

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Finzan, A Dance for Heroes (1989)

Cheick Oumar Sissoko (1945-)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Born in 1945 in San, Mali, Cheick Oumar Sissoko (sometimes spelled Cissoko) is an internationally acclaimed filmmaker and director. After graduating from the University of Paris with a degree in sociology and African history, Sissoko studied cinema at the Ecole Nationale Louis Lumière, then returned to work as a filmmaker at the *Centre National de Production Cinématographique* in his native Mali. Later, together with other Malians, Sissoko founded a film production company called Kora Films. Sissoko also became involved in Malian politics as the co-founder of the African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence party, in 1996. In 2002, Sissoko is appointed Minister of Culture, a portfolio to which is added that of Minister of National Education, which he holds until October 2007. Sissoko's internationally acclaimed films include features such as *Nyamanton/The Garbage Boy* (1986), *Finzan /A dance for Heroes* (1989), *Guimba The Tyrant* (1996), *La Genèse/Genesis* (1999), and *Battù* (2000).

Film *Finzan* ("Rebellion" in Bambara), as the film's title suggests, is the story of two rebellions: those of Nanyuma and Fili, two Bambara women, who oppose two old tribal traditions: that of the widow's remarriage to her brother-in-law, and that of excision, the removal of a young girl's clitoris. The English title, *A Dance for Heroes*, highlights Sissoko's cinematic celebration of the Malian women's fight for her rights in a patriarchal society. The film was shot in Mali. The language used in the film is Bambara, Mali's national language. The performers are local actors well-known to Malian TV and cinema audiences. For *Finzan*, Sissoko won the Silver and the Gold Montgolfier at the 1989 Nantes Three Continent Festival.

Background Cheick Oumar Sissoko describes *Finzan* as a film meant to support women in their struggle to take control of their own lives. For the women of the filmmaker's native Mali, this struggle entails, among other things, stopping the practices of force marriages that commodify women and of excision that is a form of institutionalized mutilation. Sissoko, who has served as minister of education and culture in his country, makes a strong educational movie and a compelling appeal to change aspects of his culture that impede not just women's progress, but also his country's entry into modernity.

SYNOPSIS

Nanyuma, the third wife of an old Bambara man, has just become a widow. According to customs, she must show her affliction and pain by lamenting and crying. However, unlike her two co-spouses, who seem to launch into a wailing contest, Nanyuma shows little emotion and utters no cry, because, as she remarks, she has shed all her tears during nine years of a marriage whose burden she bore like the trauma of slavery. The Bambara custom also requires that the youngest wife of a deceased husband be remarried to his surviving brother. Bala, the alcoholic younger brother of Nanyuma's late husband, tells the village chief that now that Nanyuma is a widow, he intends to fulfill his "duty" by taking her in his home as his third wife. The chief agrees, and Bala is given permission to marry Nanyuma. However, Nanyuma, who has hoped that her husband's death would be the moment for her own freedom, has vowed not to submit herself once again to a marriage arranged without her consent. She tries unsuccessfully to find refuge and support, first at her father's compound in a neighboring village, and then at her brother-in-law's house, in the city. Each time, she finds no strong ally in her protest, and the concerted efforts of men succeed in returning her forcibly to Bala.

Fili is Nanyuma's niece. Fili's family has a medical history of hemophilia. So, Fili's father, who would not risk losing his daughter under the blade of the village excision woman, raised Fili in the city. Fili grew up without undergoing the ritual of excision to which all Bambara women are to submit. However, to punish his daughter for supporting Nanyuma's rebellion, Fili's father sends the girl to the village, so that she can be chosen a suitable and respectable Bambara husband there. In the village, as Fili is showering with another

girl, her friend discovers that Fili has never been excised, and she relays the information to Fili's boyfriend, who alerts the men and the older women. The village is scandalized and sickened by what they regard as "unclean." Nanyuma's and Fili's struggle against patriarchy is juxtaposed with the village men's own protest against an abusive government official who demands that they supply him with grain at an unfair price. The villagers mobilize to have their chief freed by the commissioner. Once liberated, village chief, supported by Fili's uncle, order the village women to rectify Fili's "abnormality". Despite her protests that decisions on her body belong to her, Fili is captured and mutilated. The film ends on a tragic irony, as Fili's father, having learned that his daughter is about to be excised, comes running to the village, but arrives too late, only to witness his daughter hemorrhaging profusely.

