Ananda Devi’s World of Exclusion Brought to the Screen
The Novel Ève de ses décombres as the Film Les enfants de Troumaron
An Interview with Harrikrisna and Sharvan Anenden

§1
Author of Rue la poudrière (1989), Le voile de Draupadi (1993), L’arbre fouet (1997), Moi, l’interdite (2000), Pagli (2001), Soupîr (2002), La vie de Josèphin le fou (2003) or more recently Indian Tango (2007), Le sari vert (2009), Les jours vivants (2013), Ananda Devi has become a major writer in francophone studies, especially for works concerning her native island Mauritius. Her novel Ève de ses décombres (Eve of Her Ruins) is incontestably a work that confirmed her position as a writer in French-language literature. Acclaimed by critics when it came out in 2006, the novel won four prizes, among them the Prix Cinq Continents. In that story, Devi transports us to the impoverished neighborhood of Port-Louis and the violent destiny of four teenagers: Ève, Sad, Savita, and Clélio. These young people live in Troumaron, a suburb of Port-Louis, which the character Sad describes as “a sort of funnel; the last bottleneck where used water from the entire country is poured. This is where we toss the refugees from the cyclones, the ones who couldn’t find housing after a tropical storm […].” Troumaron is for these young people a synonym for violence, the absence of a future, and pessimism, of the bad things already present in the colonial era. This grim picture leads Françoise Lionnet to say, referring to Devi’s first novel Rue La Poudrière (1989), that “the postmodern nightmare of urban sprawl may in fact be the return of an old repression: the postcolonial fin-de-siècle.”

§2
Paradoxically, in her desire to transcend this life of misery, Ève, the heroine of the novel, enters into a series of exchanges that put her life in danger: “A pencil, an eraser, a ruler, anything. They were giving them to me. […] And then one day, when I asked as usual even if it didn’t sound like it, they asked me for something in return” (18). Ève gives her body to men and at the same time she remains a stranger to them, saying during the story: “my body will not be colonized” (93). Nevertheless it is one of these men who takes from her what she cherishes the most: Savita, her very close friend who consoles her during her moments of depression, the one with whom she had imagined another life, far away from Mauritius. Another person in Troumaron loves Ève: Sad. This young, romantic man, who discovered an expression of anger and revolt in the poetry of Rimbaud, will not be able to seduce Ève: “Ève is my reason but she pretends she doesn’t know it”. Finally, Clélio, the last voice of Troumaron, is a rebellious soul who says: “I have enough revolt to re-fill a pierced basket of my life ten times over” (24); he is questioning his identity and the meaning of his life: “and me, what am I, […] I’m not a slave but it seems to me that’s all there is around me” (54).

The novel Ève de ses décombres, symbolically gives voices to these four characters by adopting an original narrative structure. Each chapter expresses the views of one of the four young people (the novel also has a voice that is not given a name). The difficulty of the film adaptation was to be able to replace this literary richness with images and a film narrative that would not lose the integrity of the story. As André Bazin suggests: “the good adaptation has to recreate the essence and the spirit of the original.”
Faithful the film is, and the success of the adaptation is due to many elements. First of all, Ananda Devi wrote the script herself. Under the direction of Harrikrisna and Sharvan Anenden respectively the author's husband and son, this work became a family adventure. Harrikrisna Anenden has had a long career as a documentary filmmaker working for the World Health Organization in different countries around the world. His documentary work includes *Un monde de femmes/A Women's World* (1994), which relates the action of the Indonesian women for the sake of the well-being of the families, *Bâtir des villes de demain/Building the Cities of Tomorrow* (1996), which presents the problems linked to urban sprawl and its development, and *Pas de service sans preservative/No Condoms, No Service* (2001), which presents the campaign against AIDS in Thailand. This experience made it possible for him to create more authentic images for the film *Les enfants de Troumaron*. For his part, Sharvan Anenden trained in visual communication and design at the University of the Arts in London and has been making short films from a very young age. A passionate cinephile, he has helped contribute a more modern touch to the film. Harrikrisna and Sharvan had already worked together on another adaptation of Ananda Devi’s work: *La Cathédrale*, a short film made in 2006 relating a day unlike any other of a young, penniless girl from Port-Louis.

