

## **“IMAGES OF WOMEN AND OPPRESSION IN ‘FRANCOPHONE’ WEST AFRICAN FILM”**

**Sheila Petty  
University of Regina**

Par une analyse de contenu et de la structure des films africains, l'auteur examine l'influence de la colonisation sur l'image et la situation actuelle de la femme africaine.

The author uses an analysis of film content and structure to examine images of women and oppression in West African film. The nature of this oppression cannot be fully understood without situating African women's struggle within the concept of colonialism.

Filmmakers have portrayed women struggling against oppressive forms in African society since the birth of Francophone West African film in 1953<sup>1</sup>. When attempting to examine the depiction of women's contemporary social position in Africa, it would be inappropriate to ground arguments strictly in feminist film theory. A wider theoretical basis is essential in order to conceptualize a critique of issues involving women in African film. The Kenyan anthropologist Achola O. Pala, warns against simply projecting Western feminist ideology onto the African woman's struggle. She suggests that women's current position can be described as “an interplay between two parameters”: firstly, Africa's political and economic “dependency” on the Occident, from slavery and colonialism to “contemporary neocolonial links”, and “indigenous African socio-economic norms (eg. in food production, family ideology, property rights and perceptions of respect and human dignity), insofar as these continue to regulate social behaviour.” And she argues that “the problems facing African women today, irrespective of their national and social class affiliations, are inextricably bound up in the wider struggle by African people to free themselves from poverty and ideological domination in both intra- and international spheres.” (1977:9)

Kate Millett has been instrumental in exploring Western women's oppression in our society. She argues that Western women suffer from "interior colonization" due to "the birthright priority whereby males rule females." This form of colonization is "sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification." (1970:5) African women certainly experience interior colonization as women but they also suffer exterior colonization as Africans and each form of oppression must be considered in light of the other.

It is the aim of this paper to examine images of women and oppression in Francophone West African film. Through an analysis of certain artistic and cinematic codes as well as thematic concerns I will demonstrate that rather than focussing exclusively on gender struggle, it is essential to set African women's "plight" in the context of the restructuring of African societies by colonialism. African women's condition is linked with the history of Africa and with the importance of the African continent for the expansion of Western capitalism. Colonialism, with its introduction of new mechanisms for appropriating African wealth and its importation of Western culture, technology and ideology had a drastic effect on women. Urbanization proceeded and virtually everyone was drawn directly or indirectly into the commercial economic system. Colonialism encouraged inequality as women were generally not included in cash-cropping or political decision-making. Women remained responsible for feeding their families but were faced with even more of the agricultural work due to the prevalence of male labour migration in several areas. Thus, sex roles changed and women found themselves forced to adapt to ways of life previously foreign to them.

### Strategies for Examining Images of Women and Oppression in African Film

African scholars have attempted to identify the various forms of women's oppression in African film. For instance, Bilal Fall, contends that African women are presently experiencing a double oppression: firstly, that of tradition where women are subordinate to men and secondly, that of modernism where women are reduced to sex objects. Fall's observation stems from a more general argument that African filmmakers are not solely concerned with entertaining the audience but are more interested in educating the audience. African cinema is therefore essentially a moralizing cinema where themes include glorification of traditional values, the critique of societal breakdown, the awakening of a collective consciousness, or the call to order of a corrupt political, religious or administrative elite. Fall goes further to argue that the glorification and subsequently the rehabilitation of traditional societal values is often the projected desire of the filmmakers, for films show characters adopting attitudes that filmmakers would like to see everyone in society adopt. For instance in *Emitai* (Sembene: Senegal: 1971) Sembene sees liberation from the French colonial army as possible through the village women's actions. Without consulting the men, the women decide to hide the sacred rice from the French. In fact, their resistance to the French, in spite of the guns pointed at them

opposes the men's submission to authority. In *Xala* (Sembene: Senegal: 1974), Rama, a young student defies tradition by standing up to her father and by giving advice to her mother in the face of a family crisis. In *Touki-bouki* (Diop-Mambety: Senegal: 1973), Anta is as free as her boyfriend Mory, and rejects all traditions leaving women to the mercy of men. In *Letter From My Village* (Faye: Senegal: 1975), Coumba braves village disapproval when she publicly fans and massages her fiancé. In *Bronze Bracelet*, (Aw: Senegal: 1974) the prostitute flees her village and forced marriage in order to live her own life. Fall considers these "projections" to be a deliberate desire on the part of the filmmakers to "promote" women in a society where they had no right to speak in public (1987: 149).

