



My Eyes Will Send a Light to You:
African Cinema Icon to Narrative

Virtual Film Series

FEBRUARY 13-28, 2024

Description:

As part of Afrikan Heritage Month 2024, the Department of Ethnic and Race Studies will again collaborate with Randolph Library and BMCC Media Center to present an online virtual film series that explore the production of cinema by African filmmakers.

My Eyes Will Send a Light to You: African Cinema Icon to Narrative will offer an overview of the development of postcolonial African cinema to highlight the variations in content and themes that reflect the socio-cultural and political environments of the African within the Continent and its inhabitants beyond the continental borders.

African Cinema in the 1960s emerged in the era of Africa's decolonization, and its accessible technologies were later taken up by many artists. It is a medium of relative historical recentness and today favored by artists operative in global contemporary networks. A major development in African Cinema is now labeled as third cinema movement in Africa known as "The Third Cinema". This movement called for a politicized film-making practice in Africa, Asia and Latin America, since its first appearance during the 60s and 70s, taking on board issues of race, class, religion and national integrity.

There has developed a vast and growing interest in the history and literature on African cinema. This project seeks to explore how African filmmakers using the theme of Africa have specifically employed the languages enabled by cinema, such as montage, the loop, repetition and duration, to critique Africa's both the distant and more recent pasts.

Contemporary African filmmaker led artists to rework historical documents through film to elucidate local experiences and to contest old and clichéd assumptions with something previously unthought-of, unheard or unseen. These practices raise questions as to who owns history and how historical documents can be performed within the distinct needs and expectations of the present. They work through histories of colonialism, decolonization and nation-building projects. Simultaneously, African Filmmaking has stepped in to address feminist histories, questions of labor, race and class, as well as transregional alliances and other intersections.

Drawn from practices that are touched by new mediums video art and cinematic possibilities recent works related to Africa consider community and social fabric, feminist histories, diasporic subjectivity, geopolitical and environmental forces, performativity, and power issues. Over the past three decades, African Cinema has increasingly become an accepted genre of visual expression in the field of contemporary African art and also as a veritable form of visual culture.

Some of the themes addressed in the films will include:

Africa as a site of colonial extraction and exploitation. Filmmakers' reflections on race and historical memory in Africa. The consequences of crises, human rights violations, conflicts, and wars beyond Africa and the global world.

My Eyes Will Send a Light to You: Africa Cinema Icon to Narrative

THE FILM SERIES

FEBRUARY 13: NOON-6PM

Join Zoom VIEWING:

<https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/81568721271?pwd=WjIBa3RzV2k1akRRY1IPdUJFWGkvZz09>

Meeting ID: 815 6872 1271

Passcode: 203812

HYENAS 1992, Director: Djibrili Diop Mambety: Switzerland, France, Senegal, 1hr: 50Mins.

In *Hyenas*, Djibril Diop Mambéty adapted a timeless parable about human greed into a biting satire about how Africa has betrayed the hopes of independence for the false promises of Western materialism, brilliantly combining two seemingly unrelated stories. Years ago, in Dakar's port district, a mysterious prostitute, Linguère Ramatou, appeared for a few years and, just as suddenly, disappeared. Mambéty imagined a history for this enigmatic figure as a beautiful young woman abandoned by her lover for a wealthier wife and driven away by the small-minded villagers of Colobane when they discover she is pregnant. Mambéty imagined an ending for the story when he saw Ingrid Bergman in Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *The Visit*. Now an old woman, "as rich as the World Bank," Linguère returns to her village and bribes the avaricious inhabitants to kill her former lover. Mambéty's satire reveals the implacable logic of the marketplace—the reign of the hyena.

Mambety's avant-garde realistic film captures the real heart and soul of the human social and economic blood thirst for money, when stopping to think about the different animal symbols in this film like the hyena, vulture, and yes even the monkey; you can't help feeling ashamed to be part of the big machine, we call progress. then again is that not what human nature, or the nature of animals is all about? Survival of the fittest. Mambety not only nails the human viciousness and easily influenced character on the

head, but he slaps you in the face with our greed. A real plus to this movie is the musical language of Wolof.

