

PRESSEHEFT DAHOMEY



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KURZSYNOPSIS



Dahomey, Gewinner des begehrten Goldenen Bären der Berlinale 2024, ist ein poetischer und eindringlicher Dokumentarfilm der renommierten Filmemacherin Mati Diop (*Atlantique*). Diop beleuchtet weitreichende Fragen zu den Themen Aneignung, Selbstbestimmung und Restitution aus einer gegenwärtigen Perspektive. Der Film spielt im November 2021 und handelt von 26 Kunstschatzen aus dem Königreich Dahomey, die Paris verlassen und in ihr Herkunftsland zurückkehren sollen: die heutige Republik Benin. Diop stellt aus vielfältigen Blickwinkeln die Frage, wie diese Artefakte in einem Land aufgenommen werden sollen, das sich in ihrer Abwesenheit stark verändert hat. *Dahomey* ist ein bewegendes und zugleich einzigartiges Zeitdokument, das genauso faszinierend wie unverzichtbar ist. Der Stadtkino Filmverleih bringt *Dahomey* gemeinsam mit MUBI ab 22. November 2024 in die österreichischen Kinos.

LANGSYNOPSIS

Dahomey, Gewinner des begehrten Goldenen Bären der Berlinale 2024, ist ein eindringlicher und beeindruckender neuer Dokumentarfilm von Mati Diop, der Regisseurin des preisgekrönten Films *Atlantique*. In diesem gefeierten Film werden gegenwärtige Perspektiven zu weitreichenden Fragen rund um Aneignung, Selbstbestimmung und Restitution beleuchtet – so entsteht ein poetischer Blick auf eine selten diskutierte Vergangenheit.

Der Film spielt im November 2021 und handelt von 26 Kunstschatzen aus dem Königreich Dahomey, die 1892 zusammen mit Tausenden anderen Gegenständen von den französischen Kolonialtruppen geplündert wurden. Als diese Schätze Paris verlassen sollen, um in ihr Herkunftsland, die heutige Republik Benin, zurückzukehren, stellt Diop die Frage, wie sie in einem Land aufgenommen werden sollen, das sich in ihrer Abwesenheit stark verändert hat. Mit stimmungsvollen Voice-over-Kommentaren und Aufnahmen debattierender Studierender an der Universität von Abomey-Calavi eröffnet der Film vielfältige Perspektiven.

Diops neuester Film ist erfrischend und aufrüttelnd zugleich und nutzt fesselnde, unkonventionelle Erzähltechniken, um die Vergangenheit eindrucksvoll in der Gegenwart zu verankern. Auf diese Weise entsteht ein bewegendes und zugleich einzigartiges Zeitdokument, das genauso faszinierend wie unverzichtbar ist.

DAHOMEY/ABOMEY

Das Königreich **Dahomey** (Danxomé in der Sprache Fon) ist ein ehemaliges afrikanisches Königreich im Süden der heutigen Republik Benin. Es wurde im 17. Jahrhundert von König Houegbadja gegründet. Unter seiner Herrschaft und der seiner Nachkommen (eine Dynastie von drei Jahrhunderten) war das Königreich eine bedeutende regionale Macht mit einer stark strukturierten lokalen Wirtschaft, einem florierenden transatlantischen Handel, einer zentralisierten Verwaltung, einem Steuersystem und einer mächtigen Armee, zu der auch die berühmten Amazonen (Agodjié) gehörten. 1892, unter der Herrschaft von König Behanzin, nahm Oberst Dodds Abomey, die Hauptstadt des Königreichs, ein. 1895 wurde Dahomey Teil des französischen Kolonialreichs. Als das Land am 1. August 1960 unabhängig wurde, entstand die Republik Dahomey.

