THE EMPIRE REMAINS SHOP

COOKING SECTIONS

FUGITIVE REMAINS: Soil, Celluloid, and Resistant Collectivities

INTRODUCTION
Ros Gray, Shela Sheikh, and Nicole Wolf

In the article "Making Time For Soil: Technoscientific Futurity and the Pace of Care," María Puig de la Bellacasa addresses modes of soil care that are obscured by hegemonic timescales of technoscientific futurity and innovation. Rather than consider soil simply as a receptacle for the cultivation of crops—in other words, a site of productivity or financial return—Bellacasa asks us to engage with soil as a living, interdependent community and with forms of soil ecology that feature alternative human-soil relations and what she calls a "care time."[1] In her attention to practices that have been marginalized by "successful" forms of technoscientific innovation, Bellacasa takes resource from not only *ecological* but also *feminist* approaches. Our proposition is that we can add to this *postcolonial* approaches, which, although not explicitly articulated by Bellacasa, resonate with much of what she offers. We claim that it is only by combining these three approaches that we can, as she puts it, catch "glimpses of *alternative*, *liveable* relationalities"—relationalities that can "hopefully [contribute] to other possible worlds in the making."[2]

Why the postcolonial? Shifting our gaze back historically and further afield across the colonized world—colonized not only by the British, as is the concern of The Empire Remains Shop, but also by the Portuguese and the French—there are lasting legacies of the union between colonialism, cultivation (both cultural and agri-cultural), and practices of representation, above all in the hegemonic neocolonial relations of contemporary neoliberal globalization. Central here is the soil, both literally and in its currency within the collective imaginary, first of all as the site of exploitation. Colonialism in general has constituted, and continues to constitute, what we can call an "offense against the earth."[3] Here one need only think of agricultural exploitation and

1 Care time reveals a diversity of more-than-human interdependent temporalities that can challenge dominant notions of technoscientific innovation, which are based on linear temporalities of so-called progress.

2 María Puig de la Bellacasa, "Making Time for Soil: Technoscientific Futurity and the Pace of Care," *Social Studies of Science* vol. 45, no. 5 (October 2015): 692.

3 The "wretchedness" of the earth is one of the starting points for the forthcoming special issue of *Third Text*, edited by Ros Gray and Shela Sheikh, titled "The Wretched Earth: Botanical Conflicts and Artistic Interventions" (Spring 2018).

the imposition of monocultural agribusiness, and with this a violent silencing of ecological, situated (often "subaltern") knowledge. Neo/colonial extractive capitalism (that is, today's corporate colonialism) and practices of so-called development and sustainability that run counter to care time also come to mind. We recall Frantz Fanon's diagnosis in his 1961 *Les damnés de la terre (The Wretched of the Earth)* of Europe as having been built on the nutrients and raw materials of the African soil.[4] And let us not forget that the "father of the fertilizer industry," Justus von Liebig—the nineteenth-century German scientist who analyzed the chemical composition of soil and whose work greatly influenced Marx's writing on soil and ecology—identified British agriculture and imperialism as a policy of robbing the nutrients and resources of the soil of other countries.[5] Not to mention the contemporary realities of settler colonialism, built upon the legal doctrine of *terra nullius* ("empty land" or "nobody's land") as well as subsequent scorched earth policies and visible inscriptions of ownership upon the land. As such, to use the words of the postcolonial literary scholar Pablo Mukherjee, "colonialisms and imperialisms, old and new" must be understood "as a state of permanent war on the global environment"[6]—including on the soil, both as a planetary entity and as the "infrastructure of life."[7]

In order to conceptualize alternative political, economic, social, and ethical futures, and in order to make such propositions speak to our present and future contexts on both a local and a global scale, across which the legacies of colonialism—the *remains* of Empire—continue to be felt in varying intensities, it is necessary to think about both (post)colonialism and the politics of the soil together. Here we take resource from scholars such as Mukherjee, as well as Rob Nixon and Jennifer Wenzel, all of whom point to the decided belatedness of the conversation between postcolonial studies and (mainly North American) environmentalism and eco-criticism—a conversation that opens disciplinary borders to create what we can refer to in shorthand as "postcolonial ecologies."[8]

Beyond exploitation, the soil can also be understood as the ground of resistance and, despite its implications of rootedness, of fugitivity—whether in the context of historical anti-colonial struggle and moments of decolonization, past and present alter-globalization and anti-capitalist formations (such as ecological movements and agricultural cooperatives), or the promise of future collectivities in-becoming.[9] Central here are practices of representation and aesthetic strategies, through which we might begin to uncover or "unearth" (to use Annalee Davis's expression) silenced voices and histories.[10] Here, the soil itself is understood as a palimpsest, a "silent witness" bearing traces, stubborn *remainders* that await the careful gaze necessary for reactivation.

