



IN THE BLACK FANTASTIC

# Touki Bouki

## John Akomfrah on 'Touki Bouki'

Until I saw *Touki Bouki*, I hadn't understood an African Cinema to be political by its very nature, being born out of the process of cultural and post-colonial renewal for a lot of African countries. There isn't really anything anyone can call an African Cinema before independence. African national cinemas were born at exactly the same time as the African nations; through those films, nations tried to speak about themselves. *Touki Bouki* was an extreme example of that trend, because you suddenly realised that you were watching this African dreaming aloud. It was such a shocking revelation, that an African film needn't be attuned to poverty and socio-economic problems, but was marked instead by the kind of youth traumas that have been a stock-in-trade of cinemas all over the world. To have an African Cinema which taps into that sort of early-life crisis, bypassing what African Cinema is *supposed* to be – which is teaching somebody about how we live or how we die – just cuts straight through the pedagogic imperative: straight to this guy and his girlfriend who wanted to leave Africa. Paradoxically, because Djibril avoided the social problems, the economic hardship made perfect sense, just through observing what the characters do.

*Touki Bouki* has a way of choreographing African life that is informed by an African urban sensibility: about restlessness, yearning, and a search for things that is unusual in African Cinema. Most African films are supposed to emanate from a place of authenticity, where people know themselves. They know the opening of Souleymane Cissé's *Yeelen*, as it were: we have lived in this village for thousands of years, we know ourselves because we know the soil, we know the trees, we know the skies, and so on. There is a harmony between 'man and landscape'. But *Touki Bouki* has a kind of agnostic distance from that whole baggage, because it's characterised by this restlessness, by an urban African impatience with rhythm, time and storytelling. It's not the rural, pre-industrial pace of *Yeelen*. It's a much more aggressively modernist film, and you can understand why people have labelled it avant-garde.

It's not technically an avant-garde film, if by avant-garde people mean that it's trying to do something weird. It is more a portrait of African urban reality which is profoundly suffused with the tempering of that reality. Everybody knows about the restlessness that you see in towns and cities, in Accra and Lagos. This is one of the few films which actually captures that to-ing and fro-ing – not only through storytelling but also through a narrative parody of that movement. It's very graceful.

**John Akomfrah in conversation with June Givanni, *Sight and Sound*, September 1995**

## Djibril Diop Mambéty interviewed in 1995

What does avant-garde mean? It could indicate that man who, even before dawn, gets up to meet the sun while others continue to slumber. That is to say he who is not satisfied and who is still searching; it is a perpetual search; a thirst impossible to quench.

The impulse for what I do came at that moment of liberation back in the 60s, and is inspired more by my understanding of the limits of possibility than by any developments or trends in European film at the time.

It was also the moment that I stopped being racist and became a missionary. I became aware of the mission in the name of my people and of my culture, and my universal duty, which is to sing a song that the whole world can hear.

Take for instance the influence of African culture on contemporary art.

The *masque nègre* is the proof. It has given a new face to contemporary painting over the last 70 years; one could ask Picasso for example how the *masque nègre* has generated cubism. That is the sort of contribution to cinematic writing that Africans can make. What there has been so far is reinvention of cinema: but one mustn't cheat by imitating others, one must be in tune with one's heritage. What the *masque nègre* has done to advance modern art, it can do for cinematic writing.

My current work in cinema is around a trilogy that speaks of power and insanity: from *Touki Bouki* (1973) and *Hyènes* (*Hyenas*, 1992), my first two features, to *Malaika* my next feature. In *Touki Bouki* you have the overthrow of power, and it involves dreams about escape to Europe, etcetera. In *Hyènes* the two characters from *Touki Bouki* reappear: the girl who leaves to cross the Atlantic and the boy who stays on the continent as if he has betrayed her. This same girl comes back as a woman in *Hyènes* 50 years later, more rich than the World Bank, to reclaim the head of her lover for \$100 million. In *Malaika*, it is the man who comes back as the central character in yet another age, this time the 15th century.