The collaboration between the writer, Ananda Devi, and the directors, Harrikrisna and Sharvan Anenden, shows that there is an inherent dialogue between literature and cinema. For the adaptation of her novel *Ève de ses décombres*, the author became the scriptwriter and was engaged in transforming her writing, in her own words to “sacrifier les mots et le style” [to sacrifice the words and style], to create dialogues, scenes, images, which would give an authentic, realistic setting to the story of Ève, Savita, Sad, and Clélia. By agreeing to adapt her novel to the constraints of shooting (especially regarding the budget), Ananda Devi thus performed the duties of both novelist and scriptwriter. This duality brought the author to both revisit and conceive her novel from a different point of view. This transmutation appears clearly in the modification of the title *Ève de ses décombres*, which becomes *Les enfants de Troumaron*, a shift that illustrates the journey from the original work to its adaptation. *Ève/Troumaron* is a unique case of an adaptation where not only does the novelist take a key role in the film’s production, but where the Devi-Anenden collaboration also shows how an entire nuclear family functions as a creative unit.

Ananda Devi is the author of many novels, so why did you choose *Ève de ses décombres*?

Harrikrisna Anenden

In fact, even my first film was based on one of Ananda’s stories, *La Cathédrale*. I made a promise to Ananda in 1977 when the collection of short stories came out, that if one day I were to make a feature film, this is the story I would choose, as I could see my childhood in Port-Louis in this story. So, after twenty-eight years as a documentary filmmaker, we started working on that first film in 2005 after I retired from the World Health Organization. After having done *La Cathédrale*, I
started working on another of her novels, which I liked very much: *Le voile de Draupadi*. But after *Ève de ses décombres* was published in 2006, we felt that the story had a more universal impact. What it says about these young people and about the life in a suburb Troumaron could have been said of any city of the world. Troumaron could have been a suburb of Paris, the Bronx, Kolkata, Rio. Sharvan brought in his understanding and vision of these lives and help us get into the skin of the characters. He is about the same age of those kids in the “cité”, he knows their language, the way they think etc. Me, I am not of their generation and I don’t even understand the way they talk, like when they say “fag” or “clop” I did not understand that they meant cigarette, even the word “chien”, I did not know it means pimp. So Sharvan’s input was pertinent to that situation. I am from the old school and a different culture. As the novel had won several prizes, we thought it would be easier to find sponsors, although in the end this was not the case, except for the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)*, which partly funded the production (*Ève de ses décombres* had won the *Prix des Cinq Continents* from this organization).

D.P. How involved were you in the writing of the script? Did you ask Ananda Devi to make certain modifications compared to the novel? Which ones?

H.A. There were about eighteen versions of the screenplay in all! Each time she would finish a version, I would give my comments based on the visual aspects, especially as I knew we had a limited budget. There were a few points about which we had very long (and sometimes heated) discussions: one was about the fact that, in the book, the inspector gives Ève a gun to protect herself. In a novel, it is sometimes easier to make the readers believe that something like that can happen, but in the film, the inspector did not have enough of a role and enough interaction with Ève to justify his giving her his gun. We originally thought of making her steal his gun, which would be in a jacket that he had left in the car, but again this seemed far-fetched. I am not sure anymore how we ended up with the idea of the gun being in the nightclub and Ève seeing it there very early in the film. Another important point we changed was the killing of Savita, which had many versions, including during filming. In the book, it is not immediately revealed who has killed Savita; it could have been the gang, for example. It is only gradually, towards the end, that it becomes clear that the teacher is guilty. But during the filming, especially as the actors are all non-professional actors, we wanted to shoot the scene in shadows, but it was not working at all. We then realized that the film did not need the suspense of “who killed Savita” but the sense of an inevitable tragedy once Ève has her great “idea” about how they would escape from Troumaron. So Sharvan refilmed the scene showing clearly who killed Savita. We also needed to show how Ève guessed that it was him, and Ananda introduced this idea of his constantly using this kind of hand sanitizer, which also had a symbolic meaning – just as his washing his hands at the end of the film had. At the end of the book, the teacher leaves a letter confessing his crime. But this would have removed some of the intensity of that last scene.

