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## Mixing Impossible Genres: David Achkar and African AutoBiographical Documentary

Rachel Gabara

**D**AVID ACHKAR'S 1991 FILM *Allah Tantou* (God's will) contains autobiographical, biographical, and historical (both national and international) layers and first, second, and third-person narratives.<sup>1</sup> Documentary material, including photographs, newspapers, newsreels, and home movies, is combined with fictional reenactments as Achkar slips back and forth between personal and historical narrative, telling a piece of the history of a postcolonial West African nation through the story of his father, Marof Achkar, ambassador of newly independent Guinea to the United Nations until his imprisonment in 1968 by President Sékou Touré's government. Achkar's film not only mixes genres, but interrogates its genres and genre itself, exploring the nature of historical narrative, the relationship of autobiography to biography and of both to history. *Allah Tantou* provides us with a new vantage point from which to examine recent theories of genre within three academic fields—literary history and theory (including the study of autobiography), African and postcolonial studies, and film history and theory (including the study of documentary). I will read the film for two generic aspects that scholars in these domains have deemed theoretically impossible, as an African autobiography and as an autobiographical film, focusing on Achkar's use of different voices and visual evidence of the past in his fragmented revision of history.

I have chosen a single film as the subject of this essay, yet *Allah Tantou* is representative of a group of 1990s francophone West African films that are innovative personal as well as historical documentaries.<sup>2</sup> I do not wish to argue, however, for the presence of a *new* genre epitomized by this film, but rather hope to create space within autobiography for works of self-presentation from many regions of the world and in different media. European and North American academics have excluded, as we shall see, both African autobiography and autobiographical film from the genre of autobiography. More strikingly, both have also been proscribed by theorists of a revolutionary African cinema, working against Hollywood and European art films in the tradition of 1960s Latin

American political “Third Cinema.” Alastair Fowler has proposed that we think about genres as not classes but families, whose “individual members are related in various ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all.”<sup>3</sup> Ralph Cohen has shared this view, going on to assert that “the members of a generic classification have multiple relational possibilities with each other, relationships that are discovered only in the process of adding members to a class.”<sup>4</sup> After examining the arguments behind the exclusion of a work such as *Allah Tantou* from the category of autobiography, I will show what we gain when we add it to the family or to a class.

The genre of autobiography has been a troubled one in the West at least since Rousseau, yet its difficulties threatened to become overwhelming during the second half of the twentieth century as we learned that the author is dead, the self is hopelessly (or hopefully) fragmentary, and autobiography is therefore uncomfortably indistinguishable from fiction.<sup>5</sup> Critical discussions of autobiography in the 1970s tended to rely nonetheless on the inherent recognizability of the members of the genre, “the fact that we have little difficulty recognizing and so reading autobiographies as opposed to works of fiction.”<sup>6</sup> Philippe Lejeune, who has been perhaps the most prolific of all theorists of autobiography, asserted the impossibility of autobiographical hybrids that would be difficult to classify—“autobiography is not a question of degree; it is all or nothing.”<sup>7</sup> A multitude of debates about the autobiographicalness of various texts, however, belies both of these assertions. To add to the confusion, many of the same European and North American writers of fiction and theory who had proclaimed either the end or the impossibility of autobiography, including virtually all of the French New Novelists, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida, went on in the 1980s and '90s to write their autobiographies. Lejeune noted, almost ten years after his “all or nothing” statement, that “the fact that autobiography is impossible has in no way stopped it from existing.”<sup>8</sup> These unexpected autobiographers and their literary critics sought to extract themselves from the impasse of autobiography by insisting that their work differed from “traditional” life-stories, replacing “autobiography” with terms such as “new autobiography,” “autofiction,” “romanesque,” “autobiographique,” “autobiographics,” “pseudo-autobiography,” and “fictography.”

I would like to investigate what happens when we do *not* inherently recognize autobiography, when a text is not just “new” or “pseudo-autobiography,” but from a different narrative tradition and in a different form. I will not, however, subdivide “new” from “old” autobiography, nor further qualify or yet again rename the genre. Derrida’s now famous “counter-law of genre” reminds us that just as a conception of genre must always exist, genres cannot ever have been other than

mixed: "A text cannot belong to no genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always some genre and always some genres, yet this participation is never a belonging. . . . Marking itself with genre, a text demarcates itself."<sup>9</sup>

Autobiography is always a locus of contact among many genres, at once representation and invention, nonfiction and fiction, in the present and in the past and in the first and third persons. Much contemporary art, whether fiction or nonfiction, exhibits what Ihab Hassan has called a postmodern hybridization of genres,<sup>10</sup> and *Allah Tantou* will be no exception. Achkar's film marks itself off as autobiography, biography, documentary, historical and fictional narrative, participating in genres on all sides of the conventional boundaries of autobiography, but most importantly forcing the spectator to reflect upon these boundaries themselves. It is a postmodern film in the sense that, to quote Thomas Beebee, "the effect that many identify as postmodern is produced by defeating the generic expectations of the reader."<sup>11</sup> An African autobiographical film, however, bears a particular and very peculiar burden of generic expectation.

Avrom Fleishman has noted, using the examples of Arabic, Japanese, and Chinese texts, that a viewpoint he calls "Autobiography as a Distinctive Phenomenon of Western Culture" relies on the invention of various reasons to exclude the many and varied examples of non-Western self-writing from the genre of autobiography.<sup>12</sup> And, in fact, non-African theorists have consistently denied Africans the privilege of autobiography, of telling individual stories. In 1956, in an important and widely-read article that marked the beginning of a renewed critical interest in the study of autobiography, Georges Gusdorf claimed that the concept of individual identity was uniquely Western, "expresse[d] a concern particular to Western man," and that therefore "authentic" non-Western autobiography was impossible.<sup>13</sup> One could read this statement as a gesture toward the awareness of cultural difference, yet it is very much in the same vein as Saul Bellow's infamous declaration that the Zulus have never produced (and never will) a Tolstoy. Paul John Eakin has also maintained, thirty years after Gusdorf and without much additional explanation, that "the very idea of African autobiography sounds paradoxical, and so it is."<sup>14</sup>

In the early 1970s, James Olney wrote what is still the only book-length study of African autobiography. He claimed, however, paradoxically following Gusdorf's lead, that African autobiography is "less as an individual phenomenon than . . . a social one," since an African subject, as opposed to a Western one, is not individually, but rather socially determined.<sup>15</sup> Olney, who in his extensive work on Western autobiography always affirmed the existence of a generic boundary between

autobiography and fiction,<sup>16</sup> argued that in Africa autobiography and fiction were one and the same. The novels of Nigerian Chinua Achebe were “something like a supra-personal, multi-generational autobiography of the Ibo people” and Malian Yambo Ouologuem’s *Bound to Violence* was “a symbolic autobiography of the entire continent and community of Africa” (TA 17). Either Africans cannot write autobiography (or biography), since they cannot write about an individual as distinct from a collective, or they can only write collective autobiography, even when they say they are writing fiction. Moreover, a strict opposition of African collectivism to Western individualism has not been limited to discussions of autobiography. Charles Larson writes that “the hero concept—the belief in the individual who is different from his fellowmen—is almost totally alien to African life.”<sup>17</sup> Fredric Jameson has maintained that all “third-world” texts “necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.*”<sup>18</sup> Olney calls all African texts autobiographies and Jameson calls them all national allegories, but both in fact argue the impossibility of African self-writing.