We as filmmakers have the duty to be universal. We have just come to the end of the first century of cinema and really we have to win the second century. If I have any advice to give to African (and African diaspora) filmmakers, I would say, above all do not try to please, if you want to be universal – and indeed if you want to be *heard*, still do not try too hard to please, but be true to your project. We are the people that are in charge of humanity's future, no matter where we find ourselves. African filmmakers and African people both have their part to play at the great meeting of humanity. To use cinema to relieve us from our many handicaps, the lack of writing, illiteracy, knowing that cinema addresses itself not only to the eyes and ears but to the heart also. It is important to take seriously one's responsibility with the moving image, and to deal with all these historical and colonial handicaps. Cinema has to be put in the service of self-knowledge and that is urgent.

**Djibril Diop Mambéty interviewed by June Givanni, *Sight and Sound*, September 1995**

TOUKI BOUKI

Director: Djibril Diop Mambéty \*  
Production Company: Cinegrit  
Production Managers: Lamine Ba Carlos, Ousmane Sow  
Collaboration on Exteriors: Fenouil, Manuel De Kset  
Production Assistant: Medoune Faye  
1st Assistant Director: Momar Thiam  
2nd Assistant Director: Ben Diogaye Beye  
Screenplay: Djibril Diop Mambéty \*  
Director of Photography: Pap Samba Sow  
Director of Photography: Georges Bracher \*  
Grip: Alioune N'Diaye  
Stills Photography: Aziz Diop Mambéty  
Editors: Siro Asteni, Emma Mennenti \*  
Art Director: Aziz Diop Mambéty  
Costumes: Aziz Diop Mambéty  
Music: Josephine Baker, Mado Robin, Aminata Fall \*  
Sound Recording: El Hadji Mbow  
Sound Assistant: Mawa Gaye  
Assistant: Sy Abdoulaye

Contains a scene of animal slaughter which some viewers will find distressing

Cast

Magaye Niang (*Mory*)  
Mareme Niang (*Anta*)  
Christophe Colomb  
Moustapha Toure  
Aminata Fall (*Aunt Oume*)  
Ousseynou Diop (*Charlie*)  
Fernand Dalfin, Al Demba, Dieynaba Dieng, Assane Faye, Robbie Lawson, Aliou N'Diaye, Omar Seck, Colette Simon Langouste  
With the voices of: Josephine Baker, Mado Robin, Aminata Fall

Senegal 1973  
88 mins (Total running time 125 mins)

\* Uncredited

Restored in 2008 by The World Cinema Foundation at Cineteca di Bologna/L'Immagine Ritrovata in association with the family of Djibril Diop Mambéty. Restoration funding provided by Armani, Cartier, Qatar Airways and Qatar Museum Authority.



WORLD CINEMA PROJECT

IN THE BLACK FANTASTIC

The Brother from Another Planet

Fri 1 Jul 18:05; Wed 6 Jul 20:45

Sankofa

Sat 2 Jul 14:00 (+ intro by June Givanni, June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive); Wed 20 Jul 20:35

Daughters of the Dust

Sat 2 Jul 20:30; Wed 13 Jul 20:40

Yeelen Brightness

Sun 3 Jul 15:50; Thu 14 Jul 20:40

Top of the Heap

Mon 4 Jul 18:10; Sat 30 Jul 20:45

In the Afrofuture

Tue 5 Jul 18:20; Sun 17 Jul 16:00

Atlantics (Atlantique)

Thu 7 Jul 20:50; Sun 31 Jul 15:40

Kuso

Sat 9 Jul 20:50; Fri 22 Jul 18:10

Touki Bouki

Wed 13 Jul 17:50 (+ season introduction); Wed 27 Jul 20:50

The Burial of Kojo

Fri 15 Jul 18:30; Thu 28 Jul 20:40

The Black Atlantic

Mon 18 Jul 18:15 (+ Q&A); Sat 30 Jul 12:00

Eve’s Bayou

Tue 19 Jul 20:45; Thu 28 Jul 18:00

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In the Black Fantastic is an exhibition, curated by Ekow Eshun, of contemporary artists from the African diaspora who draw on science fiction, myth and Afrofuturism.

Runs 29 Jun to 18 Sep at Hayward Gallery.