

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, PhD

Lumière noire/Black Light (1994)

Med Hondo (1935-2019)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Med Hondo, whose real name was Mohamed Abid, was born on May 4, 1935, in Ain Beni Mathar (Morocco). Hondo was born of Mauritanian and Senegalese parents. His mother was from a Mauritanian slave caste (the Haratin ethnic group). After some culinary studies in Morocco, Med Hondo went to France in 1956, where he did several jobs, as a cook, a dockworker, and a farmhand. Hondo studied theater in Marseilles and later went to Paris, where he appeared in several classic plays by Molière, Racine and Shakespeare. In 1966, with a few friends from Africa and the Caribbeans, Hondo founded the Griot-Shango theatrical group to feature works from African and Caribbean playwrights. Hondo has produced several documentaries and five features, including *Oh, Sun* (1969), *West Indies* (1979), *Sarraounia* (1986), *Black Light* (1994), and *Fatima, the Algerian Woman of Dakar* (2004). Hondo did the French voice on screen of actors like Sidney Poitier, Eddy Murphy, Danny Glover, Muhammad Ali and Morgan Freeman. Med Hondo died in Paris on March 2, 2019.

Film *Black Light* is a film about a police mistake that, when covered up, turns into carnage. Here, Med Hondo not only criticizes police violence, he also criticizes the abuse of power, injustice, racism, the failings of globalization, discrimination and communitarianism, all of which undermine French society. This film was selected for the 2022 Vienna Film Festival.

Background *Black Light* is an adaptation of the detective novel of the same title, published in 1987, by French novelist Didier Daeninckx. For this film, Hondo collaborated with Daeninckx for six years, both for the adaptation and in the search for the film's production budget. The shooting of the film, which was expected to take place on the grounds of Roissy Airport in France, did not receive the approval of the Roissy airport authorities. Instead, it took place at the Palais des Congrès, where certain areas of the airport were reproduced, and to which were added images of the Roissy runways filmed clandestinely. The film was shot in France and Mali. The languages spoken in the film are French and Bambara (a Malian language).

MAIN CHARACTERS

Yves Guyot (Patrick Poivey): a French engineer murdered for his determination to shed light on the circumstances surrounding the death of his friend

Commissioner Londrin (Charlie Bauer): A French detective nearing retirement who is executed by his police colleagues

Judge Berthier (Roland Bertin): A corrupt judge in charge of the investigation into Yves's death

SYNOPSIS

In the early 1990s, France is under terrorist threat, and the French authorities are pompously declaring war on the terrorists to appease the population: "We're going to wipe out the terrorists," declares the Minister of the Interior on the television. To this end, the police are put on alert, setting up roadblocks in Paris and searching vehicles and passers-by. One evening, Yves Guyot and his friend Gérard Blanc come across one of these roadblocks in the vicinity of Roissy Airport. Their car has only one headlight, and two feverish policemen on the sidewalk shoot at them before they have time to stop. Gérard, the driver, is killed in the ambush. The two policemen claim self-defense, a version supported by the press and the judge in charge of the case. However, Yves, who survived the incident and intends to set the record straight, travels to Mali in search of the only eyewitness, an illegal immigrant who, from the balcony of the hotel where he was kept with other immigrants before their deportation to Mali, saw the whole scene. Yves records the witness's testimony before the witness is murdered. Back in France, Yves is in turn murdered in his laboratory. To

further cover up the case, the same judge in charge of the investigation into Gérard's death entrusts the investigation into Yves's death to Londrin, a police officer nearing retirement and from whom he expects little enthusiasm. Contrary to the judge's expectations, Londrin takes his investigation seriously and begins to uncover embarrassing evidence implicating not only the two policemen, but a whole network of unethical cops protected by the code of silence and the higher authorities of the Ministry of the Interior. At the end of the film, the police systematically eliminate Londrin and all the witnesses who have helped him trace the network of corruption.

SCENES

Reconstruction It is night in the vicinity of Roissy airport in Paris. In front of journalists' cameras, a judge, accompanied by detectives from the Paris police, attempts an on-site reconstruction of the scene of a police blunder that took place days earlier. A journalist asks the judge if this is another case of self-defense between the police and the victim. The judge replies that everything points to it. Yves Guyot, the survivor of the police blunder who lost his friend in the accident, shouts at the judge, who refuses to take his testimony, that the reconstruction does not conform to what really happened.



It's all a lie Guyot claims he had a front-row seat to the action as a passenger in the car. He says that, contrary to the reconstruction, the driver did not refuse to obey, and that he was driving normally when police officers on the side of the road fired at them, killing his friend Gérard Blanc. Yves Guyot says that what the newspapers have written is totally untrue. Londrin, a detective, points out to the judge that Yves seems unhappy with the reconstruction. The judge retorts that Yves is certainly trying to cover up for his friend and get out of an undesirable situation at the same time. The judge adds that he has his own reliable clues, official statements from two police officers, which contradict Yves Guyot's version. Londrin warns the judge to be careful, because police officers sometimes lie. The judge insists that, unlike Yves, who has a lot of dirt on him, the two policemen have impeccable administrative records.

