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## ***Cinomade* and the fight against HIV/AIDS pandemic in Burkina Faso**

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### *Abstract*

This article is questioning the validity of educational screenings in a West African context, based on the detail study of *Cinomade*'s activities to raise awareness of the HIV/Aids pandemic in Burkina Faso. While traditional educational films are characterised by a general discourse prepared for a heterogeneous cultural area and try to convince the participants by imposing an outsider's opinion, in that case, *Cinomade*'s team creates a specific video for each projection based on interviews made the same day in the village, in order not to expose the spectator to the point of view of foreigners (governmental employees or foreign NGOs), but to begin a debate on a subject matter brought-up by members of the community.

*Keywords:* HIV/Aids pandemic; West Africa; Burkina Faso; reception; video techniques; live commentary

*Cinomade*, an association in charge of spreading education and information to counter the HIV/Aids pandemic in West Africa, organises various meetings with the diverse populations in Burkina Faso. Using an approach called *Cinéma Débat Interactif* (Cinema – Interactive – Discussion, CDI) consisting of screening interviews made within the community, initiating debates around short films produced locally, as well as instigating a dialogue with the public, *Cinomade* aims to modify the sexual behaviours of the spectators. The success met by *Cinomade*'s film projections (a success that can be measured by the number of spectators, the level of participation, and the impact of the educational message), provides an impetus to describe and analyse *Cinomade*'s methods in order to understand what made them work. By comparing the reception of these meetings in different rural areas (where the *Cinéma Débat Interactif* method is used), I aim to explain the effectiveness of these methods of communication and health education.

In this article, I would like to stress the two main differences between the traditional educational film and the kind of educational device *Cinomade* uses: the *mirror-effect* (“effet-miroir”) made possible by video techniques and the impact of the live commentary on the reception of the audio-visual images. While the traditional educational film is characterised

by a general discourse prepared for a heterogeneous cultural area and tries to convince the participants by imposing an outsider's point of view, *Cinomade* creates a specific video for each projection based on interviews made the same day in the village. In that case, the spectator does not receive advice from foreigners (governmental employees or foreign NGOs), but begins a debate on a subject matter brought-up by members of the community. Furthermore, the *oralisation* of the projection device breaks the media's homogeneity and allows a dialogue between the film and the spectator. Thus, the commentary brings the spectator out of the usually encouraged suspension of disbelief, and opens the possibility of taking part in a form of collective reflexion. The spectator, no longer faced by an outsider's propaganda film, is more likely to consider the comments coming from the audience and respond to members of his immediate or extended community whose experiences and concerns closely resemble his or her own.

### **Video techniques and the *mirror-effect* (*effet-miroir*)**

The response to HIV/Aids in Burkina Faso is organised following two approaches: the first one is the medical and social care of the patients; the second tries to slow down the propagation of the virus by informing the populations of the risks related to the disease and by changing mind-sets and practices. In 2003, Burkina Faso was still one of the countries most affected by HIV/Aids in sub-Saharan Africa, with a prevalence of HIV-positive cases of 4.2% (ONUSIDA) among the adult population. In 2006, the rate of HIV prevalence stabilized at 2% (ONUSIDA). It thus seems that the prevention campaign had a relatively strong impact on the population.<sup>1</sup> This rise of awareness by the population appears to correspond to a modification of awareness methods, in particular education by movies. *Cinomade* is a very good example of new use of audio-visual techniques in propaganda purposes.

Film propaganda is mainly based on the immersive and persuasive aspects of the cinematographic medium,<sup>2</sup> requiring the spectator to suspend his critical drive by imposing a message that fascinates and satiates. On the one hand, the spectacular effect of the audio-visual technique prevents the audience from imposing distance between itself and the discourse of the film. This effect is amplified by the collective aspect of the screening: the fact that all the spectators simultaneously follow the same progression of images and sound

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<sup>1</sup> Source: *Rapport UNGASS 2008 du Burkina Faso*, United Nations General Assembly, janvier 2008.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on film propaganda, consult Nicholas Reeves: *The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality*. London: Ed. Cassell, 1999.

— attributing to it a single meaning and participating in a silent collective reception of the message — emphasizes the usual required suspension of disbelief. On the other hand, the film is imagined as a homogenous discourse that does not allow the development of a critical point of view. Lured by the film's tightly constructed reasoning, which often mixes arguments and emotions, the spectator is meant to accept as natural the point of view exhibited by the film. As the ideological premises are usually not articulated, the audience follows the film as a relatively neutral and natural presentation of accepted facts. Naturally, these theoretical premises do not directly correspond to the reality of propaganda film screenings, where the audience's reception is influenced by a number of other factors. *Cinomade* quickly recognized the limits of this educational technique, finding that immersive propaganda cinema did not achieve its goals. Created in the late 1990s by Bernie Goldblat and Daphné Serelle, *Cinomade*'s purpose was, at first, to organise free cinematographic projections in small villages in West Africa. Faced with the issue of the anti-personnel mines in Casamance, Senegal, the organiser tried to project a movie to raise awareness of this danger among the local population. But the movie created in Congo for a Kiswahili audience was not at all adequate for the Senegalese spectators. This is when Goldblat and Serelle decided to make local movies for specific audiences and specific issues, adapting each film to a particular cultural context (through changes in language, mode of narration, etc.). Since then, *Cinomade*'s pragmatic approach has been developed, based on the analysis of successful and disappointing encounters during projects. This approach does not consist in the *Cinomade* team bringing the “good word” to the rural zones. It does not aim to merely inform the populations about the dangers of Aids, but to create a debate about the accepted sexual practices in the community in order to lead to a collective grasp of the issue and its stakes.