D.P. Were there disagreements about elements that you would have wanted to remove or modify that Ananda insisted on keeping?

H.A. Of course, as in any collaborative venture, there were many discussions and arguments. There are both advantages and disadvantages in working as a family!
But in the end, we managed to get over the disagreements and have a screenplay that worked.

§7  **D.P.**  Regarding the language, there is some Creole present in the dialogue although there is none in the novel. I imagine that came quite naturally in the process of adaptation...

**H.A.**  Yes, in film, the language used has to feel natural. For example in *La Cathédrale*, there was French, Creole, English and even a little Hindi! These are the languages commonly heard in Mauritius. We did not have any preconceived idea about whether the actors would speak in French or Creole, except for the “monologues” which were very poetic and that we wanted to keep in French. With the gang, they were much more natural in Creole and the scenes were more powerful because of it. Also, we did not force the actors to stick to the dialogue, we allowed them to change it and adapt it to their feelings.

§8  **D.P.**  Compared to the writing of the script for *La Cathédrale*, the other adaptation of Ananda’s work that you did, what had changed since 2006? Was the work on the project very different knowing that the two productions were different, given that the first was a short film and the second a feature film?

**H.A.**  The two projects were completely different. *La Cathédrale* is based on a short story, it is a day in the life of the main character, Lina, and originally, we had intended it to be a short film. But then it developed into a longer film, with the song sequences in the background, allowing us to show life in Port-Louis at a leisurely pace. *Les enfants de Troumaron* was a much bigger challenge. There are more characters, and even the monologues were difficult in terms of visuals. Would the characters speak to the camera or be heard as voice-overs? For Ananda, there was a big leap between the two screenplays, and she worked very, very hard on *Les enfants de Troumaron*, teaching herself technique by reading books on screenwriting.

**Sharvan Anenden**

The script for *Ève* was more ambitious than *La Cathédrale*. I personally thought that it would need something different from my father’s approach in his previous film. The difference between the two scripts was the importance of the characters. *La Cathédrale* focused more on unveiling a story without getting too much into the character’s personality. I believe my father comes from a different school of thought: he approaches a story more like an observer, as a film-maker he wants to witness reality rather than molding it. Because *Ève de ses décombres* has so many details regarding the characters’ personality and backstory and how each personality intertwines with one another, I thought we needed a more aggressive approach to the image.

§9  **D.P.**  As you said earlier, the story contains many characters, Ève being the most important. In neither the novel nor the film is the word “prostitution” used. Nevertheless, it is something that we still have in mind (in one scene of the movie we can see “Ève pitin” in graffiti in Creole) because it is clear that this young woman sells herself. How did you think about presenting the character with dignity and so that the audience would identify with her? According to you, is there a facet of Ève that changed from the novel to the film?
H.A. The word “prostitution” is not used, because we do not need to state everything - you will agree with that we can use what is unspoken far more effectively. Also, it was very important to show that this is not what Ève is about. She sells her body but she has this feeling, this conviction that deep down, she is untouched. Whether she really is untouched or not, if this is just her delusion, is the tragedy of her story, but we didn’t want her to be categorized. There are lots of images showing what she does, but even these images show more of her inner feelings and moods than indicating a kind of profession. You can show lots of things in subtle ways, and try to light the shot with a poetic mood, as the writing of the novel is very poetic.

