THE FILM WEND KUUNI (BY GASTON KABORÉ) AND THE ORAL LEGACY

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Made in 1982, *Wend Kuuni* is a film by the celebrated Burkina Faso film-maker Gaston Kaboré. Burkina Faso has played a central role in the development of African film and has produced a number of trail-blazing movies. The biennial Festival Pan-Africain du Cinema de Ouagadougou (FESPACO) has been held in the capital Ouagadougou since the foundation of the organisation some twenty-four years ago (Tomaselli 1996:13). The festival is supported by the Organisation of African Unity, and Gaston Kaboré – together with West African film-makers such as Sembène Ousmane (the Senegal novelist), Souleymane Cissé and Idrissa Ouedraogo – has been instrumental in the development of the film industry in West Africa. In Gaston’s own words “The example of Burkina, one of the world’s poorest countries, proves that the creation of a national cinema has more to do with political will, effective use of existing resources and the creation of a cinematic environment than with money” (Gevisser 1992:4).

The film has been hailed for its effort on the part of the African film-maker to “return to the sources” of her/his culture, to rediscover “a ‘usable’ past”, for its “measured rhythms of traditional African storytelling to create an authentically African cinematic language” (*Wend Kuuni*, back cover). Mark Gevisser (1992:3) is also quite outspoken in this respect: “Kaboré”, he says, ...

... eschews Hollywood’s neurotic tyranny of plot and recreates, instead, the cadence of an authentically African voice: languorous, pastoral and rich; metaphorical to the point of abstraction; lyrical to the point of poetry. As with a traditional folk-tale, the simplest of characters carry with them whole villages of history; as with traditional masks, the most wooden of faces express, with the etchings of their wrinkles, whole histories of emotion.
A little later Gevisser (1992:3) says:

Kaboré shows how, by marrying the most sophisticated Western cinematography with quintessentially African notions of storytelling, a very post-colonial finger could be raised to Hollywood.

The objective here is to explore the film’s link with orality and all that the concept in this regard entails. While I will not question the obvious influence of oral tradition, I would like to suggest that its orality should be seen in a wider context of rurality and pastoralism. When, fairly early in the film, we watch a traditional harvest scene on the screen, the narrator says:

This was long ago, long before the white man came.
The Mossi Empire was in its days of splendour.
There was much grain. Rivers and wells were overflowing.
No one was hungry. All lived in peace and in good health.
(My transcription from the film)

Scenes of expanding landscapes, of sheep and cattle herding with the familiar and reassuring sounds of flocks of sheep approaching the drinking place, abound. Scenes of restful traditional living, with the camera often returning to the village of Tinga and Lale, or of Bila and his young wife Timpoko; scenes of traditional grain pounding, butter-making, or the weaving of textiles – these all fill us in on the kind of living during the 15th century, as the publicity material locates the historical time of the story. A striking pastoral scene is the one portraying the search for the boy’s parents – when men on horseback cross the country, stopping at villages to enquire from local inhabitants. The camerawork here is enterprising and clever. A few long and short camera shots are enough to call up a major activity, and to remind one of a vast country of seemingly peaceful rural existence.

An important sign of rurality and pastoralism is the film’s music. Only a few melodies are used right through the film, all reminiscent of the signature tune which we hear when the title appears on the screen. The melody is often produced by one, two or perhaps three instruments. They sound like a viola or perhaps a cello, or combinations of these. They are sometimes joined by woodwinds, brass and percussion. Young voices are used in the signature tune at the end of the film. There is a beautiful scene at the flock’s drinking place where a solo oboe or corhanguelais plays the melody. This the mute herdboy imitates with the reed-flute he made himself. The composer, René Guirma, has been particularly sensitive to the atmosphere Kaboré wanted for the different scenes in the film, and his/her contribution is no doubt remarkable. The melodies are as uncomplicated as folk-songs, but one cannot say that they are
in fact folk-tunes. In a way they remind one of the African inspired compositions of the young Pretoria composer Alexander Johnson.

Coming now to the text of the film, and the kind of orality I am studying, I would like to do three things: make a number of observations about the verbal component and language in the film; work through the rough notes about the scenes demarcated during several viewings; and address views by two literary scholars of West African film with reference to their applicability to Wend Kuuni.

On orality

“Orality” is a broad term referring to a historic, sociocultural linguistic condition in which all communication – from factual day-to-day communication, through to artistic verbal communication that gives vent to the human need to entertain and/or to enchant – took place orally, that is by way of speaking and listening, from mouth to ear, as Ngugi wa Thiong’o puts it (1990:972). This was undoubtedly true of the Mossi Empire of the 15th century portrayed in the film. However, we have to remember that we are dealing with a cinematic representation of that time. The film was made in 1982, a time in human history in which the computer, the film camera and the motion picture all had developed considerably, if not breathtakingly. The orality we are talking about here cannot be a primary orality. It is a secondary orality rather, one that is mechanically transmitted, deferred in time. “This is where the new media – radio, cinema and television – find their place. Thus a media-controlled orality can co-exist with the other three,” Anny Wynchank (1994:13) aptly states.

The film certainly creates an impression of the state of primary orality, although through its intelligent and artistic use of the means of modern technology. There is no doubt an economy of language, although my verbatim transcription of the English sub-script covers no fewer than eighteen handwritten pages. Most of the time the language is limited to short, and in linguistic terms, simple or single sentences. It is only during the heated argument between the elderly Bila and his young wife Timpoko that one gets a fairly long stretch of accusation and counter-accusation with many interjections from bystanders and people who are anxious to stop the quarrel. Complex sentences one seldom comes across. There are often long pauses between stretches of language. The speaking tempo is slow most of the time (but not always), to match the camera as it surveys the landscape.

This being so, the film is more of a representation of a story than real drama; more of a mix of telling and happening of the story than drama. Gaston
Kaboré makes effective use of a narrator at four significant stages of the film, giving the impression of a narrative-based approach – as we shall see shortly. The narrative may sometimes be reminiscent of a dramatized folktale, but a folktale in the true sense it is not, at least not in the way it is represented in the film.