Fall's observation is extremely valuable as a starting point for examining images of women in African film. He concentrates, however, on the tradition/modernity polarity in order to explain the portrayal of African women's social status in film thus reducing the issue to one of male dominance and female dependence in both traditional and modern society. It would be too simplistic to explain African women's oppression solely on the basis of a thematic polarity. Andrew Tudor warns against reducing thematic concerns of a group of films to a set of polarities. While this method may be adequate in some contexts, the assumptions necessary to analyse all content in terms of polar opposites are far from safely established (1976:125). Instead, one must go further to examine other aspects of textual production and how these elements work to construct certain images of women. Historical, political and economic factors that may explain women's changing position in African society must also be taken into account. Furthermore, an awareness of the dangers of the constructed image and of regarding this image as a true reflection of society is paramount. Fall has already argued that women's actions in African film often reflect the projected wishes of the filmmakers. Christine Gledhill explains that "Before a proper mode of representation or aesthetic relation to the 'real' can be established, we have to have some idea of where the 'real' itself is located, and how, if at all, we can derive knowledge of it. At issue then is the status of 'lived experience', of phenomenal appearances, their relation to underlying structures, the determining role of 'signification' in the production of the real, and the place of 'consciousness' in this production" (1984:18-45). However, Gledhill also warns against defining images solely in terms of the cinematic production of meaning, thus losing the ability to deal with their relationship to women as defined in other social practices. Finally, an awareness of the dangers of appearing to generalize for Africa as a whole is fundamental to any study concerning the African continent. For instance, Western literary works often present the notion of African women as a homogenous category.

### **The Specificity of African Women Film Characters**

In African film, individual heroines are quite rare and when they are present they do not always dominate the action of the film. African directors tend to emphasize a collective heroism in their films, and heroines often depict the social group, cultural identity or collective consciousness. In order to emphasize this collective heroism,

filmmakers shoot their films in social space. With the exception of *Black Girl* (Sembene: Senegal: 1966), the audience rarely sees one woman occupying the screen by herself throughout the whole duration of a shot. Scenes of crowds, groups and families are predominant. It is hardly surprising therefore that long shots are frequently used in order to cover the social space. These shots narrate the story in African film. While the use of long shots is fairly frequent in this cinema, the use of medium shots, medium closeups and facial closeups is much less frequent, these shots being used almost exclusively for the purpose of description, especially during crowd scenes when the camera moves from one face to another. However, closeups of objects such as cooking utensils and agricultural tools are fairly frequent. Facial closeups rarely allow the spectator to penetrate the psychology of a character, share her inner emotions, or participate in the progression from her past to present state. Of course, this is logical since the action is rarely centred on the individual but it does take away from any potential identification the audience might have with the heroine.

What does set the heroine apart from other characters in African film? It is certainly not psychological features, since the infrequent use of closeups does not allow the penetration of a character's psychology. Appearance and costume also do not distinguish the heroine from the other characters. In *Black Girl*, Diouana is neither more beautiful nor dressed differently from the other women in Dakar. It is her behavior and her actions that distinguish the heroine. Diouana follows her dream of moving to France and becoming rich. Her failure to fulfill this dream and her subsequent death suggest that forsaking the social group in order to pursue individualistic goals is not beneficial in any way to the advancement of post-colonial African nations. *Mortu Nega* (Gomes: Guinea-Bissau: 1988) is the story of Diminga, a Guinean woman who among other women, fights for the liberty of her country. What sets her apart from the other women in the film is the fact that she considers political independence only part of the liberation struggle. Diminga continues to fight against economic and cultural dependence by supporting the literacy campaign and finding solutions for drought and crop failure. By reference to morals, virtue, tradition and the best interest of the group, the good and the bad are set apart. In this way, filmmakers seem to be condemning or praising certain female behavior or attitudes.

Why have filmmakers created a heroine who is almost always collective, rarely individual and not distinguishable from other female characters by her appearance or costume, but rather by her behavior?<sup>2</sup> A plausible explanation lies in the fact that in traditional African culture, the individual was insignificant in the face of the group. Originality or the expression of personal interest was not tolerated unless it was intended in the best interest of the social group. Africans spurned any type of deviance from the social group which would emphasize individualism rather than the cultural identity.

