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Time Machine

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Integrated Media Arts, Hunter College
The City University of New York

2020

05/18/2020

Date

Martin Lucas

Thesis Sponsor

05/18/2020

Date

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Abstract

Time Machine is a hybrid documentary that delves into the themes of displacement, subjugation, tyranny and freedom. The film explores the logics of slavery, colonialism, eurocentrism and their interconnectedness in our modern globalized world. *Time Machine* is set in a past/present/future time where Mustapha Azemmouri, born in 1502, undertakes a journey to the 21st century. The story of Mustapha Azemmouri is one of enslavement and liberation. He was captured by the Portuguese who invaded his hometown of Azemmour in Morocco, sold in Spain and then shipped across the Atlantic to the New World around 1527. He became the first African explorer of the New World. In *Time Machine*, Azemmouri recounts his story as an enslaved man and an explorer, and reflects on a collective puzzle of 500 years of hidden history. From Morocco to France and Spain, Mustapha Azemmouri crosses land and water between Africa and Europe, collecting stories from the absentees of history. Through his journey in time and space, he re-examines the narratives of history. Images and voices from the past emerge in the present. Mustapha Azemmouri shows us that history cannot be disconnected from our experience of the present. He shows us that the globalized world we are living in is still shaped by the Eurocentrist factory of concepts and norms. Doing so, he gives us the ability to see beyond and the agency to intervene in our present

Project description

The main character of *Time Machine* is Mustapha Azemmouri. When I discovered the story of Mustapha Azemmouri, I was struck by the duality of his story. He has been described as a slave and an adventurer, he seemed to me that he was simultaneously both and neither. Born in

Morocco, he was captured by the ruling Portuguese as a youth and sold to a Spanish nobleman. He was renamed Esteban or Estebanico and converted to Christianity. In 1527, he was taken on the Narvaez expedition to establish a colony in North America. A storm struck them near Galveston Island in Texas. Out of the 300 people in the expedition, he was among the only four men who survived. They began an eight-year journey from Galveston in Texas to Mexico City in New Spain, returning in 1536. He became the first African to enter the American West. Little would be known about Mustapha Azemmouri except that the expedition's treasurer Cabeza de Vaca published a book about their 8-year survival journey, *La Relación* in 1542 where he often refers to Mustapha Azemmouri as “the black” and described him as the one who went in advance of the other three survivors, as he was the most able to communicate with the First Nation people. Mustapha Azemmouri was chosen by the Viceroy of New Spain in 1539 to serve as the main guide for a return expedition to find the Seven Cities of Cibola. He was the first non-Native to visit Pueblo Lands along the Colorado River and was known to be a medicine man among the Pueblo tribes, to the point that some folklore legends believe that a Kachina figure, Chakwaina, is based on him. Cabeza de Vaca reported that he was killed in the Zuni city of Hawikuh by the A:shiwí tribe. Other versions exist including one where he faked his death so he could gain freedom. The legend of Mustapha Azemmouri has never been told by Mustapha himself. In *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha observed that “the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis” (2013, 6). While Homi Bhabha was referring to English literature, his words inspired me to turn to those people at the periphery of history, or as Franz Fanon wrote it “the great absentee of universal History” (1959, 82), to inform and tell the process of a colonized history that attempted to erase them, leaving them in the shadows.

In *Time Machine*, Mustapha Azemmouri is presented as a time traveler. He is someone from then, who is here now. He is set in a past/present temporality defying the conventional historical narratives and interrogating the process of historical erasure. The idea was to produce a virtual time, in a Deleuzian sense where “the virtual is not opposed to the real, but to the actual” (Deleuze 1994, 208). *Time Machine* projects our view of the past into new relationships between present, future and past. In that sense, *Time Machine* adopts strategies from the Avant-Garde tradition as explained by Jeffrey Skoller, considering “elements of the past that are unseen, unspeakable, ephemeral and defy representations not necessarily verifiable through normal empirical means” (2005, 15) This virtual time is a key step into the construction of a truly postcolonial space for Mustapha Azemmouri to find himself and speak in. Willing to demonstrate this continuum between past, present and future and its impact on identity from a collective and personal standpoint, I decided to embrace the format of a hybrid documentary mixing fiction and cinema verite. My approach was one of deconstructing the physical reality and the fictional memory to question the meaning of identity. I realized this format would give me the freedom to experiment and move between space and time in the present and the past while connecting both visually and poetically. Reclaiming the codes of fiction and reality allowed me to deconstruct and reconstruct them constantly.

