

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE OTHER SHORE / Bako, l'autre rive/Bako (1978)

Jacques Champreux (1930-2020) and Cheick Doukouré (1943-)

OVERVIEW

Auteurs

Cheick Doukouré A Guinean filmmaker, who moved to France in 1960, Cheick was born in Kankan, Guinea, in 1943. As soon as he graduated from high school in his native country, he decided to emigrate to France. With no money and no papers, this twenty-year-old man went on a journey from a village in Mali to Paris. While working in a shoe factory in Paris, he took courses at the Sorbonne and graduated with a Bachelor's degree. At the prestigious Conservatoire de la rue Blanche in Paris, he rubbed shoulders with such film luminaries as Robert Hossein and Michel Audiard and became a film director. With Jacques Champreux, he made *Bako, The Other Shore* (1978), which is the story of his clandestine journey to Paris.

Jacques Champreux Born on March 31, 1930, in Paris, France Jacques Champreux was an actor and writer. He acted in over a dozen films and produced three features: *Judex* (1963), *Shadowman* (1974), and *Bako, The Other Shore* (1978). He died on December 24, 2020, in Aubervilliers, France.

Film This film, in the style of a fictional autobiography, deals with the central theme of clandestine African immigration to Europe and the difficulties of exile. In addition, the film deals with the themes of the myth of African greatness, slavery, loss and responsibility. The film won the Ecumenical Jury Special Mention at the 1978 Locarno International Film Festival and the Prix Jean Vigo in 1978. Sidiki Bakaba (Boubacar) won the Best Actor Award at the 1979 Festival de la Francophonie, in Nice.

Background *Bako* in Bambara language means "the other shore". 'Bako' is also the code name chosen by illegal African immigrants to designate France without arousing suspicion from the authorities. The film is the result of a collaboration between two filmmakers, Frenchman Jacques Champreux and Franco-Guinean Cheick Doukouré. The film is based on Cheick Doukouré's personal experience. The languages spoken in the film are French, Bambara (from Mali and Guinea) and Wolof (from Senegal). The actors are specialists in African theater. *Bako* was produced by Orpham Productions.

CHARACTERS

Boubacar A Malian man, who decides to go to France and find work to help his starving family back home

Camara A Guinean man, who is also trying to emigrate to France

Timothée Bienvenue An African smuggler and pimp in Barcelona

The smuggler in the Pyrenees An African smuggler, who helps illegal immigrants in Spain cross into France.

SYNOPSIS

The village where Boubacar lives in Mali falls victim to a severe drought that strikes the Sahel region in the late 1970s. The arid land becomes unproductive, and famine sets in. The money Boubacar's older brother Samba sends from France is no longer sufficient to support the family. So, Boubacar's father decides that his second son should follow his brother to France, find work and send the family some foreign currency. Thus, Boubacar, who has no formal education, no papers, not even enough money for his trip, takes to the emigration road. In Dakar, his uncle, at first reluctant to welcome him, finds him work on the docks so that he can pay for his trip on a ship. But Boubacar is attacked and robbed by two French sailors in complicity with a Senegalese man. Lamine Camara, a young Guinean who comes to Boubacar's rescue and is also a would-be immigrant, becomes his companion on his journey to France. The two friends take a train to

Mauritania, where Camara manages to buy himself a Spanish visa and gets ahead of Boubacar, who works as a cigarette smuggler to raise money for his Spanish visa. A few months later, Boubacar reunites with Camara in Barcelona. Camara had been robbed by dishonest smugglers and was stranded there. After a few weeks spent in a hostel waiting for an opportunity to cross into France, the two friends resume their journey, guided by an African smuggler. While crossing a river in the Pyrenees, Camara is swept away by the currents, much to his friend's despair. Boubacar arrives in France, weak and shivering from cold. He is locked in a barn rented by the smuggler from a French farmer until his brother pays the smuggler. Fearing that Boubacar might die on his farm, the farmer opens the barn doors and urges Boubacar to leave. After days of walking, Boubacar finally arrives in Paris, a year after having left his village in Mali. Showing his brother's address to passersby, he is led by a Malian immigrant up the staircase of a building squatted by illegal African immigrants. Boubacar slumps to the ground, waiting for the immigrant to alert his brother Samba of his presence. Before Samba arrives, Boubacar dies of exhaustion and cold.

