


FESTIVAL DE CANNES
SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE
HORS COMPÉTITION

MIN YE ...

« Tell me who you are »

a film by
Souleymane Cissé





FESTIVAL DE CANNES
SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE
HORS COMPÉTITION
Special Screenings

Les Films Cissé

present

MIN YE...

« *Tell me who you are* »

directed and written by

Souleymane Cissé

with

Assane Kouyaté

Sokona Gakou

Alou Sissoko

Official Screening **THURSDAY MAY 21 - 6.45 pm** - Salle 60th Anniv
Press screening Wednesday May 20 - 1.30 pm - Salle Bazin

The film crew will be in Cannes from May 20 to 23.

Mali - 2009 - running time : 2h00

Production

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SYNOPSIS

This is the story of a couple.

Above all else, this is also the tale of a passionate woman. A woman in love. A woman with a sense of pride who seeks to come to terms her solitude, her desires and her guilt.

The resulting contradictions are a mirror image of those of the Malian middle classes, existing within African society and all its traditions.

Issa, Nassoun, Abba and the other characters are a source of views, expectations and reactions which help her to move forward, which hold her back or which leave her hesitating, torn between two possible paths.

Just like her filmmaker husband Issa, she is inspired by her surrounding environment, by what she sees, what she hears and by what she makes all of this. Not for some film, but for her life.

VIEWPOINT

By combining a classic tale of adultery with the theme of polygamy, Souleymane Cissé compares the contemporary notion of "the couple" with certain ancient traditions, examining the conflict between a long-term marriage, changing feelings and sexual desire. He portrays aspects common to both Africa and to the West: women's desire for emancipation, emotional conflicts and the difficulties of male-female relationships. He also focuses on polygamy, a practice still prevalent in certain segments of African society, but one which is totally alien to European lifestyles and customs. Examined with a critical eye, in this film polygamy enters into direct conflict with the powerful personality of Mimi, a free and independent woman.

Min Yè... also surprises the viewer by sweeping aside the poverty-obsessed clichés of Africa and instead portraying a modern Mali, fully in tune with a changing world. The film's plot unfolds within the Malian middle classes, in the upmarket districts of Bamako, examining events in the lives of filmmakers, judges, women doctors or lawyers. Finally, the message and content of *Min Yè...* reminds us that Souleymane Cissé is an accomplished sensual and musical filmmaker, who marvellously captures the beauty of African villages, and the colours of the clothing and landscapes. An artist who takes the time to observe life, offering us a film accompanied by some superb African songs combined with haunting music.

Serge Kaganski

An interview with Souleymane Cissé

What were your goals when preparing the *Min Yè...* project? Which aspects and themes were you keen to talk about and to get across?

Souleymane Cissé - Originally, I had in mind a television series, considering the length of time since my last full-length film (*Waati*, 1995), and the sheer workload in making a film. I was planning on a short television film, which would be easy to make. I wrote the initial outline covering a page and a half, and contacted colleagues in the cinema world to organise the initial trials. As I was viewing these first images, I said to myself that this is the story of a couple, a subject relevant to everyone and anyone. Naturally, polygamy is firmly rooted in African culture. It's a very specific phenomenon here, but it also exists in a hidden form in other countries, in other ways. In short, we're talking about the relationship between men and women, and this is something likely to be of interest to all men and women.

The film deals with the themes of jealousy, deceit, and lies. All universal themes

In Mali, everyone takes you into their confidence and shares their secrets. But then they go on to share them with others, and the others recount them in turn to others and a whole chain reaction ensues. This is just part of daily life. Everyone lies. No one tells the truth, and everyone is competing in a kind of social game never knowing the final outcome. The challenge is how to portray this "game of treachery" in such a way that the viewer identifies with it. The relationships between members of a couple appeared to me to be the best place to start. After having written the plot in the space of three weeks, I set about contacting the actors. For the main role of Mimi I cast a Malian television announcer who I had already used previously for *Yeelen*. Then filming got underway. I found myself with kilometres and kilometres of footage. We set about editing small sequences to examine the results, and I was more convinced than ever that we needed to focus on intra-couple relationships.