Generally, in Burkina Faso, information about Aids circulates well, and people are relatively aware of the risk of infection and the characteristics of the disease. The popular discourse about HIV infection presents it as a tragic disease, as it is contagious and incurable, and one that is brought from afar and propagated by others. Sociologists who study this phenomenon note an absence of correlation between the diffusion of information and the changes in sexual practices:

The sexual transmission of HIV is well known by the majority of the Burkinabé populations; however, the systematic adoption of preventive behaviour such as condom use is far from being as generalised as is the fear of the contagion. This has no incidence, or very little, on the propagation of the virus in the country, despite the

strength of the mobilised means and wills for the awareness campaigns which sometimes involve PvVIH directly.<sup>3</sup>

The problem remains that people do not modify their sexual practices despite having been made aware of the risks. They generally do not see themselves as possible agents for the propagation of the disease, not correlating their own sexual lives with the pandemic. Young people are obviously the most exposed to the disease, due to their geographical mobility and the higher probability of their engaging in what Burkinabé sociologist Ida Nikyema calls “not-socialised sexual relations”.<sup>4</sup> This debate also concerns the elders, not only because they are sexually active but also because they generally tend to prevent open discussions about sexuality.

People are globally convinced about the danger of the disease. The difficulty remains to explain the link between risky sexual practices and the disease:

They do not see the danger of their sexual practices. [...] This is why we do not simply come to give them information. We try to explain how to use this information, in order to concretely modify the sexual practices. How can we change the mentalities? How can we give a voice to the women?<sup>5</sup>

In short, the information is transmitted, and most individuals can repeat it more or less accurately. However, very few individuals see the parallel between this remote information and their own private reality. To remediate this problem, *Cinomade* reverses the approach and begins by letting the people concerned debate the question instead of imposing a specialist’s discourse about which behaviours are good or bad. The *Cinomade* organisers have successfully elicited the village inhabitants’ participation in the debate and encouraged a collective awareness of the problem. Only then do they provide the contact information of the previously trained individuals available in the village for anyone who wishes to obtain information or prophylactics. *Cinomade* seeks not to impose a particular attitude but to

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<sup>3</sup> “La transmission sexuelle du VIH est un mode bien connu par la majorité des populations burkinabés ; mais, l’adoption systématique de comportement préventif comme le port du préservatif est loin d’être générale comme l’est la peur de la contagion. Cela n’a aucune incidence, ou très peu, sur la propagation du virus dans le pays, malgré la force des moyens mobilisés et des volontés pour les campagnes de sensibilisation impliquant parfois directement des PvVIH.” In: Abdoulaye Traoré (ed.): *Évaluation de l’efficacité d’une campagne de sensibilisation au VIH/SIDA*, 2004, p. 9. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

<sup>4</sup> Ida Nikyema (eds.): *Feed-back d’une campagne de sensibilisation au VIH/SIDA par le Cinéma Débat Interactif dans la périphérie de la ville de Ouagadougou*, 2004, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> “Ils ne voient pas le danger de leurs pratiques sexuelles. [...] C’est pourquoi ne nous venons pas simplement pour donner des informations. Nous essayons d’expliquer comment utiliser ces informations, afin de modifier concrètement les pratiques sexuelles. Comment changer les mentalités ? Comment donner la parole aux femmes ?” Michel Zongo, Chef d’équipe avec *Cinomade*, entretien, mars 2009, Bobo Dioulasso. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

encourage personal reflection in each sexually active individual in order to provoke a collective awareness and an evolution of values on a micro-societal level.

This non-hierarchical approach is why it became necessary for *Cinomade* to invent a new form of audio-visual educational practices:

In the eyes of the beneficiaries, the realization of interviews *in situ* (micros trottoirs) shows the directors' interest in the local realities. The introduction by the village chiefs gave authority to the prevention messages that were delivered. Through the demonstration of condom use, the CDI allowed to break, at least for the time of the debates, the cultural taboo that prevents people from speaking about sexuality. Many informers declare that the event will serve as a catalyser for a positive change of behaviour (condom use, reduction of sexual license, debates about sexuality, etc.).<sup>6</sup>

The objective is to create a debate about “acceptable” sexual practices in the community. In this essay, we will detail all the forms of oral interactions between the audience and the presenters that produce the desired resulting a debate. Given that each meeting begins with the screening of a film made within the community, called an *interactive sequence* (*séquence interactive*), let us begin by studying this audio-visual production.