SCENES

Prayers for Boubacar The year is 1972. In a small Malian village, the elders gather to talk about Boubacar's intention to emigrate to France. They implore the blessing of the ancestors. They announce that the village has made a collection of funds to help Boubacar. The elders sacrifice a chicken to make offerings to the ancestors, and they give Boubacar an amulet dipped in the chicken's blood, which they ask him to keep with him for protection during his journey.



A disconsolate fiancée Awa, Boubacar's fiancée, is inconsolable. She thinks Boubacar will never come back from France, as most of the men who immigrated have never returned. Boubacar explains to Awa that he has to leave, as the lack of rain is causing too much misery in the village. He tells her that he will return to marry her as soon as Samba, his older brother, is married. Awa asks Boubacar how Samba can get married when Boubacar is using Samba's dowry money to go to Europe. Boubacar promises Awa that in Europe, he will work hard to repay the money he borrowed from Samba so that Samba can get married and, then, they too can get married.



Travel Agent Boubacar goes to a travel agency for information on how to get to France. The travel agent tells him he needs an accommodation certificate, a round-trip plane ticket, and a deposit of 300,000 francs (about \$600). Boubacar is puzzled. He does not understand why he has to travel by plane and why he is being asked to go through so many hoops. The agent tells him that this is the only way to get to Europe from Mali because Mali is a landlocked country.

A father's blessing Boubacar's father blesses his son. He wishes him long life and prosperity. The father places his son's journey under Allah's protection. Boubacar's father asks God to ensure his son's safe return to him one day. The father puts an amulet around his son's neck. Boubacar goes to his mother and asks that Allah watch over her until he returns.



The farewell The villagers give Boubacar advice on brotherhood and honesty. They advise him never to forget his cultural roots. The whole village accompanies Boubacar to the station. Awa ties her scarf around Boubacar's neck. Boubacar bids farewell to the village and boards a bush taxi.



An inhospitable uncle in Dakar

Boubacar arrives in Dakar, Senegal. He looks for and finds the house of his uncle, Abdou, his mother's brother. Abdou is not very happy to see his nephew. He tells him he already has too many people to take care of. Boubacar asks his uncle to take him in just long enough to catch the boat to France. Abdou replies that this is not as easy as he thinks, as his travel pass is only good for Senegal. Boubacar tells his uncle that his father wants him to go to Paris to join his brother Samba. He tells him that things are tough in the village and that everyone there is counting on him. Abdou tells his nephew that it will be hard to keep him there, because unemployment reigns in Dakar. Abdou tells Boubacar that he will try to find him a job as a day laborer at the port of Dakar. He advises him not to forget to bribe the foreman if he wants to keep his job.



Can you take me to France?

Boubacar works as a docker in the port of Dakar. He sees two white sailors in a docked ship. He asks them if they can take him to France with them. He offers them his pay. The sailors tell him that this is impossible.



What a great people we are!

Abdou's family are gathered around a *griot*. The *griot* sings in Wolof the epic of the great kings of the past. The family listen, swaying their heads to the rhythm of the verses. Boubacar listens, keeping his distance from the family. At the end of the *griot's* tale, Abdou exclaims, with obvious pride, "What a great people we are!" The *griot* wants to know who the young man sitting in the background is. Abdou explains that he is his sister's son, who has decided to look for work in Europe. The *griot* laments that young people are fleeing the country for Europe, and that ancestral knowledge is being lost. He says his own son has left, too.



Buying false documents

Boubacar confides in his uncle that his Senegalese stay, which was just a transition to Europe, is getting longer, and that he feels trapped in Senegal. Boubacar tells his uncle that he has heard that he can obtain false documents, but that this will cost him dearly. He asks his uncle to help him with the money, promising to pay him back as soon as he gets a job in France. The uncle is outraged that Boubacar wants to involve him in fraud. Abdou gives Boubacar two weeks to leave his house.