THE LAW (TILAI) 1990 Director: Idrissa Quedraogo Burkina Faso, 1hr: 21Mins

One of the most celebrated films from Africa, this troubling drama follows a young African man who is engaged to the woman he loves until the man's father decides that he should marry this woman himself. This fateful decision forces the young lovers into an illicit affair. On the run, they find tradition and the law will play a large role in their fate.

Set in a pre-colonial African past, *Tilai* is about an illicit love affair and its consequences. Saga returns to his village after an extended absence to discover that his father has taken Nogma, Saga's promised bride, for himself. Still in love with each other, the two begin an affair, although it would be considered incestuous. When the liaison is discovered, Saga's brother, Koudri, pretends to kill Saga for the honor of the family and village. Saga and Nogma flee to another village, but when Nogma's birth mother dies, he returns home. Having brought ruin on the family

Tilai (The Law),” a film by the Burkinabé director Idrissa Ouedraogo, from 1990— “*Tilai*” is a masterwork that has long been hard to find. The film by Ouedraogo is an exemplary literary film.

It's something of a modern, West African version of a Greek tragedy, made in villages in Burkina Faso but set in an indeterminate, mythic past that offers some of the trappings of the modern world but not others (such as electricity and automobiles) while also hinting at a clash in mores provoked by the impingement of modernity. Saga (Rasmané Ouédraogo), a youngish man whose youth seems behind him, returns to his village after an unexplained two-year absence and is greeted by his brother, Kougri (Assane Ouedraogo), who informs him that, while he was away, Nogma (Ina Cissé), the woman who was going to marry Saga, has in fact married their elderly father, Nomenaba (Seydou Ouédraogo). In short, Saga's former fiancée has become the brothers' mother.

The notion of maternity is, here, a legal one. Mossi society, as depicted, is polygamous. Nomenaba is also married to the two brothers' biological mother, Koudpoko (Mariam Ouedraogo), who sees the situation clearly, and whose very inaction is an eloquently determined action: she tells Kougri that Saga is once again leaving home, unbeknownst to their father. Kougri is caught in the middle—his loyalty to his brother and piety toward his father are in conflict. The conflict is exacerbated all the more keenly when Nogma defies the law and slips off (claiming to see an aunt in another village) to stay overnight with Saga in his hut. In effect, they haven't only committed adultery but also incest, and, when their relations are discovered, both families are dishonored. Nogma's father commits suicide and Nomenaba exercises his right to order the killing of Saga—and the designated executioner is Kougri.

Ouedraogo, filming in his native Sahel region of Burkina Faso and working with amateur actors (whose performances are nonetheless compactly expressive, subtly varied, and dramatically urgent), writes sharply etched texts (judging from subtitles) that don't require much declamation but that expound the drama—and, just as important, its emotional underpinnings—both clearly and decisively. (The score, by the jazz musician Abdullah Ibrahim, reinforces the dramatic blend of modernity and tradition.) Nogma's marriage was forced upon her by her father, no less than the punishment of Saga is ordered by his father. The subject of the film is the most literal form of patriarchy, in which fathers' decrees are law and in which law primarily embodies the interests of fathers. The unnatural graft of unjust authority into village life is suggested in the remark of one village woman to a girl, commenting on Nogma's forced marriage to Nomenaba: "Nogma will come to love him as I came to love your father." But Saga's audacious defiance of paternal authority is matched by Koudpoko's quiet complicity, a complicity of silence that nonetheless finds a drolly dramatic counterpart in a brief scene in which Nogma closes her door to Nomenaba, who then heads to Koudpoko's hut, which he finds equally barred.

Ouedraogo (who studied filmmaking in the Soviet Union and France) films the villages' architecture and their natural settings with love and anguish. He turns low walls and open doors into virtual frames within frames, and extracts drama from the varied landscape of hills and plains, with its expanses and vistas, its Sophoclean crossroads and the mortally decisive encounters that arise there. The theatrical rhetoric that the filmmaker underplays in speech bursts into his images, which are as poised and majestic as they are starkly analytical. It's as if his wide-ranging views of the region were virtually crisscrossed by the sharp and implacable lines of the law. He's also as deft with intimate action as he is with long-range compositions; he films a scene of violence, at a moment of crisis, in a single shot of brisk restraint that fuses banality and grandeur, the physical and the mythic, the profane and the sacred, with a sense of awe and horror that's the very essence of the tragic dimension.

