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ASHAKARA
(TOGOLESE)

A Koulinga production in association with Television Suisse Romande/ADAVI/DiProCi/Togo Ministry of Culture. Produced, written by Phillippe Souaille. Directed, adapted by Gerard Louvin. Camera (color), Yves Poulquan; editor, Nelly Meunier; music, Louis Crelier, Sally Nyoto; sound, Gilbert Hamilton. Reviewed at Pan African Film Festival, L.A., Oct. 9, 1993. Running time: **97 MIN.**

Dr. Kara James Campbell-Badine
Jerome Blanc Jean-Marc Pasquet
Koffi Willy Monshongwo
Also with: N. Bamela, E. Pinda.

An unusual and sprightly tale of modern Africa, "Ashakara" is a colorful blend of social, political and cultural elements wrapped up in a thriller format. Although narrative is somewhat clunky, the unfamiliarity of the terrain provides an enjoyable, bumpy ride. It adds up to limited theatrical prospects but deserved exposure on the festival beat.

The essential story centers on a local homeopathic cure for a virus that's crept into Europe. Dr. Kara (James Campbell-Badine), a respected medical researcher, literally goes back to his roots in a remote Togo village to find the remedy. Then, when a French pharmaceutical company — with its own fitfully successful medicine — gets wind of the African discovery, it dispatches rep Jerome Blanc (Jean-Marc Pasquet) to secure the commercial rights.

Phillippe Souaille's script expands the simple premise into an intricate cat's cradle with fascinating, if not always successful, results. The unexpected turns include Blanc's growing allegiance to the Africans and the treachery of Kara's assistant, who's been blinded by the prospect of a financial windfall from the sale of the patent. That dream evaporates when Kara suspects the Europeans want only to suppress the remedy's entry into the marketplace. That spins out into an elaborate kidnapping ruse. Director Gerard Louvin demonstrates more energy than focus in this adventure. He's abetted by an appealing, personable cast, but tech achievements fall into an uncomfortable limbo between smooth professionalism and gritty realism.

—Leonard Klady