Boubacar is robbed

Boubacar meets a Senegalese who puts him in touch with his accomplices, two French sailors. They say they can help him. They request the sum of 100,000 francs from Boubacar for the passage to Europe. Boubacar hesitates, but finally gives them the money. The smuggler and his accomplices beat Boubacar and throw him off the boat. Camara, a Guinean would-be immigrant who had witnessed the scene, comes to Boubacar's rescue. He hits one of Boubacar's assailants, who has chased Boubacar off the ship. He manages to save Boubacar from his assailant and recover some of the money. Camara tells Boubacar that his dream is to learn electricity in France and that he has come to Senegal in the hope of stowing away on a boat to France.



Boubacar is homeless

Boubacar returns to his uncle's house, but his uncle's wife insists he leave her home. Boubacar finds himself homeless and the laughingstock of the neighborhood. Boubacar says it would be a great humiliation for him to return to the village. A man tells Boubacar that he can help him.



5000 francs for an address

Boubacar's new companion introduces him to a man to whom he pays 5000 francs for the address of a contact in a restaurant in Nouakchott. Boubacar then takes a bush taxi to the restaurant in Mauritania.



We will travel together In Nouakchott, Boubacar joins a group of other would-be immigrants in hiding. Boubacar also meets up with his defender, Camara. The two young men decide that from now on, they will travel together. Boubacar and his companions embark on a long journey across the Sahara desert in an old truck. Boubacar complains about the length of the journey. Boubacar and his fellow travelers get passports issued in Mauritania, in the town of Nouadhibou. They resume their journey by train.



Meeting Oumar, Le Doyen (The Dean) After a long train journey, Camara and Boubacar arrive in the Mauritanian port town of Nouadhibou. Here they meet Oumar, a Senegalese man who calls himself "The Dean". He tells them that he has been trying unsuccessfully to emigrate to France for the past eight years. Oumar has his bedroom walls covered with pictures of France's edifices: the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, the Sacré Coeur. Oumar knows every street in Paris, even though he has never been to France. Oumar tells the travelers where to go once they arrive in Paris. He tells them the quarters where they are most likely to find the Africans who can help them settle. Oumar tells them that all the Africans in Paris know him and are waiting to celebrate his arrival among them.



A boat is leaving in two days Camara explains to Boubacar that they will take a boat in a small village harbor. From there, they will go to the Canary Islands. From the Canary Islands, they will travel to Barcelona, Spain. Oumar tells the two friends that there is a boat leaving in two days' time and that they need to get visas. Camara gets a Spanish visa in the ghost town of La Guera, Western Sahara, by bribing a Spanish consulate employee. Boubacar does not have enough money for his visa. He looks for work to raise the money for his departure. Boubacar helps Oumar smuggle cigarettes. Camara boards a pirogue for the first leg of his journey.



Abandoned by smugglers Camara manages to make it to Spain. Together with a group of Africans, they pay French smugglers to take them by truck to Barcelona, from where they hope to catch a train to France. The French forcibly disembark them and abandon them in the middle of the Spanish countryside. Camara and other African migrants manage to reach the French border, but French customs officers refuse them entry into France. Camara waits at the Barcelona port for an opportunity to enter France by boat.



Boubacar arrives in Barcelona Boubacar arrives in Barcelona by boat. No details are given on his trip to Barcelona. He is surprised to see his friend Camara, whom he thought was already in France. Camara explains that he is stuck in Spain, penniless, having been robbed by dishonest smugglers. Camara finds Boubacar a bed in an African immigrant guesthouse. The owner of the Spanish hostel complains that the Africans are vandalizing and spoiling his establishment, and he threatens to close it to them.