Abomey war die Hauptstadt oder genauer gesagt der Sitz des Königreichs Dahomey. Die Houegbadja-Dynastie, die vom 17. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert herrschte, machte sie zu einem echten Stadtstaat. Beeindruckende Paläste, lebendiges Hofkunsthandwerk und die Ausübung der Vodun-Religion waren an jeder Straßenecke zu finden. Jeder König drückte der Stadt Abomey seinen Stempel auf, getreu dem Motto: „Dahomey immer größer!“ Mit der Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft und des Sklav*innenhandels war Abomey eine Stadt am Scheideweg. Seine Paläste von außergewöhnlichem universellem Wert gehören zum UNESCO-Weltkulturerbe.

GESCHICHTLICHER HINTERGRUND

1890

Französische Truppen fallen in Abomey ein und plündern die Paläste und die Stadt. Dodds und seine Truppen beschlagnahmen königliche Objekte.

1893–1895

General Dodds schenkt die Objekte dem Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro (heute Musée de l'Homme), darunter auch die 26 Artefakte, die nun zurückgeführt werden. Ab 2000 werden diese im Musée du Quai Branly aufbewahrt.

1957

Rückführung eines Ashanti-Hockers nach Ghana durch die englische Königin anlässlich der Feierlichkeiten zur Unabhängigkeit des Landes.

1960

Der Kongo bittet Belgien, das Belgische Museum des Kongo nach Kinshasa zu verlegen.

1969

Veröffentlichung des Panafrikanischen Kulturmanifests von Algier, in dem die Notwendigkeit der Rückgabe der von den Kolonialmächten geraubten Artefakte und Archive betont wird.

1975

Hundert Gegenstände aus dem Königlichen Museum für Zentralafrika in Tervuren, Belgien, werden nach langen Verhandlungen an Kinshasa zurückgegeben.

1978

Der Generaldirektor der UNESCO, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, plädiert für die Wiederherstellung des Gleichgewichts des globalen Kulturerbes zwischen der nördlichen und der südlichen Hemisphäre und spricht sich für die „Rückgabe eines unersetzlichen kulturellen Erbes an diejenigen aus, die es geschaffen haben“.

1982

Pierre Quoniam, der damalige Direktor des Louvre-Museums, veröffentlicht einen Bericht, in dem er sich für die Rückführung des afrikanischen Erbes ausspricht. In den folgenden vier Jahrzehnten wird keine seiner Empfehlungen umgesetzt und sein Bericht gerät in Vergessenheit.

26. AUGUST 2016

Patrice Talon, Präsidentin der Republik Benin, richtet ein offizielles Ersuchen an die französische Regierung, die während der Kolonialisierung geplünderten Kulturgüter zurückzugeben.

28. NOVEMBER 2017

Der französische Präsident Emmanuel Macron spricht sich in einer Rede an der Universität von Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, für eine mögliche Rückgabe des afrikanischen Erbes an Afrika bis 2022 aus.

23. NOVEMBER 2018

Vorstellung des Berichts „Restituer le patrimoine africain“, der von Emmanuel Macron bei der französischen Kunsthistorikerin Bénédicte Savoy und dem senegalesischen Wirtschaftswissenschaftler Felwine Sarr in Auftrag gegeben wurde.

GESCHICHTLICHER HINTERGRUND

19. NOVEMBER 2019

Frankreich übergibt das Schwert von El Hadj Oumar Tall an den senegalesischen Präsidenten Macky Sall.

24. DEZEMBER 2020

Die französische Nationalversammlung verabschiedet das Gesetz Nr. 2020-1673 über die Rückgabe von Kulturgütern an die Republik Benin und die Republik Senegal. Dieses Gesetz sieht vor, dass die Rückgabe innerhalb eines Jahres erfolgen muss.

10. NOVEMBER 2021

Die 26 von Frankreich zurückgegebenen Werke befinden sich nun wieder in Benin.

