

This material was originally published in *Oxford Handbook of Communist Visual Cultures* (2019) edited by Lu, Xiaoning and has been reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190885533.001.0001.

For permission to reuse this material, please visit <http://global.oup.com/academic/rights>.

Accepted version downloaded from SOAS Research Online: <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/25829>

## **Listening Between the Images:<sup>1</sup> African Filmmakers' Take on the Soviet Union, Soviet Filmmakers' Take on Africa**

*This chapter is dedicated to Sarah Maldoror, for her beautiful films and for her generosity*

### **Introduction**

The utopian message at the beginning of Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) is well known, but vital to recall here in relation to the focus of this chapter:

Without the help of intertitles ... This experimental work aims at creating *a truly international language of cinema* based on its absolute separation from the language of theatre and literature. [my emphasis]

At that historic moment for cinema, just after film sound had been invented in 1927, we paradoxically have a triumphant proclamation of the universality of film as a *visual* language, accessible to people around the world. It is also well known that Lenin valued cinema as the most important of all the arts due to its visual language,<sup>2</sup> particularly in a context (the Soviet Union) in which the majority of the population could not read.<sup>3</sup> The Soviet filmmakers of the early twentieth century – such as Vertov, Eisenstein, and Kuleshov – are seen as pioneers of film's visual language, particularly insofar as this language is seen to be constituted through montage or editing. However, as the burgeoning scholarship on film sound emphasizes,<sup>4</sup> since the invention of film sound (and perhaps even during the silent film period), film has always been both a visual *and* aural language, a medium that combines both images

and sound. And yet, scholars and filmmakers frequently emphasize the visual aspects of film over the aural aspects, thus losing a significant, and sometimes unsettling, angle of analysis. In this chapter – one of the first to explore the relationships between African filmmakers and Communism during the Cold War period (with a particular focus on those African filmmakers who were trained in the Soviet Union), I foreground the aural language of film, the sonic contexts in which films are made and viewed, and the language(s) in which research is conducted, so as to sound a note of caution against overly celebratory accounts of transnational film relationships – whether framed through Communist *or* neoliberal capitalist allegiances. My focus on the aural may appear paradoxical in a volume concerned with *visual* culture; I hope to show, however, that it is impossible to divorce the visual from the aural, since even in silence, the visual still references the aural precisely *through* its absence.

My interest in sound's relationship to the visual has both an aesthetic and political value. As will become apparent through my analysis, while strong Communist connections between African filmmakers and filmmakers from elsewhere around the world did indeed form during the Cold War period, these connections were often compromised either by utopian assumptions of eternal "brotherhood" or by racism toward Africans – an issue frequently critiqued explicitly or implicitly in films by Africans, and often through creating tension between images and soundtrack. Given racism's visual basis and bias, it makes sense that these filmmakers would draw on the aural as a means of defense against it. As Yevgeniy Fiks notes of the Wayland Rudd Archive, which contains more than 200 Soviet-made images from the 1920s to the 1980s, mostly of Africans and African Americans:

The images in the archive present a very complex and often contradictory mapping of the intersection of race and communism in the Soviet context. They present this issue as unresolved, revealing the Soviet legacy on race as a mixed bag of internationalism, solidarity, humanism, communist ideals as well as exoticisation, otherness, stereotyping and hypocrisy.<sup>5</sup>

Many of the contributors to the recent collection *Red Africa: Affective Communities and the Cold War* (2016) discuss the racism that dark-skinned peoples (not only Africans) experienced during their time as guests and beneficiaries of the Soviet Union. Sri Lankan student Saroj Pathirana describes how foreign students were frequently beaten and even killed.<sup>5</sup> Polly Savage thus argues for an approach of “reading between the lines” of any utopian account of the “friendship” the Soviet Union extended to colonized peoples, as radical and transformative as this policy may have been. This approach necessarily requires “close reading,” she says, to reveal the “fissures ... where the visions of donor and recipient failed to align.”<sup>6</sup> I have been inspired by Savage’s approach and wish to adapt it so as to listen between the images, as it were, to try to conjure some of the more difficult elements of Soviet-African (cinematic) relationships, particularly as they related to issues of spoken language, dialogue, voice-over, silence, music, and (mis)translation.

The broader inspiration to engage with this topic developed out of the fact that there has been an almost complete lack of research, until recently, in both African and Soviet/Russian scholarship about the fact that several of the most internationally lauded African filmmakers, across three generations – Ousmane Sembene, Sarah Maldoror, Souleymane Cissé, and Abderrahmane Sissako – were given bursaries to

study at a specific film school in the Soviet Union: the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow. This is a fact often mentioned in African screen media scholarship but not elaborated on in any way, besides in the groundbreaking chapter by Josephine Woll, “The Russian Connection: Soviet Cinema and the Cinema of Francophone Africa” (2004).<sup>8</sup> As curators Rasha Salti and Koyo Kouoh’s recent exhibition *Saving Bruce Lee: African and Arab Cinema in the Era of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy (A Prologue)* (The Garage, Moscow, 12 June – 23 August 2015), and ongoing research, is revealing, there are also dozens of other, lesser-known African and Arab filmmakers who were trained at the VGIK from the 1960s to the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> A research project called “The African-Asian Cinema Connection” which Kate Taylor-Jones and I have recently initiated is also bringing to light the fascinating relationships that African filmmakers have had with other Communist countries beyond the Soviet Union – such as Japan and China.<sup>8</sup> However, for the purposes of scope, the focus here will be on Soviet-African cinematic connections.

While research on Soviet-African cinematic relationships has recently been gaining momentum within Russian and Slavic studies,<sup>11</sup> particularly via the use of film festivals as a heuristic device (as I explore later in this article), there remains a complete lack of attention to this history within African screen media studies. I thus come to this research as an Africanist, with a particular investment in trying to find out how Africans themselves may have perceived and been affected by these relationships. I have been especially interested in the experiences of Sarah Maldoror, considered by some to be the “Mother of African Cinema” for being the first woman to make a feature film in Africa (*Sambizanga*, 1972), and whose voice has often been silenced in favor of listening to the experiences of pioneering male African

filmmakers.<sup>12</sup> While my methodology has mostly involved trying to listen between the images in my analysis of certain films made by Sembene, Maldoror, and Sissako – as well as a Soviet film made about Africa titled *African Rhythms* (1966) – I also draw on an original interview I conducted with Maldoror about her time studying at the VGIK in the Soviet Union – to my knowledge, the only interview conducted with her on this topic. It should be said, however, that conducting this interview itself presented multiple issues in translation: since Maldoror was 79 at the time and struggled to remember her time in the Soviet Union, the interview had to be conducted via her daughter, Annouchka de Andrade, and for ease of communication, we conducted it over email, in French. Clearly such oral history projects should have taken place earlier, when the filmmakers were still alive or younger, and would have allowed scholars to understand better the details of the training offered at the VGIK and the clearly quite special relationships that developed between the Soviet teacher/filmmakers and the African student/filmmakers.