Yves relives the scene Alone in his bedroom, Yves Guyot relives the scene that led to his friend's death. He sees police officers approaching his friend's car and asking them both to stay put. He sees himself trying to revive his friend who has been shot by the police. He sees himself being knocked unconscious by a policeman with a rifle butt to the back of the neck.



The police at Yves's There is a knock at the door. Yves opens it. It is the police. They push him around and enter his apartment. The police ask Yves to follow them to the prefecture, as they have some questions for him. Yves is taken to Commissioner Darqué. The commissioner informs Yves that he is part of the police force, and that he is conducting an investigation parallel to the official one. He tells Yves that his investigation will allow him to file a report on the two cops involved in the death of Yves's friend. Yves tells Darqué that no one seems to care about his testimony, and that the investigators have already concluded that his friend is guilty. Darqué asks Yves to trust his independence. Yves agrees to confide in Darqué. Yves Guyot explains that his friend and neighbor, Gérard Blanc, was driving, and he was on the passenger seat, when the police suddenly shot at them without warning. Darqué retorts that according to the two cops, Guyot and Gérard were driving with no headlights, the driver refused to stop at a police roadblock, and he had his hand out of the window in a threatening way, and they fired in self-defense. Yves will not corroborate the police's version. Yves Guyot gets upset



and screams that there was never a roadblock. He says that he knows that it is his word against those of two cops, and that the investigators will cover for the cops. Darqué asks Guyot if he will sign the police report produced by the cops. Guyot refuses. Darqué blackmails Yves. Darqué restrains Yves Guyot in a headlock. He threatens Yves to reveal to Air France, his employer, that he has a past as a prisoner which he did not reveal to them when he was being hired by the company. Yves gives in.

We will terrorize the terrorists Yves Guyot returns home to his wife, Ghislaine. Ghislaine notices that Yves looks tired and offers to make him a cup of coffee. The TV announces the fifteenth terrorist attack in Paris in less than two months. The French Interior minister promise to terrorize the terrorists wherever they may be hiding.



Yves confides in Ghislaine Yves confesses to his wife that he is being blackmailed by the police, who threaten to reveal his criminal past if he does not sign a false statement incriminating his friend Gérard. Yves reveals to his wife that he committed a petty theft crime for which he was jailed for three years. Yves is told to leave the house. Ghislaine replies that she loves him and does not hold his past against him. She is outraged by the police's behavior and tells Yves she hopes he has not given in to it. Yves confesses that he has betrayed Gérard. Ghislaine tells Yves that she is disappointed by his cowardice towards Gérard, who also helped her overcome her drug addiction. Ghislaine tells Yves she no longer wants to see him. And asks him to leave the house. Yves leaves the house. Yves pleads with his wife that he did it to protect his job; that he has nothing left if he loses his job. Ghislaine replies that he weighed his job against his best friend's life and chose his job. She insists she no longer wants to see him. Yves takes a bag of personal belongings and heads for Roissy airport. The radio in his car announces another deadly terrorist attack.



Police controls around Airport The police set up roadblocks around Roissy airport and search all the cars. Yves is searched by a policeman who courteously asks him to open his bag. All the black people around the airport are under suspicion, stopped aggressively and searched. When the police ask where he is going, Yves replies that he is going to Zagreb. Yves is stalked In the terminal, Yves buys a newspaper and sits down at a table in a café.



A stranger sits down next to him. The stranger tells Yves that he works for Inspector Darqué, who has asked him to watch Yves' movements. The stranger reveals to Yves that a French couple living in Australia and transiting through Roissy declared to the French Embassy in Canberra that they had seen the entire scene of Gérard's murder from the balcony of room 715 of the Artelle hotel where they were staying in Paris. Their version of events corroborates that of the police, and that Yves should stop snooping.

Yves rents a room at the hotel. Yves goes to the Artelle Hotel and asks to rent room 715. The concierge tells him that the room is not available and offers him room 615, which is just below. Yves takes it under a false name. Yves stands on the balcony of his room. It gives him an unobstructed view of the street where his friend died at the hands of the cops. Yves snoops around. Yves takes the elevator to the 7th floor, but an employee tells him that the elevator only stops at the sixth floor. Yves takes the stairs, but the door to the 7th floor is locked. Yves goes back to the concierge for an explanation. The concierge tells him that the entire 7th floor is closed for renovation. The next day Yves discreetly slips the concierge some money. Yves wants to know about the 7th floor. The concierge tells him that the police use the entire 7th floor to round up illegal immigrants, usually blacks and Arabs, before deporting them to their countries of origin. The concierge informs Yves that on the night of the 5th/ 6th, the night Gérard died, the 7th was full of Malians. Yves thanks him for the information and leaves.