Timothée Bienvenue Timothée Bienvenue, an African who owns a bar and a brothel in Barcelona, tells Boubacar that he can find him a place on a truck that leaves in a few days for Paris. Camara tells Boubacar that Timothée has smuggled several Africans into France. Boubacar does not have enough money to pay for his trip to France. Camara explains to Timothée that Boubacar is an honest man who will pay him the rest as soon as he gets a job. Timothée throws the two friends out of his bar, telling them his is not a good-will enterprise.



Boubacar writes to his brother Boubacar writes a letter to his brother Samba, who is in Paris, to tell him that he is stuck in Barcelona, and that he needs a money order to pay for his trip to Paris. He also asks for 1,000 francs for his friend Camara, who is in the same situation as him, having been robbed by smugglers. Camara tells Boubacar that this would be too much of a burden for Samba. So Boubacar promises Camara to send him some money once he gets to Paris.

Samba must be dead Boubacar is sad. He is convinced that his brother Samba, who has not replied to his letter, is dead. He tells Camara that he and Samba were inseparable, and that unless something terrible has happened to Samba, there is no explanation for his brother's silence.

I feel trapped Boubacar feels trapped in the hostel. He laments that he is in debt. He cannot go to France or even return to the streets. He says he cannot even leave the hotel because his visa has expired, and he risks being caught by the police. He breaks down and starts shouting that he is in prison.



Passing on credit An African immigrant tells Camara that he knows smugglers who take people to northern Spain on credit. He asks Camara and Boubacar to come with him, as he is leaving this evening. He says that he is willing to pay for Camara and Boubacar's journey to the smuggler, and that they can pay him back once they arrive in Paris.

Who can vouch for you? The smuggler asks each immigrant to give him the name and address of a relative in Paris who is willing to pay their debts. The smuggler knows Boubacar's brother Samba and agrees to help Boubacar. Boubacar is pleasantly surprised to learn that his brother is alive. The smuggler tells Boubacar that he will keep his papers until he is paid in full. He asks for five times more than Boubacar would have paid if he had had the passage money.

I will pay for Camara Boubacar pleads for his friend Camara, who has no sponsor. He promises the smuggler to pay for Camara, too. The smuggler refuses, but Boubacar insists that he will only cross into France if his friend Lamine Camara has the chance to cross with him.



Death in the Pyrenees The immigrants face the snow-covered mountains on their way to the French border. While crossing a river, Camara is swept away by the fast current. Boubacar mourns the death of his friend. The smuggler tells him to continue the journey, and that there is nothing more to be done for Camara.



France, finally! The immigrants are taken to a farm in France, where they are locked in a barn. The smuggler pays the farm owner and promises to come and collect the immigrants the next day. Boubacar is taken hostage. The smuggler returns to the farm with three cabs. He herds the immigrants into them. He asks Boubacar to stay at the barn because he has not yet been able to reach his brother to settle his debt. The farm-owner points out to the smuggler that Boubacar is ill, but the smuggler downplays his concern. The farm-owner tells his wife that he does not want this black man to die in his barn. He opens the barn and, threatening Boubacar with an iron bar, forces him out of the barn and off his farm.



Boubacar arrives in Paris Boubacar finds himself in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the night, in the cold. He tries to stop passing trucks. Boubacar wanders from town to town until he reaches Paris, holding his brother's address in his hand.

Boubacar looks for his brother Boubacar hands out his brother's address to the people he sees. A couple of women try to explain to Boubacar that black people living in the neighborhood were taken to Orly airport by the police. Boubacar does not understand what they are telling him. Boubacar finally meets a Malian who knows his brother. He tells Boubacar that his brother is staying in the same hostel as he, and that he is at work. Boubacar begs him to let him get some sleep. His compatriot tells him that he is sorry, and that the hotel cannot accommodate unregistered guests.

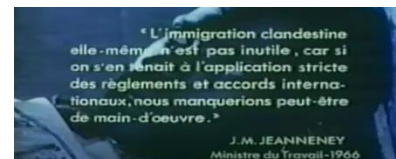


Boubacar regrets his journey Boubacar tells his compatriot about his year-long journey. He tells him that he is even poorer than when he left his homeland. His compatriot also tells him about the difficulties of life in Europe. He tells Boubacar about the exploitation to which immigrants are subjected, making them regret ever having immigrated.

