

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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ANGER OF GODS / La Colère des dieux (2003)

Idrissa Ouédraogo (1954-2018)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Idrissa Ouédraogo was a Burkinabé filmmaker whose work critically examined the interplay between tradition and modernity within his country's evolving social landscape. Born on January 21, 1954, in Banfora, Burkina Faso, and raised in Ouahigouya, a northern town, he was the son of farmers. His rural upbringing profoundly shaped his artistic sensibilities, influencing his portrayal of social hierarchy, communal life, and cultural transformation in Burkinabé society. Ouédraogo pursued film studies in Ouagadougou, Kyiv, and Paris, culminating in his graduation from the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC) in 1985. His cinematic work offers nuanced explorations of identity, tradition, and societal change, frequently challenging established norms. His filmography includes *Yam Daabo* (*The Choice*, 1987), *Yaaba* (*Grandmother*, 1989), *Tilai* (*The Law*, 1990), *Karim and Sala* (1991), *Samba Traoré* (1993), *Le Cri du cœur* (*The Heart's Cry*, 1994), *Kini and Adams* (1997), *La Colère des dieux* (*Anger of the Gods*, 2003), and *Kato* (2006).

Film *Anger of the Gods* is a poignant meditation on leadership, love, and the tragic unraveling of meaning in the face of colonial erasure. It affirms that true authority is not inherited or imposed, but earned through empathy, moral clarity, and vision. Ultimately, the film reminds us that even the most sacred triumphs can be undone when power is severed from justice and humility. *Anger of Gods* was nominated for the *Grand Prix des Amériques* at the 2003 Montreal Film Festival.

Background *Anger of Gods* is a co-production between NDK Productions (Burkina Faso) and Les Films de la Plaine (France). Several actors in *Anger of the Gods*, including Ina Cissé (Awa) and Rasmané Ouedraogo (Halyaré), have appeared in multiple films by Idrissa Ouédraogo. The language spoken in the film is Mooré (the language of the majority Mossi people of Burkina Faso).

MAIN CHARACTERS

Tanga (Barou Oumar Ouedraogo) A ruthless prince who seizes the throne by force, disregarding tradition and eliminating rivals

Salam (Fayçal Traoré) Raised as Tanga's son, Salam later learns that Tanga is not his father and confronts Tanga in a ritual duel.

Halyaré (Rasmané Ouedraogo) Tanga's uncle and a contender to the throne

Awa (Ina Cissé) A peasant woman abducted and forcibly married by Tanga.

Rasmané (Nouss Nabil) Awa's former fiancé and the biological father of Salam

SYNOPSIS

Following the death of the king of Upper Volta, the throne is meant to pass through ancestral rites. But Tanga, a young prince consumed by ambition, bypasses tradition and eliminates all legitimate contenders, including his uncle Halyaré. He seizes power by force, disregarding both customs and law. His rule soon descends into tyranny. Tanga governs through fear, silences opposition, and commits grave abuses. Among the most brutal is his abduction of Awa, the fiancée of a peasant, whom he forcibly marries. He raises her son, Salam, believing him to be his own heir. In truth, Salam is the child of Rasmané, Awa's former fiancé. When Tanga uncovers the truth, his rage is merciless. He orders the execution of Awa and

Rasmané, and hunts Salam with the intent to kill him. But the boy escapes and grows up in hiding, driven by a quiet resolve and a thirst for justice. Years later, Salam returns and confronts Tanga in a ritual duel for the throne. Tanga is defeated and dies, and Salam is crowned king. His reign brings a brief restoration of justice and order; but it lasts only five years before being swept away by the French colonial invasion, which dismantles the traditional monarchy and imposes a foreign regime.

SCENES

The king is dying In the mid-19th century, after twenty years of rule, the Emperor of Upper Volta (today's Burkina Faso) is nearing death. He summons the noblemen of the kingdom and tells them that his time has come, that his strength is failing, and that he is ready to join his ancestors. The dignitaries insist that the medicines he is taking will restore him. But the Emperor replies that he harbors no illusions, and that preparations for his succession must begin. The Emperor orders that his son Tanga and his brother Halyaré, Tanga's uncle, be informed. Gunshots fired from the rooftops of homes across the kingdom announce the emperor's decline. Messengers are dispatched to Tanga and Halyaré to convey the Emperor's decision: he wishes to see them at the royal court without delay.



Tanga's takeover As soon as the messenger informs him of his father's impending death, Tanga begins raising an army, determined to seize power by force rather than wait for the royal council to appoint the emperor's successor according to tradition. The emperor's soldiers see Tanga's army approaching. Visibly intimidated by their numbers and the power of their weapons, they lay down their arms and pledge allegiance to Tanga. The emperor's soldiers see Tanga's army approaching. Visibly intimidated by their numbers and the power of their weapons, they lay down their arms and pledge allegiance to Tanga.