The same contrast between the Western individual and the African collective reappears in theoretical discussions about the nature of African film, more specifically a revolutionary and anticolonial African Third Cinema. Clyde Taylor strictly opposes the Cartesian “I think, therefore I am” to the Xhosa proverb “A person is a person only because of other people” and characterizes African Cinema as a “hero-less narrative.”<sup>19</sup> Tahar Cheriaa states that “the main character in African films is always the group, the collective, and that is what is essential,”<sup>20</sup> while Elizabeth Malkmus and Roy Armes agree that there can be no individual hero in African cinema since “an emphasis on a broad issue (such as the anti-colonial struggle) as the primary set of a narrative . . . shifts focus away from the individual (who would be helpless in such a struggle) to the collectivity (which alone has the potential to embody power or to offer viable resistance).”<sup>21</sup> If an individual African life cannot be narrated, whether in fiction or nonfiction, in fictional or documentary film, then neither biography nor autobiography, neither biographical film nor autobiographical film, can exist. Teshome Gabriel, one of the foremost theorists of African cinema, does allow for autobiographical film, although he curiously rejoins Olney by excluding the possibility of *individual* autobiographical film. He warns that: “I do not mean autobiography in its usual Western sense of a narrative by and about a single subject. Rather, I am speaking of a multi-generational and trans-individual autobiography, i.e. a symbolic autobiography where the *collective* subject is the focus . . . (perhaps hetero-biography).”<sup>22</sup> It is quite

astonishing to discover so many differently situated theorists in agreement that there is no place for postcolonial narration in or of the singular, at the same time that we find a group of African filmmakers who disagree, mixing autobiography and biography, articulating the individual, the personal, the singular, the first person, into history. Furthermore, despite their efforts to reject Western cinematic models and theories, the above theorists of African film in fact continue the Western tradition of denying the possibility of personal history in filmic form.

The study of film was on its way to establishing itself as an academic discipline toward the end of the 1950s when Gusdorf's essay renewed critical interest in the genre of autobiography. It is surprising to learn, then, that the question of autobiographical documentary film has rarely been addressed. The earliest reference I have located to a "first-person" voice in film appears in a 1947 article by Jean-Pierre Chartier, in which he discusses not autobiographical film but first-person narration, which he calls interior monologue, in fiction film.<sup>23</sup> The only discussions of autobiography and film in the 1950s and 60s grew out of French *auteur* theory. In a 1959 review of François Truffaut's *400 Blows* in *Cahiers du cinéma*, for example, Fereydoun Hoveyda asserted that "every film is in some sense autobiographical. For better or for worse, film absorbs and reflects the personality of the *auteur*."<sup>24</sup> Annette Insdorf similarly pointed to filmic allusions within Truffaut's entire *oeuvre*, not claiming any one of Truffaut's films as an autobiography but judging that "many . . . characters, themes, techniques, and structures are intimate reflections of François Truffaut."<sup>25</sup> Arguing, like Hoveyda (and much like Olney about African texts), that every film is in some sense an autobiography of its *auteur*, Insdorf leaves us with no framework for the analysis of a specific autobiographical film as opposed to the entire body of work of a filmmaker. Nor, more importantly, can we distinguish between a fictional film about a filmmaker making a film, such as Truffaut's *Day for Night* or Federico Fellini's *8 1/2*, and a documentary in which a filmmaker attempts to recount his or her life.

These distinctions were made by Elizabeth Bruss and Philippe Lejeune in articles about autobiographical film published in the 1980s, yet both declared its impossibility based on the untranslatability of the concept of autobiography from written to filmic narrative. Bruss argued, somewhat paradoxically, not only that autobiographical film cannot exist, but that its existence would threaten the existence of autobiography altogether: "If film and video do come to replace writing as our chief means of recording, informing, and entertaining, and if (as I hope to show) there is no real cinematic equivalent for autobiography, then the autobiographical act as we have known it for the past four hundred years could

indeed become more and more recondite, and eventually extinct."<sup>26</sup> Beginning with the assumption that film, unlike written language, offers us the possibility of a direct and unmediated recording of reality, Bruss claimed that autobiographical filmmakers have a choice that autobiographers have not previously had to make, whether to record the truth or to stage it: "film makes us impatient for a direct transcription—an actual imprint of the person, unmediated and 'uncreated'" (EI 308). Moreover, since the person behind the camera can never be at the same time the person in front of the camera, the narrating "I" of autobiographical writing can have no equivalent in film and "the autobiographical self decomposes, schisms, into almost mutually exclusive elements of the person filmed (entirely visible; recorded and projected) and the person filming (entirely hidden; behind the camera eye)" (EI 297). Yet the earliest of photographers and filmmakers were aware that there is no such thing as an unmediated recording of reality. Even the only kind of film proclaimed by Michel Mesnil to be a "true" self-portrait, in which one would film oneself every hour or day for twenty years and then speed up the film or splice the segments together to see the facial changes of these years in the space of one hour,<sup>27</sup> would require the mediation of a projectionist or editor. Furthermore, as Emile Benveniste and Jacques Lacan, among others, have shown us and as Bruss well knew, the subject of language is always split; the narrating "I" is never equal to itself. Kaja Silverman notes that film merely shows us what has always already been the case in writing, "clarifies for us . . . the distance which separates the speaking subject from the spoken subject."<sup>28</sup> And Bruss eventually comes to the crux of her argument: "The trick comes off in language" (EI 307). Written language tricks us better than film and is therefore more appropriate for autobiography.