Josephine Woll points out in her essay that “inquiry into the actual significance of [Soviet] training [of African filmmakers] as well as into the admittedly vexed question of influence” has been overlooked in the past due to the bias in African screen media scholarship toward studying “France’s pragmatic and cultural hegemony” over African filmmaking.<sup>13</sup> It has perhaps also been ignored due to African filmmakers’ own expressed anxiety of having influences ascribed to their work by others: when African film critic Françoise Pfaff pointed out certain similarities between Sembene’s and Hitchcock’s films, Sembene retorted: “It is not Hitchcock’s way; it is Sembene’s way;”<sup>14</sup> in my interview with her, Maldoror said that while at the VGIK she primarily learned *not* to slavishly copy other filmmakers;

and Abderrahmane Sissako has expressed attachment to specific films rather than filmmakers (although he does name Andrei Tarkovsky as an influence).<sup>15</sup> However, these filmmakers are at the same time quick to point out what *they* see as their influences – Sembene, Maldoror and Cissé all cite Sergei Eisenstein as an influence, for example.<sup>16</sup>

This particular anxiety of influence undoubtedly needs to be politically situated, too, as a response to paternalistic and patronizing accounts of African political and artistic prowess as always having already been inspired by some non-African source; as the Pan-African theorist George Padmore cogently argued in his 1956 book *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*:

For if there is one thing which events in Africa, no less than in Asia, have demonstrated in the post-war years, it is that colonial peoples are resentful of the attitude of Europeans, of both Communist and anti-Communist persuasion, that they alone possess the knowledge and experience necessary to guide the advancement of dependent peoples. Africans feel that they are quite capable of leading themselves, and of developing a philosophy and ideology suited to their own special circumstances and needs, and have come to regard the arrogance of white ‘loftiness’ in this respect as unwarranted interference and unpardonable assumption of superiority. *Africans are quite willing to accept advice and support which is offered in a spirit of true equality ...*<sup>17</sup> (my emphasis)

To avoid assumptions of influence only in the direction of Soviet filmmakers *on* African filmmakers, I will explore some of the work of African filmmakers who were trained in the Soviet Union through David Trotter's concept of "significant affinities."<sup>18</sup> This concept, I hope, will allow me to open productive conversations between African and Soviet films and filmmakers while not presuming that similarities were necessarily a result of influence *per se*. Woll also ultimately rejects the concept of influence and settles instead for the more open idea of dialogue: "What emerges with absolute clarity," she argues, "is the ongoing, endless and endlessly rewarding dialogue engaged in by artists of every country and culture."<sup>19</sup> This stance is more generative and generous in building a *critical* transnational cinema studies since it allows for the idea that influence moves in both directions.<sup>20</sup>

While dwelling on questions of influence and affinity, I must also emphasize the expressive freedom that African filmmakers enjoyed relative to their counterparts in the Soviet Union, who had to navigate state-enforced Socialist Realism, imposed from 1932 to 1988. Indeed, in my interview with her, Maldoror emphasized that what was most difficult about her experience in the Soviet Union was "the lack of freedom of expression. We had to pretend that everything was perfect in the Soviet Union."<sup>21</sup> This perhaps relates to the fact that while many African countries were socialist-leaning during this period, very few adopted the Soviet or Chinese Communist model wholesale. John Hazard points out, for example, that Modibo Keita (from Mali) was the only African president who, during the 1960s, tried "to introduce orthodox Marxism-Leninism" into his society.<sup>22</sup> For their part, Ethiopian filmmakers have said that even though they were bombarded with Soviet propaganda on television during the Communist Derg regime in Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987, they continued to have

access to American films through the cinemas.<sup>23</sup> Another reason that African filmmakers perhaps had more freedom to pursue their own points of view is that there were very few African filmmakers during this period, due to the costs of film training and of film production; there certainly were not enough filmmakers in respective African countries to be able to create durable socialist or Communist film collectives. Largely having to operate as individuals, African filmmakers of the Cold War era often challenged conventional wisdom and refused to toe the party line in their respective contexts.

While Communist film collectives did not develop in Africa, two of the first anti-colonial films to be made in the continent were made through collaboration between non-African Communists and locals: *Come Back, Africa* (1959), generally acknowledged as the first anti-apartheid film, was made clandestinely in South Africa by American Communist Lionel Rogosin and members of the Sophiatown literary set such as Lionel Ngakane, Bloke Modisane and Can Themba; and *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) was made as a collaboration between Italian Communist Gillo Pontecorvo and members of the victorious FLN (National Liberation Front) in Algeria. There were also some attempts to build film cultures in certain socialist-leaning countries. For example, an attempt was made in Guinea Bissau, where Amilcar Cabral had enjoyed support from Cuba in his liberation struggle against Portugal<sup>24</sup> and had been inspired by the Cuban film institute ICAIC, to create a socialist-oriented Institute of Cinema in the 1970s, after independence; sadly, it was not able to withstand political and historical ravages.<sup>25</sup> The young Marxist leader of Burkina Faso from 1983 to 1987, Thomas Sankara, gave more support to fostering a film culture in his country than any other African leader, and actively sought to create connections with Communist

countries such as Cuba; these connections tended to be ideological rather than practical, however, with the financing of a film festival such as FESPACO still coming largely from Europe.<sup>26</sup>

### ***African Rhythms* (1966): Soviet Filmmakers' Take on Africa**

In order to set the Cold War scene and to try to summon the ideological and affective relationships that were encouraged between ordinary Soviets and Africans during this period, it helps to turn to a film rather than to conventional academic analysis. *African Rhythms* (1966) was one of the many films made *about* Africa by Soviet filmmakers in the wake of African independence and through which the Soviet Union attempted to involve Africa and Africans in their utopian vision of a Communist world.

Attention to the sound in this film, however, reveals where the fissures lay in the Soviet-African relationship, and is thus a useful background against which to view and analyze films by African directors who studied filmmaking in the Soviet Union.

The story of how I first encountered *African Rhythms* implicates me, too, in narratives and issues of contact zones, curatorial practices, and (mis)translation. I was introduced to the Russian filmmaker Alexander Markov who, for the past decade, has been working on a major project called *Our Africa*, in which he has been given unprecedented access to thousands of kilometres of Soviet archival footage of Africa dating back to the 1960s. As Markov has said, in the immediate post-independence period in Africa, Soviet filmmakers “rushed to Africa, making films whose titles speak to the emotion with which they were imbued: *Hello, Africa!*, *We Are with You, Africa!*, *Good Luck to You, Africa!*”<sup>27</sup> In my capacity at the time as the co-director and curator of Film Africa, a London-based African film festival, I invited Markov to our

2012 edition to present excerpts from his work. It was an exhilarating yet difficult event given various language barriers and the lack of adequate translation, which forced us to try to meet one another through the images themselves. It was at this event that Markov introduced us to a fascinating documentary, *African Rhythms* (1966), made by the Second Creative Union of Moscow, and directed by I. Venzher and L. Mahnach, about the first major arts festival in post-independence Africa – the 1966 World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal. When analyzed alongside the other documentary made about this festival – *The First Festival of Negro Arts* (dir. William Greaves, 1966) – *African Rhythms* allows an ideal opportunity to listen between the images of Soviet filmmakers’ take on Africa and Africans at the time. To complement my close reading of this film, I have drawn on an interview I conducted with Markov and on viewing Markov’s new, 45-minute version of *Our Africa* (2018).