And you finally abandoned the idea of a TV series in favour of a full-length film?

I hope you'll pardon the expression, but made-for-TV films are a little like paper towels which we throw away and soon forget. So finally we opted for a full-length film and set the whole process in motion.

By dealing with the theme of the couple, you broke free of a number of clichés where Africa and the African cinema are concerned, and moved closer to a sizeable chunk of the world's cinema.

Relationships between men and women will always have their place on screen as this is a tireless subject. Over and above this theme however, Mali is a society in which people always tend to believe that they are doomed and that there is no way out. A whole tissue of lies has spread throughout the country's organisational structure, and has even penetrated family life and the private lives of every individual. The population experiences this state of lies as a permanent feature of daily life. In a relationship between a man and a woman, it's hard to know who is cheating on whom, who's lying and who's telling the truth. This uncertainty reaches up into the upper echelons of society. In a typical Malian family you will always find this insidious form of lying, which is eating away at society as a whole. This can even extend to some pretty awful crimes, although I didn't want to portray such crimes in *Min Yè...* I preferred to remain "neutral", to consider the problem in as open a manner as possible for the viewer.



***Min Yè...* is a tale which unfolds in Malian middle-class society. The main characters are doctors, lawyers and filmmakers. Isn't this something of a novelty for the African cinema?**

Indeed, we decided to show the daily life of the modern Malian middle classes. The goal is to help people understand. Why do we play these dishonest little games? How did such a situation come about? Some of the best educated people in Malian society are also the most polygamous. Polygamy doubtlessly existed back in primitive times too, and human society probably began that way. At some stage in history, certain societies abandoned this tradition, as in the Western world. But Africa has not succeeded in shaking it off. The moment arrives when it becomes necessary to raise the issue and discuss it. Those who have been to university, and who have learned and understood a number of things nevertheless continue the practice of polygamy, even more so than the lower classes. The underlying goal of this film is to start a debate, not only about polygamy, but also about the role of African "elites". The African peoples believe that the ruling classes of their countries will bring them greater freedom. But how can society move forward if these very rulers cling onto ancient practices? *Min Yè...* explores these contradictions. Since independence, no laws have been passed to improve the situation where polygamy is concerned, which has economic consequences. If we want to fight poverty, we need to begin with polygamy. It certainly won't solve the problem totally but at least it's a first step.

Is polygamy linked to religion?

Not at all. It existed before religion. When the religions arrived in Africa, they found that polygamy was already here, and a number of them simply continued this tradition. Catholicism outlawed polygamy. Despite this I know African Catholics who are polygamous. I can't explain it, but this nevertheless shows that it's a tradition which is not directly linked to religion. There are also men in Mali who do not claim to be polygamous but who nevertheless have mistresses and sometimes spend more time with them than they do in their own homes. Our society has gone through so many lies that very often we are no longer aware of the causes and consequences. That's what makes this issue so interesting.

By placing *Min Yè...* in a bourgeois middle-class environment and not in a village, aren't you directly answering Nicolas Sarkozy's claim that the Africans have been sidelined by history, even if this was not the original goal of the film?

Throughout the world, some people are clearly insufficiently informed about other parts of the world. Some believe that they hold all of the world's culture. The time will come when we will be able to present the largely unknown history of these parts of the world, which have less power. If the culture of a given people has not reached us, then that's not our fault. Africa is here, it's a real, solid continent which has evolved, which has moved from primitive civilisation to the modern era, passing via the age of the Pharaohs on the way. It is the responsibility of the Africans to reveal and publicise this long hidden civilisation. That people may make such speeches in Dakar's prestigious university which bears the name of Cheick Anta Diop without everyone getting up and walking out is something which concerns me immensely. With films, the challenge is not to simply answer this type of political statement with more political statements. What's important is to highlight it and demonstrate it. That's what I have tried to do with *Min Yè...* In my other films, in this world everyone has their own destiny, their own story and their own worldview, but they don't denigrate others in the belief that they are masters of the world. Ten years ago, it would have been difficult to imagine something like the Obama phenomenon. Things are certainly set to change. I don't want to see these words generating fresh conflicts. I'm a man of culture, strongly attached to our human roots... without distinction. Consequently, it is our duty to help those who are lagging behind to catch up.