CLANDO, 1996 Director Jean Marie Teno: Cameron 1hr: 38 Mins. (

Proud and determined, the hunter set out, leaving behind his village ravaged by a terrible drought. All the villagers came out to wish him well, and everyone gave what he could: an egg, a handful of peanuts or a few kola nuts... As in the folktale, Sobgui, a former computer programmer who now drives a "clando" cab in Douala, flees to Europe to escape a life in Cameroon which has become unbearable. In Cologne (Germany), Sobgui joins a community of African emigrants. Most are hard-working and ambitious people. Sobgui begins a love affair with Madeleine, a German political activist who encourages Sobgui and his friends to return home and fight for change.

FEBRUARY 20: NOON-6PM

Join Zoom VIEWING

<https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/87415701511?pwd=bms0WWZIMjkybEt0SIZ5djVvVXBpUT09>

Meeting ID: 874 1570 1511

Passcode: 201998

LEGEND OF THE UNDERGROUND 2021 Director: Nneka Onuorah Nigeria 1hr: 26 Mins.

Exposing the punitive laws in Nigeria that have put an already beleaguered community at increased risk of extortion and violence, this documentary follows a group of a young non-conforming Nigerians who have created safe houses in Lagos and Harlem. The film toggles between the two cities as daily threats endanger the health and safety of a community united across continents.

Following Nneka Onuorah's impactful feature documentary debut *The Same Difference*, she joins forces with co-director Giselle Bailey to uncover rampant discrimination in Nigeria and explores the lives of several charismatic non-conformist youth who must choose either to fight for freedom of expression there or flee to live 'free' in the USA. Through social media, celebrity and bold creativity, they spark a cultural revolution that challenges the ideals of gender, conformity and civil rights in Nigeria.

Executive produced by John Legend, Mike Jackson, and Ty Stiklorius, *The Legend of the Underground* is a timely and critical look at a vibrant and resilient community that continues to fight state-endorsed discrimination in Nigeria while celebrating who they are

ATLANTICS 2019 Director: Mati Diop Senegal 1hr: 40Mins.

In a popular suburb of Dakar, workers on the construction site of a futuristic tower, without pay for months, decide to leave the country by the ocean for a better future. Among them is Souleiman, the lover of Ada, promised to another.

The film is centered on a young woman, Ada, and her partner, Souleiman, struggling in the face of employment, class, migration, crime, family struggles, and ghosts. Working mostly with unknown actors, Diop focused in the film on issues such as the refugee crisis, remorse, loss, grief, class struggle, and taking responsibility (or not) for one's actions. The Atlantic Ocean is used in many ways throughout the film, including as a symbol and as an engine for change, growth, life, and death.

In a suburb of Dakar that lies along the Atlantic coast, a futuristic-looking tower is about to be officially opened. The construction workers have not been paid for months. One night, the workers decide to leave the country by sea, in search of a brighter future in Spain. Among them is Souleiman, the lover of Ada. However, Ada is betrothed to another man – the wealthy Omar. Ada is deeply worried about Souleiman, as she waits for news of his fate in the run-up to her wedding. On her wedding day, Omar's bed mysteriously catches fire in a suspected arson attack, and a young detective is assigned to investigate the case.

In the coming days, Ada falls under suspicion and is subjected to interrogations and a virginity test. Meanwhile, her friend Fanta and the young detective are both suffering from a mysterious illness. It slowly emerges that the spirits of the men lost at sea have returned and each night take possession of the bodies of other inhabitants of Dakar. Most of these spirits are focused on the tycoon whose withholding of their pay had forced them to go across the Atlantic. They demand their pay, threatening to burn the tower down otherwise. Once they receive their pay from the tycoon, the possessed force him to dig their graves so that their spirits may rest. But Souleiman wants only to be with Ada. Unfortunately, he has possessed the young detective, which initially scares Ada. But as she meets the other spirits, including one who possesses Fanta, she comes to understand them and spends a last night with the new Souleiman. While reviewing footage from the wedding, the detective sees that he, under the possession of Souleiman's spirit, was the one who committed the arson. He closes the case.