The village is better Boubacar's compatriot leads him up the stairs of a building squatted by undocumented immigrants. He tells him that he will be able to eat and sleep here as soon as the immigrants return from their night shift. He promises Boubacar that he will bring his brother tomorrow morning. Boubacar says the village is much better. His only regret is that there is not enough food for everyone. At dawn, an immigrant discovers Boubacar dead on the stairs.



French View of Illegal immigration The film ends with a quotation by 1966 French Labor Minister, JM Jeanneney: "Illegal immigration itself is not useless, because if we adhered to the strict application of international regulations and agreements, we might lack manpower."



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

BOUBACAR Fresh from his small Malian village, Boubacar is an honest and naive young man. He would hardly have navigated the labyrinth of the exile route if his Guinean companion were not by his side. Boubacar is grateful for Camara's loyalty and tries to repay him by taking on the cost of Camara's passage from Spain to France.

Naïve Boubacar, who had never left his small Malian village before his migratory adventure, is shocked that he has to obtain documents and take a plane to Paris. He thought that such a journey could be made by land. When he arrives at the Port of Dakar, Senegal, he believes that all he has to do is hand money to some sailors for them to take him with them on their boat. From Dakar to Barcelona, he runs up huge debts, convinced that he will easily find work in France to pay off his debts. Boubacar has a naïve outlook on the world.

Honest Boubacar is a young man of integrity. He never asks for anything he is not willing to pay back. He uses his brother Samba's dowry for his trip, and he promises to pay it back as soon as he gets a job in France. He vouches for his friend Camara's passage to France, promising the smuggler to pay him in France when he earns his first salary. However, Boubacar's honesty is tested a little when he tries to obtain false papers in Senegal.

Grateful Boubacar is grateful to Camara, who came to his aid the night he was mugged and robbed by French sailors in Dakar. When Camara is unable to pay for his passage from Spain to France, Boubacar decides to help him. First, he asks Camara to write to his brother Samba, asking for money for their passage together. Camara refuses, telling him it would be too much pressure on Samba. Boubacar then vouches to the smuggler to pay Camara's debt once in Paris.

CAMARA Camara is a strong, honest and supportive young man. Boubacar's journey would have been even more difficult for him had it not been for the presence of the young Guinean. On the road to exile strewn with physical and moral violence, Camara lent Boubacar his arm and a listening ear, thus easing his worries.

Strong Camara is a strong, energetic young man. In Dakar, he protects Boubacar from the attacks of a sailor. In the Pyrenees, on the French-Spanish border, Camara carries Boubacar, who is weakened and is struggling with every step he takes. Unfortunately, Camara does not know how to swim, and he drowns in the fast-flowing current of a river.

Honest Camara is an honest young man. Where some people would have taken advantage of Boubacar's naivety - he cannot read and has difficulty counting his money - Camara helps Boubacar to keep his accounts without trying to steal from him. When Camara is stranded in Barcelona, and Boubacar tries to get his brother Samba to help him and Camara, the young Guinean tells him it would be too much of a burden for Samba and refuses the offer.

Supportive Camara provides both physical and moral support to Boubacar. When, after defending Boubacar in Dakar, he meets him again in Nouakchott, he promises that they will travel the road together. His presence by Boubacar's side helps the young Malian to overcome his anxieties and to maintain hope. In Barcelona, he helps Boubacar, who can neither read nor write, to write a letter to his brother. He comforts Boubacar when the latter is depressed and weeps.

THE SMUGGLERS The smugglers are greedy, heartless characters. For them, immigrants are mere commodities, with no human feelings whatsoever. Their exploitation of the migrants likens them to modern-day slave traders.

Violent/dishonest Whoever they are and wherever they come from, the smugglers are violent characters. They insult, beat, rob and abandon the migrants in the middle of nowhere. They rarely respect the terms of the agreements they make with their clients to protect them until they reach their destination. Their bad faith prolongs and hampers the immigrants' journey. Boubacar is robbed and beaten by the first smugglers he meets in Dakar. Camara and other immigrants are abandoned in the Spanish countryside by French smugglers.

