who does not in any way resemble me [...] that's not completely true [...] He's also a fragile being. And fragility is an element that can make anybody tip over into horror' (interview with John Anderson, 2015: para.4). Humanising the jihadists, showing their fragility, is one way of undermining the regime's power and finding a thread of hope, a point of potential human connection: the only way to move beyond the regime's violence and the zone of non-being it creates for the citizens of Timbuktu. This human understanding does not diminish the representation of the regime's brutality; rather, it can work to emphasise it.

This is amply demonstrated in one captivating sequence: a young couple is stoned to death for the sin of being in a relationship out of wedlock while, at the house of a Haitian “madwoman”, Zabou, a jihadist performs a balletic dance to music that is ambiguous: it is presented as subjective and within the mind of the jihadist, but which enhances the sensory resonance of the dance for the spectator. The juxtaposition of these scenes is startling (figures 4.1 and 4.2 below). The dance captures his humanity, his fragility, but also his implication in the violence being carried out: the music he dances to is accompanied by the slightly out-of-rhythm percussion of the stones being hurled at the heads of the young couple. Sissako has said that this scene of the stoning was based on a newspaper report of a real stoning that took place in Aguelhok, the site of several violent atrocities as Ansar Dine battled for control and was the catalyst for the entire film (Siegfried Forster, 2016). The scene is unflinching in its violence, but it neither glorifies nor glorifies the event for voyeuristic pleasure, as is the case in many Westerns. It is remarkable in its restraint. It bears witness to a despicable act and, through the bodily resonance it creates, asks the spectator to bear witness too, implicating the jihadists who themselves indulge in all kinds of forbidden acts.



Figure 4.1 (01:07:58). The dance.



Figure 4.2 (01:08:22). Aftermath of the stoning.

To tease out the intermediality of this short sequence is to engage with border thinking, relying on an ‘anchoring a politics of knowledge that is ingrained both in the body and in local histories’ (Mignolo, 2011: 274) and with Fanon’s understanding of a poetry of emancipation as analytic, descriptive and embodied. The sequence operates on the borders of film, dance, music and news media and in so doing, creates visual, sensory poetry. There is an ‘anchoring’ here, both of the actor’s body in the world through dance, and of the politics of knowledge that Sissako is concerned with. The camera, rather than focusing on the actor and the dance, seems to be engaged in a dance of its own. It pans up and down, but not always tracking the movements of the dancer, often subverting the expectation to do so, and focusing instead on the bare, earthen wall. There are rapid cuts, again focusing on materials and textures: the grains of sand kicked by the dancer’s foot, the gauzy curtain behind which a junior militant catches a glimpse of his superior and quickly retreats, Zabou in her voluminous, multi-layered robes as she reclines, the movement of the dancer indicated in the movement of her eyes. Through the motion of the camera and in the editing, there is a sense of dizzying motion that sweeps the spectator up in the medium of dance,

contrasted with shots that linger just long enough to re-anchor and provoke reflection. It is an aesthetic choice which centres the textures of Timbuktu: sand, earth and fabric, invoking a haptic mode of expression, and which indicates that the jihadists are not part of Timbuktu. Dance is therefore not merely represented in this scene, but part of its aesthetics. In the pace of editing, the motion of the camera, and the haptic visuality established in this scene, bodily resonance is created with the spectator, the significance of which is explored below.

The dance, while flighty and fanciful, is also sombre and has a ritualistic quality to it. In these contrasts, it expresses something of the ludicrous aspects of the regime, but also how it is underpinned by religious fervour and entrenched ideology. Images appearing in news media have echoes here, such as the one in Figure 4.3, from an article in *Le Point* about the Aguelhok stoning (Arefi, 2012). This shows a group of Ansar Dine militants preparing for prayer, with their rifles displayed in front of them. It is an image which, in its composition, recalls the opening scene of the stoning sequence (figure 4.4) and, in its detail (two of the men can be seen using bottles of water to wash their hands prior to prayer), the ritualistic elements of the dance. In this way, Timbuktu refers to, incorporates and transforms different media codes and in so doing creates a more interesting, rounded picture of jihadism than is often presented in news media, one which reflects human fragility. There is nothing over-the-top in Sissako's portrayal, rather there is a quiet authenticity in its intermediality, which achieves the aim that Higgins outlined, of breaking down the barriers between art and life.



Figure 4.3. Image from *Le Point* article about the Aguelhok stoning. Image credit: Sipa/Diakaridia Dembele (2012).



Figure 4.4 (01:07:16). Establishing shot of the stoning scene.

The jihadist finishes by picking up two handfuls of sand which begins to trickle through his fingers. There is a cut to the scene of the stoning, life disappeared from the two seemingly disembodied heads. Connections are drawn here between the sand and earth of Timbuktu and the dead bodies. By attuning the senses to the materiality and textures of Timbuktu, and by simultaneously calling upon the spectator to witness the stoning, the sequence is rich with what Tarja Laine terms cinema's 'vibrant matter', that is, 'the affective efficacy of cinema that enables spectators to both feel and think about the film at the same time' in bodily reciprocity (2017: 9). In carrying out the stoning, the regime sought to deny bodily agency, to reduce the two people to

mere objects at which rocks could be hurled. But in the reciprocal acts of this sequence, between the scenes, between the on-screen bodies, and between film and spectator, violence is not met with violence, but instead a 'politics of receptive generosity' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 261). The stoned victims cannot be brought back to life, but in the handling of this scene, their humanity is reinstated. As the sand trickles from the jihadist's fingers, it reassimilates with the sand on the ground. Despite the perturbations of the jihadist, Timbuktu, in its essence and materiality, remains.

Sissako does not give a blow-by-blow account of the various political factions and the battles which led to the takeover of Timbuktu by Ansar Dine. Rather, he plunges his audience directly into the besieged city and in his realisation of this *Once Upon a Time...* in Timbuktu, he encourages an emotional, sensory reaction to the deeply human stories which emerge. More than that, in the navigation and transformation of news media, within the scenes, *Timbuktu* promotes what E. Ann Kaplan has termed 'ethical witnessing', that is, not simply empathising with what is shown on-screen, but being moved to act (2011: 2). He reinterprets a news story to move beyond simple binary opposition of good and bad, in a way which re-humanises, and through the sensory resonance created through dance, invites more active participation on the part of the spectator. It is an articulation of a decoloniality of being based on embodied poetry, rather than violence, and which prioritises human connection.

Manthia Diawara, in a discussion of Sissako's cinematic poetics and politics, argues that 'Sissako is less concerned with proposing a counterdiscourse to the iniquities and liberticide brought on Timbuktu by the jihadists than he is with drawing new imaginaries with enough poetic power to enlist the spectator's symbolic participation in taking Timbuktu back' (2015: 77). By exploring intermedial and intercultural exchange beyond the filmic borders, the ways in which Timbuktu achieves such spectatorial engagement can be better understood. It is in digital spaces where music video and film engage with and transform one another that *Timbuktu* asserts itself as an act of resistance in its own right, standing against extremism in the region and the threat to Timbuktu's history, culture and people.

Singing for Timbuktu

Music comes to the fore as a major point of intermedial hybridity within the film. As above, the scenes in question are highly affective and sensorial, engaging the spectator through the 'vibrant matter' of cinema and inviting 'ethical witnessing'. Portrayed in the scenes is another attempt by the regime to break individuals' bodily schemas and to alienate them so much that, to use Fanon's terms, they become paralysed, immobile, part of the 'world of statues' (1963: 51). But in the

reciprocal relationship created with the spectator, and in the transformation of media across borders and spaces, between film and music video, there emerges a powerful example of resistance. From a diegetic body in pain, the title song, *Timbuktu Fasso*, takes on a life of its own.

Music as a tool of resistance is a central concept to the film. Under the sharia law imposed by Ansar Dine, music was banned across the region. Given the important social roles played by griots and Wassoulou singers in Mali as protectors of history and essential voices of social commentary respectively, the forbidding of music was not just a puritanical ban of entertainment and frivolity, but an insidious silencing of the population which seeped into private as well as public spaces. It led to an exodus of musicians from the country, who, along with Malian artists already living abroad, began to make music about the crisis, from a position of exile.

Wassoulou is notable for being performed by women, in contrast to the strongly male-dominated world of the griot (Heather Maxwell, 2003, Lucy Durán, 1995). Wassoulou performers explicitly differentiate themselves from griots, calling themselves *konow*, which translates as 'birds'. Durán highlights a key point of distinction: "The *konow* are musicians by choice [...] allowing them to comment on social issues in "freer" musical and textual ways than those of the *jeliw*" (1995: 102).³⁶ Instead of praise songs and family genealogies, Wassoulou performers focus on the everyday issues, events and injustices which form the basis of women's lived experiences in the Wasulu region.³⁷ The lack of constraint of lineage and expectation that exerts itself on griot practice has, according to Maxwell (2003), contributed to the huge popularity of Wassoulou. It is a genre of music familiar with resistance: at least since Oumou Sangaré's emergence in the 1980s, social practices such as polygamy and arranged marriage have been criticised in Wassoulou songs. It represents an exceptional form of freedom of speech within the conservative, patriarchal Mandé society in which it developed. Never has Wassoulou been more threatened and urgent than during Ansar Dine's rule. From 2012, when the regime took over, there was an output of work by Malian musicians in exile protesting against the regime and the ban on music. Fatoumata Diawara, a Malian singer who identifies with the Wassoulou tradition through family connections, is one of the most internationally-renowned artists who contributed to this movement.³⁸ Diawara not only appears in the film as a character, but also wrote and performed *Timbuktu Fasso*.

³⁶ An alternative word for *griots*.

³⁷ The variant spellings *Wassoulou*, *Wasulu*, and others, are used to denominate both the region and the musical style. Following Durán (1995), I use these two spellings to differentiate between the musical genre (for which the former spelling is more common) and the geographical region, which encompasses an area of southwest Mali, northern Guinea, and northern Côte d'Ivoire.

³⁸ Some Malian musicians, including Fatoumata Diawara, were already living abroad before the crisis, but considered themselves to be in a position of exile, since they were unable to return to their homeland to perform and to make music.

Sissako has long found inspiration in Wassoulou, using Oumou Sangaré's music as the soundtrack to one of his earlier films, *Heremakono* (2002). However, as Victoria Pasely (2016) points out, *Timbuktu* is the first film that Sissako has made which has an original score (by Amine Bouhafa) rather than relying on pre-existing music. In the instrumental version of *Timbuktu Fasso*, Bouhafa's choice of instruments - the *ngoni*, *kora* and flute - are instruments particularly associated with Wassoulou.³⁹ The film, then, does not merely portray the musical resistance which sprang up in defiance of the regime, but actively contributes to it. By enlisting the star power of Fatoumata Diawara and utilising the intermedial qualities of digital film technologies, it engages politically and artistically across borders and media.

The fullest realisation of *Timbuktu Fasso* within the film is in a diegetic performance. Taken out of context, it seems like a relaxed, happy scene. In a simple but cheerful room, made homely with colourful rugs, cushions and blankets, a group of five friends lounge around. Their bodies are in close proximity, limbs languidly extending towards one another, all with an air of easy, youthful companionability. One strums the *ngoni*; another uses his body as percussion, tapping his leg then his chest in an easy rhythm. A third, a young woman, played by Fatoumata Diawara, launches into a husky melody, smiling as she sings. The group are all too well aware that they are in breach of the ban on music, as is the spectator. The relaxed union of their bodies - women and men casually occupying shared space - is not an act without consequence: at another point in the film a young girl is taken away by a pair of militants simply for talking to a boy on the phone. The music-making may be taking place within a private space, but its function, and its ramifications, are very public.

The performance is stopped midway through, when a heavily-armed militant bursts through the front door and, with lightning-speed, the *ngoni* player, still carrying the incriminating instrument, takes off out of a side door. A chase across the rooftops ensues, but, typically, Sissako abruptly cuts to another scene before its resolution. The outcome is soon evident, however. Fatoumata's character, now dressed in the obligatory head-to-toe black, including gloves, is sentenced to 40 lashes for making music, and 40 more for being in mixed company. It is an extreme example of a very deliberate attempt at breaking her bodily schema, visually and physically and inducing alienation in order to make her submit to the regime's interpretation of morality.

³⁹ The *kora* is a 21-stringed lute-harp instrument, most strongly associated with griot culture in West Africa. The *ngoni* is another stringed instrument, smaller than the *kora*. The *kamale ngoni*, or youth-harp (so named for its small size and high pitch) is particularly associated with Wassoulou.

The whipping takes place in a very public arena: a dusty square surrounded by militants and casual observers. The scene opens with the whipping already in progress: the singer kneeling in the middle of the square, and despite the view of her at first being limited by the jihadists surrounding her, the camera is at her level, her whole body in shot, while only the lower bodies of the jihadists are. It is an ethical choice of shot, which again works to emphasise her humanity and refuse alienation and objectification. This is enhanced by rapid cuts with close-ups of her hands and the textures of the material of her gloves and the detailing on her sleeves, and of her face as she whimpers in pain. There is then a wide shot, establishing her position in the square, against the crowd surrounding her. Here, the pain is still clear in her tear-streaked face, in her rocking back and forth: bodily expressions of pain which resonate corporeally with the spectator. This creates affect in the way that Vivian Sobchack theorises it: 'based on the lived sense and feeling of the human body [...] as a material subject that [...] has the capacity to bleed and suffer and hurt for others because it can sense its own possibilities for suffering and pain' (2004: 178). This scene emphatically creates the sense of those possibilities of suffering and pain, and, as a result, makes it difficult to watch. But then, into the petrified silence which surrounds her, broken only by the sickening crack of whip against skin, she lets out a high-pitched cry that is not only a visceral expression of pain, but also of defiance. As she releases the cry, her body, from its hunched, submissive position, begins to rise, her head lifting, and her cry merges into song (figure 4.5 below).



Figure 4.5 (01:02:52). Cry merges into song.

The whipping continues, rhythmically, impassively, and with the aggressor mostly out of shot, the focus is completely on her bodily performance of pain and resistance. From the moment she starts to sing, the camera is trained on her face in a close-up which lasts considerably longer than the previous shots. As Doane suggests, this produces an 'intense phenomenological experience of presence' (2003: 94) that resonates with the spectator and asks them to bear witness. She sings raggedly, through sharp intakes of breath, but she sings nonetheless, using the rhythm of the whip. This is not a song for art's sake, for the pleasure of making music. It is a performance that certainly fulfils Fanon's criteria of the artist-in-action, body and soul engaged.