The Emperor urges Tanga to respect traditions Tanga enters his father's hut. The emperor warns him against claiming power through violence. "There is already too much sorrow and division in the kingdom," he says. "Don't add to it." But Tanga remains resolute. "It is for the kingdom's sake," he replies. "I must lead, whatever the price." The king reminds Tanga that he is not the only one who seeks power. He points out that Tanga's brothers, as well as his uncle Halyaré, also aspire to the throne. But tradition must be respected, he says. The successor must be chosen by the kingdom's elders. Tanga shakes his head in defiance. His father warns him that misfortune will befall him if he persists. But Tanga stands firm. He says that he is ready to face anyone who stands in his way, for it is his destiny, and his duty, to rule. The king sighs and says, "Then let the will of the gods, the elders, and the ancestors be fulfilled." He slumps in his pillows and dies.



Halyaré is sad Halyaré also receives word of his brother's condition, delivered by a courier. He is visibly saddened. Rifle in hand, Halyaré sets off alone towards his brother's kingdom. Tanga, by contrast, makes his way there escorted by a formidable army of horsemen and foot soldiers. The village elders announce the king's death. Drums begin to beat. The people mourn. His body is carried out of the royal chamber and laid in the palace courtyard, where preparations for his burial begin, his tomb carved into the earth of the royal grounds. Then Halyaré arrives.



Halyaré scolds Tanga. Halyaré calls out to Tanga, who walks towards him. Tanga declares, "The sun has set, the fire has gone out, and the king has returned to the ancestors." But Halyaré rebukes him: "You speak out of turn. It is not your place to announce the king's death. It is mine." Tanga replies to Halyaré, telling him that despite being his uncle and older than him, he does not deserve to lead the kingdom. Halyaré grabs Tanga by the collar and swears he will not let him usurp power. But Tanga warns him to think carefully before acting. He tells Halyaré that his warriors already occupy the palace, and that the elders have pledged their support. Tanga offers Halyaré a position of honor if he agrees to stand by his side. Halyaré hands over his rifle to Tanga, a gesture of submission.

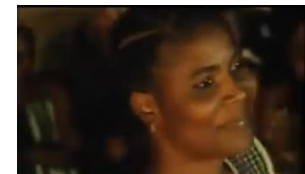
Tanga is crowned Tanga is crowned the new emperor of the Kingdom of Upper Volta, amid great jubilation. Behind him stands Halyaré, his expression tinged with disdain. The elders of the realm advise Tanga to safeguard the kingdom's prosperity, and to ensure that neither hunger nor thirst afflict the people. The kingdom's marabout (holy man) presents Tanga with the sacred amulets once worn by his father and grandfather. He tells Tanga that these charms will grant him the strength of fire, the power of metamorphosis, and the gift of invisibility. Tanga orders that word be spread throughout the land that the Kingdom of Upper Volta has a new ruler, one who will not tolerate thieves or bandits who terrorize the people. He demands that the enemies of the kingdom be warned that their days are numbered.



Tanga spreads terror Convinced of his invincibility, he demands a horse. At the head of his army, he launches a brutal assault on neighboring tribes. He sets homes ablaze, enslaves entire populations, and enforces his rule through fire and fear. During the chaos, one of Tanga's soldiers assaults a woman by the name of Awa and tries to abduct her. Halyaré strikes the soldier down with the butt of his rifle and, under cover of smoke, rescues the woman, guiding her back to her fiancé, Rasmané. That evening, as Tanga's warriors are celebrated by the vanquished.



Rasmané watches with unease Tanga's gaze falls upon the Awa. Rasmané, Awa's fiancé, sees the way Tanga looks at Awa, and silently swears that the king will not have his way. Tanga turns to Halyaré and asks who this enchanting woman is. Halyaré answers that her heart belongs to another, and that she is engaged to another man. Awa finds her fiancé withdrawn, his brow furrowed with worry. She asks gently what is weighing on him, but he remains silent. Trying to lift his spirits, she smiles and says that she sees him in the stars. He looks at her and opens up. He confesses that the king's growing interest in her unsettles him deeply. He says he is afraid that their love may be in danger. Rasmané appeals to the gods for protection. Awa tells Rasmané not to worry. She insists that the king has no concern for a peasant girl like her. Then, she asks him to give her a child to mark their love with something lasting. Rasmané is visibly offended. He reminds her that such a thing is forbidden before marriage. He begins to chant, invoking the gods to safeguard their bond.



Awa is kidnapped Early in the morning, while Awa and Rasmané lie together in intimacy, they hear a knock on their door. Emissaries of the king, flanked by Awa's parents, stand at Rasmané's door. They ask for Awa to come out, informing her that the king wishes to see her. Before she can respond, they seize her and begin to lead her away. Rasmané tries to intervene, but he is overpowered by the king's men. He begs them to release Awa. As the king and his men drag Awa away, Rasmané raises his rifle towards the king's soldiers. The villagers beg him not to act out of desperation. After a tense moment, he lowers his weapon. Determined to seek help beyond the realm of men, Rasmané sets out to invoke the ancestors and sacred fetishes, calling on them to aid him. Meanwhile, Halyaré, the king's uncle, tries to comfort Awa.