What makes the apparatus used by *Cinomade* so interesting is its adaptability in a variety of challenging situations. The idea of filming on site before the screening evolved because of the technical possibility – the flexibility of numeric video cameras – and the lack of relevant films. It was during an awareness campaign about the problem of anti-personal mines in Casamance (Senegal) that the team realised there was simply no adequate film on the topic that could be effective there: existing educational films had been made in other contexts, for other types of mines, and in other languages. After the success achieved by this on-site filming approach, the *interactive sequences* were systematically included in the meetings as an introduction to a more complex film and a debate on the same topic.

A meeting organised by *Cinomade* is generally preceded by two preparatory visits to the villages. A first meeting is organised to establish contact with the legal, traditional and religious chiefs, the professionals and generational professionals, and the village residents

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<sup>6</sup> “La réalisation des micros trottoirs *in situ* ont témoigné de l'intérêt des réalisateurs pour les réalités locales, aux yeux des bénéficiaires. Les préséances des chefs de villages ont donné de l'autorité aux messages de prévention promus. À travers la démonstration du port du préservatif, le CDI a permis de briser, au moins le temps des débats, le tabou culturel de parler de sexualité. Plusieurs informateurs déclarent que l'événement catalysera un changement positif de comportement (port du préservatif, réduction de la propension au libertinage sexuel, causeries sur la sexualité, etc.).” In: Abdoulaye Traoré (ed.): *Évaluation de l'efficacité d'une campagne de sensibilisation au VIH/SIDA*, 2004, p. 6-7. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

who will be invited to join in the project. *Cinomade* explains its main objective (to fight against the pandemic of HIV/AIDS), which is generally well received in the villages.<sup>7</sup> A date is then established, taking the *Cinomade* tour program and local events into consideration. With the agreement of various chiefs, a spokesperson is chosen in the village to manage the planning of the event. This is usually an individual already involved in medical activities (a nurse, a resource person, a doctor, a worker in a public health clinic, etc.). During the second meeting, the presenters confirm the date of their visit:

Two weeks prior to the tour, the *Cinomade* team goes to all the villages (usually around ten) in order to meet all the resource people; the priest, the imam, the prefect, the doctor, association presidents, any form of legal authority, customary, religious and associative. Everyone is involved. [...] We explain our project, the ways in which things will take place, we answer questions, we confirm the date of the screening, and verify that it does not coincide with another event...<sup>8</sup>

Posters announcing event are distributed, messages are broadcast on the local radio, and public announcers (*crieurs publics*) divulge the news during market days, using the vernacular communication channels. The organisers also resort to word of mouth, not hesitating to announce their event during local or family events such as marriages or the prayer time at the Mosque.

Thus, when the *Cinomade* team arrives in the village on the morning of the screening, it is awaited and welcomed by villagers who feel already invested in the event. For example, the villagers provide lodging and food for the team. After the official greetings, one of the *Cinomade* presenters and a cameraman go about the village in order to make a short film. This film is made with the technique called *tourné monté*, in which there is no editing involved; instead, the filmmaker keeps the rushes without any cuts and assembles them in the same order and duration in which they were filmed. This process simplifies the filmmaking apparatus to the extreme. The only materials necessary are a small digital camera and a microphone that the presenter can offer to the individuals that are filmed. The film is ready as

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<sup>7</sup> “Le Burkina Faso est l'un des pays qui a beaucoup avancé dans la lutte contre le sida. C'est un pays laïc et la prise de conscience de la pandémie a eu lieu plus facilement qu'au Mali ou au Sénégal: aucun chef ne s'oppose à la prévention contre le Sida.” Michel Zongo, Chef d'équipe avec *Cinomade*, entretien, mars 2009, Bobo Dioulasso. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

<sup>8</sup> “Deux semaines avant la tournée, l'équipe de *Cinomade* se déplace dans toutes les localités (une dizaine généralement) pour rencontrer toutes les personnes relais: le prêtre, l'imam, le préfet, le médecin, les présidents d'association, toute forme d'autorité légale, coutumière, religieuse et associative. Tout le monde est impliqué. [...] Nous expliquons notre projet, la manière dont ça va se passer, nous répondons aux questions, nous confirmons la date de la projection, nous vérifions qu'elle n'entre pas en concurrence avec un autre événement...” Michel Zongo, Chef d'équipe avec *Cinomade*, entretien, mars 2009, Bobo Dioulasso. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

soon as the film shooting ends. There is no need for an editing bench, nor is there any need for time to edit or mix. This *montage* technique gives the impression of rough material: literally, the images are shown without modification on the day of their recording. The aesthetic seems transparent, a deliberate lack of staging or manipulation: in fact, the production is well planned.

Thus, in order for the film to be a success, the makers of the video must be in control of the filmmaking process: they must know in advance the order of sequences and have a general idea of the final product. Most importantly, they must obtain interesting testimonies. An *interactive sequence* generally begins with a few shots of the village: the name of the village is shown, as well as a few of its most characteristic spaces, such as the Mosque or the church, the village school or official buildings. The village chief then bids welcome to the team and address his fellow citizens, encouraging them to participate in the evening's events. This official blessing (in French, the term used is *bénédiction*) is followed by interviews (*micro trottoir*) made haphazardly in the village. The presenter tries to film brief interviews with a few individuals representing the village's various social, ethnic and generational groups. He generally interviews eight or nine people, allowing each person to speak for about three minutes, aiming to elicit an opinion concerning the topic that will be debated later that evening. These interviews cannot be modified or reorganised; they can only be shortened or erased. The filmmakers must anticipate the content of each testimony and provoke the clearest and most concise expressions possible. The film, lasting an average of 30 minutes, concludes with an improvisation by a local musical group on the theme of the fight against HIV.

