



IN THE BLACK FANTASTIC

Atlantics (Atlantique)

Mati Diop on 'Atlantics'

This film is inspired by your short film Atlantiques, about a group of Senegalese men who set sail for Europe. At what point did the focus change from the men who left to the girls who stayed behind?

It all began in 2008. I filmed Serigne [the main character] while he was talking about his crossing to his two friends. I didn't ask him questions like, 'Why did you leave' or 'What happened when you arrived?', I asked him to tell me about his journey. At the time I felt it was important to capture the story of a crossing heard from somebody who experienced it. A couple of months later, Serigne passed away and I was confronted with the choice of stopping the film or continuing without my main character. I went back to Dakar and went to Serigne's funeral, where I met his mother and sister. I filmed his sister, a very beautiful young woman, obviously very sad, and very silent. She looked at me through the camera and I had an intuition that she should be the lead character of a feature, that I should be telling the story of migration from the point of view of a sister or a lover.

Can you talk about how you compiled those stories?

Through my cousin I met a couple of boys who told me about their desire to go to Europe. I felt a lot of things while talking with them that were not really things you can articulate. It's about observation and all the invisible dimension of these stories. The atmosphere of the city was transformed by these boys suddenly disappearing and taking boats in the middle of the night while the women are sleeping. Also, you experience the ocean very differently when you know a lot of people have disappeared there. And I read articles in which women told of their experience of losing their kids or their brother. I was very marked by my own relationship to being a witness to that. I accumulated a lot of sadness and anger. I realised, I come from this: I'm the daughter of an immigrant who left Dakar right after his brother, Djibril Mambéty, had made *Touki Bouki* – a film that was already then talking about migration.

Atlantics is grounded in the real-world problem of migration, but also has supernatural elements. What storytelling possibilities did the ghost story genre offer you?

I never thought of it as the subject on one side and the form on the other. The idea came together immediately in subject and form – the idea of talking about migration through the fantasy genre was one and the same.

Some people call [my short film] *Atlantiques* a documentary, but for me that's not really it. It was already a ghost film. My first experience shooting in Dakar was filming a boy who was flesh and bone in front of me, but who was telling me he was not here, because when you decide to leave it's because you feel you're already dead. That marked me. At that time there was a very ghostly atmosphere in the city. I was mostly going out in the evening, and the night in Dakar is very special.

As a viewer you get that sense in Atlantics, that the city has a different energy after dark.

The film is really about this ghost generation, all these young people who have lost their lives in the ocean haunting the neighbourhood by their absence. The immateriality, the fact that there is not a name that can be given to this tragedy,

the fact that they're in a [watery] grave. Also, as a partly African person, my own Africanness and sense of invisibility and magic and mysticism, has been a bit shut down by my Western culture side. So the film is a way to re-express myself, through my heritage.

The tower that Souleiman and the missing boys have been building is constantly looming in the distance of the cityscape. You created it digitally in post-production, and it seems to have a symbolic resonance.

It's a metaphor for what the foundations of the future are made of. The idea that this tower is little by little becoming a monument. When [Abdoulaye] Wade was still the president [of Senegal, a position he held 2000-12], he was supposed to build a tower – when I saw the real architectural plan on the internet, it was a black pyramid. It was like a monument for dead people. It was supposed to be a place that would host a luxury hotel and conference halls, which was very strange in a moment so marked by the loss of a lot of young people.

You've acted in films – how has your experience of being directed impacted the way you work with your actors?

It had a very big impact on me to have been chosen by Claire Denis [for *35 Shots of Rum*], who made me become for a couple of weeks a character, and [then live] forever in a film. While I was shooting this feature I was surprised by how I felt I was acting all the time. When you're on a set you play a role, whether you like it or not. People are watching you, listening to you, and so you're performing. When I talk to my actors, it goes through words, but it also has to come from a physical energy – from the way you talk, the way your body moves. It's really a frequency you have to share. But the most important thing is choosing the right person.

So what qualities did Mama Sané have that made you see her as Ada?

It's like explaining why you fell in love with somebody at first sight: it just happens. It's her, it can't be anybody else. I liked the fact that she didn't speak French, only Wolof. In the story Ada speaks only Wolof, because she didn't necessarily finish school. I liked that she wasn't completely accessible to me. Also, she's very serious. She's brave, strong, clever, but also very mysterious and innocent without being naive. It's quite miraculous to find somebody as close to the character you've written.

