

# The notions and imagination of space and time in British colonial and African intercultural philosophical cinema

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## Abstract

This article aims to enhance understanding of the changing nature of the pre-colonial, (neo)colonial and postcolonial imagination of space and time in Africa and of its organising principle in African cinema. It will focus on the cartographic and time reckoning techniques and traditions of Africans in precolonial times in contrast to the space-time imagination expressed in colonial film in Africa, such as in the instruction documentary *Daybreak in Udi* (1949). This documentary, which promotes British colonial self-help development projects in Africa, tells the story of the building of a maternity home in an Igbo village in Nigeria. Furthermore, the article will enhance understanding of the cinematic turn to a counterhegemonic film tradition as a stepping stone to the newly emerging field of African intercultural philosophical cinema. The time-space imagination in *Common Threads* (2018), shortlisted by the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF) for the best documentary will be analysed as a case in point. This documentary concentrates on the nineteenth-century and current Afro-Indian textile trade, the associated oral narratives and their visual impact on the so-called *Kanga* and *Vitenge* textiles.

Keywords: African cinema, African philosophy, intercultural philosophy, space-time imagination.

## Introduction

This article aims to enhance our readers' understanding of the difference between the notion and imagination of space and time in British colonial documentary and postcolonial rooted African intercultural philosophical film. For that purpose, we will first disclose the notion and imagination of space and time in Africa's pre-colonial to the (neo)colonial periods and focus on the nature of their transformations. We will, therefore, first give a short overview of space and time in these periods.

## Space and time in the African worldview and imagination

### Precolonial Africa

Since around 3000 BCE, Africans have created maps to give expression to their spatial imagination. Hunters and gatherers, such as the Khoisan in Southern Africa, created artistic maps on rock murals to give expression to the landscape in their dreams and their inner journey to and through it. Agriculturalists were the first to create natural – and social landscapes to facilitate a spatial understanding of their environment and its' socio-political organization. Their maps were not free artistic expressions but created in support of those in charge (Maggs 1998, p. 13-23). Since rulers succeeded each other over the centuries, new maps were added to existing ones and, therefore, the rock maps did not have an immutable meaning. Hence, map interpreters, who were employed by the rulers, became significant to legitimize the rulers' power through their spatial interpretation of the old and new maps on the rock murals. Map interpreters were trained in the royals' oral history and they used oral tradition – comprising of oral storytelling, song, theatre, and dance – to interpret the maps in support of those in charge (Nash 2015, p. 19-20).

The practice of creating maps on rock art murals did not cease to exist before the late nineteenth century. Besides, rock art maps, there are many examples of maps created by Africans in the pre-colonial period, which form part of their material culture. Between the sixteenth - and the nineteenth century, the Luba

people in the Kabongo region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, created conceptual maps of fundamental aspects of their culture on hand-held wooden objects. The *lukasa*, for instance, is a map on a wooden board, which the Luba people used as a *mnemonic* device. Their map interpreter used the *lukasa*, in combination with oral tradition, to recount the history of the Luba royals, and to grant them the authority of kingship and power. By the use of theatrical performances, (s)he aimed to connect events from the past to the present. Instead of using chronology as an organizing principle, the interpreter selected those events from the past that were most suitable to honour the royals' ancestors and to articulate the significance and might of the then ruling royal rulers (Bassett 1998, p. 32-33, Moss 2016, p. 90-91).

Since half of the human environment consists of the sky, unsurprisingly, Africans have always connected their maps to their observations of the celestial bodies, such as the Moon, the Sun, the stars and the Milky Way. Celestial myths of origin form a significant part of African oral traditions, such as those of the ancient Egyptians. They believed that time is cyclical and that every day the sky goddess Nut, the alleged mother of all the stars, gave birth to Ra, which was the name of the Sun god. Ra entered Nut's mouth in the evening and travelled through her body at night to fly out of her vagina in the morning in the form of a bird right after her husband Geb had 'watered' or impregnated her. By painting Nut on the interior of the coffin lid of a mummy, the ancient Egyptians hoped that their mummified royals would also fly through Nut's body and womb to be reborn in the form of a star to be admired in Heaven by all of his or her descendants (De Young 2012, p. 475-477) (see figure 1).