From the beginning of Ève’s narration in her room, it is clear that everything she has done since childhood is for survival, even for her school material – “a pencil, a ruler, an eraser, some paper”. Most of the images where she is with a customer or the teacher are done with lots of care not to be overly explicit, because we don’t want the audience to be judgmental, we know that she has closed herself on her pain. She even says it herself “I do everything”. But we don’t show it. Coming back to the Creole wording “Ève Pitin”, it was Sharvan’s idea, it was a way of showing the increasingly hostile reaction of the inhabitants of Troumaron towards Ève. She is going to school in a little white dress and she walks by a wall that has her name and this insult, and we feel that the darkness is closing around her. This scene ushers in the second part of the film, where the tragedy unfolds. For the last part of the question I think I have explained that we have tried through the film to give a poetic feel to the images to be in line with the writing of the novel. Perhaps in the novel we are more aware of Ève’s inner torment and rage, of her coldness, even, towards herself, and of the danger she puts herself in. In the film, she is perhaps less complex and tortured. She knows how to use her charm to get whatever she wants - money, even good marks for her exams to be able to leave Troumaron, to be able to leave the country with Savita. Even so, we have tried to remain faithful to the novel, as far as Ève is concerned.

Photo 1: “Ève”
(courtesy of the directors, Harrikrisna and Sharvan Anenden)
S.A. I do not believe Ève has any dignity left in her. Because she was abused from a very young age, she does not really have any foundations for honest human behavior as she has been taken advantage of most of her life. In the film she is a torn woman whose actions have led to the murder of one of the few people who truly cared for her. It is not clearly stated where she is honest to herself and to others, as she could be playing the same game between Savita and the teacher, taking advantage of their weakness for her. Throughout the film you see her as a confident woman who calls herself a “predator” and is able to survive in an unforgiving environment, she also does not always give in to the bullying she is subjected to. On the other side of her emotional spectrum, we witness Ève giving in to her weaknesses by speaking her mind to Savita and Sad. We are able to sympathize with her because we have a clear idea of how she would react in specific situations from anger to affection. What really attracted (I think) the audience was how she spoke from the heart when she was with the only two protagonists who loved her [Savita, Sad], because it gave us hope that she was not alone in her struggle. The natural beauty and charisma of Kitty Phillips, the actress who plays Ève, also helped a lot.

What transpires in the book is how the author perceived her. I can only hope that the audience would see her character in the film, the same way the filmmakers did. My mother saw her as a strong woman fighting but I saw Ève as a woman fighting to get strength back.

D.P. The Savita/Ève relationship is skillfully developed in the film. We feel the strong link that unites the two young women. The scene when the two young women put on Indian veils is particularly effective. This is a magical moment...

Could you discuss the symbolism?

H.A. This is also Sharvan’s creation. It was not in the novel, but there are very few moments in the film where we feel that we can breathe a little. The sequence in the area of “Marie Reine de la Paix” above the town is one where there is some
softness and a kind of hope. The scene in Savita’s bedroom is another one, but it comes after Ève’s experience with the men on the island and is just before the introduction of the teacher that will lead to Savita’s death. So it is a kind of hiatus, of pause where you feel they are on the edge, where maybe they will be able to make it. Red veils are symbols of marriage for Hindus, worn by the bride to cover her face, so that only the groom can see her at close range. Maybe Savita’s parents were preparing for her wedding and they started buying the dress for her. And when Ève looks at the veil and Savita puts it on her head, it is both a glimpse of something that will never happen for Ève and a kind of pact of love between them. And it is also the last and only time we see Ève smile softly in the film; we see her absolute beauty and sadness.

S.A. I did not care so much for this scene as it was too ambiguous and did not serve to help understand the rest of the story it just puts more question marks on Ève’s motivation without going anywhere. But in such a dark depiction of society even a gratuitous scene of affection is a welcome refreshment. It, again, helped the audience have hope for both of them, which made them want to continue to watch the story unfold.

D.P. Among the male characters, it seems to me that Sad and Clélio also evolve between the novel and the film. In the movie, Clélio is clearly rebellious and violent but he has a guitar... So from my point of view, he is as poetic a character as Sad, and perhaps even more than so, but with a certain pessimism. His thinking is also very deep. Was that intentional?