NOVEMBER 2021

26 königliche Schätze des Königreichs Dahomey verlassen Paris und kehren in ihr Herkunftsland, die heutige Republik Benin, zurück. Zusammen mit Tausenden anderen wurden diese Artefakte 1892 von den französischen Kolonialtruppen geplündert. Doch wie soll man die Rückkehr dieser Vorfahr*innen in einem Land betrachten, das sich in ihrer Abwesenheit neu orientieren musste? Während die Seele der Artefakte befreit wird, tobt eine Debatte unter den Studierenden der Universität von Abomey-Calavi.

BIOGRAPHIE MATI DIOP



MATI DIOP

Mati Diop wuchs in einer französisch-senegalesischen Familie auf, mit einem Musiker als Vater, Wasis Diop, und einer Fotografin und Kunsthändlerin als Mutter. Sie ist die Nichte von Djibril Diop Mambéty, dem Regisseur des Kultfilms *Touki Bouki* (1973). Der Formalismus ihres Kinos hat seine Wurzeln in einer frühen Neugierde für die Künste, vor allem für Video und insbesondere für den Sound. Im Alter von zwanzig Jahren begann Diop am Theater zu arbeiten und schuf Sound- und Videoarbeiten für Theaterstücke. Zur gleichen Zeit drehte sie ihren ersten selbstproduzierten Kurzfilm, *Last Night* (2004). Ihre ersten vier Kurzfilme drehte sie während ihres Studiums an den Kunstinstitutionen Le Fresnoy und Le Pavillon (Palais de Tokyo). Die Begegnung mit Claire Denis, die sie für die weibliche Hauptrolle in *35 Rhums* (2008) besetzte, bekräftigte schließlich ihren Wunsch, Filmemacherin zu werden.

Die Filme *Atlantiques* (2009, Tiger Award beim International Film Festival Rotterdam), *Mille Soleils* (2013, Grand Prix beim FID Marseille) und *Atlantique* (2019, Grand Prix bei den Filmfestspielen von Cannes) bilden ein Manifest, das auf der politischen Entscheidung fußt, kämpferisches Kino im Senegal zu machen. Für die Filmemacherin ist Kino ein Instrument, das fehlende Bilder rückerobert, im Kolonialismus verwurzelte Darstellungen infrage stellt und Held*innen erschafft, die in der afrikanischen Vorstellungswelt verschwunden sind.

Parallel dazu drehte Mati Diop mehrere Kurzfilme, darunter *Big in Vietnam* (2011, Tiger Award beim International Film Festival Rotterdam) und *Snow Canon* (2012, Premiere bei den Filmfestspielen von Venedig), die Motive und Themen wieder aufgreifen: die Einsamkeit von Exilant*innen, Städte und Landschaften, die von Mythologie und Geheimnissen durchdrungen sind, und die Nacht, aus der Tänze und Gespenster hervortreten. Diese Themen finden sich auch in *Tokyo Trip* (2023) und *In My Room* (2020) wieder. Mati Diop setzte ihre Videoarbeit mit *Liberian Boy* (2015) und *Naked Blue* (2022) fort, bei dem sie gemeinsam mit Manon Lutanie Regie führte. In den Jahren 2020 und 2021 drehte sie außerdem zwei Musikvideos in Paris für Bonnie Banane und Wasis Diop sowie einen Werbespot mit Solange Knowles.

Mati Diops Spielfilm *Atlantique* (2019) gewann den Grand Prix bei den Filmfestspielen von Cannes, wo sie als erste schwarze Regisseurin für den Wettbewerb ausgewählt worden war. *Dahomey* (2024), ihr zweiter Langfilm, der in Benin gedreht wurde, versteht sich als Fortsetzung von Diops künstlerischem Aktivismus auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent.

ASSETS



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CREDITS (AUSWAHL)



WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
MATI DIOP

IMAGE
JOSÉPHINE DROUIN-VIALLARD

EDITING
GABRIEL GONZALEZ

TEXT – VOICE OF THE TREASURES
MAKENZY ORCEL

PRODUCED BY
EVE ROBIN
JUDITH LOU LEVY
MATI DIOP

SOUND
CORNEILLE HOUSSOU
NICOLAS BECKER
CYRIL HOLTZ

MUSIC
DEAN BLUNT
WALLY BADAROU

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
GILDAS ADANNOU

PRODUCTION MANAGER
MARCO TULIO PIRES

LINE PRODUCER
CHRISTIANE CHABI-KAO

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER
AMA AMPADU

A CO-PRODUCTION
LES FILMS DU BAL
FANTA SY

CO-PRODUCED BY
ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA

WITH THE SUPPORT OF
GOUVERNEMENT DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE
DU BÉNIN
CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET
DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE
LA RÉGION ÎLE-DE-FRANCE

LE FONDS DE PROMOTION DE L'INDUSTRIE
CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE ET AUDIOVISUELLE
(FOPICA)

WITH SUPPORT FROM
ARTE FRANCE

TRANSLATOR
SIMON JOHN

WITH STUDENTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF
ABOMEY-CALAVI
GILDAS ADANNOU
JOSEA GUEDJE
GAËL SANKARA DAAVO
HABIB AHANDESSI
ROSE OUEMEHO
MARYLINE AGBOSSI
RAÏMI BASSITOU NOUATIN
DIDIER SEDOHA NASSANGADE
IMELDA BATAMOUSSI
JOËL TCHOGBE
DIANE CAKPO
CHAMELIE DOGNON
MORIAS AGBESSI
GILBERT GODOVO
YVON KOSSOU-YOVO
DONALD GBOSSA
EDAH GONTRAN
MESSI BOCO
ODILON GBENONTIN
KEVIN DA-SILVA

THE TEAM OF CURATORS AND EXHIBITION
MANAGERS
CALIXTE BIAH
ABDOU LAYE IMOROU
PAUL TIMOTHEE DOTO
JULES BOCCO
RICHARD J. V. SOGAN
DIDIER DONATIEN ALIHONOU

EXHIBITION CURATOR
ALAIN GODONOU

WITH THE VOICES OF
LUCRECE HOUEGBELO
PARFAIT VIAYINON
DIDIER SEDOHA NASSEGANDÉ
SABINE BADJOGOUMIN
DOWOTI DESIR

TECHNISCHE DETAILS



TITLE
Dahomey

COUNTRY OF PRODUCTION
Benin, France, Senegal

YEAR OF PRODUCTION
2024

ASPECT RATIO
1.85

RUNTIME
68 min

SOUND
5.1

INTERVIEW MIT MATI DIOP (ENGLISCH)

After the Grand Prix in Cannes, the selection of *Atlantics* (*Atlantique*) in the shortlist for the Academy Award for Best International Picture, and Netflix US buying the film, you might have taken a more mainstream turn, but you're back with a film even more radical than *Atlantics* in its message and form.

I came up as much in the mainstream as in counter-culture. *Atlantics* transposes the range of my cultural influences. With my first feature, I tried to stay as close as possible to my artistic language while consciously playing the game of more classical storytelling. With *Dahomey*, I went back to a freer writing and shooting process that was closer to my previous films. The brutal shutdown imposed by the pandemic made me question the meaning I wanted to keep giving to my work as a filmmaker, and its political impact. While reflecting on the feature film to which I wanted to devote the next few years of my life, I kept working in a variety of formats. During lockdown, I was fortunate enough to receive a commission that allowed me to make a film alone, at home, using audio recordings I had made of my grandmother. After the soul-destroying whirl of the *Atlantics* promotional tour worldwide, making in my room with limited resources was a redemptive, repertory experience that reminded me of my ability to make films out of nothing. A year later, when I found out that 26 royal treasures from *Dahomey* were to be returned to Benin by France, I stopped what I was doing and decided to make a film about it.

What was the starting point of *Dahomey*? What spurred you to make this film?

When I first heard the term “restitution” in 2017, I was still writing *Atlantics*. As an afro descendant filmmaker, the word resonated deeply within me. Fundamentally, the issue runs through my work. Also, the films I made in Dakar between 2009 and 2019 speak to a process of return – going back to my African origins, to a part of myself that was buried for too long under the hegemony of my Western environment. Added to that, there was the troubling echo between the figure of the revenant in *Atlantics*, which I was just finishing writing, and the return of African artifacts to their native land. Restitution, reverence, return, and reparation came together in my head. As perplexing as Emmanuel Macron’s announcement in Ouagadougou may have been for me, the project for the repatriation of African cultural heritage within five years was a shock because I sadly realized that I had never imagined the possibility of something like that happening in my lifetime, perhaps out of resignation.

I had never imagined what restitution might actually look like, and while trying to visualize it, a film was already crystallizing in my mind. Initially, I envisioned writing a feature film that would chronicle the epic adventure of an artifact, from it being looted in the late 19th century to it returning home in 2075. It had to anticipate the future, simply because it seemed to me to be so unlikely that any restitutions were imminent or even that we would be alive to witness such a historic chapter. Even so, I had informed my producers, Judith Lou Levy and Eve Robin, that if repatriation of artifacts (from France to their country of origin) took place, I absolutely wanted to film it, so we had to stay on the alert, to be ready. We kept an eye on the press until the announcement dropped suddenly that 26 royal treasures from Abomey (Benin) had been selected for restitution on November 10, 2021, and we had to make the shoot possible. It was a race against time: asking for permission from the Beninese government to escort the treasures – the government became a partner in the film while guaranteeing us the independence we insisted upon – while organizing all the logistics of a shoot going from Paris to Cotonou, where I had never been before. Shortly after starting work on the film, I decided to create a production company based in Dakar (Fanta Sy) to co-produced it with Les Films du Bal, from the continent.

INTERVIEW MIT MATI DIOP (ENGLISCH)

How did you visualize *Dahomey* and over what period of time did you make it?

The film took shape over two years, from 2021 to 2023, alternating phases of shooting and editing, while honing ever more the writing and the articulation of the different registers of language in the film, between documentary and fantasy. The four shooting periods were scheduled to coincide with the treasures' journey, starting with their departure from Quai Branly Museum, followed by the journey in a cargo plane to their arrival in Cotonou. Back in Paris, the editor (Gabriel Gonzalez) and I put together the first 15 minutes of the movie. The second shoot, in Cotonou, consisted of filming the installation of the artifacts in the exhibition space within the presidential palace by the team of Beninese curators, including Calixte Biah, whom we had followed since they left Quai Branly, and Alain Godonou, the curator of the exhibition. Once that sequence had been shot, I stayed in Cotonou for over a month to prepare the second major chunk of the film, which focuses on how young people in Benin view the restitution of the treasures. I chose to give this the form of a great debate in an auditorium at the University of Abomey-Calavi.

After more editing, a third sequence was shot in 2022: the exhibition of the artifacts at the palace, reuniting the people of Benin with their repatriated treasures, and an initial fantasy sequence meandering at night around Cotonou. The final phase of shooting consisted in filming another debate at the university to cover missing angles, and complete the nighttime roaming of the spirit of the treasures, in the presidential palace and city. In parallel with the various phases of shooting and editing, I worked with the Haitian author Makenzy Orcel on writing the text of the voice of the treasures.

***Dahomey* is a film on the border between documentary and fiction. In the end credits, it says "written and directed by Mati Diop". Can you talk us through notions of writing and directing this documentary?**

What distinguishes documentary from fiction concerns above all the question of the writing process. On top of the imperative need I felt to make this film, after *Atlantics* I also needed to re-experience a free writing and shooting process rather than on a work of fiction. I like to break free of conventions about format, and I like the idea of reinventing my approach to the writing of it with each film. I visualized *Atlantics* as a Gothic tale. *Dahomey* is a fantasy documentary. If people come out wondering what it is that they just saw, having had a unique experience (while feeling some kind of emotion, of course), then I feel I have contributed to making cinema more surprising and innovative. That's also what I expect from a film, wherever it is from.

In documentaries, the writing is first and foremost a point of view, on people or on a situation. Writing begins with the film language that translates (or betrays) your relationship to the world, to other people and to yourself. In the end, when you're watching a movie, whether documentary or fiction, the only question is whether cinema happens or not.

When I arrived at Quai Branly Museum with Joséphine Drouin Vialard, the director of photography, for the first day of shooting, when the artifacts were due to be removed from display and crated up, we didn't know what to expect and were very apprehensive of the museum's institutional environment. In *Statues Die Too* by Resnais & Marker (1953), one of the only films I had in mind as a reference, the shots of the statues verge on the sublime. It is at once a political manifesto and art film. I was aiming for the same aesthetic rigour but, in a documentary, you cannot control everything around you. Only one take is possible, only one place to be. It's now.

INTERVIEW MIT MATI DIOP (ENGLISCH)

The film quickly departs from pure reality by giving a form of life – a voice – to one of the artifacts ...

When I began filming, I was so steeped in the feature I had in mind that my approach to reality was suffused in lyricism. I was looking at what I had already dreamed. The decision to film the treasures like characters with their own perspective and subjectivity enabled Joséphine and I to maintain a strong focus while grasping other dimensions that I wanted to make palpable.

To my mind, the historical dimension of the moment had a mythical dimension that I wanted to transcribe through the manner of filming. To bring out the weight, density, and texture of what was going on. Often, reality produces pictures that are far more striking than anything fiction generates. I was astonished by the highly technical process that looked like a funeral ceremony, with a tempo set by the crating up of each artifact to the sound of drills and construction site banging. We had indeed entered the era of museums' disquiet. The atmosphere was very solemn – you felt every passing second. History was changing direction – something was being reversed. Sometimes, everyday people turn into mythological characters or archetypes that must be acknowledged and made sublime. That is the case with Calixte Biah, the curator brought in by the Beninese government to fly with the treasures from Quai Branly to Cotonou.

Before coming up with the idea of having the artifacts talk, I wanted first of all to make their silence, which we recreated in sound editing and mixing with Nicolas Becker and Cyril Holtz, as audible as possible. It seemed to me to be the most eloquent way of restoring their power while evoking their secret, opaque, and inviolable aspects. The particular sequence when the artifacts are installed in the exhibition space at the presidential palace was fine-tuned and rewritten in the editing suite. Back on Beninese soil, the artifacts open up to a new dimension of themselves. Through the observations on their condition read out by Calixte, a part of their history is restored through the marks of time. At the same time, the people looking at them and after them, and talking to them, perhaps also rediscover part of themselves

It's the story of a return told to us in the Fon language ... can you tell us about the choice of language? How, and with whom, did you come up with this voice of the treasures?

All the films I shot in Senegal are in Wolof. It's a highly political choice. *Dahomey* speaks first and foremost to the people of Benin, who must be able to hear and recognize themselves. As subjective as it may be, the story of the voice of the treasures must be returned to them in the Fon language, which everyone in Benin speaks. Fanon says, "To speak one's language is to exist absolutely for the other." But it is also to exist absolutely for oneself. *Dahomey* approaches restitution from an African perspective that speaks to the universal, a prism that the West has always made its own. To flesh out the artifacts' subjectivity, I chose to give them an inner voice, translating the desire to release these artifacts from the status of objects, in which they have been locked since their abduction, by once more making them the subject of their own story, the protagonists, and narrators of their adventures. Giving the artifacts a voice and a story to tell, through the singular tale of their expropriation, meant choosing to evoke the condition of a plundered territory, a dispossessed nation, a community seeking sovereignty.

For historical, political and (always) poetical reasons, I insisted on writing that story in collaboration with a writer of Haitian origin. Practically all Haitians are the descendants of black slaves, mostly deported (in the early 18th century) from the Bight of Benin and West Africa, including Senegal. From the mid-18th century onward, the deported Africans came primarily from the Congo, and in total, before the Haitian revolution, the majority were from central

INTERVIEW MIT MATI DIOP (ENGLISCH)

Africa. Beyond the style that a writer or poet could contribute to the story told by the voice of the treasures, the Haitian resonance meant a lot to me. I was also looking for someone who would be able to write from the invisible world.

When Makenzy Orcel came on board, editing was already advanced, and the treasures' story had a specific place and role in the film (in the form of five distinct scenes). I knew what I wanted to hear from the artifacts, according to the symbolic spaces they were passing through, but I was looking for a language to say it in, which Makenzy provided. He drew much of his inspiration from shots in the movie. Once he had written his text, I in turn readapted it to the rhythm and musicality of the film.

Once the text was translated into old Fon, I called sound designer Nicolas Becker, with whom I chose to create the voice of the treasures. The recording took place in Benin, using male and female voices with very different tones. Back in Paris, we created a genderless vocal texture in deep, metallic frequencies. I wanted a texture with a futuristic aesthetic, like a creature in a genre movie that would break with the whole folklore-and-tradition image in which African ancestrality is too often confined, and using genre to bypass that kind of stereotype. The music by Wally Badarou, who is of Beninese origin, greatly contributes to the fantasy dimension of the film. While that of Dean Blunt, who is of Nigerian origin, adds a more spiritual dimension.

Youth is front and center of every film you've made in Senegal. In *Dahomey*, likewise. How do you explain that choice?

When I say that the issue of restitution runs through my work, I refer specifically to the films I chose to shoot in Dakar between 2009 and 2019. When young Serigne, in *Atlantiques* (2009), gives a first-person account of his migration journey, he becomes the protagonist and subject of his story. By devoting my first feature to young Senegalese who have died at sea while trying to make it to Europe, the primary aim was to leave a trace of a contemporary tragedy while trying to render its complexity in all its personal and existential dimensions. The restitution of African cultural artifacts plundered during the French colonial period concerns first and foremost Africa's young people, whose voices had not been heard on the subject yet but were instead hijacked in political circles or cloistered in the academic field. It was necessary to shift the whole issue from the summit to the base, to create a space that might allow young people to identify this restitution as part of its history and reappropriate it. To create a space where they might be heard.

How did you approach that question with them?

I dreamed up a great debate at a university, like a massive brainstorming session, to consider all the questions that this restitution raises and, above all, reveals. I wanted the debate to revolve around issues of history, vestiges and remembrance. For me, the challenge was to find a way to create a space of free expression on a subject that belongs absolutely to the protagonists.

With Gildas Adannou, a young filmmaker who was my AD on this movie, we held a casting call to put together a round table of a dozen students, researchers or young lecturers. I wanted them to be from different backgrounds and disciplines, from art to history via economics or social sciences. I met lots of people and held numerous interviews. We had to be absolutely sure everyone would defend a singular and personal point of view on the restitution of the treasures – gather together people who would voice a variety of opinions on the matter. I chose a location that seemed super-dynamic visually, as much for the perspectives as for the light. The raked seating responded to my desire for a chorus, an agora. Joséphine Drouin Vialard

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and I thought up a system with three cameras, which would bring to life each person's intervention, as well as the audience and university life going on all around.

On the day of the shoot, I chose to broadcast the debate over the campus radio to generate more tension and urgency among the speakers, who knew a larger audience was listening. Irrespective of filming, it was legitimate for the debate to be aired and shared among as many people as possible. I gave Gildas, whom I had asked to moderate the debate, a list of all the questions I really wanted to ask these young people, and first of all, how do you measure the loss of something if you never realized you lost it?

Paris, January 2024

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