



SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE
HORS COMPÉTITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

A FILM BY
SOULEYMANE CISSÉ

Films Cissé / Sisé Filimu 2015



SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE
HORS COMPÉTITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

les Films Cissé

present



OKa

“Our House”

screenplay and direction

Souleymane Cissé

with

Magnini Koroba Cissé

Aminata Cissé

Badjénèba Cissé

M’Ba Cissé

The cast members of the film will be at Cannes from May 20 to 23, 2015

Mali 2015 - duration 96 minutes

Production

Sisé Filimu - Les Films Cissé

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S y n o p s i s

O Ka

(Our house)

O Ka, it is the family of an artist in Bamako, that house which binds him to his parents, to his story, to his memories, and from which his sisters were expelled, regardless of the law, some day in 2008. **It is also his country, Mali**, which he saw sinking into war, in spite of the traditions of tolerance which had driven it since the independence.

The fight for truth goaded the artist to speak and commit himself.

O Ka

(Our house)

Souleymane Cissé tells the story of his ancestors. A story that dates back a long time, before the colonial times. It is a saga, the saga of the Cissés. The film traces back several generations, covers all eras. O Ka is a polyphonic autobiography, first we hear Souleymane Cissé's voice, but also the ones of his relatives, from the oldest to the youngest, who belong to the present generation. **The voice of that child that he films with endearment, and who could as well be him, the boy he was, as his grandson. The voice of the house in which he grew up and that he wants to give to his four sisters in distress.**

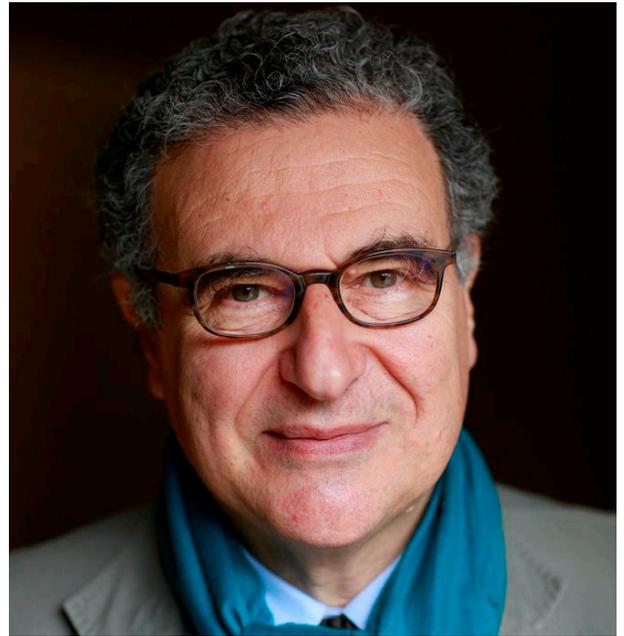
O Ka is a family story. Souleymane Cissé says he was born in 1940 at Bozola, a poor commune of Bamako. Ever since he was a child, he has been in love with images. Then with education. He has a taste for learning and a gift for knowledge. This is what, later on, made him a filmmaker, the author of *Yeelen* of which we see pictures—beautiful pictures of the shooting, in 1986, on the ochre dunes of Mali's desert.

O Ka shows nature, animals, be it ants, by the thousands, a white horse, roosters and ostriches, and, above all, these children in their white sheets...

"Fire goes wherever it wants", says the old wise man, the marabout.

The world is turning upside down because of that feud between the Cissés and the Diakités. Incredibly strong images of the police expelling the Cissés from the house in which they grew up and lived their whole lives. Souleymane Cissé's sisters resist, scream their distress out, ask for justice. That quarrel divides the neighbourhood, and Mali, too. This right for which the four sisters are fighting, ready to die, if need be.

Point of view



Serge Toubiana

Director of Cinémathèque française

The hundred-year-old trees, the peeping of the birds, the sound of the wind, the peaceful river. A filmmaker tells the tragic eviction of his family, films the child to whom the need for justice and the rejection of humiliation is to be passed on.

Mali is a land directly assaulted by terrorists and religious fanatics who keep destroying the slightest remnants of the African civilization. These ostriches which run on all sides. The white of childhood, the white of youth which is about to take its destiny into its own hands.

These children who play into space like free birds do. This Africa, in all its beauty, in all its distress.

O Ka is a movie dedicated to women.

To Souleymane Cissé's four sisters, who fight for truth and against an obviously unfair court ruling. To his mother, that he brings to mind in a primal memory. And through these women, through their affection and through their struggles, dedicated to all the ones who stand up for their rights, for the protection and education of their children, for their families. Dedicated to film editor Andrée Davanture, who had worked on Cissé's films for almost 40 years before she passed away.