The story is more complex than a traditional folktale. While it tells the central story of the mute boy in search of his parents, there are also side stories with their own plots, solved and unsolved. While it will be possible to recognize some of Propp’s thirty-one functions that made up his famous “morphology of the folktale”, they do not come together in the way they do in a folktale. Even if one looks at African folklorists’ adaptation of Propp’s model, such as by C.T.D. Marivate (1971) or C.T. Msimang (1980), one fails to apply them coherently and consistently. There are examples of functions such as lack of initial situation, of interdiction, violation, villainy, and consequence, but they are not coherent, or carried through as in the traditional folktale.

This I do not see as a weakness in the film. In fact, it would be a gross misunderstanding on the part of the critic to hold this against the work. It is the spirit and atmosphere of orature and orality that should be looked at for a fair understanding of Gaston Kaboré’s tale. To me the film presents what one could call a cinematic idyll – a film portraying idealized scenes from rural life. Seen together with its fine music, it is “a serene composition suggestive of pastoral repose” (Webster 1981:476).

THE SCENES

I have not had access to the film’s script, which would have been helpful. It would have been interesting too to see how and where this demarcation of scenes differs from Marie-Jeanne Kanyala’s script. I have counted two introductory scenes during the prelude, that is before the title appears on the screen and the film “officially” starts. In the first an elderly gentleman opens the door of his house and addresses a weeping woman at the other side. He tries to convince her to marry again, since her husband has been away for thirteen months and will not come back. She does not agree. When he leaves her, she is alone with her grief, asking “What shall I do”? Painfully she decides: “I’ll run away from here. I’ll take my son and run away. It is the only solution... I’ll run away.” That is scene 2 of the prelude.

When the film starts, we see a traveller getting off his donkey and approaching a bush. He finds a boy lying flat on his face. He investigates and finds that the boy is still alive. He discovers that the boy is a mute, but he can hear. He gives
him water and the boy recovers. They leave. This is scene 3 (Traveller finds mute boy).

Scene 4 (Arrival at Tinga’s village) shows how the traveller brings the boy to a nearby settlement where he leaves him in the hands of Tinga, a weaver of textiles. His wife is Lale, and their only child is a daughter called Pogneré. She takes an immediate interest in the newcomer and is surprised that he cannot speak. The scene is rather important for our understanding of the film and its language. Let us look at my transcription:

*Mother:* Pogneré, have you nearly finished?

*Pogneré:* Yes.

*Traveller:* Good day!

*Tinga:* Greetings!

*Tr:* How are you?

*T:* Well, and you?

*Tr:* Very well.

*T:* What is it?

*Tr:* I found this boy in the bush ... He was lying there, half dead. I could not leave him there.

*T:* I see.

*Tr:* I have seen your farm. You may know him ...

*T:* What’s his name?

*Tr:* He cannot talk. I think he is a mute.

*T:* He is not from this village.

*Tr:* I’ll leave him in your care. I’m just passing through.

*T:* Leave him here. I’ll find his parents. Isn’t it strange? I wonder how he got here.

*Tr:* May I have some water? I have very far to go.

*T:* Of course. Pogneré, come here! ... Go and fill the gourd.

*Tr:* I’m a salesman, a hawker. Here today ... somewhere else tomorrow.

*Pogneré* (to Wend Kuuni): What’s your name? Do you hear me? Well, answer me. My name is Pogneré. And you?

*T:* Safe journey!

*Tr:* Thank you!

*T:* (to Pogneré and Wend Kuuni) Let’s go inside.

The language is indeed kept to the minimum, and there are long pauses between the different turns of the characters. But the language is sufficient and progressive. I will call it functional.
Scene 5 (The search for the parents.) In this scene the narrator speaks for the first time. He says:

Narrator: The chief of the village has decided to send riders across the land to spread the news. The child’s parents must appear at the court.

The camera now takes us with the riders across the land. The search is in vain. The scene ends at the chief’s court where the boy is entrusted to the care of Tinga. He, at request of the chief, gives him a new name: Wend Kuuni (God’s Gift).

Scene 6 (Wend as herdboy. Rural harvesting) It is in this scene that the narrator speaks for the second time, locating the story in precolonial times, as we have indicated earlier.

Scene 7 (Market-place). The hustle and bustle of a traditional African market. Wend is given work. He must sell Tinga’s textiles. The film shows how Wend copes with his inability to speak, using his hands and fingers.

Scene 8 (Home and homely chores). The scene shows how Wend assists his foster father, and how Lale scorns her little daughter. A passing visitor is told that Wend has been with the family for two years now. This makes the scene quite important since it is used to indicate passing time.

Scene 9 (Wend and his flock). There is no spoken language in this scene, and it is used entirely to reflect Wend’s loneliness and longing for his parents. The scene shows how in his mind he sees his father, good-looking and dressed as a hunter (and hero).

Scene 10 (Home again). The scene spends time showing how the mother ill-treats her daughter, who is more interested in Wend Kuuni than bothering about her mother’s quarrelsome attitude. To Wend Pongoré says: “Wend Kuuni, last night I dreamt that ... you could speak. It seemed so real.”

Scene 11 (Wend and his flock again). The narrator tells about Wend’s orphaned existence. He says:

Narrator: Although Wend Kuuni has a new family ... he must still bear his grief alone. He thinks of all he has lived through. As a mute he has no one to confide in.

It is a beautiful pastoral scene which once again symbolizes Wend’s lonely existence as well as his world of thoughts.

Scene 12 (Home again). Pogneré’s mother sends her to go and fetch water at
the river. We see landscapes of pastoral settings. The scene prepares us for the following one in which Pognéré is sent again. This time things go wrong.

**Scene 13 (Pognéré is sent to take butter to her aunt).** Instead of walking straight to the aunt, Pognéré passes the kraal where she picks up Wend Kuuni’s reed-flute. She aims in the direction of the veld.

The scene is interrupted with scene 14. It takes place at Bila’s village where a quarrel between Bila and his wife is eventually but temporary solved through the intervention of Tinga and some friends. The questionable attitude towards women and their position in the male-dominated society come out clearly.

When the people disperse, the camera returns to the uncompleted scene 13, showing Wend in pensive mood clearly suffering from loneliness. It is in this position that Pognéré surprises him. The affection between the two young people is clear. She presents him with the flute and asks him to play. Again using his hands, he shows her that she must leave. She says:

\[ P: \text{Play me something before I go ... Don't you want to? Will you play me at the river then? Promise? Promise?} \]

And the narrator says:

**Narrator:** That day Wend Kuuni awoke with a strange foreboding. All day long the feeling never left him. What was going to happen?