H.A. A large part of this came from the actors playing the roles. These are not professional actors, so they had in a way to project the character as close to themselves as possible. In the book, Clélio certainly adopts a more violent language and attitude than Sad, but in the end, he is the most vulnerable of the lot. Sad is the one who observes, who comments, maybe who tells the whole story. The initial shot of Clélio with his guitar, on the roof, did show more of his sadness than his anger. Even if he has a knife, it is to cut himself, and his “violence” is not as strongly expressed as in the book. Ananda changed his monologue at the beginning to fit in more with this character. So the actor changed the character, which is in a way a good thing to happen. Even though he doesn’t have as much screen time as Sad, he is also a strong center of the film. He also dreams of escape through his brother, Karlo, who ends up a prisoner (symbolically) himself.

S.A. This is the yin and yang of the film. Sad is a dreamer who does not seem to be grounded in reality, he is full of hope but becomes more grounded as he finds himself responsible for Ève. Clélio lost hope a long time ago. When you see his environment, you understand his predicament and can feel that he is more grounded than Sad. But he gradually loses touch with reality as he lets the dark side of his mind take over. It’s the positive and the negative.

D.P. Another aspect of the film that differs from the novel is the group of young people from the poor suburban area. This gang that terrorizes the neighborhood shows some interesting cultural aspects of Mauritius. How did this idea come to you?

H.A. The gang took on more and more importance as the screenplay was being written. The menace they present for Ève, and also the moment when they start to flare up when the police took Clélio to prison became important dramatic points in
the story, which was more underplayed in the novel. We felt we needed to build up
to the climactic ending, while also showing that they were also victims of society.

S.A.  I was less involved in the writing and I did not notice a difference between
the book and the film. In both, I always strongly felt their presence. Maybe it is
psychological: the book seems to me to be from Ève’s point of view whereas the
script levels the importance of each character, not giving Ève more importance
even though she is at the center of the story.

§13  D.P.  Finally, the teacher appears as a more isolated character, both from his
students and from his colleagues. In one of the scenes that does not exist in the
novel, we can see him sneaking into the teachers’ lounge. So why did you want to
show this man, who failed in his mission as an educator, as trying to avoid the rest
of the faculty? Before his death, we can see him alone again in his appartment...

H.A.  Mauritius is a small society, every one knows every one, and they may
even know what you did before you did it! So it is suggested that the other teachers
know that he has slept with Ève. Or else, it may all be in his mind and he thinks
they must know what he has done. He becomes sort of paranoid, full of shame, it
may be in his mind that he hears these voices. He knows that if the authorities
know what he did, he will go to prison. This scene also was Sharvan’s set up and
direction, to show the slow disintegration of the teacher’s mind, which was
essential to lead on to the murder scene.

S.A.  The scene in the teacher’s lounge should have been weird and awkward, it
was supposed to emphasize the teacher’s unease and clear sense of guilt. It was all
supposed to be psychological, putting the audience in HIS state of mind when para-
noia was taking over. Unfortunately it did not pan out the way I wanted because of
certain problems on the shoot.

§14  D.P.  Regarding the editing, you decided to show the murder of Savita chrono-
logically (rather than using a flashback) which takes out a little of the suspense
compared to the novel... Did you hesitate on that point or was it more logical from a
cinematographic perspective?

H.A.  I think I replied to this question earlier. In the original scenario the
murder scene remained a sort of mystery till the end. When we were doing that
scene we realized it was not working. This is where the screenwriter being on the
set helped. We changed the screenplay and filmed it as you saw in the film, which I
think was the best way out with our very little budget. It also helped to make it clear
that he kills Savita to prevent her from telling the community about him. It is his
fear of disgrace and prison that pushes him over the brink.

S.A.  The death’s position in the script did not really matter to me. This film is
not a thriller, it is a drama. We wanted the audience to connect with the characters
more than with the story. With the murder it was important to follow Ève and the
teacher’s psychological development. Yes, we took away one element of suspense
with the murder, but we added another one by letting the audience know some-
thing Ève did not know yet, letting them wonder what would be HER course of
action and her state of mind, which is what mattered to me. From my perspective it
was not necessary to drag the audience in the dark with the identity of the culprit.