The First World Festival of Negro Arts, held 4-24 April 1966 in Dakar in Senegal, was an event of “Olympian proportions” and is said to have had “the greatest impact of any single cultural event in Senegal” to this day.<sup>28</sup> There were 25,000 participants and 2,500 performing artists from 45 countries and 4 continents, and “You needed a hundred seventy hours just to see the competitive program of the festival” (*African Rhythms*). There were art exhibitions; music, theatre, and dance performances; film screenings; colloquia; and cocktail parties. Fortunately for scholars, a great deal of excellent research has recently been published about the Festival.<sup>29</sup> However, perhaps the most evocative documents we have are two films, one by African-American filmmaker William Greaves and one by Soviet filmmakers I. Venzher and L. Mahnach.

While there is not space here to engage in a full comparative analysis of the two films, it is important to note certain key similarities and differences given that these films were meant to officially represent the respective positions of the United States and the Soviet Union at the Festival – positions that were, in many ways, diametrically opposed, as David Murphy points out:

The festival, somewhat inevitably, also found itself bound up in the complex political wrangling of the Cold War, as both the USA and the Soviet Union sought potential allies among the newly independent African nations. ... In particular, the participation of Duke Ellington's orchestra had been facilitated by funding from the US State Department which had, by the mid-1960s, been deploying its Jazz Ambassadors programme for a decade as part of its Cold War diplomacy, sending black artists around the world to represent the USA while, back home, they did not enjoy even the most basic civil rights ... For its part, the Soviet Union, which consistently underlined US racism in its pitch to newly independent black countries, was keen to use the festival to increase its influence in Africa.<sup>30</sup>

Lacking resources, the Soviet Union attempted to attack the US largely on moral grounds: "While the Soviets could not compete with America's contribution of black art and performance, they did serve vodka, and they mounted an exhibit highlighting the fact that (as the *New York Times* reported) 'the Russians never engaged in the slave trade, while guess-who did.'"<sup>31</sup> What is evident in the Soviet enthusiasm for the festival, however, is an ignorance of the ways in which the black artists themselves defined the event, and a will to appropriate the festival into a triumphant Communist

narrative, just as the North Americans displayed a will to appropriate the festival into a glorious narrative of American liberalism.

Both documentaries largely work in the mode of revalorization and celebration, recognizing the need – after hundreds of years of denigration and oppression through slavery and colonialism – to revive and celebrate black cultural heritage. The excitement of the filmmakers is palpable in the textures of the films themselves, which are mimetic rather than simply descriptive of the festival. In both films, the camera seems to participate in the festival rather than adopt the position of a bystander. Most significantly, however, these films do what many historical accounts of the festival cannot: they bring it “alive” again in material, haptic form by allowing us to see the facial and bodily expressions of the participants. Murphy compares the Soviet film favorably with the American film because it “was shot in colour and it captures more of the spontaneity and excitement of the performances” as well as “street scenes that are largely absent from the Greaves film ....”<sup>32</sup> Murphy has nothing critical to say about *African Rhythms* and reminds us “to be wary of excessively ideological readings of complex personal encounters.”<sup>33</sup> While this is an important point, a close listening to (and not simply a close viewing of) the film reveals certain fault-lines that are crucial to acknowledge, and which show the hypocrisy of the Soviet Union critiquing the United States for its racism.

Narrated in Russian, the film was clearly aimed at a Soviet rather than global audience. As with Greaves’ film, its tone is triumphantly fraternal; however, rather than uniting on the basis of race, here the makers clearly see the independence of African countries as related to the march of Communism and *their* version of

internationalism. Interestingly, the word “Négritude” is not used in the film despite this being a key organizing concept for the festival;<sup>34</sup> rather, the festival is renamed “the first International festival of the *African* art.” When Senghor is quoted, there is no mention of race but rather of world peace and “international civilization.” The message of the film, as the voice-over tells us, is that “the people of different nations, different races, can live in one united and friendly human family.”<sup>35</sup>

In positive terms, the film anoints Dakar as the epitome of a bright, modern, self-sufficient city. Indeed, the film opens with panning shots of the Dakar beach, high shots looking down on the modern city centre, then more shots of the coastline and of the rich magenta shock of bougainvillea, all set to the rousing voice of Mighty Terror (the stage name of Fitzgerald Henry, 1921-2007), a Trinidadian calypso singer who attended the festival, singing the song “Dakar, I do love Dakar.” Into the optimistic strains of similarity between the Soviet states and the reunited African nations “that were torn from each other” (as the voice-over tells us) slip notes of exoticization, however, that set Africa apart from the Soviet Union. The Russian voice-over refers to “the musical rhythm” that courses through Africans’ blood, and this quickly turns into racist narratives of human development (“And, suddenly,” the Russian voice-over says, “somewhere in the dance patterns, in its spontaneity, you recognize the hot childhood of humanity”). This racist pinning of Africa to a primitive identity is contradicted by the images of an Africa as modern sublime in the rest of the film – a paisley suitcase, a woman in a *boubou* strumming a guitar.

The film also veers in strange ways between problematically speaking *for* Africa (as in, “We and the drum are one”), and speaking *about* Africa to Soviet audiences in an

ethnographic tone (as in, “In the Jeve language, Togo means ‘behind the sea’”). All of these aural examples from the film remind us, like the contributions to the book *Red Africa* (2016), that racism infected Soviet-African relationships during the Cold War and undermines any retrospective scholarly attempt to find utopian “brotherhood” here. It is extremely significant, in this respect, that Alexander Markov has explicitly chosen *not* to re-voice old films such as *African Rhythms* in his film *Our Africa* (2018). He says he does not want to “rehabilitate the Soviet point of view on the African continent” but rather to critique it.<sup>36</sup> In the section that follows, I will listen between the images of certain films made by African filmmakers who trained at the VGIK in Moscow, to analyze *their* critiques of racism, their exploration of cross-cultural (mis)understandings, and some of the visual and sonic affinities their work shares with that of Soviet filmmakers.