Halyaré does not approve of the king's actions Halyaré tells the king that what he has just done is immoral. He tells him that he has shattered a household and risks provoking the wrath of the ancestors. He reminds the king that both his grandfather and father ruled with far more grace and humility. Tanga, clearly enraged, threatens to have Halyaré killed if he continues to defy him.

The Birth of Salam Nine months later, Awa goes into labor. The king, his court, and the people wait anxiously. The delivery is long and arduous. But at last, Awa gives birth to a son. The entire kingdom erupts in joy. The king proudly celebrates the arrival of an heir to the Kingdom of Upper Volta. He names his son Salam. Yet amid the jubilation, the villagers gaze uneasily at the sky. Visibly frightened, they warn that a misfortune is coming. An elder from the village carries a message for



the king, one he wishes to deliver in private. But the king insists he speak before the court. The elder steps forward and declares that the newborn will bring misfortune upon the king and his people. He urges the king to lift his eyes to the sky, to read the signs of doom etched in the sun. The king, visibly enraged by the prophecy, orders the elder to be cast out of the royal court.

Salam Is Rasmané's Child Awa notices strange marks on her baby's skin. Visibly alarmed, she summons Halyaré, the king's uncle. In a hushed voice, she confides in him that her former fiancé, Rasmané, bears the same marks, and that the night before the king took her away, she had made love to Rasmané. Halyaré's face pales. He urges Awa to bury the truth forever. He warns her that if the king learns about this, it could cost her life and her child's life. Worse still, it could bring ruin upon her entire village.



Twelve Years Later Halyaré takes his young nephew under his wing. He sees the pain behind Salam's eyes and vows to shape him into a warrior worthy of the kingdom. Day after day, Halyaré trains Salam, teaching him the art of horseback riding and the rhythm of swordplay. Twelve years have passed since the birth of Awa's son. The rains have grown scarce in the Kingdom of Upper Volta, and the land begins to wither. Whispers spread among the villagers, and unease turns to blame. The elders speak of a curse, claiming that Awa and her son are the source of the kingdom's misfortune. Even the children of the kingdom begin to torment the young prince, mocking him, shunning him, treating him as an omen rather than an heir. One afternoon, Salam rides his horse to a nearby village. He stops near a small pond, where children are swimming and their mothers are gathering water. Eyes turn towards him. Some of the children notice his uneven teeth and begin to laugh. A few of the women smile awkwardly, whispering among themselves. Salam lowers his gaze. He turns back towards home, crying.



A Mother's Intervention Back home, Salam gets a pair of pliers, determined to remove the tooth that makes him different. Just as he raises the tool to his mouth, Awa enters the room. She gasps and rushes to him, snatching the pliers from his hand. "That tooth is not a curse," she says. "It should never stop you from living, from laughing, from being a child like any other." Salam insists he wants the tooth gone. Awa takes him to the kingdom's blacksmith, a man known for more than just shaping iron. The blacksmith removes the long tooth. In the days that follow, Salam smiles more easily and plays more.



Salam Turns Defiant Salam begins to change. He breaks the women's pottery without remorse and shows no respect to anyone around him. When confronted, he tells his father that he has not forgotten the years of mockery, the laughter, the whispers, the shame. He tells his father that he wants revenge. Halyaré leads Salam to a high ridge. Above them, an eagle with a white collar circles the sky. "That," says Halyaré, "is the enigmatic eagle. No one has ever come close to it. Those who try die." Salam stares at the bird, defiant. "One day," he says, "I will catch it."



Discord in the Village At the village bar, where men gather around calabashes of *dolo* (the local millet beer) the blacksmith recounts the difficulty he faced removing Salam's tooth, praising the boy's extraordinary courage. The other patrons wave off his story, dismissing it as drunken rambling. The conversation grows heated. Voices rise, tempers flare. Suddenly, one man draws a knife and stabs another. The village elders warn the king that misfortune has befallen the kingdom. They claim Salam is the source of these troubles, that he will bring ruin to the realm and topple the king's power. Halyaré pleads with the king not to heed their accusations, urging him to see beyond fear and superstition. But the king appears swayed by the elders' words.



The King's Fury and the Revelation The king decides to make offerings of poultry and livestock. He visits the diviner who had warned him twelve years earlier. But the gods reject his offerings. Enraged, the king storms the diviner's sanctuary, destroying it in a fit of wrath. Amid the wreckage, the diviner reveals a long-buried truth: Salam's true father is Rasmané, Awa's former fiancé. The king shares the revelation with his uncle. He declares that Salam is a bastard who must die, otherwise, Salam will kill him. Awa, too, must perish. He orders Halyaré to bring Salam and his mother to the palace the next day for their execution.



Awa's flight Halyaré rushes to warn the princess. He tells her that the king has uncovered her secret, and that she must find safety at once. Awa asks why he is helping them. He replies that it is his secret. Awa flees with her son. She tells Salam that they must seek refuge with his true father.



The Child's Doubt As they pause to rest, Salam makes a sudden decision: he wants to return to the palace, to "his father," the king. His mother pleads with him to stay, begging him to believe the danger is real. But Salam refuses to accept that the king wishes him harm. He turns away and walks off, leaving her behind. Halfway there, overcome with sorrow, Salam returns in tears. His mother embraces him tightly.