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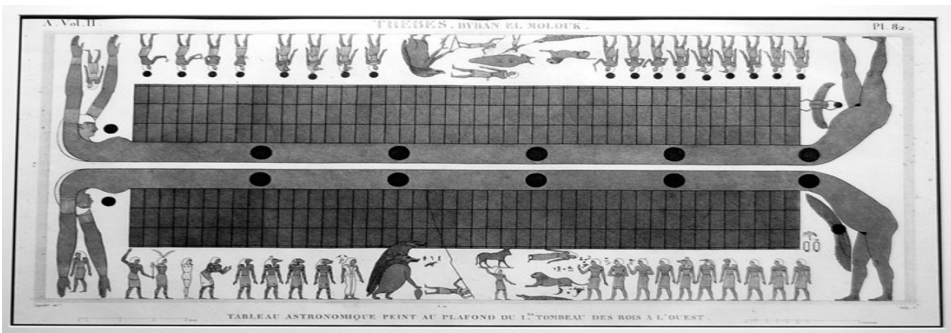


Figure 1: Drawing of an astronomical ceiling painting from a temple at Thebes in the tomb of the kings, from Napoleon's *Description de l'Egypte*, ca. 1802; a book that was created after he commissioned an expedition to Egypt of scientists and artists in 1789. Note the double depiction of Nut, the sky goddess, with the Sun god Ra shown entering her mouth at sunset, traversing her body, and flying out of her at sunrise (Kanas 2012, p. 30).

This is how the ancient Egyptians connected the heritage of their mortal royals to the movements of the celestial bodies in their cyclical notion of time. Nut's movements were observed by male Hour Watchers. Their careful observations of the celestial bodies enabled the ancient Egyptians to gain an understanding of time as related to the recurrence of the seasons, the weeks, and the hours in a day and to establish calendars (De Young 2012, p. 477-481).

A cyclical conception of time is not only indigenous to the ancient Egyptians but to Africans in many of their cultures. The creation myth of the Bambara-Malinké in contemporary Mali, for instance, goes that the world ends and is reborn with the emergence of *yeelen*; a bright light. Time imagination of the ancient Egyptians, as well as sub-Saharan Africans, was most often cyclical but not abstract and merely directed to the understanding of the course of concrete natural events (Snedegar 2012).

### (Neo) colonial Africa

The 1884-1885 *Kongokonferenz* (Berlin Congress) was a determining moment in the (cartographic) history of Africa and Europe. Since then, Africa's indigenous maps gradually ceased to exist as the new official partitioning of Africa was visualized in colonial maps of the continent. Since then, various cultural-ethnic African groups became part of nations in Africa that were created by the Europeans as part of their colonization of the continent. The Akan people of West Africa, for instance, became divided between Ghana, Togo and the Ivory Coast. Colonial maps of Africa were not only used to demonstrate how the African continent, except for Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, was divided among European nations but also to impress everyone with the grandeur of these nations. The maps were often decorated with European flags and the spices and raw materials that one could get in the colonies, such as gold in South Africa and/or depicted naked or wildly dressed ladies (see figure 2).



Figure 2: Pictorial map of South Africa designed and drawn in Pretoria in 1950 by the artist Bernard Maurice Sargent. The map shows the diverse places and extraordinary manner of strange things to be seen by those who voyage to this land beloved of the sun and who travel about therein for their pleasure". source:[https://www.antikbar.co.uk/original\\_vintage\\_posters/travel\\_posters/south\\_africa\\_pictorial\\_map\\_sargent/PT2062/](https://www.antikbar.co.uk/original_vintage_posters/travel_posters/south_africa_pictorial_map_sargent/PT2062/).

