African films and film-makers have frequently criticised Negritude and its political derivations. Pioneering African film-makers exposed the failures and denounced the abusive rhetoric of authenticity that served as principle – cosmetic principle – for several political regimes in Africa. It was in this post-independence era that the Senegalese Ousmane Sembène made a stand against corruption and neo-colonialism by adapting his novels to the screen and criticising Senghorian politics. His film *Xala* (1975) satirised the socialism of Senghor by showing how the privileges of the elite are protected. In response, the Senegalese government censored the film as it did with Sembène’s film *Ceddo* of 1977.1 Femi Okiremuete Shaka contextualises:

Sembène... actively participated in both the political and cultural debates that followed the emergence of the Negritude Movement, as well as participating in the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists held in Paris in 1956. Sembène is however one of the very few black Francophone writers who right from the beginning of the Negritude Movement criticized its key concepts.

Noureddine Ghali continues by saying that:

Sembène is one of many later African writers who have criticized the concept [of Negritude] vigorously, amongst other things for underpinning the view that the European contribution to global culture is to be technological and rational, while Africa can remain in acute economic disarray because it is happy just ‘being’... The close affinity of the concept with the racist view of Africans as happy dancing people has also attracted critical comment. Sembène adds here that he was in Senegal for the anti-colonial struggle – a veiled allusion to the fact this concept was developed in intellectual circles in Paris – and that the concept of ‘Negritude’ meant no more to him than to his people in the development of that struggle.3

About *Emitai* (1971) – his film depicting resistance fighters in a Senegalese village of Diola and the massacre that took place there – Sembène states

rhetorically that he was unaware of the independence movement being born from the so-called ideology of ‘Negritude’, because he was living with his people, in the same conditions as them. On the relationship of the Diola community with the gods in his film, Sembène asserts:

... they always wanted to mystify us. We were always hung up on this notion of gods, on negritude, and a lot of other stuff. And throughout this period, we were colonized...\(^4\)

He adds:

I have tried to demonstrate that if the negritude movement brought something to birth, it was still the act of a minority [and] that the people had already engaged in the struggle to be free.\(^5\)

Sembène will partially abandon writing and eventually turn to the medium of cinema in local languages for its popular potential and as a means of liberation:

... what led me to the cinema is that it goes further than the book, further than poetry, further than the orator. When I brought out Xala, each evening I had at least three hundred people all the time in the audience, with whom I used to debate in small groups from time to time... I want to bring back to my people their own situation so that they can recognize themselves in it, and ask questions. For the Third World film-maker... it is a question of allowing the people to summon up their own history, to identify themselves with it... This is why the language used plays a very

\(^4\) Ibid, p 48
\(^5\) Ibid, p 41

Still from Xala (1975), directed by Ousmane Sembène, © MTM
6. Ibid, p 46
9. Murphy and Williams, op cit, pp 94–5
14. In this film, a Parisian girl projects her exotic idea of ‘the negro beauty’ on her African partner who in turn abuses her gaze while similarly projecting his exoticism about Europe on her. He pretends to be a prince or proclaims his right not to work since his girlfriend is the daughter of an industrialist. In a meantime, the film shows the reality of the exploitation of black labour. At the end of the film a text appears saying ‘fifteen years after independence and still the same fantasies’. The film also shows the gap between Africans and Afro-Americans who do not share the values proposed by Négritude. Afro-Asiatic

important role: that is why I use the national language, Wolof, which is the language of the people.6

This choice of film medium for the masses came together with its implementations on the ground. Sembène travelled with his films to remote villages, in a way that paralleled the Soviet film trains. Whereas the struggle in Emitai is still anti-colonial, in Xala it becomes a class struggle. According to Sembène, the struggle against injustices was not racial but social. On the literary and cultural level, Sembène considered himself first as a worker and only afterwards as a black man, ‘Ma lutte est de classe, ma solidarité n’est pas de race.’ (‘My struggle is with class, my solidarity is not with race.’)7