The next scene is a return to yet another part of scene 13: the arrival of Pognéré with the butter, although not at the aunt’s place (she wasn’t there) but at her mother’s. The mother’s scorn of her child continues.

**Scene 15 (Tinga visits Bila)** shows Bila brooding over the quarrel with his wife. Although everything looks fine on the surface, body language gives enough reason to believe that things are not well at all. Something may happen.

**Scene 16** is a night scene with three shifts of location. It first shows Wend Kuuni discovering the corpse of Bila hanging from a tree. There is a shout of shock. The camera then shifts to the home of his foster parents. The dialogue reveals their surprise that he has not come home yet. Pognéré tells them that he has gone to the fields to search for his lost knife. Then, Wend appears, shouting: “Old man Bila ... in the fields. He’s hung himself!” Tinga says: “Take it easy. Tell me what happened.” Wend replies: “I wanted to get my knife and found Bila there, hanging.” It is Pognéré who first makes the surprising observation: “Wend Kuuni can talk!” Lale says: “Keep quiet!” and Tinga replies: “Lale, you see what I mean: Wend Kuuni speaks.” She replies: “Yes,
since when have you been able to talk”? He says: “I don’t know.” Pogneré urges him: “Tell them what happened”, while the father says: “Wend Kuuni take us there.” From a distance and with fine imagination the camera now follows the group as they make their way through the night.

This important scene shows the unravelling of a well-known psycho-medical condition, Wend Kuuni’s muteness which was temporary. It is a known phenomenon that muteness can result from a traumatic experience (which the audience does know at this stage), and that it can be brought to an end by the occurrence of another often similar or related incident (Bila’s suicide, which Gaston Kaboré allows his audience to share with the young Wend).

In Scene 17 the loving Pogneré visits Wend in the fields where he is herding his flock of sheep. She seizes their cordial relationship to ask him to tell her about his mysterious life. When Wend starts to reply, one feels that a crucial stage of the story has been reached. Wend relates to Pogneré the part of the story whose the end we saw at the beginning! This is a true flashback with a lot of information, and we see how Gaston Kaboré makes full use of the advantages of the film medium. Wend says:

I remember when my mother and I were very poor, I fell ill very often. My mother cried a lot, she talked a lot about father. But I never knew him. One day ...

From here scene 18 takes over as an analepsis, showing the boy and his mother in their little house. The mother weeps about the missing father whom she still hopes will return to relieve them of their hardship. While she sings her son a little song, noises are heard at the outside of the house. There are shouts that she should come out. When the mother appears outside, she faces an angry crowd who accuses her of being a witch and of killing and bewitching their children. Mother and son watch as their house is put on fire. They start to run away. In a state of delirium the mother imagines (and the audience sees) her hunter-husband leaving the house, an epitome of a hero, the lost prince. The camera follows mother and child as they take to the wilderness, later to find some place to rest. The son observes his mother’s exhaustion and devastation, mumbling her grief of what will happen to him. She dies. And the flashback ends with the son calling: “Mother, mother, mother, mother!” The shouts, one accepts, were the last words before he became mute.

The camera returns to scene 17 and Wend completes his narration:

Wend: I ran many hours.
Then I stumbled and fell.
When I awoke ...

Pogneré: ... the traveller was there.

The film ends with Wend telling Pogneré:

The sun is setting. Hurry home.

The camera stops on a pleasing rural scene and the credits roll while functional music adds to the viewer's feeling of satisfaction.

VIEWS BY WYNCHANK AND MAKWARD

Coming now to the third promise, one would like to repeat the view that this film was created in the spirit of oral tradition, and that it succeeds in recreating the atmosphere of those times. However, in the process of the griot shedding his old skin (image from Abiola Irele 1971:17) to become a cineaste, much has been added and some may have been lost. Anny Wynchank postulates four characteristics of how the oral tradition marks the structure as well as the content of many West African films:

- The narrative is structured in a linear pattern, often interspersed with digressions and marked with repetitions. The rhythm of the montage and the pace of the film are usually slow. This is particularly noticeable in such films as Yeleen, by Souleymane Cissé, from Mali, Tilai by Idrissa Ouedraogo from Burkina Faso, and Wend Kuuni by Gaston Kaboré, the famous film-maker, one of the founders of the biennial Pan-African Film Festivals in Ouagadougou in 1969. This slow rhythm, which might enrage the hurried Western spectator, reflects the African mode of living.
- The characters in the film are often types who can be found in the oral tale, including the trickster, the thwarted lover, the dictatorial father, the domineering woman, etc., and their itinerary can be that of an initiatory journey.
- The topic of the film, as in the oral tale, is often based on the irrational.
- Finally, the film usually illustrates a moral teaching.

While the basic outline may be in order for the body of films from West Africa, one needs to be careful not to generalize. The question is whether these features (linearity, oral-tale character types, irrationality, and moralization) will not depend on, first, the story chosen, then the intention of the cineaste and, accordingly, the way the script was put together. Gaston Kaboré chose an old tale and preferred to relate and to recreate pristine Mossi culture that way. The linearity of the film is broken up at pivotal stages – at the beginning, in the
middle (cf what has been marked here as scene 13), and towards the end (scene 17, its flashback (scene 18) and the return to 17). The linear scenes are often incomplete and contain elements which validate further development and solutions in following scenes (cf Pogneré's transgressing of home rules to see the boy, and Bila's quarrel that led to his unhappy ending which is reflected in parts of scenes 14, 15 and 16). The mysterious father figure is shown twice as reflections of the thoughts of son and mother (in scenes 9 and 18 respectively). These are signs of non-linearity which show considerable skill in manipulating story time and narrative time, as well as similar skill in utilizing the profound means of the film medium. Here the camera's interaction with landscape and the microphone's with music are additional voices the cineaste employs to speak concurrently with the scenes of the plot. A film-maker with different intentions may choose to work differently with the same tale.