CHARACTERS

Nanyuma A Bambara widow, who refuses to be remarried by force to Bala
Bala A Bambara man, who wants to take Nanyuma, the widow of his deceased brother, as his third wife
Fili A hemophiliac young Bambara woman who refuses to undergo the custom of excision
The village chief A traditional chief

SCENES

A dying husband Nanyuma's husband is dying. Two of his three wives are at his bedside. His youngest wife, Nanyuma, is going about her business as usual. Kani, the eldest wife, asks Nanyuma why she does not care about their husband's condition. Nanyuma carries on with her chores, unmoved by Kani's question. Tiéfing and Bala, the dying man's brothers, are urgently called. Entering their brother's hut, Tiéfing instructs his wives to go about their household chores and leave the men alone with their dying brother. Nanyuma is working in the fields. Her son, Jigi, comes running and tells her that his father is asking for her. Nanyuma stops work and returns to the village. The husband's body, wrapped in a white cloth, lies in his hut, surrounded by his three wives, also veiled in a white cloth. Nanyuma's two co-wives mourn their husband's death. As for Nanyuma, she remains silent, sulking. The deceased was a hunter from the "Dozo" brotherhood. Members of the hunting brotherhood sing and act out hunting scenes to celebrate his prowess. The women also dance in a circle. One of the mourners notes that Bala, the deceased's youngest brother, is very happy for someone who is supposed to be mourning the passing of his brother. Another mourner adds that Bala is visibly thinking about going to bed with his brother's widow. The deceased is finally laid to rest. Of his three wives, Nanyuma sheds no tears, while her two co-wives continue to mourn their husband's death.



Mother – daughter Nanyuma's mother reproaches her for her indifference. Nanyuma replies that she has shed all her tears during her nine years of hellish marriage with her husband. Nanyuma's mother replies that it is true that the world treats women badly, even though women are the world's mothers. She advises her daughter to be patient and resigned. To the sound of his *kora* (stringed-instrument), the village *griot* tells the village chief about a time when women ruled great kingdoms. The chief tells the *griot* that these are myths, and that women do not have the capacity to govern but are made to be governed.



Bengali hopes to marry Nanyuma Bengali, a man from the village of Nanyuma's father, goes to ask his village chief for permission to marry Nanyuma. He reminds the chief that he and Nanyuma have always loved each other and had hoped to marry before her father offered her to another man. Bengali tells the chief that since she is now a widow and he, too, is a widower, they would like to marry each other. The chief tells Bengali that Nanyuma is already promised to her brother-in-law, Bala. Furious, Bengali tells the village chief and Nanyuma's father that he will marry Nanyuma, whether they like it or not. Bengali gets up and leaves the meeting unceremoniously. The chief orders Bengali to be arrested and brought to him. The chief flogs Bengali in public for contradicting him.



Bala wants Nanyuma Bala comes to see the village chief. He tells him that he would like to make Nanyuma, his brother's widow, his third wife. The village chief congratulates Bala on doing his duty and reminds him of the importance of looking after Nanyuma's children. Bala thanks the chief and leaves. The chief tells his *griot* that Bala is possessed and that Nanyuma has put a spell on him. The chief notes that since his brother's death, Bala thinks of nothing else but sleeping with his sister-in-law. Bala is visibly impatient for Nanyuma to be delivered to him. His two wives laugh at him and tell him that his new wife will never come since she has already found another man in a neighboring village.