Sembène rejects negro-essentialism as well as assimilative approaches by African elites.8 ‘He saw in Négritude a deliberate obfuscation of contemporary realities in favour of an essentialist vision turned towards the past.’9 Sembène has always therefore dissociated himself from theorisations of Négritude. The divergent approaches to Négritude by its initiators never allowed a common ideology to emerge and this is what made Sembène say he was ignorant about Négritude: ‘For me, it is like the sex of the angels.’10

African film-makers some fifty years later did not share with Négritude the same forms of Surrealist expression and existentialism. Theirs was instead a radicalised cinema of engagement because of the political situation that had abused Négritude ideology. Film-makers could not afford to unwind in sentimental and subjective explorations of individual sensations and personal relations when matters of life and death were at stake. By means of social and didactic realism in African cinema, issues relating to Négritude and racial pride gave way to preoccupations with political transparency:

The project of the early film-makers was to expose the failures of their abusive authoritarianism. By the 1970s, when Sembène attacked neocolonialism, most famously in Xala (1974), others like Dikongué-Pipa, challenged a patriarchy associated with traditional society, as in Muno Moto (1975) or Le Prix de la liberté (1978). By then négritude was viewed as passé or compromised.11

Idrissa Ouedraogo – author of the films Tilai (1990) and Samba Traoré (1992) – repeats Wole Soyinka’s famous words: ‘A tiger does not shout its tigritude’, and he adds, ‘Il bondit sur sa proie et la dévore’ (‘It leaps on its prey and devours it’).12 Jean-Pierre Bekolo also seems to parody afrocentric or negritudinous attitudes in his irony towards African authenticity, especially in Aristotle’s Plot (1996)13 and Ben Diogaye Bèye seems to pervert the Négritudinist gaze in Les Princes noirs de Saint-Germain-des-Prés (1975).14 ‘However, Négritude, even when defined as the whole of cultural values of Black Africa’, could only provide us the beginning of the solution to our problem, not the solution itself’, says Senghor.15

Is there a link between ‘African’ cinema and Négritude, beyond the cinematographic criticism that film-makers direct against the cultural politics of Négritude? ‘Négritude was a culture before being politics’, says Senghor. ‘The “Slave Trade” was firstly due to cultural contempt. And the most effective instrument of our liberation will be Négritude,
more exactly, *Poïèsis: Creation.* This is why the Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Pierre Bekolo asserts that ‘Africa has only one problem: how it’s represented all over the world... If the problem is the image then the solution is also the image.’ Many other similarities of the kind can be found. Although Sembène was anything but a follower of Negritudé, his struggle for dignity constitutes the heart of his projects, from *Borom Sarret* (1962) to *Moolaade* (2004). We should recall that dignity is the central theme of Negritude as well as of African cinema. Souleymane Cissé says that:

> ... the first task of African filmmakers is to affirm that people from here are human beings, and to communicate those values that could serve others. The generation that will follow us, will open itself up to other aspects of cinema.

Similar to Negritude, the project of African cinema not only consists in affirming human dignity, but aspires to share values on a universal scale. As René Depestre analyses:

> When rereading the texts of Césaire, Senghor, Alexis and other participants in the first Congress of Black Writers and Artists in 1956 at the Sorbonne, we understand that the Congress was not a meeting between persons with black skin. It was rather an effort to bring new values to the conscience of all peoples.

In the panel discussion on Negritude during the film festival African Screens, Manthia Diawara confirms that, despite political dissent, Negritude manifests itself unconsciously in the generation of filmmakers who make films about the gap between tradition and modernity and about the quest for traditional values.

In his film *Sources d’inspiration* (1968), which provokes reflection on the artist’s role in newly independent African countries, Cissé quotes Aimé Césaire, as does the Malian/Mauritanian film-maker Abderrahmane Sissako in his film *La vie sur terre* (1998):

> Beware of crossing your arms in the sterile pose of a spectator, for life is not a show on stage, for a sea of troubles is not a proscenium, for a screaming human being is not a dancing bear.