An African-American scholar who follows the development of West African film at close range is Edris Makward. Basing himself on the novels and films of Sembène Ousmane, and addressing the captivating shift from griot to cineaste, Makward inter alia remarks:

It is as if the griot of modern times that Sembène Ousmane had become, in his own eyes and in the eyes of many of his admirers, had moved from the status of maître de la parole (master of the word), to paraphrase another African writer, Camara Laye, to that of maître de l'image (master of the image).

One has to also admit that there is in these films, a certain dryness in the scenarios and in the dialogues; it is indeed as if the importance of the art of speech was reduced to the minimum, as if le maître de la parole (the master of speech) in adopting a new medium the language of visual images had lost interest in verbal art as a means of expression that could be combined effectively with this new medium, and had decided to give almost total preeminence to the new maître de l'image (master of images) that he has become. This weakness, this relegation to the secondary role of verbal art, of the art of dialogue or of narrative, constitutes, in my opinion, the major flaw of much of African cinema, not just the cinema of Sembène.

Professor Makward's scholarly and eloquent distinctions between word/speech and images, and the way the African film-maker chose the latter (sometimes to the detriment of the former), are worthy of consideration. The distinction fits and honours those film-makers of Africa who are using the rich oral past to explore the present and to forge the way to the future. While admitting that Gaston Kaboré too could not escape this "power struggle" between dialogue and image, I would not like to hold this against him in full. Again the film-
maker’s intentions with the subject matter, the way s/he chose to draft the script, and the abilities of the medium itself (camera, sound and screen) should be considered. It is perhaps one of the “disadvantages” of the film medium that it tends to overpower the word, given its great visual mobility. To be effective and fully utilized according to its nature and abilities, it does require less speech, since the audience fills in and interprets what is seen on the screen. It demands swift changes of scene which puts a limitation on the quantity of speech (and perhaps even on quality). The “battle” between speech and image becomes a power struggle between eye and ear, seeing and listening, and humankind’s ability to comprehend not necessarily through participation of both, but either through the one or the other. While one would be inclined to expect that participation of these and other senses would create full(er) comprehension, the medium dictates that the one should not be a mere duplication of the other. The viewer’s interpretation of the image often renders the word/dialogue/speech unnecessary. If this is true, ideally, image and speech should be complementary, not (necessarily) duplicatory.

Supporting the film’s impression of orality is the use of the Bukina Faso indigenous language Moore (see endnote 3). This enhances its accessibility to the local population and their identification with the film medium. This brave step on the part of the producer is an act of empowerment of the African language, and already an indication of the probability of Ngugi’s prediction (1990:972) about the “return of the native tongue” in the 21st century. The use of French or English would have marred authenticity, while the subscript in English (and French?) enables international viewing as well.

Gaston Kaboré’s Wend Kuuni suggests a creative way of how Africa’s rich oral past will be preserved and recreated through the breathtaking cinematographic developments of our century and the following. From the student of orality in its different skins it will require similar breathtaking scholarly insights and skills.

ENDNOTES

1. This contribution was read as an introduction to the showing of the film on 4 September 1996, as part of the First Unisa African Film Festival, 31 August–6 September 1996. I would like to thank the organiser Dr Martin Botha (Department of Communication) for the generous invitation to participate.

2. In August 1973 I was interviewed by a selection committee of the University of South Africa for a senior lectureship in the Department of African Languages. Professor J.A. Louw was one of the senior representatives of the Department. During the interview he asked me whether I was interested in folklore. I replied positively, yet with one reservation: “Only insofar as folklore serves as inspiration and nourishment
to modern literature”, I said. To what extent the reply contributed to my appointment in the Department, I will not know. What I do know is that Professor Louw’s question started a process during which my folklore interests and research activities have developed considerably further than the reservation I had mentioned at the time: over the past twenty-three years at Unisa I have published widely in the fields of praise poetry, migrant poetry, and the oral-written interface; expansion to the fascinating field of African film was inevitable. All these I owe to the Nestor to whom I dedicate this contribution for his scholarly influence and enriching friendship.

3. Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta) lies near the centre of what is known as French West-Africa. Neighbouring states are Mali (in the North and West); Ivory Coast, Ghana and Togo (in the South); and Niger (in the North-east). There is a population of about 10 000 000 people. About 53% of the population speaks Moore, the language used in the film. In Greenberg’s classification of the languages of Africa, Moore falls in the Niger-Kordofanian language family. Speakers of Moore as first language represent the largest single unit known as Mossi. The French colonisers arrived in 1880 and formal colonisation followed in 1916 after a “brutal uprising” was crushed by the French. The country gained independence in 1960, its capital being Ouagadougou. It changed its name to Burkina Faso in 1984 and its present president, Captain Blase Compare, was elected in 1987. Among its major industries are agriculture, processed foods and textiles - an ancient industry of which we see much in the film. Mining, tyre manufacturing and film are the other large industries. It exports cotton, gold and live stock. Despite these activities it is still a very poor country with a literacy rate of about 15% (Grimes, 1992:166).

4. Professor Marquard from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, read a paper on aspects of orality in West African films at a conference held in Tunisia in March 1996. I contacted him by fax shortly after Dr Martin Botha asked me to participate in the Unisa African Film Festival, and his kind sending of a copy of his manuscript is acknowledged with thanks.

REFERENCES


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INTRODUCTION

The journal *Bantu Studies* and its successor, *African Studies*, have been associated with the publication of Khoisan topics for over 70 years. The journal has provided South African-based scholars with a forum for publishing the results of local research in this field and the contributors number some of the pioneers: D.F. Bleek, W.H.I. Bleek, C.M Doke, J.F. Maingard, G.S. Nienaber. Its pages provide precious records of a number of now extinct groups such as the Korana, the Xam, the 'Auni, the Xegwi, and, linguistically, the Khomani. Khoisan studies have maintained a steady momentum since they were initiated in the last century with W.H.I. Bleek and L.C. Lloyd’s investigations of Xam (Bleek and Lloyd, 1911), and they have recently received a renewed impetus from anthropological, historical, linguistic and archaeological research. Today there are regular international Khoisan conferences, a specialist monograph series, *Quellen zur Khoisan Forschung/Research in Khoisan Studies*, and even an interdisciplinary Khoisan electronic mail bulletin board.