Time Machine takes place in three different countries. It is an expedition into memories for Mustapha Azemmouri. The film opens in the Sahara where dunes are always the same and never the same. “I look at the Sahara, I see the past. I look at the Sahara, I see the present” he says. In Morocco, we are first confronted with this past/present time where everything was and everything is. It is also inspired by the concept of Sankofa, a word from the Akan tribe in West Africa that signifies the recuperation of the past in order to comprehend the present and find the

future. Mustapha Azemmouri acts as a connector, questioning the meaning of evolution through space and culture. The environment he finds himself in is both familiar and unfamiliar to him. Five hundred years have passed on earth and he is the connector between what was and what is. Retracing his own story from childhood to the day he was enslaved, his voyage forces us to rethink how we understand our present moment. From the Sahara to his own birth city of Azemmour, his own memory collides with collective memories. Locations and environment play a central role during the documentary. Earth, water and sky acts as natural witnesses of history. The Niitsitapi people believed in three realms of reality: the Above world, the Below world and the Water world. There are all parallel dimensions, existing side by side but interconnected, where natural and supernatural beings reside. Mustapha Azemmouri uses those elements throughout his journey. Water becomes a conductor. Once shipped across seas and oceans, he now follows the flow of water to retrace his memory, regain himself and connect with other natural and supernatural beings. Through my work, borders have always been central. Borders are a present survival of colonialism. They alter identities. They construct an 'us' on the inside to the exclusion of 'them' outside but also construct an 'I' inside and 'I' outside, extending the meaning of borders well past their physical existence. Through the use of fiction/non-fiction, I wanted to conceptualize a geo-temporal map where physical borders fade. Azemmouri's journey towards Europe pauses at the port city of Tangiers, facing the Strait of Gibraltar. Aboard a ferry from Tangiers to Spain, Mustapha Azemmouri finds himself in Paris. As borders change, languages change too, adding layers of identity. While wandering through France's colonial history, the absentees are talking to Mustapha Azemmouri. Those, like him, who take the space of non-identity. To explore this idea, I chose to focus on two particular historical events and places. First, the Pont Saint Michel where a plaque commemorates The Paris massacre of 1961

when hundreds of Algerians were murdered by the French police. Second, the Bois de Vincennes where we can find the remains of the Human zoo during the Colonial Exposition. Both locations are highly symbolic of the continuous attempt to erase and distort history. Yet, ruins emerge as the perfect metaphor of this past/present time where Mustapha, as a shaman, connects with the supernatural. “Mustapha, their memories are grey and silent, you have to follow the light” says Sarah Baartman in her letter at the end of the Paris sequence. *Time Machine* ends in the Spanish city of Seville, a place where Mustapha Azemmouri lost his name and his religion. Baptized in what was once a Mosque, he is renamed Esteban. This is also where his legend as an explorer began. Our omniscient character finally understands that his fragmented identity is plural. He now understands that his identity is made of identities. “They are all part of myself”, says Mustapha as he understands that he is made of the stories of the absentees. “Open your eye, open all your eyes, you’ll see that I’m part of you”, he indicates addressing in this case the collective figure of the colonizer symbolized by the tomb of Christopher Columbus buried in a Cathedral that was once a Mosque. Mustapha Azemmouri emerges as a third identity with the potential for transformation. He is now the one handing over the mirror of time to the “self-other”. Doing so, he is not only challenging an “one-eyed” narrative but hoping, as Homi Bhabha writes it “to transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces, both human and historical” (2012, 367).

Research analysis

To conceive *Time Machine*, my research focused largely on Third Cinema films, postcolonial and diaspora studies. My work has been driven by major theorists and scholars including Franz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Ella Shohat, Robert Stam and Teshome Gabriel. The

colonial process has long been framed by the dichotomy of colonizer/colonized. In this system of oppression, violence is not only an instrument of subjugation but also of dehumanization. Being colonized results in losing the ability to describe and interpret one's own image. Hence started my quest: How to reconstruct one's image ? How to reinterpret ourselves ? What do we "see" through this process of reconstruction ? All these questions collide with a dominant hegemonic narrative. This made me understand what was at stake during my own creative process: how to unthink eurocentrism, as Ella Shohat (2014) wrote it, in order to create a new discourse ?