Screening a film that was made *in situ* allows *Cinomade* to anchor the debate within the community: "This allows the subject to be localised; it allows to debate about what they themselves have said and not about what people elsewhere might have said."<sup>9</sup> The village inhabitants will not be meeting in the evening to watch an entertainment piece or an informational documentary made elsewhere, but will see familiar faces discussing important issues. From the very beginning, the debate is situated within the heart of the community. The images have a similar status to those seen in a *family film*, which, for theorists such as Roger Odin, is elaborated as a space for intimate communication, one in which the

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<sup>9</sup> "Ça permet au sujet d'être localisé, ça permet de débattre sur ce qu'eux-mêmes ont dit et non pas sur ce que des gens ailleurs auraient dit." Bernie Goldblat, Membre fondateur de *Cinomade*, entretien, mai 2009, Ouagadougou. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

production contexts and the cultural space of the screening closely coincide.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the family film allows the spectator to create a link between the audio-visual image and reality, engaging his personal memory in order to complete the reality shown onscreen by recalling additional elements from his own experience.

The same phenomenon occurs during the screening of the *interactive sequences* (*séquences interactives*). Each individual can recognise himself onscreen, either directly or through the image of a brother, mother, a neighbour, a familiar place, or a way of speaking. Seeing a person from the community on screen provokes at once identification and the sentiment of belonging, which are in turn reinforced by the presenter at the end of the screening: “The film you just saw, where was it made? Here. Is it your film? It is our film!”<sup>11</sup>

In the theoretical reflection “Cinéma, oralité et espaces de communication”, Odin shows the ways in which the family film pushes spectators to comment on the images shown.<sup>12</sup> The same process arises when audiences are shown the interviews: while some individuals recognise a parent, others comment on what is being said. The debate is already started, the proverbial ice is broken, and the presenter will incite further conversation as he prompts everyone to contribute via the microphone. The interviews (*micro-trottoir*) are sometimes the first occasion for village inhabitants to voice their opinions publicly. They form the starting point of the debate, which begins on a theme that is simultaneously polemic and socially acceptable: the oftentimes-difficult relationships between men and women. This standard topic is referred to as the *guerre des sexes* (the war of the sexes), and through its generally accepted playfulness it opens up a debate within the community. Everyone has an opinion about male and female roles, and most wish to share those thoughts. This initial conversation on gender roles allows for a practice run in taking a position on an issue and inaugurates a climate in which the sharing of opinion is allowed, facilitating further debate on a more specific question, namely the prevention of HIV.

As the audience appropriates the film and the debate, the event organisers progressively remove themselves from the debate: “It has the power to efface us, in a way. Even physically, we are between the screen and the public. Then it’s effaced and we disappear a little.”<sup>13</sup> Once

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<sup>10</sup> Sur le film de famille, see Roger Odin (ed.): *Le film de famille, usage privé, usage public*. Paris: Méridiens-Klincksieck, 1995.

<sup>11</sup> “Le film que vous venez de voir il est fait où ? Chez nous. C’est votre film ? C’est notre film !” Michel Zongo, *Cinomade* team leader, interview, March 2009, Bobo Dioulasso. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

<sup>12</sup> In: V. Bouchard, G. Lacasse, G. Scheppler (eds.): *Pratiques orales du cinéma*. Paris: Ed. L’Harmattan, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> “Ça a cette force que ça nous efface, en quelque sorte. Même physiquement, nous sommes entre l’écran et le public. Là ça s’estompe et on disparaît un peu.” Bernie Goldblat, Membre fondateur de *Cinomade*, entretien, mai 2009, Ouagadougou. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

again, this self-effacement differs from the customary ways in which foreign NGOs tend to present information on AIDS; instead of receiving authoritative messages on good and bad practices, the villagers are left to dialogue about the topic on screen and in the crowd.

*Cinomade* progressively becomes a simple interface, acting as a mediator among the various opinions expressed by the public during the debate.

The video no longer functions as a means of propaganda, but turns into a mirror screen:

It is a way to place a mirror in front of the population. We do not impose an image, but it is the population that looks at itself in order to see how it walks, dances, etc. Then, each individual has the liberty to correct his own attitude, having become aware of the problem. The means of discovering your own self allows you to see your defects. [...] *Cinomade* does not explain to the local populations how to change. On the contrary, it is for each individual to find the path of change to modify his behaviour, in order to have sexual and social practices that do not endanger him and that do not imperil the community.<sup>14</sup>

The video offers itself to the community as a mirror in which that community can observe its own diversity and its contradictions. The *opinion leaders* can then become aware of the problems represented by certain sexual practices, such as extra conjugal relationships, and of the danger they represent for their community.<sup>15</sup> When more outspoken segments of the population (*opinion leaders*) – generally the elders and the women – become aware of the stakes, they can create a critical mass and provoke a change of values within the community. What was formerly tolerated – for example, discreet relationships outside the marriage – becomes targeted as unacceptable by the *opinion leaders*. Similarly, the men – or at times, women – who refuse the use of condoms, for reasons of comfort, pleasure or conviction, become marginalised.