Greedy/ruthless The smugglers treat the immigrants as merchandise to be traded for maximum profit. For them, the immigrants have no value other than their market value, and not as human beings. The smugglers cram their clients into the backs of trucks, in inhumane conditions, as if they were mere packages. They lock them up in barns like cattle. And when the worst happens, like Camara's drowning, they only regret the money they lose with the death of the customer, not the life of the human being who disappears.

THEMES

Griot/myth At his uncle's house in Dakar, where he makes a short stopover while waiting for a boat to France, Boubacar listens to a *griot* (traditional poet-storyteller and historian) sing the praises of his ancestors. Seated around the *griot*, the uncle, his wife and children listen as the singer recounts the great feats of arms of African princes who resisted colonial occupation. Intoxicated by the ballad, they nod and smile. At the end of the song, the satisfied uncle exclaims, 'What great men we are!' Sitting on the sidelines, arms folded, a little huddled in on himself, Boubacar watches them strangely. Ever since he left his small Malian village, as soon as his journey began, he has seen the pettiness of his people, and he certainly wonders how they came to be like this, if it is true that his people were once so great. How, where rudimentary drilling, water conservation and irrigation systems would have sufficed, could these people not have protected themselves against the great droughts, instead of entrusting their fate to the whims of nature, which today is starving them? From the short-sightedness of his people to the open inhospitality of his uncle, Boubacar must have come to the conclusion that the greatness of the people sung by the *griot* is just a myth, an analgesic to heal the visible pains of the present, because a people so short-sighted, so

apathetic and so selfish cannot have been a great people. If only Boubacar knew that his journey and his disappointment with his people had only just begun!

Climate migration Long before the term "climate migration" became fashionable in international parlance, *Bako* shows how a country's disastrous climatic conditions drive its youth to seek better living conditions elsewhere. For years, it had not rained in this small Malian village, and the meagre harvests produced by the barren land are no longer enough to feed the people whose main activity is subsistence farming. Boubacar's family has only been able to survive thanks to their shrinking harvest and the money sent to them from France by Samba, Boubacar's elder brother, who emigrated years ago. Today, however, climatic conditions have worsened. Rain is extremely rare. The land no longer produces anything, and famine is knocking at the villagers' door. So Boubacar's father decides that, rather than wasting away in the village working a land that produces nothing but dust, Boubacar's vigorous arms should be put to work in France, to provide the family with foreign currency in the same way that Samba's arms do. The road to France is strewn with physical and psychological pitfalls and regrets. Boubacar loses his dignity and tells himself that, had it not been for the famine, he would never have left the village. In fact, it was the lack of food caused by the disastrous climatic conditions that led Boubacar to follow in his brother Samba's footsteps on the emigration road.

Loss (of vital force) Samba leaves his village to emigrate to France. Years later, his brother Boubacar decides to follow in his wake. On his way to exile, Boubacar meets other vigorous young Africans who have also chosen to emigrate. And all these young people—thousands of males who are fleeing their homelands—are the human resources that Africa is losing and which are depleting the continent. On the docks of Dakar, where he unloads trucks to earn a little money to cover his passage to France, Boubacar's vigor is evident. This vigor and dynamism could have been put to good use for his community in Mali. However, it is a vigor that is on its way out of Africa, and which in time will leave Boubacar's little village stripped of its energy, populated by old men and women without husbands. With the departure of Samba, Boubacar, Camara and so many other Africans, the African workforce disappears from Africa to be sold cheaply in the West, and Africa falls into a spiral of deprivation and underdevelopment. Today, more than 40 years after *Bako*, the situation has worsened. Entire ships of young African would-be immigrants are disappearing into the deadly currents of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Today, through a scheme it calls "selective immigration", the West attracts African brains by offering them juicy opportunities, while those rejected by the West die in the desert and the ocean trying to reach Europe at all costs.