SOLEIL O 1970 Director: Med Hondo French-Mauritania 1hr: 38 Mins.

It depicts, with sardonic fury, the adventures of an unnamed young African man (Robert Liensol) who arrives in Paris and, with naïve optimism, seeks his fortune among his colonizers. He considers himself at home in France, but soon discovers the extent of his exclusion from French society. Facing blatant discrimination in employment and housing, he and other African workers organize a union, to little effect; seeking help from African officials in Paris, he finds them utterly corrupt and unsympathetic. Making friends among France's white population, he finds their empathy condescending and oblivious, and his sense of isolation and persecution raises his identity crisis to a frenzied pitch. Hondo offers a stylistic collage to reflect the protagonist's extremes of experience, from docudrama and musical numbers to slapstick absurdity, from dream sequences and bourgeois melodrama to political analyses. Hondo's passionate, wide-ranging voice-over commentary, addressing the hero in the second person,

blends confession and observation, aspiration and despair, societal and personal conflicts

Mauritanian director Med Hondo's debut is a bitterly funny, stylistically explosive attack on Western capitalism and its legacy of colonialism. Laced with deadly irony and righteous anger, **Soleil Ô** follows a starry-eyed immigrant as he leaves West Africa for Paris in search of a job and cultural enrichment, but soon discovers a hostile society in which his very presence elicits fear and resentment.

Drawing on the freewheeling stylistic experimentation of the French New Wave, Hondo deploys a dizzying array of narrative and stylistic techniques—animation, docudrama, dream sequences, musical numbers, folklore, slapstick comedy, agitprop—to create a revolutionary landmark of political cinema and a shattering vision of awakening black consciousness.

“When I wrote my script I did not have an audience in mind. I was living in France and experiencing what being a minority felt like. I had to yell and free myself. Writing the script of **Soleil Ô** was an authentic act of rage and liberation.” (Med Hondo)

“**Soleil Ô** resembles a manifesto, scrappily shot across four years and suffused with a political indignation that, despite the film's historical specificity, still feels urgent today.

FEBRUARY 22: NOON-6PM

Join Zoom VIEWING

<https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/87417521165?pwd=bHZOeExxcTJ4TWZlZzV3eitxU2NmQT09>

Meeting ID: 874 1752 1165

Passcode: 375554

KUKURANTUMI: ROAD TO ACCRA, 1983 Director: King Ampaw Ghana 1hr.:17Mins

In this revealing African comedy-drama that contrasts the hectic life in Accra, the capital of Ghana, with the relative peace of Kukurantumi, a rural town, a truck driver makes runs between the two locations with few problems until he is forced to replace his truck. In order to raise the money to get a new vehicle, he sells some stolen watches and promises his daughter in marriage to a rich merchant. Rebellious against this fate, the

daughter runs off to Accra with her boyfriend -- but then nothing turns out quite like she had planned, and the rich merchant looks better with each passing day.

CEDDO, 1977 Director: Ousmane Sembene Senegal, 2hrs.

In protest of forced conversion to Islam, the Ceddo (outsiders) kidnap King Demba War's daughter Princess Dior Yacine and hold her hostage.

Set in the seventeenth century, at the onset of enslavement trade, *Ceddo* unravels the complex religious and social forces at work in a Senegalese village. According to Sembene, "Ceddo was the name given to the last holders of African spiritualism before it became tinged with Islam or Christianity." When the villagers ("Ceddo") are introduced, their traditional religion is being threatened not only by the presence of the white trader and the missionary, but also by the influence gained by the Islamic leader (Imam) on the king. Princess Dior Yacine is kidnapped to force the king to take action against the Imam. The ending has the unexpected beauty of a Greek tragedy, with the Princess proudly reassuring her rights as a woman and as an African.