Lejeune begins his brief consideration of autobiographical film with a series of questions: "Can the 'I' express itself in the cinema? Can a film be autobiographical? Why not? But is it the same thing as when we speak of literary autobiography? . . . Is autobiography possible in the cinema?"<sup>29</sup> He ultimately answers in the negative for the same reasons as Bruss: "The 'superiority' of language results from its capacity to make us forget its fictional portion, rather than from any special ability to tell the truth . . . It is not possible to be on both sides of the camera at the same time, in front of it and behind it, whereas the spoken or written first person easily manages to mask the fact that . . . I am an other (*je est un autre*)" (CA 8–10). Writing can deceive us more effectively, even if we already know that it is deceptive. It seems to be strangely more difficult to theorize about autobiographical film than to make one, a fact acknowledged by Lejeune in his odd assertion that "autobiographical film is perhaps theoretically impossible, but in practice it exists!" (CA 8)

Both Bruss and Lejeune in the end shore up a conventional understanding of literary autobiography, one which both had undermined in earlier work on literary autobiography,<sup>30</sup> by a strategy of opposition with film as the other of literature. Faced with the challenge posed by the filmic medium, they revert to a more restrictive generic classification rather than rethink the category of autobiography.

Several scholars of film have hinted at other ways of thinking about autobiography in film, which will allow me to begin my reading of *Allah Tantou*. In his analysis of avant-garde diary films from the 1960s and '70s, P. Adams Sitney drew a parallel, rather than Bruss and Lejeune's stark contrast, between literary and filmic autobiography. Sitney maintained, remembering instead of trying to forget the difficulties of self-narration in writing, that "film-makers resemble the literary autobiographers who dwell upon, and find their most powerful and enigmatic metaphors for, the very aporias, the contradictions, the gaps, the failures involved in trying to make language (or film) substitute for experience and memory."<sup>31</sup> Michael Renov, who has been interested in films which construct "subjectivity as a site of instability—flux, drift, perpetual revision—rather than coherence," reminds us that artifice is a necessary component of autobiographical narration in any medium.<sup>32</sup> Jim Lane notes that the autobiographical documentary always contains at least two voices, always "bears the mark of personal, actual events and a consciousness that bears witness to, and forms an opinion about, these events through documentary representation."<sup>33</sup> Filmic autobiography, with its material, visible split between director or filmer and actor or filmed self bemoaned by Bruss and Lejeune, troubles our conventional notions of coherent identity and provides us with new forms in which to explore and represent fragmented subjectivity.

No analytic framework has been established, however, for a study of autobiographical film. Very little work has been done on genre in film in general, and what has been done has been surprisingly limited. Alan Williams pointed out almost twenty years ago that virtually all critical studies of filmic genre have dealt exclusively with North American films.<sup>34</sup> This is still the case, not only for the considerations of autobiography and film above but also for the essays collected in Nick Brown's *Refiguring American Film Genres*, those in the second edition of Barry Keith Grant's *Film Genre Reader*, for Steve Neale's *Genre*, and Rick Altman's recent *Film/Genre*.<sup>35</sup> All of the genre categories discussed by these critics are therefore derived from North American film history, and most often from Hollywood studio films. Canonical Western European films occasionally make a brief appearance, but the Latin American, East Asian, and African cinemas are notably absent from the debate. Moreover, scholars have overwhelmingly chosen to study the

“genre film” rather than the ways in which ideas of genre circulate in film. Grant’s “comprehensive bibliography” is thus divided into the following generic subsections: comedy films, crime films, disaster films, epic films, erotic films, film noir, gangster films, horror films, melodrama, musical films, science fiction films, sports films, war films, western films, and miscellaneous. Judith Hess Wright limits herself to the western, science fiction, horror, and gangster films.<sup>36</sup> These categories are of very little use to the study of African film, especially of African documentary. Williams suggests that we classify cinematic texts within only three, more broadly construed genres—narrative film, experimental/avant-garde film, and documentary (the second two of which have no place at all in Grant’s long list)—which would accommodate a wider range of films from all over the world (RGC 121). But even this system will not provide an easy place for Achkar’s film, which contains aspects of all three.

*Allah Tantou* begins with a dedication in white letters against a black background—“To my father, and to all of the prisoners of Camp Boiro and elsewhere”—followed by 8 mm home movie footage of a family decorating their Christmas tree. These images, which then shift to footage of a father picking up and holding his young son, are accompanied by David Achkar’s first-person voice-over, stating that “Many sons admire their fathers. I hardly knew my father. What I know of him, I know from what my mother or his friends have told me. But also from what he wrote to us.” The title credits to the film quickly follow, over an image of a man writing while sitting on the floor of a prison cell. We gather from the credits and subsequent narration that this is an actor, Michel Montanary, playing the role of the filmmaker’s father, Marof Achkar, who died in 1971, and that the boy in the home movies is his son David. The next images are of the letters that Marof Achkar wrote to his family from prison, which are then replaced by more 8 mm footage, now of a government ceremony. We hear another voice-over, but this time it is “Marof Achkar,” that is to say, the actor playing the role of David Achkar’s father, who speaks in the first person and in the present tense.<sup>37</sup> He tells us of the hero’s welcome he received upon his return from abroad, just before his arrest and imprisonment at Camp Boiro during one of Sékou Touré’s purges of his own government. Achkar then cuts from the 8 mm footage to a series of photographs of Marof Achkar in his official capacity at the U.N. and newspaper headlines from articles about him: “Achkar Calling Tune,” “That New African Bombshell,” “Africa’s Clark Gable Warns Denmark.”

I have as yet described only the first three minutes of *Allah Tantou*, but the fragmented and polyphonic nature of this unconventional documentary is already evident. David Achkar, Marof Achkar’s son, speaks in

a first-person autobiographical voice-over in the film, sometimes addressing the spectator and at other times addressing his father. "Marof Achkar" also uses the first person, both in voice-overs and in diegetic dialogue within the scenes which reenact his time in prison. Third-person narration within David Achkar's voice-over and the incorporated newsreel footage is occasionally joined to the two first-person voices. These layered voices together narrate the story of Marof Achkar's political career: the son provides both personal and historical information; the "father" tells his personal and political experiences and realizations while in prison, from the inside; the newspapers and newsreels document his political life prior to his imprisonment, from the outside. Achkar combines elements of the fictional narrative, the experimental/avant-garde, and the documentary genres, in a film that forces us to question our preconceptions about genre. He tells an autobiographical and biographical story of two individuals, challenging the impossibility of African autobiography, and tells it in filmic form, challenging the impossibility of autobiographical film.