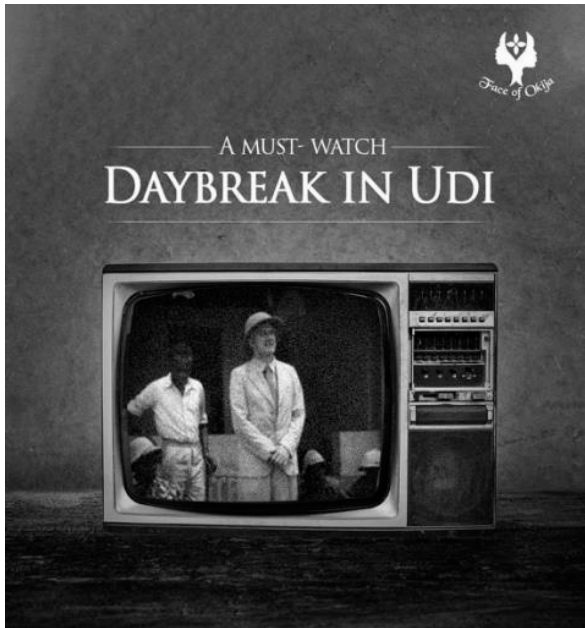
On these maps, African subjects were often negatively stereotypically portrayed as ugly looking savages and wild (wo)men, whereas Europeans were depicted as adventurous, muscular, imposing and handsome in line with imperial propaganda. Street names and places on these colonial maps often referred to European founders of the colonial nations (Engberg-Pedersen 2017-587). Although some colonial rooted place names have ceased to exist, recent studies on the decolonization of maps, demonstrate that in Africa most maps are still Eurocentric and render unequal power relationships between the Global North and its former colonies (McGowan 2017, p. 207-247).

Since the colonial era, not only Africa's indigenous mapmaking cultures but also their systems of time reckoning have almost entirely been replaced by European

cartographic cultures and a Western system of economic time (Snedegar 2012, p. 471-472, Akerman 2017, p. 7-8). Since the African continent regained its political independence, displaced African temporal frameworks have not been revived and global capitalism has continued to put its footprint on Africans' conceptualization of space and time.

Our next section's analysis of the British documentary *Daybreak in Udi* (1949) is a case in point to illustrate how the European hegemony of space and time is rooted in and resonates in colonial film in Africa.

Cinema in Africa, which has its roots in the colonial era, was entirely Eurocentric. The first cameras were sent to Africa by the French from the atelier Lumière in



Lyon, to support their 'mission civilisatrice'; the presumed French colonization of African countries to educate and enlighten Africans (Ukadike 1994, Bakupa-Kanyinda 2009). Other Europeans, including the British, also made use of film in Africa to educate but also colonize Africans. In the late 1940s, British mass education programs in colonial propaganda or African instruction documentaries were turned into self-help development projects to prepare Africans to gain independence.

Colonial film in Africa: *Daybreak in Udi*, 1949

An example is *Daybreak in Udi* (1949). In 1950, an Oscar went to this £30,000 documentary by Terry Bishop that was created by Britain's Crown Film Unit (BCFU). Its main topic is the building of a maternity hospital at the request of the Igbo population of Udi, a district in Onitsha in Eastern Nigeria. The documentary was created to promote the earliest British self-help development projects in Africa. In the period 1940-1952, the BCFU was the film producer for the British state itself and, therefore, all of its colonial based documentaries were of a propagandistic nature (Russel 2012).

No doubt, *Daybreak in Udi* is a British social construction that is quite far removed from representing the way of life in the British colonies. It tells the story partly by and about the real historical British Senior District Officer Rowland Chadwick, who plays a younger version of himself. Chadwick makes the audience believe that the Igbo people themselves longed for progress and *in concreto* for the building of a maternity clinic and subsequently the building of a road. Two Igbo teachers with first names, Dominic and Iruka who belong to the *évolué*, ask Chadwick – whose home is spatially distinct from the African village – whether he can help them, by providing building materials and operators. By realizing the maternity home children will, henceforth, be born safely and the risk will be strongly reduced that they will die soon after birth. The documentary breathes the thought that Africans are willing to help themselves and are eager to receive some minimal financial and managerial British help to realize their goals.