### **African Filmmakers’ Take on the Soviet Union: Listening Between the Images**

As noted above, the research of curators Rasha Salti and Koyo Kouoh is helping to uncover the profound extent and nature of the relationships between the VGIK in Moscow and African filmmakers. Because this research is still emerging, however, I want to focus here specifically on the work of several of the most internationally well-known African filmmakers who studied at the VGIK. Woll (2004) has already offered an illuminating close reading of films by three of these filmmakers, each from a different generation – Ousmane Sembene (Senegal), Souleymane Cissé (Mali), and Abderrahmane Sissako (Mali/Mauritania) – searching for similarities between their work and that of their Soviet/Russian teachers and filmmaking contemporaries. Sembene (1923-2007) went to study at the VGIK for one year, in 1961, when he was already a well-known novelist;<sup>37</sup> Cissé (1940-) spent eight years studying film at the

VGIK in the 1960s when he was in his twenties;<sup>38</sup> and Sissako (1961-), who spent parts of his youth in Mali and Mauritania respectively, went to the Soviet Union when he was nineteen, initially to study Russian, before moving from Rostov to Moscow to study at the VGIK from 1983 to 1991.<sup>39</sup>

What is particularly striking, however, is that Woll makes no mention of Sarah Maldoror, who trained at the VGIK at the same time as Sembene,<sup>40</sup> leading to a life-long friendship. [INSERT DOVEY-FIGURE 1 HERE] The first woman to direct a feature film in Africa – *Sambizanga* (1972) – Maldoror’s status as an African filmmaker has sometimes been challenged because she is of the diaspora.<sup>41</sup> However, as someone who travelled and worked extensively across the African continent, and who participated in the liberation war in Angola (she was also married to the Angolan anti-colonial resistance fighter Mário Pinto de Andrade), Maldoror is perhaps the example *par excellence* of the radical filmmaker concerned with bringing about social justice and international solidarity and, in my view, fully deserves her place within the history of African filmmaking. Her film *Sambizanga* and the films that she helped to make – *Battle of Algiers* (1966) and *The Pan-African Festival of Algiers* (1969) – express the pain and excitement of the times surrounding and during the African liberation wars, and *Sambizanga* is particularly poignant for focusing on one woman’s experiences during this era.

Besides leaving Maldoror out of her study, another significant oversight in Woll’s otherwise groundbreaking essay is that she focuses on film as primarily a visual rather than audio-visual language. Woll positions herself as someone with “eyes educated in Soviet cinema”<sup>42</sup> and notes that “The early Soviet directors left their mark on the

African directors' manipulation of cinema's basic aesthetic components – camera placement, *mise-en-scène*, shot duration, pacing,<sup>43</sup> thereby focusing on the visual, rather than aural, components of filmmaking. This is not to say that Woll is incorrect in emphasizing that the Soviet filmmakers' visual style – and especially Eisenstein's montage strategies – had a significant impact on African filmmakers trained at the VGIK. As David Trotter explains in a recent article following renewed contemporary interest in the work of Sergei Eisenstein during the centenary, in 2017, of the October uprising brought to life in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925):

Montage involves the editing of individual shots into a sequence of some kind. Most directors of the [1920s] aimed to link one shot to the next in such a way as to generate a coherent, psychologically-motivated narrative ... Eisenstein preferred collisions to linkage. In his view, it was the violence with which one image met another that provoked in the viewer an otherwise inconceivable new thought or feeling.<sup>44</sup>

Eisenstein called this form of montage dialectical because of the way it generated meanings and affect through juxtaposition. As noted before, Sembene, Maldoror, and Cissé have each acknowledged the influence of Eisenstein's filmmaking on their work. Sembene expert Samba Gadjigo shared with me that Sembene spoke about the influence *Battleship Potemkin* had on his editing process,<sup>45</sup> and in our interview Maldoror also singled out this film as the most influential she saw while in the Soviet Union, saying that it made her realize it was not sufficient for a filmmaker to have only the technical means to make a good film – that much more was required. But what I am interested in exploring here is how these African filmmakers also seemed to turn radical, dialectical montage into an *aural* principle in certain films.

Sembene, who joined the French Communist Party when he worked in Marseilles in the 1950s and proclaimed himself a Marxist to his “last breath,” vehemently drew on “his radical, Marxist views”<sup>46</sup> to counter Senegalese President Leopold Sédar Senghor’s notions of Negritude and “African Socialism,” which Sembene saw as exploiting an essentialist idea of indigeneity to mask the lack of “a deeply critical analysis” of neo-colonial capitalism in post-independence Senegal.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, both *Borom Sarret* (1963) and *Xala* (1974) are caustic, Marxist critiques of Senghor’s failures to address economic exploitation of the poor and the corruption of the rich and powerful *comprador* class in Senegal. While Gadjigo highlights *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988) as Sembene’s film that shows the most affinities to the work of Eisenstein, *Borom Sarret* and *Xala* also draw on dialectical montage to parody and critique the exploiters and to express empathy with the exploited, in a similar way to *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1927). Sembene reveals his uneasiness with adopting *any* party line, however, through using the power of sound, something that was not available to Eisenstein during the silent cinema period. What is most striking about Sembene’s first two films – *Borom Sarret* (1963) and *Black Girl* (1966) – is how they use voice-over to *individualize* and thus create audience empathy for their protagonists (an impoverished cart driver and a young woman who works as a domestic help for a white family, respectively). It is also through these characters’ voice-overs that Sembene is able to act as ventriloquist, expressing his own critique of class, racial and gender exploitation.

Samba Gadjigo and his co-editors of *Ousmane Sembene: Dialogues with Critics and Writers* (1993) clearly see Sembene’s choice to study at the VGIK as somewhat

unusual of African filmmakers at that time, and they also imply that this training set Sembene off on a different path from that of his peers:

unlike his peers in francophone Africa, [Sembene] went not to France but to the Gorki Institute in Moscow for his technical training in filmmaking.

Sembene's own experience may explain why his work does not conjure up the simplicity of the African village, but instead often focuses on industrial and urban settings, examining the characters and motives of those who seek to exploit the changed social conditions of the post-colonial economy and polity in modern West Africa.<sup>48</sup>

Like Sembene, Sarah Maldoror can be said to have blazed a trail entirely and uniquely her own. Born in 1938 in Gers, France to Guadeloupian parents, Maldoror first attended theatre school in Paris. Like Sembene, she was offered a scholarship to study filmmaking at the VGIK in 1961, and then returned for an additional year in 1963. Maldoror made her first short film *Monangambé* in Algeria, in 1968, and it was selected for Directors Fortnight at Cannes in 1971. Maldoror's first feature film *Sambizanga* adapts a story by Angolan writer José Luandino Vieira about the anti-colonial war in Angola of 1961-1974, and won the Tanit d'Or at the 1972 Carthage Film Festival. Maldoror had to make the film in the Democratic Republic of Congo due to the fighting in Angola; she made it when only in her early thirties, and without being able to speak Portuguese.<sup>49</sup>

Also like Sembene, Maldoror has professed her admiration for Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1917) and her films, like those of Eisenstein and Sembene, show her clear,

Marxist investment in highlighting an opposition between the exploiters and the exploited. Where Sembene pays attention to White racial exploitation of Black people in *Black Girl* and *Camp de Thiaroye*, however, Maldoror is careful to show in *Sambizanga* that White people can be both oppressors and oppressed; in the film, the Angolan construction worker, Domingos Xavier, is eventually killed because he refuses to name his White comrade who is fighting alongside him in the anticolonial war. As Maldoror has said: “the colour of a person’s skin is of no interest to me. What is important is what the person is doing. ... For me there are only the exploiters and the exploited, that’s all.”<sup>50</sup> *Sambizanga* is an unusual anti-colonial film for another reason, however; its protagonist is not Domingos, a man, but rather his wife Maria, and much of the film simply yet emotively shows Maria’s walk from her village to the city to search for Domingos after his arrest. “What I wanted to show in *Sambizanga*,” Maldoror says, “is the aloneness of a woman and the time it takes to march.”<sup>51</sup>