It became vital for me to understand what are the ways and tools that filmmakers coming from the colonized world can apply through their films in order to decolonize the mind and develop a non-eurocentric perspective. In *Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films*, Teshome Gabriel (2011) developed a framework of concepts that gave me a very solid basis toward my goal. Teshome Gabriel identified a three-phase path along which Third World Film culture has emerged, following Franz Fanon three stages towards decolonization, from "domination" to "liberation" (Fanon, 1977). Combining elements of realism and surrealism, I knew that this film would subscribe to the third phase also known as the combative phase. "One element of the style in this phase is an ideological point-of-view instead of that of a character as in dominant" (2011, 190), explains Teshome Gabriel. In that sense, *Time Machine* aims to challenge the ideological determinants and colonial mindset. Another element relies on the use of non-linear temporality. "Since the past is necessary for the understanding of the present, and serves as a strategy for the future, this stylistic orientation seems to be ideologically suited to this particular phase" (190) adds Teshome Gabriel. The scholar was one of the main theorists of Third Cinema, an aesthetic and political radical project from the 1960s. Filmmakers throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America offered an alternative imagery in contrast to Hollywood and

European art cinemas. Filmmakers such as Glauber Rocha, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino deeply challenged Eurocentrist narratives and norms. They profoundly inspired my work. In *Third Cinema: Exploration of Nomadic Aesthetics & Narrative Communities*, Teshome Gabriel (2014) dissects the Hollywood narratives and their process of identification arguing that “Hollywood narratives are based on identification with a hero who represents “us,” set in contrast to a villain, an enemy, who can be destroyed in order to make the community whole” (2014). Through this constant dichotomy, the process of exclusion is clear. In contrast, Teshome Gabriel presents Third Cinema as a dynamic alternative to this uni-directional community narrative. “Is it truly impossible to have a narrative community that maintains an openness to the stories of other cultures and peoples? What kind of stories/narratives can be told that do not depend upon an oppositional or exclusionary mode of thought? Third Cinema, I would argue, offers a glimpse of this possibility” (2014). A possibility I wanted to explore through my film. Far from the representation of a traditional hero, Mustapha Azemmouri emerges as an inclusive catalyst. His journey is a testimony of syncretic interactions through history and communities. He does not define himself in contrast to the colonizer but re-define himself through fragments of identity.

From this perspective, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (2014) played a fundamental role in the critical thinking of *Time Machine*. In the Afterword chapter, they both reflect on their discussion of 1492 and the Iberian empires as a “foundational moment” (369). Tracing globalization from this moment, 1492 represents a turning point, one that created the world we are living now. A world shaped by the Reconquista of Al-Andalus, Christopher Columbus and the Spanish colonization of the New World. The date of 1492, they argue “forms a metonym for a series of interrelated historical

processes” (371) that includes the expulsion of the Moors and the Jews, the Inquisition, the beginnings of the transatlantic slavery, the conquest of the Americas. Born in 1502, the character of Mustapha Azemmouri is historically grounded in this pivotal moment. Using his own temporality, I wanted him to guide us through the world as it has been shaped. He was born the same year Christopher Columbus made his fourth and final voyage to the New World. Traveling through time and spaces, he sees how colonialism has penetrated the souls and structured the modern world. As he recalls his own experience from then, he informs us on the now. He is able to see the interconnection of multiple events, the complex global cultural encounters and the non-ending process of eurocentrism. “I know what was and what’s ahead” he says while on the street of the Spanish city of Seville.