According to Gülsüm Baydar, ‘urban spaces are not passive containers of their inhabitants, but complex mechanisms that orient, organize and control gendered and sexualized bodies, which in turn may subvert such regulations’ (2015: 12). There is certainly this sense in the way the square is demarcated in this scene. Like the football scene analysed in Chapter Two, here again the interaction and combination of bodies with space results in a transformation of that space. Here, the bodies of the militants and onlookers form the borders of the square in which the woman is whipped, making an example of her by the very public, brutal punishment. One of the jihadists is shown filming the scene; presumably (as is shown elsewhere in the film) to share on social media, making an example of an infidel and demonstrating the success of the jihad, potentially as both a warning and as a recruitment advert: another proposed film-within-the-film. However, this scene also powerfully demonstrates the ability and strength of Fatoumata’s character to resist. Thanks to her performance, her refusal to submit to the punishment or accept wrongdoing, she subverts Ansar Dine’s narrative. Instead, the filming of her punishment becomes a testimony of suffering and an act of embodied resistance. It is one of many such acts in the film which, as Sow notes, ‘are led by the youth, and the mothers and daughters whose actions counter, and emphasize the inanity of, the destructive venture of the jihadists’ (2016: 285). There is a strong link with Wassoulou here. Through this bodily and musical performance of resistance, there is no attempt to judge or to pass on wisdom, as griots do, simply to bear witness to and to communicate a communal suffering.

Between Film and Music Video

The diegetic performances are only one part of the story. It is in digital spaces beyond the film that *Timbuktu Fasso* asserts resistance most forcefully, and the song’s intermedial, intercultural connections emerge in a dynamic process of dialogue and exchange. For any non-Bambara-speaking spectator, the lyrics of *Timbuktu Fasso* cannot be understood in the film. They are not subtitled, and it is left ambiguous as to whether the militants who storm the session are locals or foreigners, and, thus, whether or not they understand the song. This does not affect the coherency of the narrative in the film, since the significance of the performance, and the punishment that ensues, is emphatically communicated. It is perhaps after the film has ended, when, as Manthia Diawara (2015) notes, the images linger in the mind, that the intermediality of the song comes into play.

Diawara’s official music video for *Timbuktu Fasso* (Universal Music France, 2015) has gained more than 2.5 million views on YouTube to date. Within the description provided, there is an official English translation of the Bambara lyrics by Fatoumata Diawara and Amine Bouhafa (2014), though, interestingly, no French one. In the comments sections of the video, YouTube

users themselves have translated the lyrics, often at the request of others, into both English and French. While the official Universal Music France translation has quite considerable differences compared with user-generated translations, the latter of which appear to be more literal translations, there is consensus over the key messages of the song: homeland (ko yo ne fasso ye – this is my homeland), suffering (ko denmisennu bε kasi la ala – The children are in tears/the children are crying) and the will to fight and resist oppression (Maliba n ko don dε bε se – The Great Mali, we will be victorious/ Timbuktu will remain). This participatory activity surrounding the video demonstrates engagement with the content beyond pure enjoyment of the spectacle, as well as the ethical and political importance to Bambara-speakers of fully getting across the message of the song to an audience outside of Mali. This demonstrates the efficacy of the ‘poetic power to enlist the spectator’s symbolic participation’ (Manthia Diawara 2015) in both film and music video. Thus, *Timbuktu Fasso* becomes a very clear act of resistance and ensures that the attempt to silence Malian voices cannot succeed.

The music video not only allows us to hear the song in its entirety, but, unlike the acoustic version in the film, here the performance is the fully orchestrated version, featuring the Prague Philharmonic. The orchestra’s inclusion in the music video is visual as well as aural, and in this aspect, further points of reciprocity and exchange become evident. It demonstrates the way in which a song whose lyrics are highly localised is interpreted and expressed by other bodies in other spaces. It heightens awareness of the full richness of a composition which has identifiably Malian elements, necessary for giving voice to this Malian crisis and resistance, but which emerged out of complex intercultural and intermedial connections, both in its inspiration and in its performance.

Furthermore, dialogue between film and music video is evident in the way that the music video restructures and incorporates the visual filmic material. The excerpts from the film are edited here in a way which reflects Sissako’s fragmentary style, but they come in a different order, and are interspersed with shots of Diawara singing in the studio and shots of the orchestra. In the music video, the shots are ordered in such a way that those which show moments of high tension, such as the whipping, and the stoning, are grouped together at the climax of the song, giving a different intensity and rhythm to the images. This works as a call to action: emphasising the most brutal acts represented in the film but asserting the strength of the Malian people to resist and reclaim their homeland. In its intercultural links, and in the power of its translated lyrics shared across borders, it encourages solidarity with the people of northern Mali and against extremism.

Through its intermedial connections, *Timbuktu* is a contribution to a movement of resistance, which responds directly and defiantly to extremism in Mali. The film’s poetic mode is politically

engaged, and in its subtle reworking of Italian Western influences, *Timbuktu* responds thoughtfully to violence. It reworks the generic codes of the Western to move beyond binary oppositions of good and evil and to show the limits of violence as a tool of resistance. Instead, it engages with a decoloniality of being by finding more productive spaces of reciprocity and exchange, both diegetically and extra-diegetically, in digital spaces beyond the film, where the boundaries between art and life are extremely permeable.

***Félicité*: a Congotronic Symphony**

It may not be obvious, but there are African rhythms in Beethoven – Héritier Mayimbi Mbuangi, Violinist (in *Kinshasa Symphony*, 2010).

Félicité is a film born out of a ‘decolonial politics of receptive generosity’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 261). This becomes clear through an intermedial analysis. It is a film influenced by music videos and documentary film (in contrast to *Timbuktu*, it is a film which was inspired by music video, rather than the other way around) and which weaves these other filmic media so deeply into the fabric of *Félicité* that it achieves the intermedial goal of blurring and dismantling barriers between art and life in extraordinary ways. It brings together two of the DRC’s most influential musical groups, Kasai AllStars, who pioneered a genre of music known as Congotronics, and the Orchestre Symphonique Kimbanguiste (OSK), a Kinshasa-based symphony orchestra. Both these groups, in turn, have been formed from productive intercultural exchanges. With a focus on the film’s musical scenes, this analysis will demonstrate the interplay between these media, and the spaces created for resistance and reincorporation.

Gomis, like Sissako, has created an auteurial style of filmmaking which operates on the basis of poetics rather than narrative, though their poetic styles are very distinct. Gomis’ poetics are predicated on the quest ‘to perceive, rather than construct, reality’ (interview with Alain Gomis, 2017) and amid the whirling movement of a city, find something permanent. It is an ethical commitment to a decolonial being-in-the-world in which he, as the filmmaker, takes up a position of listening, observing and establishing human connection, rather than constructing or fabricating. This is no empty commitment: the film is in Lingala, the lingua franca of Kinshasa, which meant turning down the opportunity for considerable funding from the CNC. In an interview, he explained:

There are two funding sources from the CNC which are: one is an advance on receipt which gives you 500,000 euros, but which stipulates that the film be mostly in French. If not, you have to try to get the *cinéma du monde* funding, which is also from the CNC, about 100,000 euros. So [...] a difference of 400,000 euros (interview with Gomis, 2017, appendix I).

The use of Lingala then, is not just a narrative choice but also a political one. It is a delinking which brings with it complications in funding the film, but which represents a refusal to 'make people speak in a language which is not theirs, in which they express themselves in a natural, everyday manner' (interview with Gomis, 2017, appendix I), and which contributes to a phenomenologically realist presentation of Kinshasa.

The musical influences are the other major factor here. It is hard to overstate the importance of representing decolonial ways of being which offer alternatives to violence for the citizens of Kinshasa (*les Kinois*). For individual processes of reincorporation to happen – that is the positive construction of identity in which one's bodily schema is seamlessly part of the self and not uncomfortably attended to – delinking from the horrors of the colonial past and the civil wars thereafter is a necessary and ongoing process. This process is far from an easy one in a city which can seem as nothing more than ravaged and dirty, a city which used to have the nickname 'Kin la belle' and is now often called 'Kin la poubelle'.⁴⁰ Gomis admits he found it a challenging place to work and was struggling at first to find ways to represent the city beyond his initial impressions of it – he describes it as 'a city that is sometimes very difficult to visually confront' (interview with Gomis, Appendix I). What does it do to someone's bodily schema, their embodied sense of self, if it is constantly conveyed to them that the place in which their body primarily interacts with the world is dirty, brutal, a failure? In a phrase which makes colonialism feel all too-present, Kinshasa was described in the *National Geographic* as 'seeth[ing] like primordial ooze across a 250-square-mile patch of tropics [...] a marvel of dysfunction' (Robert Draper, 2013, para.5). Violence here has not proved to be a recourse to a better being-in-the-world; quite the opposite. For Gomis, the key to achieving a different representation of Kinshasa, and ways of being within it, lay in the city's music scene and, in particular, the rehearsal room of the OSK. In this surprising sanctuary, a different interpretation opened, one which focuses on the *Kinois*, the people, and thus finds, in this unlikely place, aesthetic beauty born out of shared humanity, bodily agency, and intercultural connection.

Without negating the sometimes brutal realities of life in Kinshasa, Gomis finds beauty through the articulation of bodies. It is in the OSK's peaceful, blue-hued rehearsal room, in the collaboration of bodies to produce extraordinary music. It is there in the bar where Félicité sings, where, to the Congotronic rhythms, people get drunk, dance, and lose all inhibitions. It is there down an alley, against a yellow wall, where a group of musicians improvise. In this sense, the film exhibits epistemic disobedience: rejecting 'knowledge' of what Kinshasa is, and instead finding

⁴⁰ See, for example, articles such as 'Kinshasa is Drowning in Waste' (Kossevi Tiassou, 2018), 'Kin-la-Belle ou Kin-la-poubelle? Open Waste Dumping in DRC' (Mike Webster, 2018)

ways to express place through embodied acts of reciprocity and exchange. Such ‘disobedience’ and reciprocity is enabled through intermedial connections, especially with music video, as is explored below.

Song dubbing and ethics of realism

The music, right from the opening scene of the film, is infectious and energetic. The members of Félicité’s band are played by members of the Kasai Allstars, the country’s most famous Congotronics band. The band brings together a total of 25 musicians from five different ethnic groups with very different musical cultures. In particular, according to their record label, Crammed Discs, Kasai AllStars brought together Luba and Lulula, two musical styles that were previously thought of as incompatible (Crammed Discs, 2015). They pioneered an eclectic, multicultural musical form that mixed oral and musical cultures. Some of their instruments are traditional and were brought from villages in Kasai province; others have been innovated from scrap materials on the streets of Kinshasa; others still are electric. Altogether, it creates a frenetic electronic sound for which the Congotronics genre is known, along with distinct singing styles and dance. Called the AllStars because the band features some of the country’s biggest music stars, drafted in from their own bands, it is a melding of pre- and postcolonial influences to reassert Congolese identities on a global stage. Gomis says that watching YouTube videos of Kasai AllStars inspired the film and the character of Félicité – and he went to the DRC to seek them out before he had even sketched a plot but knowing they would become part of the film (see interview with Gomis, 2017). Intermediality is thus woven into *Félicité* from the outset, and the Congotronics which infuse the film offer a different interpretation of Kinshasa through a decolonial gaze. Rather than seeing Kinshasa as a ‘marvel of dysfunction’, the spectator is immediately and sensorially drawn into the bar where Félicité sings. This is a Kinshasa of corporeal presence and collaborative creative practice, where places are given meaning through the movement and interaction of bodies.

There are clear similarities between a YouTube video of Kasai AllStars performing the song *Drowning Goat* (Crammed Discs, 2008) and the performance of the same song in this opening scene (figures 4.6 and 4.7 below). In *Félicité*, the composition of the shots of the musicians – nearly all of whom are the members of Kasai Allstars – right down to their place on the stage and the cuts between close-ups of individual musicians and their instruments and wide shots of the whole group - is based on those same shots in the *Drowning Goat* music video. The music video is much rawer: low resolution, unpredictable lighting and contrast from shot to shot, sudden zooms in and out. But both film and music video use the song and the performance of it to engage the spectator’s senses and create bodily resonance. The Congotronics music greatly aids this: songs

generally start with voice or simple melodic instrumentals and build up to a more frenetic sound, each instrument repeating motifs that create a strong rhythm until there is multi-layered, almost excessive sound that the body cannot help but get involved with, culminating in dance. In the *Drowning Goat* video, this is realised in singer Mua Mbuyi dancing. In the film, the musical performance also becomes part of the fictive diegesis, which is achieved by combining the shots of the band described above with shots of the bar's patrons, talking, drinking and then, as the music builds, dancing. It is vibrant, sensorially engaging, joyful.



Figure 4.6. Mua Mbuyi performing in the *Drowning Goat* video (09:35).



Figure 4.7. *Félicité* (00:06:59). Félicité performing *Drowning Goat*

Gomis implicates the spectator within the scene, overcoming voyeuristic distance. One way this is achieved is by using a hand-held camera in constant motion. Cuts are interspersed with panning shots in which the camera focuses briefly on different faces and bodies, catching snippets of conversation, moving around the space like another body in the crowd. This, in conjunction with the liberal use of close-ups, locates the spectator more within, rather than outside the scene. Secondly, 'entanglement' of spectator and screen (Laine, 2017: 10) evoking simultaneous cognitive and sensory response, is realised by prioritising sound over image in the first seconds of the film. The screen is black, overlaid with opening credits in white. But already, there is the ambient sound of the bar: lively chatter, the clinking of bottles. The conventional visual superiority of cinema is overturned, preventing voyeuristic distance and heightening sensory engagement. The first image, a close-up of Félicité's face demonstrates further how close-ups can produce an 'intense phenomenological experience of presence' (Doane, 2003: 94). With the lack of any kind of establishing shot, audio privileged initially over visual, and then an arresting visual which communicates phenomenological presence, the possibility is created for the spectator to interact with Kinshasa in a radically different way. This is an understanding of place as living, breathing, creative entity.

The one striking difference between the *Drowning Goat* video and this opening scene is that the only character in the band not played by one of the Kasai AllStars is Félicité herself. The voice

heard is that of the singer, Mua Mbuyi,⁴¹ but the character of Félicité is played by first-time actor, Véro Tshanda Beya. This raises questions about phenomenological reality and ethical realism, especially due to the trend emanating from Hollywood of actors singing live in films. Films such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *La La Land* and *Les Misérables*, claim “authenticity” on the basis of such live performance. However, as explained in detail by Paul Tinggen, this ‘authentic and real’ performance in the two Hollywood films is the result of intensive set manipulation and technical mixing, overdubbing, re-recording and digital sound manipulation (see Tinggen, 2017 and 2013). In response to these films, there have been calls to bring back dubbing in Hollywood (Kaleigh Donaldson, 2018; Jason McHenry 2017) owing to what some have found to be jarring vocal performances by the stars in those films, which actually break cinematic illusion.

Katherine Spring (2011) and Marsha Siefert (1995), writing about historical song dubbing practice in Hollywood, both note that the important requirement is maintaining ‘the illusion that the body seen onscreen is the source of the voice emanating from the soundtrack’ (Spring 2011: 285), the body being that of a screen star.⁴² Siefert considers the implication of this practice in early Hollywood films with all or predominantly black casts, which were almost universally dubbed with white singers (even when the black stars were celebrated singers in their own right) explaining that ‘pairing a white, trained voice with a black star image helped that image to “pass” as acceptable’ (1995: 60). The implications for bodily alienation here are enormous. This was not limited to Hollywood and song, but also applied in a totalising way to many early African films: Sembène’s first film (and the first black African feature film) *La Noire de...* (1966), was constrained by funding requirements to dub its title character in French.⁴³ Such constraints and considerations have not gone away in the intervening decades: black stars in Hollywood films are still often dubbed by white voices, particularly when being dubbed for foreign-language markets (Abend, 2021). Funding for francophone and lusophone African cinema often, as Gomis’ experiences illustrate, still come with language conditions. In *Félicité*, Gomis appears to play with all of these conventions and resists those which can lead to bodily alienation.