The underground world of migrants Yves calls the Malian embassy in Paris. The offices aren't open yet, and the custodian answers. Yves tells him he wants information on repatriated migrants. The custodian whispers that most of the migrants have been picked up north of Paris. The custodian gives Yves an address in a restaurant where he is advised to speak to a man named Fofana whose cousin, Babemba, is one of the deportees. Yves goes to the address where Fofana lives. Fofana is not there, but Yves is advised to go and see Handyman, a Malian radio repairman, who tells him where to find Fofana. Yves finds Fofana in a makeshift Malian market set up in a courtyard. Yves explains to Fofana that he wants to go to Bamako to meet Babemba. Fofana invites Yves to his house for a cup of tea and gives him information on how and where to find Babemba. Fofana tells him not to make trouble for Babemba, who is already traumatized enough.



Yves in Mali Yves explains to one of his colleagues that he must urgently travel to Mali incognito. Yves gets a false identity from his colleague and manages to land in Bamako, Mali. Yves goes to see Babemba's relatives. Babemba tells Yves what he experienced on the night of the 5th/6th. Babemba recounts how, in chains, the group of migrants he was part of was loaded onto a bus and taken to a hotel, through the back door, near the airport. Babemba says he saw nothing, but on the plane back to Mali, one of the migrants, Boudjougou, who now works in a hotel in Timbuktu, mentioned hearing gunshots and seeing police cars through the window of the Artelle hotel. The next day, Yves hires a bush taxi to go and see Boudjougou in Timbuktu. The driver plays French music. Yves asks him to put on an African tape. Yves rummages through the driver's collection and pulls out a tape of Malian music, which he hands to the driver. The taxicab breaks down. The driver stops for repairs. Yves gets impatient. To kill time, Yves takes a stroll along the banks of the Niger River. Young Malian women flirt with him. Yves arrives in Timbuktu. He goes to the hotel and asks to see Boudjougou. The hotel concierge tells him that Boudjougou has gone to work in a hotel in Gao, 400 kilometers from Timbuktu. Yves and his driver have to take the ferry across the river. The ferryman is in no mood to work. Yves gives him some money, and he takes them across. On their way to Gao, the cab passes through a village littered with scrap metal. The driver explains to Yves that this is the waste brought to the Sahel countries by the Paris-Dakar Rally. In Gao, Yves learns that Boudjougou has gone to guide a Dutch hunter in the dunes. Yves and his driver track them for hours, finally spotting their lit tents glowing in the dark. Yves and his driver approach cautiously. Yves takes out his portable tape recorder to record any possible conversation, but he cannot find a cassette. The driver offers him his music cassette, which still has some unrecorded space on the second side.



Boudjougou is killed Yves meets Boudjougou. The two men walk towards the tents. The Dutch hunter is actually a butterfly hunter. He complains that there are all kinds of animals in Africa, except butterflies. Yves finally meets Boudjougou. He tells him that he has come from France to see him. Yves tells Boudjougou that he would like to hear what he saw the night of his friend's death. Boudjougou tells Yves that other migrants and he were packed in rooms 715 and 717. The air was suffocating, so he went onto the balcony to get some fresh air. He then heard some gunshots and saw a car zigzag and run into a light pole and stop. While Yves is recording Boudjougou's testimony, military vehicles rush in and destroy the tents. The soldiers ransack everything, set fire to the camp and leave. The next day, Malian newspapers reported that the butterfly hunter and his driver were in a serious accident, and that the Malian driver had died. A man spies on Yves on his way back to France.



Yves's tape is seized The cassette on which Yves recorded his interview with Boudjougou is seized by a customs officer at the airport. It bears the title of a song banned in Mali. Yves tries to bribe the customs officer. The customs officer gets angry and threatens to have Yves arrested.



Yves returns to Paris He calls his wife. She tells him to be careful, and that their phone line is being tapped by the police. A man spies on Yves' every move. He overhears Yves telling his wife that in Africa he spoke to a witness who could demolish the police version. Ghislaine tells Yves that the newspapers have reported that Gérard was involved in a plot to steal a large shipment of Gold. The papers say that Gérard's role was to supply the burglars with airport worker uniforms for the operation. Yves replies that he does



not believe a word of the story.

Darqué awaits Yves Yves goes to his hotel. Inspector Darqué is waiting for him in his room there. The inspector tells Yves that he knows he was in Mali. He asks Yves to forget about Gérard, and that Gérard was a bad seed. Yves tells Inspector Darqué that he has recorded statements from a witness who saw what happened.



Yves is killed Yves goes to his holography laboratory. While he is working there, a man creeps up behind him and strangles him with a wire. Judge Berthier asks Inspector Londrin to investigate Yves' death. The judge tells Londrin that 10 strangulations of the same kind have taken place in the last ten years without any conclusive result.