In what follows, we present a series of edited extracts from a symposium that we convened under the title Fugitive Remains: Soil, Celluloid, and Resistant Collectivities in October 2016 as part of The Empire Remains Shop program. Through an afternoon of presentations,

4 "This European opulence is literally scandalous, for it has been founded on slavery, it has been nourished with the blood of slaves and it comes directly from the soil and from the subsoil of that underdeveloped world... Colonialism and imperialism have not paid their score when they withdraw their flags and their police forces from our territories... The wealth of the imperial countries is our wealth too... Europe has stuffed herself inordinately with the gold and raw materials of the colonial countries... From all these continents... there has flowed out for centuries toward that same Europe diamonds and oil, silk and cotton, wood and exotic products. Europe is literally the creation of the Third World." From Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 96, 101–102.

5 See John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), especially page 164.

6 Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in Englis*h (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 68.

7 See María Puig de la Bellacasa, "Encountering Bioinfrastructure: Ecological Struggles and the Sciences of Soil," *Social Epistemology* vol. 28, no. 1 (2014): 26–40.

8 See Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*; Jennifer Wenzel, "Reading Fanon Reading Nature" in *What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say*, eds. Anna Bernard, Ziad Elmarsafy, and Stuart Murray (London: Routledge, 2015); Rob Nixon, "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism" in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, eds. Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton, and Jed Esty (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 233–251; Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, eds., *Postcolonial*

screenings, and discussions, our aim was to explore aesthetic practices as what we might call "ecologies" of the image, between the human and nonhuman, vital and inert.[11] More specifically, our interest lay in the connective tissues—both metaphorical and literal—between soil and celluloid (photographic or filmic), and the centrality of soil to what Kodwo Eshun and Ros Gray have named "ciné-geography": "situated cinecultural practices in an expanded sense, and the connections—individual, institutional, aesthetic, and political—that link them transnationally to other situations of urgent struggle."[12]

To think this through, we invited Filipa César, Bouba Touré, and Raphaël Grisey, with simultaneous translation from French (in the case of Touré) by our colleague from Goldsmiths, Jean-Paul Martinon. In what follows, César draws from her ongoing research into the "soil semantics" of Amílcar Cabral, the Bissau-Guinean and Cape Verdean anti-colonial leader who was also an agronomist. She reads his "double agency" within the broader context of *Luta ca caba inda (The struggle is not over yet)*, an ongoing project—itself a form of ciné-geography—by César, together with Guinean filmmakers Sana na H'Hada, Flora Gomes, and others. The project departs from the digitization of the INCA (Instituto Nacional de Cinema e Audiovisual, Bissau) archive of the liberation movement and focuses on experimental enquiries about how to reactivate the material today. Here, the care time of soil would first of all involve considering the "neglected soil" and acting "in defense of the earth," to use Cabral's own phrasing. César thinks with Cabral, showing how he subversively employed his position as a state soil scientist and his access to colonial administrative structures in order to address the colonial exploitation of the soil as well as to build thought and practice for a liberation movement based on the fugitive potential of a resistant relationship between soil and a people. The surface of the earth is acknowledged as a "conflict zone" while also offering a metaphorical and material resource for anti-colonial struggles.

Touré spoke of his arrival in France from Mali in 1965 and his involvement in migrant workers' cooperatives in Paris. For him, soil is space and matter for the possibility of resisting the employment choices given by the French state. Touré was part of a group of low-paid African migrant workers who left the factory and became apprentices to French farmers, which led to the founding of the self-organized agricultural and activist cooperative Somankidi Coura in 1977, after the Sahel drought of 1973. Next, Grisey presented his ongoing collaboration with Touré, tracing the "generative archive" of Somankidi Coura (yet another ciné-geography), and above all Touré's insistent image-making-as-documentation, both in and of itself and in the broader context of still and moving image-making at the time and within transnational solidarities. Grisey's collaboration with Touré hints at the potential of other alliances between culture and agriculture, between diverse collectivities and struggles, and between past and present images, and pays particular attention to the ongoing generation of archives (and thereby possibilities), rather than merely "cataloguing" Touré's rich

Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, Anthony Carrigan, eds., *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2015). See also T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2016).

9 Our understanding of "fugitivity" is informed by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's use of the term in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe, New York, Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013). Here, fugitivity is employed as a mode of subversion from *within* (in Harney and Moten's case, the institution of the university), a movement or motion of refusal and improvisation that is not reducible to mere flight, exodus, or escape. See Jack Halberstam's introduction, "The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons." In this sense, there is a significance to the symposium Fugitive Remains having taken place in The Empire Remains Shop on Baker Street—a space parallel to (which is not to say entirely outside of) the regular space of the (academic, arts) institution. For Harney and Moten, the subversive intellectual's fugitivity includes a desire to be out in the open, rather than a room of one's own; "she wants to be in the world, in the world with others and making the world anew" (11). Making a world, then, in a movement of relationality towards common cause.

10 "The Colloquy: Wild Plants as Active Agents in the Process of Decolonization," with Annalee Davis, Janice Cheddie, and Niall Finneran, The Empire Remains Shop, August 5, 2016.