"O Ka" also means "house" in the Soninke language. Our house. It seems like a rather simple story: by counterfeiting some land ownership titles, the Diakités, a family who had benefited from the Cissé family's hospitality, claims rights to the Cissés' ancestral house, located in the old commune of Bozola, in Bamako. The Diakités bribed a judge who then ruled in their favour and ordered that the four Cissé sisters be expelled from the house, in spite of their age and, above all, in spite of the law. Deeply wounded, Cissé's sisters decided to sit in front of the house and claim for justice. The short news item is real, far from being unique in Mali, no matter how obvious the fraud appears. However, their judicial fight has been on since 2008 and the Supreme Court has yet to reach a verdict.

Although obviously "our house" stand for many more things. First of all, it's a family. When Souleymane Cissé talks about his house, he talks about his family, and when he talks about his family, he talks about his house. Through words or images, he brings back to life the generations before him and the ones who live now, ready to take over. He entrusts us with his story and his yellowed pictures, which look like the ones of many a family. There was his grandfather, the founder. Then his father, born in a house in Bozola, which has now become one of the biggest marketplaces in West Africa, reminding us of Bamako and the Cissés' business tradition. This father—an ageless figure who appears in the picture—is the man one mustn't disturb, whose room was

Point of view

Thomas Wallon

Scénariste / Dialoguiste



forbidden. He's also the one who forced his children to go to school and saw to their education. Souleymane Cissé's four sisters, as Cissé himself, were born in that same house whose numerous rooms and small courtyards are just so many fragments of a great shared history. Souleymane Cissé wouldn't be able to tell that story without referring to women, and the patience and care of the ones who looked after him. His mother, who had to deal with the delicate child he was, and his elder sister—one of the evicted ones—who always looked after him. The fate that awaits the four sisters—old women who used to inhabit that house as keepers of a shared history—seems all the more cruel and offensive to all the others.

Mali is yet another house, an endangered one, too. The film traces its long history back to the Soninkés, a people as ancient as the Cissés, so the legend says. Souleymane Cissé's childhood is a witness to its essential features: education, transmission of stories and of cultures—a common treasure, cherished by all. That feeling that fate sets itself against them—all exits being blocked one after the other, justice and truth being threatened by uncontrollable forces, by that "infernal machine of men", as is said in the film—isn't that what Malians experienced in 2012? The destruction of the Timbuktu mausoleums was probably a sign for the Western world, but it was, first and foremost, an attack against the traditions and culture of all Malians. A whole people suffered that denial of justice.

Finally, this movie has to do with a theme that runs through Souleymane Cissé's films: nature, its wild fauna and flora, its balance destroyed by the malice of men. Eventually, that great house of all men is victim of that surge of violence and lies. In his film however, Cissé tries to reconstruct nature, to stabilize it through its permanent presence, as a mark of confidence in man's capacity of wonder.

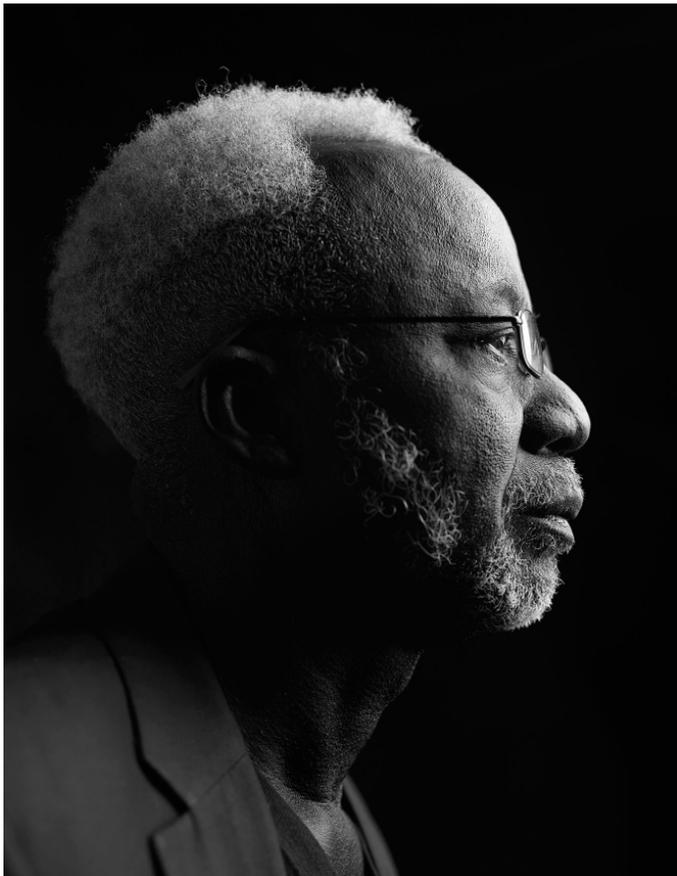
Only a large house could be a receptacle for all these themes. As a consequence, the narration is made up of several layers. With great poetic and sensory freedom, images of several times and origins are combined in order to rebuild what has been torn down: justice, common culture, hope. This would not have been possible without a deeply committed architect. When confronted with injustice, Souleymane Cissé first was a bit confused: the world-famous filmmaker—Mali's artistic icon, seemed very far away from his native Bozola commune. But he was touched, hurt and upset. It took him some time to conceive of this film—as an answer to his attackers, as a support to his people, as a message of hope to all the citizens of Mali. In order to achieve this, he had to speak out, he had to get involved personally, both behind the cameras and in front of them. With *O Ka*, he is both bearing witness and showing a way out, without any excessive optimism.