"Marof Achkar"'s voice-over continues as Achkar cuts to another scene, during which Montanary is sitting on a stool in an large, empty cell. As the camera circles over "Achkar"'s head, we learn that it has been "197 days since my arrest on October 17, 1968," and that he still does not know the charges brought against him by a special court, composed of President Sékou Touré's friends and family. As the voice-over progresses, the reenactment images are replaced by 8 mm documentary footage of crowds cheering at the side of a road, welcoming Marof Achkar home. "Achkar"'s voice-over is then replaced by that of the filmmaker, who accompanies more home movie footage with "it is here in Coyah," a village fifty-four kilometers from Conakry, "that you were born." Achkar then jumps to the beginning of his father's political career:

1958. Guinea, your country, led by Sékou Touré, your president, says "no" to the constitution proposed by General de Gaulle, becoming the first independent francophone African country. Sékou Touré becomes a myth, Africa's providential man. A singer and dancer with the Ballets Africains, you, like so many others, put yourself at the service of your country and begin a brilliant career at the U.N.

Speaking to us of his father, he at the same time speaks *to* his father, apostrophizes him, bringing him to life in and by means of his film.

Achkar further traces his father's political trajectory via newsreel footage of him speaking about human rights in South Africa in his role as ambassador to the United Nations. The narrator of the newsreel identifies "Achkar Marof, of Guinea, chairman of the United Nations Special Committee on the policies of apartheid in South Africa," and

provides information both about apartheid in South Africa and the ways in which the U.N. was working against it, mentioning a special meeting of this U.N. committee in Stockholm. The members of the committee, including Marof Achkar, are listed for us as we see footage of him shaking hands with other dignitaries in Sweden. Achkar then cuts abruptly to a reenactment scene showing “Marof Achkar” asleep on the floor of his prison cell. This strategy of juxtaposition emphasizes the cruel shock of Marof Achkar’s fall from international renown to miserable isolation and imprisonment. Achkar stresses the irony of his father’s transition from investigator of human rights violations in apartheid South Africa to political prisoner of the black African government of his own country.

David Achkar reflexively manipulates, then, the multiple visual media, still and moving pictures, documentary evidence and fictional reenactments, that make up *Allah Tantou*. He links the different image-fragments that make up his narrative through both conjunctive and disjunctive uses of sound. The dialogue and voice-overs often overlap or bleed over from one type of image to another, continuing over a cut, for example, from a reenactment to 8 mm home movie footage. This mixing of diegetic levels serves various purposes. The conjunction of a reenactment voice-over with images from home movies often produces an effect of focalization as a result of which the footage seems to constitute the memories of “Marof Achkar.” This could function to add depth to his character, to make him seem more lifelike, yet Achkar consistently juxtaposes the documentary photographs and footage of Marof Achkar with the “Marof Achkar” of the reenactments. Since the two quite simply look like two different people, it is impossible for the viewer to “believe in” the character.<sup>38</sup> No attempt has been made to trick the spectator into confusing father and actor and believing that this is an “unmediated recording of reality”; Achkar explained that “I shot [the film] with my cousin. He doesn’t really look like my father—he’s my mother’s nephew. He didn’t even see the home movies.”<sup>39</sup> At the same time, however, the transitions back from reenactment to footage clearly marked as documentary remind us that Marof Achkar and his son David had off-camera lives. The film rejects generic categorization either as only documentary or only fiction.

The mainstream documentary tradition has been one of coherent third-person narration (the infamous “voice of God”) rather than of Achkar’s fragmented first person. When Achkar went to Amnesty International and requested funding to finish his film, “they said I shouldn’t have made a film about my father. I thought that was nonsense” (MH 112). An Amnesty human rights film should speak in the third person and not the first, about a group or collective and not an

individual, and especially not about a member of one's family. Bill Nichols has pointed out that, according to convention, "subjectivity, rather than enhancing the impact of a documentary, may actually jeopardize its credibility."<sup>40</sup> Hayden White argues that the insertion of the first-person voice into historical narrative constitutes the difference between narration and narrativization, between "a discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it and a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story."<sup>41</sup> Both Nichols and White draw on the work of Roland Barthes, who wrote that the "objective" historian eliminates all traces of an "I" from his discourse, so that "the (hi)story seems to recount itself."<sup>42</sup> Achkar does not want history to seem to tell itself, but instead makes us aware of the fact that it is being told, using not just one but two first-person voices in his biographical and historical narrative.

Achkar complicates conventional documentary narration not just by his use of the first person, but also by drawing attention to the fact that any history is a narrative (re)construction of the past. We know that "Marof Achkar"'s words are either drawn directly from his letters and prison writings or scripted by his son based on what his mother and his father's friends have told him, but Achkar keeps us off balance, nowhere specifying whether, or when, he is citing a source as opposed to extrapolating or imagining. Achkar has imagined and then reenacted his father's time in prison since no documentary images of this period of his life exist. These reenactments do not belong to any recognizable filmic genre, are neither realistically documentary nor realistically fictional, and disconcert the spectator. The camerawork is heavily stylized and does not attempt to convey documentary authenticity; Achkar said that "for the mise-en-scene of this drama, I decided to stay away from any realism."<sup>43</sup> In several of the reenactments, we simultaneously hear "Marof Achkar" participate in dialogue and speak in a voice-over and are jolted into remembering that the scene, as we are watching and hearing it, could not possibly have taken place. The scenes which recreate "Marof Achkar"'s torture in prison are the starkest of the film; we see him hanging on a bar suspended from the ceiling, hands and feet tied, alone against a black background which cloaks even the walls of the cell. The most crucial reenactment scene, however, is that of the confession that this torture was designed to extract. In December of 1969, after seven months in prison, "Marof Achkar" finally learns that the charges against him are of financial mismanagement and his captors type a confession for him to read as they record his statement. They tell him to read with conviction—"You were an actor. You know the routine." The spectator knows not only that Marof Achkar was an actor and dancer by training, but that "Marof Achkar" is here being played by an actor, as are

his captors. These words have been scripted by the filmmaker for ironic effect, and our awareness of this reflexivity blocks the creation of any “reality effect” in a scene that could have easily been written and filmed to grip the spectator through identification and suspense.

“Marof Achkar” then continues, “My name is Marof Achkar. Born in 1930 in Coyah, son of Moustapha Achkar and Damaë Camara. Married, four legitimate children, artist, ex-Ambassador.” This first-person autobiographical narrative is followed by the false confession which has been scripted for him, in which he claims to have been part of a French colonial network and a traitor to his country. In another reflexive voice-over, “Marof Achkar” states that “It’s a script, a bad script” and Achkar cuts from the reenactment to a series of photographs of Marof Achkar in Paris and on a world tour with the Ballets Africains in the 1950s. These documentary images combine with the preceding scene and the voice-over to inform the spectator that this, in fact, is what Marof Achkar had been doing in Europe, to remind us once again of the ridiculous nature of the concocted confession. Achkar then cuts back to the prison reenactment scene, to “Marof Achkar”’s confession that in 1964, when he became Ambassador, he went on the CIA payroll and recruited other Guineans to betray their country. He reads that he received \$10,000 for his treasonous acts, at which point his captors stop him and ask him to change this sum to \$500,000, since “It’s a much more serious sum . . . The People must think that you earned a lot.” An elderly Imam who has been watching the proceedings tells “Marof Achkar” to be sure to include his participation in Nazi networks as well. The script, written by those who imprisoned Achkar and rewritten by his son for this reenactment, has gone from ridiculous to patently ludicrous. Not only is Marof Achkar’s innocence affirmed without a doubt in the mind of the spectator, but Touré’s strategy of deceiving “the People” for their own good is unmasked in all of its hypocrisy. David Achkar sets *Allah Tantou* as a document against the confession represented within it, rewriting its false rewriting of his father’s political work and commitment.

Nichols observes that another “risk of credibility” is involved in the use of reenactments in documentary film; the supposedly indexical bond between image and reality is “ruptured,” since the spectator knows that “what occurred occurred *for* the camera” and is thus an “imaginary event” (RR 21). He draws on White’s work to remind us, however, that this is a false problem, since all history depends on reenactment; “History . . . is always a matter of story telling: our reconstruction of events must impose meaning and order on them.”<sup>44</sup> Written nonfiction also often “reenacts,” attaching invented dialogue to historical accounts, in order to acquire more, and not less, credibility for its narrative. The difference is that writing, unlike film, is not “burdened with the problem

of an actual actor who would approximate without being the historical personage" (RR 22). Once again, writing can trick us more easily than film, and it is film that may teach us that we have been tricked. David Achkar not only bears but brandishes the burden of the need for a "stand-in" for his father in his autobiographical documentary. As a result of the obvious inauthenticity of these reenactments, the spectator is never allowed to forget that "Marof Achkar" is not and cannot be Marof Achkar, since Marof Achkar was shot and killed, was permanently taken away from his son after suffering for many years in prison.

Analyzing suture, the knitting of the spectator into the film he or she is watching through a process of identification and desire, Silverman has noted that classic film narrative works not only to "activate the viewer's desire and transform one shot into a signifier for the next, but . . . to deflect attention away from the level of enunciation to that of the fiction" (SS 214). Like fiction film, the documentary genre has its own narrative conventions which shift attention away from the level of enunciation in order to convince us that it is simply presenting the world "as it is." Nichols has described the reflexive mode of documentary film, however, as that in which "the representation of the historical world becomes, itself, the topic of cinematic meditation," the filmmaker engages in "metacommentary" and speaks about "the process of representation itself" (RR 56).<sup>45</sup> Whereas conventional documentary realism "provides unproblematic access to the world," in reflexive documentary "realist access to the world, the ability to provide persuasive evidence, the possible of indisputable argument, the unbreakable bond between an indexical image and that which it represents—all these notions prove suspect" (RR 57, 60). In *Allah Tantou*, Achkar uses juxtaposition to teach the spectator how to read, never telling us what to think but forcing us to interpret the fragments with which we are presented. He refuses to give us what we expect from documentary, never letting the images of history seem to tell their own story. The film's reflexivity breaks the illusion that classical Hollywood cinema maintains by means of invisible editing; Achkar refuses to let the spectator be drawn into identification with either character or camera.

*Allah Tantou* makes evident the extent to which Marof Achkar's life, both as a dancer and a politician, was publicly recorded. Yet even with all of this visual evidence, a public hero can be "rewritten" and disgraced or forgotten. How can a son use the images of his father which have survived him? How can he connect them to resurrect his father both for himself and in the public mind and eye? How can Achkar accomplish the biographical documentary of a dead man—a man, moreover, whom he barely knew? Oliver Lovesey has claimed that despite the problems with Jameson's formulation of *all* "third-world" literature as national

allegory, the genre of the prison diary is “one of the defining genres of African literature and one of the best examples of ‘national allegory.’”<sup>46</sup> As written by Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and Kwame Nkrumah, among others, the African prison diary is a reflexive genre, which “brushes against the grain of official histories of the prisoner’s activities; it rewrites official “master narratives” of national history” (APD 214). In *Allah Tantou*, David Achkar films his father’s prison diary for him, in his absence, telling his father’s untold story and reestablishing his “good name” against the false confession, part of Touré’s “master narrative,” that had been his official biography. He then reflects upon the link between his father’s story and his nation’s history. Over 8 mm footage of Marof Achkar speaking at a government congress, “Marof Achkar”’s voice-over from his prison cell continues:

My son. Insults are the weapons that remain at the disposition of the weak when it seems that nothing more is to be gained with a conciliatory attitude. I was so well integrated into his regime that I was not able to sense what was about to happen. I saw things as if a student; I could neither see nor understand what was hiding behind each of their attitudes, each of their words. I will never be so naive again.

Addressing his son, the “father” recounts, from beyond the grave, the realization of having participated in a government to whose crimes he had been blind. In 8 mm footage from another congress, a banner proclaims that “The Revolution is Exigency,” quoting the title of a poem published by Touré in 1978, which begins “Let us resolutely destroy/ Any betrayer of the nation.” The filmmaker then reciprocates his father’s address in another voice-over:

Victim of a purge. Every three or four years, politically weak governments that have experienced failures must accuse and condemn some of their members in order to justify themselves. You were among the first. Your voice and your personality, which had become too strong abroad, frightened them. Once the Revolutionary Committee got what it wanted, a signed, recorded, and filed deposition, it could be used at any moment. This was how the regime functioned. No-one was safe from it.

We hear overlapping and fragmentary meditations on the past, present, and future of Africa: “Illusion, deception, realism, efficiency, these are the stages the young African diplomat goes through”; “It is too early to judge the evolution of democracy in Africa”; “Marxist theory, which is a leftist ideology. . . .” Over newsreel footage of Cuba, juxtaposed with footage of African women dancing and then of Nelson Mandela giving a speech, different voices claim that African countries are too weak and too underdeveloped, that Marxism encourages a cult of personality as

evidenced by Stalin, Mao, and Castro, that the colonized still need their ex-colonizers, that colonization was a crime against humanity. These chaotic theories and images present but do not resolve the dilemmas facing not just Guinea, but all postcolonial African nations—democracy versus socialism, Christianity versus Islam, tradition versus modernity.