The Fall of Halyaré Halyaré is captured by the king's guards and brought before Tanga. The king accuses him of treason. Halyaré does not flinch. He spits in the king's face. Tanga orders his uncle's execution. Halyaré is killed, and his body left to the wild beasts beyond the palace walls. Later, a woman from the kingdom covers his remains with her wrapper. The king's guards arrest Awa's parents, demanding to know the whereabouts of their daughter and grandson. Brought before the king, Awa's father stands tall. He tells Tanga he is not afraid of him. Awa's mother spits in the king's face. The king orders their death.



"That man is your father!" Salam turns to his mother and asks, "Who is my real father?" Awa hesitates. Then, she hears a familiar song, Rasmané's song of love. He has learned of her escape from Tanga's palace and is now searching for her. In the distance, Awa sees him approaching. Her face lights up. She points towards the figure drawing near, with a wide smile. "That man," she says to her son, "he is your father." Rasmané and Awa run towards each other, hearts pounding. "That boy over there," Awa says, pointing to Salam, "he is your son. He bears the same birthmarks as you." Rasmané breaks into a sprint towards Salam. Startled, the boy turns and runs. But Rasmané catches up to him gently. He kneels, searching for the marks. They are exactly where his own are.



A Fractured Bond Rasmané looks into the boy's eyes and calls him his son. Salam steps back. He insists that King Tanga is his real father. Rasmané kneels and tells the boy that Tanga is not his father, but a bloodthirsty tyrant who wants them all dead. Awa joins them. Rasmané says they must leave, that there is a village, his grandparents' home, hidden and safe beyond the hills and the river, where they will be protected.



The Ambush Just as the three fugitives begin to feel safe, they hear the king's soldiers coming from the nearby valley. Rasmané quickly suggests they split up to avoid being captured all at once. He and Awa hide Salam in a shallow pit beneath a cluster of rocks, covering him with dry branches and thick brush. Then, Rasmané urges Awa to flee while he walks towards the soldiers to distract them. But Awa refuses to leave him. Tanga dismounts from his horse and stares at Awa and Rasmané. He demands to know where they are hiding Salam. Neither of them answers. Then, without a word, Awa spits in the king's face. Tanga's expression hardens. He orders their execution. Salam steps



out from his hiding place just in time to see the soldiers dragging his parents away. The king's men raise their rifles against his parents. Salam shuts his eyes. He covers his ears. Shots are fired. After the soldiers leave, Salam buries his parents side by side in the desert. He promises to avenge them. And he walks away.

The Memory Trying to reach safety, Salam collapses in the desert. But then, his father's words return: "Beyond those hills, there's a river. And beyond that river, the village of our ancestors." Salam clenches his fists in the sand. He swears he will reach it, no matter the cost. Two young nomadic shepherds, Sana and her younger brother Karim, find Salam collapsed in the desert. They lift him and carry him to their parents' campsite. There, Salam is cared for, nursed back to strength. As the days pass, he bonds with Sana. They laugh, and they tend the cattle together. Sana's parents watch with visible joy, grateful to see their daughter smiling, and Salam alive.



"I want that strength!" Salam spots the enigmatic eagle with the white collar, the one the king's brother, Halyaré, had spoken of. He tells Sana that the eagle embodies absolute strength. And he wants that strength. The children begin their pursuit. They run, climb, wander. The chase stretches across seasons, landscapes, and years. Fifteen years pass. The camera follows them, growing taller, wiser, wearier. Their faces change. Their eyes deepen. The eagle still remains out of reach, but never out of sight. Sana says she is tired of running and asks if they can take a break. Salam hands his rifle to Sana. He tells her he must continue the pursuit alone. Sana watches as he walks away, his figure slowly fading into the horizon. The eagle remains in flight. And Salam keeps chasing it.



Ingrate, just like all the other men Salam arrives in a vast field of baobabs. He calls out to the eagle, asking it to end the fifteen-year chase and reveal itself. The eagle appears before him, not as a bird, but as a person. It tells Salam that the strength he now possesses was given to him through the pursuit itself. Salam replies that if the eagle is as strong as he is, then one of them must die, because two equal forces cannot coexist. Salam kills the eagle. As it dies, the eagle calls him ungrateful, just like all other men.



"Bring me the king's head!" Salam goes to find Sana. Together, they return to her family's camp. What they find are sun-bleached bones, remains of her parents and brother, killed by the king's soldiers. Sana tells Salam she wants the king dead. She asks him to bring her the king's head. Salam promises he will.



The duel between Tanga and Salam Tanga gathers his people and tells them he has learned that Salam is seeking him out, intent on destroying him and claiming the throne. He announces that he is going to meet Salam face to face, and that it will be a duel between them. He declares that if he does not return, they must be ready to accept Salam as their new king. But he assures them that Salam will not survive the encounter. The duel between Salam and Tanga takes place. After a display of mythical power and metamorphoses, Salam succeeds in killing Tanga. He is crowned the new king of the Empire of Upper Volta.



