

festival/ CANNES 95

Two African films for 100 years of cinema

by Jadot Sezirahiga

From 17th to 28th May 1995, the Cannes International Film Festival will host cinema lovers as it does every year. And in this year of the centenary, the Cannes Festival, the most prestigious rendezvous of the seventh art, has made no exception to the rule and will commemorate the cinema's hundred years - in its own way. The themes most frequently raised in the great classics of the cinema will be reviewed in thirty four-minute films. Seven films from the "The cinema seen by ..." series, an initiative of the British Film Institute, will also be screened. The festivities for the centenary will also include the "dance of the century". With seven dancers, this dance is a tribute to the great heroic and romantic figures who have inspired Karina Saporta. There will also be exhibitions presenting some of the landmarks of the century of the cinema: patents of inventions, drawings, reproductions of great film scenes, portraits of stars...

The 1995 Cannes vintage is also the competition. The jury (including Gaston Kaboré, the filmmaker from Burkina Faso), chaired by actress Jeanne Moreau, will see 23 films from fifteen countries in the official competition.

This year, Africa is once again present at Cannes, represented by two ambassadors. The Malian Souleymane Cissé in the official competition with his latest feature film, Waati (Time) and Drissa Touré in the "Un certain regard" section with his film Haramuya. Cissé is not a stranger to Cannes. His talent was recognized in 1987 when his film Yeelen was awarded the jury's prize.

From Burkina, Drissa Touré is also at Cannes for the second time. In 1991, he presented his first feature film, "Laada". Haramuya is an ordinary chronicle of the social life and poverty in the "bidonvilles". Drissa Touré denounces with sensitivity and without allowances the problems of city life and he is also successful in recalling that integrity and honesty, faith and respect (Fousséni's qualities) are the guarantees of a well-balanced life.

Waati

Nandi is a black child in South Africa at the height of the apartheid regime. She encounters violence and despair, love and compassion. She is filled with a desire for knowledge and liberation through learning. In her company, the audience goes back over Africa's past of poverty and magic, its convulsive present and its future which is "bound to be better". Nandi travels and disco-

Fousséni est un homme ordinaire. Il appartient à l'ethnie des pêcheurs qui vivaient autrefois sur la berge du marigot où s'est développée la zone urbaine. Animiste, il a été converti à l'Islam par les dioulas, commerçants musulmans qui l'ont accueilli dans un faubourg de la ville. Il a deux femmes et deux fils et reste très attaché à sa foi et à ses traditions.

Sortis de la concession, ses fils n'ont de référence que la ville avec ses hordes de marginaux. Le plus jeune, craignant de décevoir son père, succombe au vol. Il est alors exclu et livré à la solidarité de la misère des bidonvilles.

Waati

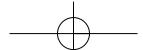
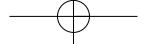
Nandi est une enfant noire d'Afrique du Sud en plein apartheid. Elle rencontre violence et désespoir, amour et compassion. Elle est habitée par le désir de la connaissance et de la libération par le savoir. Avec elle, le spectateur revisite le passé de misère et de magie de l'Afrique; son présent convulsif et son futur "inéluctablement meilleur". Nandi voyage et découvre son continent et sa réalité de femme africaine.

WAATI - Une œuvre politique et culturelle

Ecrans d'Afrique vous propose quelques réflexions que Souleymane Cissé a récemment livré.