Recently an intense interest in the Khoisan peoples and their languages has come from a quite different direction, namely from the recognition that the new South Africa should acknowledge its Khoisan heritage and the people who still identify with it. Suddenly, the Khomani and the Griqua are laying claim to land and cultural rights under the new dispensation and when the latter turn
to language, the importance of *Bantu Studies* and *African Studies* as an archive is obvious.

This article contributes to the momentum of interest in the Khoisan field through a survey of a selection of papers from *Bantu Studies* and *African Studies* which may be little known or inaccessible but which have made an important contribution, and in some cases even provided a foundation for the discipline. The period covered is from the inception of the journal in 1921 until 1967, a period which may be identified with the flowering of the early tradition of Khoisan studies in South Africa. The papers surveyed are listed in appendix 1; appendix 2 is a list of all the papers on Khoisan topics which were published in *Bantu Studies* and *African Studies* during the survey period.

**Bantu Studies and African Studies**

When the first number of *Bantu Studies* appeared in October 1921 it carried the sub-title “and general South African anthropology”. In his opening editorial entitled “Native studies in South Africa”, the editor, J.D. Rheinallt-Jones, felt it necessary to explain that the title of the journal had been selected mainly for brevity and that there had been no intention of excluding “contributions on Bushman or Hottentot lore”. Indeed, this was soon evident, because the next number of the journal carried A.W. Hoernlé’s note “A Hottentot rain ceremony” (the sole Khoisan contribution in volume 1). By the time volume 2 appeared in 1923, *Bantu Studies* had a new sub-title: “A journal devoted to the scientific study of Bantu, Hottentot, & Bushman” and it carried no fewer than five papers on linguistic, anthropological and ethnological topics on the Bushmen.

*Bantu Studies* retained this sub-title until 1941 when it was renamed *African Studies* and during its first 20 years all but the last four volumes carried at least one paper on a Khoisan topic. Undoubtedly, volume 10, 1936, and volume 11, 1937, crowned this effort with the publication of 14 papers reporting the results of the University of the Witwatersrand’s research trip to study the Bushmen living between the Auop and Nossop rivers in Gordonia. These papers together with some additional material were republished in 1937 as *Bushmen of the Southern Kalahari*, edited by J.D. Rheinallt-Jones and C.M. Doke.

The re-naming of the journal was simply supposed to reflect a change in editorial policy to embrace a “wider scope” of subject matter, but in fact it marked a dramatic break in the publication of Khoisan research in the journal. It was to be fully 20 years before *African Studies* again published a paper on a Khoisan topic, in the form of L.W. Lanham and D.P. Hallowes’ papers on Eastern Bushman (*African Studies*, 1956), and since then only a limited number
of papers on Khoisan topics have appeared in the journal. The reason for this uneven activity over 74 years may be attributed to the special "market forces" that have governed this field of investigation in South Africa.

In his 1921 editorial, Rheinallt-Jones had expressed the hope that the creation of Bantu Studies might encourage South African academics to initiate a local research effort in Khoisan studies, a field that had received more attention from scholars in Berlin, Hamburg and London and untrained missionaries, explorers and administrators. He quoted with approval the sentiments expressed in the South African Quarterly of September 1920 that it would have been "nothing less than a national disgrace if we looked on remissly at this work being done entirely by outsiders" and that "South African scholars can achieve pre-eminence in the world's learning in this field if they choose to do so" (Bantu Studies, 1, 1921). The modest response reflected the small number of local scholars who were able to rise to this challenge: until 1937 Dorothea Bleek accounted for about 70% of all Khoisan contributions to the new journal! During the same period only three other scholars, Doke, Kirby and Maingard published more than one paper there. In the next 25 years it is J.F. Maingard's name, almost exclusively, that dominates the authors of Khoisan contributions. The pool of scholars thus turned out to be quite small. Nevertheless, the history of Khoisan studies shows that both Dorothea Bleek and Maingard were scholars with an international reputation who made a major contribution to Khoisan studies in South Africa and one can imagine that Rheinallt-Jones must have derived some personal satisfaction from being able to publish some of their scholarship in Bantu/African Studies.

The selected papers

Dorothea Bleek's prodigious output was a reflection of her untiring commitment to continuing the tradition of research initiated by her father W.H.I Bleek and aunt L.C. Lloyd. This took the form of preparing for publication some of the Xam texts collected by her father and aunt, conducting fieldtrips to East Africa and to remote parts of southern Africa to study Khoisan languages and cultures and the compilation of her magnum opus, A Bushman dictionary (American Oriental Society 1956) which incorporated the Xam vocabulary collected by her father and aunt. However, only a few of Dorothea Bleek's most original publications in the field of Khoisan studies appeared in Bantu Studies (none of her oft-quoted statements on Khoisan genetic relationships did). These were her papers on the Bushmen of central Angola (Bantu Studies, 3) and her grammatical sketch, texts and vocabulary of |'Auni (Bantu Studies, 11), both based on her own fieldwork. They provide a precious record (from |'Auni the only one) of groups of
Bushman who were on the verge of extinction when she studied them. The 'Auni of Gordonia are now gone and today the Angolan !kū or !kuŋ or !o !kū – Bleek used all three names – in their modern guises as !Kung or Vasekela – are in the final stages of the cultural and linguistic disintegration that was in progress 70 years ago when Bleek visited them. She recorded the linguistic symptoms then: codeswitching with Nyemba and the substitution of non-clicks for clicks in the speech of the youth. These studies just rescue those groups from complete oblivion.

The bulk of Dorothea Bleek’s papers in Bantu Studies consists of a collection of Xam texts, selected by her from the Bleek and Lloyd archival collection, under the general title “Customs and beliefs of the Xam Bushmen” (Bantu Studies, 5,6,7,9,10). These texts have made important contributions to the interpretation of Bushman cosmology and religion as reflected in the Rock Art of the Bushmen (for example Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989; Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1994) and some offer a few intriguing glimpses into the personal lives of the narrators (see Deacon 1986, Hewitt 1986). These are soon to be reproduced together with other Xam texts (Lewis-Williams forthcoming). The piece “Special speech of animals and moon used by the Xam Bushmen” (Bantu Studies, 10) is of special linguistic interest. In their stories, the Xam portrayed the speech of animals such as the blue crane, ostrich, tortoise and jackal with distinctive phonetic peculiarities reflecting articulatory limitations or personality attributes. Thus, the ostrich cannot click because its “tongue is bone and is round and not long”; the jackal uses a nonaffricated version of the bilabial click as a substitute for all clicks and the tortoise substitutes labials for most consonants because “it does not talk with its tongue, it talks with its mouth’s skin”. As many of the substitutions are systematic, they provide interesting perspectives on the narrator’s linguistic analysis of normal Xam sounds, in much the same way as linguistic games in other traditions.