11 In thinking through the traces harbored within both soils and celluloids, a key reference has been Susan Schuppli's "operative concept" of the "material witness." See Schuppli, *Material Witness: Forensic Media and the Production of Evidence* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, forthcoming). See also http://www.material-witness.org.

personal and political collection of images. The exchange between Touré and members of the Berlin-based, refugee-led *weareborn free! Empowerment Radio (We!R)* during a symposium in July 2017 (organized by Grisey) exemplified the manner in which this visual archive might act as a catalyst for conversation and new alliances between past and present struggles and between generations of migrants and refugees, rather than simply as something to be "shown" and passively consumed.[13]

The Fugitive Remains event was one of many ongoing, accumulative gatherings bringing together friends and collaborators across geographies, generations, disciplines, and urban-rural divides. As such, the collectivities of our title can also be understood in the sense of ciné-geography: as "the invention [and/or, in this case, recuperation] of discursive platforms such as gatherings, meetings, festivals, screenings, classes, and groups founded by a range of students, activists, workers, filmmakers, artists, critics, editors, teachers, and many others at decisive moments in order to mobilize collective strategies that may have been evolving for some time."[14]

The residues collected below form but one installation of an ongoing, unfinished, collective attempt to respond to the following questions: How can we "activate" or "re-wild" the fragilities and potentialities of colonial remains—be they scarred landscapes or dissonant archival film material—for our present moment? Between soil, celluloid, and political struggle, what assemblages might be (re-)animated? What forms of non-hierarchical human/nonhuman community and collectivity might these give rise to? How can filmmaking practices be aligned with those of permaculture in terms of the creation of ecosystems and networks of interconnected elements? Or by thinking from the margins, the marginal, or minor images—in permaculture terms, the productive edge (the roles assigned to marginal or minor plants/images)?[15] From the plundering accumulation of colonialism to the primitive accumulation of capital, what might alternative economies and relations to the soil and the image be? What are the political ecologies of the audio-visual, and how might this relate to contemporary formulations of the "commons" and/or "undercommons"?[16] What nascent ecologies of knowledge—derived from local and "minor" practices, submerged histories, and memories of the land and soil—can be unearthed?

12 Ros Gray and Kodwo Eshun, "The Militant Image: A Ciné-Geography," *Third Text* vol. 25, no. 1 (January 2011): 1.

13 *weareborn free! Empowerment Radio (We!R)* is a radio program organized by Refugees and Friends, http://wer.oplatz.net. Following the October 2016 event, many of these questions re-appeared during a seminar at Archive Kabinett in Berlin in July 2017 around the exhibition "Sowing Somankidi Coura: A Generative Archive," conceived by Raphaël Grisey with works and contributions by Revolution Afrique, Safi Faye, Raphaël Grisey, Sidney Sokhona, Bouba Touré, and Kaddu Yaraax.

14 Ros Gray and Kodwo Eshun, "The Militant Image," 1.

15 Nicole Wolf spoke of this during the above-mentioned seminar, "Sowing Somankidi Coura," in order to think through the representational challenges of what Amitav Ghosh calls "the great derangement." See Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

16 Again, with reference to Harney and Moten's conception of the "undercommons."

17 Amílcar Cabral, *Estudos Agrários*, (Lisbon and Bissau: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical and Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa Lisboa-Bissau, 1988), 81.

THE SOIL SEMANTICS OF AMÍLCAR CABRAL
Filipa César

In what follows, I offer a rereading of the agronomic writings of Amílcar Cabral (from between 1949 and 1960) in order to unearth his double agency, not only as a seeder of African liberation movements, for which he is better known, but also as a state soil scientist.[17]

When Cabral stated, in a speech in London in 1971 about his then-occupied country of Guinea-Bissau, that "our people are our mountains," he was not only referring to the morphological flatness of the territory of West Africa, but also to the lack of hierarchy in the people's movement against Portuguese colonial occupation.[18] This image was presented in response to the strategic use of mountainous land as a resource of natural force by Che Guevara's guerrilla fighters.[19] Cabral flattened hierarchies of power within his specific geo-political circumstances, uniting the people through a single uniform that made no distinction of rank and choosing education and humility as the preferred weapons of militants. The mountain was the multitude made potent.

Cabral understood agronomy not merely as a discipline that combined geology, soil science, agriculture, biology, and economy, but also as a means to gain material knowledge about people's lived conditions under colonialism—data that first became precious to denounce the injustice of the violation of land under colonial rule and that later informed the warfare itself. Cabral's operation of reading the people as mountains in the context of colonial extraction, oppression, and exploitation is evidence of a visionary understanding of what we can in retrospect call the "Capitalocenic" condition of the "edaphosphere" (the sphere of the soil), and further lays the ground on which we can think about the struggle.[20]

Between 1949 and 1960, Cabral worked as an agronomist in Cape Verde, Portugal, Angola, Mozambique, and Portuguese Guinea, addressing issues of soil, erosion, food storage, and agricultural census. Reading through the meandering scientific studies—most of them written in Portuguese and rarely translated—that he wrote in his tasks as an agronomist on behalf of the Portuguese Overseas Ministry, it is easy to identify Cabral's materialistic urges and his desire to use and develop a soil semantics. His proposals can be seen as a vision of the land as a mirror

18 Amílcar Cabral and Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola, and Guiné, *Our People Are Our Mountains: Amílcar Cabral on the Guinean Revolution* (London: Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola and Guiné, [1973]), 7.

19 "Fighting on favorable ground and particularly in the mountains presents many advantages." Ernesto "Che" Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961), 63.