Slavery History books tell us about the slave trade in the days when white slave traders arrived on African coasts and had African men, women and children hunted down and forcibly loaded onto ships, to be sold as livestock on American and British tobacco, cotton and cane plantations. It was the time of the first globalization, the first transnational "trade". Today, *Bako* recounts another kind of slavery, one in which the black man himself voluntarily puts himself in chains on his way to Europe and entrusts himself to a black slave trader for an epic crossing of the Atlantic. This time, it is no longer the white man who forces the black man to make the journey to the West. In fact, the white man does everything in his power to prevent this journey from taking place, closing the doors of the West to the black man. However, urged on by their families and communities, Camara and Boubacar are determined to make the journey into slavery. By truck, on foot in the desert, and by boat, the African immigrant has but one goal: to reach the West and sell his strength to the white man for a pittance. On the way to the white paradise, the immigrant is held to ransom, robbed, insulted, beaten and imprisoned by the black smuggler, a modern-day slave trader. Here, as seen in *Bako*, the white man is no longer in control of this new slavery. He is merely a middle-man, an opportunist who earns a few bucks by renting out his truck, smuggling a few illegals into the hold of his boat, and renting out his farm as a temporary detention facility. The real orchestrator of this new slavery, the real slave trader, is the black man, for whom the other black man is nothing more than a commodity from which to extract maximum profit.

Responsibility The Malian diaspora around the world contributes to Mali's economy at an impressive rate. Cash transfers from the Malian diaspora to Mali in 2019 are estimated at over a billion dollars. This money sent by immigrant workers is used to build dispensaries and schools, drill village wells, and buy food and seeds, among other things. As a result, Malian emigration becomes a collective responsibility. The

Malian who emigrates is celebrated and blessed by the village, which hopes to reap the benefits of his adventure, and the immigrant himself feels invested with a responsibility towards his family and his entire community. So, in preparation for Boubacar's departure, the whole village comes together to pray for him, give him advice and talismans to protect him throughout his journey and stay abroad. On his journey, Boubacar feels a heavy responsibility to remain true to the values of his community. When Camara, the Guinean immigrant who has run out of money, is unable to pay for his journey, Boubacar shows empathy and solidarity, making a commitment to the smuggler to pay for Camara. When Boubacar writes to his brother Samba from Barcelona and receives no reply, he is convinced that Samba is dead. More than Samba's physical death, Boubacar is talking about the death of the values to which Samba owes allegiance. Even before his departure, his father had told him to remind Samba, who had stopped showing signs of life, that the family needed his help. For Boubacar, Samba's silence means a flight from responsibility, an alienation from his roots that he finds hard to understand.

Rural exodus/urban seduction When rural areas fail to deliver on their promise of well-being for village populations, it is to the city that hopes turn. In *Bako*, it is Paris, the city of cities, that fascinates the people of this small Malian village where the land has become unproductive, harvests are scarce and famine threatens. It is to Paris that the village sends its valiant sons to seek pittance for all. Like all legends of rural exodus, emigration to Paris is a tale of peril, disillusionment and death. This exodus, which depopulates African rural areas and kills African youth on the illusory roads, is also a trial of African governments. African youth are fleeing Africa because it has nothing to offer them, because African governments have failed to build infrastructure, to promote agriculture—which employs 90% of the African population—and to create viable, sustainable jobs. In Boubacar's village, droughts follow one another and get worse without any measures being taken to conserve water and irrigate the fields. While in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Gaddafi's Libya and Egypt, to name but a few, deserts are being transformed into lush green fields, in sub-Saharan Africa, little effort is being made by governments to introduce water conservation methods, irrigation practices and less water-hungry crops. The fate of the population continues to be entrusted to providence, which continues to be severe, driving more and more young people out of the countryside and leading them like seduced fireflies to the glittering lights of the great European cities.