Nanyuma flees Nanyuma leaves her son with her co-spouses and decides to seek refuge in her mother's village with her daughter. Nanyuma's father is upset to see her there. He orders her to return to her new husband, meaning, Bala. Nanyuma's mother hides her daughter in a remote hut, which she will not reveal despite her husband's threat to disown her. Nanyuma's daughter asks her grandmother why a grownup like her mother has to hide. The girl accuses her grandmother and mother of cowardice for letting themselves being shouted at and ordered around like slaves. Nanyuma's father stands in the middle of his compound and shouts at his daughter to get out of his home wherever she is hiding. He also orders his wife to leave his home. His granddaughter tells him that he should be ashamed of himself for the way he treats women. Bengali comes to collect Nanyuma's mother and daughter.



Nanyuma is taken back to the village Tensions rise between the villagers and the commissioner. The soldiers become threatening. The *griot* from the village where Nanyuma has taken refuge arrives in the middle of the discussions. He tells the chief that he is bringing back Nanyuma, who is the property of the village, dead or alive. The villagers refuse to supply the millet requested by the commissioner. The commissioner gives them a month to comply or be arrested.



Bala, who had sneaked out of the meeting to go see Nanyuma, comes back, crying that she has escaped. The village chief tells the commissioner that he must end the meeting because there is an emergency. The village chief orders the young men to set off in search of Nanyuma before nightfall. The village bush is lit up by the torches of villagers searching for Nanyuma. Nanyuma smears shea butter on her body to hide her scent from the bush animals. She manages to elude her pursuers and finds herself hours later in town, in the courtyard of one of her late husband's brothers. Nanyuma asks her brother-in-law to help her by taking her in. The brother-in-law replies that her fate has already been decided by tradition, and that she must abide by it. He tells her that he cannot stand in the way of tradition. Nanyuma tries to sneak out of her brother-in-law's home. She is captured and tied up. Nanyuma is tied up and loaded onto a bus bound for the village of Bala, accompanied by her niece, Fili, and escorted by two men. Passengers on the bus are shocked by Nanyuma's treatment and order the two men to untie her. As soon as her arms are free, Nanyuma slaps one of her tormentors for humiliating her. Once in the village, Nanyuma is tied up again and isolated in a hut. Bala joins her there. He beats her. Nanyuma is taken by force to the town hall to legalize her marriage to Bala. Nanyuma refuses to put her fingerprint on the marriage certificate. The town hall employees and the men from the village forcibly seize her and force her to put her fingerprint on the marriage certificate. Nanyuma tells them she does not believe in this charade. Bala tries to take Nanyuma by force. Nanyuma pulls out a knife from under her mattress and threatens to kill him if he dares approach her. Bala begs Nanyuma and tells her that his love for her is driving him mad.

Jigi's plan

Nanyuma's son Jigi, and his playmates are planning a wicked surprise for Bala. They want to punish him with the recipe their grandparents used against the colonizers and their armies of collaborators. The children decide to put a very hot pepper in Bala's drink, which will inflict chronic diarrhea on him. They mix the hot pepper with Bala's alcohol and put the gourd back where they found it. The children watch for Bala's arrival. Bala fetches his gourd and starts drinking. The children position themselves in the surrounding trees and call to him, imitating spectral voices. Bala is seized with fear. The voices predict that Bala will suffer from severe diarrhea tonight if he bothers Nanyuma. Bala runs away, weeping. Bala decides to defy "the voices" and take Nanyuma by force at gunpoint. The voices' prediction comes true. Bala suffers from severe diarrhea, which sends him rushing to the bathroom. Bala spends the whole night in the toilet. Bala returns for his gourd of alcohol, this time with his rifle. He is determined to shoot the spirits that torment him. Bala summons the spirits and aims his gun at the tree foliage from where their voices came. The ghostly voices order Bala to lower his rifle. The children come down from the trees, dressed in the costumes of mystical Bambara rituals. Bala asks them not to hurt him. The children order Bala to stop chasing Nanyuma or he will die from their wrath.