Your editing style is long. This is a film which "breathes", contrasting with the fast pace often dominating the world of pictures today.

Each story sets its own pace. In the past, I made films of a different kind. In *Min Yè...* I was keen to penetrate the inner world of the characters. A fast pace just wouldn't have done the trick. We preferred to allow time to weave its magic, enabling the viewer to appreciate, to be moved by, and to really get a feel for the plot. This film is different from those that I have made before. It's modern and concerns the modern day. Even Africans tend to have clichés in the African cinema, often convinced that we are limited to making "village films". I wanted to show viewers a film fully in step with modern Malian society. And this film states clearly that Malian society must change.

The music is beautiful, and plays an important part in the film

The production is a unified whole. When I write, I already have the sounds in mind to create the right atmosphere. The next step was to check that they music really worked with the scenes and the editing. I had asked a number of major composers for music, but the results simply didn't work. I then looked instead to existing music, if only to experience the real flavour of Bamako: Oumou Sangaré, Rokia Traoré, Ali Farka Touré, Vieux Farka Touré, David Reyes, Bassekou Kouyaté, the Cissé brothers, and the Mali Instrumental Ensemble, etc. Their music corresponded to the image that I was seeking. We also had to call in young composers to write the music for certain sequences.

There are some excellent tree shots at the start and end of the film.

A world without trees would be a very difficult world indeed. Where there are trees there are roots. Where there are roots there are lives and hope. The tree also represents the spirit of the male character. This filmmaker is a man all alone, although he has two wives.



How would you describe the situation of the African cinema today?

With a sense of sadness. Naturally, we should never lose hope, but we have now spent decades, and devoted our lives, fighting for this cinema to exist. Unfortunately though, we African filmmakers do not have the legitimacy that comes with power. We have no political influence, the sort of influence which would have people stating clearly that these filmmakers exist and must make films. In France for example, filmmakers successfully exist even if the institutions or authorities do not agree with them politically. In my country, Mali, we do not have the benefit of such a situation. This non-recognition has existed for decades. In that respect the democratic revolution has changed nothing, which is a great pity. Until we take account of what has already been done, it will be difficult to move forward. Nevertheless, those who do not believe in the film industry watch the pictures, which penetrate the intimacy of their own homes. When Mali became independent, we were told that the cinema is a luxury. When you spend years of your life studying for this profession and they then tell you that it's a luxury, it can be very hurtful. If a culture is seen as a luxury for a country, the country has no reason to exist. This struggle, which we have waged for years now, has still not been fully resolved. Despite this, the new government is made up of university graduates. Which then raises the following question: are they there to manage or to pass on what they learned at university and to take society forward? This is what has happened in America with Obama. It's a real revolution. A peaceful revolution. I hope that this event will help our country to become more mature and to embrace change without violence. The mind and spirit must always take priority.

Souleymane Cissé

Director/ Scriptwriter / Producer

Souleymane Cissé's career is certainly impressive. He was only 7 when he began to develop an interest in the cinema. After completing his secondary education in Dakar, he returned to Mali in 1960, when the country became independent. It was at that moment that he suddenly realised, during the screening of the documentary on the arrest of Lumumba, that he wanted to make films. He won a scholarship and headed from Moscow where he worked as a projectionist and later a filmmaker.

In 1970, he was employed as a cameraman by the Malian Ministry of Information. Two years later, he produced *Cinq jours d'une vie*, which scooped awards at the Carthage Festival. His first full length film *Den Muso (The Girl)*, successfully completed thanks to French cooperation, told the story of a young dumb girl raped and rejected by her family. It was banned in Mali and earned Souleymane Cissé a jail sentence.

He produced other films which were better received, including *Baara (Work)*, and *Finyé (Wind)*, both of which scooped the *Etalon de Yenenga* at Fespaco. However, it was *Yeelen (The Light)*, which was awarded a jury prize at Cannes in 1987, that finally brought him to the attention of the general public.