§15  D.P.  Concerning film techniques, you use deep focus a lot, such as in the first
images of the neighborhood where we can see the hills and houses in the back-
ground, framed by the walls of apartment buildings, which gives a kind of beauty to that desolate area. It could be any poor neighborhood in a developing country. Did you do that deliberately to give a beauty to this run-down neighborhood while a voice from off-screen says “our neighborhood is our kingdom...”?  

**H.A.** Coming back to the poetic images this is one of the ways Sharvan and I could “pay back” our use of the novel for the film, by trying to convey the poetry of the words through the images. As I said in one of your earlier questions about the script, it was a work of many months (nearly 24), and 18 script versions, and how to use the voice of the four main actors, there was a lot of thinking behind each scene, behind the voice-over, and Sharvan brought his own vision of how to show the inner feelings of each character. As for the cité, it is a character in the film, we used lots of hours during color correction to give the cité that look in postproduction. That said, there are lots of things we could not do due to time and money. It had to be shown with a special kind of light, and yes, there can be beauty in that poverty.

**S.A.** Most of the cut-in shots were filmed by my father and the d.o.p. [director of photography]. Those moments that just show the city for what it is with its inhabitants are my favorite ones and those moments reinforce the visual style of the film. Perspective is usually needed as a rule of thumb to provide depth to a shot, otherwise it would just look flat and boring. I do not see those images as beautiful, and I believe my father wanted to show Mauritius for what it is, without misleading anyone. I saw the beauty in the people photographed, like seeing kids being kids and just playing around in a simple fashion but not in the actual place. I’ve been there, my parents came from there and a lot of my friends too, and I am much too aware of how horrible those places are to find any beauty in it. They are empirical proof that humanity has abandoned part of itself.

**§16 D.P.** How did you select the locations for filming? Did you have any difficulties shooting in the neighborhood that appears in the film?

**H.A.** The actors who play the members of the gang come from the same sort of area, and even they were very afraid to come to shoot in this cité. They told me it was a very dangerous area, that our equipment would be stolen, we could face violence etc. But one thing I have learned during my twenty-five years of making documentaries around the world, working with people of different cultures and backgrounds, is that you can’t go in with prejudice. You need to behave simply and with respect, and make local people feel that they are part of the project. In the end, we did not have any problems, and we used community members as extras in the film. The group playing dominos and cards in two sequences, the group that the gang starts beating up are from the cité, and of course all the scenes of daily life, which gave the film an authentic feel. We rented four apartments in the community for each of the main characters, they even allowed us to paint their walls the colors we wanted, and Sad to write his sentences on the wall. We were accepted by them, we did not have any problems.

**§17 D.P.** The prison where Clélio is kept is a place full of symbolism that evokes colonial domination. We can see in the middle of the cell an iron bar that prisoners would have been chained to in colonial times. Could you say a little more about this place?

**H.A.** There are lots of colonial places in Mauritius. This is a real prison, it is over one hundred years old, so it was built by the English after they took over from
the French. When I visited that place it did speak to me. There was an incredible atmosphere in the old stone walls. In the middle of Clélio’s cell, there is this long rusted iron bar that crosses the cell. Someone told us that the prisoners were kept chained to that bar when they were in the cell. (It hasn’t been used as a prison for about fifty years). Sharvan suggested having Clélio sit on that bar and place the camera in level with him. It is a very powerful shot. In the prison yard there is a place where they used to hang criminals. It would have been impossible to shoot in the real prison, or even to use a built set because of the cost. But in the end, we were lucky to have that place, as said above the cité is a character, the prison too became a character. After a few hours in there, the actor playing Clélio felt the distress of his character perfectly.

Photo 3: “Clélio en prison”
(courtesy of the directors, Harrikrisna and Sharvan Anenden)

§18

D.P. The movie, like the novel, sends an image and a message that does not correspond to the idea that people (especially tourists) have about Mauritius. How did the authorities receive your work?