Tradition and modernity *Bako* seems to be taking up an age-old thesis in literature, that of the authenticity of rural areas and the corruption of urban areas. Before leaving his small Malian village, Boubacar receives advice from his elders. They advise him never to deviate from honesty and solidarity, ancestral values prized by the community. Boubacar promises them that he always will be true to these values. However, as Boubacar moves away from the rural area and into the urban one, he sees these values deteriorate. In Dakar, the Senegalese capital, where he makes a stopover at his uncle's house hoping to board a boat for France, solidarity is not the order of the day. His uncle welcomes him reluctantly and, after a short stay, orders him to leave his house. In Dakar, Boubacar is also robbed by a Senegalese in collusion with two French sailors. In Dakar, Boubakar himself is tempted to buy fake papers. Continuing his migratory journey, this time via Mauritania, Boubacar meets Camara, a Guinean, with whom he makes his way, each supporting the other all the way to Barcelona. In this European city, the two friends pay for the services of an unscrupulous African smuggler, for whom the only thing that counts is profit and who treats would-be immigrants as mere merchandise. Crossing an icy, raging river in the Pyrenees, Boubacar's loyal and supportive companion is swept away, and the greedy smuggler forbids any effort to save him. Camara's death in the unforgiving West heralds the end of rural values of solidarity and honesty. To underline this absence of rural values in the urban zone, Boubacar freezes to death on the stairs of a building squatted by African immigrants in France, without his brother Samba, whom he had hoped to find in France, being able to do anything for him.

Marriage *Bako* opens a glimpse into the tradition of marriage in the Bambara-speaking region of Mali. Boubacar promises his fiancée, Awa, that he will return to marry her as soon as his brother Samba has married. But Awa tells him she doubts this will happen any time soon, given that Boubacar is leaving for France with Samba's dowry money. What we learn from this short exchange is that in Bambara culture, younger brothers cannot marry until the eldest in the family has already taken a wife. Boubacar will have to wait until his brother Samba marries before thinking of marrying Awa. Moreover, a man who comes to ask for a girl's hand in marriage must present himself to her parents with a dowry. This dowry can be in the form of livestock and grain, or material goods such as cloth, jewelry and money. As the woman has no right to land ownership, her dowry constitutes her wealth. Asking for the hand of a girl is actually a misnomer

because for his first marriage, the young man does not choose his partner. She is chosen for him by his father, from a friendly family of good reputation. Here, therefore, it is clear that neither Samba nor his brother Boubacar chose their future wives. They were chosen for them by their father. And since Bambara society is polygamous, the brothers can subsequently choose their other wives as they wish. Because marriage is a collective affair, the children resulting from it belong to the whole community. Hence the interest shown by the whole community in Boubacar's fate as he leaves for exile.

Quest The quest for well-being and a better future is one of the strong themes of the film. For the parents of Samba and Boubacar, victims of drought and famine, this well-being can only come from elsewhere, and more specifically from the West. So, they set their two sons, first Samba and then Boubacar, on the road to immigration, in search of happiness in France, so that when they find it, they can send them a piece of that happiness. For Boubacar's fiancée Awa, who is waiting for him in the village, her quest for validation as a married woman is deferred with the departure of her beloved. Like most young women in her village, Awa aspires to respectability through marriage. But this aspiration is twice postponed, first by the departure of the elder Samba, who must necessarily marry before his younger brother Boubacar, and then by the departure of Boubacar himself. But for the two brothers, as much as for immigrants in general, the well-being they seek seems to elude them interminably, putting itself further and further out of their reach as they move forward. Exile becomes unbearable. Shame overwhelms them. Return becomes impossible, and death, as in the case of Camara, Boubacar and many other would-be immigrants, puts an end to their quest for elusive happiness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the light of this film, what are the direct and indirect problems caused by illegal immigration?
2. What solutions do you see for reducing illegal immigration?
3. Do you believe that illegal immigration is a necessary evil? Justify your answer.
4. France and Canada have opted for "selective immigration", that is, immigration based on the selection of migrants according to their profiles, skills and origins. What do you think of this concept? Elaborate on your answer.
5. What do you make of the statement by the French Minister of Labor at the end of the film?