The commissioner and the chief

The new commissioner, dressed in a three-piece suit, arrives in the village escorted by two soldiers. He speaks in French and orders the village chief to be brought to him. The villagers ignore him. He gets angry. The village chief tells the commissioner that he has no manners to come and give them orders, and in French of all languages. The village chief tells the commissioner to get to the point, and to speak Bambara. The commissioner explains to the villagers that they will have to supply the government with two tons of millet at the price set by the government. The villagers take offence at the fact that the government treats them with contempt, fixing the quantity of grain to be supplied as well as the selling price. The commissioner vows to make the villagers pay for the humiliation they have inflicted on him. Men come running to announce that the village chief has just been arrested by the commissioner. The villagers, men and women alike, mobilize with weapons and clubs. But one villager proposes that they march to the police station non-violently. The villagers demand the release of their chief. The commissioner demands that the grain be delivered to him first. The villagers refuse and stage a sit-in in front of the police station. The commissioner tries to send a messenger for reinforcements, but the villagers prevent him from leaving. Villagers from surrounding hamlets join the demonstrators. One of the commissioner's guards advises the commissioner to release the chief to avoid the worst, and the commissioner complies. A village party is organized to celebrate the event.



Fiji is not circumcised

Fili takes a shower with Saran, a young woman with whom Fili has been friends since her arrival from the city. Fili reveals to Saran that she has not been excised, and that her clitoris makes her a whole woman. Saran is surprised that Fili has never been excised. Nanyuma hears Fili and Saran laughing in the shower. Nanyuma asks Fili what they were laughing about. Fili explains that she was showing Saran her clitoris. Nanyuma is scandalized by Fili's non-excised condition. Nanyuma tells Fili that she made a big mistake confiding in Saran. Nanyuma advises Fili to not trust Saran. Rumors of Fili's "anomaly" reach the ears of Segi, dubbed "White man", a young man from the village living in France, who, while on vacation in the village, met Fili, and hoped to marry her and take her to France with him. "White Man" runs to tell his father and the men's assembly what he has learned from Saran about Fili. Fili explains to Nanyuma that the clitoris is an integral part of a woman's body, like her tongue, which has its own function and must be preserved. Nanyuma is shocked and tells her that, on the contrary, the clitoris is a dirty organ that a woman should get rid of. Fili's uncle summons the women of the village. He tells them that he is disturbed by what he has heard about his niece, and he asks them to verify the credibility of the information. The excising woman takes Fili into the bathroom to check her condition. She returns to confirm to Fili's uncle that Fili is indeed not excised. She adds that she has never seen such a monstrosity in her life as a woman. Fili explains to her uncle and the women that when she was born, her mother died of hemorrhage because she



was hemophiliac. The doctor told her father not to excise her, as she might suffer the same fate as her mother. The uncle takes offense. Fili tells him that the clitoris is her body and that she feels comfortable with it. The uncle goes after her and promises to kill her if she repeats this abomination. Fili explains that in town, women are mobilizing against the practice of excision, which kills many women. The village women tell Fili that women in the city are nothing but bimbos busy adorning themselves with expensive jewelry. The women and children of the village mock and insult Fili whenever they see her. Nanyuma tries to protect Fili from her detractors.

Chief is a traditionalist Some of the village women come to plead with the chief to let Nanyuma choose the man she loves, and also to allow Fili to keep her clitoris. Fili, they say, has taught them a lot about the risks associated with excision. The chief replies that Nanyuma's case depends on her late husband's family. He tells the women that as far as Fili is concerned, he will never tolerate a non-excised woman in his village. He insists that excision is one of the cornerstones of tradition. Fili asks Segi (White Man) if he really loves her. Segi replies that he loves her, but he cannot marry her because she's not excised, and in France, the other migrants and their wives would laugh at him. She tells him that this has not stopped him from sleeping with her. She tells him that at least she will not be marrying an idiot like him. Segi starts sobbing. Fili's uncle demands that she be excised. Fili replies that he has no right on her body. The uncle orders Fili to be restrained and forcibly excised. The operation goes badly. Fili bleeds profusely. The excising women panic. Warned of what the village is preparing to do to his daughter, Fili's father arrives at the village in a hurry, but it is too late: his daughter, a hemophiliac, has just suffered the excising women's blade. Fili's father carries his daughter in his car and drives her to hospital, vowing to make the villagers pay if his daughter dies.