How does this work with the film’s song dubbing? Siefert indicates that, aside from racial discrimination, song dubbing becomes unethical when it ‘obscures the owner of the voice [and] rob[s] the singer of the opportunity to reclaim his or her voice in live performance’ (1995: 57).

⁴¹ Mua Mbuyi’s name is sometimes stylised as Muambuyi, including in Crammed Discs’ publicity about Kasai AllStars. I have used the stylisation of her name as she is credited in the film.

⁴² The commodification of the star body in Hollywood in the 1950s hugely increased song dubbing practice, as explained in detail by Siefert (1995).

⁴³ The title character’s monologue in *La Noire de...* was dubbed by a Haitian actor. The issue here is not that the black actor was dubbed by a white person, but that Sembène was forced to use the language of the coloniser to represent the experience of the colonised.

This is not the case in *Félicité*. Firstly, the Hollywood dynamic of screen star and anonymised singer is reversed here: Mua Mbuyi is the star; Tshanda Beya was a street vendor prior to her being cast in the film, indicating another level of ethics and embodied experience taken into account in the casting process. Kasai AllStars are prominently noted in the brief opening credits, and Mua Mbuyi is credited no fewer than four times: as the singer, as the vocal and dance coach, as the composer of some of the songs used in the soundtrack, and for her minor on-screen role (she plays Félicité's aunt). Kasai AllStars' visibility has been greatly increased by the film, and they have capitalised on their association with it with the film's soundtrack album and their most recent European tour, which took place to celebrate/promote the release of the film in numerous European countries (Crammed Discs, 2017).

Secondly, as will be explored below, unity between body and voice – Mary-Ann Doane calls this the 'fantasmic body' (1980: 34) – is not always maintained. Doane theorises that auditory pleasure is gained from the cohesion of body and voice, and that this unity 'hold[s] at bay the potential trauma of dispersal, dismemberment, difference' (45). These 'potentially traumatic' elements are not held back in *Félicité* (there is literal dismemberment!) and attention is drawn to the illusory aspect of image/sound synchronicity in ways designed to create unease. This filmic disunity of body and voice interacts productively with the concepts of excorporation and the breakdown of a bodily schema (Zeiler, 2013), as discussed in Chapter Two. It is a film about dispersal, dismemberment and difference in many ways, and it is by bringing together the two different musical influences, Kasai AllStars and OSK, that these dissonant elements are exposed.

My Heart's in the Highlands

If Luba and Lulula music should not work together, then Congotronics and Classical definitely should not. Yet they do. Gomis combines two disparate musical groups coexisting in Kinshasa into the body of the film's protagonist. The performances by the orchestra punctuate the film: shot with a blue colour palette and somewhat desaturated, these scenes are a distinct aesthetic contrast to the rest of the film and stand almost outside of the narrative, whilst simultaneously intensifying the film's affect and providing a sensory link to Félicité's inner world. Gomis presented to the OSK some works by Arvo Pärt, a minimalist-classical Estonian composer whose work is renowned by filmmakers for its ability to 'communicate a sudden atmosphere of stillness and meditation [and] immediate sensory reaction' (Service, 2012). It is well outside the usual style of the OSK, which mainly takes on big symphonic works. Pärt's austere, spiritual work provides a stark contrast with Congotronics, and provides pause and distancing.

Our first glimpse of the orchestra comes at the first point of crisis, when Félicité learns that her son has been injured and is in hospital. There is a cut from the realist, mobile sequence of her journey to the hospital, to a totally still camera and the blue-hued rehearsal room where the orchestra begins to play. It is a fleeting scene, juxtaposed with the first scene of Félicité's forest, which, at this early juncture, makes little narrative sense. It is aesthetically distinct to both the main narrative and the orchestra scenes: a grainy, pixelated, panning shot of dark trees silhouetted against the night sky. It disorients and dislocates the spectator who has been launched from a phenomenologically realist Kinshasa into a surrealist world. The orchestra's music fades, replaced with the humming of cicadas in the forest at night. At the point that Félicité experiences pain, the spectator is refused easy identification with her. This is an ethical approach to the representation of trauma that refuses 'empty empathy' (Kaplan, 2005: 87). Instead, the spectator, much like those around Félicité, is only permitted to see her in the way that she wants to present herself and to communicate her story. Those points at which there is deep pain, trauma and vulnerability cannot be approached by 'vicariously experiencing [the] trauma' (Craps 2015: 42) but instead promotes critical reflection by piecing together these dissonant images. There is a sudden cut, abruptly stopping the music and replacing the night-time forest with the noise, bustle and light of the city as Félicité steps from the car. It is as if the camera struggles to keep pace with her here, again refusing identification.

The point at which the orchestra can be understood as part of Félicité's inner world comes in a scene at the bar, immediately after we have seen Félicité leave the hospital where her son lies traumatised and badly injured, and where a woman posing as a relative of another patient has just stolen her money. A mobile, hand-held camera is employed here, jogging up and down in an echo of Félicité's bodily motion as she walks out of the hospital. Simultaneously, *Drowning Goat*, the Kasai AllStars song, reprises on the soundtrack. There is a cut to an extreme close-up of Félicité's face, now mid-performance at the bar, and illusory cohesion of body and voice is restored. In the power of Mua Mbuyi's voice, in the frenetic rhythms of the song, and in the use of close-ups, it becomes a form of embodied resistance for the character. She transforms her immense pain into energy for her performance as the song builds. She is smiling, dancing. For a moment, the spectator re-experiences the sensory joy of the opening scene. This time, however, there is an unexpected shift. The on-screen performance of Tshanda Beya continues, but she stops lip-synching while continuing to dance. *Drowning Goat* fades, but Mua Mbuyi's voice can still be heard. Overlaying the fading Congotronics is the mournful sound of strings continuing the earlier Pärt piece, but now completely disembodied. The orchestra is in the 'wrong' place, and bodily unity is lost. We can still see the Congotronics music playing out, Félicité is still 'there', but the music we hear is totally, disorientingly different. The bodily image she wishes to project and the

vulnerability of her inner world collide. As discussed in Chapter Two, the bodies of the central characters in *Félicité* operate with a politics of absence, demonstrating varying states of bodily alienation. In this scene of auditory and visual dissonance, Gomis simultaneously creates this body politics and points to the intermedial borders as they shift within the film.

Nagib recognises a clear difference in representational and presentational cinema, representational being the creation of a fictional illusion, presentational relating to ‘realist modes of production and address’ (2011: 10). This tends to involve fidelity to the representation of time, space, place, and body with the use of long takes, on-location shooting, and often non-professional actors. In *Félicité*, these two modes do not seem to be mutually exclusive. There is a constant blurring of the lines between cinematic fiction and phenomenological reality, subtly drawing attention to the filmmaking process. Gomis explained that he wished to indicate to the audience that ‘we are creating fiction in a real city, which serves as the screen’ (interview with Gomis, 2017, Appendix I), and allowing access to Félicité’s inner world, on her terms. The above scene in the bar is soon followed by another scene set in the night-time forest, which gradually begins to form a narrative of its own. This time, we are deeper in the forest and Félicité appears, wearing a white dress. She walks wordlessly through the trees. It is so dark that it is difficult to perceive her, and again, there is an abrupt cut to blinding light and sudden noise as Félicité rips back the curtain to her bedroom and demands: ‘O koti awa ndenge nini?’ [how did you get in?] (00:37:09).⁴⁴ Diegetically, this is aimed at Tabu, who is on the floor fixing her fridge, but it might just as well be aimed at the spectator. Resistance and vulnerability, alienation and reincorporation: the instability of these concepts are encapsulated in the treatment of Félicité’s bodily schema in these scenes.

Through the orchestral performances, cultural and intermedial boundaries are crossed, altered and reshaped. The central performance is a reworking of a poem by Scotland’s Robert Burns, *My Heart’s In the Highlands*, arranged by Pärt, reworked by the OSK. The full, classical orchestration in the film gives the piece much more richness and variety of sound than Pärt’s original – it seems to breathe life into it – while the singing part maintains the austerity and intonation of the original (sung by Danish soprano Else Torp) whilst giving it a local accent. This reworking of the poem and musical composition across times and spaces does not indicate universality so much as that ‘culture and cultural products are always the result of struggles, negotiations and productive interactions between different systems, practices and interests’ (Nagib and Jerslev, 2014: xxiv). This heavily layered intermediality combines in Félicité’s body. The words ‘My heart’s in the highlands, my heart is not here’ accompany Félicité on a return trip to the hospital, where she

⁴⁴ Lingala transcription provided by Diyo Bupengo.

finds that Samo's leg has had to be amputated (see Chapter Two). The words of the poem, set to the music already imbued with dissonance and dispersal, give emphasis to the absence and alienation occupying Félicité's bodily being.

The music, both of Kasai AllStars and the OSK, provides not only a method but also sites beyond dominant representations of Kinshasa where trauma (dispersal, dismemberment, difference) can be expressed, and processes of resistance can begin to take shape. This idea is given clarity by the words of one of the OSK's choir members, Mireille Kinkina. In *Kinshasa Symphony*, she says: '[music] takes me far away. I'm not here anymore. I'm a long way away. It's really fabulous. When I sing I'm entirely myself. I'm in a different world.' (2010, 00:29:34). There is a different articulation of the same idea in Félicité's night-time forest, a place to which the orchestral music provides the key, and in the way she loses herself in the Congotronic performances. They are refuges, characterised by sound rather than image, and they provide an escape, a different way of being-in-the-world. What Kinkina describes can be termed 'flow', that is, a 'holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990: 39). In *Félicité*, where trauma and bodily alienation abound, this sense of flow, accessed through music, offers freedom, to not attend consciously to the body.

Dispersal and filmic spaces

Doane posits a conceptualisation of cinema 'as a series of spaces including that of the spectator' (1980: 50) a concept that can be intermedially expanded, fractalising into a dizzying number of overlapping and interacting spaces. An example of this comes from the official website for *Félicité*, which was live at the time of the film's release (2017). It was a sort of multimedia mood board which provided a multi-layered experience demonstrating the intermedial dynamics of the film. Not only were there embedded links to digital film clips and YouTube music videos directly related to the film, such as Kasai AllStars and OSK performances, but also to videos of other music that inspired different characters in the film, including tracks by Nina Simone and the Congolese singer Tabu Ley Rochereau, along with a wealth of film stills and information. It was a unique intermedial tool (figure 4.8 below). The website offered a digitised way of unmasking intermedial spaces, delighting in the creative process alluded to within the film itself, and offered and interconnected mapping, rather than a linear narrative, of the film's production, which resonates with the film's politics of reciprocity, generosity and interconnection. It was perhaps never meant to exist for long – maybe not beyond the production and promotional period of the film. In any case, it has disappeared, and the only trace of it lingers in the Internet Archive's WayBack Machine, an archive of webpages. What this illustrates is the fragility of digital media in the dispersal across borders. Websites, as well as digitally-made films and videos, can disappear

without warning. Films may not exist in a physical, tangible format that can be owned, merely hosted on a streaming platform and taken down at any time. However, the dispersal of a film across media, cultural, technological and geographical borders has huge advantages: through its various intermedial connections, the film can reach new audiences. The reciprocal relationship between *Félicité*, Kasai AllStars and OSK has had tangible results, such as the album, *Around Félicité*, the soundtrack album, which also features additional tracks by Kasai AllStars, as well as international tours for both groups. As with *Timbuktu*, whilst the digital body of film is fragile it moves spectatorship to active, community engagement, both within the DRC and far beyond.

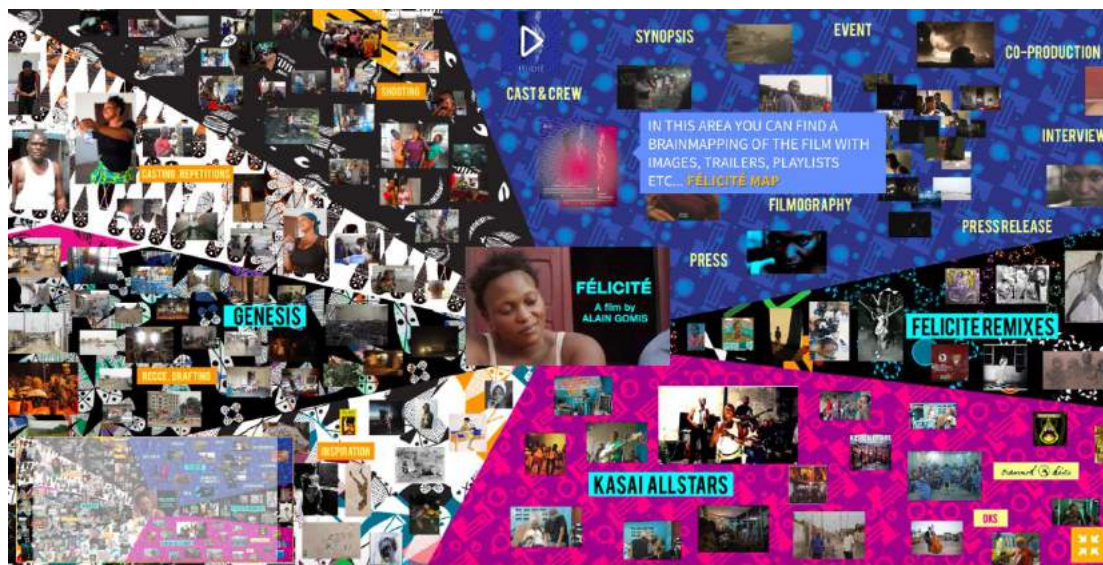


Figure 4.8. A snapshot image of the *Félicité* film website demonstrating the media constellation surrounding the film, taken when the website was still live (2018).

There are parallels to be drawn here between the body of the film *Félicité* and the body of Félicité within the film. Her body too, through a process of destabilisation and dispersal, gains both power and fragility. In *Félicité*, the way in which spaces are organised and the deployment of sound and body in the scenes discussed, so that bodily unity is destabilised rather than reinforced, also opens up spaces, rather than masking them. 'Representational illusion' (Doane, 1980: 50) is destabilised, spaces altered by intermedial exchanges. Voyeuristic distance is dismantled, sensory engagement enhanced, and a body politics employed which moves from absence and distancing to gradual dialogue and exchange – but exchange conducted on Félicité's terms.

Félicité, who has been made hard and brittle by repeated traumatic and violent interactions, finds a way to a decolonial mode of being involving questioning, exchange, and embodied resistance through the organisation and interaction of spaces. In the forest, she encounters an okapi, and the animal's presence in the forest is gentle and calming. There is a cut to the bar, in the diegetically real world, but Félicité (in her forest gown) and the okapi have been transposed. They stare at

each other silently. Like the displacement of music, this is a surreal dislocation which reshapes the film's spatial boundaries and encourages a questioning mode of being.

