

Kanraxël Film

Testimonial

Kanraxël – The Confluence of Agnack, is a documentary film offering a unique insight into linguistic and cultural diversity in Agnack Grand as the village prepares for the ritual celebration of the first anniversary of their late leader's death. Challenging the stereotypical portrayal of rural Africa as primitive and uneducated, *Kanraxël* captures the rich interaction of cultures and languages that Agnack sustains, making it not only an eye-opening documentary, but a valuable resource in investigating multiculturalism. Acutely relevant to today's ever-progressing urbanisation, globalisation and migration, the film reveals that multilingualism is not only a complicating phenomenon emerging in the modern world, but a characteristic deeply embedded in the culture, history and lifestyle of villages in Casamance.

Located in Casamance, at the intersection of two rivers, Agnack is a village where cultures meet. Like many villages in Casamance, Agnack is characterized by intense social exchanges, with children being fostered in and out of the villages, women leaving or joining the village upon marriage, and much temporary and permanent migration. Rather than considering multilingualism as a complication or an obstacle, where cultures clash and spark tension, Agnack demonstrates a positive approach to cultural diversity. Many of the villagers are fluent in six or more languages between which they alternate seamlessly. Alongside the fluidity of cultural identity in Agnack, the ideas of an origin-defining mother-tongue or national language are dissolved, with Senegal's official colonial language of French and the lingua franca of Wolof being just two of the complex mixture of languages spoken in the village. In contrast to the more common "problem story" documentaries portraying crisis and hardship in rural Africa, *Kanraxël* highlights the wisdom Agnack has to offer. Chouette Films' project presents first world audiences with a valuable message about the potential to manage multiculturalism through sharing and learning each other's languages and through tolerance of differences.

Kanraxël takes the form of an observational documentary, influenced by the work of ethnographic filmmaker David McDougall. By omitting any presence of the crew or equipment, the film focuses attention on the villagers to fully immerse the audience in the social culture of Agnack. By using a cinema vérité style, the project inevitably raises the issue of balancing authenticity with aesthetics. By avoiding an explicit acknowledgement within the film of the filmmakers' presence and unpreventable influence, it is arguable that a certain degree of authenticity has been compromised. It is widely discussed that documentary as a genre can never be entirely objective and factual, because it is impossible to eliminate all the obtrusive effects of the documentarians. However, in *Kanraxël* the aesthetic of encapsulating the village's unique cultural diversity is prioritised, bringing the audience as close to the social actors as possible by making the filmmakers invisible. Over the course of time spent filming in Agnack, the villagers grew to ignore the camera and became more relaxed around it during their busy preparations for the festivities. The fact that the filmmakers were not able to converse with the villagers in a common tongue turned out to be an advantage, helping to reduce the crew's ability to alter or manipulate what the camera witnessed. This enabled the filmmakers to take a back seat and let the conversations and activities of the villagers create the film's material and lead its story-line.

Kanraxël provides a viewpoint on multilingualism as an active and integral aspect of the community's lifestyle and culture in Agnack. Rather than focusing on the technical articulation of each language by interviewing individuals in isolated shots, *Kanraxël* captures the use and interchange of languages within the lively contexts of daily life and ritual in the village. Although this renders the footage less suitable for the purposes of linguistic analysis, the documentary's observational style works to reveal the intrinsic role of languages within the community. By incorporating the use of language in song, socialisation, worship, work and education, *Kanraxël* reveals the vast range of contexts in which languages are fundamental to the community's life. The film's voice over in Baïnouk Gujaher, Agnack's patrimonial language (the language associated with its founders), completes the viewer's submersion in the culture of the village and transports the sounds of this locally confined language to audiences across the globe.

The scope of the *Kanraxël* project is much broader than its documentary film product: it is a research project. The filming itself was an active method of research into multilingualism in rural Africa, as part of Professor Friederike Lüpke's fieldwork. In turn, the project has produced resources rich in educational material, extending the reach of the research and opening it up to further study. A wealth of learning resources supplementing the film are available online, investigating different issues raised in the project and prompting discussions. This bank of research material is not only of interest to studies in linguistics, but it is relevant and valuable to a wide range of subject areas. Designed for students from Key Stage 3 through to Key Stage 5, the school resources include a set of six ready-made sixty-minute lesson plans, covering the subject areas of Geography, MFL, PSHE and Economics, as well as a variety of suggested essay titles. The university resources are divided into themes and are presented in the Instructor's and Student's Manuals, which follow the same clear layout and provide theme introductions, learning objectives, suggested reading, exercises and discussion topics. As each session in both the school and the university resource collections is accompanied by supporting clips from the film, they do not require all students to view the whole film, although this is recommended to maximise their learning outcomes. The film broaches a broad variety of topics, from the spiritual and sociological to the linguistic, agricultural and economic, rendering it an extremely versatile resource.

Because of the remarkable access that the filmmakers had been given to the community and the ritual festivities of Agnack, they felt a strong responsibility, both to their audiences and to the villagers, to portray the complex meeting of cultures and interplay of languages faithfully. *Kanraxël*'s premier screening was held in Agnack in recognition of the community's fundamental involvement in the project. Nothing could have commended the film's success in encapsulating the rich culture of Agnack better than the approval of the villagers themselves, especially one villager's reaction: "This is us! This is who we are!"