In the documentary, Chadwick is portrayed as a trailblazer in self-help mass education; a practice that was later on formally incorporated into the British colonial policy of Indirect Rule in Africa. *Daybreak in Udi* had three target audiences: one, the Igbo and other Africans in the British colonies, who were meant to get excited about British' self-help development projects after viewing it. Two, the British taxpayer had to be convinced that development help in Africa was not a waste of money as valuable projects were realized with a minimum of British' financial support. British audiences also had to be reassured that the development projects were progressive and were not forced upon the African population. The latter argument was also used to convince audience group three, which consisted of the critics of European colonialism across the globe.

To reach these three target audiences, the documentary was viewed in Africa and Europe but also in the United States, Australia and the Far East. To what extent British taxpayers and global critics of colonialism were convinced of the documentary's message is unknown, but African nationals were critical of its content due to the, in their view, portrayal of the African villagers as almost naked savages in contradiction to the well-dressed African *évolués* (Page 2014, p. 838-840). The same critique was uttered by the Igbo writer Chinua Achebe, the father of African literature, who after viewing or at least hearing about the documentary felt inspired to write his first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Achebe aimed to show the world "that the white man did not wake the black man from a deep slumber" and that African cultures existed before the colonization of Africa (Akpuda 2014).

The documentary, however, does indeed give the impression that most of the Igbo people were not in control of their space and time and that, without the paternalistic attitude and financial help of the British, they were left over to the whims of nature and the ambivalent demands of the (ancestral) spirits. It does not inform its audience about the indigenous rhythms of the Igbo people nor

of the spatial organization of their villages. The documentary simply resonates with the colonial idea that knowledge and imagination of space and time did not exist in Africa before British imperialism and colonialism and that Africans have been grateful for being civilized by European nations that introduced modern linear time and strict spatial demarcations in the colonies. European notions of space and time allegedly regulated the rhythm and mobility of African bodies and brought them in line with the demands of global capitalism. As Nanni (2012, p. 73,221) explains, the African ideas of time and spatial orientation in line with the rhythms of the seasons and the location and movements of the celestial bodies – the philosophy of “as above, so below” – was regarded to be non-existent or at best equated with savagery by the European colonizers. To become spatial and timely aligned with England’s Greenwich Mean Time was equated with becoming civilized, whereas it meant that Africans and other non-Westerners had to be subjugated to a notion of time and spatial orientation that especially served the industries of the Global North.

In *Daybreak in Udi*, the central figure is Chadwick and his presence is felt in every scene, even in his physical absence. His narrative voice-over often precedes his entrance in the scenes and in those scenes where the camera does not mainly focus on him, his paternalistic attitude towards the Africans still makes clear that he is the central authority in the village. Furthermore, the main focus is on the well-dressed Africans Dominique and especially Iruka, whose London accent reveals that their texts are voiced by London based black Africans of the Crown Film Unit’s Film Training School. The only other African figure with a first name is Eze, who as the head of the *Egwugwu* or ancestral cult is strongly opposed to the building of the maternity clinic as he fears that it would diminish his authority in the village. The other Africans remain nameless and are scantily dressed, thereby representing the mass of Africans that still had a long way to go on the road to civilization.

Although Chadwick interacts with ordinary Igbo people and maintains a cordial relationship with them, unlike the *évolués*, these characters do not have names and remain underdeveloped. Chadwick is helpful to all Igbo people of Udi but it is clear that he believes in a social-spatial hierarchy in which he has positioned himself at the top. The *évolués* come second while the village elders and the rest of the village dwellers are at the bottom of the social ladder. Therefore, it is the *évolués* with whom Chadwick interacts most and who, next to himself, most often fill the screen. Dominique and Iruka function as intermediaries between the white man and the other village dwellers to whom Chadwick keeps a greater distance. The *évolués* symbolize that Africans are capable of developing themselves and that some have already succeeded in doing so, who are, therefore, appointed, to help the remaining Africans to go with the flow of the modern nations. The *évolués*, who are both teachers, also help to convince other Africans



to participate in the self-help projects and to put little value on the ancestral belief and resistance of the *Egwugwu* cult leader. Both them and Chadwick portray Eze as a traditional elder, who with his superstitious belief and nocturnal masquerade, is a jammer as he hinders the village dwellers' collective effort to realize the new clinic.