An emphasis on what is *shown* in *Sambizanga*, however, can elide the power of the film’s soundtrack, which seems to me to be inspired by Eisenstein’s conception of dialectical montage, transposed from image to sound. Where the images in *Sambizanga* are, for the most part, gentle in their lingering long takes or affectionate in their close-ups on people’s faces, the sounds in the film crash against one another just as we see and hear the waves crashing against the Angolan shoreline in the opening shot of the film. While there is obvious violence in the scene in which the colonial police torture Domingos, a deeper sense of violence is embedded in the film through the way that Maldoror shifts between the plaintive musical refrain that accompanies Maria on her journey to find her husband and the harsh sounds of police activity (shouting, banging doors, bullying, hitting). If one deeply *listens* to the film

rather than simply viewing it, the sonic montage is painfully evident – we hear the sounds of new life (Maria and Domingos’ baby crying), of grief (Maria’s wailing when she learns of Domingos’ death), of joy and resilience (the upbeat music at the party at the end of the film, at which Domingos’ comrades vow to fight on), all crashing against one another to create a cacophony of life.

It is well known that the Soviet Union offered very generous bursaries to Africans wishing to train in filmmaking, but when I asked Maldoror in our interview why she had chosen to study at the VGIK, she simply said: “Who did not dream of studying at this school?” It was thus the reputation of the VGIK that drew these African filmmakers there, as well as the desire to sidestep the pull of Europe that many other African filmmakers had experienced, with all that it entailed. Far from studying in Moscow being only a pleasurable experience, Annouchka de Andrade pointed out to me that her mother frequently told her, as she grew up, about the racism that she had experienced in the Soviet Union during her film training there. At the same time, in my interview with her, Maldoror spoke of her teacher, Mark Donskoi (Eisenstein’s assistant), with great admiration, saying that she learned from him, in particular, how to respect actors because “it is the actors who make the film.” She says that her two years (1961, 1963) at the VGIK were “fundamental” to her development as a filmmaker and that it was here that she learned “what cinema is.” Other lessons that she attributed to Donskoi’s teaching included “curiosity and the importance of going to visit churches and museums. Donskoi told us to study the composition of each work – the total view but also the details ... to learn to find the particularity of each one and to capture it.” What is especially striking about Maldoror’s responses to my questions is the *human* rather than *ideological* connection that Maldoror felt with

Donskoi, which aligns with the close relationship Woll describes between Sembene and Donskoi.<sup>52</sup> This is an important reminder that, in our analysis of cross-cultural relationships in the Communist world (or in any context), we have to search beneath formal policies and official ideologies to uncover the chemistry between individuals, which often exceeds or transgresses the party line.<sup>53</sup>

In his films, the Malian-Mauritanian filmmaker, Abderrahmane Sissako, the youngest of the African filmmakers under study here, certainly prioritizes the chemistry between individuals, and there is also often a palpable, poetic chemistry between himself as filmmaker and his characters, whether he is making fiction or documentary films. His characters seem to glow, brought alive on screen by Sissako's attentive, patient eye *and* ear. Sissako studied under the filmmaker Marlen Khutsiev at the VGIK from 1983 to 1991, during the final phase of the Cold War, and he made one of his first short films, *Octobre* (1993) in Russia. As Sissako himself has said, this film is "about a mixed-race couple in Russia – a society which, without necessarily being racist, does not easily accept the Other."<sup>54</sup> The couple is Irina, a White Russian woman, and Idriss, a Black African man (we never hear which country he is from), and early on in the film we learn that Irina is pregnant but has not told Idriss because she is unsure whether or not she wants to keep the baby.

In a wonderful essay comparing Sissako's *Octobre* to Khutsiev's films, Prachi Mokashi-Punekar argues that "Sissako, quite like Khutsiev, creates a dissonance between the visual and the aural."<sup>55</sup> She notes that "*Octobre* is a film that uses dialogue sparingly and as the film progresses it gradually dwindles into silence. Instead of dialogue, Sissako chooses to explore Irina's psyche through internal

monologues and Idriss' state of mind through music."<sup>56</sup> Beyond this, we could argue that it is only through sound that Idriss is able to stage any kind of resistance to the unspoken *visual* prejudice that envelops him in Russia; when Idriss visits Irina at her apartment, her neighbours complain to the police that "someone" has been making a noise on the landing, even though Idriss has not made a sound. It is paradoxical, of course, that the neighbours complain about the *sounds* of someone when we know their prejudice is *visual* – about skin color. In protest, when Idriss leaves Irina's apartment, he stops on the landing, stamps his feet, and claps his hands. Thereafter we are treated to an electrifying scene in which Idriss, in the Moscow Metro, is approached by a black African woman who begins to dance with him without saying a word, before she runs off to get her train; African music provides the beat for their moves. The scene – which has significant affinities with an early scene in Khutsiev's *I Am Twenty* (1965), in which a woman approaches and dances with the protagonist Sergei before running off to her boyfriend – is full of the sense of warmth and home and connection which Idriss clearly lacks in his life in Russia and in his relationship with Irina.

*Octobre* seems to suggest that images deceive where words, sounds, and music can provide clarity, resistance, or connection. Toward the end of the film a dark-skinned child brings Idriss his hat; he asks where she is from, but before she can answer an older, pale-skinned woman calls her by a Russian name and she runs off. In the scene in which Idriss remembers the moment he met Irina on a train, the camera suggests that there was a strong visual attraction between them – the camera moves from Idriss' point of view to Irina's handbag dropping to the floor to a long shot of them standing beside one another, shyly smiling, being rocked by the moving train. But

while we, the viewers of the film, have access to Irina's thoughts and feelings through her voice-over, she does not pay Idriss the same compliment, and refuses to talk to him when he comes to visit her at her apartment. Like her neighbours' unspoken prejudice, Irina refuses to *talk* about what is clearly bothering her – that if she has the baby it will be mixed race and suffer from racism.

The film aptly ends with the following sequence of shots: Irina staring forlornly at a television screen on which we see the famous Georgian dancer Vahtang Tchaboukiani in his role as Othello in the filmed ballet *Maure de Venise* (1958); a shot of Irina's point of view, showing the frame of the television; and finally, a shot in which we are taken *inside* the television to a close-up of Tchaboukiani's face, full of grief and powerlessness at having lost Desdemona and at being trapped in a society that traps him within his own skin. Images deceive, we are reminded, just as in the opening sequence of the film we see a random body lying in the middle of the street removed by a police van as though it were a *trompe l'oeil*. Without the power of the aural, Sissako seems to suggest, we would have no way of escaping the suffocation of the visual. But the film, which clearly references Eisenstein's *October* in its title, also appears to be a critique of the kind of utopian triumphalism evident in the latter film; rather than the dramatic violence of revolution, here we have only the violence of a quick color shot in an otherwise black-and-white film, showing the crimson blood on Irina's finger as a thorn from the roses Idriss gives her pierces her skin.