Colonization But he barely has time to savor his victory. White colonizers launch a brutal assault on the kingdom, spreading terror and devastation. The film ends with the dawn of French colonization in the Empire of Upper Volta.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

SALAM Salam is a resilient and determined figure whose long journey from exile to sovereignty is marked by strength and unwavering purpose. Guided by a strategic mind, he navigates myth and power with patience and precision, reclaiming his place without replicating the tyranny that once cast him out.

Resilient Salam endures the trauma of losing his parents and being cast into exile, yet he never succumbs to despair. His survival in the desert and his long pursuit of the eagle reflect a quiet, unbreakable strength. This resilience becomes the foundation of his transformation from orphan to sovereign.

Determined From the moment he hears the legend of the white-collared eagle, Salam commits himself to the impossible task of capturing it. His journey spans fifteen years, marked by solitude, hardship, and unwavering focus. Determination becomes his compass, guiding him through both myth and reality.

Strategic Salam learns to read the political landscape of Upper Volta, understanding that brute force alone cannot reclaim his place. He chooses when to reveal his identity, when to fight, and when to wait. His strategic mind allows him to dismantle Tanga's myth without becoming a tyrant himself.

TANGA Tanga is a proud and manipulative ruler whose belief in his divine authority blinds him to truth and isolates him from his people. His downfall is tragically self-inflicted, as his refusal to change traps him in a crumbling legacy built on fear, spectacle, and illusion.

Proud Tanga sees his rule as divinely ordained, refusing to acknowledge the cracks in his empire. His pride blinds him to his uncle's legitimacy and the people's growing unrest.

Manipulative Tanga uses fear and spectacle to maintain loyalty, silencing dissent with calculated cruelty. His manipulation corrodes truth, leaving a legacy built on deception.

Tragic Though he begins as a powerful ruler, Tanga's refusal to evolve seals his fate. He becomes a relic of a fading era, undone by the very myths he created. His tragedy lies not in his death, but in his inability to see beyond himself.

AWA Awa is a loving and protective mother whose quiet strength defies Tanga's tyranny. She chooses sacrifice over betrayal to shield those she cherishes.

Protective Awa shields Salam from the king's wrath, hiding him and refusing to reveal his whereabouts. Her maternal instinct is fierce, rooted in love and defiance. She chooses death over betrayal, proving that protection sometimes means sacrifice.

Defiant Even when threatened by Tanga's soldiers, Awa does not flinch or plead. Her silence is a form of resistance, a refusal to validate injustice. In a world ruled by fear, her defiance becomes a quiet revolution.

Loving Awa is a tender yet fierce mother, shielding her son from ridicule and affirming his worth, telling him he is no different despite his unusually long incisor. Her love for Rasmané, quietly nurtured over time, remains unwavering, rooted in shared resilience and a deep emotional bond that no threat or separation can undo.

RASMANÉ Rasmane is a quiet yet unwavering figure of courage, whose refusal to compromise his integrity ultimately costs him his life. His deep loyalty to Awa and Salam, grounded in love rather than duty, becomes the moral foundation that shapes Salam's identity and quest for justice.

Courageous Rasmané speaks truth to power, knowing it will cost him everything. Rasmané's courage is not loud. It is in his refusal to be complicit, in his choice to stand beside Awa. His death is a testament to the price of integrity.

Loyal Rasmané remains devoted to Awa and Salam, even when betrayal would be easier. His loyalty is rooted in love and belief, not obligation. It is this loyalty that gives Salam a sense of belonging and purpose.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Myth Myth is both a tale from the past and a living force that shapes identity, destiny, and collective memory. It offers symbolic frameworks through which individuals and societies interpret power, transformation, and belonging. Myths can be inherited or constructed, used to inspire or to control, and often reflect the tension between tradition and reinvention. In many cultures, myth is inseparable from ritual, serving as a bridge between the visible and the invisible, the historical and the timeless. It can sanctify authority or challenge it, depending on who invokes it and how. In cinema, myth becomes a narrative engine, animating characters with ancestral echoes and spiritual depth. This dynamic is vividly illustrated in Salam's journey, where myth is not static legend but a living, evolving force that guides his transformation and confrontation.

Illustrative moment: From the moment Salam hears of the white-collared eagle, a creature said to embody absolute strength, he confides in Halyaré and later Sana that he desires that power for himself. Yet the eagle remains elusive, undergoing a metamorphosis into human form, a transformation that signals the living and evolving nature of ancestral myth. Salam's journey becomes a mythical quest, one that spans fifteen years, a period marked not only by longing but by deep engagement with ancestral rituals. He calls upon the spirits of his forefathers, seeking their guidance as he prepares to reclaim the kingdom of Upper Volta. In this vengeful pursuit, Salam must confront Tanga, the tyrant who has weaponized myth for domination. Tanga presents himself as a divinely chosen ruler, rewriting history to legitimize his reign. His myth is rigid and imposed, while Salam's is fluid and earned through exile, transformation, and spiritual communion. Their final confrontation unfolds like a sacred ritual, saturated with supernatural displays that blur the boundary between legend and reality. As they battle, myth and reality intertwine. Both men channel ancestral forces, transforming into beasts and spirits, invoking a lineage that stretches beyond time. In the end, Salam's living myth prevails. It is not inherited but forged through suffering, metamorphosis, and ancestral invocation. By killing Tanga, Salam becomes the new king of Upper Volta, his victory a testament to the power of myth not as propaganda but as embodied truth.