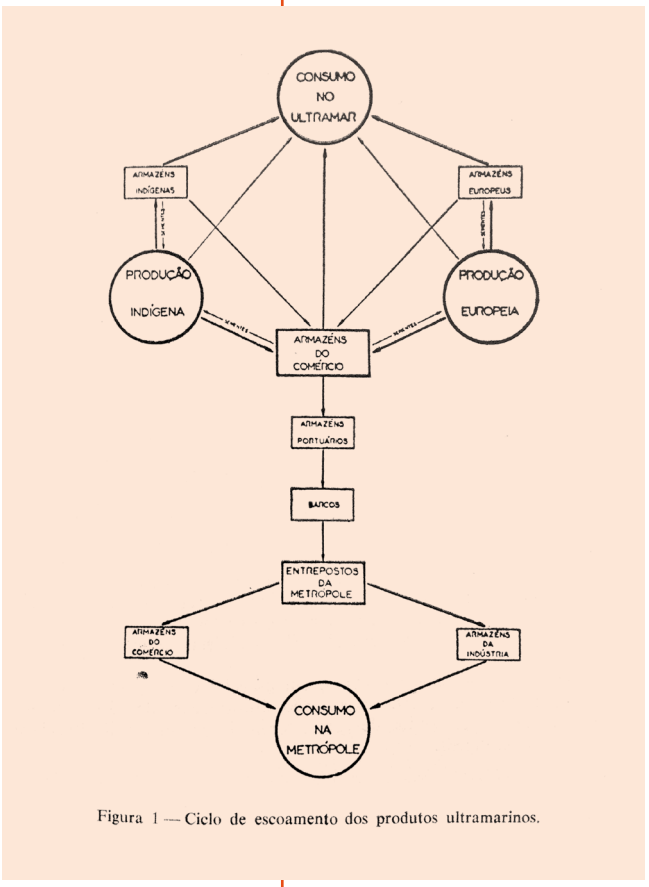


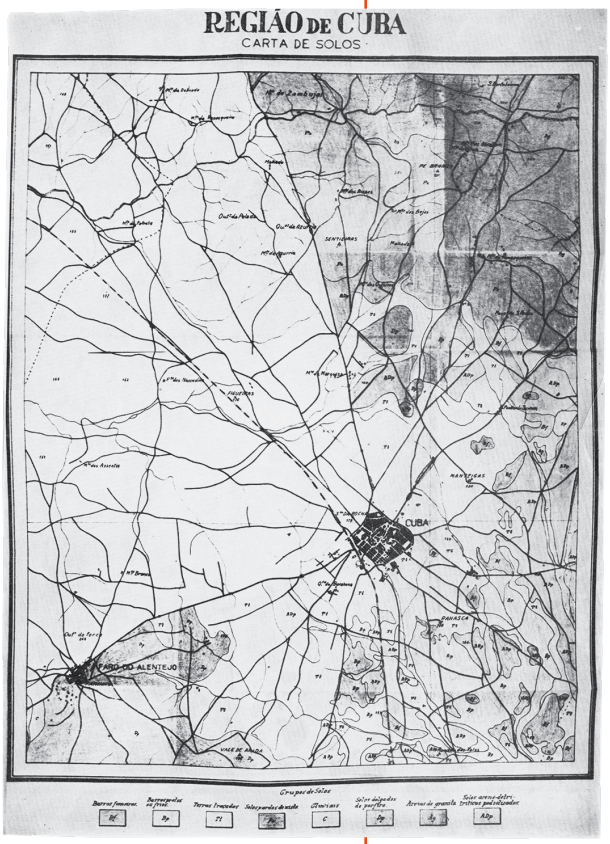
Figura 1 — Ciclo de escoamento dos produtos ultramarinos.

Drawing by Amílcar Cabral of the consumption of goods in the metropole in relation to their production in the colonies.

20 Cabral speaks of "edaphology" (from the Greek *edaphos* and *logia*): the science that is concerned with the influence of soils on living things.

of historical processes and living conditions that are dependent on a conscious and active "defense of the earth."[21]

One of the key moments in Cabral's agronomic thinking is his definition of the "meteorization of the rock," a phenomenon that invokes contradiction—the negation of one (rock) in order to give rise to another (soil)—and suggests a definition of soil as a conflict zone. "Our people are our mountains" is a tool for operating two organisms—people/mountains—fused by *meteorizations* and *negation-existences*. The negation of the rock to give rise to the soil; the negation of the soil to give rise to life; the negation of life to give rise to riches; the negation of riches to give rise to uprisings. The mountain is at war. Armed struggle is not a stage upon which to kill, but a state of exception to encircle and expand another cognitive mode and an awareness of a permanent *mesological* (environmental) state of war. Cabral notes the value of embracing negation and destruction in order to think within what constitutes the stage where life occurs: "The conflict between lithos and atmos is due to the antagonisms between rock and clima—if we admitted the existence of intention in natural phenomena, we could argue that this 'opposition' demands that the rock transforms itself in order to subsist. Neither the rock disappears completely, nor the climatic phenomena cease to operate—rather, the rock gets integrated into a new form of negation-existence."[22]



Soil map by Amílcar Cabral for the study "Erosion of Agricultural Soils, an Investigation of the Alentejo Region of Cuba" (1949).