The documentary is overall a positive representation of the Igbo people, who are being portrayed as hard workers capable of developing their village with little help. Nevertheless, Chadwick is very negative about Eze and he openly calls him a fool for hindering the community's development project and thus preventing the people of Udi to progress. For, Eze, however, the new road that the people of Udi are building should not go far – as the village dwellers sing. Instead, it should go around, because as the *Egwugwu* cult leader Eze should spread respect for the go about of the elders and the ancestors, who are the custodians of the land and traditional ways of life. In his cyclical notion of time, the future of today is equal to the history of the day after tomorrow, which implies that both the past and the future are relative and only today certainly exists. In Eze's worldview, the ancestors and the living are thus sharing a universe in the same time zone. Eze's job is to take care of the performance of rituals, such as the masquerade, with which he represents the ancestors and tries to scare off the builders of the maternity clinic, to no avail.

In *Things fall Apart*, Achebe (1958, part 2, Chapter 15) has demonstrated that Eze's fear of losing his authority in the village by permitting the white men to carry out their self-help development projects is not unfounded. Achebe concludes that "things fell apart" in the literary village of Umuofia once the white men were allowed to occupy their space and started to build churches with the 'help' of Africans at the pace of industrial time. No doubt, there is a truth behind the warning words of Jomo Kenyatta, the first Kenyan president, who said that "When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray'. We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land."

## Counternarratives in African cinema and its critics

Colonial empirically rooted cartography and studies of time reckoning have thus continued to confirm hegemonic European cultural discourse. For counter-discourse, one should, therefore, search outside social reality in the world of postcolonial oriented Western and African art. In the art scene, which is not male-dominated, unlike the social world of mapmaking, (female) African artists have been engaged with counter-narratives that include and embrace indigenous African notions of time and space in the postcolonial era.

Postcolonial artists have often perceived cartography and artistic expressions of time as fluid rather than fixed and static. Postcolonial African artists have artistically employed maps as a spatial intercultural perception rather than containment (Huggan 1989, p. 27-28). Unlike maps, which are preeminently a language of power and not of protests, artists can decipher such power structures thereby practicing “map-breaking to reconstruct the post-structural practice of map-making” (Huggan 1989, p. 125-126). Postcolonial oriented African artists have aimed at creating more open cartographic structures in their artworks. See, for instance, the Senegalese writer Mariama Bâ’s *Scarlet Song* and the Ghanaian born sculpture El Anatsui’s off-centred pottery and woodwork (Shevlin 1997, Enwezor 2011).

African filmmakers have also reacted against the oppression of African cultures and the denigration of Africans in colonial times. Film reception studies have demonstrated that colonial films and documentaries that were created in Africa by the British Colonial Film Unit and its ramification, the mentioned Crown Unit, often received negative feedback from Africans. African audiences experienced the films and documentaries’ simple narrative and the slow pace, that British colonials regarded as necessary for them as diminutive and uninspiring (Smyth 1988, Diawara 1992, p. 2-11, Fair 2010, p. 111-114). After most African countries had gained independence, African filmmakers, therefore, aimed to ‘shoot back’ by using the medium of film in a way similar to what Chinua Achebe did by the use of literature. Achebe ‘wrote back’ and conducted contrapuntal readings of several European novels thereby agitated against their portrayal of Africans as savages and voiceless characters such as in *Heart of Darkness* by the Polish-British writer Joseph Conrad (Achebe 2016). In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad wrote:

A between whiles I had to look after the savage who was a fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind-legs. (Conrad 1996 [Orig 1899], p. 22-23).

In African film, Africans received first names and surnames, their voices were being heard and their characters were not flat but round. The medium of film was used to liberate Africans from the shackles of neocolonialism. The makers of these films focused, therefore, most often on Africans who were opposed to the Global North and its (neo) colonial hegemonic cultures (Tomaselli, Shepperson et al. 1995, p. 25-28). In contrast to most European and American films, these filmmakers concentrated on the notion and imagination of space rather than time. Long takes and shots with natural sounds of the community and its environment were meant to emphasize the unity of self and nature, and time was

brought in line with the rhythm of natural life, social ceremonies and speech rhetoric. Henceforth, it included long silences (Gabriel 1979, p. 367-368).