As a politically committed filmmaker, Souleymane Cissé is also the president of the Union of West African Cinema and Audiovisual Designers and Entrepreneurs (UCECAO), an organisation which partially owes its existence to him. His work resulted in him being granted the title of Commander of the National Order of Mali by President Amadou Toumani Touré on 1st January 2006.

His new film, *Min Yè...* is being presented as part of the official selection for the 62nd Cannes Festival in 2009.

Filmography

1975	Den Muso (The Young Girl)
1977	Baara (Work)
1981	Finyè (Wind)
1987	Yeelen (Light)
1995	Waati (Time)
2009	Min Yè... (Tell me who you are)



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Assane Kouyaté

Issam (The Husband)

Assane Kouyaté was born in Bamako in 1954. In 1976, he gained his postgraduate diploma in Modern Humanities from Bamako's *École Normale Supérieure* and went on to study at the Moscow Cinema and Television Institute where in 1989 he gained a diploma in advanced cinema studies.

In 1988, he worked with the Russian director Sergei Salaviov as second assistant on the film "The Pigeon". He has worked with various directors including the Argentinean director Pablo César on the film "Aphrodite" in 1998.

In 2001, he produced his first full-length film "*Kabala*" which told the story of a Mandé village faced with the threat of its well drying up. This film, which was presented at Critics Week in Cannes, received a prize for the best screenplay and the jury's special prize at FESPACO (the Pan African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou) in 2003.



Sokona Gakou

Mimi

Charming and elegant, Sokona Gakou is today a presenter and journalist for African television. She has presented the flagship programme "Grand Sumu" on Africable from its early beginnings.

Half Senegalese (on her mother's side) and with a Malian father, she spent a large part of her childhood at Banamba.

She worked in Senegal for six years. After obtaining a Masters degree in English at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* she began her career as a secondary school teacher. Purely by chance, she quickly found her way into television where she became an announcer for the ORTM, successfully presenting the "Samedi Loisirs" programme.

She has also worked for *Radio Télévision Sénégalaise* (RTS) presenting a cultural programme: *Esquisse et Création*.

She went on to create the programme "*Tempo Africa*" which enjoyed a great deal of success, taking the form of a sort of "snapshot" of artists, interspersed with musical sequences. She then launched "*Grand Sumu*" on Africable, which also proved to be a big hit.

Min Yè... marks her first appearance on the big screen, in this film directed by Souleymane Cissé.

Alou Sissoko

Abba (Mimi's lover)

Alou Sissoko was born on October 10, 1961 in Bamako, (Mali). After his studies, he worked as a journalist, cameraman and photographer.

In 1998, he was given the main role in Mali's first major TV series, *Walaha*. He has since featured in several full-length and short films including *Fantan ni mone* (2000), *Bikow* (2002), *Sidigamie* (2004), *Kabala* (2005), *Siby* (2005), *Configuration* (2006), *Ba Djene* (2007), *Commissaire Balla* (2007), and *Min Ye* (2007).

He has also participated in several TV adverts.



CAST

Issa (Mimi's Husband)	Assane Kouyaté
Mimi	Sokona Gakou
Abba (Mimi's lover)	Alou Sissoko

CREW

Director	Souleymane Cissé
Screenplay	Souleymane Cissé
Producer	Souleymane Cissé
Chief cameramen	Fabien la Motte Xavier Arias Thomas Robin Amaury Agier Aurel Nicolas Mercier Youssouf Cissé
Audio Engineer	Idrissa Joseph Traoré
Editors	Andrée Davanture Youssouf Cissé Barbara Bossuet Marie Estelle Dieterle
Sound Mixer	Joël Rangon
Original soundtrack with the N'goni by	David Reyes Mamah Diabaté
Managers	Drissa Gakou Kibily Demba Sissoko Abdoulaye Djiguiba Abdoulaye Cissé
Assistants director	Alou Konaté Mamadou K. Cissé
Costumes	Sokona Gakou
Production Designer	Bakary Ouattara
Script	Fatoumata Traoré
Make-up	Aïssata dite hadja Sarr
Production	filimu Sisé/Les films Cissé