Over a period of ten years, this agronomic praxis overlapped with Cabral's interaction with international African liberation movements, hinting at the operation of a double agency: the agronomist Amílcar Cabral and the underground liberation leader Abel Djassi (Cabral's *nom de guerre*).

Cabral insisted on the need to "return to the source," but this should not be confused with an essentializing return to an origin or a root. Rather, this can be read as the return to the *original matter*. Cabral departs from the specificities of a *land* and the conditions of people's lives on it and in it. This position partially fills the void left by the Eurocentric Marxist critique of capitalist agriculture and demands a return to the rock—to the *edaphos*—refusing to reify the definitions enforced by the blind spots of the colonial thesaurus. This proposition to return to the matter of the ground also implies going underground, both in the sense of a subversive "mining" through the system in which one operates and in the material meaning of being within the humus and inhabiting its metabolic processes, pace, and rhythm. This crust of meteorization reclaims its own epistemology following a cognitive humility—*humble* derives from the Latin *humus*—that is not compatible with a particular ruling system. Humility is not a submissive mindset; it is also not a religious abdication of individualist

21 In 1954, Cabral published a series of agronomic articles including "In Defense of the Earth I–V," originally published by Boletim Cultural da Guiné Portuguesa and subsequently reproduced in *Estudos Agrários*.

22 Cabral, *Estudos Agrários*, 92.

forces of desire. It doesn't mean a submission to power but rather a sub-mission—a mission under—a creeping agency linked to multitudinous soil phenomena.

In 1966, during the first Tricontinental Conference in Cuba, Cabral delivered his paper "The Weapon of Theory." One year later, as part of an alliance agreement with Fidel Castro, Cabral sent young Guineans to Cuba to be trained in medicine, warfare, and cinema. Four of them (Sana na N'Hada, Flora Gomes, Jusefina Crato, and José Bolama) went to the ICAIC (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos) to learn about filmmaking under the guidance of Santiago Álvarez. But first, they were introduced to the Spanish language and the practice of voluntary work: work that is not profitable but teaches an experience of the common and, as N'Hada put it, "[teaches] humility." To be humble is to be next to humus, to be earthed, to not inflate and lose contact with the ground, to stay close to the soil. This voluntary work (and embedded humility) was what set in motion Guinean film production and the magnetism that created this cinematic assemblage. In 1972, the Guinean filmmakers returned from Cuba to begin documenting the ongoing war of liberation against Portugal, and later, the building of an independent nation.[23]

23 Regarding the birth of Guinean cinema as part of the decolonizing vision of Cabral, see Filipa César's collaborative project with Sana na N'Hada, Flora Gomes, and others, *Luta ca caba inda (The struggle is not over yet). Luta ca caba inda* takes the form of discursive screenings, mobile cinemas, encounters and discussions, writings, walks, film productions, and publications. See *Luta ca caba inda: Time Place Matter Voice, 1967–2017* (Berlin: Archive Books, 2017).

Voluntary work by Guinean students in Cuba.

To look today at the remains of these pioneers of Guinean cinema's praxis gives us insight into both their representational intentions and the inscription of time and war in the materiality of the now-ruined celluloid. In an interview from 2015, N'Hada explains:

> Once the legal status of the [Guinean] National Film Institute was approved we had to create a program to follow. How would cinema work in a legalized way? We had been shooting for about five or six years, when we founded the Film Institute. Now, what ought to be done? So we created

the 'Program of Rural Promotion by Audiovisual Media,' which meant that, with cinema, we could make people from there understand people from here. We would contribute to imagining a national space, together with Creole.[24]

24 Sana na N'Hada in *Spell Reel* collective film, assemblage and essay by Filipa César (Germany, Portugal, France, and Guinea-Bissau: Spectre Productions, 2017).

The decomposition (or "composting") of the celluloid remains—for example, of the reels for the never-finished film *Guinea-Bissau: 6 Years After*, which depicted various indigenous agriculture practices—can be seen as the meteorization of matter that Cabral convoked as fundamental for decolonizing epistemologies.

Flora Gomes during the production of the film *Guinea Bissau: 6 Years After*.

THE AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE OF SOMANKIDI COURA
Bouba Touré

When I arrived in France in 1965, like everyone else of my generation, I could neither read nor write. There was no school in my village. It was us, the migrants, who built a school in 1973. (a) When I arrived in France, we stayed at a migrant workers' hostel, where many of us would share a room. Visitors were not allowed because the owners did not want the French to see our housing conditions. We would call the hosts our "sleep traders." I became a photographer to show people where and how we were housed.[25]

25 For an account of this period, see Bouba Touré, *Notre case est à Saint-Denis 93* (Paris: Xérographes, 2015).

(a)

When I arrived in France, there were no problems with documents. But capitalism always needs precarious workers in order to better exploit them. Incidentally, one of Charles De Gaulle's prime ministers said in 1963 that France, and French companies, could not possibly function without undocumented workers. As a result, there were many issues with obtaining documents to either stay or work. I was the only

(b)

(c)

(d)

(e)

one who had them, as I was born before independence from France, but I was staying with Portuguese workers who had extremely precarious contracts. French politics has always created problems with documents, according to the moment or the different interests of companies. Given the situation, we told ourselves that there was no reason for our brothers and cousins to join us just to have the same problems. That is how we had the idea to create an agricultural cooperative along the Senegal River in a place of emigration.