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s interpretations of postcoloniality and postcolonial discourse helped me make sense of this complex time/space in which Mustapha Azemmouri navigates. “The post in postcolonial suggests a stage after the demise of colonialism, and it is imbued with an ambiguous spatiotemporality” (2003, 14), they wrote in their introduction to *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*. They question the space in which the concept of post-colonial operates. In that sense, the post-colonial operates in an ambiguous space. “By implying that colonialism is over, furthermore, “postcolonial” risks obscuring the deformative-traces of the colonial hangover in the present, while at the same time delegitimizing research into the precolonial past” (14). In that sense, the post-colonial should not only mark a “then” and a “now” but make us re-analyze the traditional dichotomy in which the colonial encounter has been represented. This made me understand that in order to make sense of those “deformative-traces”, I needed to interpret the colonization from a transnational and transcultural perspective. Only then, I would be able to achieve the rewriting of the historical dominant

narrative. Mustapha Azemmouri navigates through this transnational and transcultural sphere. My idea was to position my work within this dimension of the post-colonial, criticizing the colonial narrative in order to move beyond it.

Mustapha Azemmouri came to see the world through his own displacement. He can see with “three eyes”. In this context, the concept of hybridity developed by Homi Bhabha adds a new theoretical and practical framework. For Homi Bhabha (2012), hybridity refers to the cultural dynamics in which the moment of the lived difference within inter-subjectivity is at the same time a “historically transformative moment” (347). As Mustapha Azemmouri experiences these transformative moments, he is able to understand that while the colonizing experience has left indelible inscriptions in the cultures of the colonized, the experience was not external to the colonizer’s societies. He understands what the Eurocentrist mind has made of him as much. And, this understanding allows him to see what the Eurocentrist mind is made of. As he understands the binary form that defines the colonial structure, he is able to deconstruct and break them. In that sense, the last sequence in *Seville* sets to present this “go beyond” discourse. As Mustapha watches tourists rushing to see the tomb of Christopher Columbus inside the Seville Cathedral, he grasps the mechanism by which the West is blindly estranged from itself. He is now in position to reverse the mirror. “I’m handing you the mirror, open your eye, open all your eyes, you will see that I am part of you”, he says. Here, Azemmouri raises the questions of blindness and seeing, echoing Michelangelo Antonioni’s *The Passenger* (1975) when Rama Fadedda turns the camera on his interviewer saying: “Your questions are much more revealing about yourself than my answer would be about me. Mr. Locke, we can have a conversation but only if it is not just what you think is sincere, but also what I believe to be honest.” Furthermore, through this last sequence, I wanted to propose a reinterpretation of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin

“excess seeing” that serves as a fertile ground for something new to emerge. “The excess of my seeing is the bud in which slumbers form, and whence form unfolds like a blossom” (1990, 24), Bakhtin wrote. In that sense, the excess of seeing refers to what Mustapha Azemmouri sees from his position but cannot be accessed by others as much as my own mission to help others see what they cannot see in order to give them the agency to intervene.

Cinematic approach

History is written and rewritten from the process of forgetting and remembering and thus might be real, imaginative and fictional. In that sense, *Time Machine* relies on non-linearity as well as fiction in its approach to deconstruct historical narratives. The film finds part of its inspiration in Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983), Trinh T Minh-ha's *Réassemblage* (1982) and Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* (1993). These films nourished both my storytelling strategies and my cinematic approach in order to develop an alternative cinematic language with *Time Machine*. If the Hollywood films focus on showing us an imaginative fiction inspired from our realistic illusions, and the traditional documentary form tends to show us reality of actual events related to the same time/space, both *Sans Soleil* and *Réassemblage* cultivate a new kind of narrative that is disconnected from the bias of the event that occurs in the same time/space.

Sans Soleil (1983) usage of non-linearity in the temporal and spatial narrative of memory, identity and culture intrigued and stimulated the visual and narrative storytelling of *Time Machine*. Chris Marker blurred the lines between fiction and nonfiction in his film to the level that it is almost impossible to easily define or categorize the film genre. On the Hokkaido Ferry in Japan, Chris Marker depicts an environment where we feel the resonance of war. We can experience the trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki while it is not even mentioned nor shown.

Hence, only our mind, music, images and the following narration, “curiously all of that makes me think of a past or future war: night trains, air raids, fallout shelters, small fragments of war enshrined in everyday life” (1983), are provoking this mixture of fictional and reality effect. The writing and editing of the Tangier-Europe ferry sequence in *Time Machine* is greatly inspired by Marker's genius flair.