Nanyuma frees herself Nanyuma takes her children and leaves the village. Bala pursues her, begging her to stay with her. But Nanyuma's lover, Bengali, cuts Bala off at knifepoint. Nanyuma leaves, pointing out the injustice of the world against women, who produce the world's wealth but have no right to enjoy it.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

NANYUMA Nanyuma is a rebellious woman, empathetic towards Fili, and determined to regain her freedom. Twice, Nanyuma tries to escape from the village but is brought back to Bala, to whom she is forcibly married. She is repulsed by Bala. She is insubordinate against tradition, and she leaves the village defiantly.

Rebellious While Bambara custom demands that Nanyuma play the role of a grieving wife on the death of her husband, Nanyuma refuses to mourn her husband's death. In fact, during his dying moments, she carries on with her housework as if nothing had happened, while her two co-wives engage in a demonstration of crying and lamentations. Nanyuma also refuses to marry Bala, her late husband's younger brother. This is Nanyuma's rebellion against a system that has enslaved her for the nine years she has remained married to her late husband against her will.

Empathic In the village, where she becomes an outcast because she is not excised, Fili finds support in her aunt Nanyuma, who becomes her confidante and advisor. Nanyuma protects Fili from the mockery of children and women who insult her as she passes. Nanyuma advises Fili to flee the village to escape forced excision, but the young woman's stubbornness gets the better of her.

Determined Nanyuma was unable to marry Bengali, the love of her life. However, with the death of the man she was forced to marry, Nanyuma promises Bengali that she will regain her freedom from a second forced marriage and reunite with him. To this end, Nanyuma takes refuge in her father's village but is forcibly returned to Bala. She flees a second time in the middle of the night, rubbing herself with shea butter and dust to elude the wild animals of the savannah. She arrives at the home of her brother-in-law, who refuses to protect her and sends her back to the village. She is forced into marriage with Bala but refuses to sleep with him and threatens him with a knife. In the end, she leaves the village openly, hiding from no one, while Bala follows, imploring her to stay.

BALA Bala is an undignified, violent drunkard. His whining as he follows Nanyuma disgusts his two wives, who laugh at him. When Nanyuma refuses him, Bala threatens her with his gun. Bala also tries to kill Nanyuma's lover Bengali, whom he accuses of stealing Nanyuma's love.

Disgraced Bala is a drunkard and a simpleton. The village children ridicule him. The village chief admits that Bala isn't very bright. While the village is mourning the death of Bala's brother, Bala is all smile, thinking about Nanyuma becoming his wife soon. While the village is having an important meeting with the commissioner, Bala comes whimpering, interrupting the gathering, because Nanyuma has escaped. The villagers laugh at Bala's antics and his obsession with Nanyuma, and his wives mock him for the lack of dignity he displays while impatiently awaiting Nanyuma's arrival.

Violent Bala has convinced himself that Nanyuma is his wife from the moment the chief approved his marriage to her. He considers that he has a husband's right over her, especially the right to sleep with her, whether she likes it or not. Bala tries to take Nanyuma by force. When the Nanyuma refuses, Bala pulls out his gun and threatens her. Caught with chronic diarrhea, and forced to run to the bathroom, Bala abandons his plan. However, believing that Nanyuma is refusing because she loves Bengali, Bala ambushes Bengali and shoots at him with his rifle, but misses.

FILI Fili is a rebellious young woman who supports Nanyuma's fight for freedom. Fili is, nevertheless, a naive young woman. Convinced that gentle persuasion will dissuade the villagers from excising her, she ignores Nanyuma's advice to seek shelter. Her naivety delivers her to the violence of excision.

Rebellious Fili rebels against her father when he has Nanyuma tied up and sent back to the village. She rebels against her uncle, who wants to have her excised by force, claiming that her body belongs to her alone, and only she can decide what to do with it. She also rebels against the village excising women when they come looking for her to excise her. However, she is alone against everyone and ends up suffering the violence of the excising women's blade.

Supportive Fili is an important support for Nanyuma. When Nanyuma, who was seeking refuge and comfort in the city with Fili's father, is sent back to the village by him, Fili does not approve of her father's decision and shows this by her defiant stance. Fili's opposition leads her father to send her back to the village. In the village, Fili and Nanyuma, whose opposition to tradition makes them outcasts, support each other and become mutual confidantes and advisors.