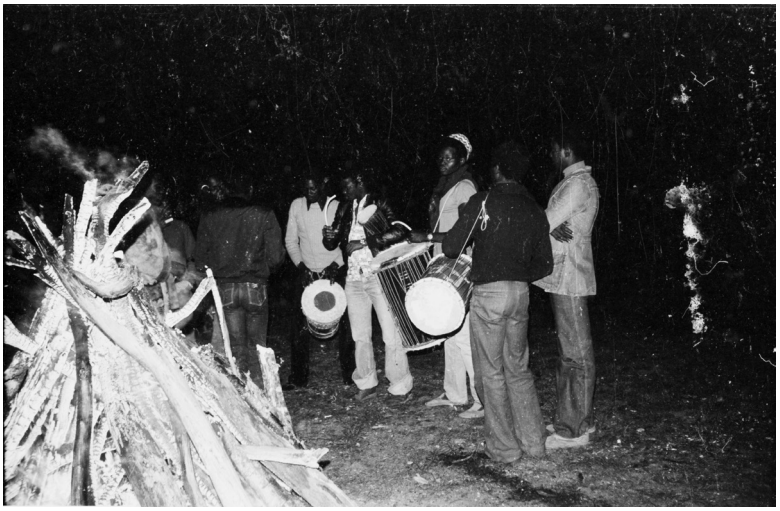
Here we see the "hostels" for immigrant workers, the one in Charonne in Paris and the one in Pinel in Saint-Denis where friends were visiting. These are intimate and familiar photographs. (b & c) In 1973, we created an association, the ACTAF (*Association Culturelle des Travailleurs Africains en France*, or the Cultural Association of African Workers in France): we created it in the hostels of Saint-Denis to reflect first on our migrant conditions and then for a project in Africa. (d)

You just heard about Amílcar Cabral (with Filipa César). Before ACTAF, we founded a committee to support combatants fighting against the Portuguese colonizers in Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique. It was right after the Carnation Revolution in 1974 that we decided to turn to agriculture.

We went as apprentices to gain experience from farmers in the countryside—to the Marne and the Haute-Marne regions in France. Here you can see the village, Courcelles-sur-Aujon, where we spent six months, and the farm where we used to gather. (e) We would spend three weeks with the farmers and one week together to discuss. There were many friends and colleagues with whom I did my training. In 1976, there was a tremendous drought and we had to find bales of hay in other French regions to feed the livestock. (f) The children of our hosts and other friends used to come see us on Sundays during our stays; this is a small party with some farmer friends. (g)

(f)

After the idea of the cooperative materialized, we worked on the storyline of *Safrana ou le droit à la parole* (*Safrana, or Freedom of Speech*) with Sidney Sokhona, the filmmaker. The script captured everything from the emergence of our idea to our return. When the film premiered in 1978, I was already back in the village. We had left France at the end of 1976 and started work in Somankidi Coura in 1977.

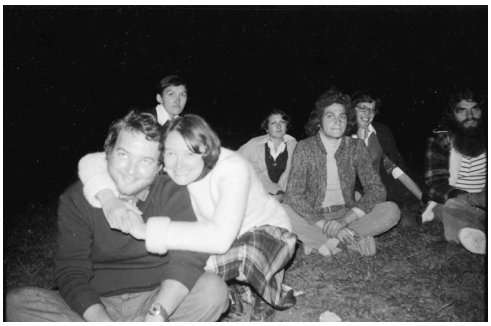


(i)

Here is the family of farmers we stayed with in Grandes Loges in the Marne region to gain some experience. (h) We threw a village party following the African tradition. It was dark, we lit a bonfire, friends came to see us, we sang and danced together. (i)

Safrana traces our history. Had we simply left, no one would have known about it. But we were fourteen people motivated to spread our model across the region. Before our arrival, there was absolutely no culture of market gardening with irrigation. The idea for *Safrana* was one about our return. But it is a fiction. When we started shooting *Safrana* in 1975, the farm training had not even started yet. That took us two years to accomplish.

The idea behind *Safrana* was to make an archive of our return, in particular for an African audience. The film was shown on TV in Mali several times. (j) It was an archive of what we had done in order to show an example; it proved that we could go to France without staying in the hostels. Most African immigrants in France come from Mali, Senegal, and Mauritania. We



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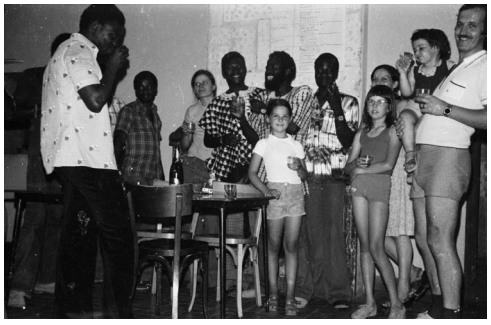

(h)