You've described the young women that Ada surrounds herself with as examples of 'Afro-capitalist neo-feminism'. Can you explain that term?

It's really about a certain kind of woman I met in Dakar, who use men to buy them clothes, to take them to restaurants. When I met those girls I was surprised by the way they weren't hiding their intentions. As far as we knew, they weren't well treated in this country, and so why wouldn't they treat [the men] as badly as they were treated? It appeared very cynical to me, but I admired the way they would be very transparent about it. So when Fanta says to Ada, 'Keep the house, he will not be there the rest of the year, we'll just use him because it's all he deserves,' for me, it's a cross between feminism and capitalism. I found that very interesting, how capitalism gives birth to new ways of...

Resistance?

Yes, or relationship strategies.

There's a good-natured humour in the way these women are portrayed, too.

Yeah, definitely. For me, these girls were comedy characters. I could make a whole movie on them.

Interview by Simran Hans, *Sight & Sound*, December 2019

ATLANTICS (ATLANTIQUE)

Directed by: Mati Diop

Production Companies: Arte France Cinéma, Canal+ International
in co-production with: Les Films du Bal, Cinékap, Frakas Productions
with the participation of: Le Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Aide à la production avant réalisation, Aide à la création visuelle et sonore numérique
with the support of: Eurimages, Fonds de promotion de l'industrie cinématographique et audiovisuelle du Sénégal, Fonds Image de la Francophonie

and the participation of: Ministère de la culture et de la francophonie de Côte d'Ivoire

with the support of: Centre du Cinéma et l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Casa Kafka Pictures, Belfius

with the participation of: ARTE France, Canal+, TV5Monde, Ciné+
in association with: Ad Vitam, MK2

Presented by: Les Films du Bal

Produced by: Judith Lou Levy, Eve Robin

in co-production with: Oumar Sall, Cassandre Warnauts, Jean Yves Roubin

Associate Producer: Michel Merkt

Assistant Director: Vincent Prades

Script Supervisor: Christelle Meaux

Casting: Mati Diop, Bahijja El Amrani

Screenplay: Mati Diop, Olivier Demangel

Director of Photography: Claire Mathon

Editor: Ael Dallier-Vega

Art Directors: Oumar Sall, Toma Baquéni

Costume Designers: Rachèle Raoult, Salimata Ndiaye

Music: Fatima Al Qadiri

Sound: Benoît de Clerck, Emmanuel de Boissieu

Cast

Mama Sané (*Ada*)

Amadou Mbow (*Issa*)

Ibrahima Traore (*Souleiman*)

Nicole Sougou (*Dior*)

Amina Kane (*Fanta*)

Mariama Gassama (*Mariama*)

Coumba Dieng (*Thérèse*)

Ibrahima M'Baye (*Moustapha*)

Diankou Sembene (*Mr Ndiaye*)

Abdou Balde (*Cheikh*)

Babacar Sylla (*Omar*)

France-Senegal-Ivory Coast-Belgium 2019

106 mins

IN THE BLACK FANTASTIC

The Brother from Another Planet

Fri 1 Jul 18:05; Wed 6 Jul 20:45

Sankofa

Sat 2 Jul 14:00 (+ intro by June Givanni, June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive); Wed 20 Jul 20:35

Daughters of the Dust

Sat 2 Jul 20:30; Wed 13 Jul 20:40

Yeelen Brightness

Sun 3 Jul 15:50; Thu 14 Jul 20:40

Top of the Heap

Mon 4 Jul 18:10; Sat 30 Jul 20:45

In the Afrofuture

Tue 5 Jul 18:20; Sun 17 Jul 16:00

Atlantics (Atlantique)

Thu 7 Jul 20:50; Sun 31 Jul 15:40

Kuso

Sat 9 Jul 20:50; Fri 22 Jul 18:10

Touki Bouki

Wed 13 Jul 17:50 (+ season introduction); Wed 27 Jul 20:50

The Burial of Kojo

Fri 15 Jul 18:30; Thu 28 Jul 20:40

The Black Atlantic

Mon 18 Jul 18:15 (+ Q&A); Sat 30 Jul 12:00

Eve's Bayou

Tue 19 Jul 20:45; Thu 28 Jul 18:00

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Presented in cultural partnership with Hayward Gallery and Southbank Centre

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

In the Black Fantastic is an exhibition, curated by Ekow Eshun, of contemporary artists from the African diaspora who draw on science fiction, myth and Afrofuturism.

Runs **29 Jun to 18 Sep at Hayward Gallery.**