Naive Fili makes several naive mistakes. She is naive enough to show her intact clitoris to a village girl in the shower. When the girl to whom she has confided her secret leaks Fili's condition, the whole village is outraged and determined to "rectify" Fili's abnormality. While Nanyuma advises Fili to flee to her father, who has always protected her from excision because of her hemophilia, Fili decides to stay and reason with the villagers, believing she can change their minds. Fili's naivety leads her to tragedy.

THE VILLAGE CHIEF The village chief is a traditional, rebarbative and authoritarian figure. He runs the village and speaks of it as his private property. He rejects any opinion contrary to his own, and especially any voice that dares to suggest equal rights for men and women.

Narrow-minded The village chief is a narrow-minded character. He tells his *griot* (oral historian) that women are naturally predisposed to be governed, not to be rulers. He says that women lack the intelligence and determination of men. When his *griot* tells him that human history is full of examples of kingdoms that were ruled by women, the chief replies that these are myths, and that no such kingdoms have ever existed.

Authoritarian The village chief considers himself the absolute master of his village. When the women intercede with him to allow Fili to keep her clitoris, the chief replies that he will not allow any unexcised women into his village. He orders the young men of the village to restrain Fili, who tries to flee, and he orders the women to excise Fili as quickly as possible, exposing the young woman with hemophilia to the prospect of death.

Traditionalist The village chief maintains that his governance is based on traditional Bambara foundations. He maintains that no Bambara oral history has left traces of the equality of women and men, and that things will not change under his management of the village. For him, the traditions of widow remarriage to the brother-in-law and female circumcision, if challenged, would destabilize Bambara society.

THEMES

Patriarchy With *Finzan*, Sissoko makes a parody of patriarchy. Bala is a drunk and an idiot. Even his six-year-old nephew and the village chief recognize it. The village chief confides in the *griot* and in some of the women that Bala's request to marry Nanyuma troubles him. However, Bala is a man. And no matter how mentally ineffective Bala is, what matters first is that he is a man, and as such he is entitled to the prerogative attached to his gender in a society designed to give men power over women. However, Bala's antics, his drunkenness, the ease with which the village children ridicule him, his inability to control Nanyuma, who is supposed to be his chattel, are pointers of patriarchy's inefficiency. That the village chief himself has allowed a man as deficient as Bala to arrogate to himself rights over a woman as intelligent and hard-working as Nanyuma, on the sole basis that Bala is a man, is indicative of the chief's lack of discernment, and therefore of patriarchy's failure. This lack of discernment of patriarchy can also be seen in Fili's father, who is supposed to be the fundamental protector of his family and yet sends his daughter to be mutilated in a village where he knows full well that the inflexible tradition of excision is a danger to his hemophiliac daughter.

Tradition Traditionally, Bambara women have no right to choose their spouses. Their husbands are imposed on them by the men in their families, mainly their fathers. Upon her husband's death, the widow is given in marriage to one of her deceased husband's brothers. The widow can only aspire to marry a man of her choice if her late husband's brother refuses to take her as his wife, and if her father subsequently gives her the freedom of choice. Nanyuma did not have such luck. Thus, Nanyuma, who had hoped that her husband's death would free her and allow her to marry Bengali, the man she has always loved, is denied this happiness and assigned to Bala, her dead husband's youngest brother. As a woman, Nanyuma is considered an eternal minor whose major decisions must be made for her by male guardians. From childhood, women are marked as the property of men by clitoridectomy, an operation designed to eliminate sexual pleasure in women, which is the sole prerogative of men. Clitoridectomy has serious health risks associated with it. Many women die every year from complications associated with this operation. Fili, who suffers from hemophilia, bathes in a pool of blood after a dangerous operation to satisfy the ego of the Bambara man. From Sissoko's perspective, this Bambara man is a caricature. The village chief, the commissioner, Segi (White Man), and Nanyuma's brother-in-law are representative figures of that man. The village chief is antiquated and stuck in tradition. Segi and Fili's father are grotesquely ambivalent between tradition and modernity. The commissioner is totally alienated from his tradition.