Sissako quotes Césaire as a statement on the cinematic visualisation of otherness, which explains his decision not to make a spectacular film but rather a slow-paced film that respects the rhythms of his father’s village.

In *Muna Moto* by Dikongué-Pipa (1975) an initiation ritual serves as a flashback during Ngando’s pondering on the injustice that has been done to him by his uncle who took his girlfriend as his third wife, thereby trading a dowry of imported goods that Ngando could not possibly afford. The dowry serving as a commodity instead of a symbolic gesture exemplifies the societal change and symbolises the abuse of tradition. Ngando’s dilemma between following his personal will and reconciling himself to a compromised tradition (enhanced by the voiceover of his deceased father asking him to submit to the tradition) is resolved by the
traditional ritual that Ngando remembers from when he was initiated. In this ritual, Ngando is represented by a dog that gets up and walks away. It is the force of the ritual that enables Ngando to revolt against a compromised tradition. When watching closely the ritual performed in *Muna Moto*, we might not want to see the film as simply challenging ‘a patriarchy associated with traditional society’ and to suggest that the film considers Negritude to be compromised. Instead, the director recalls the need for a genuine relation with tradition that allows an encounter with modernity that is truthful to one’s own cultural identity or, as Senghor would say, ‘it is time to recreate ourselves in the revival of our ancestral cultures and by developing ourselves according to our lines of forces...’.

In his film *We Too Walked on the Moon* (2009) Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda establishes a dialogue between two Negritude poets, Aimé Césaire and Tshiakatumba Matala Mukadi, whose ‘poetry of the historical event’ situates itself in continuation of Césaire’s lineage. The poems are taught to Congolese pupils in a classroom decorated with icons of African history and its diaspora. Recalling these icons situates the film in the ‘present of the memory’ and reminds us that ‘no race has the
monopoly on beauty, intelligence or strength, a reminder that still holds its place in the Congolese classroom, as a necessary means of undoing the inferiority complex inherited from the mental integration of Western imagery that constituted the initial raison d’être of the Negritude movement. In We Too Walked on the Moon, Bakupa-Kanyinda celebrates ‘the bravery of the dream, the courage of those who preceded us, of those who think we can reach the moon’. In choosing ‘Black Star Line’ as the name of his production company (referring to Marcus Garvey’s ideology of return), Bakupa-Kanyinda relates strongly to Mamadou Diouf’s definition of Negritude:

Césaire’s words ‘I discovered my identity by meeting Senghor’ (the latter defining Negritude in his turn as the entirety of the cultural values of the black world) perhaps constitute the essence of Negritude. They indicate that understanding the black world is the possibility for blacks in the Diaspora to create an identity. The imaginary or real return to Africa founds the identity of all blacks. Africa is the true locus of memory for all blacks, according to Negritude.

When creating the spirit of Black Star Line, says Bakupa-Kanyinda, we said to ourselves that even if the body would not return to Africa, the spirit will. Africa is an allegory in itself, which is not limited to its continent.

Negritude is a chapter of pan-Africanism... This chapter is not closed because muses and new channels are emerging. Negritude has dated since


25. Mamadou Diouf in Lumières Noires, op cit
it met the needs of a certain moment and worked as a mainspring, but as Césaire said, it is not frozen in time. It acts as an affirmation of existence, in a Sartrean way: ‘Je suis nègre donc je suis.’ I feel good with the term nègre.26

Other links between African films and Senghor’s Negritude can be found. Les contes des veillées noires and les chants gymniques, which are channels of African cultural and spiritual expression that helped Senghor to find his Negritude,27 constitute the themes of Ça twiste à Popenguine (1994) by Moussa Sene Absa and L’Appel des arènes (2005) by Cheikh Ndiaye. The girl in La petite vendeuse de soleil by Djibril Diop Mambéty recounts the opening of La belle histoire de Leuk le lièvre, a story handed down to us by Senghor. This story, in which animals consider the youngest ones the most intelligent, is placed in the royaume d’enfance (kingdom of childhood), Senghor’s recurrent poetic theme. Moreover, themes of Negritude relating to the African mask can be recognised in terms of cinematic masquerade.28 The mirror of the African fetish can be transposed to the reversed gaze of African cinema. The expression of an imaginary Africa – a desire to express a cultural consciousness of an imaginary entity – or unity is present in allegories of Africa throughout the history of African cinema.29