Londrin investigates Yves death Londrin carries out his investigations. He questions Yves's wife Ghislaine. She tells him she has no details of Yves' trip, except that he told her he had interviewed an important witness who had contradicted the police version. Ghislaine tells Londrin that she felt Yves was worried and hounded, as he changed phone booths every 60 seconds to talk to her. Londrin wants to question Ghislaine's brother, Jean-Pierre, whose car Gérard was driving on the night of the incident. Londrin goes to the cinema where Ghislaine's brother works. Numerous American and French film posters are on display. A turbaned Muslim custodian tries to clean a movie poster featuring a nude woman while covering his eyes. Londrin asks to inspect Jean-Pierre's car. Londrin turns on the headlights, which work fine. Londrin notices that the car has a brand-new lightbulb and asks Jean-Pierre if he replaced the bulb lately. Jean-Pierre says he has not done any repairs to the car recently and was even planning to get rid of it because it reminds him of the death of his friend Gérard.



Londrin speaks to an old colleague Londrin questions a colleague of Yves, who reveals that Yves had just returned from Mali a few days before his death. In a bar, Londrin runs into a drunk former policeman, Cadin. Londrin tells him he is investigating Yves's death. Cadin reveals to Londrin that the Artelle Hotel, where Yves had stayed before his trip to Mali, had been used to round up Malian immigrants awaiting repatriation. Cadin tells Londrin that this should give him a serious lead in his investigation. Cadin suggests that Londrin get in touch with a secret investigation police agent named Dalbois. Cadin leaves Londrin with the bill for his drink for the information he provided.

A hologram can reveal a lot Londrin pays Dalbois a visit. Dalbois is passionate about robots. He lives in a big house with the automatons he has created. Londrin learns from Dalbois that examining photos taken with a hologram can reveal images like visual echoes of whatever is happening behind the camera; for example, an image of the person taking the photo. Londrin returns to Yves' colleague Eddie. He asks him if he can have access to the hologram Yves was making at the time of his murder. Eddie gives the hologram to Londrin.



Judge Berthier destroys the evidence Judge Berthier summons Londrin to see how the investigation is progressing. Inadvertently, the judge reveals to Londrin that he knows Yves was in Mali. Londrin begins to distrust Berthier. Londrin hands Judge Berthier a hologram. He tells the judge that this hologram, if viewed with a laser beam, will reveal the face of Yves' killer. The judge asks



if he has ever seen it. Londrin replies that he has not. The judge takes a pair of scissors from his drawer and cuts the hologram into small pieces.

Londrin perseveres Londrin takes one of the pieces of the hologram and tells the judge that the smallest piece of this hologram bears the imprint of the whole hologram. Londrin adds that the probability of the hologram carrying the assassin's visual echo of what is happening behind the camera is infinitesimal. However, if there is a chance of this happening, the piece in his hand will be enough to tell who Yves' killer is.

An unethical journalist Londrin meets the journalist who published the article corroborating the police version of Yves' death. Londrin accuses him of having let himself be manipulated by the police and of having, in turn, manipulated public opinion. Londrin vows to the journalist that he will never be bought and manipulated.



The Minister of the Interior is impatient The minister asks how Berthier is handling the investigation. His assistant informs him that the operations are being criticized by some press outlets for the damage they cause to democracy. The Minister replies that *raison d'Etat* takes precedence over democracy.

Londrin is eliminated Londrin asks the journalist to take him to the so-called witness who fed him the police version of the story. Londrin confronts the witness in his hideout. A SWAT team breaks in and kills the witness, the journalist, and Londrin.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

YVES Yves is a persevering, sociable character who never hesitates to use bribery to achieve his goals. While his affability opens doors, his tendency to always corrupt his way out of difficulty nearly leads him to be arrested in Mali.

Persevering Yves is a resourceful character. He sees that the murder of his friend Gérard by two policemen is misrepresented in the press as a case of self-defense. So he decides to conduct his own investigation to confound the journalists, public opinion and the examining magistrate, whom he had thought to be honest. To do this, he evades the surveillance of the French police, who are tailing him, and travels to Mali, a journey fraught with culture shocks and pitfalls, where he succeeds in recording the testimony of the only eyewitness to the incident.

Sociable Yves is an affable character whose friendly nature gives him access to informants who are reluctant to talk. His sociability gives him access to the clandestine milieu of African immigrants in France and enables him to talk to Fofana, who invites him to his home for tea before giving him information on how to find the witness to his friend's death. In Mali, Yves quickly befriends a cab driver, who is willing to accompany him on the most dangerous adventures of his African trip.

Corruptor Yves is a character who uses corruption on his way to his objectives. When he wants information on the hotel where the Malian immigrants were staying before their deportation, he slips a few banknotes to the uncooperative concierge. In Mali, he bribes a ferryman reluctant to work and gets priority passage on the ferry. At Bamako airport, he tries to bribe a customs officer to smuggle an audio cassette that is banned in the country. This time, however, he comes up against an honest official who threatens to have him arrested.

JUDGE BERTHIER Berthier is an unconscientious and corrupt judge. He does his work without much conviction, and he expects his collaborators to show the same lack of professionalism.

Unconscientious Judge Berthier cares little that a man lost his life under the bullets of rogue police officers. What matters to him is that the boat not rock. So, he insists on hiding the investigation under the fallacious conclusion of self-defense, rejecting Yves' pleas that he is not only a witness, but also one of the victims of the police blunder. Berthier is guilty of dereliction of duty.