QUILOMBO 1984 Director: Carlos Diegues Brazil, 1hr: 54Mins

Palmares was a 17th-century quilombo, a settlement of escaped slaves in the mountains of northeast Brazil. The story follows a group of plantation slaves, among them Abiola (Tony Tornado), who revolt in 1650 during the Dutch-Portuguese War (1601-1661) and escape to the mountains and the city of Palmares, where they join other former slaves who have already been living there peacefully and autonomously. On arrival, Abiola suggests that Palmares trade with a friendly squatter. The leader of Palmares, Acotirene (Alaide Santos), disagrees, but realizes that she is getting old and times are changing. After consulting a divination tray, she anoints Abiola the new leader and renames him Ganga Zumba and places him under the protection of Xango, who manifests himself through Ganga Zumba in trance. Ganga Zumba goes on to become a legendary king (see Diegues' film "Ganga" about the life of this character in particular). Ganga Zumba and his people keep Palmares safe for years.

The film introduces other important characters, among them Zumbi (Antonio Pompeu), who was born free in Palmares but was captured as a child and lived as a slave for fifteen years, and Ana de Ferro (Vera Fischer), a white woman who chooses to live in Palmares because she had been branded a Dutch collaborator as she had been a prostitute in Dutch-controlled Recife. Zumbi becomes chief warrior of Palmares and leads successful raids but refuses to take Recife, since to hold it would require enslaving the white population. Ana rises to become an advisor to Ganga Zumba. When the Dutch-Portuguese War ends, Ganga Zumba is persuaded by the Portuguese to leave the mountains to live on a reservation in the Cocaú Valley in exchange for peace. Many of the villages and towns of Palmares disagree with this change and choose to

remain in the mountains. In the Cocaú Valley, Ganga Zumba is poisoned and killed.

The warrior Zumbi emerges as the leader of a new generation at Palmares. Zumbi, unlike Ganga Zumba, demands freedom and independence and refuses to compromise with the Portuguese. Intermittent warfare exists until 1694, when the Portuguese send a decisive force under Domingos Jorge Velho (Maurício do Valle) against Palmares. The quilombo is once again attacked and this time taken by the Portuguese, with most of its inhabitants brutally murdered or enslaved (though the film manages to represent these events without victimizing the people). Although, the movie ends on a low point depicting the death of Zumbi and the destruction of the principal settlement of Palmares, a title card at the end explains that the people of Palmares continued to resist the Portuguese until at least 1797. The film insists that Palmares must continue to live on through memory and by keeping alive the traditions of its people.

FEBRUARY 26: NOON-6PM

Join Zoom VIEWING

<https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/87417521165?pwd=bHZOeExxcTJ4TWZlZzV3eitxU2NmQT09>

Meeting ID: 874 1752 1165

Passcode: 375554

NIGHT OF TRUTH, 2004 Director: Fanta Regina Nacro Burkina Faso France, 1hr: 40Mins.

The first full-length film by director Fanta Régina Nacro. Set in a fictional West-African country, this film tells the story of the night of reconciliation between two ethnic groups, the Nayak and the Bonandés. After ten years of war and much bloodshed, Théo, leader of the Bonandés, invites the Nayak president to come and make peace. However, things do not go as smoothly as planned. The film is in French and Dioula

GRIGRIS 2013: Director: Mahamat-Saleh Haroun. France/Chad 1hr: 40 Mins

Souleymane, 25, dreams of being a dancer in spite of having a paralyzed leg. At nightclubs, he transforms into the beloved dancer Grigris, impressing people with his moves. However, when his stepfather falls seriously ill, Souleymane desperately needs money and decides to work for petrol smugglers.

LUCKY 2011, Director: Avie Luthra South Africa 1hr: 40Mins

Lucky (2011/IV) written and directed by Avie Luthra, is a difficult--but excellent--film from South Africa. Sihle Dlamini plays Lucky, a ten-year-old boy who is forced by grim circumstances to leave his village and travel to the city. Life was hard in the country, but life in the city is harder. The only relative Lucky has is his uncle, who barely tolerates him. Lucky wants to go to school, recognizing this is the only path out of poverty and despair. His uncle has other priorities. Lucky's only ally is an older Indian woman, Padma, played by Jayashree Basavaraj.