POLITICS

Leadership: Legitimacy Legitimacy in leadership often hinges on the tension between inherited authority and earned trust. Across cultures and histories, rulers have claimed power through lineage, divine right, or conquest. Yet legitimacy is rarely absolute. It is shaped by ritual, law, and the perception of the governed. When succession is contested, the question arises: does power belong to those born into it, or to those who prove themselves worthy? Legitimacy can be ritualized through tradition, but it can also be redefined through moral clarity, sacrifice, and vision. In stories where dynasties falter and challengers rise, the struggle for power becomes a deeper inquiry into justice and identity. This dynamic unfolds vividly in the tale of Tanga and Salam, where bloodline and destiny collide, and the throne becomes a crucible for truth, transformation, and the soul of an empire.

Illustrative moment: Tanga seizes power as his father lies dying, bypassing the traditional process in which the elders elect a new ruler. He claims legitimacy through bloodline, insisting that his divine ancestry exempts him from customary succession. In doing so, he casts aside his uncle and proclaims himself leader, cloaked in royal regalia and surrounded by loyal subjects. His rule is inherited, ritualized, and sustained through fear. In stark contrast, Salam, born of no noble blood and considered a bastard, emerges from exile to challenge Tanga's authority. Shaped by grief and a fifteen-year journey guided by the white-collared eagle, Salam returns not with a crown, but with the memory of his slain parents and a promise made to Sana. Their duel transcends mere combat. It becomes a spiritual and political reckoning over who truly deserves to lead. As the battle unfolds, both men undergo supernatural transformations, channeling ancestral spirits and assuming



mythical forms. The confrontation for the throne is also one for the soul of the empire. When Salam defeats Tanga, it is not brute strength that prevails but earned legitimacy. His victory affirms that true leadership is forged through sacrifice, resilience, and moral conviction.

Leadership: Power abuse Power abuse, in any context, reveals the corrosive effects of authority unbound by ethical restraint. When leaders prioritize control over compassion, history shows that fear, violence, and manipulation often follow. Whether through inherited rule, ideological dominance, or foreign conquest, unchecked power tends to silence dissent and distort truth to maintain its grip. The cycle of tyranny, internal or external, thrives when systems lack accountability and when leadership is divorced from the needs of the people. True authority, by contrast, demands humility, empathy, and a commitment to justice. It must be earned, not imposed. The film captures this dynamic with striking clarity, illustrating how both indigenous and foreign powers fall prey to the same corrupting forces. Through its contrasting portrayals of leadership, it reminds us that domination may secure a throne, but only humility can sustain a people.

Illustrative moment : The theme of power abuse runs like a dark thread through the film, embodied most starkly in King Tanga's rule. Tanga manipulates history, silences dissent, and weaponizes fear to maintain control, presenting himself as a divine ruler while orchestrating brutal executions, including those of Salam's parents and Sana's family. His charisma masks tyranny, and his refusal to acknowledge Salam's legitimacy reveals a deep insecurity beneath his grandeur. Even in his final speech to the people, he frames the impending duel as a noble defense of the throne, though it is driven by ego and paranoia. The colonizers who arrive after Salam's coronation continue this cycle of abuse, imposing terror without dialogue, reducing the empire to ashes.



Colonial erasure Colonial erasure operates through both physical destruction and symbolic domination, dismantling native systems of governance, belief, and memory to impose foreign rule. It is conquest as well as a rewriting of history, where ancestral knowledge, communal rituals, and social hierarchies are rendered obsolete or barbaric. The colonizer's violence is strategic, designed to sever ties to the past and replace them with colonial narratives of civilization and progress. This process is vividly illustrated in the film, where a once-organized kingdom, governed by elder-led elections and spiritual traditions, is reduced to ashes under colonial firepower. The command of "Fire! Fire!" becomes a metaphor for historical amnesia, a forced blank slate where the legacy of Tanga and Salam, their duel, their beliefs, and their people's customs are consumed by flames. Colonialism thus becomes an architecture of forgetting, built on the ruins of memory.

Illustrative moment: The film begins with a clear premise: a kingdom governed by ancestral customs, where succession to the throne is determined through an election organized by the elders. Even though Tanga disrupts this process by seizing power, the structure remains visible, a society rooted in ritual, hierarchy, and communal decision-making. Spiritual beliefs permeate the narrative, from Tanga's invocation of divine ancestry to the supernatural duel with Salam, where both men channel ancestral forces and transform into mythic beings. After Salam's victory, his coronation reaffirms the kingdom's spiritual and political continuity. Yet this legacy is violently erased with the arrival of French colonizers. Their assault is swift and brutal: villages are burned, corpses litter the land, and the white commander's repeated cry of "Fire! Fire!" signals a deliberate cleansing. The violence suggests a tabula rasa, a forced forgetting, where tradition, memory, and social organization are obliterated to make way for colonial rule.