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Le dernier long métrage du cinéaste malien, *Yeelen*, avait reçu le Prix du Jury au Festival de Cannes en 1987. Huit ans après, Cissé présente un projet encore plus ambitieux. "Je tenais particulièrement à mener à bien ce projet parce que je me sens profondément concerné par tous les bouleversements, non seulement en Afrique du Sud mais un peu partout dans le monde. Par conséquent, je voulais sortir des frontières du Mali. Certains m'en ont fait le reproche. Mais c'est tout simplement parce que je pense que le cinéma n'a pas de frontières. Je suis un homme des horizons infinis dans un monde où, comme un nomade, l'on peut circuler et communiquer librement. C'est une sorte d'utopie, mais à travers ce film, je pouvais en parler concrètement. D'ailleurs *Waati* a réuni une équipe multinationale et multiraciale, rassemblant des Maliens, des Ivoiriens, des Guinéens, des Sud-Africains, des Italiens, des Français, des Américains, des Russes". Ce film, si attendu par les cinéphiles, est le résultat d'un scénario que Cissé a écrit depuis 1988. Son tournage s'est effectué en trois étapes et dans quatre pays: l'Afrique du Sud, la Côte d'Ivoire, la Namibie et le Mali. La première partie, qui se déroule dans le pays de Mandela, traite de la crise d'une société



through his character who upsets the circle of life and learning. Cissé has chosen a girl (who will become a woman) to take on the role of his heroine. Is this a way of paying tribute to the African woman? The filmmaker's answer does not beat about the bush: "before writing the final version of the scenario, I spent several months in South Africa... People told me everywhere that the real resistance in the country was from the women... The Afrikaaners were more afraid of black women than they were of black men. I thought it would be interesting to give a sort of supernatural strength to this young girl".

Language of truth

The painful themes that Cissé approaches in Waati include, as could be expected, that of racism. But more than the issue, it is the style that the artist has chosen to talk about it that captures our attention. He places great importance on the ancestral way of initiation: the tale. A grandmother tells her grandchildren a story. There are animals in it. "This tale is a metaphor of our society," says Cissé, "where, in order to get by, you have to be a clever rabbit who has been to the school of life and who has learned to escape from his hunters...". A lesson that the grandmother has to impress on the memory of the children so that they do not feel completely abandoned. The constant theme is that of speaking the language of truth, of saying what the Whites profoundly think and what the Blacks feel in their inner depths. If racism is in the line of fire of the doyen of African filmmakers, the Church, the accomplice of white power, does not find grace either in his eyes. "As a constituted body," the white Church has approved and justified apartheid, which explains why a black anti-racist Church has grown up on the margins of the other official Church.".

Cissé addresses all African youth whom he would like to see get back a sense of responsibility and duty. He says that "the period of colonization is over but Africa really has to manage its economic and intellectual independence. One of Africa's biggest problems is that of the lack of a managerial class to lead their countries towards the future. Amongst students in the 1960s and 1970s, there were those who chose to forget their continent and those who had a sense of patriotism. Unfortunately the majority of the latter have been eliminated". The concern of the director of Waati is also to address not only young people but all Africans and even the whole of humanity. "I have never reduced the problems that Africa suffers from to what goes on between Whites and Blacks, but it was a question of problems between men... I have always wanted to go beyond divisions and races... A notion is never made up of only one ethnic group. I do not see why the Malian nation could not live in its ethnic diversity which is an enrichment". An enrichment for Africa but which Africa has bequeathed through the influence of its culture (language, painting, sculpture, dance..) to the rest of the world.

It is the deep knowledge of this culture and of our past

malheureusement ces derniers pour la plupart ont été éliminés". Le souci du réalisateur de *Waati* est aussi d'interpeller non seulement les jeunes mais tous les Africains et même toute l'humanité. "Je n'ai jamais réduit les problèmes dont souffre l'Afrique aux propos entre Blancs et Noirs, il s'agit de problèmes entre des hommes... J'ai toujours voulu aller au-delà des clivages et des races... Une nation n'est jamais composée d'une seule ethnique. Je ne vois pas pourquoi la nation malienne ne pourrait pas vivre dans sa diversité ethnique qui est un enrichissement". Un enrichissement de l'Afrique mais que l'Afrique a su léguer à travers l'influence de sa culture (langue, peinture, sculpture, danse...) au reste du monde.

C'est la connaissance profonde de cette culture, de notre passé qui nous permettra d'aller de l'avant.