In the final scenes of the film, Félicité has cut off her tightly woven braids, leaving a soft fuzz of hair. Her face is softer, expressions more gentle. She finds an easy physicality with Tabu and, where before she was intent on keeping him (and the spectator) out of her inner world, now she tells him softly: 'I saw you in the forest'. The very last shots of the film focus on the OSK as they perform *Sieben Magnificat-Antiphonen: O Immanuel*, a soaring choral piece by Pärt. Again, Gomis blurs fiction, phenomenological reality and intermedial borders all at once. The camera pans across the faces of the choir, each one in close-up. Right in the middle of this sequence, there is a cut to a close-up of Félicité, placing her almost within the choir, and the choir within her (figures 4.9 and 4.10 below). She looks utterly serene and at peace. She looks over her shoulder, revealing the Kasai AllStars playing onstage, while she and Tabu sit and listen. Again, there is a dissonance between sound and image, as the choral piece continues. This is a brief snapshot before a return to the panning close-ups of the choir members. Here, the brief disunity between sound and image is not destabilising or disconcerting. It creates a rich site of bodily interaction where boundaries are blurred and reshaped: intermedial poetry that engages body and soul.



Figure 4.9 (02:04:10). Panning shot of OSK choir. Figure 4.10 (02:04:51). Close-up of Félicité mid-sequence.

Musical transformations in *Medan Vi Lever*

Medan Vi Lever is more explicit in its politics of reciprocity and exchange (intercultural, transnational interaction is an explicit and central part of the narrative). The discussion of *Medan Vi Lever* in Chapter 3 demonstrated how West African aesthetics visually permeate the Swedish-set scenes as well as those set in The Gambia. The intermedial lens in this chapter demonstrates how deeply this goes: the medium of film combines with griot and theatrical cultures from West Africa, as well as with hip hop music. Boundaries are blurred and reshaped between all these art forms, and from that process there emerges a politics of being based on questioning, interaction, and the continual construction of identity: embodied resistance to the expropriation and violence outlined in the last chapter. As in *Timbuktu* and *Félicité*, musical performance within the film

stands out as a key site of ‘struggle, negotiation and productive interactions’ (Nagib and Jerslev, 2011: xxiv).

Intermediality runs deep in Dani Kouyaté’s veins. Born in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, into a family of griot lineage, he practically grew up in the theatre (his father was one of the country’s first professional actors). He later profited from attending Ouagadougou’s film school, followed by further cinematic study and training in Paris (see interview with Kouyaté, 2017, appendix II). Theatre is embedded in all of Kouyaté’s films; not just in terms of staging and storytelling, but also in terms of bringing some of the human element of theatre production into film. Explaining his love for theatre first, he says: ‘in theatre, you take a box and bring it to life. In cinema, you take life and put it in a box’ (Interview with Kouyaté, 2017. Appendix II). Overcoming this frustration with cinema and capturing some of theatre’s living quality and ability to facilitate human connection seems to be central to his filmmaking. Unsurprisingly then, *Medan Vi Lever* stars theatre professionals: Josette Bushell-Mingo and Richard Sseruwagi, both of whom are theatre actors and directors based in Sweden. In addition to its theatrical sensibility, it is a musical film and, specifically, a film in which musical expression, collaboration and improvisation is essential to both the narrative and the ethics of the film. In explaining the power of musical improvisation, similar to theatre, to create bodily human connection, Kouyaté echoes Fanon’s plea: ‘Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?’ (1986: 231) when he says: ‘musical improvisation, for example, is a really good way [...] to understand the other, to share with the other, to find equilibrium with the other. [Musicians] will find a common language very easily [...] without involving the head, simply through human, bodily vibration’ (interview with Kouyaté, 2017. Appendix II). It is on this basis of reciprocity and exchange, most evident in its intermediality, that *Medan Vi Lever* enacts a body politics which moves beyond the violence discussed in Chapter Three, and which works towards a decoloniality of being based on human interaction.

The figure of the griot

Within *Medan Vi Lever*’s musicality, the figure of the griot, with the ability to ‘modulate between music and image’ (Alexander Fisher, 2016: 5), emerges as an important point of intermedial enquiry. The association of griot practice and intermediality could be considered a problematic one, but only if intermediality is defined through a purely technological lens.⁴⁵ However, as Nagib and Jerslev point out, ‘while digital media have contributed to an intense and extensive awareness of the hybridization of any single ‘medium’, it is important not to limit understanding of

⁴⁵ Catherine Makhumula (2018) raises such concerns in the context of Anglophone African theatre.

intermediality to ‘technological immediacy’ (2014: xxvi). Griots hold distinctive and complex roles within West African societies as storytellers, advisers, praise-singers and guardians of history, and as such, are central figures in concepts of African oral traditions.⁴⁶ Their practice is intermedial by nature, combining oral, musical and bodily performance. The figure of the griot has also been linked with canonical francophone African cinema since its inception, and definitely since Sembène declared that “‘the African filmmaker is the griot of modern times’” (cited by Françoise Pfaff, 1984: 40). The idea of Sembène as griot, along with studies of the griot figures that appear in his films, has been highly influential in the construction of both canon and theory of African cinema, in large part thanks to Pfaff’s (1984) book on Sembène’s cinema, followed by Manthia Diawara’s influential work extending this concept beyond Sembène to African filmmakers in general, thereby setting up a basis for finding the ‘originality of African cinema [...] in the oral tradition’ (1988: 7). This focus on the ‘tradition’ of the griot and the dominance of Sembène’s didactic, social realist style as a model for what African cinema ‘should’ be: ‘a tool for social transformation and political praxis [...] *essentially and only militant*’ (Tcheuyap, 2011: 13, original emphasis) has been criticised from a number of angles. Tcheuyap (2011) argues that claiming a specificity of oral tradition in African cinema is reductionist, in that it implies that traditional and oral narratives are the only influence in African cinema, something that leads to burdens of authenticity and political engagement and, thus, to the exclusion of many films from the canon of African cinema. As well as ignoring the multiplicities of cultural influence and connection within the development of cinema in Africa, Diawara’s model also treats griot culture as ‘an artifact unproblematically recoverable from the past’ (Damon Sajjani, 2013: 158) rather than itself being dynamic and in a process of constant adaptation and change.

The early influence of the griot in African cinema can be compared to the need Fanon saw for armed struggle and the political participation of intellectuals – griots and filmmakers were among the intellectuals involved in the struggle for liberation. It was a necessary step in the route to decolonisation, a way of demonstrating another way of being, but it is a limited framework. Fisher points out that the invocation of the griot within African film theory has been based upon the ‘inscription of the oral narrator in the visual discourse’ (2016: 5). That is to say it works to differentiate African cinema from the film language developed by European semioticians and instead emphasises the similarities to griot performance of oral narratives, pointing to the use of

⁴⁶ The term *griot*, itself of unclear etymology, has equivalents in many West African languages. Two of the most noted are *jeli/jali* (Maninka/Mandinka, Mali) and *g(u)ewel* (Wolof, Senegambia). There can be differences in precise functions and roles according to ethnic group and/or region. I employ *griot* in this first section as a broad term, bearing this understanding of it in mind. Thomas Hale (1998: 18-58) provides a more thorough overview of the many various roles griots have historically undertaken, along with more information on regional variation.

longer takes, low-angle shots and fewer shot/reverse shot sequences to more closely mirror oral performance tradition (see Gugler, 2003; Boughedir; 2001; Diawara, 1988). However, as Fisher elaborates, this fails to recognise the importance of music, both in griot performance and in film and, as Thomas Hale (1998: 146) has noted, in griot performance, the musical and the oral are fused and 'synergistic' and rely on an entire repertoire of performative skills and tools which include the voice (including both speech and song), the body, and musical instruments.

The griot in Kouyaté's cinema is not an artifact. It is a part of his own identity that is in continual negotiation with other influences. This is particularly evident in an early film, *Keita! L'Héritage du Griot* (1995) which deals with griot storytelling and the tensions between this traditional way of passing on stories and memory, and 'modern' European education, tensions which Kouyaté experienced in his upbringing. As Kate Bolgar Smith has shown, the film is 'culturally syncretic and inspired by contemporary events' (2010: 25). In *Medan Vi Lever*, the representation of the griot is less explicit, but through the film's musical performances, griot practice emerges as a way of demonstrating productive routes towards embodied resistance, through the fusion of oral, musical and bodily performance in modes of human connection and exchange. Griot performance here connects with hip hop, and through intermedial transformations between film and music video, these performances point towards a decoloniality of being predicated on the qualities of sensorial, bodily, human interaction, a politics of giving, which offers another way of being that is not predicated on violence (as discussed in Chapter Three).

The previous chapter demonstrated how Ibbe was responsible for inflicting unintentional violence on members of his family, providing the catalyst for serious bodily breakdowns. Yet Ibbe too experiences deep and unsettling excorporation: the teenage son of a single, black mother in a white society, fighting his own battle with the tensions between the traditions of his mother's culture and his desire to be a trendsetter in urban Sweden (this tension between tradition and modernity is a theme in Kouyaté's work), he vacillates on the edge of alienation. What pushes him over the edge is, on the one hand, his mother's refusal to support him in his passion for hip-hop music – something she experiences as Ibbe being an off-the-rails teen refusing to get a decent job – and his record label's demands that he change the lyrics to his songs to make them more commercially viable, thereby suppressing his voice. In *The Gambia*, both Ibbe and Kandia are forced to reckon with their preconceptions about each other and, by entering into a politics of giving and reciprocity, through griot modes of performance, they reconnect with one another.

Yet *The Gambia*, in the film, does not represent an unproblematic site of tradition. Similar dynamics of emotional, familial violence explored in the previous chapter in relation to Ibbe's Swedish grandparents are present among Kandia's Gambian relatives. Her brother Modu has all

but disowned his pregnant daughter, Soukeina, because she wants to marry Ismael, a griot who, in Modu's eyes, is of a lower class and with few prospects. Kandia, outraged at Modu's treatment of the young couple, berates him, apparently unaware of her own hypocrisy as she defends Ismael against the same arguments that she has raised with Ibbe: that music is not a stable or responsible career path. A connection is thus drawn between Ibbe and Ismael. While at first their music seems worlds apart – Ismael's 'traditional' kora-playing, and Ibbe's 'modern' rapping, they are brought together in a creative, dynamic process of exchange.

Transformation of the griot in hip hop

Many of the scenes which take place in The Gambia have a theatrical quality to them, especially those scenes with an ensemble set-up. This comes from both the staging of scenes and in the performances of the theatre-trained actors. At key moments of either intergenerational and cultural tension or intercultural exchange and reciprocity, the actors are positioned in a semi-circle, almost as if on a stage, addressing an audience (figures 4.11 and 4.12 below). Where *Félicité* engages in realist aesthetics and embodied camerawork, using the extra-diegetic sequences to point to the fact it is a fiction film, here this sort of staging indicates a conscious storytelling mode; a griot mode of address, but one which diverges from the social realist tradition. Instead, it incorporates myth (see Chapter Three) and musical performance in a way which engages more with the embodied experience that Kouyaté finds in theatre. It is a very different aesthetic style and mode of production in comparison with either *Timbuktu* or *Félicité*, but once again, what the film insists upon is human relation and connection, and once again, intermediality between film and music video produces a relationality and touch between bodies, and a politics of reciprocity and exchange. Here, this comes from the fusion of Ismael's (Suntou Susso's) 'Afro-Manding' kora music and Ibbe's (Adam Kanyama's) Swedish rapping.



Figure 4.11. *Medan Vi Lever* (00:48:19).



Figure 4.12 (01:06:57).

The first musical improvisation between Ismael and Ibbe sets up the dynamics of touch, sensing and exchange and allows Ibbe, utterly alienated at home in Sweden, to begin to put words to his experience and to communicate bodily and musically. The distance created by the 'storytelling' mode of earlier scenes is overcome by engaging the spectator sensorially: the scene opens with a close-up, motion-filled shot of mint tea being poured. The camera is not still for a second here,

rapidly panning up and then around to capture the faces of the group as they sit around Ismael, bodies in close physical contact, moving to the kora music. The camera alights on Ibbe for a moment, emphasising his position amongst the group, before panning down to the kora that Ismael is playing, creating visual connections between the two of them (figures 4.13 and 4.14 below). After realising that everyone is sharing a single cigarette, Ibbe goes to buy another pack, thereby establishing a reciprocal dynamic of giving: he has been invited into the group, they have shared with him, and he responds in kind. When he returns, having shared the cigarettes around, he begins to improvise a rap over Ismael's kora melody, establishing a connection here that was so lacking at home in Sweden. The whole scene is one of easy interrelation between bodies, framed inclusively, reminiscent of the scene in *Timbuktu* in which friends gather to make music, and in the panning shot in *Félicité* that focuses on close-ups of faces. In similar ways, this scene in *Medan Vi Lever* establishes connection and exchange with the spectator as well, through the sensory proximity created.



Figure 4.13 (01:05:31). Medium shot of Ibbe during panning shot.



Figure 4.14 (01:05:36). Close-up of kora immediately afterwards in the same sequence.

There is a cut to the next scene, diegetically taking place the next day, with the strains of the kora still lingering on the soundtrack. Over lunch, an argument breaks out between Ibbe's cousins about whether Ismael's music is traditional or modern. 'Ibbe got Ismael to play something other than traditional music!' argues Karim. 'Ismael plays Afro-Manding!' his sister Lala shoots back. 'Afro-Manding is modern music with traditional instruments!' (01:08:30). Griot practice, in Kouyaté's film, is contested, dynamic, changing: a site of intercultural connection and relationality. This is more evident in the next scene in which Ismael and Ibbe are together, this time on the beach. The scene opens with a close-up of Ibbe, repeating the refrain 'Medan vi lever' over the kora music. Ismael stops and asks what it means. Ibbe explains that it is something along the lines of 'while we live', which prompts Ismael to think for a second. Then he says: 'hold on, let me actually find a chord for that' (01:17:10). He starts playing again and tries out the words himself, with the new chord pattern. Ibbe's Swedish words are transformed into a distinct, Gambian musical pattern. The result is a 'synergistic oral and musical performance' (Hale 1998) that is more than the sum of its parts. Ibbe is discovering and constructing a new way to live, a reincorporated bodily schema, born of the relationality and human connection he is

experiencing among his Gambian family, and especially in the musical relationship with Ismael. Unlike in *Timbuktu*, where the lyrics of resistance in *Timbuktu Fasso* are left unsubtitled, here Ibbe's Swedish words are subtitled, explicitly communicating his journey from alienation to reincorporation: 'I used to hate that I was mixed race/my identity felt misplaced [...] my identity ain't just my skin/it's all one world we're living in'. A politics of giving, of human connection and exchange is posited as a way to move beyond the alienation of the racial epidermal schema and to reconstruct a bodily schema, enabled by musical improvisation and the transformation of griot and hip-hop practice as they come into contact.