**(Film) Festivals, Audiences and Cross-cultural Encounters: Productive Meetings and (Mis)translations**

Notably, the study of Communist film festivals has developed into one of the most productive sub-fields for understanding the relationship between the Soviet Union and African filmmakers in the Cold War era, as well as cultural diplomacy in the Communist world of the Cold War era more generally. This research is currently being pioneered by, among others, Russian scholars such as Rossen Djagalov, Masha Salazkina, and Elena Razlogova. Djagalov and Salazkina have been undertaking groundbreaking research on the Tashkent Festival of African and Asian Cinema which was, they convincingly argue, the “most visible link in the Third-World filmmakers’ and Soviet cultural bureaucracies’ ambitious but now-forgotten effort to construct, with Soviet help, a Third-World cinematic field that could compete against Hollywood or west European cinema’s global domination in the realm of both aesthetics and distribution.”<sup>57</sup> Notably, this attention to welcoming sub-Saharan African filmmakers was not a feature of the Film Weeks that were organized in the People’s Republic of China from 1949 to 1966, although there was a focus on Egyptian cinema in 1957.<sup>58</sup> While one could argue that this might have been due to the fact that sub-Saharan Africans only began to make their own films in the early 1960s, it seems the Soviet Union incorporated sub-Saharan Africa into its vision to a greater extent than China.

Just as Ran Ma reveals fascinating nuances of how the PRC interacted with other nations through film,<sup>59</sup> Djagalov and Salazkina use the Tashkent Festival as an opportunity to emphasize “the polyvalence of Soviet interactions with the non-Soviet world, thereby offering a counterpoint to the work of such prominent scholars as Evgeny Dobrenko, who have stressed the top-down nature of Soviet interactions with foreign cultures.”<sup>60</sup> They read the Tashkent Festival as a contact zone but one that

“cannot be reduced to the ‘colonizer-colonized,’ ‘center-periphery,’ or any singular hegemonic model (including the Cold War binary).”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the possibility of escaping from the suffocating, oppressive hierarchies of French control over African filmmaking was also one of my motivations for studying what I assumed might be a more equal transnational cinematic partnership between the Soviet Union and Africa. While the evidence suggests that this cinematic relationship certainly was more balanced than the cinematic relationship between France and Africa, it is still important to acknowledge the problems.

A recent article that reveals both the significant affinities and the difficulties in Soviet-African cinematic relationships through focusing on the importance of sound and language is Elena Razlogova’s “The Politics of Translation at Soviet Film Festivals during the Cold War” (2015). Razlogova is not only a scholar but also comes from an illustrious family of film translators; her father, Kirill Razlogov, was one of the film translators for African filmmakers at film festivals in the Soviet Union. This article is thus imbued with a charismatic, insider’s perspective of what actually took place at these film festivals. As Razlogova tells us, “International festivals became enmeshed in the politics of translation from their inception”<sup>62</sup> and “Nations thus fought the Cold War both on vocal and visual film tracks.”<sup>63</sup> She makes a vital distinction between film festivals held in the socialist and capitalist world in this respect:

On paper, most festivals have required or preferred subtitled films since the early 1950s. ... Soviet festivals – the Moscow International Film Festival, launched in 1959, and the Tashkent International Festival of African and

Asian Cinema, inaugurated in 1968 (it had included Latin American cinema since 1974) – chose simultaneous film translation as the standard.<sup>64</sup>

This choice was partly practical (it was far less costly to rely on live, simultaneous commentary than on dubbing or subtitling) and partly political (the socialist festivals “needed multilingual translation all the more because they courted filmmakers and critics from Asia, Africa, and Latin America,”<sup>65</sup> unlike the major West European festivals, which celebrated films from these countries but were not interested in “cultivating Third World filmmakers as a group”<sup>66</sup>). While the demands of offering simultaneous translation of films aloud and via earphones, sometimes in as many as five different languages, led to frequent criticisms of these festivals by visitors, usually along technical lines,<sup>67</sup> Razlogova emphasizes instead the unexpected benefits of such cacophony at festivals – the politicized spontaneity, the sense of empowerment and community created among audiences, and the cross-cultural humility fostered. American fear at how the ideological perspectives in their films might be changed via this process led to *Variety* trade magazine warning American companies “to always subtitle pictures sent to the Moscow festival.”<sup>68</sup> And yet, they might not have feared, since “Local spectators’ judgments often contradicted the Soviet political party line” and they would stamp their feet and shout if they did not desire the translator’s intervention.<sup>69</sup> Far from ignoring cultural differences, these sonic encounters reminded participants of them, encouraging “a sense of “humility,” making the encounter with foreign, especially non-Western, films, both more pleasurable and less certain.”<sup>70</sup>

As Salazkina and Djagalov point out, “The Soviet archives offer unusually rich and almost unexplored perspectives on African and Asian culture.”<sup>71</sup> And, as Alexander Markov noted in his interview with me, although the Soviet-African connection is not well known in contemporary Russia, young Russian people in particular are “very curious about this part of the Soviet history.”<sup>72</sup> However, as I have emphasized above, if we are to engage in a truly critical transnational film studies, then we require perspectives from both sides. More research is needed from African perspectives on these relationships.<sup>73</sup>

### **A Sound Future: Transnational Cinemas, Education, Decolonization**

Viewed in the most positive light, Soviet-African cinematic relationships were (framed as) an attempt to contribute to global decolonization, sovereignty for the oppressed, and cross-cultural partnerships on an equal footing. In reality, as I have shown, such utopian aims did not succeed and the fissures and fault lines begin to emerge as soon as one begins, in particular, to listen between the images. African students’ experiences of racism in the Soviet Union paint a far grimmer picture and such painful experiences, somewhat paradoxically, are often to be sensed more through the aural than the visual language of film. It is only when we start to listen to the voice-over in *African Rhythms*, for example, that we are repulsed by the patronizing and infantilizing views of Africans expressed therein.

At the same time – and precisely *because* it forces us to focus on our lack of understanding, and on the need for humility in the face of the Other – sound can have revolutionary qualities. Socialist film festivals were progressive in emphasizing linguistic differences through simultaneous translation, rather than smoothing out

these differences through emphasizing film as a universally accessible visual language. Doing the research for this chapter has been an equally cacophonous and humbling experience through which I have found myself longing for greater competency in French and for even a basic knowledge of Russian. This was a reminder that, within the growing field of transnational cinema studies, we need to engage in collaboration and not over-estimate our own, individual ability to interpret texts and experiences from widely divergent cultural backgrounds.

### **Acknowledgments**

My sincerest thanks to the filmmakers who so generously shared their experiences with me through interviews – Sarah Maldoror and Alexander Markov. I am also indebted to Annouchka de Andrade, Alain Sembene, Samba Gadjigo, and Rasha Salti for their wonderful help. Masha Salazkina, Rossen Djagalov, and Elena Razlogova have been an inspiration and I want to thank them for their openness and for sharing their work. Thank you also to Prachi Mokashi-Punekar for allowing me to cite from her brilliant essay comparing Sissako and Khutsiev’s films.