JUSTICE

Vengeance Revenge is a primal response to injustice, often born from deep wounds inflicted by betrayal, loss, or humiliation. It transcends mere retaliation, becoming a quest for restoration, restoration of dignity, of memory, of balance. In many narratives, vengeance is a journey, one that reshapes the avengers and exposes the moral fractures of the world they inhabit. When justice is denied or corrupted, revenge emerges as a personal way to reclaim agency in the face of powerlessness. It binds characters together through shared trauma and drives them toward confrontation with those who wronged them. In *Anger of the Gods*, vengeance against exclusion and the murder of parents is undoubtedly the driving force behind the hero's

quest, Salam, and catalyzes the downfall of the antihero, Tanga. All the key characters, Halyaré, Salam, and Sana, bear the scars of the usurper king's brutality.

Illustrative moments: Tanga's uncle Halyaré, illegally removed from succession, humiliated by his nephew, becomes Salam's mentor, training him to confront the tyrant. Awa, Tanga's first target, temporarily escapes death at the hands of Tanga thanks to Halyaré, but is eventually executed alongside Rasmane, leaving Salam orphaned. At his parents' grave, Salam swears to avenge them, while Sana, also made orphan by Tanga, demands Tanga's head to Salam as a price for justice. Thus, the film's resolution hinges on a collective drive for vengeance, where personal wounds converge toward an inevitable confrontation. Tanga's fall is not merely political; it is the culmination of a wounded memory demanding reparation.

RELATIONSHIP

Love Love, at its essence, is a mutual act of recognition. It is a quiet unfolding between two individuals who choose, again and again, to see, support, and grow with one another. More than merely passion or proximity, it is a sustained commitment to emotional safety, shared purpose, and reciprocal care. True love is patient, deepening through trust and time rather than urgency or possession. It flourishes when both hearts move towards a common horizon, not when one imposes direction upon the other. In narratives shaped by longing and resilience, love becomes a refuge, a space where dignity is preserved and vulnerability honored. But when love is distorted by control or entitlement, it loses its essence, turning into a tool of harm rather than healing. This contrast is rendered in the relationships between Rasmané and Awa, Salam and Sana, and the violent intrusion of Tanga's forced desire.

Illustrative moments: Rasmané and Awa choose each other freely. Their bond grows through shared understanding and emotional patience, a love that listens, waits, and respects. This gentle rhythm is shattered when Tanga kidnaps Awa, imposing his desire as force rather than invitation. In parallel, Salam and Sana's connection is nurtured from childhood, beginning the day Sana finds Salam unconscious in the desert and brings him to her parents' campsite to be nursed back to health. Their love deepens through the symbolic pursuit of the white-collared eagle, a journey marked by memory, play, and mutual longing. Like Rasmané and Awa, Salam and Sana thrive because their love is chosen and cultivated over time. In contrast, Tanga's claim reveals the violence of love stripped of consent, where desire becomes domination and affection turns into entitlement. These juxtapositions affirm that love cannot be coerced; it must be nurtured, reciprocated, and freely sustained by two hearts moving towards a shared horizon.



FLAWS

Greed/selfishness Greed and selfishness, when left unchecked, corrode the foundations of community, governance, and spiritual integrity. They transform leadership into tyranny, tradition into spectacle, and shared purpose into personal gain. In societies where power is meant to be earned through wisdom and service, the greedy twist systems to serve their own ambitions, often cloaking exploitation in the language of destiny or strength. Selfishness isolates the individual from collective responsibility, replacing empathy with paranoia and stewardship with hoarding. The pursuit of dominance becomes insatiable, feeding off fear and silencing dissent. Rituals lose their sanctity, and laws bend to the will of the powerful. Such is the descent witnessed in Tanga's rise and reign.

Illustrative moment: Greed pulses at the heart of Tanga's rise and reign, distorting the kingdom's political and spiritual order. Though succession is meant to be decided by elder-led elections, Tanga seizes power through manipulation and brute force, sidelining his uncle and tradition in favor of personal ambition. Tanga's rule is marked by excess and paranoia. He surrounds himself with armed guards, silences dissent and exploits the kingdom's resources to consolidate control. Even the sacred duel with Salam is tainted by Tanga's refusal to honor ancestral codes, as he attempts to cheat fate through dark rituals and coercion.

His greed is material and existential, a hunger for dominance that blinds him to the kingdom's fragility. In the end, his grasping accelerates the collapse, leaving behind not legacy but ruin, hunger, and resentment.