However, before continuing our attempt to unravel similarities between Negritude and African cinema, a question imposes itself. Will reflection on Negritude, rather than Negritude itself, reveal to us some openings towards thought on African cinema? Starting from the premise that Negritude is not limited to the writings of its three apostles – Senghor, Césaire and Damas – we could reconsider the critique against Negritude and ask if such reconsideration could perhaps provide food for thought on African film. Two possible means to do so can be advanced. The first will consider Negritude, as well as African cinematographic expressions, not as necessarily essentialist but as particularistic. The second will approach Negritude not as a simple inversion of occidental values (values that it would be advisable to reject as purely tributary to the occidental and Eurocentric episteme) but as a strategy. This approach allows us similarly to perceive African cinema as no longer simply a tributary to occidental cinema in its technique, aesthetics and narration, but to consider it as a strategy that goes beyond the mirror-site or an ordinary ‘game of the gaze’ in a cinema of acculturation.

Let us first follow the first way of thinking on particularism versus essentialism. The reproach against Negritude for being essentialist has also been a constant in criticism of African cinema, which we considered as authentic and unitary, as representing a certain African essence or as the projection of an occidental imagery, in other words, as suffering from the mirror-effect of a European auto-conception. The alternative would be to interpret Negritude as an expression of particularism rather than an expression of essentialism. Negritude goes beyond a racial vision on the world. Césaire expresses this idea in the following words: ‘I belong to the race of the oppressed.’30 We notice the same move to step beyond the biological notion of race into a more political one in African film. Sembène tells Ghali that:

Xala was shown at the Bombay festival last January and the Indians told me that the film’s content applies to Indian society. They have all these
beggars and bourgeois, and they had to have a film get to them from Senegal to allow them to identify with something on their doorstep.31

In agreement with Césaire’s Negritude, the films by Jean-Pierre Bekolo and his generation use particularism as a springboard for universalism. In order to return the double gaze of rejection and assimilation that proceeds from the status of liminality inherited from colonialism, Bekolo adopts a strategy that seeks a particular cinema. Particular in its narration, aesthetics and themes, it nevertheless wants to be understood, ideally by everybody. In making a ‘different’ cinema, Bekolo puts his finger on the particularism of dominant cinematic storytelling as having a tendency to universalism, and yet without believing in a uniformly Africanised cinematic language. As Césaire strikingly says: ‘plus nègre on est, plus universel on est’ (‘the more black one is, the more universal one is’).32 In other words, the sole universality possible is the recognition of particularism. The right to recognition is perhaps the sole essence attributable to Negritude. Consequently, the act of seeing performed by Bekolo’s films does not only restore an existence that had been denied and of which African film-makers consider they have been deprived. In Aristotle’s Plot, for instance, Bekolo sets himself the task of denouncing narrative codes as prescribed by Aristotle: he asks himself whether an African story also has to arouse fear and pity. In showing that a different cinema does not exclude understanding by a universal audience, he follows Césaire’s maxim that culture is ‘neither escape from the world nor egoistic withdrawal into oneself’.