Gender *Finzan* stages the confrontation between reason and unreason, and the film makes it plain that sanity is male and insanity is female. Not only is woman irrational, but her proximity with sane men is likely to turn them into irrational beings. Bala, the youngest brother of Nanyuma's deceased husband wants to take Nanyuma as his third wife. Bala's excitement is extreme as he waits for the formalities to be completed so that he can have Nanyuma in his bed. For the village chief and the deceased's friends, it is Nanyuma's natural, feminine malevolence that has rendered Bala irrational. Women, the village chief tells his *griot*, do not have the intellectual acumen of men. However, women are naturally endowed with the power to do evil, and particularly to make men crazy, and Nanyuma is using it against Bala. She is, therefore, like most women, a monster that must be tamed lest she should destabilise Bambara society. Thus, all available means of control, whether persuasive or violent, are used to restore Nanyuma to cultural normalcy.

Power relations *Finzan* denounces the abuse of state and family powers. The Malian government, through the commissioner, demands sacks of grain from the peasant population at the price set by the government. The farmers retort that their meagre harvests are barely enough to feed them, and that even if they had grain to sell, they should be the ones setting the prices. Indeed, Mali's agricultural sector, which employs over 80% of the country's working population, feeds its participants poorly. Farmers are kept in poverty by systemic abuse on the part of state actors, who buy farmers' produce at rock-bottom prices, only to resell it at huge profits. In *Finzan*, the farmers refuse to comply, and their leader is arrested and imprisoned by the commissioner. This government method is reminiscent of the requisitioning methods of the colonial administration, already denounced by filmmakers like Sembène in *Emittai* (1971). Here, Sissoko is criticizing his country's government, which he compares to a colonial repressive force, his way of saying that little has changed for the population since Mali gained independence. The colonial master has been replaced by a local master who is equally unscrupulous.

Injustice To the general injustice perpetrated against the population by their rulers is added another layer of injustice, the one committed against women by men. The filmmaker denounces the injustice directed against women through expressive metaphors (a tethered donkey in labor; a billy goat in heat chasing a tethered female goat, whose only escape is to run in circles; a lamb suckling its mother with violent thrusts), as well as Nanyuma's last words at the end of the film, when she leaves the village for good: "This world comes from our wombs, and it mistreats us. We give life, and we are not allowed to live. We produce the food, and others eat without us. We create wealth, and it is used against us." Nothing could be truer in the Malian context, where women, whose human rights are trampled underfoot, are almost like beasts of burden dedicated to the reproduction of the species and to chores. Nanyuma's little girl rebels against the way men treat women. The six- or seven-year-old calls her grandfather a shameless bully and her mother and grandmother cowards for accepting their treatment as slaves. *Finzan*, which Sissoko dedicated to the African women, is a heartfelt cry for equal rights for women.

Rebellion The villagers stand up against the injunction of the commissioner (a representative of the abusive state) to supply the state with sacks of millet at a derisory price set by the government. Just as the commissioner, accompanied by his armed guards, is engaged in a verbal confrontation with the villagers, Bala arrives, announcing in a panic that Nanyuma, who had been brought back from her father's village, where she had taken refuge, has escaped again. The village chief interrupts the meeting with the commissioner and sends the men of the village in search of the rebel. Nanyuma, who thought she had found shelter and comfort with her brother-in-law, is brought back, tied up, to the village of Bala. Nanyuma's nephew rebels and threatens his father with a club for his treatment of Nanyuma. Offended, Nanyuma's brother-in-law not only sends Nanyuma back to the village, but also his own daughter, Fili, whom he accuses of leading an inappropriate lifestyle in town. The village no longer has just one rebel, Nanyuma, to contend with, but also Fili, the non-excised girl, who proclaims loud and clear that her body belongs to her alone, and that she will not allow anyone to arrogate to themselves the right to mutilate her. Alone against the whole village, Fili is neutralized and her rebellion against tradition is quickly contained. She is forcibly excised. While Fili, the hemophilic girl, bleeds to death, Nanyuma, this time without hiding herself, defiantly leaves the village.