Corrupt When Guy is killed, Berthier entrusts the investigation to Londrin. He tells Londrin to carry out as has been done in previous investigations, without too much eagerness. He even suggests to Londrin the expected conclusion of the investigation. When he sees that Londrin is determined to conduct the investigation according to the standards of justice, Berthier summons him and promises him a golden retirement with a handsome pension. However, Londrin refuses to get involved in corruption, and for that, he is eliminated.

LONDRIN Londrin is a veteran police officer with a strict respect for police morality. He has an investigation to conduct, and he carries it out with the naïveté that his superiors will support him.

Honest A few months away from retirement, Londrin could have twiddled his thumbs and enjoyed his pension. In fact, Judge Berthier had guaranteed him a handsome pension if he colluded with the police. Londrin refuses to compromise his integrity and diligently carries out his investigation. What he discovers in the corrupt police world costs him his life.

Determined Judge Berthier entrusts Londrin with an investigation, assuming that Londrin will conduct it superficially and close the case prematurely. Ignoring the judge's expectations, Londrin perseveres with his investigation. Londrin's determination uncovers evidence of police corruption as he goes along. Despite warnings from some witnesses that persistence could cost him his life, Londrin continues his investigation. In the end, he is murdered by his colleagues.

Naïve Londrin was naïve to believe that the conclusions of his investigation would be accepted by his colleagues and superiors. He was swimming against the tide not only of his immediate superiors, but also of the upper echelons of the French society, such as the Minister of the Interior, who did not want to cause a public stir about the inefficiency and systematic violence of the French security forces. Londrin, this honest cop, was a real obstacle to the corrupted pool of public forces. Londrin was therefore liquidated.

THEMES

Tradition (conception of time) Time is an element we tend to take for granted; and yet, the perception of time, especially the understanding of its division, is a notion that differs enormously from one person to another, from one people to another. We all have our threshold of tolerance, a length of time beyond which waiting becomes unbearable. First, we start fidgeting, then grumbling, then complaining, then outright demanding an explanation for the long wait. Although the tolerance threshold varies from one individual to another, there is a cultural component to time, and it is possible to speak of an African, American, Asian or European tolerance threshold. The non-African business person who travels to West Africa will have to rethink his/her conception of time during the stay in Africa. Material conditions (precarious means of transport, almost non-existent or dilapidated roads) and climatic conditions (torrential rains, heatwaves) in Africa have generated in the average African a tolerance for waiting that Westerners will certainly find unbearable. It is not uncommon that a meeting scheduled for an hour earlier has not yet begun, or that a reception announced for 9pm only starts at midnight. Africans' relaxed notion of time has inspired numerous jokes and songs by Africans themselves.

Illustrative moments: Yves' adventure in Mali is interrupted by impromptu events that delay his quest to find and talk to the witness to the incident that caused his friend's death. On several occasions, Yves has to shed his Western notions of punctuality and arm himself with African patience. Yves arrives at Babemba's family home and, after conferring with Babemba, who gives him another lead for his investigation, Yves wants to set off right away. But the family patriarch convinces him to spend the night and get some rest before hitting the road again. The next day, the unreliable cab to Timbuktu breaks down. Yves has no option but to wander around the town, hoping that the repair, for which the mechanic is nowhere to be found, and the driver is vague about how long it will take, will not be a matter of days. Later, the ferryman who is expected to take them to the other side is in no mood to work. Yves must bribe him. This apparent lack of urgency on the part of the Malians carries over to France, where before giving Yves the information he requests, Fofana invites him home for coffee and to meet his family.

Communitarianism Since the Sarkozy era, France has been toying with the idea of ending all forms of communitarianism. Accused of being one of the sources of French ills such as incivility, aggression, burglary and trafficking, communitarianism has captured the headlines and animated numerous debates.

For many French people, this phenomenon, which is balkanizing France and creating sub-zones in France whose behavioral, linguistic and cultural mores are the antithesis of France's traditional values, must be stopped. Immigrants must be forced to adopt French values, French purists argue, unless the French people accept that good old France must disappear. The paradox is that while proponents of the demise of communitarianism theorize about integrating immigrants into the French social fabric, their appeals are tinged with racism. Insofar as, for too many of these purists, the restoration of French values rhymes with the removal of the immigrants, they have given their direct or implicit consent to the harassment of the immigrant, driving him or her into the entrenchment of their cultural community where they find comfort, and thereby reinforcing that very "undesired" community. *Black light* sheds light on the reality of the black immigrant pushed into communitarianism by a hostile and inhospitable France.