Links between griot performance and hip-hop are not new. Russell Kaschula (1999), for example, gives the example of Zolani Mkiva, a South African *imbongi* who had, at that time, begun performing to hip hop music. Kaschula views this as an example of an adaptation of a traditional art to new media.⁴⁷ Daniel Banks, in his study of griots, hip-hop and Homeric oral poetry, suggests that there is a deeper link, and that there is more to it than two distinct forms of media, one traditional and one new, coming into contact for the first time. He explains that the hip-hop emcee has similar functions to the griot in that they both speak about a 'community's issues, its values, its ancestors, its heroes and heroines, its triumphs and its struggles'. (2010: 240). Furthermore, he argues that both griot and hip-hop performance are 'living, spontaneous and responsive acts' (239), in which texts are composed as they are performed and rely on the presence of, and response from, others. Relationships of shared knowledge and exchange run deep in what seem at first to be disparate oral cultures, and this is what Kouyaté elucidates in these scenes between Ibbe and Ismael. The shots alternate mainly between close-ups of Ibbe and Ismael as they improvise and bounce off each other, their joy expressive and affecting. The openness in Ismael and Ibbe's musical relationship to move beyond any fixed notions of their respective craft to something more transformative, based on a 'questioning mode of human existence' (Zeiler, 2013: 82) is set in direct contrast with the elders' stubbornness and unwillingness to engage in a similar process. The scene with Ibbe and Ismael on the beach is juxtaposed with one set inside Modu's house, as Kandia confronts him about his refusal to allow Soukeina to marry Ismael. The exuberant music carries over into this scene, but soon dissipates, replaced with a stony silence as Modu refuses to listen. It is a juxtaposition which demonstrates the danger in letting tradition become calcified.

The juxtaposition of contrasting scenes is a technique employed throughout the editing of the film: from the point at which Kandia arrives in The Gambia, roughly halfway through the film,

⁴⁷ Kaschula's (1999) article draws comparisons between West African griots and Southern African *imbongi*, who share similarities in terms of their societal and performative roles.

Gambian and Swedish-set scenes alternate. Firstly, this alternation has the effect of bringing into sharp contrast Ylva's decline with the vibrancy of Kandia and Ibbe. Kandia, at first swaps her rather plain Swedish clothes for bright West African dress, including flamboyant headwraps and, for the first time in the film, the noticeable use of make-up. Initially, this appears to be an attempt at an outright disavowal of her Swedish identity, but this attempt is quickly undermined when she goes to meet Ismael for the first time and, greeting him after his band have performed, she does so in Swedish, before quickly correcting herself. Outright rejection of part of her being does not seem possible. There is more than simple juxtaposition and contrast going on in the editing. The alternation of Swedish and Gambian scenes also binds across time and space, and the politics of giving and reciprocity evident in the musical improvisation scenes expand out to the rest of the film. It connects Sweden with The Gambia, and connects a divided, hurting family as they learn new ways of being in relation to one another. The gradual process of overcoming excorporation, which, Zeiler explains, is incredibly difficult, can only take place with a release from violence and binary opposition and the acceptance of being in a questioning mode. It is what eventually leads Kandia back to Sweden and to her reconciliation with Ylva (discussed in the previous chapter).

One of the key functions of the griot is a process Hale refers to as the ability to "time-bind" (1998: 23). using knowledge of the past to advise on the present and future. Traditionally, it is bound up with prestige and power, meaning that the griot's art can become beholden to the elite. This is particularly evident in praise-songs, historically for rulers, royals and nobles in pre-colonial societies. Nowadays, a common trope is that of the nouveau-riche paying griots vast sums of money in order to have a praise-song composed about them. It is for this reason that Damon Sajnani actually warns against perpetuating the 'trope of rapper as modern griot' (2013: 156) because of the very different social relations and positions of griots and hip hop artists. Kouyaté, however, demonstrates the ways griot and hip hop practice can again enter into a process of exchange and transformation, based upon 'time-binding'. In the final performance of the film, Ibbe joins Ismael and his band in a performance of 'Medan Vi Lever'. The performance uses the past to inform the present, but also to cast new light on the past, and to heal a divide between the past and present. Ibbe begins with an expression of love for his mother, and an invocation of their ancestors, binding time in a form of a praise-song, but not one that glorifies the powerful for economic reward. Instead, it reaffirms the strength of their mother-son relationship, which has been strained in their differing struggles of excorporation. Then, in its testimonial of Kandia's struggle to provide for her son as a young, black, single mother in a foreign country, and in Ibbe's use of cadence and rhythm, the hip hop influences are apparent, modulated by the Swedish language and a particular experience of migration and locality. Furthermore, the fast, urgent beats are modified by the melodic runs of the kora. It does not conflate griot with rapper, but one

relates to and transforms the other through the intermediality of the performance. The performance overwhelms Kandia. It is a final, but necessary, breakdown in a bodily schema, one that is fragile and has been hastily constructed from a position of opposition and hurt. What is achieved through a new, more vulnerable connection between mother and son, is a more healthily incorporated bodily schema for each of them which can account for the different points of connection, exchange and relationality that make up their being.

The final transformation of the song comes in its movement across intermedial borders to become a music video. Like Fatoumata Diawara's *Timbuktu Fasso* video, Kanyama's *Medan Vi Lever* (2016) reworks excerpts of the filmic material in combination with new material. The interaction of griot practice and hip hop here is made visible with shots of Susso playing the kora, first against a black-and-white African art mural, later on the beach, interspersed with shots of Kanyama singing in different locations around Banjul, along with short clips from the film (see figures 4.15 and 4.16 below). In its transformation of the filmic material, the music video breaks down boundaries between art and life, bringing the song – and its combination of griot and Swedish hip hop practice – to a new, largely young, Swedish audience that may be quite different to the predominant audience of the film. It illuminates the borders, and border crossings, involved in the song's production, both in terms of geography and media. Kanyama's performance in the video asserts a comfortable, transnational being-in-the-world, but the meaning of the song (which, even for a Swedish-speaking audience, really comes from the film and its narrative) contains a sense of the struggle and the work involved to reach such a mode of being, one founded on questioning, giving, and exchange, which relies on overcoming battles within one's own body and those with others. Film and music video thus inform each other, and it is through this intermedial transformation that embodied resistance emerges as a positive mode of being.



Figure 4.15 (01:15) *Medan Vi Lever* (music video).



Figure 4.16 (02:08). Kanyama in *Medan Vi Lever* (music video).

Conclusion

Each of the films in this chapter, in the combination and transformation of different media, responds to Fanon's wish to live by questioning, sharing with others, and relating to others. When summed up in these simple terms, this desire can sound somewhat utopian and naïve, but the

films demonstrate Zeiler's insistence that (2013) achieving embodied resistance after repeated and damaging episodes of excorporation and bodily alienation is difficult. It is rarely a simple and easily completed task, more an ongoing process and a way of being that signifies both vulnerability and openness. However, it is also evident in each of the films that to live any other way is simply not possible. Without enacting a politics of decoloniality predicated on giving and exchange (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) and without 'thinking geo- and body-politically' (Mignolo 2011: 274), what is left? Violence, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, is not sufficient. It does not enable healthy relationships between mind and body, nor between different bodies. Each of the films in this chapter warns, in its own way, that the result of *not* working towards decoloniality of being would instead lead to an existence that 'tip[s] over into horror' as Sissako (2017) notes in the discussion of *Timbuktu*. This 'horror' looks different in each of the films but whether it comes in the guise of the slow poisoning of relationships in *Medan Vi Lever*, the economics of bodies in *Félicité*, or the stripping of bodily rights and physical violence in *Timbuktu*, it represents a dehumanisation and alienation from one's own body.

This chapter has demonstrated that the full potential for other ways of being-in-the-world, based on presence rather than absence, and on relationality and exchange rather than opposition and violence, is realised in each film in its intermediality. In particular, the productive spaces within and between film and music video have emerged as key sites, not only for the transformation of media and the articulation of a questioning mode of existence and a politics of reciprocity, but also, significantly, for breaking down the barriers between art and life. In these digital spaces, film becomes an intermedial site of engaged spectatorship and of community participation, where such modes of relation and human exchange can flourish beyond the filmic borders, in human bodies with the capacity to sense, feel and relate to one another.

Conclusion

Mon ultime prière :
O mon corps, fais de moi toujours un homme qui interroge!
(Frantz Fanon, 1952: 188)

The final words of *Black Skin, White Masks* are in the form of a prayer, but a prayer Fanon makes to his own body, imploring it to make of him a man who always questions. This 'questioning mode of human existence' (Zeiler, 2013: 82), connected intimately with the body as a locus of resistance and knowledge production, where sensing and perception have active roles in shaping the world, has proved to be a driving force in shaping this thesis over the course of its four chapters. Such a mode of existence, as we have seen, is a form of embodied resistance, fundamental to the creation and articulation of decolonialities of being, and is central to all of the films in this corpus. As has been amply demonstrated, the digital technologies used to make these films certainly do not hinder sensuous forms of cinema with a commitment to the physical and material, and it has been argued throughout that it is precisely in the use of techniques evoking human physicality and materiality - of textures, of objects, of land, of the skin - as well as through the films' intermedial connections and transformations, that each film points towards a decoloniality of being based on 'receptive generosity' (Maldonado Torres, 2007: 262): a politics of dialogue and exchange which enables rehabilitation from states of alienation, and facilitates an agentic being-in-the-world.

A focus on physicality, materiality and decoloniality anchored the analyses throughout the thesis, and each chapter demonstrated different aspects of these concepts as they work in the films. Though each chapter had a broad theme, this did not equate to categorising the films thematically. Instead, the structuring of the chapters sought to highlight different concepts relating to decolonial thinking and doing, recognising and analysing the films in their narrative and aesthetic complexity. This approach was aided by bringing the films into different comparative perspectives with one another through the chapters. Analysing the films in this way meant that numerous points of connection could be established across the francophone/lusophone divide, while simultaneously recognising historical, geographical, and cultural specificity. The employment of border thinking, which allowed for the grounding of bodies (and films) in their 'geo-historical location[s]' (Mignolo, 2011: 277), was a central concept in this regard. Secondly, due to the numerous theoretical strands being brought together - phenomenology of the body; decoloniality of being; theorisations of film concerning the body, physicality, and materiality; and intermediality - structuring the thesis in this way supported the layering of these strands as the

chapters progressed, which sought to build the argument in a coherent way, and again, allowed for greater depth of analysis had the thesis followed a structure based on narrative themes.

In bringing these threads together, two key analytical considerations emerged: on the aesthetic level, the way in which physicality and materiality are represented and evoked; and on the spectatorial level, the way in which bodily resonance with the film is engendered, and a politics of reciprocity established between film and spectator to encourage more active, participatory spectatorship, so as to prevent empty empathy. Attention to these two key aspects demonstrated how interlinked they are: it has been argued throughout that those aesthetic techniques with a close, sensory focus on the body, on texture, (invoking Marks' (2000) 'haptic visuality'), and on bodily motion, help to overcome spectatorial distance, instead engendering bodily resonance and the 'entanglement' of spectator and screen (Laine, 2017: 10). This creates the conditions for simultaneous cognition and affect for the spectator. In this way, the filmic aesthetics activate their own politics of reciprocity and exchange that engage the spectator in a decolonial process of thinking and doing. Building on this core idea, the final chapter demonstrated how, by investigating the intermedial aspects of film, this politics of reciprocity operates beyond the filmic borders, leading to other media encounters and other forms of engagement with spectators, creating new spaces where embodied resistance can be enacted.

Diverse phenomenological insights into film, from those theories concerned with spectatorship and the senses (Laine, 2017; Marks, 2000) to those focused on the bodies within film and their motion (Nagib, 2011) and the treatment of space and temporality to attend to the physical and material (de Luca and Barradas Jorge, 2016) came into dialogue with one another throughout the thesis, and despite their different theoretical positionings, the aim was to show the productive connections between them, particularly with the emphasis on ethics and engagement that comes from all of them. In so doing, decoloniality of being could be situated as theory and praxis, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019), and Mignolo and Walsh (2018) insist upon. Decoloniality relies on a simultaneous, mutually constitutive process of thinking and doing, and this process had echoes in linking through the narrative, aesthetics, and spectatorship considerations of each film. Throughout the thesis, this was centred on narratives of being and non-being in the films, connected to aesthetic attention to the body and senses, leading to bodily resonance with the spectator, engendering both cognitive and affective understandings of the films, and promoting active spectatorship – a simultaneous thinking and doing.

Both the structure of this thesis and its interdisciplinary nature, each requiring this handling of various threads, needed coherency and a degree of containment: engaging closely with Fanon's work was a method to support that. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, Fanon's

phenomenology has not been given the full examination it deserves, but it has been demonstrated here that his phenomenological interventions: the outlining of the reduction to a racial-epidermal schema that produces such deep bodily alienation; and the primacy of human relation in remaking one's bodily schema, and indeed the world, are critical for understanding the means by which a decoloniality of being might be achieved. Understanding the potential of Fanon's insights, this thesis sought to bring new significance to his phenomenological work in the context of African cinema, demonstrating how his phenomenology and decolonial thought has application in a digital age of postcolonial, transnational cinema. Attention to his work across the thesis enabled the processes of non-being and bringing into being – the destruction and reincorporation of bodily schemas – to be understood in terms of film aesthetics and decoloniality. Zeiler's (2013) positioning of such processes in terms of excorporation, bodily alienation and embodied resistance contributed to the shaping of the analysis across the thesis. As was emphasised at various points, such processes are not linear, and whilst there was a layering of concepts throughout the thesis, the intention was not to suggest a neat series of steps from non-being and alienation to the reincorporation of a coherent bodily schema and the achievement of a decoloniality of being. Chapter Three, on violence, demonstrated this process is anything but linear, and that the violence has huge ramifications for achieving a decoloniality of being.

However, by reading across multiple texts by Fanon, this violence, very much specific to the needs of the time and place, is understood as part of his wider view on the primacy of the body (specifically the body in motion, with the rhythms of the breath and muscular tension) and bodily interaction (the opportunities to engage on deeply human levels with one another) as the key elements for achieving decoloniality of being. Interacting with these key ideas were concepts providing insight into the body as a source of testimony, collective history, and resistance. In Fanon's work, this is evident in his call to artists and intellectuals to engage bodily in the resistance. In the film analysis, complementary concepts along these lines, such as Gladys Francis' 'corpomemorial tracing' (2015: 12) and Mignolo's '[writing] with bodies on the border' (2011: II), outlined in Chapter One, enabled deep analysis of such representations of the body in the films. Here, aesthetic techniques relating to physicality, touch and bodily resonance, were of key importance, as demonstrated in close scene analysis, such as the panning over textural objects and waking bodies in *Alda e Maria*, or the auditory resonance of a heartbeat in *La Pirogue*.

Building on the concepts outlined in the first chapter, in Chapter Two, productive routes towards decolonialities of being were explored. Within this discussion, the transformation of body, space and time in their interaction – Merleau-Ponty talks about the body 'combin[ing] with space and time' (1962: 140) – became of key importance. This conceptualisation of body, space and time

opened up dense sites of haunting in the films, where there is an interplay of presence and absence that relies on an interplay of memory, the body, and senses beyond what is visible on screen, invoking what Derrida refers to as the 'haunted community of a single body' (2006: 166-7). The close focus on certain filmic spaces and aesthetic techniques enabled a deeper discussion of slow cinema, temporality, materiality, and the engagement between body and land, drawing upon the work of de Luca and Barradas Jorge (2016), Rancière (2016) and Nagib (2011), among others, as a way of articulating a decoloniality of being and realising the type of human connection Fanon prioritises, which Walcott expresses as 'human intimacy based on mobile association' (2014: 104).