Later on in *Sans Soleil* (1983), the traveler/narrator/spectator arrives in Tokyo where the train drives by the frame before jumping into another time, into another color, into Africa. The audience does not have time to figure out this transition on its own, until the narration starts to guide them into one of the most important questions of the 20th century, the contrast of “African time to European time, and also to Asian time... In the 19th century mankind had come to terms with space, and that the great question of the 20th was the coexistence of different concepts of time” (1983). Although it is not literally connected to my storytelling choices in *Time Machine*, I wanted to explore how to build an intimate relationship between the traveler-narrator (Mustapha) and his traveler-spectator (audience). I also tried to explore the notion of contrast of time, and how it can be applied and reinforced through the film. How one can travel different temporalities, different geographies through the two channel medium ? Mustapha's temporality is invisible. The spectator might have difficulties to acknowledge his narration time, his geography. *Sans Soleil's* (1983) editing and aesthetic choices gave me great inspiration to overcome these challenges. It also opened the door for me to imagine other strategies in order to guide the audience, including for example the repetitive usage of water imagery and sound. Throughout the film, what we see within the diegetic scenes is disconnected from what we hear from the non-diegetic sounds, which allows us to imagine a new temporal and spatial understanding of the story, a new fiction, a new reality. The last strategy is also present in Trinh

T Minh-ha's *Réassemblage* (1982). Through her film, Trinh T. Minh-ha allows us to interact within a "Third Space" (2012), to borrow the concept of Homi Bhabha. The filmmaker is allowing us to create a new fiction, a Third Space which I translated into a "third eye", in order to understand a given reality.

In the quest for the self and the collective, Chris Marker's film brings us into a problematic correlation of memory, omission and remembering to reveal how the manufacture of universal tale, oral and written history is inspired from a fiction conceived by an individual mind before it becomes a collective fiction and thus goes unnoticed among us as reality. "Every representation of truth in the depiction of reality is a question of degrees of fictitiousness. The more one tries to clarify the line dividing the two, the deeper one gets entangled in the artifice of boundaries" (Minh-ha 2012, 145). Trinh Minh-ha tackles the same issue but under the lens of documentary and anthropology, she is showing us that meaning cannot get transmitted without disorientation, "truth" stops here, another starts after the transmission process, to such a degree where fiction is everywhere.

Sankofa (1993) was also an important film to study both theoretically and practically during my creative process. In this film, Haile Gerima recounts the story of enslavement during the trans-Atlantic trade from an Ethiopian, African and Diasporic perspective. Unlike Hollywood's representation of subjugation, *Sankofa* (1993) depicts an alternative representation, full of empowerment and resilience. In the opening of the film, we hear this voice repeating "Spirit of the dead, rise up and claim your story". This phrase in itself was the essence of my willingness to explore the spiritual medium within my work. The souls of the absentees, of Mustapha Azemmouri, of Sarah Baartman rise up to claim their stories.

Interestingly, *Sankofa* (1993) also deals with different temporalities. The first one is set during a contemporary time where Mona, an African American model is taking part in a fashion shoot at the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana. A location where enslaved people were held, waiting to be loaded onto ships and sold in the New World. Mona enters the castle and finds herself trapped in a time travel back to the slavery era. She is enslaved and sent to North America. I applied this storytelling strategy in a reverse way. Mustapha Azemmouri, a man of the past, is sent from his era to navigate through our modern time. Haile Gerima also made important location choices that made me think carefully about my own location scouting. The past is still present among us today also through spaces. It is indelibly inscribed in locations such as the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, or House of Slaves on Goree Island, or the Bois de Vincennes ruins of Human Zoos in Paris.

During my time in the IMA program, I had the opportunity to travel through the history and the arcana of documentary. It represented a precious moment in understanding today's representation of the word documentary. My first glance at the documentary was framed under the umbrella of recording and filming historical, societal, cultural and political events. The didactic and informative aspect of documentary used to be the most important point of this understanding. The reality and actuality aspect of documentary and its separation from fiction used to be a banality in my mind. That being said, scrutinizing films like *Nanook of the North* (1922) by Robert Flaherty or *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929) by Dziga Vertov, known to be the foundation of documentary, show how regressive, rigid and blind is our mass-representation of reality within documentary. As for films like, *Land Without Bread* (1933) by Luis Buñuel, *Moi, un noir* (1958) by Jean Rouch or *Sans Soleil* (1983) by Chris Marker, fiction becomes the engine of reality.