What about of the second way of thinking, strategy versus tributary to the West? The understanding of Negritude as inscribing itself in the colonial mode of thought in reversing its hierarchy of values is maybe a reiteration of the reduction of the other to a variation – and in the case of Negritude to an inversion – of the self. The alternative would consist of interpreting Negritude as a strategy rather than a mode of thought that is a tributary to occidental logos. Of course, it is not desirable to reduce African film to its strategic aspect. However, we will limit ourselves to this perspective, strategy as heuristic principle, without seeking to recuperate all African cinemas to this thought. In his 1965 text Vues sur l’Afrique noire, ou assimiler, non être assimilés, Léopold Sédar Senghor formulated very precisely what is at stake in the strategy of Negritude, as it is in African cinema: ‘to assimilate or become assimilated’. Négritudinists asked themselves: ‘How can we change and surpass the intervention of the other to our advantage?’ In the case of the film-makers this becomes: ‘how can we appropriate and use cinematographic technique to our advantage in order not to be appropriated by dominant imagery?’

In 1895 the first 100 cameras from the atelier Lumière in Lyon were sent to Africa to build the image of African people and to justify the colonisa-

Which meanings can we generate with film, which meanings can it bear for us? We will tackle the question of what film could signify by entering into the process of African film-making and its possible intentions.

31. Ghali, op cit, p 43
32. Aimé Césaire: une parole pour le XXième siècle, (1094), directed by Euzhan Palcy, 164 minutes
The process of cultural appropriation proper to African cinema has been anticipated within the Negritude movement as ‘active assimilation’. We can perceive this in the particular appropriation of French in Negritude poetry as well as in the films of Bekolo, in the cinematographic techniques of Sembène, in the transformation of its grammar by Mambéty, and in the influence of Afro-American Jazz and Western film genre on numerous African film-makers. This is no longer the double gaze of colonialism that prevails – the one that combines assimilation and refusal – but something other that combines appropriation with transcendence, to the extent that many film-makers proclaim cinema to be an African invention. Bekolo states in Aristotle’s Plot that cinema was born in the third century before Christ; Mambéty asserts that cinema was born in Africa because the image itself was born in Africa. He continues:

The instruments, yes, are European, but the creative necessity and rationale exist in our oral tradition... Oral tradition is a tradition of images... Imagination creates the image and the image creates cinema, so we are in direct lineage as cinema’s parents.34

We could also think of Dani Kouyaté, who says that the griot (the traditional storyteller) has always been a film-maker, of Gaston Kaboré, who purports that African cinema escapes the opposition between tradition and modernity, and finally of Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda, who affirms:

I made a film called 10,000 Years of Cinema because I’m convinced that 10,000 years ago, here in Africa, a griot made cinema. The griot is the narrator, the storyteller. Even though there is no camera, when he tells stories, we can see images. This is what I call the greatness of Africa. This is cinema: the desire for the other. I will end up by quoting Djibril Diop Mambety who said that cinema is Waru in Wolof, and Waru means ‘amazement’.35

Claiming that cinema was invented in Africa twenty-three centuries ago amounts to saying that cinema has always enlightened what has been consistently called ‘the continent of darkness’. Accordingly, African film-makers, as well as thinkers of Negritude, placed their image of Africa within history. This strongly counters the occidental idea of a backward Africa without a past (a claim made ever since Hegel). ‘Our task consists in giving an understanding that whites lied with their images’, says Souleymane Cissé.36 Of course, African films were only born sixty years ago, and this in a situation of oppression and marginalisation in which the African is understood as the ‘other than...’, La Noire de..., as Sembène titled one of his first films. This situation of alienation forced the African to make an attempt to think of the self by way of the image and stories which were imposed by the centre and, by extension, the techniques which the coloniser possessed. The appropriation of the image, the mastering of cinematographic techniques is the neutralisation of that situation of alienation. In this perspective, referring to twenty-three centuries of African cinema metaphorically advances the assertion that African (filmic) storytelling does not inevitably and necessarily have to be a reaction to the intervention of the West. The other is not indispensable for the African to define him- or herself.
In other words, cinema, as well as poetry, literature and European languages, is an intrinsic part of African culture. Claiming the invention of cinema is therefore related to a certain openness of the particular to the universal: the particular that does not turn itself towards its difference or its differentiation but, on the contrary, assumes the liberty to transcend hegemony. From this follows the openness of African cinema, confirmed by Abderrahmane Sissako: ‘We are more universal than Europeans are... The other is less different for the African than is the African for the others’.  

