



**TIGRITUDES: A PAN-AFRICAN FILM CYCLE 1956-2024**  
**AFRICAN ODYSSEYS PRESENTS**

# Night of the Kings

## Night of the Kings (La Nuit des rois)

Directed by: Philippe Lacôte

©: Banshee Films, Wassakara Productions,  
Périphéria Productions Inc., Yennenga Production  
Production Companies: Banshee Films, Wassakara  
Productions, Périphéria, Yennenga Production  
In association with: Memento Films,  
Axia Films, E2C

Developed at: TorinoFilmLab

Produced by: Delphine Jaquet, Yanick Létourneau,  
Ernest Konan, Yoro Mbaye

Written by: Philippe Lacôte

Script Collaboration: Delphine Jaquet

Director of Photography: Tobie Marier Robitaille

Editor: Aube Foglia

Art Director: Samuel Teisseire

Costume Designer: Hanna Sjodin

Original Music: Olivier Alary

Tam-tam, Slide Guitar: Olivier Alary

Music Directed by: Olivier Alary

Sound Design: Pierre-Jules Audet

Cast:

Koné Bakary (Roman)

Steve Tientcheu ('Barbe Noire')

Digbeu Jean Cyrille ('Demi Fou')

Rasmané Ouédraogo (Soni)

Isaka Sawadogo (Nivaquine)

Abdoul Karim Konaté (Lass)

Anzian Marcel ('Lame de Rasoir')

Laetitia Ky (queen)

Denis Lavant ('Silence')

Ivory Coast-France-Canada-Senegal-Italy 2020©

93 mins

Digital

+ intro and discussion on the role of griot with filmmaker Tomisin Adepeju and Tony Warner of African Odysseys and Black History Walks

Set in a real-life Ivory Coast penitentiary, *Night of the Kings* is not your average prison movie. The second feature by the Ivorian writer-director Philippe Lacôte, it is a highly theatrical, poetic, sometimes fantastical drama, yet is rooted directly in brutal reality, drawing on the recent history of his country and this century's civil war.

*Night of the Kings* is the story of a nameless young man (Koné Bakary), sentenced to imprisonment in Abidjan's La MACA (Abidjan House of Detention and Correction). The prison is ruled by boss inmate, or 'dangoro', Blackbeard (Steve Tientcheu from Ladj Ly's *Les Misérables*). With a power struggle brewing, Blackbeard selects the newcomer to be the prison's 'Roman' – a storyteller assigned to entertain the inmates on the night of a red moon. The role of roman is a genuine feature of La MACA life, says Lacôte, although not as dangerous as the film suggests. 'You don't necessarily get killed, but you can get beaten up if you're not a good storyteller. A roman enjoys a special status. During the day he's treated like a prince – he gets to have sex, he gets presents – but at night he's the storyteller and he has to work, that's his job.'

Together with specific references to Ivory Coast's civil war, Lacôte's film uses elements of fantasy, together with brief eruptions of song and dance from a prisoners' chorus. The result is a seemingly incongruous merging of reality and myth – but, Lacôte says, 'in Ivorian culture in particular and African culture generally, there's no difference. In the West, the term is "magic realism", but for us the frontier between living and dead, visible and invisible, realism and magic is practically non-existent – or at least, porous. I needed to tell this story from the point of view of the African imaginary.'

Lacôte shot his exteriors at La MACA itself, recreating its interiors in two colonial buildings – and deriving further authenticity from his casting, 25 per cent of the large ensemble being former prisoners. For the hall where the Roman performs, the director wanted to convey the impression of an arena – both a theatrical auditorium and a space of combat. He himself has known La MACA since he was a child, when his mother was a political prisoner there. 'Every prison resembles its country. In Africa, it would be unthinkable to isolate every prisoner in a separate cell, because life there happens collectively. This particular prison is very free: it has these big areas where you might have 500 prisoners in a shared living space.'