The idea of human connection via mobile association proved particularly evocative and pertinent in terms of film, especially in the interplay of presence and absence, and the movement of films themselves across borders. In this sense a dialogue was created between the second and fourth chapters, where narratives, aesthetics, and intermediality come together in mobile association, recognising film as highly mobile, open to transformation, but also fragile in its motion. In their dispersal to different spaces and media forms, these films produce acts of continual creation that 'enlist the participation' of spectators, encouraging a politics of reciprocity and exchange. The third chapter demonstrated the fundamental importance of such reciprocity and exchange: to overcome violence and the lasting alienation and damage to bodily schemas that it can produce, finding ways to relate to one another – to touch, feel and discover the other, as Fanon (1952) writes – is essential for a decoloniality of being. Throughout the thesis, and central to achieving this in film, aesthetics engendering bodily resonance between film and spectator came to the fore: proximity, bodily density on-screen, haptic visuality, auditory techniques, and close-up shots. These have been of key importance for asserting presence, being, and connection.

Taking account of the limited ways in which the body as a point of inquiry has been used until now in African film studies, as outlined in the Introduction, it was also important to conduct deeper analysis of the ways in which various bodies act, interact, and move in film. As discussed in the Introduction, it was important to differentiate between bodies within and connected to film so as to avoid unhelpful conflation of concepts. Nagib's (2011) ethics of realism was particularly productive for examining the connections between body and land, and how the bodies of actors engage with phenomenologically real landscapes. Even within the films examined here that do not correspond consistently to typically realist aesthetics, such as *A República di Mininus*, *Frontières*, and *Medan Vi Lever*, there were powerful examples of phenomenological reality attested to by actors' bodies in motion in the locations of filming. Similarly to the techniques producing spectatorial bodily resonance noted above, this connection between body and land

worked to create an overwhelming and affecting sense of physicality and presence: a being-in-the-world produced in the interaction of body and space, in geographically specific locations, narratively functioning as acts of embodied resistance (Mon-de-Ferro's run in *A República di Mininus*, discussed in Chapter Two, is a particularly striking example). When taken together with the aesthetic techniques producing haptic visuality, an almost tactile presence on-screen, and the motion of filmic bodies in intermedial spaces, which themselves contribute to phenomenologically real, embodied acts of resistance (especially notable in Fatoumata Diawara's performance of *Timbuktu Fasso*, discussed in Chapter Four), these various points of inquiry and ways of analysing filmic bodies attest to the relation, reciprocity and deep humanity produced by these films. In so doing, this thesis suggests ways in which decolonialities of being, based on precisely these conditions of reciprocity and humanity, might be realised.

The methodology employed here could be applied to a wide range of films. The corpus analysed here was small and selected according to very specific criteria given the scope of the thesis. It has shown what is possible in a limited selection of digitally-produced films, all by auteur filmmakers, all who have competed at Fespaco. It would be interesting to see how the methodology used here might open up new ways of thinking about completely different genres, schools, and historical moments of African cinema, and how such work could forge more connections across African films, filmmaking cultures, and national/regional cinemas. Looking at early African cinema, from the pre- and immediately post-independent period with this lens, would provide a fascinating comparison, particularly with regard to the articulation of decoloniality at the time.

Such points of inquiry would be valuable in contributing to the debates surrounding the future directions of African cinema as well. Certainly, recognising digital film – and its intermedial connections – as fragile and ephemeral, whilst demonstrating the intense sensory effects of physicality and materiality that the films examined in this thesis produce, is important for understanding and contributing to the current debates, particularly at Fespaco, about the impact of digital technologies on African cinema, and on the future of the festival. This thesis has demonstrated through the analysis that cinema's death certificate has not been signed, as Ouédraogo argued (Claude, 2017), and while digital may be giving rise to new ways of working and new fusions – including between the arthouse cinema historically featured at Fespaco and Nollywood influences – there is vast potential for cinema with finely tuned poetic and artistic sensibilities to continue to thrive, in a variety of filmic and intermedial spaces. This is not to denigrate the Nollywood influence: indeed, the combination and transformation of these cinematic models, both with huge influence across Africa, in the digital age, is an area where research is needed.

Ouédraogo died in 2018, leaving behind an enormous cinematic legacy in Burkina Faso – and more widely – with much to offer in the digital age, to a new generation of filmmakers, working with different technologies. Echoes of his commitment to physicality, to the connection between body and land, which Nagib (2011) analyses in relation to his film *Yaaba*, reverberate in the films analysed here, as demonstrated above. Those techniques, artistic modes, and ethical considerations of canonical African films such as Ouédraogo's have no reason to disappear in the digital age: they can continue to inform filmmaking for generations to come. The digital revolution may have provoked wide anxiety: it produced something of a rupture in cinematic norms and assumed knowledge of the elements of producing an art film in the Fespaco model. However, as this thesis has sought to demonstrate, it is in those sorts of ruptures, and the spaces they create, that a density of history, memory, and cultural knowledge can be found, and where body, space, and time interact to bring back into being that which was lost. Such ruptures and spaces were connected in this thesis, through the narrative, aesthetic, and intermedial: the exploration of intermediality demonstrated productive spaces created in the interaction of different media that respond to and complement those created through zones of non-being and through haunting. Throughout the thesis, it has been shown how borders are blurred and reshaped through bodily interaction and mobile association, including the filmic border between film and spectator.

This thesis has aimed to demonstrate that digital does not equate to a specific genre or to a reduction of quality. As Kouyaté expressed emphatically, digital technologies are a revolution in African filmmaking (see Introduction). Gomis expressed similar sentiments, saying: '[digital] now allows us to imagine, to restructure, to advance African cinema' (interview with Gomis, 2017, Appendix I). It is patently worth investing in digital technologies for filmmaking and production, to realise the potential of the technology, whilst also investing in training locally. Digital is a tool; the artistry and communicative power that filmmakers possess is a skill and a talent that can be nurtured. With cheaper, easier-to-use camera equipment and production conditions, these technologies offer the potential to 'delink' from European centres of production. Combined with the increase in national funding available with programmes such as FOPICA in Senegal, it is with film production entirely on African soil that decoloniality in the film industry could be realised.

At specific moments, there was some scope to comment directly on the active, bodily participation and co-creation of the actors in the films, particularly with regards to the connections between body and land, or in the participation of music artists in the films and the transposition of filmic media to music video or vice versa. However, there is a great deal more to be said concerning actors, their agency, bodily participation, and decoloniality of being. Commenting on seeing herself on-screen for the first time, Véro Tshanda Beya, who played

Félicité in Alain Gomis' film explained: 'C'est donc seulement au Fespaco [...] que je me suis vue enfin sur l'écran. J'étais contente, je me disais : « C'est vraiment moi qui a fait ça ! »' (Interview with Rochebrune, 2017b, para.9). [It was only at Fespaco [...] that I finally saw myself on screen. I was happy; I said to myself: "It was really me who did that!"]. Tshanda Beya's phenomenal acting was at least part of the reason for *Félicité* winning that year, and there was a lot of buzz around her in reviews and at festivals at the time. Whether that buzz translates into ongoing success, or even acting work, remains to be seen, and her story, as a non-professional actor discovered in an open casting is a defining one of francophone African cinema in particular that does not often translate to a career. Debates on casting and the professionalisation of acting, outside of the highly commercial industries are highly active and contentious, especially in parts of West Africa with thriving film cultures, such as Burkina Faso and Senegal, though there are increasing moves towards professionalisation here (see, for example, *Le Quotidien*, 2020; Direction Langue française, culture et diversités, 2018; Songré, 2016). In Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, the lack of film infrastructure and funding on national levels, owing to long periods of war and instability, without the kind of conditions to consider professionalising acting, there is even greater reliance on a mix of non-professionals and foreign actors (as exemplified in *A República di Mininus*), though a younger generation of actors, particularly in Angola, are starting to create some change in that dynamic. There is not the scope to delve into these issues here, but it would be a worthy area of research in terms of decoloniality of being, film cultures, and the effects of the digital revolution.

Above all, this thesis has highlighted the need to engage in questioning modes of existence, to participate co-creatively in the production of art, and in the shaping of the world. It has shown that digital does not take away from the most human forms of contact and relation, and it has responded productively, through complex analyses of nine different films, to Fanon's plea: 'to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself' (1986: 231), engaging with politics of 'receptive generosity' (Maldonado Torres, 2007: 262). It is hoped that the research here will inspire other projects along a variety of interconnected paths, thinking and doing decolonially.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Interview with Alain Gomis, 2017

Pourquoi avez-vous choisi Kinshasa comme lieu, et donc Lingala comme langue, pour ce film ?

Quand je travaille au début, j'ai souvent un personnage, des images, des choses, et là, il y avait cette femme, cet enfant et puis ... c'était pas encore un scénario, c'était pas encore une histoire, c'était des petites choses, des notes. Puis, j'ai écouté cette musique du Kasai AllStars et j'ai vu un vidéo, j'ai vu la chanteuse et, tout à coup, tous les petits morceaux que j'avais là pourraient se réunir autour ce personnage. C'est vrai que aussi la question pour moi était de tourner peut-être dans le sud du Sénégal. Moi, je suis d'origine de Guinée-Bissau, qui est au sud du Sénégal. Je voudrais montrer une autre ... autre chose que Dakar, je voulais avoir une histoire... à la forêt, quoi. Tout à coup, j'avais cette voie de cette femme ; c'était un peu comme si j'entendais la voix du personnage que j'avais dans la tête. Alors, faire le film au Kinshasa, ça devenait une autre aventure et quelque chose de ... à la fois enthousiasmante, à la fois effrayante, et puis la possibilité de filmer dans une grande métropole africaine, de faire un film effectivement à un endroit que je connais pas, et du coup d'être obligé, d'être ... comment dire ? disponible, attentif.

Forcément il fallait le faire en Lingala. En général, pour faire des films, soit en français ou soit... en fait, à cause des problèmes économiques, c'est-à-dire... en France il y a le CNC et il y a deux aides du CNC qui sont : l'une l'avance sur recette qui vous donne 500,000 euros, mais qui oblige le film être en majorité français. Sinon, vous allez essayer d'avoir le cinéma du monde, qui est aussi du CNC, à peu près de 100,000 euros. Donc pour un cinéma comme le mien, ça fait une différence de 400,000 euros – beaucoup quoi. Même si après je vais aller chercher dans d'autres endroits, tout ça. Mais pour moi, c'est un peu stupide, cette chose que de faire parler les gens dans une langue qui n'est pas la leur, dans laquelle ils s'expriment de façon naturelle, quotidienne. En mise-en-scène, ça a été vraiment extraordinaire tourner dans cette langue que je connais un tout petit peu. Pour la même raison, c'est-à-dire que ça demande une écoute, une présence qui fait qu'on n'essaye pas de construire une réalité, mais plutôt de percevoir une réalité. C'est une position que je trouve beaucoup plus juste, en fait. Pas celle du fabricant, essayer de... non pas attraper, mais d'être en connexion avec quelque chose, sur son sens profond.

Vous créez les liens entre les espaces naturels, comme la forêt, et les espaces urbains. Il paraît que la ville où vous tournez le film devient important, presque comme un autre personnage. La ville, dans ce cas Kinshasa, elle prend cette signification pendant le processus de la filmer, où est-ce que c'est une choix consciente d'avance ?

C'est une moitié consciente, c'est-à-dire que j'ai une sorte de fascination à filmer les villes, et là, filmer Kinshasa, je savais pas dire pourquoi, c'est comme si c'était un espace vivant, entièrement. C'est vivant, une ville. Filmer une ville à un moment donné ... il y a quelque chose qui reste permanent – c'est permanent et il y a du mouvement. Finalement, essayer de toucher à cette chose, tout en étant en mouvement, réveille quelque chose de permanent qui nous appartient à tous. Donc, effectivement, à Kinshasa comme à Dakar, il y a cette proximité dans la culture et dans la vie quotidienne entre le monde concret, celui qu'on vit tous les jours, et une sorte d'invisible, quoi. Cet invisible-là, il est souvent effectivement relié dans la tradition, relié à la forêt. Cette espèce d'endroit qui est à la fois un refuge. La ville, elle est mouvante, elle agit sur la société ; la forêt, l'invisible agirait sur nos intérieurs. C'est de relier ces deux espaces dans lesquels on vit : un espace intérieur et un espace extérieur.

Vous avez vraiment ces contrastes entre la nature et l'urbanité, et aussi les contrastes avec votre usage de la lumière. Puis, il y a les contrastes de la musique, et j'étais frappée par les scènes de l'orchestre, avec la lumière bleue, presque au dehors du narratif, mais qui, au même temps, montent en puissance le choc émotionnel de l'histoire. Donc, comment avez-vous décidé de travailler avec cet orchestre, ainsi que Kasai AllStars, et comment avez-vous décidé de faire ces contrastes entre les deux genres musicaux ?

Le travail avec Kasai AllStars, ils faisaient partie du film très vite. Je me suis dit que Félicité c'était cette chanteuse. Donc ça, d'abord était d'essayer de sélectionner des chansons que j'aimais beaucoup mais qui puissent raconter quelque chose, ou pas raconter, mais exprimer quelque chose des différents états de Félicité. Soit en étant en connexion avec ces états, soit en étant en contrepoint avec ces états. Ce travail-là, j'étais ensuite à leur rencontrer à Kinshasa. J'ai vu beaucoup de groupes qui jouaient cette musique-là, qui est la musique luba, mais finalement, j'ai décidé de rester avec les Kasai AllStars. Ils sont composés de plusieurs groupes différents ; il y a donc plusieurs genres de musique dans leur répertoire. Donc ça m'offrait plusieurs possibilités de résonance en quelque sorte, pas avoir toujours la même sonorité, mais avoir des choses qui puissent avoir plus de relief d'un film, en fait. Ensuite, quand je suis arrivé ... au début, on m'a dit que la chanteuse Muambuyi était morte, mais quand je suis arrivé, j'ai vu qu'elle était vivante !

Mais, par contre, elle était un peu trop âgée pour jouer le personnage que j'avais créé, une femme à peu près de 35 ans, avec un enfant de 16 ans, et elle était plus âgée. Elle a accepté tout suite d'être la voix du film mais que ce soit quelqu'un d'autre qui joue le rôle. Donc elle a accepté, et elle a travaillé avec Véro, pour lui apprendre les chansons, pour lui apprendre à bouger, c'était très important, le rapport avec la comédienne.