Illustrative moments: the world of the black immigrant The blacks hunted down by the French police live in constant fear. Hiding from the authorities, they build themselves an underground support network in the precarious quarters of French cities, which keeps them out of reach of social protection benefits and accentuates their poverty. During his investigations to find witnesses to the death of his friend Gérard, Yves is stunned to discover the world of the black immigrants in Paris. Adopting enigmatic nicknames (such as Handyman) to deceive the police, the undocumented blacks live in a parallel world, protected by a network of discreet sentinels. They have their own language, made up of whispers (the embassy guard who answers Yves' phone call does so under his breath and in fear) and a creolization of French by their mother tongues. And as Yves realizes when he is invited to tea at the home of one of them, Fofana, their family lives are marked by their ancestral traditions. The configuration of roles and space for each member of Fofana's family corresponds in every detail to that of the Malian family Yves discovers when his investigation takes him to Mali. Fofana's family is a patriarchal one.



Immigration France enjoyed a honeymoon period with African immigration. During the German occupation of France, over 140,000 West Africans enlisted in the French forces to liberate France. During the post-war reconstruction period, thousands of Africans were recruited by France to work in labor-starved factories. But since then, France's attitude towards immigration, and more specifically black immigration, has changed. Today, in France, black migrants, whether legal or not, are hounded and harassed by the police on a daily basis. The inhospitality of the French towards blacks is a fact that Med Hondo pointed out in his very first film, *Oh, Sun* (1968). Hondo takes up this criticism in *Black Light*, this time to show how, in moments of crisis, the African migrant becomes the symptom of France's malaise, in whom all of society's ills are condensed. Extirpating the black migrant from France would solve France's problems and restore the country to the perfect state. Such seems to be the logic, especially at a time when France is under terrorist attack. The black migrant is therefore a potential terrorist that ought to be removed.

Illustrative moments: France, after its honeymoon with black migrants in the inter-war years, has always been against immigration, especially African immigration. Today, as can be seen in *Black Light*, under the pretense of fighting terrorism, the power that be get rid of Black immigrants in France. Black immigrants in *Black Light* are hunted down by the police under the protection of the Ministry of the Interior, which requisitions hotels and planes for their removal. As a result, black migrants are forced to live underground in deplorable conditions. They do not shop in the same stores as French nationals, improvising their own markets and meeting places, living in communitarianism under conditions that are not conducive to the well-being of women and children, and thus swelling the ranks of the destitute in the French society. When captured by the authorities in the great mythical net they cast in their fight against terrorism, black migrants are caged like wild beasts and repatriated to their countries of origin, as Yves realizes when he meets the unfortunate Babemba, who leads a life of broken dreams, shame and trauma in Mali.

Betrayal *Black Light* is the trial of a France that has strayed from the primordial principles of liberty, equality and fraternity that form its motto. Indeed, as Med Hondo, a Frenchman of African descent who suffered a great deal of prejudice on his way to establishing himself in the seventh art, seems to be telling us, in France, French citizens of foreign origins are neither free, nor equal to native French. Hondo's film argues that the triptych of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which, in the euphoria of the 1789 French Revolution, took shape under the pen of Robespierre to become the slogan of France's supposed indivisible unity,

never took root. The film also criticizes African governments, most of whom have failed in their mission as protectors of the people, and who, through their indolence and dereliction of duty, have abandoned their populations to the mercy of a West more concerned with its own interests than with building a community of equality and fraternity. Beyond this breach of the state's responsibility to its citizens, Hondo also criticizes the breach of interpersonal loyalty by which the individual preoccupied with his own well-being stabs his fellow man in the back with the dagger of disloyalty.

Illustrative moments: French citizens and black immigrants in France are manhandled by the police. Immigrants are rounded up like animals and deported in conditions that violate human dignity. Yves's friend Gérard is summarily murdered by the police, who later try to cover up the crime. Yves is murdered by the police for having sought to discover the circumstances of his friend's death, and Inspector Londrin is murdered by his colleagues for having uncovered corruption within the police force. For the French Minister of the Interior, all this is the collateral effect of "raison d'Etat". The Minister's attitude is a serious violation of the individual freedoms theoretically guaranteed by the French constitution. The Malian government is also betraying its people insofar as it harasses them with the muscles of the state. Even in Mali, Babemba is afraid to give his testimony to Yves, for fear of reprisals from his government. Moreover, Fofana had warned Yves not to get Babemba into trouble with the Malian authorities, who were colluding with France to hush up any action that might embarrass France. Yves is spied on by the Malian authorities, who send soldiers after him. The witness to the police blunder, who gives Yves information, is killed one night by Malian soldiers, who ram through his camping ground with guns and flamethrowers.

Globalization What does Africa stand to gain from this great globalization program, which was trumpeted in the early 1990s as a process of intensification and enlargement of trade and transport and of population mobility? Nothing, many observers would say. In this plan concocted by Western social engineers, Africa serves only as a beast of burden to pull the West's heavy carriage. And whenever the peoples of the continent have dared to ask for even the slightest reciprocity in their relations with the West, they have simply been ignored, if not put in "their places" as second-class citizens of a world that is to be built by their labor, but whose fruits they are not to taste. This theme of duplicity in the concept of globalization, already addressed by Hondo in his previous films, returns once again in *Black Light*. In a subtle way, Hondo shows how, in the North-South relationship, Africa simply opens up and gives to the West without receiving anything in return, except humiliation.