### **Bibliography**

Ahmed, Sara. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

Altman, Rick. *Sound Theory Sound Practice*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Bolgar Smith, Kate. *Soundtracks of the city: listening to the film music of the black diaspora in London and Paris*. PhD dissertation, SOAS University of London, 2016.

Cesar, Filipa. “Black Students in Red Russia.” In *Red Africa: Affective Communities and the Cold War*, edited by Mark Nash, pp. 27–33. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016.

Carter, Jill. “Towards Locating the Alchemy of Convergence in the Native Theatre Classroom.” *Canadian Theatre Review* 149 (Winter 2012): 82–84.

Chomentowski, Gabrielle. "L'Expérience Soviétique des Cinémas Africains au Lendemain des Indépendances." *Le Temps des medias* 26 (Spring 2016): 111–25.

Djagalov, Rossen and Masha Salazkina. "Tashkent '68: A Cinematic Contact Zone." *Slavic Review* 75.2 (Summer 2016): 27–98.

Dovey, Lindiwe. *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Dovey, Lindiwe. "Interview with Rasselas Lakew," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 25.1 (2013): 107-113.

Dovey, Lindiwe and Angela Impey. "African Jim: sound, politics, and pleasure in early 'black' South African cinema." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 22.1 (2010): 57–73.

Ellerson, Betti. *Sisters of the Screen* (New York: Women Make Movies), 2002.

Gadjigo, Samba et al. "Introduction." *Ousmane Sembene: Dialogues with Critics and Writers*, eds Samba Gadjigo et al, pp. 1-3. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993.

Hanson, Helen. *Hollywood Soundscapes: Film Sound Style, Craft and Production in the Classical Era*. London: British Film Institute, 2017.

Hazard, John. "Marxian Socialism in Africa: The Case of Mali," *Comparative Politics* 2.1 (October 1969): 1-15.

Higbee, Will and Song Hwee Lim. "Concepts of transnational cinema: towards a critical transnationalism in film studies." *Transnational cinemas* 1.1 (2010): 7–21.

Ma, Ran. "A genealogy of film festivals in the People's Republic of China: 'film weeks' during the 'Seventeen Years' (1949-1966)." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14.1 (2016): 40–58.

Maldoror, Sarah. "To Make a Film Means to Take A Position." In *African Experiences of Cinema*, eds Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham (London: BFI, 1996), 45-47.

Mokashi-Punekar, Prachi. "From Moscow to Mauritania: Bridging Second and Third Cinema in Abderrahmane Sissako's *Octobre*." Unpublished Masters essay for module "Cinema, Nation, and the Transcultural" (SOAS University of London).

Murphy, David, ed. *The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar, 1966*. Liverpool University Press, 2016.

Murphy, David. "Introduction." In *The First World Festival of Negro Arts*, ed. David Murphy (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 1-44.

Murphy, David. *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction*. Oxford: James Currey, 2000.

Onwudiwe, Ebere and Minabere Ibelema, eds. *Afro-Optimism: Perspectives on Africa's Advances*. Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger, 2003.

Pfaff, Françoise. "The Uniqueness of Ousmane Sembene's Cinema." In *Ousmane Sembene: Dialogues with Critics and Writers*, edited by Samba Gadjigo et al, pp. 14-21. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession* (1991): 33–40.

Razlogova, Elena. "The Politics of Translation at Soviet Film Festivals during the Cold War." *SubStance* 44.2 (2015): 66–87.

Saul, John. *The next liberation struggle: capitalism, socialism, and democracy in Southern Africa*. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005.

Savage, Polly. "Reading Between the Lines: African Students in the USSR." In *Red Africa: Affective Communities and the Cold War*, edited by Mark Nash, pp. 35–43. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016.

el-Tahri, Jihan. *Cuba: An African Odyssey* (Paris: Arte), 2007.

Trotter, David. "A Cine-Fist to the Solar Plexus," *London Review of Books*, 40.15 (2 August 2018), 33-35.

Vieyra, Paulin Soumanou. *Le cinéma et l'Afrique*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1969.

Vieyra, Paulin Soumanou. *Ousmane Sembène, cinéaste: première période, 1962-1971*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972.

Vieyra, Paulin Soumanou. *Le cinéma au Sénégal*. Brussels: OCIC and Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983.

Von Eschen, Penny Marie. *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Woll, Josephine. "The Russian Connection: Soviet Cinema and the Cinema of Francophone Africa." In *Focus on African Films*, edited by Françoise Pfaff, pp. 223–240. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004.

## **List of Interviews**

Maldoror, Sarah. Interview by email. 17 July 2017.

Markov, Alexander. Interview by email. 18 September 2017.

---

<sup>1</sup> My title is a direct reference to, and adaptation of, the title of Polly Savage's chapter "Reading Between the Lines: African Students in the USSR", in *Red Africa: Affective Communities and the Cold War*, ed. Mark Nash (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016), 35-43.

<sup>2</sup> Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, *Le cinéma et l'Afrique* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1969), 74.

<sup>3</sup> Josephine Woll, "The Russian Connection: Soviet Cinema and the Cinema of Francophone Africa", in *Focus on African Films*, ed. Françoise Pfaff (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 225.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example: Rick Altman, *Sound Theory Sound Practice* (London: Routledge, 1992); Lindiwe Dovey and Angela Impey, "African Jim: sound, politics, and pleasure in early 'black' South African cinema," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 22.1 (2010): 57-73; Kate Bolgar Smith, *Soundtracks of the city: listening to the film music of the black diaspora in London and Paris* (PhD dissertation, SOAS University of London, 2016); Helen Hanson, *Hollywood Soundscapes: Film Sound Style, Craft and Production in the Classical Era* (London: British Film Institute, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Yevgeniy Fiks, Untitled, in *Red Africa: Affective Communities and the Cold War*, ed. Mark Nash (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Filipa Cesar, "Black Students in Red Russia," in *Red Africa: Affective Communities and the Cold War*, ed. Mark Nash (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016), 32.

<sup>6</sup> Savage, "Reading Between the Lines," 35. We also perhaps need to consider these experiences of racism as one of the reasons why these relationships with the Soviet Union have not been discussed more by African filmmakers and scholars; in this sense, the silence itself might be the most powerful statement. As Ayi Kwei Armah says: "If I see things unseen by those who have eyes, why should my wisest speech not be silence?" (used as an epigraph in Namibian filmmaker Perivi Katjavivi's film *The Unseen* [2016]).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the lack of any reference to this in Frank Ukadike's interview with Souleymane Cissé in *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 19-28.

<sup>7</sup> The brochure for the exhibition *Saving Bruce Lee* (2015) is an invaluable resource in terms of providing biographies of many of these filmmakers including, for example, Moroccan filmmaker Mohammed Abouelouakar and Algerian filmmaker Rabah Bouberras. It also provides information on these African and Arab filmmakers' Soviet mentors, including not only the most well-known (Mark Donskoy and Marlen Khutsiev) but also less well-known teachers such as Roman Karmen and Alexander Stolper.