In a very real sense, then, Marof Achkar's story *is* shown to be a national allegory; his tragedy is not only the tragedy of other Guineans, but of innumerable other Africans. We must examine, however, the way in which David Achkar concludes the story of his father's odyssey through politics in the reenactment of his time in prison. "Marof Achkar" physically and mentally deteriorates into blindness and delirium, considering suicide before reaching a state of calm resolve. As he writes in his cell, he says that:

I hope that I will learn more, since I hope to find freedom and personal fulfillment through this ordeal. . . . I have never felt as free as I do now. Of course it is difficult to be in prison, but this is only physical subjugation. My mind has never been as free as it is now. Because I know exactly who I am and what I want, where I am going and why. I know precisely my ideal. . . . I hope to be able to begin everything again very soon. I regret having participated in this government.

This personal resolution stands in stark contrast to the non-resolution of the collage of images and quotations which allegorized Marof Achkar's experience. "Marof Achkar" has come to certain realizations as an individual and not as a participant in a national collective. David Achkar then takes over the voice-over, providing most, but not all, of the last chapter of his father's story. We learn that, after a pact was signed between Touré and Amilcar Cabral, "On November 22, 1970, a commando unit of the Portuguese army, then involved in a colonial war with Guinea Bissau, the neighboring country, landed in Conakry" to liberate their citizens from Camp Boiro. Marof Achkar was free for a few hours but was then easily recaptured because of his blindness. In the following years, Touré accused half of his population and nine tenths of his government of treason; there were hangings in Conakry, "but no news of you." We see photographs of other Camp Boiro prisoners, one by one, in silence. In 1971, David Achkar and his mother were sent into exile and in 1984, after Touré's death, the camp was opened following a military coup. Not until 1985 did Achkar and his mother receive a death certificate, of which we see a close-up, which stated that Marof Achkar had been shot on January 26, 1971. The last words of the film, however, are in "Marof Achkar"'s voice, over 8 mm footage of cars traveling along a dirt road; "It was on a morning such as this, on a road like this one,

that I was shot, in January 1971." Achkar cuts to white and then fades in to the image of a handwritten letter signed by Marof Achkar, its last words "Dedicated to my son F. M. David Achkar on his tenth birthday." Through the medium of film, in another joltingly reflexive moment, David Achkar has allowed his father to pronounce an impossible autobiographical statement—"I was shot." The film ends in a first-person voice passed from son to father; the dedication from son to father which began the film has reciprocated the one in this last letter.

Olney praised those African autobiographies, such as Kwame Nkrumah's, in which the individual presents himself as "representative" of African experience (*TA* 37), and Jameson, responding to the criticism of Aijaz Ahmad, once again defined national allegory as "the coincidence of the personal story and the 'tale of the tribe.'"<sup>47</sup> Yet neither David nor Marof Achkar's history "coincides" with that of Guinea; an essential aspect of the tragic death of Achkar's father is that his murderer was the leader of Guinea and a hero of African independence. Marof Achkar's political trajectory was one of an individual destroyed in the name of a collective, of a People's revolution, and his son has used a formally reflexive text, which combines first-person autobiography and biography in the second and third person, to resist his father's erasure from Touré's version of Guinean history. Lisa McNee, in a discussion of Wolof autobiography and more specifically women's oral performances of autobiographical poetry [*taasu*] in Senegal, has rightly pointed out that Jameson's notion of all "third-world" literature as national allegory does not recognize the possible need or desire on the part of a "third-world" writer to "resist forced collectivization"; "assigning a wholly collective subject position to African autobiographers . . . obviates all discussion of political relations between individuals and collective political institutions."<sup>48</sup>

Touré himself, moreover, linked what he considered to be an un-African individualism to an un-socialist realist art: "Africa is essentially 'communocratic.' Collective life and social solidarity provide its customs with a humanist basis that many peoples could envy . . . Yet who has not observed the progression of personal egoism in the social circles contaminated by the spirit of the colonizers? Who has not heard the defense of the theory of art for art's sake . . . the theory of every man for himself?"<sup>49</sup> He believed that the cinema should never be anything but "an instrument, a means, a tool put to the use of the Revolution"; it should not create, but rather be an "adaptation of what has existed."<sup>50</sup> It is therefore not surprising that David Achkar would choose to address the relationship between his father as an individual and Touré's repressive collectivism in a film that, although not a purely formalist work of "art for art's sake," does reject formulaic realism. Yet a tension with

regard to the political value of formal experimentation has pervaded theories of African Third Cinema. This is evident within the work of Teshome Gabriel, who has praised, like Touré, radical content in conventionally realist narrative, claiming that “Third Cinema filmmakers rarely move their camera and sets unless the story calls for it” (TC 60). Gabriel has also stated, however, that anticolonial films “try to expand the boundaries of cinematic language and devise new stylistic approaches appropriate to their revolutionary goals,” that revolutionary filmmakers seek “the demystification of representational practices as part of the process of liberation.”<sup>51</sup> *Allah Tantou* has been open to criticism for *how* it tells its story, both for an excessive concern with form and, as we saw earlier, for a focus on the individual. Yet it is Achkar’s innovative style and use of a first-person autobiographical and biographical voice, his many subversions of our generic expectations, that enable the fashioning of a historical narrative asserting an African perspective not only on colonization and decolonization, but on the complications and crimes of African post-independence politics as well.

I would like to suggest, returning to the problem of African autobiography with all we have learned from *Allah Tantou*, that in the context of postcolonial African film it is crucial to allow for portrayals of persons as well as of the People. Albert Memmi has described the ways in which the colonizer unilaterally defines the colonized, does not allow him or her to exist as an individual but only as depersonalized by “the mark of the plural”; “The colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity (‘They are this.’ ‘They are all the same.’).”<sup>52</sup> Frantz Fanon’s 1952 *Black Skin White Masks* both addresses and exemplifies the power of a first-person narrative in the self-construction of the colonial subject face to face with, or in reaction to, the colonial other. Fanon recounts the burden of the black subject forced to define himself in relation to the white colonizer; “I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality.”<sup>53</sup> Through autobiographical narration the colonized rejects being “overdetermined from without” (116), speaks as an individual, refusing to be only spoken *about* (“The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly” [113]). Fanon reminds us that “Negro experience is not a whole, for there is not merely *one* Negro, there are *Negroes*” (136). The no-longer-colonized may finally claim his or her singularity, no longer drowned in, but still participating in, a collective.