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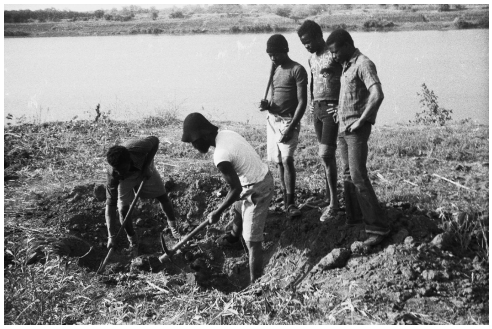


(l)

(m)

(o)

(p)

were the first ones sleeping in the hostels in the 1960s. We asked the different governments of these countries to give us a place to stay along the Senegal River. In this image, the river has completely dried out. (k) Fortunately, dams were built. Currently, the rivers always have water. These hydraulic constructions were financed by the three countries—Senegal, Mauritania, and Mali—and built by a German constructor. France did not participate. Water came from Guinea on its way to the Atlantic. After the construction of these dams, there is always water.

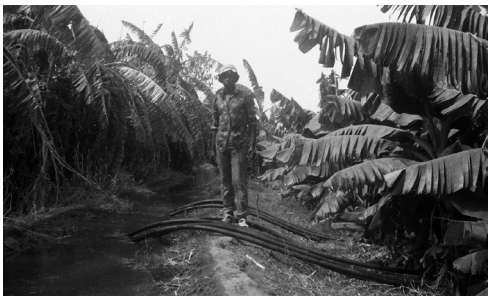
(n)

Here is the cooperative in Mali when we arrived on the banks of the Senegal River; we removed the trees, roots, and stumps to prepare the ground. (l & m) Here is the construction of the canal among termite mounds. We broke the mounds only up to a certain height, so that the termites could rebuild them within a week. (n) In Mali, according to the law, land belongs to nobody but the state. This is neither a communist nor a collectivist regime, it is simply an African tradition. We have the right of use but not the right of ownership. Everything we made, we have now; but it still doesn't actually belong to us.

This is a photograph of sowing—everything was done by hand. (o) That day, youth from a village near Somankidi came to help. (p) Here is the nursery; this is when we began to irrigate with water from the canal. (q)

In this image we are planting trees. (r) When it rains, it rains very strongly and erosion quickly follows. Trees reduce rainwater erosion. Thanks to constant irrigation, the bananas rooted very well. We ate collectively: our whole life and work was collective at the beginning—we were single. It is important to remark that we were fourteen when we began, and now the village has three hundred people. (s)

(s)



(q)

(r)

SOWING SOMANKIDI COURA: A GENERATIVE ARCHIVE

Raphaël Grisey

The stories and images gathered together in the ongoing research project *Becoming Cooperative Archives* come from peasant and migrant workers' liberation struggles in France and West Africa beginning in the 1970s. These stories are articulated around a paradigmatic moment: the Sahel drought of 1973, which revealed the limitations of certain modes of anti-imperialist struggle and demanded the formation of new alliances and, with this, a new "post-human," "radical" ecology to decolonize development politics. As such, these empowering stories and images, driven as they were by what we can call a certain "Afrofuturist realism," require some care. Considering these from today's perspective, we can see how they are in contact with either colonial, Pan-African, or nationalist grand narratives but somehow follow their own paths, stateless and fugitive—a controlled escape, a reterritorialization.

This ciné-geography implies multiple structures and infrastructures: structures of education, like the Free University of Vincennes or literacy classes in migrant

worker hostels (*foyers*); the remains of state or colonial agricultural infrastructures; networks of termite colonies, irrigation systems, seed nurseries, and ecosystems of fallow lands; visual archives, such as that of Bouba Touré or of peasant alliances; collaborations, for instance between the French film collective Cinelutte and the neo-Trostkyist group Revoafrique, or between the filmmaker Sidney Sokhona and ACTAF; solidarities between migrant workers and African liberation struggles; and my friendship and collaboration with Bouba Touré.

The projects of ACTAF and of the Somankidi Coura cooperative were a radical gesture of autonomy: an autonomy from the forms of political action established by leftist groups in France in the 1970s, an autonomy of organization that claimed a freedom of movement and of speech, a freedom to choose alliances, an autonomy from state migration politics in France and agricultural ones in French West Africa.

Revolution Afrique Group, still from *Open days in Drancy* (1971).

The research deals with complexity, layers of infrastructures, transmission, and translations. It aims to find inroads through material assemblages, to discuss and activate those materials through various modes of collaboration, and to circulate these movements anew in different forms.

It was within a community of images that I first met Bouba Touré. He used to come to my mother's place for dinner with a slide projector twice each year after returning from his trips to Mali. I saw slides of the Kayes Market, the cooperative of Somankidi Coura, portraits of the founding members, children, women, the Senegal River, the irrigation system, and fields of onions, okra, and bananas. There were also photographs of demonstrations and of his friends in the Charonne workers' hostel in Paris and the Pinel hostel in Saint-Denis. He made the images speak and the images spoke to him.

While his hand focused each new image as it appeared on the wall, his voice described the relationship between the cooperative he had founded and the everyday lives and struggles of immigrant workers in France over the past fifty years. His narrative tied together the scattered places that appeared in the images. It strove to fill the space between the slides, recreating traces of his story—the journey from rural life, to an immigrant worker, to a cyborg farmer—an entire trajectory informed by the knowledge of his ancestors.