And finally, the horizon of *O Ka* is not made of Bozola walls, no matter how old and steeped in history they may be, it is not one family, as exemplary as it may be. The film won't focus on one personal issue. In spite of the pain his sisters endured with that denial of justice, *O Ka* looks to the future and is delivering a message of hope. The love Souleymane Cissé bears for children comes through better than ever before. Whether they are wandering through an empty building or playing among ostriches, they are not just his grandchildren and he is not only a misty-eyed grandfather filming them.

He is filming those who embody hope for their country, the value of education, the power of love to defeat evil.

Souleymane Cissé

Filmmaker / Screenwriter / Producer



© Xavier Arias

Souleymane Cissé's history is quite impressive to say the least. He was only 7 when he started to get interested in cinema. After attending secondary school in Dakar, he went back to Mali in 1960, at the time when the country won its independence. That was when the revelation hit him, on the occasion of a screening about the arrest of Lumumba: he would be a filmmaker.

He got a grant and went to Moscow where he worked as a projectionist, and then became a director. In 1970, he was hired as a cameraman by the Malian Ministry of Information. Two years later, he directed *Five Days in a Life* which was awarded at the International Festival of Carthage.

His first long feature, *Den Muso* (The Girl), which was completed successfully thanks to a French cooperation, tells the story of a mute girl that was raped and who then was rejected by her family. The film was

forbidden in Mali and Souleymane Cissé went to prison. He was acclaimed by the critique with movies such as *Baara* (Work), and *Finyé* (The Wind), which were both awarded the Stallion of Yenenga at Fespaco. But it is with *Yeelen* (Light), Grand Prize of the Jury at Cannes in 1987, that he finally came to fame. In 1995, he directed *Waati* (Time), which deals with the deep wounds left by apartheid and racism, and, in 2009, *Min Yé...* (Tell Me Who You Are), which shows the contradictions of the Malian bourgeoisie in search of meaning.

In 2013, Souleymane Cissé directed *O.Sembène*, a documentary in tribute to his late friend.

A committed filmmaker, Souleymane Cissé is also the president of the Union of the creators and entrepreneurs of cinema and audiovisual media of West Africa (UCECAO) that he partly created. His work enabled him to be appointed a Commander of the National Order of Mali and Commander of the Arts and Letters of France.

His new film *O Ka* (Our House) will be premiered in the Official Selection at Cannes 68th Film Festival in 2015.

Filmography

feature films

1975	Den Muso (The girl)
1977	Baara (Work)
1981	Finyé (Wind)
1987	Yeelen (Light)
1995	Waati (Time)
2009	Min Yé... (Tell me who you are)
2013	O.Sembene
2015	O Ka (Our house)

Cast

Housewives, Souleymane Cissé's sisters, playing themselves:

Magnini Koroba Cissé
Aminata Cissé
Badjénèba Cissé
M'Ba Cissé



Technical staff

Screenplay and direction

Souleymane Cissé

Cinematography

Xavier Arias

Fabien Lamotte

Thomas Robin

Hamady Diallo

Sound

Yiriyé Sabo

Vincent Defaye

Mixing

Joël Rangon

Edited by

Andrée Davanture

Youssouf Cissé

Marie-Christine Rougerie

Clémence Diart

Production manager

Fatou Cissé

Post-Production

Walter Films



Ibrahim M'baye Diarra



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ORKA

*There is no greater distress
than that of a helpless man
facing injustice.*

TO
ANDRÉE D'AVANTURE TALEGHANI



Conception posters: Gordon

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