Indeed, this allegation that cinema had its birth in ancient Africa, and not in the modern France of the Lumière brothers, seems objectionable to Westerners due to their false opposition between adaptation and authenticity. The inauthentic imitation, perceived as arrogation, is a condemned value for Western thinking, because it is not original. Even nowadays, this kind of appropriation is ‘rejected in a monstrous succursal of Occidentalism’, as Jean Baudrillard says. Yet cinema has not been borrowed and cannot be a derivation: dependence and assembling do not exclude autonomy, according to Jean-François Bayart. African cinema is the result of hospitality towards the technique and its narrative potentialities, genres and aesthetics, an absorption and transmutation of its use, which implies a total liberty of storytelling.

What is film – the content or the container? Although the container can have some content, I felt that the content should be invented in Africa, like the rap singer compelled to disrespect the rule of law when he places his fingers on the record and stops it from playing normally as he manipulates it to create a different kind of rhythm... an entirely new art form and aesthetics.

Aesthetics, like technique or language, is thus no longer reducible to a vehicle for or of unilateral universalism. This relation to the appropriation of otherness, theorised in Senghor’s motto as ‘to assimilate, not to be assimilated’, is closely related to the metaphor of ‘anthropophagy’ employed by the Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade in his Manifesto Antropófago (1928), inspired by Montaigne’s sixteenth-century essay on cannibals. Andrade proclaimed anthropophagy as a process of absorption and blending of other cultures. He argued for a critical ingestion of European culture and the ‘reworking of that tradition in Brazilian terms’. In the same decade of Negritude, the metaphor of anthropophagy came to ‘play an important role in the Brazilian artistic and literary cultural movement during much of the twentieth century’. Anthropophagy:

... is understood to be a modernist process formulated in Brazil, in which artists and writers attempted to understand the configuration of Brazilian identity amongst its forming cultures (African, Indian and Portuguese) which cultivated a symbolic practice of incorporating the Other’s value to construct its own.

Not only values but also the techniques and information of the developed countries (such as the technology of film) are devoured, negotiated and adjusted for the sake of survival by learning from the oppressors and
mastering their ways and weapons, and in this way reflect the consciousness of the relationship between knowledge and power.

This ‘anthropophagic’ relationship between the same and the other is expressed by African film-makers in their appropriation of cinematographic techniques and by Negritude’s assimilation of the French language. These strategic processes are already evident in the composition of the word Negritude itself, the suffix ‘-itude’ implying the idea of an attitude, of a claimed pose, in relation to the state or the intrinsic quality. Therefore, we could alter Ouedraogo’s phrase that criticised Negritude to: tigritude is leaping and devouring.

[Negritude] is an attitude and a method, again, a spirit which, significantly, makes less the synthesis than the symbiosis between modernity and Blackness. I say ‘Blackness’ and not Negritude because it is more about the Black spirit rather than the Black experience.45

The concept of Negritude bears reference to something that does not necessarily have to express its idea. Contrary to the Western perspective, from Plato to Hegel, on art as an expression of an idea, African art according to Negritude is not a material manifestation of its idea but considers itself the expression of the thing. This is why we cannot limit ourselves to looking for films that express the ‘idea’ of Negritude but must look for those that are Negritude. The conception of this ‘Negritude’ quality or state – formulated by Senghor as ‘the whole of cultural values of the black world’ and by Césaire as ‘the consciousness and acceptance of oneself as being black’ – is thus variable and dynamic. The expression – cinematographic or other – can thus transgress this -itude of a certain moment or period but remain the expression of Negritude, even if the etymon nègre is no longer perceived as an ‘essence’ but as an attribute to which we do not want to be reduced but from which we cannot detach ourselves; an attachment whose signification is inaccessible, significant but without signification, and that transgresses the logic of an anti-racist interpretation of Negritude in the 1930s and ‘40s that attributed meaning to skin colour. This is why Césaire could say in 1987 that ‘Negritude [was not a historical impasse, but] the seizure by ourselves of our past and, through poetry, through the imaginary, through the novel, through art, the intermittent fulguration of what we can become’.46