In order to obtain this result, the *Cinomade* presenters exhibit the carefully chosen words of an elder, a mother, or a young man who has travelled as an example. Gradually, people begin to share the stories of their own sexual experiences, something they probably would not have done in any other context:

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<sup>14</sup> “C’est une manière de mettre un miroir en face de la population. Nous n’imposons pas une image, mais c’est la population elle-même qui se regarde pour savoir comment elle marche, danse, etc. Ensuite, chaque individu a la liberté pour corriger son attitude, après avoir pris conscience du problème. Le fait de se découvrir toi-même, ça te permet de voir tes défauts. [...] *Cinomade* n’explique pas aux populations locales comment se redresser. C’est au contraire à chacun de trouver le chemin pour modifier son comportement, afin d’avoir des pratiques sexuelles et sociales qui ne le mettent pas en danger et qui ne fragilisent pas la communauté.” Sévérin Da, Animateur CDI, entretien, mars 2009, Bobo Dioulasso. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

<sup>15</sup> E. Katz, P.F. Lazarsfeld: *Personal Influence, The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*. Glencoe: Ed. Free Press, 1955.

[For example, a young man bears witness saying that] without the condom he would be dead, because he travelled in Côte d'Ivoire; he had money, he did whatever he felt like doing, what he could not do in the village. Thankfully, he had understood the importance of protecting himself. Thus, young people share their stories with the younger ones. It is in this way that education is transmitted here: the young ones listen to the older ones. If the older one speaks about his own sexuality, whether in good or bad terms, it can become an example for the others. The idea is to channel everything that is good speech.<sup>16</sup>

Progressively, the crowd validates this position. The main difficulty consists in opening the debate – something that the *séquence interactive* facilitates – and to orient it towards questions usually not discussed publicly in the Burkinabé society: sexual relations and, particularly, extra-conjugal relationships. The film opens the debate and allows for a better grasping of the stakes. Nonetheless, this would be insufficient without the activity of the presenter who begins and discretely orients the debates. Let us examine his role in detail.

### **The impact of the live commentary on the reception**

Beyond the screened film, the presenter has a key role during the events of the evening, “[...] because he is the one who provokes the debate, who is the moderator. He is the one who calms or fires up [the crowd].”<sup>17</sup> It is absolutely necessary for the presenter to speak fluently one of the languages spoken in the village. *Cinomade* organises screenings in Moré, in Dioula, and in and Gulmancé, depending on the majority language in each cultural space. This is an important question, since the presenter effectuates the transition between the filmed reality and the audience and from one testimony to the next (filmed or live). He engages each participant with the aim of provoking a discussion. Thus, the crowd present in front of the screen “ceases to be the spectators in order to become actors”.<sup>18</sup> He is nevertheless in a fragile position, because a small mistake can end the debate, closing down the participants’ willingness to share their ideas. This is why his knowledge of the host

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<sup>16</sup> “[Par exemple, un jeune homme témoigne que sans] la capote, il serait mort, parce qu’il a voyagé en Côte d’Ivoire, il avait l’argent, il faisait ce qu’il voulait, ce qu’il ne pouvait pas faire au village. Heureusement, il a compris l’importance de se protéger. Ainsi, des jeunes partagent leur expérience avec des plus jeunes. C’est comme cela que se transmet l’éducation ici : les jeunes écoutent les plus âgés. Si le plus âgé parle de sa propre sexualité, en bien ou en mal, ça peut devenir un exemple pour les autres. L’idée est de canaliser tout ce qui est bonne parole.” Michel Zongo, Chef d’équipe avec *Cinomade*, entretien, mars 2009, Bobo Dioulasso. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

<sup>17</sup> “[...] parce que c’est lui qui provoque le débat, qui est le modérateur. C’est lui qui calme, qui excite.” Bernie Goldblat, *Cinomade* Founding member, interview, May 2009, Ouagadougou. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

<sup>18</sup> “Cesse d’être des spectateurs pour devenir des acteurs.” Bernie Goldblat, *Cinomade* Founding member, interview, May 2009, Ouagadougou. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

language and culture is of utmost importance, as he must understand all the subtleties of the debate and be able to interact with the public in an elegant and quick manner.

*Cinomade*'s main objective is to provoke a long-term debate and not to affront the local populations by shocking them. Taboo subjects must be presented in an indirect fashion; open criticism of the village ways of life must be avoided, as well as all gratuitous spectacular content:

We do not seek the sensational or the spectacular. We do not seek to shock the spectators or to make them say things they will later regret having said. We respect the modesty of each participant. We push them to speak without revealing things that are too intimate.<sup>19</sup>

Generally, in West Africa and particularly in rural zones in Burkina Faso, it is very rare for people to speak openly about sex in public. Usually, all that concerns male-female relationships is considered highly intimate, and it is extremely rare for couples to show affection in public. Sexual relationships remain taboo: traditionally, a father does not speak to his children about this topic, nor does a mother to her sons. It is therefore easy to imagine the challenge of organising an intergenerational debate about sex and HIV between men and women in a small community.