In a 1984 lecture, now an essay entitled “The Writer and His Community,” Chinua Achebe steps back for a moment from his discussion of the collective authorship of Igbo *mbari* art: “We may have been

talking about individualism as if it was invented in the West or even by one American, Emerson. In fact individualism must be, has to be, as old as human society itself. From whatever time humans began to move around in groups the dialogue between Mannoni's polarities of 'social being' and 'inner personality' or, more simply, between the individual and the community must also have been called into being. It is inconceivable that it shouldn't. The question then is not whether this dialectic has always existed but rather how particular peoples resolved it at particular times."<sup>54</sup> Burkinabé filmmaker Gaston Kaboré has similarly asserted, against those who speak of traditional cultures "as monolithic, as if there were no personal ideals," that "I show [in *Wend kuuni*] that the personal exists, though perhaps not expressed in the same way as in other societies."<sup>55</sup> Achebe and Kaboré urge us to question the established opposition between Western individual and African collective within both Western and African theories of African literature and film. We may now ask how the individual is represented both in alliance and in conflict with his or her community. How does this representation contribute to our understanding of individual, national, and African history? Achkar's first-person voice-over in *Allah Tantou* may be compared to the role of a traditional *griot* narrating collective history, and in fact many theories of African film have relied on the analogy of roles between filmmaker and *griot*. Yet if we stop our analysis here, we overlook the subtlety of the film, the ways in which Achkar blurs the boundaries between stories of individuals and collective historical narrative using both documentary images and reenactments, narrates and edits *Allah Tantou* to present overlapping and multiple voices.

In "Marof Achkar"'s voice-over following his discovery of inner peace while in prison, he says that he loves his wife and children and that "We want to be continued after our children. Who wants to be forgotten, afterwards?" What can save one from being forgotten? Raw documentary evidence is not enough, not if it is denied by a dictator or lies hidden in archives, and in any case, no one life can ever be completely recorded. David Achkar has made meaning from a combination of evidence and artifice, from the public documentary images of his father and from reenactments based on the letters, books, and memoirs his father wrote in prison. By doing so, he has not only "continued" Marof Achkar, saved him from "*L'oubli*," but has also been one of the first to denounce Touré's reign of terror in Guinea. And, at the same time, Achkar has told a story that is his own, saying of *Allah Tantou* that "I felt I would only exist once I had finished the film" (MH 112). Intertwining private story and history, the personal and the historical, he has placed his family at the center of national and international, colonial and postcolonial, history. Raoul Peck has claimed that the autobiographical

elements of his 1992 documentary, *Lumumba: Death of the Prophet*, were designed to draw the viewer into the story.<sup>56</sup> Though this may be part of the case, it is also true that Peck, like Achkar, is drawn into History by his film, as both have drawn History into their stories.

Achkar has made a film that in some ways resembles the introspective avant-garde diary films discussed by Sitney, yet unlike Jerome Hill and Stan Brakhage he looks outward in his reflexive exploration of personal identity and history. I have stressed the autobiographical aspect of the film, but it is clear that *Allah Tantou* is as much biography as autobiography. I would like to argue, however, that the biographical neither dilutes nor destroys the autobiographical. Although Richard Butler claimed that “if [a] book is not self-centred it falls into the class of what I will describe as *allobiography* and not real autobiography,”<sup>57</sup> Achkar shows us that stories of self and other(s) are necessarily interwoven. He structures his film around his relationships to an individual hero, his father, whose story is inextricably linked to the stories of the communities and nations within which both have lived and acted, achieving an imbrication of the personal within the historical without any dissolution or deprecation of the individual. The individual is in fact glorified and memorialized in connection with his role in a collective struggle. *Allah Tantou* places an emphasis on the individual which cannot and should not be allegorized away; not only is the personal political, but the political personal. Individual here in no way implies the stereotypical Enlightenment model of the unitary, coherent subject; the complex narrative construction of the film precludes any risk of such an understanding.

Both African autobiography and autobiographical film are not only possible, but have much to teach African and non-African scholars of fictional and documentary literature and film. Declarations of the impossibility of African autobiography deny African writers and filmmakers the individuality previously denied them by colonial powers. Declarations of the impossibility of autobiographical film ignore the global proliferation of autobiographical films and videos. In order to escape the critical impasse that results from a restrictive model of autobiography, we must instead choose to conceptualize a genre that has flexible and porous borders, one that includes rather than excludes works such as Achkar’s. These new members of the family of autobiographical texts offer innovative possibilities for the interrelation of autobiography, biography, and history, expanding the boundaries of what has been considered first-person narration. *Allah Tantou*, impossible to theorize according to our existing generic frameworks for understanding autobiographical as well as African narratives, shows us our shortcomings and dares us to account for it.

## NOTES

- 1 *Allah Tantou*, dir. David Achkar, perf. Michel Montanary, Archibald Films, 1991. All translations mine. Achkar died suddenly in 1998 at the age of 38, having completed a second film, *Kiti: Justice in Guinea* (1996), but leaving a third unfinished.
- 2 Other examples include Jean-Marie Teno's *Africa, I Will Fleece You and Vacation in the Country* (1992 and 2000, Cameroon), Raoul Peck's *Lumumba: Death of the Prophet* (1992, Haiti/Congo), Mweze Ngangura's *The King, the Cow, and the Banana Tree* (1994, Congo), Samba Félix Ndiaye's *Letter to Senghor* (1997, Senegal), and Abderrahmane Sissako's *Rostov-Luanda* (1997, Mauritania).
- 3 Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), p. 41.
- 4 Ralph Cohen, "History and Genre," *New Literary History*, 17.2 (Winter 1986), p. 210.
- 5 See, for example: René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York, 1956), p. 78; Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), p. 307; Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," *Modern Language Notes*, 94 (1979), 920–1; Robert Elbaz, *The Changing Nature of the Self* (Iowa City, 1987), pp. 1, 6.
- 6 Louis Renza, "The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography," *New Literary History*, 9 (1977), 4.
- 7 Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris, 1975), p. 25. My translation.
- 8 Philippe Lejeune, "Le pacte autobiographique (bis)," *Poétique*, 56 (1983), 427. My translation.
- 9 Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," tr. Avital Ronnell, *Glyph*, 7 (1980), 212. I have slightly modified Ronnell's translation.
- 10 Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn* (Columbus, Ohio, 1987), p. 170.
- 11 Thomas Beebe, *The Ideology of Genre* (University Park, Penn., 1994), p. 9.
- 12 Avrom Fleishman, *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 472.
- 13 Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, 1980), p. 29.
- 14 Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography* (Princeton, 1985), p. 200.
- 15 James Olney, *Tell Me Africa* (Princeton, 1973), p. viii; hereafter cited in text as *TA*.
- 16 See, for example, James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: An Introduction," *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, p. 25.
- 17 Charles Larson, "Heroic Ethnocentrism," *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New York, 1995), p. 65.
- 18 Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 69.
- 19 Clyde Taylor, "Black Cinema in the Post-aesthetic Era," *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemin (London, 1989), pp. 90, 106.
- 20 Tahar Cheriaa, "Le groupe et le héros," *Camera nigra: Le discours du film africain*, ed. Victor Bachy (Paris, 1984), p. 109. My translation.
- 21 Elizabeth Malkmus and Roy Armes, *Arab and African Film Making* (London, 1991), p. 210.
- 22 Teshome Gabriel, "Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory: Towards a Third Aesthetics," *Questions of Third Cinema*, p. 58; hereafter cited in text as *TC*.
- 23 Jean-Pierre Chartier, "Les 'films à la première personne' et l'illusion de réalité au cinéma," *La revue du cinéma*, 1.4 (1947), 32.
- 24 Fereydoun Hoveyda, "The First Person Plural," *Cahiers du cinéma, the 1950s: Neo-realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge, 1985), p. 55.
- 25 Annette Insdorf, *François Truffaut* (New York, 1994), p. 173.
- 26 Elizabeth Bruss, "Eye for I: Unmaking Autobiography in Film," *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, pp. 296–7; hereafter cited in text as *EI*.