After having focused on the process of assimilation in African cinema in relation to Negritude, we now continue to consider the question of meaning of cinema by considering its teloi that are similar to those of Negritude. The aims that African film-makers allot to themselves are diverse but nevertheless all related to those of Negritude. First, there is the artistic aspect as purpose in itself; second, the re-establishment of dignity (Sembène-Senghor); the rehabilitation of foundations (Césaire); the affirmation of existence (Nasser Ktari, Assande Fargass); and finally the participation in the universal (Bekolo-Césaire). Other recurrent themes in both are nostalgia, the claim to the right of speech, revolution and the destabilisation of the language of the coloniser and many others.

We can recognise those Negritude aims and intentions of African cinema in ‘Third Cinema’, which is a cinema of opposition towards all

Chewing and processing the desired parts of the ‘Other’ is very distinct from an identification (Heloísa Buque de Hollandia, The Law of the Cannibal or How to Deal with the Idea of “Difference” in Brazil, 20 April 1998: New York University). On the contrary, the need to absorb the other is not mimicry but a strategy to renovate and revitalise one’s own society and to rework its cultural products. See Budasz, op cit, p 12.

43. Haroldo de Campos, ‘Concrete Poetry and Beyond’, op cit, pp 38–45, in Budasz, op cit
44. ArtThrob, Back on Track, op cit
forms of colonisation, neo-colonisation, cultural imperialism or politics of oppression. Teshome Gabriel defines it in this way: ‘an alternative cinema, a cinema of decolonisation and for liberation’; Third Cinema also refers to the formerly subjugated peoples’ shared desire to use film to reappraise their history, restore popular memory, and denounce social ills as they counter existing misrepresentations and affirm a new sense of identity’. The ‘Film Policy for Nigeria’, for instance, is explicit and conservative: ‘to encourage the exploitation of our heroic past and cultural heritage in the production of films...’. Above all, according to Jonathan Haynes, it is a matter of creating for the outside world an exemplary and positive image that turns out to espouse the characteristics of state propaganda and that manifests an inferiority complex. The manifestos of Algiers in 1975 and Niamey in 1982 are more ambitious. There, the FEPACI (Fédération Panafrique des Cinéastes) announced cinema as a tool for reflection, awareness and the redefinition of identity and dignity. This strategy of politics through culture, put forward by Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral, was inspired by the Négritude movement.

Parallelisms can be discovered between African film and Négritude in the modes of representation that were put at stake. Cinema and Négritude share the mechanism of projection, the techniques of implied narrative framework, the mobilisation of visual resources and dramaturgy. Negro-African poetry is ‘an image or analogical, melodic and rhythmical images in their entirety’, ‘a luxuriance of images’, according to Senghor who understands poetry as all artistic creation, including film, by relying on the etymological sense of the word poiësis which means ‘creation’.

Poetry is made by repetitions, by editing and movement, all characteristics essential to cinema. No poem is more cinematically apt than the famous one by Léon Damas. The same word or group of words is repeated in a verse or stanza but with changes of place and context in its etymological meaning.

Ils sont venus ce soir où le
tam
tam
roulait de
rythme en
rythme
la frénésie
des yeux
la frénésie des mains la frénésie
des pieds de statues
DEPUIS
combien de MOI
sont morts
depuis qu’ils sont venus ce soir où le
tam
tam
roulait de
rythme en
rythme
la frénésie
des yeux

49. Haynes, op cit, p 64
51. Senghor, Ce que je crois, op cit, p 119
52. Ibid, p 147
53. Ibid, p 150
To conclude, we have to emphasise why the too facile relationship between Negritude and the so-called Calabash cinema has not been included in our reflexion thus far. The ‘Calabash’ categorisation is itself already a certain stance that departs from a determined conception of Negritude and that even opposes itself to possible new interpretations of Negritude. Associations between the particular aesthetics of Calabash cinema and Negritude eclipses the latter’s indisputable modern aspects. That is the reason why I have approached Negritude as a continuous movement in which we can situate the phenomenon of African film which – in its modifying representations, as the Ethiopian film-maker Haile Gerima would say – nevertheless always expresses what it understands by the (variable) etymon nègre of the suffix ‘-itude’.