In order to keep the possibility of dialogue open, the team leader begins by acknowledging this taboo and by putting the topic into perspective:

I tell people: "It is normal, I would not be able to speak with my father and my mother about sex. But today we are all concerned; we are forced to speak. It is life today that imposes this on us, we must adapt". Then people understand that we are not here against them in order to transform their society, but only to give them new keys.<sup>20</sup>

The presenters then try to provoke the beginning of a debate in a roundabout fashion. Since it is usually quite difficult to create an atmosphere of trust which can open a discussion, the method often used is to resort to humour, by beginning a debate concerning the *guerre des sexes*. The majority of young Burkinabé men believe that young women are first attracted to

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<sup>19</sup> "On ne cherche pas le sensationnel ou le spectaculaire. On ne cherche pas à choquer les spectateurs ou à leur faire dire des choses qu'ils regretteront ensuite. On respecte la pudeur de chaque intervenant. On les pousse à parler, sans les forcer à dévoiler des choses trop intimes." Michel Zongo, Chef d'équipe avec *Cinomade*, entretien, mars 2009, Bobo Dioulasso. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

<sup>20</sup> "Je dis aux gens: 'C'est normal, moi non plus je ne pourrais pas parler de sexe avec mon père et ma mère. Mais, aujourd'hui, nous sommes tous concernés, nous sommes obligés de parler. C'est la vie d'aujourd'hui qui nous impose cela, il faut que l'on arrive à s'adapter.' Alors les gens comprennent que l'on n'est pas là contre eux pour transformer leur société, mais juste là pour leur donner de nouvelles clés." Michel Zongo, Chef d'équipe avec *Cinomade*, entretien, mars 2009, Bobo Dioulasso. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

a man for his wealth, and that “if you don’t have money, you cannot get a girlfriend.”<sup>21</sup> Naturally, the young women believe this to be false. This is an important subject, but not considered as taboo, and so it allows everyone to jump into the (often heated) discussion. Generally, this topic is already mentioned by one of the people during the interviews, allowing the presenter to make a reference to the film. After some time, in order to advance the discussion and to include other generations, the presenter asks what the audience thinks of the so called “tontons”, literally “the uncles”, referring to older men who attract young women by offering them gifts. By this point, all the generations are insinuated in the debate, and it is much easier to touch upon other, more sensitive questions such as sexually transmitted diseases and the HIV/Aids. The liaison between the “tontons” and young girls is shown to be particularly dangerous, as it generally favours the multiplication of sexual partners and trans-generational relationships, the “tontons” generally being married men and the young girls generally having other relationships (with other “tontons” and/or with younger men). Thus, through the prism of relationships between men and women, a funny and socially acceptable topic, the presenter seeks to progressively lead the public discussion to taboo subjects.

A relationship of trust between the villagers and the *Cinomade* team is of crucial importance, which is why *Cinomade* avoids any attitude that could be interpreted as superior or disdainful, and never judges the ways of the community. The team does not seek to moralise, nor to ban certain behaviours. Rather it strives to provoke a change of the ways things are done, to incite a change in traditions: “We do not give them lessons”.<sup>22</sup> The lesson comes from the interior of the community, from the confrontation with the experience of each individual who belongs to the whole. Through the apparatus called *Cinéma Débat Interactif* (Cinema – Interactive – Discussion, CDI), the presenter tries to provoke a debate in order to make certain opinions come to light, with the aim to then give value to those opinions that correspond to an accurate perception of the illness or to a security practice. He does not officially give his opinion, but he significantly influences the debate to allow the emergence of a form of consensus within the spectator group. The idea is to convince individuals to participate in a collective process and to provoke a critical mass, with the complicity of a segment of the population and the collaboration of the elites (legal, traditional and religious).

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<sup>21</sup> “Si t’as pas d’argent, tu ne peux pas avoir une copine” (quote from the film *La guerre des sexes*, directed by Bernie Goldblat in 2009). Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

<sup>22</sup> “On ne leur donne pas une leçon.” Michel Zongo, *Cinomade* Team leader, interview, March 2009, Bobo Dioulasso. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

A disrespect of the two basic rules of refusing to shock and judge can end the debate. The system *Cinéma Débat Interactif* (Cinema – Interactive – Discussion, CDI) consists in creating a relationship of trust that enables people to open up and speak about taboo topics. The idea is to begin a debate that will continue after the meeting: “if we shock, the door it took us months to open will rapidly close. If we accompany the speaking-out, especially by the women, we provoke a questioning and a re-evaluation of accepted ideas within the community, which can continue even when the *Cinomade* team has left the village.”<sup>23</sup> At that point in time, relay resource persons enter into play: doctors, nurses, or members of associations that fight Aids can continue to speak out and convince people. The door is open; the taboo subject can now be discussed. The village population can begin a change in mind-sets. It is a slow process, one that can be easily interrupted, but it remains the only way to provoke a real change in the behaviours within a community.