Illustrative moments: Hondo illustrates this thesis by highlighting two opposing traditions: an African tradition of hospitality and openness, and a European tradition of individualism and selfishness. When in his investigations Yves finds a Malian informant by the name of Fofana in an underground market in Paris, the latter willingly invites him to his home for tea in the company of his wife and children. Fofana then gives Yves the address of Babemba, a witness to the police blunder, who has been repatriated to Mali. Yves goes there, and as soon as he arrives, is welcomed by Babemba's family, who invite him to eat and offer him lodging, before entrusting him, the next day, to a cab driver, who becomes his faithful companion during his Malian journey. In Mali, Yves sees for himself what the Paris-Dakar Rally, that race of motorcycles, cars and trucks that allowed European thrill seekers to fulfill their dreams in Africa, really brought to Africa: a graveyard of scrap metal polluting the continent's impoverished countryside. Here, Med Hondo shows how, in the context of globalization, Africa's open arms to Europe are reciprocated by Europe's rejection and deportation of African migrants and the dumping of Europe's waste in Africa.



Corruption For a long time, the press has prided itself on being the Fourth Estate, a democratic counterweight to the three branches of government: the executive, the legislative and the judiciary. To remain so, the press must retain its celebrated independence and freedom. However, in many countries, the press is often accused of selling out this independence and freedom and choosing to play into the hands of politicians by acting as their lever. Indeed, the press has often found itself politically compromised, putting forward theses concocted by states without verifying them, either through honest error, laziness, or because it has sided with the powers that be and has willingly decided to mislead the public. In fact, as these kinds of deviations have become more and more prevalent over the last few decades, the traditional press has lost some of its glory, and the public has turned to less orthodox means of obtaining their information. In *Black Light*, Hondo denounces this collusion between the press and governments, which makes the press

a satellite voice of government, and therefore not credible, especially when it has been proven that to maintain themselves, governments tend to lie to the people.

Illustrative moments: The judge summons Commissioner Londrin to his chambers. He has decided to entrust him with the investigation into the police blunder. Londrin is a police officer close to retirement, and the judge, who wants to protect the two murder suspects, hopes that Londrin will not be too inquisitive and will conduct a superficial investigation that will conclude that the police officers acted in self-defense. The judge makes this clear in so many words to Londrin and even assures him of financial compensation for his cooperation. This is the code of silence and the reward that comes with for those who participate in the corruption. Londrin has no intention of getting mixed up in this scheme, and he launches a real fight for justice, with an investigation that conforms to the right standards. As Londrin's investigation progresses, he begins to shed light not only on the guilt of the police officers, but also on the corrupt judicial, media and governmental apparatuses that are trying to shield them. Londrin confronts the journalist that has written fallacious articles dictated to him by the police. Londrin tells him that he is disappointed in him for letting himself be manipulated and, thereby, manipulating the public. To prevent Londrin from airing the truth, a major police operation is set in motion, which eliminates Londrin and all the inconvenient witnesses he has been able to interview in France, including the journalist.

Power abuse It is not uncommon for states to use moments of national crises as pretexts for tightening the noose of repression on their citizens, thereby curtailing their individual freedoms. The state's argument is that these repressive actions are in line with the logic of collective well-being as opposed to individual interests. Examples of this are legion: after the terrorist attacks in the USA on September 11, 2001, Americans willingly submitted to restrictive measures at bus and train stations and airports. Likewise, in the wake of the fear generated by COVID 19, the world's citizens saw their freedom of movement curtailed, and their access to education, work and recreation restricted. In each case, citizens have generally agreed to alienate their individual liberties in the name of what their governments have presented to them as the common good. Yet, under the cloak of the common good, many abuses have been committed. This is what Med Hondo criticizes in the context of France, as it was faced with terrorism. The French government trampled on democracy and on the rights of its citizens in the name of so-called greater public welfare.

Illustrative moments: In this film, anyone with a modicum of authority misuses it. Police officers with a zeal inflated by a nationwide fight against terrorism operate with their fingers feverishly stroking the triggers of their weapons. Without taking any precautions, they shoot at a vehicle with two occupants, killing one of them. They are then covered up by an immoral judge, who entrusts the investigation to a commissioner a few months away from retirement, from whom he expects very little energy. Yves Guyot, the victim's friend, intends to restore the truth that the police have failed to tell. To prevent him from doing so, a police commissioner hunts him down, intimidates him and ends up having him murdered. For the Minister of the Interior, this is all a matter of "raison d'état". All these deaths must be blamed on a national moral imperative: the eradication of terrorism and immigration. France must remain pure of the African and Arab abscess, whether violent or not. So, the minister, using his authority, deploys a death squad to eliminate all inconvenient witnesses.