“Bushman terms of relationship” (Bantu Studies, 2), presents comparative kinship terminology from Xam, compiled by D. Bleek from the W.H.I. Bleek and L.C. Lloyd manuscripts together with kinship terminology from Naron, ìk’au ìen and !kuŋ based on her own material collected in the field. The paper thus gives a comparative perspective on this nomenclature from representative languages of the Southern, Northern, and Central Bushman languages and it remains an interesting source of data (see Barnard 1992)

Dorothea Bleek was by all accounts a modest and self-effacing person but she also possessed self-confidence and courage – enough to undertake pioneering field research in remote parts of Africa. “A note on Bushman orthography” (Bantu Studies, 2) shows that she had enough self-confidence to take on the
great C.M. Doke in a debate about his proposals for phonetically adequate click symbols and to reject them as linguistically inappropriate for the Khoisan languages. She maintained that her father’s and aunt’s practice in using adapted Lepsius symbols was more adequate and it is interesting that Doke conceded the point by using these symbols in a later paper “An outline of Ṣ Khomani Bushman phonetics” (Bantu Studies, 10). In a rare demonstration of her phonetic insights, she based part of her argument on the difference between “audible” and “silent” release of a click’s secondary closure, but she followed this with a disarmingly frank acknowledgement of her limitations: “To Dr. Beech (sic) I tender hearty thanks for his kind help in explaining the phonetic script of the I.P.A. [International Phonetic Association] which would otherwise have remained a closed book to me” (Bantu Studies, 2:74)! Apart from its biographical interest, this paper provides a historical dimension to the debate about click symbolization which continues to this day.

The Empire Exhibition at the Milner Park Showgrounds in Johannesburg in 1936–37 featured an exhibition of living Bushmen who had been brought from Gordonia. During the exhibition they lived in a camp at the University of the Witwatersrand’s Frankenwald Research Station north of Johannesburg, and it was here that Bleek was able to extend her earlier investigations into the language of one of the groups, the launi (sic), which she had begun 20 years before while on a trip to the Nossop and Auop Rivers (Bleek, 1956: ii, and fn. 5). Her findings were reported in two papers, “Grammatical notes and texts in the launi language” (Bantu Studies, 11:253–258) and “I’auni vocabulary” (Bantu Studies, 11:259–278). Bleek recognised that I’auni was a distinct language in the Southern group (she labelled it S IV in Bleek, 1956) (for some unsubstantiated reason, she thought it bore similarities to the Central group of languages (p. 195). Her very brief description and vocabulary are the only records we have of this now extinct language.

J.F. Maingard, another stalwart of Khoisan studies, made a seminal contribution to the study of the language, customs and history of the !Ora (Korana). His papers spanned a period of 36 years and provided some of the best available descriptions of the Korana: “A revised manuscript version of the Korana catechism of C.F. Wuras” (Bantu Studies, 5), “Studies in Korana history, customs and language” (Bantu Studies, 6), “Korana dialects” (African Studies, 23), and “Korana texts from Bloemhof” (African Studies, 26). In the index of Bantu Studies, 6 he also appears as the author of “Korana names of animals and plants”, also reproduced here, but the paper is in fact his edited version of material collected by none other than L.C. Lloyd and her younger sister I. Lloyd from a Korana speaker who was in Cape Town in 1879!
Beterianien, dem 12. Oktober 82,

Sehr geehrter Herr Doktor, Hahn,


1. Die Morgen heisst: //kob. (Die Morgensprache heisst //kob mit der Morgen ausgesprochen, dass scheint mir, als ist in //koab oder //kob, mehr wie o als o zu hören, wofür ich keinen Buchstaben weiss.)


5. Knie heisst: //kob. (Die Kuh sagen //kob mit derselben Note, mehr wie o als o zu hören.)


8. Geru ist nicht bekannt. (Die Hohl sagt //shak mit der Hohl ausgesprochen, dass scheint mir, als ist in //shak oder //shak, mehr wie o als o zu hören, wofür ich keinen Buchstaben weiss.)


17. Dschungel ist nicht bekannt.

18. Taub, Wunde Tag verwunden kann, der nicht in der Kora Sprache, der gewöhnlichen Frosch nennt die Kora //hoark //hoaka //shak. Eine sehr grosse Frosch nennt sie /kob.

19. Taum ist nicht bekannt.

20. Taub, Wunde Tag verwunden kann, der nicht in der Kora Sprache, der gewöhnlichen Frosch nennt die Kora //hoark //hoaka //shak. Eine sehr grosse Frosch nennt sie /kob.


{karr karra, hell(?)},

neib, leuchten

neiba, scheinen, auch leuchten. (Die Sprache ist sozusagen, dass der Kora Sprache ausgesprochen, dass scheint mir, als ist in //kob oder //kob, mehr wie o als o zu hören, wofür ich keinen Buchstaben weiss.)

19. Taum, Wunde Tag verwunden kann, der nicht in der Kora Sprache, der gewöhnlichen Frosch nennt die Kora //hoark //hoaka //shak. Eine sehr grosse Frosch nennt sie /kob.


Mit herzlichen Grüßen,

C.F. Wuras

A letter written by C.F. Wuras to T. Hahn from Bethany in 1982. The German translation (translator unknown) reveals that Wuras is commenting on some similarities and differences between Nama and Kora. (J.F. Maingard Papers, UNISA Library Archives)
Maingard’s edited version of Wuras’s Korana Catechism is an extremely important paper, first because it reproduces what he describes for the time as the “only long and connected text” in the language (Maingard 1931:111), second, because it provides a close linguistic analysis of the phonology, morphology and syntax of the Kx’am loam and Arre loam Korana dialects spoken at Bethany, Orange Free State between 1840 and 1858 and, third, because of its observations concerning the endangered state of the language at that early time – and the shift to “Dutch”.