Once the debate has been successfully started – thanks to the provocative but morally accepted theme of the war of the sexes (discussed above) and by the screening of testimonies from other village as well as the surrounding communities – and once the mirror has been installed via the mirror-effect of the *interactive sequences*, the entire undertaking consists in encouraging and shaping the debate. The discussion must keep a lively tone and must not be dominated by a minority who might be against change. The presenters intervene on this level in a way that is as effective as it is discrete. If they lose control of the debate, the meeting might create an effect that is contrary to the one planned and reinforce the present situation. It is therefore necessary for the team to successfully contradict what they define as “*la mauvaise parole*” (bad speech or discourse), without closing the discussion:

The difficulty is to break the myth of the bad speech, by the good speech, without killing the debate. The presenter is a catalyst, a moderator. He plays a double role: he tries to oppose people when it is needed, in order to then discuss both stances. He does not take a stand; he is really in the middle. So the people trust him, they do not hesitate to express what they want to say, since he does not chose one side of the debate in front of the public.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “Si l’on choque, on ferme la porte que l’on a mis des mois à ouvrir. Si l’on accompagne la prise de parole, en particulier celle des femmes, on provoque un questionnement et une remise en cause des idées reçues au sein de la communauté qui peut se poursuivre même lorsque l’équipe de *Cinomade* a quitté le village.” Bernie Goldblat, *Cinomade* Founding member, interview, May 2009, Ouagadougou. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

<sup>24</sup> “La difficulté est de casser le mythe de la mauvaise parole, par la bonne parole, sans tuer le débat. L’animateur, c’est un catalyseur, un modérateur. Il joue un double rôle: il essaie de mettre les gens en conflit quand il le faut, pour ensuite les départager. Il n’a pas de prise de position, il est vraiment au milieu. Donc, les gens lui font confiance, ils n’hésitent pas à exprimer ce qu’ils veulent dire, car il n’a pas de partis pris face au public.” Michel Zongo, Chef d’équipe avec *Cinomade*, entretien, mars 2009, Bobo Dioulasso. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

The presenter must keep his role as an impartial moderator of the debate and avoid becoming an authority figure who simply validates certain opinions and discredits others. This positioning is made possible by all the work performed prior to the meeting: the many moments of contact with the village, the appropriation of the meeting by the spectators, and a relationship of trust between the *Cinomade* team and the audience. However, the debate itself makes possible the sharing of various opinions and the collective examination of consciences. Meaningful debate happens as all the community representatives have their say, including the men, the women, the young, the elders, and people from the high and low castes.

This is why the *Cinomade* team tries to ensure that the discussion includes voices from all the sexes, generations, and social classes in the community. Once again, this balance is not easy to achieve in a society that is very hierarchical and codified, a society in which the speech of elders is still particularly respected and in which public speech by women (and even more so that of young girls) is highly codified. In order to reach this equilibrium, the *Cinomade* team works with two presenters, of whom at least one is a woman. The first presenter stands next to the screen, designs the speakers and comments on the testimonies. The second, usually the female member of the team, remains with the audience, holding a wireless microphone and encouraging the spectators, mainly women, to share their thoughts, in a continuation of the brief interviews given by young women during the filming (*micro-trottoir*). The spectators do not automatically perceive her as a member of the *Cinomade* team: “At the beginning of the evening, the spectators do not necessarily know that she is part of the team.”<sup>25</sup> Her role is mainly to encourage the women and the girls to speak-up: “She provokes the men, she takes in the crowd, she pulls the women so that they talk. Often, they are shyer.”<sup>26</sup>

Giving the spectators the right to speak openly echoes the pedagogical principles described by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). For Freire, generating a balanced dialogue between teachers and students helps to prevent situations of power and gives back a decisional role to the listener:

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<sup>25</sup> “Au début de la soirée, les spectateurs ne savent pas forcément qu’elle fait partie de l’équipe.” Bernie Goldblat, *Cinomade* Founding member, interview, May 2009, Ouagadougou. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

<sup>26</sup> “Elle vient provoquer les hommes, elle fait le tour du public, elle tire les femmes pour qu’elles viennent parler. Souvent elles sont plus gênées.” Bernie Goldblat, *Cinomade* founding member, interview, May 2009, Ouagadougou. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

[...] the fundamental goal of dialogical teaching is to create a process of learning and knowing that invariably involves theorizing about the experiences shared in the dialogue process.<sup>27</sup>

However, contrary to Freire's thesis, it does not seem to me that the *Cinomade* educational apparatus brings the listener to a posture of total awakening to a situation of oppression. The organisers do not perceive the status quo as a situation of oppression; their interventions therefore do not aim to reveal a situation of inequality. They consider themselves, as they consider the villagers, as part of a society that is changing. The perception of inequality and oppression is usually theorized from the outside of the community and tends to shape foreign-backed projects. The *Cinomade* project is based on a holistic view of a society and its own problems. This is also why the *Cinomade* presenters never pass judgment on situations that would likely be called "macho", "misogynist" or "colonial". Furthermore, the spectators' awareness is focused on a very specific problem and not larger societal change, and the *Cinomade* objective is not to create a *tabula rasa* from a "past" or a "tradition" as some Marxist principles stipulate. The emerging reflexion is internal to the community, and it has to be collective in order to be successful. This aspect of the *Cinomade* experience corresponds to a type of collective educational process that Paulo Freire did not necessarily theorize.