Police brutality/injustice Many associations in France have denounced the police methods suffered by people of African and Arab origin. For French sociologist Fabien Jobard, the French police have a structural violence problem that no other European country has. Although some people want to compare police treatment of blacks in France to that of blacks in the USA, many critics find the comparison unsound. And they are right, because in the U.S. the police do not usually stop black walkers in the street without probable cause to ask to see their ID. French police, they say, have a serious problem with racist violence. Jobard's comments come just as the video of a young black man being beaten up in front of his studio by four police officers was posted on social networks. The video, which has attracted over 4 million views, has caused such an outcry in the cultural world that President Macron has expressed his disgust and called for sanctions against the cops. Police brutality against blacks and Arabs goes back a long way. Hondo, as one of his former comrades, journalist Saad Al Massoudi, tells us, did not have fond memories of his dealings with the Marseilles police as a young African in France without official documents. So, it is a real-life suffering that Hondo decides to portray in his film.

Illustrative moments: At Roissy airport, black travelers are stopped and searched by the Parisian police. It would be business as usual were it not for the difference in treatment reserved for blacks and whites. While the former, with weapons pointed at them by agitated police officers, are ordered to drop whatever luggage they have in hand and stand up straight, arms in the air until ordered to resume their activities, the latter are greeted politely and processed with calm, before being let go. The difference in treatment stems from the fact that, in the imagination of the French authorities, Blacks and Arabs are threats, even potential terrorists, and therefore undesirables on whom police brutality is justified. Hondo shows the arrest of the blacks, their incarceration in the requisitioned hotels and their transfer to the planes that will take them back to Africa, in a manner similar to the transportation of black slaves during the slave trade. The difference here is that the journey is in the opposite direction, towards Africa.



Democracy France, which calls itself the “land of freedom and human rights”, likes to lecture the rest of the world on the principles of democracy, liberty and equality. Having settled into its mythical role as the world's moral compass, France would never for a moment consider itself to be on the receiving end of the criticism it hurls at others. And yet African literature and cinema abound with instances where France's propensity for violation of individual freedoms and anti-democratic acts are singled out for criticism. Hondo's film follows in the denunciatory tradition of thinkers such as Césaire, Fanon, Memmi and Sembène. France, Hondo seems to tell us, is indefensible in the way it treats, not just blacks and Arabs, but every other citizen, and above all in how far it is prepared to go in twisting the arm of democracy to justify that treatment. Here, it is the erosion of democracy through the executive's collusion with the police and the press that comes under fire.

Illustrative moments: In *Black Light*, the views of the French people and their government seem to coincide: the black migrant is no longer welcome, as he was in the 1940s in the French trenches against the Nazi regime. France no longer needs the black man to fight its war and run its factories. And Hondo shows how the muscles of the state are now put to work to keep black people out of the so-called land of human rights where they have come to seek an elusive paradise. The end justifying the means, the methods used to dislodge the migrants are proving to be undemocratic. Migrants are thus hunted down, arrested, herded like animals and deported, in defiance of all the democratic principles on which France prides itself. But it is not just black migrants who are subject to France's anti-democratic abuses. Native Frenchmen, like Gérard and his friend Yves, are executed in defiance of democracy. And it is the French Minister of the Interior who, on behalf of the government, justifies this anomaly worthy of totalitarian regimes.



Appearance: Human societies live by perceptions and appearances. This is a sad fact, but a fact, nonetheless. People aspire to well-being. And all too often, this well-being is offered to them by intangibles, mere mirages. Those in power know this, and they often use optics and pyrotechnics to their advantage. Just as the economy is more artistic than scientific, the needle of our well-being moves, by the second, left and right according to simple perceptions of decline and growth on the stock markets, or according to simple perceptions of security offered in a political speech, in a police raid, or according to the image of a statesman visiting a disaster zone, adopting the accent of the affected populations, dressing like them. And the most affected of people, the most stricken, perhaps, receiving a visit from their senator or governor, patting them on the shoulder or taking a baby in his arms, can feel enveloped through this gesture of simple insincerity, by a feeling of well-being. Hondo's film puts the finger on appearance as a tool for manipulating people.

Illustrative moments: Appearances can be deceiving, Med Hondo seems to warn us in *Black Light*. Ghislaine is married to Guy. However, behind his appearance of an honest, blameless husband, Guy hides a secret, which makes him vulnerable to blackmail by the corrupt police. Guy has a criminal past that he has not revealed to either his employers or his wife. The police, who use Guy's secret to shake him down, are the protectors of the people in appearance only. When their interests are threatened, the police are no longer ethical, and under the pretense of working honorably, they bend the law, frame victims and torment the innocent. This dishonest police practice is not always the isolated act of rogue officers. It is the symptom

of a rottenness that comes from the highest levels of government. Appearance is a state governing tool: the Minister of the Interior, who on TV poses as the protector of French people's sleep, is the very one who organizes their suffering at the hands of the police. To appease people worried about terrorist attacks, he orders no less terrorist actions against innocent individuals. As long as the sight of people being hunted down and deported gives the French population the perception of security. It's all a question of facade, of appearance.