Maingard’s Korana studies complement D.M. Beach’s well-known work on the phonetics of the language (Beach, 1938), J.A. Engelbrecht’s comprehensive study of the Korana (Engelbrecht, 1928,1936) and C. Meinhof’s linguistic description (Meinhof,1930). In fact, Engelbrecht’s account of the history of the Links (‘Are-mā- ‘ē is) and the Taaibosch (Kei !Orana) Korana, is largely based on Maingard’s paper “Studies in Korana history, customs and language” (Engelbrecht, 1936: 31, fn. 1). The Korana were eventually engulfed by history and today there is scant trace of them. Perhaps they are best known to a few historians who have documented their fierce resistance to colonial expansion in the 19th century (Strauss, 1979; Ross, 1975), but, as South

A rough hand drawn map by Maingard providing a priceless record of Korana place names for parts of their homeland, including the original names of well-known modern towns in South Africa, such as Potchefstroom, Klerksdorp, Christiana and Kimberly (J.F. Maingard Papers, UNISA Library Archives)
African history is re-visited and peoples attempt to unravel their heritage, Maingard’s Korana studies will provide a rich record to illuminate the process.

Maingard was interested primarily in linguistic matters and he published some important comparative studies on the Khoe language group which, of course, includes !Ora. In the section on language in his 1932 paper he demonstrated that among the Khoekhoe varieties (modern Nama, !Ora and Cape Khoe) there was a close affinity between one dialect of !Ora and Cape Khoe, a relationship that is not surprising given the history of the Korana (Van Riebeeck’s Tobacco Thieves or Gorachouqua were in all likelihood the !Ora-xau-kwa “the people of !Ora’s place” (Engelbrecht, 1932:3-4)). He extends this comparative perspective in two papers, ‘The central group of click languages of the Kalahari’ (African Studies, 20) and “A comparative study of Naron, Hietshware and Korana” (African Studies, 22). In the former he includes R.L. Livingstone’s vocabulary of a language collected on one of his journeys in what is now Botswana, and with fine insight identifies it as the first record of Danisi, an eastern Khoe variety, basing his conclusion on the pattern of click replacements of the palatal and alveolar clicks. The remaining data is from Dornan’s Hietsho and Maingard’s own material on Naron, !Gana and a Khoe variety he recorded in Molepolole. In the latter paper he adds some intriguing and little-known comparative material on Xam (Southern) and Hie and Naro (Central) concluding that they show an “undeniable relationship to one another”.

The University of the Witwatersrand’s formidable research team to visit Tweerivieren in Gordonia in 1936 included Maingard. One of his responsibilities was to investigate the +Khomani language spoken there and he analysed its morphology and syntax and collected and translated texts. His paper “The +Khomani dialect of Bushman: its morphology and other characteristics” is a report of the results. For some reason his paper did not appear in Bantu Studies, 10 and 11 with the other reports of this research expedition, but was later published with these papers in Bushmen of the Southern Kalahari (Rheinallt-Jones & Doke, 1937). His +Khomani paper complements the one by C.M. Doke on the phonetic structure of the language (Bantu Studies, 10). Maingard’s paper is the only record we have of the grammar of the language, which is now effectively dead. It is also of interest for its speculations that certain morphological and phonological features of the language were reflections of the “simple mind” of its speakers or their tolerance of “relative approximations” rather than invariance in pronunciation. In addition, the paper provides some glimpses into the pattern of bilingualism among the +Khomani in 1936: they were fluent in Nama and, fortunately for the investigators, many were fluent in Afrikaans; contraction of +Khomani was observable. Luckily the “best” speaker, !Gurice, was part
of the group that visited Johannesburg and he was recorded in the Phonetics Laboratory at the University reciting the story of “Oom Wolfie”. This excellent acetate recording has been preserved together with its fluent Afrikaans translation! The paper also contains an important and little known comparison of + Khomani and Xam based on 52 lexical items and other shared features. Apart from Lanham and Hallowes’ more modest comparison of Xegwi and + Khomani (African Studies, 15), this is the best evidence (as opposed to speculation) we have of linguistic relationships among the Southern Khoisan !Wi languages.

Whereas D. Bleek and Maingard were prolific contributors to the journal, C.M. Doke, who later became co-editor with Rheinallt-Jones, only published two papers on Khoisan topics in Bantu Studies. Both were classical studies of the phonetic structure of two San languages and they demonstrate that Doke was a master phonetician. “An outline of the phonetics of the language of the Chũ: Bushmen of the NW Kalahari” which appeared in Bantu Studies, 2, is based on material he collected in 1925 chiefly at Neitsas in the Grootfontein district of South West Africa, but includes some comparative material from Otjimavare, southwest of Neitsas (this allowed him to make the first observations on click substitutions in a Khoisan language). For this paper, Doke devised a new orthography for symbolising click influxes and certain effluxes but, as noted above, he later abandoned it. The accuracy with which Doke identified the various effluxes was impressive, particularly because a number of them were without precedent in Khoisan studies. He was the first phonetician to confront in a systematic way the contrast between aspiration with and without an audible velar plosive (L. Lloyd, also an excellent phonetician, failed to solve this when she heard it 50 years earlier (Traill, 1993)) and his solution, although flawed, remains the convention for the language (Snyman 1975) and its first practical orthography (Dickens 1992).

Doke’s “An outline of + Khomani Bushman phonetics” (Bantu Studies, 10) complements Maingard’s paper (discussed above). Khomani phonetic structure was simpler than that of Chũ:, but it presented Doke with problems of a different kind, namely “the indefiniteness and variability of the sounds” (p. 61). He saw this as an intrinsic characteristic of “Bushman phonetics” (the counterpart of Maingard’s “relative approximation” in morphology (Rheinallt-Jones & Doke:253)) which affected the pronunciation of vowels and clicks, of which “there is also confusing variety, voiced forms and ejective forms each at times being substituted for the plain velar releases” (p. 61). The accuracy of these observations should not be doubted but a more likely explanation for them is that they were well-known symptoms of a language in the final stages of contraction; in this case the + Khomani were about to complete the shift to Nama and Afrikaans (Traill,1995:14). Doke’s skill as a
phonetician is well illustrated in his description of the mechanism responsible for a voice quality with “considerable voice friction in the throat” as involving a “contraction and narrowing of the pharynx which make the epiglottis vibrate roughly” (p. 67–68). Audio recordings ofǂKhomani confirm that this sound is also found in !Xóô, and later fibre optic and x-ray investigations have verified Doke’s physiological description exactly (Traill, 1985). Since this was also a feature of Xam (p. 68) (Bleek & LLoyd referred to it as a “rough, deep pronunciation” ([1911:vii]), it and the labial click are typological peculiarities of the Southern group of Khoisan languages.