Special Viewing

FEBRUARY 27, 2024 NOON - 4PM

Horace Brockington is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: FEBRUARY 27 TUESDAY FILM SERIES

Time: Feb 27, 2024 12:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom VIEWING

<https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/86779062496?pwd=ZG9kV3RkcysyMmszQnF1eHFtYmRqQT09>

Meeting ID: 867 7906 2496

Passcode: 874837

Sarah Maldoror Simbianza 1972 1hr: 37Mins. Angola and Republic of the Congo

This revolutionary bombshell by Sarah Maldoror chronicles the awakening of Angola's independence movement. Based on a true story, *Sambianza* follows a young woman as she makes her way from the outskirts of Luanda toward the city's center looking for her husband after his arrest by the Portuguese authorities—an incident that will ultimately help to ignite a national uprising. Featuring a cast of nonprofessionals—many of whom were themselves involved in anticolonial resistance—this landmark work of

political cinema honors the essential roles of women, as well as the hardships they endure.

The most significant expression of Maldoror's artistic and political commitments is *Sambizanga* (1972), a cinematic work of immense historical and cultural importance that stages a reckoning with the interlocking systems of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. This film, about the Angolan struggle for independence from Portuguese colonization, made her one of the first women of African descent to direct a feature film on the African continent and was awarded the prestigious Tanit d'or grand prize at the 1972 Carthage Film Festival. Regrettably, a serious assessment of the importance of Maldoror's contributions has come only after her passing in 2020. With the restoration of *Sambizanga* presented in this release, her only completed narrative feature has found a second life of chromatic vibrancy, making more apparent than ever its position as a bright jewel of revolutionary filmmaking.

The narrative arc of Maldoror's film follows Maria (played by Elisa Andrade, a Cape Verdean economist), an Angolan woman whose tractor-driver husband, Domingos Xavier (Domingos de Oliveira), is brutally taken by the colonial secret police and imprisoned on suspicion of insurgent activity. With their baby on her back, Maria carries the story forward as she leaves their village to find him. For Maldoror, there was a personal dimension to *Sambizanga*'s story line: her life partner, the Angolan poet and intellectual Mário de Andrade—who co-wrote the screenplay with Maurice Pons—was one of the earliest leaders of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA); the couple were also part of an internationalist social sphere that included such renowned figures as the Guinea-Bissauan and Cape Verdean revolutionary leader Amílcar Cabral, and the Martinican anticolonial writer Aimé Césaire, who is the subject of four of Maldoror's nonfiction films. The director's intermingled social, political, and artistic worlds directly influenced the forms of Pan-Africanism and anticolonial solidarity that animated her filmmaking practice.

FEBRUARY 28: NOON-6PM

Join Zoom VIEWING

<https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/86573589111?pwd=cUczSXBxTmppsQ0Zjd0JZeGVnSnZlZz09>

Meeting ID: 865 7358 9111

Passcode: 229009

MUNYURANGABO 2007, Director: Lee Isaac Chung Rwanda, 1hr: 37Mins

From opposing ethnicities, Ngabo and Sangwa are tested when old-timers warn, "Hutus and Tutsis should not be friends." An intense and inspiring portrait of youth in Rwanda, 'Munyurangabo' features Poet Laureate Edouard Uwayo delivering a moving poem about his healing country. Rwanda.

THE HERO 2004 Director: Zeze Gamboa 1hr: 31Mins Angola

A 20-year veteran of the Angolan civil war returns to the capital city of Luanda where he faces the challenges of assimilation and survival.

Everyday life is a struggle in Luanda, capital of Angola where a thirty -year civil war has left its mark on the souls of the people. On a television program called "Meeting Place," men and women, young and old, hold up pictures of their loved ones and plea for help in finding them. Work is hard to find, electricity goes on and off sporadically, food and medical supplies are scarce, and old women still must walk long distances to get water. The city is filled with refugees and veterans who exist in a twilight zone. The countryside is littered with dangerous landmines, and the government has been able to do very little toward removing them. Many families cannot return to their homes.

Vitorio (Oumar Makena Diop) is a war veteran who lost his leg when a landmine exploded under him. After much squabbling with the bureaucrats at a government hospital, he is given a prosthetic leg. But Vitorio has no luck in finding a job since most supervisors only want able bodied men. He ends up sleeping on the street. When his prosthetic leg is stolen, he plunges into a whirlpool of despair. Luckily, Judite (Maria Ceica), a prostitute who lost her son years ago, befriends him and gives him shelter.