African film builds around antithetical images. In works of fiction, opposition is a practical way of differentiating between various characters and situations, the conflict between two characters or two situations generally causing a progression in

the narrative. African filmmakers employ polarities to such an extent that they mark almost every film. The tradition/modernism polarity necessarily implies the opposition of past and present, village and city. Thus, settings convey an immense amount of information. The village is portrayed as a sort of lost paradise, as the birthplace of tradition and ancestral glory. By contrast, the city is depicted as a place of change, as a place of new ways of thinking and living and as a place where individualism takes precedence over the group. Thus, settings convey an immense amount of information. They are not merely backdrops for the action, but symbolic extensions of the theme and characterization.

Interestingly enough, whether an African filmmaker is portraying a "traditional" woman or a "modern" woman, the use of long shots and social space tends to remain constant. It is through the use of settings, sound effects and language that filmmakers contrast these women. For instance, traditional village womens' homes and activities oppose those of modern women and a further polarity is created: poverty versus luxury. In the village, women generally live in huts or in a group of huts with a central courtyard and fireplace, cooking utensils, calabashes, mortars and pestles, etc. In African film, village scenes almost always include shots of at least one woman cooking. Fields are rarely shown without women labouring over rice, millet or sorghum crops. This is portrayed in films such as *Letter From My Village*, Fadjal (Faye: Senegal: 1979) and *Wend Kuuni* (Kabore: Burkina Faso: 1982).

Women occupying "modern space" live in the city. In the shanty towns and slums, the homes are small, crowded together and poorly constructed. In *Black Girl*, Diouana lives in the slums of Dakar before leaving for France and the promise of a more comfortable home. In films such as *Destiny* (Coulibaly: Mali: 1976) and *The Price of Liberty* (Dikongue-Pipa: Cameroon: 1978), the women live in luxurious homes with immense gardens.

Traditional and modern women are also contrasted through the constant use of antithetical auditory images. Sound effects produced by women in villages or traditional settings are contrasted with sound effects produced by "modern" women in the cities. In *Letter From My Village*, *Emitai*, *Tenga* (Ouedraogo: Burkina Faso: 1985) and *Wend Kuuni*, we see women working in fields. Long sequence shots portray groups of women, some with babies on their backs, breaking up the soil with hoes. As the hoes fall on the earth, they render dull thud-like noises at a rapid rhythm.

Sounds differ depending on the objects used. When women gather around the village well, we hear the scraping of iron pots on the cement walls of the well and the creaking of the pulley as the women draw the water. The audience rarely sees a well in sequences shot in the city. Most homes, save those in the slums, have water taps. Furthermore, crop labour is not done in the city. Here, women are often employed as secretaries in offices. Sound effects in these sequences include the banging of typewriters, the grating of filing cabinets, the clicking of high heels, etc.

Women's social status is often determined by their choice of language. While traditional women tend to speak their native tongue or a local language no matter where they are, modern women generally speak French wherever they are. Thus, use of the colonizing or the indigenous language exposes not only one's social status but also the co-existence of two linguistic spheres in post-colonial Africa. That setting, sound effects and language work to construct opposing images of women in African film is probably due to the fact that through colonialism women have been forced to adapt to urban life and a foreign language.

### Images of Women in Pre-Colonial Society

Fall claims that in traditional society women are subordinate to men but fails to point out, however, that in traditional society there is a potential balance in sex roles and women enjoy a measure of autonomy and power due to their child-bearing and food producing and distributing capacities.

In many traditional African societies, a woman's body was viewed "as an asset, as a sacred vessel carrying life, and as a source of strength and pride ... the woman is of intrinsic value in the ideology of many African societies and represents the ultimate value in life, namely the continuity of the group." Steady (1981: a: 32) Mothers never voluntarily interrupted their reproduction cycle since a family's wealth would depend on its number of children. Children ensure the continuity of the group, ensure essential labour and are a form of social security for parents when they grow old. To not provide for one's elderly parents is a recent, urban phenomenon.

Women without children are stigmatized in many African societies. Barren women are often thought to be witches and their sterility is punishment for past sins. In *Muna Moto*, (Dikongue-Pipa: Cameroon: 1975) Mbongo the rich landowner has three barren wives whom he refers to as "the witches". He takes the young and beautiful Ndome as his fourth wife even though she is already pregnant by another man. He prefers her fertility to his other wives' fidelity. Some of the more recent West African films depict women coping with problems of infertility. In *Yaaba* (Ouedraogo: Burkina Faso: 1988), the childless Sana is considered a witch and forced to live outside the village. The young twelve-year-old Bila braves public opinion by adopting *Sana* as his "yaaba" (Grandmother). *Sana's* role in society shifts from "witch" to the prestigious one of educator as she quietly demonstrates to Bila the virtues of patience and understanding. The importance placed on motherhood and fertility reflect the centrality of children in Africa. Women's status, however, is not solely determined on the basis of child-bearing capacities.

Women's sex roles and status in society based on their participation in production has been studied by Engels as early as 1891. More recent studies examine women's status and production. For instance, Steady claims that "central to this whole issue and to the recent studies of sex roles from various perspectives and paradigms is the attempt to arrive at an understanding of the sexual division of labour in its various economic, social, cultural and ideological dimensions. Taking into

account the complex conceptual problems surrounding the term 'egalitarianism' one can accept that, in general, there is a greater sexual egalitarianism in societies where gathering, hunting and horticulture are the main economic activities." (1981:b: 10-11)

African economy, before colonialism, was a subsistence economy. Africans produced the necessary food and clothing for their families. No one strove for profit in order to accumulate a fortune. Material requirements were reduced to the need to eat and to protect oneself and one's family from harsh climate and enemies.

In traditional societies, both male and female labour were necessary in food production. Women exerted a certain degree of control over their labour since the sexual division of labour was constructed along parallel rather than hierarchial lines. Equal value was assigned to male and female labour and women enjoyed decision-making power concerning their input to food production.

Baumann studies the sexual division of labour in what he terms "African Hoe Culture", where the hoe is used to work the land. According to Baumann, the men would clear the land whereas the women would plant and harvest the crops. Women would generally spend more time than men in the fields. (1928: 289-319) More contemporary studies of women's participation in production have been conducted by such researchers as J. Kaberry who writes that as wives, mothers and young girls, the women produce most of the foodstuffs and devote most of their time to agricultural work. In this domain they enjoy considerable independence and clearly defined rights.(1952:8) Steady affirms that women's labour output in subsistence farming in Africa far surpasses that of men. A United Nations Economic Commission for Africa study estimated that women comprise 60 to 80 percent of the labour force in African agriculture.(1981: c: 11)

Images of women are abundant in African films where agricultural work is depicted. In *Letter From My Village*, the narrative focusses on village life in Fadjal, Senegal. In a series of long shots and full shots both men and women prepare the soil for planting crops. Images of women in the fields outnumber those of men. Up at the crack of dawn, the women are bent over their hoes all day long. *Fadjal* is the continuation of *Letter From My Village's* portrayal of rural Senegal.<sup>3</sup> In this film, the women harvest and winnow the grain. They are in charge of growing rice whereas the men are in charge of growing peanuts and millet. While rice and millet are grown for village consumption, peanuts are grown for export. Since the men are in charge of the latter crop, they will reap the benefits. This would never have occurred in traditional society before colonialism. In *Letter From My Village*, the women denounce the single-crop farming policy. They complain that the abandonment of other crops such as millet and corn for the exclusive cultivation of peanuts is the root of all their present problems. This is entirely true, but the audience is never informed as to how and why this monoculture was introduced to Senegal. The film does not explain that during colonial expansion, the French encouraged peanut cultivation in

order to reap profits from its export back to France. The Senegalese peasant, formerly self-sufficient, was suddenly forced to participate in this new monetary-based economy in order to pay the taxes levied by the French.

The growth and processes of capitalist modes of production led to the decline of the traditional system of food production. The best land was seized for cash-crop production and in certain areas of Senegal, rice was deliberately imported so as to compete with local production. These capitalist processes had serious effects on women's roles in food production. Women's rights to land were reduced whereas their workload was increased. While most traditional African societies assumed that land was controlled by the group, European laws assumed that individual men in each family owned the land. The men sometimes sold the land they controlled for cash, and their wives, the actual farmers were left landless.

Gaston Kabore does not resist evoking the future confiscation of both men and women's land in *Wend Kuuni*. The film opens with the voice over, "At this epoch, the White man had not yet tread upon Mossi soil. The Mossi empire was at its grandest moment. Grain was abundant and wells and rivers overflowed. Peace and prosperity reigned in all the land!" Kabore paints a picture of life in a traditional Mossi village before colonialism. *Wend Kuuni*'s<sup>4</sup> adopted father is a weaver; his adopted mother and sister cultivate sorghum and *Wend Kuuni* tends the family's sheep. Men's and women's tasks are equally important in this family-based production unit. In Kabore's second feature *Zan Boko*, (Burkina Faso: 1988) the issue of confiscated land and space becomes much more urgent. Nopoko witnesses the disappearance of her rural lifestyle as her village is gradually absorbed by expanding city boundaries. She continues to encourage her husband Tinga, to neither exchange nor sell their land for that would mean turning their backs on their roots and their identity.

### Images of Women in Post-Colonial Society

The advent of colonialism and the monetization of African economy had disastrous effects on women's economic independence. Capitalism resulted in the reinforcement of patriarchal values and the hierarchization of labour. Different values were placed on male and female labour and contrary to subsistence economy, the production unit was based on the individual rather than the family. The new wage labour system introduced under capitalism favoured male labour over female labour. Thus, in many cases, the labour force in agricultural production was totally assumed by women. Female labour in agricultural production was necessary to capitalist development since it subsidized male labour and created greater capitalist accumulation for those who owned the means of production.

Money became the basis for all activity and individuals are now defined in terms of the accumulation and possession of material goods: homes, cars, clothes, objects of value, etc. Certain social values were transformed. For instance, the dowry's symbolic value was eventually eclipsed by its potential economic value. Cutrufelli

writes that in traditional marriage, bridewealth had no exchange value but served to sanction social order, "marriage goods are not for exchange; actually, by being moved one way or another, they sanction the control of one side over the offspring of a woman from the other side. It is not a matter of 'exchanging' women for dowry items: what is at issue in this circulating process is the offspring anticipated from a woman". Thus, marriage payments were an essential element of the social system. In modern society the woman has increasingly become a commodity, "the dowry used to represent the marriage deed, but in a colonial economy and under the pressure of a growing poverty, the girl's parents have found a way to ask for money, in fact for sums which have grown higher and higher, mostly too high for the youth to cope with." (1983:49-50) In *Pousse Pousse* (Kamwa: Cameroon: 1975), Rose's father won't allow her to marry Pousse Pousse before he pays a large dowry. The numerous gifts include bottles of whisky and banknotes. When Rose's father starts insinuating that he would like a car, the young couple marry without his knowing. In *Diankhab* (Johnson-Traore: Senegal: 1969), Maimouna's mother literally "sells" her daughter to the richest man desiring her hand in marriage. The voice over narration condemns her actions, "Mother, your heart has been bought. Five thousand francs (CFA), is that too little, too much? See what you represent?" (referring to Maimouna)

Steady writes that under capitalism "an unequal dual economic system inevitably develops which favours the modern urban sector at the expense of the traditional rural sector. Additionally, within the modern sector there exists formal and informal labour markets. The unemployed and recently arrived immigrants to the city become absorbed in the informal labour market and eke out a living as hawkers, domestics, prostitutes, etc." (1981: d: 13)) African film is rich in examples of women participating in the informal labour market. This labour market is more oppressive than the formal one since it not only exploits women but also marginalizes them.

In *Black Girl*, Diouana is a domestic worker for a French family in Antibes. In a series of flashbacks, we relive her past. A voice over commentary narrates Diouana's thoughts "it all started in Dakar. No one wanted a maid". The audience watches her making the rounds of all the European homes, to no avail. She eventually makes her way to the maids' square, an area of Dakar where all the unemployed domestic workers gather and wait for prospective employers to pass. The group of young women moves from one sidewalk to another, following the buildings' shadows. Finally, when "Madame" arrives, a dozen women rush toward this "providence". Madame examines the women as if she were choosing a vegetable at the market. She scrutinizes Diouana, utters the word "you" in her direction and turns to leave. Diouana follows. Upon returning home she dances for joy, announcing to everyone, "I'm working for Europeans!" She accompanies the family on holiday to France, dreaming of acquiring beautiful clothes and valuable objects. In Dakar her only task is to look after the couple's children. In Antibes, however, she realizes her bosses are exploiting her, forcing her to cook, clean and do the laundry. She never goes out. She knows absolutely no one in France and cannot speak the language. She

complains bitterly to herself, "I never came to France to clean. I came to look after the children, where are they?"