Two papers by Lanham and Hallowes on Eastern Bushman, or ||Xegwi, which appeared in *African Studies* in 1956, mark the end of the tradition of descriptive studies of Khoisan languages initiated by D. Bleek, Maingard and Doke. Significantly, these two papers coincide with virtual end of the San languages in South Africa (||Xegwi was clearly moribund in 1956, with only about 20–30 speakers left and Lanham and Hallowes correctly predicted it would become extinct with the passing of the generation of speakers they interviewed. In fact the language died when the last known speaker, Jopi Mabinda, was murdered in 1988; he had been one of Lanham and Hallowes’ main informants), and once again, the journal provides an invaluable record of a part of South Africa’s linguistic heritage (see also Potgieter (1955)). “An outline of the structure of Eastern Bushman” (*African Studies*, 15) is a careful analysis of the phonological, morphological and syntactic structure of this Southern !Wi language, and although the companion paper “Linguistic relationships and contacts expressed in the vocabulary of Eastern Bushman” (*African Studies*, 15) shows that ||Xegwi has close relationships to ǂKhomani of Gordonia, a number of features of the language set it apart from the other languages of the !Wi Group (Westphal,1971) which includes Xam and ǂKhomani. For example, ||Xegwi has uvulars, unlike Xam or ǂKhomani, a feature it shares with !Xóô, a non-!Wi language. It has no palatal click [+] unlike all the other Southern languages, and has a series of palatal non-click consonants which have replaced it (but this is not at all regular as it is in certain Khoe languages). The interesting linguistic borrowings from Swati, Sotho and Tsonga into ||Xegwi also remind one that the language had a unique development.

The question of linguistic relationships between the Khoisan languages are topics which have always attracted scholarly attention and continue to do so. Maingard’s comparative studies reviewed above and Lanham and Hallowes’ discussion of relationships among the !Wi languages make a valuable contribution to this aspect of Khoisan studies. Nienaber’s papers “Die vroegste verslae aangaande Hottentots” [The earliest reports concerning Hottentot] (*African Studies*, 15) and “’n Lysie Hottentotse woorde uit 1626” (A short list
African Studies, 22) add a fascinating philological dimension to comparative Khoe studies. The latter article discusses the oldest wordlists of Cape Khoe (Hottentot) from the earliest in Herbert’s 1626 list of 31 words to Burchell’s 1812 list of Korana words with particular attention to a close analysis of Herbert’s transcriptions. Nienaber’s knowledge of the sources was unsurpassed and the paper includes a valuable list of a number of obscure and more modern references.

Among the remaining papers from Bantu Studies included in this survey are some with a historical interest. Thanks to D. Bleek, Bantu Studies published a piece by the person commonly regarded as the founder of Khoisan studies, her father. W.H.I. Bleek’s “A fragment” was written in 1869 and is a continuation of his Comparative grammar of South African languages (Bleek 1862, 1869), two parts of which had been published before his death. The “Fragment” consists of a detailed discussion of the pronouns of Nama, !Kora, Western Cape Khoe and Eastern Cape Khoe, drawing on all available sources and including some original data from a “Katkop” variety of !Kora. The data is summarised in a table, evidently in Bleek’s own hand.

C.F. Wuras’s “An account of the !Korana” is a translation of a manuscript sent to Sir George Grey in 1858 when Wuras was the missionary at Bethany in the Orange Free State. It contains some intriguing remarks on the differences between !Korana and Nama, using Nama data from the “Roggeveld Hottentots” and the “Chonakua” who “lived not far from Cape Town” (p. 290).

Wuras gives us the Chona name for Cape Town: Ṯuy ṮKeib (i.e. [hui leip]) glossed as “hastily pack the ox for a journey” (p. 290)! He also provides an extremely interesting description of !Kora customs.

Finally, one should mention A.W. Hoernlé’s “A Hottentot rain ceremony” (Bantu Studies, 1) not only for its intrinsic interest, but also because it was the first paper on a Khoisan topic to appear in Bantu Studies.

The papers that have been surveyed above are simply a selection from some of the important contributions to Khoisan research that appeared in Bantu Studies and African Studies in the period 1921–1967. The choice reflects mainly the intellectual emphases of the scholars who have been most active in philological and linguistic research only because this field is most distinctively associated with the journal’s coverage during its first 45 years. There is, of course, no implication that other important work in the broad field of Khoisan studies was not published in the journal during this period and therefore a full list of papers on Khoisan topics for the period 1921–1967 has been provided in appendix 2. The 1967 cut-off marks the publication of Maingard’s last paper and with it the end of a tradition.
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**APPENDIX 1**

**Papers surveyed above.**

**Papers by D.F. Bleek**


Special speech of animals and moon used by the !Xam Bushmen. *Bantu Studies*, 10, 1936:163–199.


**Papers by J.F. Maingard**


The Central Group of clicks languages of the Kalahari. *African Studies*, 20,
A sample of Maingard’s unpublished notes on the Bushman language that was spoken in the Boshoff area of the Free State. The language closely related to the the variety labelled SIIb by D.F. Bleek, survives only in these notes (J.F. Maingard Papers, UNISA Library Archives)

**Papers by C.M. Doke**


**Papers by L.W. Lanham and D.P. Hallowes**


**Papers by G.S. Nienaber**


**Papers of historical interest**


**APPENDIX 2**

Papers on Khoisan topics in *Bantu Studies* and *African Studies* 1921–1967 (chronologically arranged).

P.R. Kirby. The music and musical instruments of the Korana. *Bantu Studies* 6, 1932:183–204.
P. de V. Pienaar. A few notes on the phonetic aspect of clicks and the