The film, says Lacôte, is a homage to the African institution of griots, traditional narrator-troubadours; his hero is the nephew of one, and essentially becomes one (literally) overnight. 'They sing the praises of chiefs, kings or presidents, and they are also historians. So for us, mythology and objective history are the same thing, there's no contradiction.'

Where political history comes into play in *Night of the Kings* is through references to the civil war and the arrest in 2011 of President Laurent Gbagbo. Meanwhile, Lacôte's hero narrates the tale of a real Ivorian underworld figure, Zama King, giving his life the dimension of legend in some beautiful, distinctly fanciful sequences. The real story was less beautiful: the leader of one of the African youth gangs known as 'microbes' – a name inspired by Brazilian favela

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### Bezness

Sat 13 Jul 20:30

### Félicité

Sun 14 Jul 14:40; Thu 18 Jul 18:00 (+ intro with author and presenter Kevin Le Gendre)

### Shirley Adams + Firstborn Eersgeborene

Wed 17 Jul 18:00 + discussion

### Bye Bye Africa

Wed 17 Jul 21:00

### Bled Number One

Tue 23 Jul 20:40

### Faya Dayi

Fri 26 Jul 18:15; Wed 31 Jul 20:35

### Original Voices

Sat 27 Jul 12:10

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drama *City of God* (2002) – Zama became a folk hero but was killed by a mob in reprisal for his crimes in 2015. His murder, says Lacôte, was filmed and posted on social media. 'When I saw those images two years after the civil war, I couldn't help wondering where we'd come to with violence in my country. Did it mean that, two years on, violence was still on the loose? That's why I wanted to tell Zama's story.'

Lead actor Bakary Koné (not to be confused with his Ivorian and Burkinabé footballer namesakes) was found during a two-year casting process, during which Lacôte recruited 40 young people – 'singers, dancers, aspiring actors, martial arts practitioners' – for a two-month workshop. 'Bakary nearly didn't get chosen. He was very shy, but he was always first person to arrive at the workshop, then afterwards he'd stay behind and put the chairs away.' The actor's hesitancy was part of the appeal, ideal for a hero only slowly discovering his inner magic – a character who 'has the power of a storyteller, and doesn't even know it.'

Jonathan Romney, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 2021

**Tomisin Adepeju** is a British-Nigerian filmmaker based in London. His award-winning shorts have screened at over 150 film festivals, including Sundance, BFI London Film Festival and London Short Film Festival. He is currently developing his debut feature, *The Light of the Living* with Ken Loach's Sixteen Films. Tomisin has also written about film for MUBI, BFI and several other platforms. He is the founder of the screening and event series DAILIES where he regularly curates shorts and feature film programmes.

**Host: Tony Warner** is a community activist and guerrilla historian. He has been exhibiting educational and empowering films about African/Caribbean history in museums, art galleries, restaurants and youth clubs since 2000. He pioneered community partnerships with and lectured at the Imperial War Museum, National Portrait Gallery, Museum of Docklands and the BFI – which all led to huge increases in Black audiences.

Tony is the co-founder and chair of the African Odysseys programme. This grassroots initiative has been exhibiting African diaspora films plus Q&As on a monthly basis at the BFI Southbank since 2007. It is the only such programme in the country and has been attended by tens of thousands of people. He is also the founder of Black History Walks in London, a group which explores the Caribbean and African history of the capital via 12 guided walks, talks, films, courses, bus tours and river cruises. The tours have been featured on various national and international media such as CNN, BBC, ITV, *The Guardian*, Channel 4 etc. Since 2011, in an ongoing collaboration with the Nubian Jak charity he has sponsored five Black historical blue plaques across London and researched ten more.

As a management consultant specialising in diversity, he has trained various corporate, government and educational agencies; including creating a 26-week course for pupils in primary and secondary schools to improve self-esteem, behaviour and academic performance.

Tony is the author of *Black History Walks in London Volume 1*. The book explores the African/Caribbean presence in London over the last 2000 years. He is currently working on a GCSE history book on migration and Black British Civil Rights for use in schools.