Much later, my friendship with Touré led me to produce a film, *Cooperative*, in 2008 around his images and around the cooperative of Somankidi Coura, which I eventually visited.[26] In the meantime, Touré had started to film his own video diaries. At the cooperative, the founding members all told me the same story with minor variations. It was a collective story that had already been written, reworked, almost established in advance in order to be projected into the future, addressed to generations-to-come as well as to contemporaries both here and over there, all defending a certain perspective. Thirty years later, their position was harder for me to discern in view of the day-to-day problems and the intense pace of the work in the fields. How is it possible to understand the initial strength they had needed to escape from the centrifuge of immigration, from the rural exodus, from the weight of the traditional system? How is it possible to move beyond the contradictions and failures of the liberation movements and tackle new battlegrounds created by the drought and erosion affecting the Sahel? When they returned to Mali after the 1968 *coup d'état*, the people who considered themselves most revolutionary took this to mean that they were traitors. The villagers themselves thought they were madmen at first, not understanding why someone would want to return to poverty far away from their family. Their families complained about no longer receiving money.

Raphaël Grisey, still from *Cooperative* (2008).

I didn't know at that time how much the photographs of Touré and the cooperative had already been in dialogue with film and still images. Touré had been working since the 1970s as a projectionist in the Cinéma L'Entrepôt in Paris. He learned the job at the post-1968, free University of Vincennes. That's also where he met Sidney Sokhona, a young migrant worker like him, who became a filmmaker. Sokhona made his first film, *Nationalité: immigré* (1975), about the migrant workers' strike in the hostel he was living in. The film involved migrant workers in its production and distribution, which was all done collectively. Touré and other members of ACTAF traveled with copies to show it in hostels (*foyers*) all over France.

The ACTAF also showed films shot during the liberation struggles in the Portuguese colonies and organized "blood and cloth donations" with members of the French Communist Party. They later showed films related to the 1973 Sahel drought.

26 *Cooperative* was screened at Goldsmiths, University of London in summer 2011 together with Bouba Touré's *Bouba Touré, 58 rue Trousseau, 75011 Paris, France.*

27 This film was screened, with a discussion, at Goldsmiths, University of London on October 20, 2016, the week prior to the Fugitive Remains symposium. These events, together with the seminar at Archive Kabinett in Berlin in July 2017 (see notes 13 and 27), form an important part of the accumulative series of gatherings gestured towards in the Introduction above.

28 The term comes from Seloua Luste Boulbina, "*Hétérochronies décoloniales*" lecture at "Theory Now: Réengager la pensée," ~~La colonie~~, Paris, November 19, 2016.

29 The project has been assembled as *Sowing Somankidi Coura—A Generative Archive* (Berlin: Archive Books, 2017), edited by Raphaël Grisey in collaboration with Bouba Touré, with contributions by Aïssatou Mbodj-Pouye, Romain Tiquet, Jean-Philippe Dedieu, Tobias Hering, Olivier Marboeuf, Bouba Touré, Raphaël Grisey, Sidney Sokhona, Siré Soumaré, Ousmane Sinaré, Siré Soumaré, Bathily Bakhoké, Ladji Niangané, Mady Niakhaté, Gundo Kamissokho Niakhaté, and Karinne Parrot.

I am an immigrant.
I am also the one who came to France clandestinely to work on the assembly line.
I am the one whose great grandfather had been sent to the Americas during slavery.
I am the one whose father had died in the Ardennes during World War II, a war he was taking part in without knowing why.

Sidney Sokhona, still and dialogue excerpt from *Nationalité: Immigré* (1975).

Bouba Touré in his flat, Rue Trousseau, Paris (1985).

Sidney Sokhona, still from *Safrana or Freedom of Speech* (1977).

In 1975, Sokhona shot *Safrana ou le droit à la parole* (*Safrana, or Freedom of Speech*).[27] The film recounts four immigrants' everyday lives and their experiences in factories through flashbacks as they head to the countryside to meet French farmers in preparation for a return to Africa, where they will farm themselves. Touré plays himself in the film. It is an interpretation of the group's own story.

I wanted to understand the networks, friendships, affinities, and institutions that had made up the ciné-geographies of those first assemblages. What differences became apparent in the digitization and redistribution of previously undigitized images and archives? Does that dissonance between actors, producers, and generations need to be reduced, or on the contrary, emphasized? How could one avoid getting lost in the amplification of trivial differences and connections and find a way to underline the dominant or emancipatory forces at play?

Finally, what can be done so that new connections between images and narratives and their recirculation can be regenerative rather than a catalogue?

The chronology of the production and (re)appearance of the archives, images, and narratives twists and diffracts. The "heterochronies" of the connections, emergences, and returns has led me to view my research as a speculative practice.[28] Thinking of these images and narratives in terms of infrastructures of different scales reveals a deep time: that of the soil, climate, and plants. Taking seriously these heterochronies makes it possible to translate the cooperative's experience in time, re-projecting it as a possibility, just as the initial movement was.[29]

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