Pour ce qui est l'orchestre symphonique, en fait, en allant là-bas, moi, j'avais vu un documentaire qui s'appelle Kinshasa Symphonie, qui raconte l'histoire de cet orchestre. Je connaissais son existence, et quand j'étais à Kinshasa, j'ai été à leur répétition. Ça a été tout extrêmement fort, parce que dans cette ville, c'était une journée de repérage, une journée un peu difficile, parce qu'il y a des endroits de Kinshasa qui sont très dur. Très vite, ma question, c'était comment filmer cette ville ... il y avait quelque chose très repoussant dans l'image de Kinshasa. C'est une ville qui est parfois sale, une ville qui est parfois ... très difficile d'affronter visuellement. Donc ma question pendant très longtemps était : mais comment je vais faire ? Je veux pas que les gens regardent ces images. Il y a une sorte de dégoût pour cette ville. C'était une vraie question pour moi pendant longtemps. Comment faire pour représenter cette ville ? Donc j'avais eu une journée un peu difficile, et le soir, j'étais de les entendre répéter, et il y a eu quelque chose d'extraordinaire. Tout à coup, dès qu'ils se souvenaient de jouer, j'ai eu l'impression d'une sorte de grande réconciliation. Cet orchestre me paraissait exprimer parfaitement ce que je ressentais dans cette ville, c'est-à-dire, des choses très, très simples devenaient impossibles, et des choses impossibles devenaient simples. Il y a une sorte de part à permanent, et on passe des plus grands des espoirs ou plus grand enthousiasme en un second. Et voilà, cet orchestre symphonique, alors que c'est le seul dans l'Afrique subsaharienne, dirait quelque chose de l'extraordinaire possible de cet endroit-là. Donc j'avais très envie travaillé avec eux, donc je l'aurai proposé des partitions de l'Arvo Pärt, ils ont accepté tout suite. J'ai toujours rencontré partout une sorte d'enthousiasme à faire des choses ensemble, d'aucune difficulté, Les difficultés étaient administratives, mais avec les gens d'une manière générale, ça a été très simple, et toujours avec beaucoup d'envie. Donc je l'avais composé les partitions, ils ont réorchestré, ils ont retravaillé, et pour moi, c'était la possibilité, du coup, d'avoir dans le film cette espèce de cœur antique de donner un petit peu de distance, de tout à coup dire : « nous sommes en train de faire un film », de dire « il était une fois », de dire tout ça avec cet orchestre. De raconter cette histoire autrement. De dire, de trouver le statut du film – c'est-à-dire : « nous sommes en train de faire la fiction dans une ville réelle, qui serve comme l'écran, le réceptacle d'une histoire presque mythologique, d'une histoire humaine presque mythologique. Ce que je trouve très beau, c'est qu'il y a un film qui était conscient de lui-même, et une ville qui disait – il y a eu ce sentiment-là – une ville qui disait : « nous nous mettons en représentation pour représenter quelque chose des êtres-humains ».

Oui, j'ai trouvé que l'orchestre fournit un espace de la beauté, de la tranquillité, dans une ville un peu sale, comme vous avez dit, et c'est ça qui m'a frappée quand je l'ai vu.

J'ai maintenant deux questions un peu plus générale. La première est sur votre opinion de la révolution numérique dans les cinémas africains, et si vous pensez que la technologie change des choses au niveau de l'esthétique, où tout simplement à l'échelle de la pratique ?

Du point de vue de la production, c'est quelque chose qui permet, je pense, aujourd'hui, la possibilité d'un cinéma africain. Les coûts, le prix, est beaucoup important, la possibilité de la diffusion aussi. Tout ça peut arriver à un moment où ... voilà, filmer en 35mm, projeter en 35mm, ça n'était plus possible. C'est un peu comme quand le téléphone portable est arrivé en Afrique, tout à coup, dans les maisons qui n'avaient pas de téléphone fixe, se trouvaient avec deux, trois téléphones portables. Il y avait quelque chose qui correspond parfaitement à la ville africaine. C'est-à-dire que, je pense que « digital » est beaucoup plus adapté à l'Afrique. L'Europe s'adaptait au numérique, mais en Afrique c'est immédiat. Je pense aussi que les évolutions viendront directement d'Afrique. Je trouve qu'il nous permet aujourd'hui d'imaginer, de restructurer, d'avancer, le cinéma africain.

Deuxièmement, esthétiquement, je pense que ça permet, dans mon cas par exemple, ça me permet de faire des prises très, très longues. Ça me permet de tourner un peu différemment. Ça me permet de faire des prises de 12 minutes, de tourner dans les bars, ou dans la rue, d'avoir quelque chose comme ça, d'abord de très léger. Tu peux s'insérer dans les villes ou dans les décors de façon assez facile, et de faire des prises très longues, c'est-à-dire que d'introduire de l'improvisation, d'introduire de pouvoir parler pendant je tourne, de pouvoir lancer les comédiens, de pouvoir laisser intervenir les choses qui n'étaient pas prévues. Il y a quelque chose du présent qui peut se faire grâce au numérique. La question pour moi, elle est pas tellement de définir l'esthétique, mais plutôt de mettre la technique, la caméra, et cetera, dans une relation qui permet de capter la maximum de puissance, de ce qui se passe. Donc voilà, je définis la grande image, la taille du plan, les choses comme ça, dans l'idée d'avoir le maximum de sensation possible, de sensation de ce qui se passe. Donc la question était : « comment j'allais filmer cette ville ? », par exemple, et finalement la réponse était de la filmer avec le plus d'honnêteté et d'authenticité que possible. De jamais 'faire image', en fait. Ne pas vouloir faire image, ne pas vouloir avoir une transformation esthétique. Au contraire, de lui faire confiance et de trouver où est la position ou l'image qui fait que je recevrai le maximum de la sensation, de la beauté, des acteurs, de la ville. Est-ce que ça rassemble ce que je ressens ? Est-ce que cette image me donne la sensation de ce que je ressens ? En fonction de ça, je la transforme, et le numérique permet ça.

Votre cinéma est vraiment un cinéma des sensations. Ce n'est pas juste l'image. Il permet la connexion corporelle.

J'essaye de faire ça, effectivement. D'avoir une relation qui soit physique avec le film.

Ma dernière question concerne le Fopica au Sénégal. Je voudrais vous demander votre opinion du Fopica et des opportunités au Sénégal pour les jeunes cinéastes.

Le Fopica, c'est extraordinaire ! De pouvoir avoir au Sénégal un fond qui permet d'avoir de l'argent, commencer d'avoir l'argent. C'est extraordinaire. Ça veut dire que, quand vous présentez ailleurs pour le financement de vos films vous pouvez déjà avoir quelque chose. C'était toujours la même question, vous alliez à droite, à gauche, dans différents pays, mais dans votre pays, vous avez quoi ? Et vous disiez rien. Là, il y a quelque chose qui change beaucoup, qui est même une question de dignité, qui vous permet d'avoir un peu plus de force, pouvoir s'adresser à quelqu'un d'autre sur un pied d'égalité, pas seulement comme si vous étiez en demande. Donc ça c'est très important d'un point de vue de cette façon de se sentir. Je pense que c'est vraiment important. Deuxièmement, pour beaucoup de jeunes réalisateurs et réalisatrices, c'est aussi la possibilité, de façon beaucoup plus facile quand on fait un court-métrage, par exemple, de faire un court-métrage au Sénégal, parce que sinon, aller financer un court-métrage sénégalais en Angleterre, en Allemagne, ou en France, c'est très compliqué. Donc bien sûr que le Fopica s'ensuivait les débats, il y a plein des choses d'améliorer, mais personne aujourd'hui au Sénégal ne dirait qu'il trouvait à arrêter le Fopica. Aucun cinéaste ne dirait une chose pareille. Je connais des jeunes cinéastes qui ont fait leurs films grâce à Fopica. Je connais plein de court-métrages qui se soit *Enfant Perdu*, *Une Place dans l'Avion*, *La boxeuse*. Jamais ils auraient pu rêver de faire ces films dans ces conditions sans Fopica, Moi, je suis très heureux que ça existe. Aujourd'hui, il faut vraiment se battre pour qu'on continue de structurer le cinéma sénégalais. Le travail à faire est immense. Ce dont on parle du numérique et cetera. Ces fonds permettraient, si on continue de travailler avec beaucoup de persévérance, de construire enfin une architecture du cinéma, une structure du cinéma qui permettrait – non pas le talent, le talent est toujours là, c'est pas un problème – c'est de ne pas recommencer à zéro chaque fois. C'est ça le problème. Que chaque cinéaste n'est pas à construire complètement son nom de pouvoir exister. C'est ça qu'on peut réussir à faire. Moi je m'engage pour une sorte aussi de cinémathèque, qu'il faut que Fopica fasse un vrai centre national de la cinématographie. Il faut qu'un politique qui va rouvrir des salles, mais il faut pas seulement rouvrir les salles, il faut aussi des salles qui sont des sortes de ciné-clubs, une sorte « d'éducation du public ». C'est pas une éducation pour les médias, comment il faut regarder les films, c'est juste une pratique.

Donc le Fopica va réduire aussi la nécessité pour les fonds européens ?

La première expérience du Fopica montre que pour le long-métrage, qui est compliqué, ça reste difficile de financer les films parce que beaucoup des films n'ont pas réussi à trouver de financement complémentaire. Le Fopica n'est pas destiné à financer 100% d'un film. C'est une aide. Ça résout pas tous les problèmes, mais c'est une aide.

Appendix II

Interview with Dani Kouyaté, 2017.

Peux-je commencer par demander de votre histoire comme cinéaste ?

Moi je viens d'une famille de griot, une famille traditionnelle, ça veut dire que mon grand-père était un griot pratiquant, traditionnel, mon père aussi, et moi je viens un peu de cette école traditionnelle, de ma famille de griot. Mais, à la différence que je suis allé à l'école, très tôt, à l'école moderne. Donc ce qu'il fait que très jeune, j'étais déjà dans le milieu artistique, de part de mon statut de griot, mais j'ai eu aussi la chance d'avoir mon père qui était le premier acteur professionnel du cinéma du Burkina Faso, et j'ai eu la chance d'assister à des plateaux de tournage très tôt dans mon enfance et j'étais dans le cinéma déjà à ce moment-là. Après, je suis allé à l'école du cinéma au Burkina, à Ouaga, il y avait une école du cinéma et j'étais là-bas jusqu'à la licence, j'ai fait trois années d'université, de cinéma là-bas, à Ouaga, et après, je suis allée en France et j'ai terminé mes études de cinéma en France. J'ai fait un diplôme d'études à approfondir en cinéma à Paris. Donc après ça, j'ai commencé à faire mes films.

Et dans cette époque-là, il fallait aller en France pour continuer des études ?

Ce n'était pas incontournable, ce n'était pas absolument vitale, pendant ce temps, il y avait des gens qui a fait du cinéma même sans aller à l'école du tout ! Mais j'étais à l'université, c'était le circuit universitaire, en fait. C'est là où se démenait une sorte de logique de continuer, parce que j'étais à l'université, donc j'ai fait une licence en création cinématographique, c'est qui ouvrait la porte vers la maîtrise après vers un diplôme d'études à approfondir, vers un doctorat, et cetera. Donc il se trouve que à l'université de Ouaga, je ne pouvais pas continuer après la licence, il n'y avait pas la suite, donc il fallait continuer en Europe. Donc du coup, c'était logiquement en France que je pouvais continuer mes études, parce qu'il n'y avait pas d'autres possibilités, de toute façon, en Afrique, et parmi des pays européens, la France était la plus proche pour la formation que je faisais, et en plus, le français qui était là. J'ai continué mes études en France pour aller au bout de mes études universitaires.

Oui, je comprends. Donc, la deuxième question c'est autour du théâtre, ce que vous faites avec le théâtre et le cinéma, quels sont les liens entre les deux, et les différences ?

En fait, moi je sors du théâtre, le théâtre, c'était ma première école, parce que comme je disais, je suis allé sur scène avec mon père très tôt. J'ai fait le théâtre avec mon père, j'ai fait des contes, et là, à l'âge de sept ans, j'ai raconté des histoires avec lui sur scène. Le théâtre a toujours été une école. Le théâtre continue encore à être une école. Parce que le théâtre, à la différence du cinéma est en contact, plus vivant et plus humain, non seulement avec les acteurs, en travail, mais aussi avec le public. La relation, elle est vivante. À la différence du cinéma, elle est vivante et fragile aussi, et simplement humaine. Donc il y a une sorte d'électricité dans le théâtre qu'on n'a pas dans le cinéma. Mais ce n'est pas quelque chose de négative, juste quelque chose de différence, pas la même magie. La magie du cinéma est moins humaine et moins épidermique que la magie du théâtre. Ça c'est une grande différence entre les deux. Mais pour le travail d'acteur, pour le processus de l'incarnation d'un caractère et tout ça, ce n'est pas très différent pour un acteur du théâtre ou un acteur du cinéma. D'entrer dans un personnage, de comprendre un personnage et de l'incarner, ce n'est pas très, très différent, techniquement. Comment met tout ça en boîte ? En théâtre, on prend la boîte et on met en vie. En cinéma, on prend la vie et on met en boîte – c'est un peu ça la nuance, mais pour le travail d'acteur, pour créer son personnage, je pense que les démarches ne sont pas très différentes.

Maintenant, pour le metteur en scène, la différence entre le théâtre et le cinéma, pour ce qui me concerne, reste une frustration par rapport au travail avec les acteurs en cinéma. Je suis un peu plus frustré qu'avec le théâtre, parce que de jeux au théâtre, quand on travaille pendant trois mois avec des acteurs, pour refaire des répétitions, pour partir, aller dormir, revenir chercher, travailler ensemble, être en difficulté, ne pas savoir où on va, et tout ça, ça crée, ça tisse les relations humaines. Ça crée une famille. Donc en quelque sorte, après chaque création, on a une famille. Donc je veux dire que chaque création crée une famille et après, c'est comme s'il y a une famille qui s'est éclaté en quelque part et il y a ces petits chagrins d'arrêter quelque chose. Ça existe au théâtre. Au cinéma, on n'a pas cette opportunité d'avoir ce chagrin ! Parce que parfois, tu travailles avec des acteurs que tu ne connais même pas. Tu ne connais même pas leur nom. Vraiment, parce que tu les appelles avec des noms de leurs personnages. Parce qu'ils viennent juste au moment qu'ils doivent travailler et s'enregistrent juste après, peut-être, parce qu'ils sont trop pris avec un autre film à faire où ils n'ont pas le temps, ou toi, tu n'as pas le temps. Peut-être si vous avez la chance de vous vous rencontrer c'est à la pause autour du café et vous n'avez le temps de connaître qui est devant toi vraiment.

Vous n'avez pas la même sens de famille ?

Non, absolument pas, et en plus, parfois, même il y a des gens qui passent très peu dans ton film, c'est eux qui leur rôle n'est pas long, mais qui apporte beaucoup dans ton film, mais qui sont venus juste pour deux jours de tournage et tu n'as pas même la chance de parler avec eux d'autre chose que ton film. Donc ce sont des êtres-humains qui apportent beaucoup, et qui tu ne connais même pas, et qui tu ne verras pas même plus ! Et Ça, au cinéma, c'est très frustrant pour quelqu'un qui a l'habitude de travailler au théâtre.

Il me semble que vous apportez quelque chose du théâtre dans votre cinéma, qui est différent des autres cinéastes, en fait. Même avec le film le plus récent, *Medan Vi Lever*, il y a l'importance de la musique et de l'expression corporelle entre les personnages. Est-ce que vous pouvez parler un peu de ce film-là en termes de la musique et de l'expression corporelle ?