<sup>8</sup> An edited volume is forthcoming on this topic.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example: Woll, "The Russian Connection"; Elena Razlogova, "The Politics of Translation at Soviet Film Festivals during the Cold War," *SubStance* 44.2 (2015): 66-87; Rossen Djagalov and Masha Salazkina, "Tashkent '68: A Cinematic Contact Zone," *Slavic Review* 75.2 (Summer 2016): 279-98; Gabrielle Chomentowski, "L'Expérience Soviétique des Cinémas Africains au Lendemain des Indépendances," *Le Temps des medias* 26 (Spring 2016): 111-25.

<sup>12</sup> For example, she is not included in David Murphy and Patrick Williams, *Postcolonial African Cinema: Ten Directors* (Manchester University Press, 2007) or

---

in Ukadike, *Questioning African Cinema*. This is possibly because she was not born and raised on the African continent, revealing a certain bias against filmmakers of the African diaspora who have, nevertheless, been actively engaged in filmmaking on the continent.

<sup>13</sup> Woll, "The Russian Connection", 223.

<sup>14</sup> Françoise Pfaff, "The Uniqueness of Ousmane Sembene's Cinema," in *Ousmane Sembene: Dialogues with Critics and Writers*, eds Samba Gadjigo et al (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 19.

<sup>15</sup> Rachel Gabara, "On the Politics of African Auteurs," in *The Global Auteur: the Politics of Authorship in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 44.

<sup>16</sup> Email correspondence with Samba Gadjigo, 10 August 2017; personal interview with Sarah Maldoror, 17 July 2017; Woll, "The Russian Connection," 233.

<sup>17</sup> George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1956), 17-18.

<sup>18</sup> David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Woll, "The Russian Connection," 237.

<sup>20</sup> Further research is needed, for example, on the influence the African filmmakers had on Soviet filmmakers during this period.

<sup>21</sup> Personal interview, email, 17 July 2017.

<sup>22</sup> John Hazard, "Marxian Socialism in Africa: The Case of Mali," *Comparative Politics* 2.1 (October 1969): 1.

<sup>23</sup> Lindiwe Dovey, "Interview with Rasselas Lakew," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 25.1 (2013): 108.

<sup>24</sup> Jihan el-Tahri, *Cuba: An African Odyssey* (Paris: Arte, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Cesar, "Black Students," 92.

<sup>26</sup> Lindiwe Dovey, *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 102.

<sup>27</sup> Comments made at Film Africa 2012 film festival in London.

<sup>28</sup> Ebere Onwudiwe and Minabere Ibelema, *Afro-Optimism: Perspectives on Africa's Advances* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger, 2003), 55.

<sup>29</sup> David Murphy ed., *The First World Festival of Negro Arts* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> David Murphy, "Introduction," in *The First World Festival of Negro Arts*, ed. David Murphy (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 31.

<sup>31</sup> Penny Marie Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 160.

<sup>32</sup> Murphy, "Introduction," 32.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example: Murphy ed., *The First World Festival of Negro Arts* (2016); Andrew Apter, "Beyond Négritude: Black cultural citizenship and the Arab question in FESTAC 77," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28.3 (2016): 313-26.

<sup>35</sup> I had to rely on the English subtitles for the Russian voice-over, which might have obscured certain nuances.

<sup>36</sup> Personal interview, email, 18 September 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Woll, "The Russian Connection," 225.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

- 
- <sup>40</sup> As Annouchka de Andrade, Sarah Maldoror's daughter, told me, there is some confusion about whether Maldoror and Sembene met while in Moscow, or had already met one another in Africa before that.
- <sup>41</sup> Betti Ellerson, *Sisters of the Screen* (New York: Women Make Movies), 2002.
- <sup>42</sup> Woll, "The Russian Connection," 232.
- <sup>43</sup> Woll, "The Russian Connection," 233.
- <sup>44</sup> David Trotter, "A Cine-Fist to the Solar Plexus," *London Review of Books*, 40.15 (2 August 2018), 33.
- <sup>45</sup> Email correspondence, 10 August 2017.
- <sup>46</sup> David Murphy, *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 1.
- <sup>47</sup> John Saul, *The next liberation struggle: capitalism, socialism, and democracy in Southern Africa* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 33.
- <sup>48</sup> Samba Gadjigo et al, "Introduction," in *Ousmane Sembene: Dialogues with Critics and Writers*, eds Samba Gadjigo et al (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 1. It should be noted that the same focus can be found in Souleymane Cissé's early films such as *Baara* (1978) and *Finyé* (1982) but I do not have the space here to analyze these films; some analysis of these films can be found in Woll, "The Russian Connection."
- <sup>49</sup> The first time that I met Maldoror in person was when I invited her to present *Sambizanga* (1972) at the 2003 Cambridge African Film Festival. Assuming from *Sambizanga* (which is in Portuguese) that Maldoror speaks Portuguese, I arranged for a Portuguese-speaking friend to meet her at the train station to welcome her. But she speaks only French (and used interpreters on her film set), and my friend found himself in a cab with her unable to communicate. This reveals the assumptions we are capable of making about each other's language affiliations and how deeply this affects the research process and relationships, too.
- <sup>50</sup> Sarah Maldoror, "To Make a Film Means to Take A Position." In *African Experiences of Cinema*, eds Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham (London: BFI, 1996), 46.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.
- <sup>52</sup> Woll, "The Russian Connection," 225-228.
- <sup>53</sup> David Murphy makes a similar argument in his introduction to *The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar, 1966*, ed. David Murphy (Liverpool University Press, 2016).
- <sup>54</sup> Olivier Barlet cited in Woll, "The Russian Connection," 231.
- <sup>55</sup> Prachi Mokashi-Punekar, "From Moscow to Mauritania: Bridging Second and Third Cinema in Abderrahmane Sissako's *Octobre*", unpublished Masters essay for module "Cinema, Nation, and the Transcultural" (SOAS University of London), p.6.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.
- <sup>57</sup> Djagalov and Salazkina, "Tashkent '68," 280. Forty-nine African and Asian countries were represented at the first festival in 1968, and there were more than 200 film industry and government personnel involved (Djagalov and Salazkina, 279).
- <sup>58</sup> Ran Ma, "A genealogy of film festivals in the People's Republic of China: 'film weeks' during the 'Seventeen Years' (1949-1966)," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14.1 (2016): 40-58.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.
- <sup>60</sup> Djagalov and Salazkina, "Tashkent '68," 281.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.
- <sup>62</sup> Razlogova, "The Politics of Translation," 67.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 73 and 77.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>71</sup> Djagalov and Salazkina, “Tashkent ’68,” 282.

<sup>72</sup> Personal interview, email, 18 September 2017.

<sup>73</sup> I have written about Paulin Soumanou Vieyra’s experiences of the 6<sup>th</sup> World Festival of Youth and Students (held in Moscow in 1957) in: Lindiwe Dovey, “Towards Alternative Histories and Herstories of African Filmmaking: From Bricolage to the ‘Curatorial Turn’ in African Film Scholarship,” *A Companion to African Cinema*, ed. Carmela Garritano and Kenneth Harrow (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming).