

Bekolo accomplishes two goals: he reengages with the ideological critiques that undergirded much of early African cinema, and he carries out his own critical project by deploying elements of popular media culture in a manner that does not disavow, but rather engages, commercial media's style.

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Mama Keita, director. *L'Absence*. 2009. 164 minutes. French and Wolof. France, Guinea, Senegal. Kinterfilm. 2009. No price reported.

If one had to choose one scene to capture the heart of Mama Keita's *L'Absence*, it could be the one in which Adama, the leading character, is lost in the middle of Dakar with only Euro banknotes. He needs Francs CFA. Time is running out for him to find his mute sister, to get her out of the underground life of prostitution. A man who is a dwarf offers him help but disappears suddenly in the backyard of a street shop with the money. Adama wanders around asking whether anyone saw him. A man stops by and asks sarcastically, "Since when do you give your money to a stranger?" This is how Adama, this young scientist from the Senegalese diaspora, realizes brutally, in the midst of a manhunt, that money cannot buy help, even in "Africa."

For once, exile is not viewed through the optic of the desire to leave, through the hope for a better life abroad. In Mama Keita's movie exile only appears when it ends: when one returns. Adama was a promising young student. With the kind support of professors, he got a grant to study in France. The promises were fulfilled: he led a successful professional life, rising to a top position in the scientific academia. Was it this success that kept him away, during long and silent years, from his home country of Senegal?

Keita reveals very little about Adama. What matters is not his tragic family background, the loss of a mother in childbirth. It is his inability to return, to recreate a family bond that was never clearly broken but left an open wound, barely hidden in this voluntary exile. *L'Absence* is what we could call a psychological drama cast as a thriller. Adama has returned, but he is held back by his past demons. Over the years he had comforted himself by sending money to his relatives, easily convinced that it was enough to maintain "a family." However, he is not a particularly likeable character. Although we know little about him, his acts reveal a selfish, irresponsible, blinded man. As the film goes on and the tension increases, he is little more than a pathetic man running after, or maybe against, the absence that separated him from his family. Yet the drama suggests that nothing can wipe out absence, be it his own or another's.

The film poses the central question: What can replace exile? What is left when everyone leaves, and what remains? Keita marries drama and thriller so as to show the dark face of a Dakar left alone, abandoned by its promising sons and daughters: a Dakar underground, surviving on easy money, where individuals themselves are abandoned as families disintegrate through exiles and absences.

William Nadylam's crude, unsentimental, and even harsh performance in the role of Adama holds the film altogether. Keita himself has acknowledged a certain chaos in the scenario (see his interview with Olivier Barlet, "*L'Absence: Une Métaphore de l'Etat de l'Afrique*," May 2009, www.africultures.com), explaining that the shooting conditions had been so difficult and constraining that he thought this would be his last film. *L'Absence* was shot in five weeks with a low budget. It is only after many, though award-filled, years that the film has made its way to cinemas in 2014. (It was selected for the Rotterdam Festival and received the Best Screenplay Award at Fespaco 2009.)

In the film's tragic critique of postcolonialism one might find echoes of Cheikh Amidou Kane's novel *L'Aventure Ambigüe* (1961), in which a young man returns from a promising exile at university in Paris only to find himself feeling suicidally lost and alienated at home. Such a comparison, however, risks reducing Adama's impossible return to a situation of cultural incompatibility. There is much more than that here. Adama is never accused of being either too assimilated or decultured. Instead, the film hints at the violence of his departure—with the moral violence of his absence mirrored and replaced by the physical violence now pulsing through Dakar. The question is not simply whether one can return after exile, but what does leaving mean? The film presents absence through its moral and social implications, and exposes its inherent contradictions, opposing the irresistible attraction of an international, "extroverted" success (see Jean-François Bayart's *The Politics of the Belly* [Polity, 2009]) with a continent that has been left orphaned.

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Haile Gerima, director. *Teza*. 2008. 140 minutes. Amharic, German, and English, with English subtitles. Ethiopia/Germany. Negod-Gwad Productions, Pandora Filmproduktion, and Westdeutscher Rundfunk. \$29.95.

Teza, the latest work of the director Haile Gerima, has been widely lauded in festivals for everything from its musical score to its acting and cinematography, and it has received dozens of awards from, among others, FESPACO, the Venice Film Festival, and the Dubai International Film Festival. The story