The interaction between the presenter and the audience largely depends on the technical apparatus. We have seen how the *interactive sequences* allow the presenter to set-up and open the discussion. Similarly, without a microphone, the presenter could not lead the debates: one must imagine a crowd of over 1000 people during each meeting, outside, with all the noise inherent to such a gathering.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, a large part of the impartial stance of the moderator comes from the fact that he is the one holding the microphone and that his speech is amplified. In many villages, this aspect is reinforced by the village chief's endorsement of the debate, either in the *interactive sequences*, or in the evening, live, through that very microphone. Indeed, even in some Mossi villages, where tradition usually proscribes the chief from speaking directly in public, some chiefs will address themselves to the crowd gathered for the meeting: "The chief of Kokologo

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<sup>27</sup> Donaldo Macedo, Introduction to Paulo Freire: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 2000, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> "Les projections cinéma dans ces localités sont des facteurs de rassemblement de grande foule. Beaucoup de personnes n'avaient jamais vu de film sur grand écran, et les quelques rares vidéos-clubs de la place refusent par moment (jours de marché) du monde. L'intervention de CINOMADE a mobilisé en moyenne 2700 personnes par soirée dans chaque localité." Abdoulaye Traoré (ed.), *Évaluation de l'efficacité d'une campagne de sensibilisation au VIH/SIDA*, 2004, p. 44. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

[small town West of the capital Ouagadougou] participated in our evenings, even in the debate. He directly encouraged people to speak up and to participate in the debate.”<sup>29</sup>

The presenter within the crowd also plays with the sound amplification. She speaks up, showing the other women that they too can answer the men (who at that given moment do not have access to the microphone). She gives the microphone to young women who otherwise would not dare speak in front of the crowd. Thus, the microphone serves as a tool to create a balance between the testimonies, since the act of giving the microphone to a chosen individual – whether during the interviews or the meeting – not only invites and encourages a person to speak but also legitimises their testimony.

It is true that, at first, the presence of the microphone discourages young women from speaking in public. But the atmosphere created by the screening of the interviews filmed in the village creates a strong desire to participate in the debate. The female presenter shows the way by answering the boys and young men through the microphone. She then continues using the microphone without facing the crowd, but by staying in the middle of the crowd, which is less intimidating. All these elements combine to create an environment in which young women can speak publicly through the microphone. Still, this remains a fragile and, at times, unpredictable process. Summing up, without these two audio-visual techniques, the video camera and the microphone, the *Cinomade* meetings could simply not work. The CDI is dependent on the recorded or amplified word.

The ability to quickly modify the plan of action and adapt the *Cinomade* apparatus to the realities and types of interactions created in each village has shaped the main characteristic of the CDI: it was created incrementally, while adapting to the various situations encountered by the team. The interactions between the *Cinomade* group and the audience are developed according to the same principle, which is why it is essential to have a very well prepared and entirely autonomous team. Everyone is concerned and each employee has to adapt to the real situation and be ready to perform several roles. For example, the driver also acts as a mediator with the public; the project manager becomes the cameraman during the interviews. The members of the *Cinomade* team assume their roles entirely for the length of their stay in each village: in order to modify behaviours, to create awareness without alienating the people they meet, each member keeps the program goal in mind during all the interactions with the

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<sup>29</sup> “Le chef de Kokologo [petite ville à l’ouest de la capitale, Ouagadougou] a participé à nos soirées, au débat même. Il a encouragé en direct les gens à prendre la parole et à participer au débat.” Michel Zongo, *Cinomade* Team leader, interview, March 2009, Bobo Dioulasso. Translation by Izabela Potapowicz.

local community. Even the most insignificant exchanges (conversations during informal meals, for example) are thus consciously performed with this objective in mind.

*Cinomade* does not conceive of the video projection as a way of informing or even of convincing audiences. The screening of recorded interviews in the place of their creation is intended to facilitate the community members' speaking out and becoming involved in the meetings. Furthermore, the film is no longer understood as a means to deliver a message, or even seen as a message to be delivered. On the contrary, it is a way to provoke a new attitude, to encourage the participants to speak out and consider a novel point of view. The meeting takes place in front of the film screen, which serves as a pretext, a sort of catalyst for the collective debate that ensues. The video screening is then engaged in a larger process of communication based on audio-visual techniques such as the recording of testimonies (*mediatised orality*) and live debates (*direct orality*). This type of hybrid cultural activity is being constantly adapted by the *Cinomade* team to each new context in which it is used, thus creating new *ways of doing*. Generally, the simplest way for the community is to seek to adapt already existing ways of doing to the new educational apparatus set in place by *Cinomade*.

Moreover, the media heterogeneity used throughout the entire *Cinomade* intervention, from the first contact with the village leaders to the video screenings and discussions, opens the possibility of an appropriation of the film and its message by the spectators. The film is no longer a foreign cultural object shown in the middle of the village but the expression of the village members it is meant to address. The various meetings leading up to the event and the discussions held after the screenings allow a collective appropriation of the entire process.



« La guerre des sexes », Burkina Faso, 2008 (source: Cinomade)