This is an expression of the attitude of reprendre, to ‘take up again’ or ‘to resume’, as intended by V Y Mudimbe as an image of the contemporary activity of African art that ‘takes up an interrupted tradition, not out of a desire for purity... but in a way that reflects the conditions of today’ and that reflects on its power to adapt according to changing post- and neo-colonial contexts, its re-imagination and reinvention.54 This ‘resumption’ is not limited to the essentialist aspect in the reformulation of Negritude’s etymon that is depicted by Senghor as ‘Negritude of the sources’ and by Sembène as ‘the stage of complexes’.

No, says Césaire in his Cahier talking about his Negritude. African cinema, and definitely all forms of African contemporary art, will finally allow us to conclude by saying that Negritude does not convey a single concept. This could even be illustrated by a film-maker who refuses to be called an ‘African film-maker’. Bouna Médoune Sèye tells us: ‘I’m a

55. *Lumières Noires*, op cit

56. My négritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the clamor of the day/My négritude is not a pool of dead water on the dead eye of the earth/My négritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral/It plunges in the red flesh of the soil/It plunges in the ardent flesh of the sky/It pierces the opaque despair of its upright patience, Shireen K Lewis, trans, in *Race, Culture, and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory from Négritude to Créolité*, eds A Allahar and S N Jackson, 2006, Caribbean Studies, Lexington Books, Oxford, pp 39–40

57. Described by Jean-Pierre Bekolo and Joëlle Esso, *Afroback* comes from ‘the necessity to tread the boards by naming things which others haven’t named, which we still don’t name ourselves and which the other wouldn’t know how to name. This absence of words shows us that the African in relation to the West has not yet defined his model...’ In this Afroback generation of artistsliving in France, the ‘return to the sources’ is an aesthetics that goes along with a visionary approach of Africa. This ‘back’ is not nostalgic but strategic, says Bekolo. Afroback appears in cinema through this generation of Occidentalised Africans looking for their roots as an identity quest. Mama Keita, Serge Coelo, Abderrahmane Sissako, Gaité Fofana, Zeka Laplaine, Alain Gomis... a generation after the Calabash cinema made by ‘villagers who seized cameras’ and the engaged film-makers of the independences, Afroback is also the schizophrenia in which a generation decides to regain the conviction that the power and truth are in Africa. This schizophrenia had to be named in order not to be a defect but a vision in which a power is incarnated that already carries the Africa of tomorrow.

Césaire shows us that it is not a matter of rigid identity by saying that ‘ma négritude n’est ni une tour, ni une cathédrale... elle plonge, elle trouve’ (‘my negritude is not a tower, not a cathedral... it dives, it digs’). In this regard, contemporary forms of négritude can be recognised for instance in ‘Ciné-gritude’, an exhibition of all Fespaco-laureates (FESPACO prize-winners); the project Imagine Africa that takes as its aim the unification of Africa by means of the imaginary, the representation, the media and education, from the basis of their politics of hospitality; and the Afroback style consisting of an aesthetics as a form of resistance. In sum, Negritude belongs to a cinematographic domain that covers a period much longer than that extending from the 1930s to the 1950s and that is geographically much vaster than Africa, even reaching the realm of the extra-terrestrial, as glimpsed in the title of Bekolo’s video-installation *Une africaine dans l’espace* (2007) and in the latest film by Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda, *We Too Walked on the Moon* (2009).

Translations from the French are by the author unless indicated otherwise in the notes.