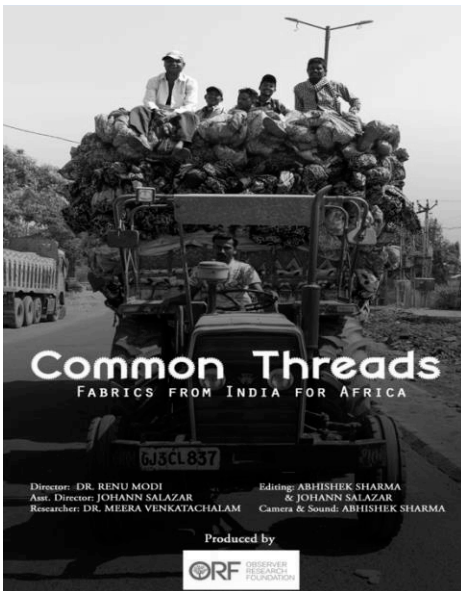
During the 1980s and especially the 1990s, another type of African cinema also came into existence, which does not concentrate on the reflection on European (neo)colonialism in Africa but, instead, on the preservation and reviving of oral traditions. This so-called Sankofa cinema, to which the film *Yeelen* (1987) by the Malian filmmaker Souleymane Cissé belongs, remained close to Africa's theatrical traditions, such as the Yoruba's Travelling Theatre. Instead of centralizing a counter-hegemonic discourse, it aimed to use the medium of film to reconnect to the oral traditions of the African past and learn from it for the current and future generations of Africans.

A relatively new development is that cinema enthusiastic African oral storytellers, the so-called *cinéaste-griots*, have also entered the field of filmmaking to tell oral ancient and new stories that convey community norms and values. These modern storytellers do master the art of telling a story in moving images and sound but the way they do so differs from those of most Western filmmakers as their film narrative structures are also rooted in Africa's ancient oral storytelling traditions thereby deriving from the international standard film 'grammar'. In African cinema, and African oral cultures, the narrative is most often open-ended and film audiences are invited to contemplate a suitable plot. The organizational principles are not based on chains of causality but parallelisms and allegorical comparisons and less on the individual than on the cultural group. Arguable most strikingly is that these films are not about conflict and competition but an expression of a binary complementary worldview in which opposing forces are discussed as interdependent (Jørgensen 2001, Jørholt 2001, Thiers-Thiam 2004). In this worldview, modernity and tradition, or the Global North and the Global South, are not contrasting and rivalling forces but "the head and tail of the same coin" as the late African philosopher, Sophie Olúwolé wrote and used to say (Olúwolé 2014, p. 159-160).

With the African philosophy of binary complementary, Sankofa cinema has become a stepping stone to a newly emerging type of African Cinema known as African intercultural philosophical cinema. We will elaborate on this new film type in the next section.

## African intercultural philosophical cinema: *Common Threads*, fabrics made-in-India for Africa, 2018

In this section, we will focus on how African intercultural philosophy is currently enriching the field of African cinema. Intercultural philosophy is an orientation in philosophy that aims to combat Eurocentrism and include non-Western traditions in philosophical debates by effectuating philosophical dialogue. It was founded by the German philosophers Frantz Martin Wimmer, Heinz Kimmerle and the Indian-born German-based philosopher Ram Adhar Mall (Kimmerle 1997, Wimmer 1998, Mall 2000). These founding fathers of intercultural philosophy had a strong focus on Africa alongside Asia. They understood and reacted to Aimé Césaire's (2001 [Orig 1955]) observed historical succession between the genocides of Africans in Germany's Second Reich in Africa and the Jews in the Third Reich in Germany as being comparative results of the darker side of Western modernity. Their philosophical reaction was to combat Eurocentrism and the concomitant claim of superiority of the West over the rest. They and their successors argued for the inclusion of pre-colonial philosophical traditions, such as African and Indian oral traditions, as philosophies by positioning them on an equal footing to Western philosophies (Kimmerle 1997, Müller 2022).