Ten-year-old Manu (Milton Coelho) lives with his grandmother, Flora (Neusa Borges). His mother abandoned him, and his father went away to war years ago and has never returned. Although Manu is one of the smartest boys in the school, his teacher, Joana (Patricia Bull), is worried about his lack of interest in studying. He and some of his street buddies have formed their own gang of thieves to steal bike parts and car radios. This gets him into trouble with Caca (Nelo Helder), a violent thug who doesn't want anyone else on his turf.

First-time feature director Zeze Gamboa has fashioned a compelling and richly developed drama that brings three of the main characters together and opens up new possibilities for each of them. Joana meets Vitorio at the hospital and is deeply moved by the hardships he has endured. She has recently re-established contact with Pedro (Raul Rosario), a rich young man who has just returned from his studies abroad and is going to work for his uncle, a Minister in the government. Joana's idea is to put Vitorio on the radio with a plea for the return of his artificial leg. Manu finds himself drawn into the life of the war veteran, but thankfully it is in a beneficial way for both of them.

The Hero is an emotionally involving drama that realistically shows how a little kindness on the part of those in power can result in miraculous changes in the lives of those who are without hope or the resources to transform their own lives. Harriet Beecher Stowe has observed, "To be really great in little things, to be truly noble and heroic in the insipid details of everyday life, is a virtue so rare as to be worthy of canonization." This film illustrates the truth of this observation with its convincing depiction of Vitorio's perseverance, Joana's empathy, Manu's hopefulness, and the simple heroism of his grandmother who makes lugging water into a spiritual act.

YELEN 1987 Director: Souleymane Cisse Mali/Burkina Faso 1hr: 45 Mins.

It is the 13th century, in the time of the Malian Empire. Nianankoro, a young man, sets off on his initiation journey through the bush. His father, Soma, a priest who has become corrupted from exposure to the soul-changing power of his magic, pursues him, intent on ending Nianankoro's quest to become a man before it can be completed, before Nianankoro can claim some of the authority of his father. Nianankoro understands that he must gather additional power before he can break his father's will -- or kill him. In greens and golds under a shining Malian sky, their fears and ambitions collide, in a story that feels even more ancient than the epoch in which it is set. For, to destroy Soma's influence over him, Nianankoro must also engage the spiritual foundations of the world. Soma invites the gods to destroy his son, and Nianankoro invokes the powers of the earth in his defense. There is a trial of and by the African elements themselves, heat, fire, and light.

Cissé has woven this tale of generational conflict in a tapestry of mythology as dense as any the cinema has seen. The worldview of these characters is not offered as a set of exotic practices or curious traditions; instead, it is lived as truth. Bambara custom is presented in *Yeelen* not as festival culture, to be tasted for a moment like a strange dish at an ethnic street fair and then forgotten in favor of one's own cuisine, but as that cuisine itself, the food of life. Few works of any culture have succeeded as *Yeelen* does in thus not only speaking simultaneously to a culture, and for it, to an outside world which has a long history of patronizing those customs. Cissé sees the spirit world as one of intense vitality and presence, dissolving the Western boundaries of inner and outer humanity, past and present. This is, for instance, a place in which the hypnotic, handmade rhythms of the drum and the chant live joyfully with modern jazz. (His soundtrack brings together Malian vocalist Salif Keita and French jazzman Michel Portal.) Likewise, Cissé's storytelling style disdains linearity, borrowing instead the circular form of the oral tale. Western ideals of causality, with their assumption that humans can know the answers to their own lives as they can fully know (and thus command) the world around them, is ignored here, as Cissé sends scenes and stories streaming to us which have a sense of adjacency to one another, but rarely give the easy satisfactions of Hollywood's archly constructed narratives. Grumpy critics have called this approach "primitive." Yet, what could be less primitive than a storyteller who demands that we see the universe as it is, not as it might be in some infantile fantasy of

control, instantly knowable and without mystery? And if Cissé's is a view of existence where the human being insists on a prideful, prominent place, it is also one which honors the non-human natural world, its trees and animals and water, as powerful creations in their own right.

Series organize by Horace Brockington, Department of Ethnic and Race Studies

DEPARTMENT OF ETHNIC and RACE STUDIES