H.A. I’d use Clélio’s sentence for it “Il faut ouvrir leurs yeux avec un canif” [“Their eyes have to be opened with a pocketknife”]. As I’ve said, we did not recreate any sets, everything was already there for us to film, to show and to build into the story. It is all in Mauritius. We were very lucky in that, despite the difficulties, we succeeded in doing a film that we could feel proud of, and this in a country that does not have a film industry and with hardly any funding.

We did have very good reviews in the Mauritian papers, and even internationally, so, we are very happy for we all worked hard on this production. There haven’t been any problems with the authorities. When the film was shown in Mauritius some people said they did not know this existed in the country. And yet, it is such a small island, everything is on your doorstep. But most of the public response was very positive and said that we were showing aspects of Mauritian society that people refused to see.
S.A. The authorities are too busy being corrupted to bother about our revelations about Mauritius. That film is not going to change people’s perception of a country, because at the end of the day it is just one piece of entertainment and nothing else. It might make you think on the way back from the cinema, but you won’t wake up the next day having found your calling in life.

§19

D.P. Some of problems of European suburbs are identical to those of Troumaron. Watching this movie, I am reminded of some of the images and themes from Mathieu Kassovitz’s film La haine. Do you think that your movie’s message is more universal than the one in Kassovitz’s film?

H.A. I saw this film only once, a long time ago. It has a similar theme, although his was a bigger budget with European producers, while ours had not a cent from outside, except OIF. I wouldn’t say that ours or his is more universal, they have been built differently that’s all. Both are universal stories, really. As I said above that the story could be cinéma vérité set in many cities, in Mauritius, in the suburbs of Paris, in Kolkata, in the Bronx, in Brazilian favelas. There are many ways of telling the same story.

S.A. No film has a more universal message than another when the subject is the struggle of human beings. They all serve the same purpose.

§20

D.P. A big difference with La haine is that your movie presents the problems essentially from a feminine point of view. Was it difficult making the movie from this point of view? Is it for that reason that the film does not keep the original title of the novel, in order to broaden the story to include more about the group of young people?

H.A. I have done lots of documentaries in which I have shown the suffering of women: films on female genital mutilation, women with AIDS, women with tuberculosis in India where these women have to hide to take their medicine so that their in-laws don’t see them, otherwise they would have been thrown out of the house. I have always tried to treat the subject with care, compassion and love to show the suffering through the eyes of these women. We had lots of discussion about the title of the film. We felt we could not keep the title of the novel, as the film is not only about Ève. Even if she is the heroine, she carries the film on her shoulders, without Ève there is no Les Enfants de Troumaron, but still, I hope you will agree, there are four main characters in the film in addition to the other youngsters who are all the children of Troumaron. Also, the novel’s title is very abstract, perhaps too literary for a film.

S.A. I was not in anyway made uncomfortable by the fact that the point of view is that of a woman. I have grown up seeing men in my family abuse their women and I do understand where my mother was coming from when she wrote the script and the book. I told both my parents not to change the title... It was for marketing reason that they did it, as they received feedback regarding the “obscure original name”.

It was my mother’s decision to enlarge the scope of the characters. I thought it was a good call because from a creative point of view I found it amazing that she was able to give birth to so many different vibrant personalities and we get to see most of them up close.
Another difference from the film *La haine*, the young people from Troumaron see the wealthy, touristic city but they never really go there (in *La haine*, there is a sequence in downtown Paris). There is no interaction between them and the inhabitants of Port-Louis. During this shot, you celebrate the beauty of the island, showing the port and industrial zones. How did you pick these locations?