La musique était très importante dans ce film. Parce que c'était au départ un film musical. C'est pour ça que je voulais travailler avec un jeune qui fait le hip-hop, parce que je pense que, dans ce monde, qui est complètement perdu et qui se cherche aujourd'hui, ceux qui travaillent avec la culture et l'art en général, ont beaucoup plus de chance que les autres, parce que l'art c'est un moyen beaucoup plus pragmatique et beaucoup plus vivant pour rencontre l'autre. Pour se chercher, pour comprendre l'autre, pour partager avec l'autre pour chercher des équilibres avec l'autre. L'improvisation musicale, par exemple, c'est un très grand moyen du partage, des échanges entre les êtres-humains. Tu mets un musicien, je ne sais pas, un musicien anglais et un musicien brésilien en face, ils ne sont pas jamais vus, c'est leur première rencontre, ils improvisent ensemble, ils font quelque chose qui peut surprendre tout le monde. Ils vont trouver un langage en commun très facilement, sans théorie, sans passer par la tête, juste la vibration humaine et corporelle. Et le timing, le tempo, tout ça c'est tellement intelligent, mais l'intelligence qui ne passe pas par la tête, mais qui passe par le corps : l'intelligence du cœur. Et le cœur, il partage beaucoup plus facilement que la tête. C'est pour ça que j'ai passé par la musique pour faire cette recherche du caractère principal, qui est un peu perdu, et qui finalement va se retrouver à travers de la musique. La musique est très importante pour ce film à cause de ces aspects-là. Et aussi, j'ai eu la chance de travailler avec un très grand connaisseur de la musique africaine qui est suédois, qui s'appelle Andreas Unge, qui est un très bon musicien, qui a fait la musique du film, et qui a fait un très beau travail.

Pour la question de l'expression corporelle, je dirais que c'est une des choses que je fais mais qui ne passe pas, une fois de plus, par la tête, elle passe par le cœur. Il y a beaucoup de choses que je

ne théorise pas dans mon travail ; de toute façon, ce n'est pas mon travail de théoriser, il y a des gens qui le font très bien, c'est leur boulot. Mais moi... probablement, dans le casting, j'ai tenu compte de l'attitude. Parce que, si vous voulez... au théâtre, par exemple, j'essaye d'être moi, mais si tu es acteur sur scène, qui est lui, lui-même, sans un petit plus, ça devient quotidien et banal. Je suis moi-même, mais avec un plus. Et le plus-là, c'est peut-être juste ma petite façon d'être sur scène, l'attitude. C'est l'attitude qui va amener la vie, ou c'est l'attitude qui va tuer la vie, qui la rend banal aussi. Et cette attitude, parfois, on l'a, ou on ne l'a pas. Il y a des gens qui ont beau fait mais ils ne sont pas impressionnants. D'autres appelleront ça une aura, ou être charismatique, je ne sais pas quoi, mais ça dépend beaucoup de l'attitude physique. C'est très difficile à théoriser, mais c'est très important, en fait.

Il semble que l'usage de la musique, l'usage du corps, la physique, sont tous des manières d'établir ces relations de cœur entre les être-humains.

Oui, certainement. Absolument.

Dans *Medan Vi Lever*, et aussi dans votre film précédent, *Soleils*, il y a le thème de la migration et la recherche des racines, les gens qui vivent des vies transnationales. Pourriez-vous parler un peu de ce thème ?

C'est une sorte de comédie, ça, de psychose, quasiment, pour moi, parce que c'est un thème qui filigrane quasiment tous que je fais, consciemment ou inconsciemment. Je me cherche, en fait. Je me cherche. Depuis l'âge de sept ans, je commence à migrer, à faire des migrations dans des identités, dans des univers différents. Parce que quand je suis allé à l'école française à l'âge de sept ans, j'ai commencé à apprendre le français. À partir de ce moment-là, j'ai commencé à compter en français, à lire en français, à réfléchir en français, à rêver en français, et tout en parlant ma langue, tout en restant moi-même, tout en vivant auprès de mon père et de mon grand-père, qui était de griot pratiquant. Donc j'avais réfléchi d'une double identité, d'une certaine façon. Je me suis trouvé parlant dans ma langue, et réfléchissant en français. Parce que c'était plus pratique pour moi réfléchir en français parce que c'est avec ça que j'ai compté, que je faisais mes mathématiques, mes raisons du monde, et tout ça. Quand je voulais être raisonnable, raisonner, réfléchir, calculer, aller vite, j'ai passé tout de suite au français ; c'était plus rapide pour moi. C'est ça que j'ai eu l'habitude à faire. Et si j'ai l'envie de compter, de calculer dans ma langue maternelle, je prends deux fois plus de temps pour faire la même calcul. Donc ça déjà est une forme de métissage de mon cerveau, qui avait commencé là. Après, l'anglais, si ajoute ça, après le déplacement en Europe... maintenant j'ai 55 ans, j'ai vécu plus de la moitié de ma vie en Europe maintenant. Mes enfants sont nés en Europe, ma fille travaille à Paris. Bon, si tu me demandes, si

tu demandes de mes enfants d'où venaient, on dit de Burkina, mais au même temps, ils sont parisiens, et maintenant il y a un bon parti qui vit avec moi en Suède et qui va en suédois, anglais, français, qui se disent burkinabé. Et moi-même, je me suis là, je me dis « griot », je parle de l'Afrique, je fais des films sur l'Afrique, mais je suis parlant en français pendant tu es – je ne sais pas dans quel pays tu es – et tout ça, ça veut dire quoi, pour moi ? C'est une question permanente que je me pose, et je suis en permanence à la recherche de mon identité personnelle.

Enfin, j'ai fait un film documentaire avec un historien qui s'appelle Joseph Ki-Zerbo qui était le premier historien africain qui a écrit l'histoire de l'Afrique, qui est mort maintenant, qu'il est de Burkina. J'ai eu la chance de faire un film avec lui juste avant sa mort. Pour lui, l'identité ce n'est pas un héritage ; identité, c'est quelque chose qu'on construit. Lui, dans ce film, il m'a ouvert un peu les yeux sur cette problématique-là, parce que pour lui, l'identité c'est la conquête d'autres luttes. Il faut lutter pour son identité et pour s'affirmer. Ce n'est pas du tout un héritage. Alors, par ce film, maintenant je comprends tout : alors, depuis l'âge de sept ans, tous les matins, je cours derrière mon identité, pour le construire. Et tous les jours il y a des choses de nouveau qui viennent, que je dois intégrer. Et donc mon identité est en perpétuel mouvement. Donc je pense que quand on voit les films de ce perspective-là, forcément, ça ouvre les choses, ça ouvre les esprits. Ça fait comprendre que finalement, rien n'est acquis d'avance et rien n'est perdu d'avance. Tout s'est construit.

C'est très intéressant. Donc dans vos films, c'est toujours un processus d'explorer l'identité, de la construction d'identité, dans des cultures différentes, mais qui se concentrent, dans une certaine manière, dans une seule personne.

Oui, tout à fait. Je pense que la façon très concrète, la question, c'est qu'est-ce que je tire le positif de tous que je rencontre sur mon chemin ? Je peux résumer un peu comme ça. C'est mon attitude de demander de ce que m'arrive, qu'est-ce qu'il y a de positif ? C'est moi-même, mais moi-même avec de plus, chaque fois.

La dernière question pour moi est autour du numérique. Qu'est-ce que vous pensez, qu'est-ce que vous voyez maintenant au Burkina Faso avec le numérique, et la manière de faire des films ?

Moi, je sors de l'ancienne école. Quand j'ai commencé le cinéma, on était en analogique, on faisait des films avec la pellicule. Et déjà si je remonte plus lointain, j'étais à l'école du cinéma au Burkina, on travaillait avec un format qui s'appelait U-Matique à l'époque, un format vidéo, peut-être mal connu maintenant, très peu de chance que vous connaissez ça, je crois ! C'était de très grosses

cassettes, qu'on mettait dans une très grosse caméra, et vidéo, et il y avait une seule caméra dans toute l'école. Nous, en faisant le cours derrière la caméra, pour faire nos exercices de l'école, parfois tu peux attendre un mois avant de voir la caméra. Et si tu avais la caméra, tu l'avais pour une seule journée, et tu dois faire vite ton truc. Et après, on avait accès à une salle de montage, chacun à son tour, et il n'y avait qu'une seule, on était quinze étudiants. C'était impossible d'exercer normalement, ou de pratiquer. Toucher une caméra, c'était un évènement. Donc du point de vue du numérique aujourd'hui, c'est une révolution. C'est le jour et la nuit. Maintenant, même avec le téléphone on peut faire des films !

À part de ça, la question de la pellicule : avant, quand j'ai tourné un film dans un village au Burkina, c'était une folie. Parce que la pellicule – d'abord on n'avait pas de laboratoires en Afrique. Au Burkina, en Afrique Noire, on n'avait aucun laboratoire. Pas en Afrique Noire francophone, à ma connaissance, en tout cas. Même chez les anglophones au Ghana on n'avait pas. Pourquoi ? Parce que cette activité-là, n'était pas suffisamment vivante pour créer une industrie, pour faire un commerce, on ne faisait pas suffisamment de films pour créer des laboratoires. C'est parce que les laboratoires n'étaient pas viables économiquement, parce que tu ne peux pas créer un laboratoire pour faire cinq films tous les ans, ça ne peut pas vivre. Donc nos laboratoires étaient en France. Donc si tu filmes en Afrique, il fallait envoyer la pellicule en France pour la développer, pour que tu puisses voir s'il y a une image là-dessus. Moi, je faisais mes films en Afrique, dans un village. Il fait chaud et la pellicule, elle peut brûler. Ça veut dire qu'une fois que tu as filmé, tu mets la pellicule dans une boîte noire, et tu la démonte et tu mets bien le scotch là-dessus, pour que la lumière n'entre pas, sinon tu n'auras pas d'images, et il faut que ça reste au frais, sinon ça va brûler. On est dans le Sahel, dans un pays où il fait 40 degrés au soleil, et donc il faut que la pellicule reste en permanence à l'ombre. Et qu'est-ce qui se passait ? On mettait la pellicule dans la glacière, et on mettait la glace là-dessus, et il fallait éviter que l'eau entre dans la boîte, donc tu mets la pellicule dans la glacière mais avant tu l'entoure bien en plastique, tu fermes ça très bien, et tu mets tout ça, et tu l'envoie le plus vite que possible à l'aéroport dans le capital, que ça prenne le premier avion pour aller à Paris, pour aller au laboratoire. Et puis là, le laboratoire va ouvrir ça, ils vont développer la pellicule rapidement, pour voir s'il y a une image là-dessus, si tu n'as pas fait une bêtise. Ça n'est même pas pour voir les aspects artistiques, c'est juste pour voir si tu as une image sur ta pellicule ! Et souvent on avait le rapport du laboratoire qui disait : ouah, c'est bien, il y a les images, on n'a pas brûlé ! Un rapport technique, pas artistique. Tu es content parce que tu as une image, mais tu ne sais pas comment le comédien a joué, tout ça, parce que tu ne peux pas le voir. Après, une fois que tu finis de faire tout ça, tu arrives en France, et là maintenant, on fait la projection des « rushes ». C'est là tu vas découvrir maintenant les bêtises artistiques. Tu vas dire : Ah merde ! Là, il a mal joué ! Mais c'est bien trop tard.

Donc la numérique maintenant c'est une révolution. C'est une façon pour nous de pendre la main sur les choses, d'avoir une liberté totale de s'exprimer. Surtout, ce qui est intéressant, ce qu'aujourd'hui, on a les mêmes moyens que tout le monde. Ça, c'est une grande révolution. Un jeune réalisateur de Ouaga aujourd'hui dispose des mêmes outils qu'un jeune réalisateur de Berlin, de Londres, ou de Paris. Il n'y a pas de complexes à ce niveau-là, à ce niveau d'outils. C'est la démocratisation de l'outil. C'est quelque chose d'extrêmement importance en matière de la création. Donc les jeunes d'aujourd'hui ont beaucoup plus de forces de frappe en matière de création. Et moi-même, j'ai eu la chance de faire tous mes derniers films en numérique. Là, j'ai fait en tout 5 longs-métrages, mais je n'ai fait que deux en analogique, les trois derniers étaient faits en numérique. Donc j'ai vu le changement. J'ai fait un film qui s'appelle Ouaga-Saga, qui était le premier film que je faisais en numérique. Pour moi, c'était un parti de plaisir, c'était comme un jeu d'enfant, parce que tu peux filmer autant que tu veux, sans avoir peur de consommer de la pellicule.

Qui a couté cher aussi ?

Oui, la pellicule coute cher. Ça c'est un aspect dont je n'ai pas parlé. Quand je faisais un film qui s'appelle *Sia, la rêve du python*, que j'ai fait en 35mm, j'avais écrit le film en français et encore, quand la scripte calculait la longueur du film, ça va faire un film un peu près d'une heure et demie, mais c'était écrit en français et quand on jouait en Bambara, le dialogue, ils font une minute en français, trois minutes en Bambara ! Ça c'est la tradition orale. En français je dis : Bonjour comment ça va ? Mais en Bambara tu dis bonjour comment ça va, tu demandes de la famille, les enfants, les voisins ... tu prends ton temps, sinon, ça n'a pas du sens, ce n'est pas crédible. Alors, la pellicule, qu'on n'avait plus vu, pour filmer, ne suffisait pas. Le budget qui était prévu a explosé. Donc le producteur n'était pas content ! Et ça c'est le problème qu'on n'a pas plus avec le numérique. A tous ces niveaux-là, il y a une révolution du numérique. Il y a vraiment plusieurs aspects qui sont importants.

Aujourd'hui, on a les moyens de s'exprimer sans complexe dans la même façon que tout le monde. Au même temps, il y a le danger que, le fait que c'est accessible à tout le monde, c'est aussi très facile à faire n'importe quoi. Ça c'est incontournable, quand quelqu'un a très, très soif et tombe sur l'eau, tu ne peux pas plaindre parce qu'il boit quand même beaucoup. Je pense que dans ce moment, on est dans une force de s'exprimer, on était privé pendant très longtemps d'expression, donc maintenant on s'exprime dans une façon peut-être excessive, peut-être incontrôlé, mais c'est de bonne guerre, et après ça va se calmer. Quand tu as très soif et tu tombes sur de l'eau, tu ne rends pas compte que tu peux boire doucement. Mais quand tu bois très rapidement, tu rends compte que c'est stupide de boire comme ça, que tu n'as pas besoin de le faire comme ça. Tu vas

te calmer. Et la prochaine fois que tu as soif, tu as l'eau à côté de toi, et tu boiras dans une façon plus raisonnable, plus calme. Ça c'est un peu la situation actuelle, qui fait que on assiste à beaucoup de déchets. Avec ces nouvelles technologies, il y a plein de gens qui font n'importe quoi, mais ça ne lève rien à l'importance de cette révolution-là, ça explique tout simplement le besoin et l'envie de s'exprimer.

Oui, et c'est aussi une façon pour les jeunes de se former, de le pratiquer...

Absolument, donc la chance que nous n'avons pas eue, eux, ils ont cette chance. Nous, avec une caméra pour quinze personnes... on était obligé de passer par l'école pour nous exprimer, pour apprendre, pour la théorie. Eux, ils peuvent apprendre en faisant.