The dialogical method was used to reflect upon each philosophical tradition to learn from one another and enhance understanding of one's cultures and philosophies. A politically neutral, dialogical space was created to make sure that the voices of all participants in the dialogue were being heard. In this thinking space, the unequal power relations between participants were aimed at being suspended *in extremis*, and a reflection of all participants was required for a four-dimensional hermeneutic reflection on the Self and the cultural Other, so that will be discussed how I understand myself and the Other and how the Other understands itself and me (Mall 2000, Kimmerle 2012).

The short documentary *Common Threads* (2018, approx. 20 min) and the eponymous entitled book were created by an Indian research team of the Centre of African Studies (CAS) in Mumbai (Venkatchalam, Modi et al. 2020). The film,

which was directed by Associate Professor and former CAS Director Renu Modi, will be analyzed<sup>1</sup> to enhance understanding of how African intercultural philosophy is gaining ground in the field of African cinema.

*Common Threads*, which was shortlisted in the best documentary section at the Zanzibar International Film Festival, tells the story of the Indian-African trade in textiles since Antiquity. It focuses specifically on the trade in so-called *Kanga* and *Vitenge* cloth from Jetpur in the Rajkot district of Gujarat to East Africa (*Kanga* and *Vitenge*) and West Africa and West-Central Africa (*Vitenge*) since the nineteenth century. The documentary demonstrates that the trade in these textiles from India to Africa is the result of good people-to-people relations within high trust families and diasporic Asian-African networks.

Although the documentary makers' approach is mainly historical and anthropological there is an underlying philosophy that qualifies the documentary to be an artwork begging for African intercultural philosophical cinematic analysis. The documentary is non-Eurocentric and the researchers' stance is *not* to stress the superiority of the Western textiles and trade nor how the African-Indian textile trade became the victims of European market protectionism. Instead, the documentary shows how both African and Indian local initiatives developed in the period of both earlier Arabic and Western dominance of the Indian Ocean trade and how Indian trade families, in their close collaboration with Africans, managed to reach a different audience of African consumers for their textiles. Unlike Afrocentrists or Asian centrists, the documentary makers do not centralize African or Asian agencies but focus on the interconnectivity of the Asian-African trade and common initiatives. The creators are non-centric, which makes them intercultural philosophical, because they do not negate the trade history of Africans or Indians, nor do they write their historical reality of empowered subjects through the eyes of either of them. Instead, they focus on the connecting force of the Indian Ocean as a unifying stream for the transport of people, products and ideas. They refer to the work of the Kenyan novelist Sultan Somjee who in his novel, *Home between Crossings* (2016) mentions that *kanga* is a metaphor for "the two-way flow of winds over the land and the Indian Ocean" of the "singing of *utenzi* poetry in rhymes and rhythms made by the poets of the

1 This analysis is an elaborate version of the paper presented by Dr Louise Müller at the 2020-2021 online Africa Knows conference at Leiden University. We like to thank Dr Nkululeko Mabandla for his valuable comments on the draft of this paper during the conference. See L.F Müller, Towards an Epistemology of African Intercultural Philosophical Cinema, 10 December 2020, <https://www.africaknows.eu/panels/#8994>. We are also grateful for the valuable comments of the late Dr Kofi Dorvlo on Chinua Achebe's contrapuntal readings of European novels and Dr Heidi Muijen's shared deep understanding of the philosophy of space and time.

coast when their ears are filled with the music of the sea” (Somjee 2016, p. 319). Their non-centralized stance and focus on Africa qualify *Common Threads* as African intercultural philosophical cinema.