That is true, even when Sad is with Ève by the harbor after the visit to the police station, Sad tells Ève “*Il faut trouver le chemin qui mène vers eux. Eux ils s’en sortent*” [“we have to find the way that leads to them. They’re getting by”]. But they never find the way, they are stuck in Troumaron. We tried to put some light in a dark film, but we did not have a choice, the novel is dark, as all of Ananda’s writing, and in this novel in particular, we do not get out of the stifling atmosphere of Troumaron. It’s only through poetry that sometimes some light comes in. Those places were chosen according to the scenes we needed to do. Even for the end scene, we had to look for many places before we happened to fall on that bridge and were able also to find a place for the teacher’s house. There is a lot of symbolism in the film. For example when Ève goes down the canal we don’t know what will happen to her, her life has always been in darkness, and in the novel Sad takes the gun from her and they sit on the road leaning against a wall in the rain. Even in the novel we don’t know what will happen, will Sad go to prison by saying that he killed the teacher? No one knows - even the directors don’t know. We want the spectators to draw as many conclusions as they can. We don’t want to spoon-feed them. It was the same for *La Cathédrale*, the end was left to the spectator to do that interpretation.

I did not choose the locations. The port has such a strong identity in Mauritius history that it could not be passed by. Most of the locations speak for themselves from a visual standpoint and the script does reflect how the industrial revolution has affected Mauritius.

The movie was extremely well received. You were awarded many prizes, including *Prix du Public* from La Réunion and the *Prix Oumarou Ganda de la 1ère Œuvre*. How do you react to this recognition as one of the pioneers among francophone directors in Mauritius? It seems to me that the country does not have a film industry...

I would like to say humbly I am proud to have helped put Mauritius on the world map of cinema. I did my first competition film in 1980 after coming back home after my film studies for a worldwide competition under the aegis of ACCT, which is now known as OIF; I won the Grand Prix for this film. I have also won several prizes for my documentaries for the WHO (World Health Organization), I feel honored by these prizes. But to be honest, getting the prize at FESPACO for “Les Enfants de Troumaron” was special for it was a reward for Sharvan and I, family sweat, long hours of work for Ananda. I was happy for Sharvan’s work to be recognized and for the time Ananda put into the film production. It means a lot to all of us. So yes, I do feel honored, and just wish to say thank you for I can’t find more words to express this feeling.

I have a lot of resentment for Mauritius as it has a lot of potential but fails to rise to the challenge. Mauritius is a microcosm of inequality, much stronger than anywhere else. Politics and self interest will always prevail and will always trump…
artistic or social development. Nothing happens in this country, and all it took for a first feature film was for a Mauritian couple to stand their ground for what they believed in.

§23 D.P. Did certain directors inspire you during your career? Which ones do you feel are related to your work?

H.A. When I wanted to go to film school, I had seen maybe four films in my life in Mauritius, and maybe saw a few more films with friends when I was a student of photography in London. To be honest when I wanted to enroll in film school I was a “virgin” in film knowledge, but it seemed like a logical way to expand my knowledge of the audiovisual realm, as I was working as a photographer. I would say that I was drawn to cinéma vérité, the school of Bazin, the Neo-Realist movement, like De Sica’s Bicycle thieves which is still ingrained in my mind till today. Visconti with Death in Venice. Fellini, Rossellini, for the Neo-Realist movement. Satayjit Ray’s first film, Apur Sansar that took him ten years to finish, that he even had to broker his wife’s jewelry to finish, and which was recognized worldwide except in India at that time. These are among the films that capture my imagination. But also the New Wave of Godard opened my eyes as well. I did enjoy Casablanca too. Just recently I have re-watched a few films of Hitchcock, who is a master of images for mystery films, no question. There is also The Battleship Potemkin in which one can learn about film editing, especially when the carriage goes down the steps. But I would say that if there is one film that is engraved in my mind it is Bicycle Thieves.

S.A. I don’t feel any affiliation to any filmmakers. I grew up only watching comedies, blockbusters and horror films. It was only after I shot Ève that I have developed a taste for something more substantial than blockbusters.

D.P. Concerning your other projects, are you planning another adaptation from Ananda’s work?

H.A. Yes... But I cannot say anything for now...

Denis Pra
Southern Illinois University

NOTES


3. André Bazin, Qu’est-ce que le cinéma ?, Paris, Cerf, 1976, p. 95.