This journey was my guide to craft a more detached sense of documentary juggling between subjectivity and objectivity, real and fictive. Instead of a blind and candor quest of truth, documentary has a potential to question, experiment and dig into our diverse perspectives, symbols and emotional patterns. This art form is a space of dialogue, reconciliation, remembering, but also provocation, flattening and reenactment of customs, ethics and values. Thanks to this journey, our preconceived ideas of the borders built between film, science and art genera are fading out. Documentary should be this space that allows us to question our neologies and our perpetual changing of concepts and visions.

Documentary is a manner of gazing into our souls as well as the others. Each made film has an indisputable value vis-à-vis its author, their protagonist and of course the immortal audience. It allows us to countersign our biases and contribute into the ongoing culture hybridity and the alteration of representation. If today, we are calling documentary as it is thanks to our perceptions, linguistics and etymologies, we should not be afraid of seeing it evolving into a fresher definition subject of a post-established identification. After this journey, we might think about some synonyms of the word documentary as System D, Réassemblage, or to borrow a French slang word, “débrouillardise” which could be interpreted as a certain sense of resourcefulness.

Thesis production process

Time Machine was born out of a completely different project I was working on. My initial project focused on forced migration and displacement as well as cultural survival. In this initial documentary project, I wanted to capture spaces of interactions within the migrant, displaced, refugee and exiled communities through the stories of two main characters who

crossed the southern and northern borders of the United States. Using reenactments, cinema verite, characters voice-overs and diaries, the film would have followed them using a three act structure based on the stages of forced migration (pre-forced migration, forced migration and post-forced migration). My aim was to be able to create a mirror for migrants themselves to see each other and reclaim their own representation as part of an identity reconstruction process. As I finished writing my treatment, I felt cornered by my own work. Stuck within my experience of the present and a very political timeframe, I felt entangled with myself as a filmmaker. In 1965, during an exchange with French filmmaker and ethnologist Jean Rouch, Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène said: “You say seeing. But in the domain of cinema, it is not enough to see, one must analyze. I am interested in what is before and after that which we see. What I do not like about ethnography, I’m sorry to say, is that it is not enough to say that a man we see is walking, we must know where he comes from, where he is going” (2008, 4). In order to make sense of my own effort to deconstruct the dominant narrative, I decided to examine the shadows of our collective history. I knew that my project was aiming to tell the story through a historical character. I also knew that the project needed to be transnational. Around this time, I rediscovered the story of Mustapha Azemmouri. As mentioned previously, little would be known about him except for a few sixteenth-century Spanish accounts. His story has been consigned to textual shadows and his visibility obstructed within the narrative of colonial conquest. This Moroccan man was suppressed from the dominant narrative, yet still present. For me, he embodied the multiple layers of history. I first developed a long script about his own personal story. I came across the work of author Laila Lalami. In 2014, she published *The Moor’s Account*, a fictional memoir telling the journey of Mustapha Azemmouri from his perspective. Captivated by his story, he became even more tangible for me to the point where I started

developing the story not only about him but with him. I wanted my subject to impose a countermovement of time and thus I came convinced that the use of fiction/non-fiction could open a space I never dared to explore until then. Mustapha Azemmouri became a connector allowing me to deconstruct the dominant history. I spent time researching specific historical events and characters who might encounter Mustapha and enter in dialogue and conversations with him during the film. The Algerian War, the Human zoos and the migration crisis punctuate the voyage of Mustapha Azemmouri, as a painful reminder of a taboo past. He became the collector of suppressed stories.

While I constructed my treatment with the idea of hiring an actor to interpret Mustapha Azemmouri, I soon realized that I had to be realistic and efficient. Without sufficient funds to hire an actor and have him travel to three different countries, I took the decision to incarnate the character myself alternating behind and in front of the camera. While hesitant at first, the experience was truly transformative during the filming stage as well as the writing of the voice-over. It helped me to see from his perspective, experiencing the environment differently as well develop an inner voice, not entirely mine and not entirely his but ours. The production phase of the film took 25 days to complete in three different countries: Morocco, Spain and France. I collaborated with two cinematographers, one in Morocco and one in France to support me in the field. The sequence in the desert was by far the most challenging, having to deal with a complicated environment and technical difficulties, especially at night. In Morocco where I spent around two weeks, I kept working on the voice-over day by day, collecting thoughts and feelings in a notebook.