APPEARANCE

Appearance/dissimulation In *Anger of the Gods*, dissimulation and the manipulation of appearances are both acts of deception and strategies for survival in a world shaped by violence, ritual, and precarious power. Ouédraogo reveals how individuals conceal truth to protect themselves, assert control, or preserve dignity. Public rituals mask private fears; silence becomes a form of resistance; and identity is often obscured by imposed roles. The tension between what is seen and what is felt drives the film's emotional core. This theme finds poignant expression in the relationship between Awa and Tanga, where mutual concealment defines their bond. Tanga cloaks his insecurity in spectacle and authority, while Awa veils her son's true parentage in silence. Their dissimulation reflects a broader societal imperative to navigate oppression through disguise, where survival often hinges on what remains unsaid.

Illustrative moments: Awa and Tanga engage in a tense interplay of dissimulation, each concealing truth to assert control and survive. Tanga masks his usurpation behind mythical ritual and divine pretense, projecting strength while fearing the fragility of his rule. His forced marriage to Awa is framed as destiny, The marriage that produces a legitimate heir to the throne with the blessings of the gods. Yet, it conceals emotional insecurity and a desperate need to suppress her past with Rasmane. Awa, in turn, resists oppression and avoid death, temporarily at least, through silence, never revealing that Salam is Rasmane's son. Her deception is protective, a maternal strategy to shield her child from Tanga's wrath and save her own life. Though outwardly submissive, Awa's quiet defiance undermines Tanga's authority. Their relationship becomes a dance of concealed motives: Tanga cloaks fear in spectacle, while Awa cloaks resistance in silence. Each knows, to some extent, that the other is dissembling, yet they maintain the illusion to preserve power, safety, and legacy. Ouédraogo uses their mutual deception to explore how silence and disguise become tools of survival in a world ruled by violence and ritual.

PHILOSOPHY

Tragedy and absurdism Salam's trajectory lends itself powerfully to an absurdist reading. The film's structure mirrors the cruel logic of absurdism: Salam's heroic arc, marked by spiritual legitimacy and communal restoration, culminates not in renewal but in annihilation. He wins the throne through ancestral rites and moral courage, yet the kingdom he inherits is already doomed. The colonizers arrive not as rivals in a political contest, but as agents of erasure—indifferent to the sacred, immune to tradition. The final irony is devastating: the very moment Salam fulfills his destiny, history intervenes with brute force, rendering his triumph meaningless. This collapse of purpose, where victory leads to ruin and justice is swallowed by violence, evokes the absurdist notion that human striving is often met with cosmic indifference. The hero's journey ends not in redemption but in silence, reminding us that history's arc does not always bend towards justice.

Illustrative moment: In the film's final act, Salam ascends the throne amid chants, drumming, and ancestral blessings, a scene rich with spiritual symbolism and communal affirmation. Yet this moment of triumph is swiftly undercut by the arrival of French soldiers, whose rifles and commands shatter the celebratory rhythm. Villages are torched, elders slaughtered, and sacred grounds desecrated. The white commander's cry of "Fire! Fire!" echoes like a curse, reducing centuries of tradition to smoke and silence. Salam, once a symbol of hope and continuity, stands powerless as his kingdom crumbles. The coronation, once a promise of renewal, becomes a prelude to devastation. This juxtaposition, ritual against rifle, memory against massacre, embodies the absurd: a hero crowned in the ruins of his world, his victory rendered hollow by forces beyond reason or justice.



Hope and disillusionment

Hope and disillusionment often coexist in stories of struggle and transformation. Hope arises from the belief that change is possible, that pain can lead to healing, and injustice can be overcome. It gives people strength to endure, offering a glimpse of a better future. But hope is fragile. When ideals meet harsh realities, or when outside forces disrupt progress, disillusionment can take hold. This shift is especially painful when hard-won victories are reversed, revealing how vulnerable personal or collective triumphs can be. In such moments, the promise of renewal fades, replaced by a sense of betrayal or loss. This tension is vividly portrayed in Salam's story, where his rise to power suggests redemption, but is ultimately shattered by colonial invasion, turning hope into a symbol of what could have been, rather than what was achieved.

Illustrative moment: The theme of hope and disillusionment pulses through the arc of Salam's journey. After years of exile, loss, and spiritual trials, Salam defeats Tanga and is crowned king of the Empire of Upper Volta. His ascent marks a moment of collective hope, a promise of renewal, justice, and restored dignity. The people celebrate, and for a brief moment, the empire breathes freely under a ruler who has earned his place through sacrifice. Yet this triumph is abruptly shattered by the arrival of French colonizers. Their invasion is swift and merciless, replacing mythic struggle with mechanical violence. Villages burn, ancestral voices fall silent, and Salam's reign is cut short before it can take root. The film closes not with resolution, but with rupture, as the dream of self-determination gives way to foreign domination. Hope, once hard-won, dissolves into disillusionment, leaving behind only the echo of what might have been.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does the film challenge societal perceptions of physical differences?
2. How do the relationships between Rasmané and Awa, and Salam and Sana, illustrate love as mutual recognition and emotional patience?
3. How does the film contrast inherited power with earned legitimacy through the characters of Tanga and Salam?
4. What does Salam's journey suggest about the qualities that make a leader truly worthy of authority?
5. In what ways does Tanga's rule demonstrate that fear and manipulation, even when cloaked in charisma or tradition, ultimately weaken true leadership?