- 27 Michel Mesnil, "Cinémasque," *Corps écrit*, 3 (1983), p. 189.
- 28 Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York, 1983), p. 198; hereafter cited in text as SS.
- 29 Lejeune, "Cinéma et autobiographie: problèmes de vocabulaire," *Revue belge du cinéma* (1986), 7–8. My translation; hereafter cited in text as CA.
- 30 See Bruss's extended analysis of autobiographical narration in *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore, 1976) and Lejeune, *Pacte autobiographique*.
- 31 P. Adams Sitney, "Autobiography in Avant-Garde Film," *Millennium Film Journal*, 1.1 (1977–8), 61. Jay Ruby has similarly found "personal art films" to be the filmic equivalent of literary autobiography. ["The Image Mirrored: Reflexivity and the Documentary Film," *New Challenges for Documentary*, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Berkeley, 1988), p. 72.]
- 32 Michael Renov, "The Subject in History: The New Autobiography in Film and Video," *Afterimage*, 17.1 (1989), 5.
- 33 Jim Lane, "Notes on Theory and the Autobiographical Documentary Film in America," *Wide Angle*, 15.3 (1993), 32.
- 34 Alan Williams, "Is a Radical Genre Criticism Possible?" *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 9 (1984), 122; hereafter cited in text as RGC.
- 35 *Film Genre Reader II*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin, 1995); *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Brown (Berkeley, 1998); Steve Neale, *Genre* (London, 1980); Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London, 1999).
- 36 Judith Hess Wright, "Genre Films and the Status Quo," *Film Genre Reader II*, p. 41.
- 37 I will use quotation marks when referring to David Achkar's father as imagined or reenacted in his son's film in order to distinguish between "Marof Achkar" as acted by Montanary and the real Marof Achkar as represented in photographs, newsreels, and home movies. Without a first name, Achkar will always refer to the filmmaker, David Achkar.
- 38 It is interesting that several critics, including Frank Ukadike and Stephen Holden, have incorrectly asserted that David Achkar himself is playing the role of his father, either not noticing or resisting Achkar's reflexive strategy in an overly autobiographizing reading of the film. See N. Frank Ukadike, "The Other Voices of Documentary: *Allah Tantou* and *Afrique, je te plumerai*," *Iris*, 18 (1995), 81; Ukadike, "African Cinematic Reality: The Documentary Tradition as an Emerging Trend," *Research in African Literatures*, 26.3 (1995), 88–96; Stephen Holden, "Independence in Africa and Death in High Places," *New York Times*, 30 Sept. 1992, C18.
- 39 Pat Aufderheide, "Memory and History in Sub-Saharan African Cinema: An Interview with David Achkar," *Visual Anthropology Review*, 9 (1993), 112; hereafter cited in text as MH.
- 40 Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington, 1991), pp. 29–30; hereafter cited in text as RR.
- 41 Hayden White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore, 1987), p. 2.
- 42 Roland Barthes, "Le discours de l'histoire" [1967], *Le bruissement de la langue* (Paris, 1984), p. 168. My translation.
- 43 "Allah Tantou," *Le film africain*, 2 (May 1991). My translation.
- 44 Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington, 1994), p. 32.
- 45 Ukadike has briefly examined *Allah Tantou* and Teno's *Africa, I Will Fleece You* in relation to Nichols's category of reflexive documentary. See Ukadike, "African Cinematic Reality: The Documentary Tradition as an Emerging Trend."
- 46 Oliver Lovesey, "The African Prison Diary as 'National Allegory,'" *Nationalism vs. Internationalism* (Tübingen, 1996), p. 210; hereafter cited in text as APD.
- 47 Fredric Jameson, "A Brief Response," *Social Text*, 17 (1987), 26.
- 48 Lisa McNee, "Autobiographical Subjects," *Research in African Literatures*, 28 (1997), 84. See also Carol Boyce Davies, "Private Selves and Public Spaces: Autobiography and the African Woman Writer," *Neohelicon*, 17 (1990), 187–88.

- 49 Ahmed Sékou Touré, *L'Afrique en marche*, t. X (Conakry, 1967), p. 520. My translation.
- 50 Ahmed Sékou Touré, *La révolution culturelle* (Conakry, 1969), pp. 360, 364. My translation.
- 51 Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: An Aesthetics of Liberation* (Ann Arbor, 1982), pp. 24, 95.
- 52 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, tr. Howard Greenfeld (Boston, 1967), p. 85.
- 53 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, tr. Charles Lam Markmann (New York, 1967), p. 98; hereafter cited in text.
- 54 Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments* (London, 1988), p. 38. Achebe's caveat is a response to Octave Mannoni's very Jamesonian analysis of the Merina of Malgasy: "We do not find in him that disharmony almost amounting to conflict between the social being and the inner personality which is so frequently met with among the civilized" (quoted in Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments*, p. 38).
- 55 Michael Martin, "I am a storyteller, drawing water from the well of my culture": Gaston Kaboré, Griot of African Cinema," *Research in African Literatures*, 33 (2002), 168.
- 56 Response to a question from the author after a screening of the film at the Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival, American Museum of Natural History, November 1998.
- 57 Lord Richard Butler, *The Difficult Art of Autobiography* (Oxford, 1968), p. 19.