Upon completion of the shoot phase, I sat down and started working on a rough cut sequences after sequences, following my initial plan. The writing of the voice-over raised a

dilemma: which language to use ? Should Mustapha Azemmouri speak english and why ? My advisors suggested the idea of using my own language, Moroccan Darija. At first, this represented an important challenge and barrier to me since I had never written in Darija as it is mainly an oral dialect. That step of writing in my own native language resulted in a real reappropriation of my own culture and identity, it really opened the way towards a more poetic voice-over. I felt liberated from my own internalized linguistics difficulties. It also allowed me to think about one of my primary audience more closely as it opened the possibility to tell the story in the common language of my people, thus making it even more accessible to them, without a linguistic filter. I kept the voice-over in Darija from the opening sequence in the desert until the Tangiers sequence. Then as borders change and the question of colonialism becomes more central, I felt the need to change to French. Aboard a ferry towards Europe, Mustapha reads a letter written in French and facilitates the transition towards the Paris sequence. From a decolonized perspective, the use of French was not necessarily an easy choice but in this case it helped me address a different French-speaking audience as well as criticize the logics of assimilation. In the Sevilla sequence, Mustapha Azemmouri uses Darija again to speak with his inner voice. Languages play a central part within *Time Machine*, helping navigate identities, tones and mood while reinforcing the idea of transnationality. But it was also a powerful tool during the conception of this new cinematographic language where I explored the infinite relationship between word and image.

Overall, *Time Machine* has been for me an experimental and transformative experience, making sense of a long artistic questioning about identities and representation. I experienced liberation during this process. The use of fiction/non-fiction opened the possibility for other ways

of seeing and relating. More important, I came to understand my work as an instrument of thought.

Audience and Exhibition

Time Machine is intended to appeal to several audiences. It primarily targets a Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian audience but more widely the African audience as well as its diaspora in the world. They are the primary target in the sense that the film was constructed to speak to them. But, adopting a transnational and transcultural approach and delving into globalized themes, *Time Machine* also intends to reach an European and American audience.

There will be three phases of distribution for this particular project but also the idea to push the story further in a feature version. The first phase is to screen *Time Machine* at film festivals. With its language and use of fiction/non-fiction, *Time Machine* I believe has the potential to interest film festivals that aim to program hybrid projects that operate beyond the scope of the classical documentary traditions. I am also really eager to target film festivals across Africa including at one of the first film festival in Africa, The Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, as well as the International Arab Film Festival in Algeria and the Agadir International Documentary Festival in Morocco. Aiming to reach Diasporic audiences, I will submit the film to the NY African Diaspora International Film Festival (USA), the Toronto Diaspora Film Festival (Canada), the Festival International Media Nord Sud (Switzerland), the Afrika Film Festival Kölm (Germany). Finally, I believe *Time Machine* has the potential to reach audiences at more traditional documentary festivals such as the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam - IDFA (Netherlands), Hot Docs

Canadian International Documentary Festival (Canada), Sunny Side of the Doc (France) and the Cinéma du Réel (France).

Submitting and releasing the film through screenings will allow me to take the pulse of its reception within different audiences and trigger meaningful conversations about the content but also the format of the hybrid documentary. While structured around five sequences across three different countries, I am hoping to raise funds to complete a feature version of the film. A feature version that would include two more chapters taking place in the US. One sequence in New York City that will mark the arrival of Mustapha Azemmouri into the New World but also a strong focus on the Bronx Zoo linked the exhibition of Ota Benga within a human zoo in 1906. The last sequence will take place in Hawikuh, New Mexico to explore his encounter and relationship with the A:shiwí tribe in the Zuni city of Hawikuh, and discuss his relationship to spirituality as well as the last moments of his life.

The second phase of the distribution focuses on educational and academic engagement especially in Africa, Europe and North America where both themes and format could be a source of analysis. I am particularly interested to see *Time Machine* discussed between researchers, professors and students in order to raise awareness and create a conversation around the rewriting of history and representations in film and media studies but also in other areas of studies. The final phase of the distribution will be targeting video streaming platforms including Kanopy and Criterion to give the project a greater reach and larger audience.

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