Besides deconstructing and then rejecting all ‘centricisms’, the documentary makers also reconstruct reality by acknowledging the effect of intercultural dialogue on the creation of cultural products. The *Kanga* and the *Vitenge* textiles breathe both Asian and African ideas and are the result of their interconnectivity enabled by the Indian Ocean that harmoniously merges their contact and intercultural horizons and unites the best of both worlds. The African-Asian dialogue that is reflected in these textiles strengthens the South-South trade relations and empowers the trading subjects, which helps to overcome their common trauma in their encounter with Europe. It helps to triumph over the vertical violence by past oppressors and to talk back by using textiles as a medium of expression that aesthetically visualizes their African-Indian selves. The textiles in the documentary and the documentary itself are forms of popular culture that speak to the current and the next generation of Africans in Africa and the African diaspora in Asia who have embraced them as a medium of expression of their moods and identities. With their open mindset and their listening ears, the makers of *Common Threads* have created an intercultural philosophical cinematic space. By the use of interviews with Africans and Indians that reflect upon their own culture and that of the cultural Other, both African and Indian voices are being heard and different perspectives on the African-Asian textile trade and textiles are highlighted without judgements nor arrogance towards Africans. The documentary makers have practiced ‘epistemological modesty’, as the late Yoruba philosopher Sophie Olúwolé would have labelled it, in their dialogues by being accommodative listeners rather than claiming the truth of their points of view.

Accommodativeness entails the acknowledgement of another person’s position and the intellectual modesty to be able to ‘agree to disagree’ in a sphere of respect for one another’s visions, Olúwolé wrote (Olúwolé 1997, p. 39-67). The documentary makers’ accommodative stance proves, alongside the previously mentioned reasons, that with *Common Threads* they have created a cultural product that does epistemic justice to the knowledge and narratives of Africans and Indians in the making of their textiles as part of precolonial rooted indigenous epistemologies by placing them cultural-philosophically on an equal footing to those imported by Europeans.

The messages of the talking cloth, the *Kanga* and *Vitenge* textiles connect the current generations of Indian and African customers to their oral traditions and their (ancient) past. In the same way as the rock art and *lukasa* memory board maps, they are a tool to convey a spatial orientation that is connected to a cyclical notion of time in which the ancestors are perceived as the living dead that conti-

nue to communicate with the living by the use of material cultural creations, such as talking cloth.<sup>2</sup>

*Common Threads* demonstrates that it is possible to overcome binary oppositional language in African cinema, such as Subject versus Object, Religion versus Superstition, and to encounter one another and learn from each other through conversation and dialogue. The documentary proves that African intercultural philosophy is practicable in African cinematics and that the field has a promising future. The new field of African intercultural philosophical cinema enables filmmakers in Africa and its diaspora to reflect upon and visualize the social intercultural realities between traditions and modernity that they encounter in the contemporary globalized world.

## Conclusion

This article has shown that intercultural philosophical notions and the imagination of space and time are entering the field of African cinema. After decades of colonial notions and imaginations of space and time and counter-hegemonic discourse, African intercultural philosophical cinema settles with oppositional thinking in African cinema and embraces the binary complementary worldview, which has its roots in Africa's ancient oral traditions. In this newly emerging type of African cinema, tradition and modernity are not represented as opposing forces but as different aspects of a common reality. After decades of (neo) colonialism, the open-ending in the African imagination of space and time is gaining ground in the continent's cinematic tradition. It's unknown where this 'new road' will bring African filmmakers but, for sure, it's emancipating them from the vast impact of colonial cinema in Africa.

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2 A similar function has been attributed to the Adinkra funeral cloth of the Akan people of Ghana, see Müller, L. F., et al. (2021). *The Adinkra Game: an Intercultural Communicative and Philosophical Praxis*. *Cultures at School and at Home*. M. Metsärinne, R. Korhonen, T. Heino and M. Esko. Rauma, Rauman Normaalikoulu Teacher Training School, University of Turku: 192-224.

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## Documentaries

- Daybreak in Udi* (1949). Directed by Terry Bishop. Story-writer: Montagu Slater. Main character: E.R. Chadwick. This government-financed documentary was later edited into a 1953 two-segmented documentary called *Savage World* by the same crew of filmmakers. Youtube-hyperlink: <https://youtu.be/tYJBjxWN95U>
- Common Threads* (2018). Directed by Dr Renu Modi, Asst. Director and Title Animation: Johann Salazar. Researchers: Meera Venkatachalam and Rhea D'Silva. Voice over: Safia Ally. With support from the Observer Research Foundation, Mumbai and the Centre for African Studies, University of Mumbai. YouTube-hyperlink: <https://youtu.be/jplcCfOfi5A>.