Closely linked with Diouana's economic exploitation is sexual exploitation in the form of sexual harassment. One of her bosses' dinner guests decides to kiss her on the cheek without first asking her, exclaiming "that's the first time I ever kissed a Black woman!" Diouana recoils but says nothing. The guest is amazed that she doesn't speak French. "She's like an animal!" In the eyes of the guest, Diouana is nothing more than a beast of burden. Her eventual breakdown and suicide death is the result of loneliness, lack of communication and her belief that she is nothing more than an object for her bosses. Diouana's "interior colonization" as an African woman is largely determined by the sexism and racism characteristic of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism.

Begging constitutes a second form of informal labour. In *Certificate of Poverty* (Bathily: Senegal: 1981), the heroine has no money to send her sick child to the hospital. She explains her case to several bureaucrats, "I live with my grandmother; we beg for a living." When a total stranger finally shows kindness toward her, the child is already dead. In *The Money Order*, (Sembene: Senegal: 1968) Ousmane Sembene denounces neocolonial societal organization through a woman beggar. The woman, who claims to have been pickpocketed stops Ibrahima (the protagonist) in the street and asks for money so she can return home to Yoff. Ibrahima gives her twenty-five francs (CFA). Hours later they meet again, only this time she is carrying a baby. Ibrahima is indignant but the woman denies ever having crossed his path, "Go your own way. I'm not what you think. I'm an honest woman." In his anger Ibrahima retorts that begging has become a profession.

The use of prostitution as a means of survival in depressed urban areas is portrayed in African film. In traditional African society the possibility of prostituting a woman's body for money rarely existed. Poverty and rural depopulation due to changing societal and economic structures often forces women to emigrate to urban areas where sometimes their only means of subsistence is prostitution. In *The Polygamous Wazzou* (Ganda: Niger: 1971), an attempt on Satou's life forces her to flee to Niamey where she becomes a prostitute. In *Destiny*, Fanta and her daughter Penda are forced to leave home when Penda becomes pregnant. They are refused shelter by other members of their extended family before ending up in the city of Mopti. As a last resort, Fanta prostitutes herself so that Penda and the baby will have something to eat. In *The Price of Liberty* the young women who emigrate to the city and become involved in prostitution soon realize that the "liberty" they were seeking has its price. Their pimps beat them and steal from them to the extent that the women are forced to ensure not only their economic and social survival, but their physical survival as well. Group solidarity and the knowledge of self-defence are important survival imperatives for these young women as well as for those involved in begging and domestic work.

These non-traditional roles did not exist in pre-colonial Africa since the extended family provided for all its members and especially those in difficulty.

### Conclusion

Through visual and auditory screen images, African film directors attempt to portray women's oppression in African society. An analysis of certain aspects of film structure reveals that while the same shots and space are used in the depiction of both traditional and modern women, settings, sound effects and language work to construct opposing images. The constant use of binary metaphors such as past/present and tradition/modernism portrays changes in women's lifestyles from pre-colonial societies to post-colonial society. While forms of change are clearly pointed out by filmmakers, mechanisms of change are not satisfactorily demonstrated. The audience is only made aware of the fact that a new system has replaced the old one. The films do not take into account the earlier period of African history when the French colonial administration transformed traditional African society by imposing new political and social structures. To an audience not well versed in colonial theory, African women's oppression seemingly stems from African male dominance.

The issue at stake, therefore, is not simply whether women are subordinate to, or oppressed by men in both traditional and modern society, but how colonial and neo-colonial social models divest African women of their traditional autonomy, power and decision-making, forcing them into non-traditional and often marginal and oppressed roles. African women's oppression reflects the injustice of an Africa dominated by Western cultural, economic and political systems.

### ENDNOTES

1. The Guinean, Mamadou Toure was the first African south of the Sahara to shoot a film. His twenty-three minute short entitled *Mouramani* examines the friendship between a man and his dog.
2. The same holds true for heroes.
3. *Letter From My Village* and *Fadjal* were shot by Safi Faye - the first woman director to have shot a feature-length film south of the Sahara. The other films discussed in this essay were shot by male directors. Although the issue of whether the portrayal of women in films made by women is different from films made by men is pertinent, it is not the focus of this paper.
4. Wend Kuuni means "gift of God" in the More language.

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