Marriage The history of Mali from the 11th to 13th century teaches that the first marriages were structured around occupational specializations. To protect both the secrets of their trades, as well as the wealth that these trades generated, members of the same occupational specializations would only marry amongst themselves. Over time, as occupational specializations democratized, protecting family wealth took precedence over safeguarding specialization, and inter-family marriage became the order of the day. The widow's remarriage to the brother of the deceased falls into this latter logic. The injunction for Nanyuma to marry Bala is part of the logic of preserving the family heritage, to prevent it from scattering and thus dissolving. Nanyuma is a young, hard-working woman, an asset, whom her late husband's family would benefit from keeping in the family. However, according to traditional wisdom, while a woman is an asset to be preserved in the family through marriage, her anatomy predisposes her to wandering and promiscuity. For a woman to be worthy of marriage, that is, retrained and loyal, her anatomy must be tamed by removing her pleasure center; hence clitoridectomy. By keeping her clitoris, Fili makes herself unmarriageable (her boyfriend, Segi, tells her that as much as he loves her and derives pleasure from their sexual encounters, he cannot marry her because he will be the laughingstock of his friends); worse, Fili makes a mockery of the institution of marriage, which is sacred in Bambara country. Fili and Nanyuma are therefore the monsters to be restored to Bambara society, one by excision and the other by forced remarriage to her late husband's brother.

Solidarity vs betrayal The Bambara woman is betrayed not only by her man, but also by her sister. Men have carved out a place for themselves in Bambara society at the expense of women, and men stick together to preserve it. Here, women are the slaves of men, who dispose of them as they please, marrying and remarrying them regardless of their opinion, and putting them to work to build up their own personal wealth. When men are in trouble, all the forces of the tribe are mobilized, whether male or female. So when the village chief is arrested, the whole village - men, women and children - organize a sit-in protest until he is released. The solidarity that women show towards men is returned to them through betrayal. Instead of supporting the women when they need comfort, the men become their tormentors, further exacerbating the women's suffering. The men mobilize to bring Nanyuma back to Bala whenever she escapes from him. The men also insist that the women, who support them and produce many of the resources that make them

successful men, be beaten and mutilated. The worst betrayal comes when the men convince the women to join them in their efforts to oppress women. So, for example, aided by the men who seize Fili, when the young woman tries to flee, the women mutilate their fellow woman to the satisfaction of the men.

Change The Bambara, an ethnic group from West Africa spread across Mali, Senegal, Guinea and Burkina Faso, are proud of their ancestral customs. Although resistant to change, Bambara society is in the throes of transformation. But it is above all through the young that the filmmaker announces this change. Nanyuma's daughter, on the one hand, calls her grandmother and mother cowards for accepting bad treatment from men; and, on the other hand, she calls her grandfather disgraceful and shameful for his treatment of women. She also announces that things will not be the same with her generation. And for this little girl, Fili, who reclaims the fullness of her body, of which her clitoris is an essential part, and Fili's younger brother, who raises a club against his father to oppose the humiliating treatment inflicted on Nanyuma, have begun to lay the foundations for this change. Nanyuma, Fili, and Fili's younger brother, are the bridge on which the child will walk towards a future more respectful of women's rights. And this future, as Sissoko clearly shows, will be built through solidarity between men and women, a solidarity that until now has unfortunately only existed when it comes to mobilizing in support on behalf of men.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can you explain the title of the film?
2. Intrafamilial marriages are marriages between people of the same immediate or extended family. Why do some societies practice them?
3. Why do most societies avoid intrafamilial marriages?
4. Clitoridectomy can fall under the category of body mutilation or modification. Do you know other forms of culturally encouraged body mutilation or transformation? What are they? What are their purposes?
5. What does Fili mean when she says that her body belongs to her?
6. Why do men in some societies believe they own women's bodies?
7. Whether we are men or women, is the argument that our bodies belong to us always valid? Explain with examples.
8. Imagine what happens to Nanyuma and Fili next.