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DIRECTORS IN FOCUS

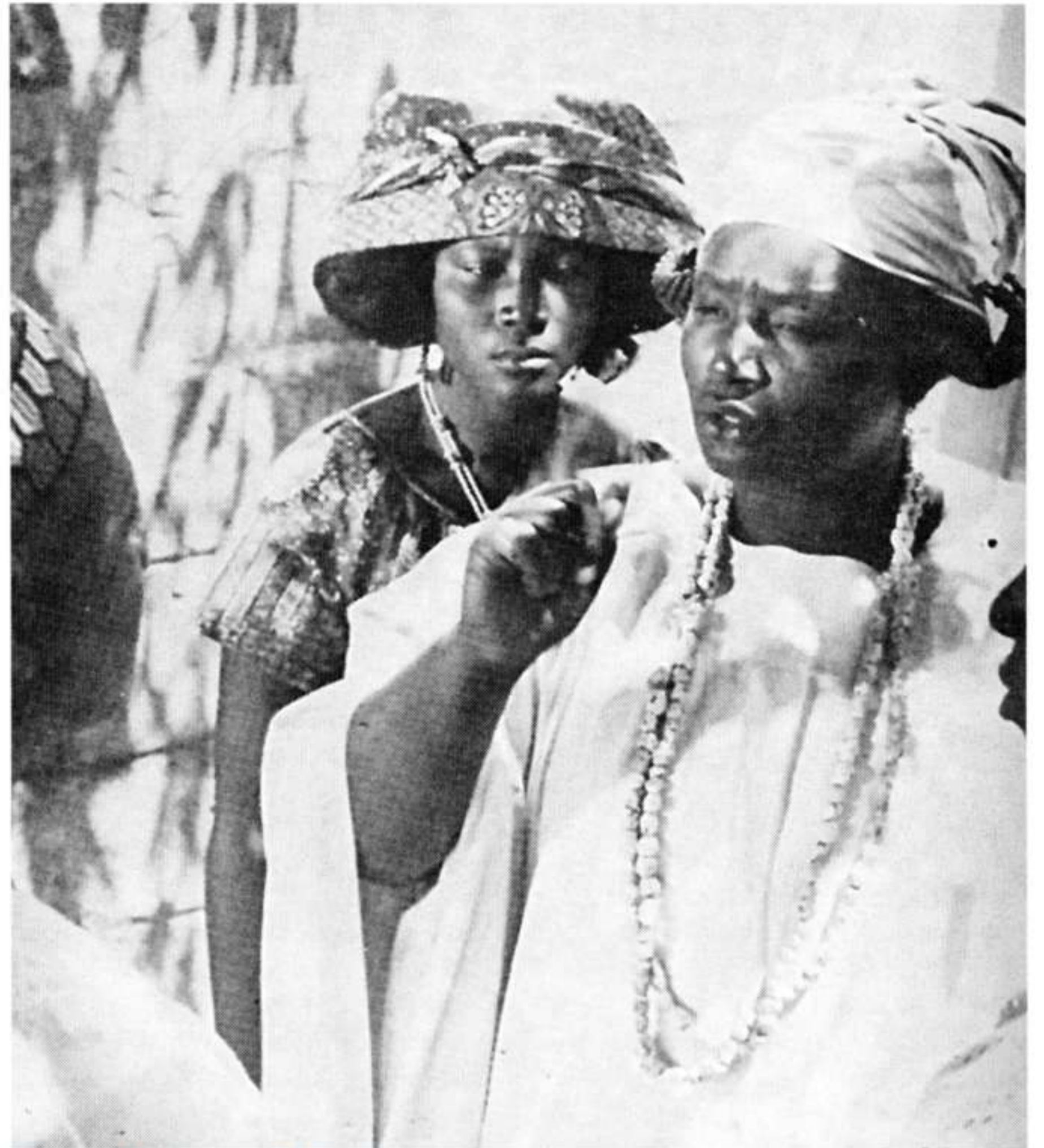
Ousmane Sembene—The Father

Sembene, Ousmane ... P. 3... Harvard Film Bulletin ... May & June

THE HARVARD FILM ARCHIVE is deeply honored to welcome Ousmane Sembene, this year's recipient of the fourth Genevieve McMillan and Reba Stewart Fellowship Award for Distinguished Filmmaking. The foremost figure in the evolution of African cinema, Ousmane Sembene remains, at seventy-eight, its most provocative and fiercely independent spirit. Hailing from the former French colony of Senegal, Sembene established himself as one of Africa's leading novelists before turning to cinema as a means of reaching a wider audience. His work often centers on identity problems encountered by Africans caught between Africa and Europe, tradition and modernization. The concentrated realism of his early classics evolved into a rich, wide-ranging mixture of black comedy, political allegory, sophisticated satire, traditional African forms, and biting social criticism.

In 1987, after a nearly ten-year hiatus from filmmaking, Sembene returned in peak form with *Camp de Thiaroye*, a powerful tragedy of colonialism, and *Guelwaar*, a trenchant comedy of contemporary Senegal. In conjunction with our tribute, we are pleased to present the New England premiere of Ousmane Sembene's latest work, *Faat-Kine*, which tackles the question of women's lives in Dakar today. These mature masterpieces confirm that no filmmaker is a sharper critic of the internal problems of modern Africa nor a more passionate advocate of African pride and autonomy.

For his guidance and encouragement in arranging for the visit of Ousmane Sembene, the Harvard Film Archive extends its thanks to Professor Samba Gadjigo, Associate Professor of French at Mount Holyoke College. We additionally wish to thank Karen C. C. Dalton and the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard.



Ousmane Sembene *Mandabi* 1968



Ousmane Sembene *Borom Sarret* 1964

Ousmane Sembene in Person May 2

◆ May 2 (Wednesday) 9 pm

◆ May 8 (Tuesday) 9:15 pm

Borom Sarret

Directed by Ousmane Sembene
Senegal 1964, 16mm, b/w, 19 min.

With Abdoulaye Ly

French with English subtitles

SEMBENE'S FIRST FILM (aside from an unreleased documentary on the Songhay Empire, made for the government of Mali), *Borom Sarret* ("cart owner") chronicles a day in the life of a beleaguered horse-cart driver in Dakar. In spite of the material limitations of the production—if not because of the challenges they posed—*Borom Sarret* manages to create a powerful social statement as it combines simple means with complex observations on bureaucracy, religion, and the anonymity of the modern city. Compressing his narrative into a mere nineteen minutes, Sembene conveys the condition of Senegal's urban poor as he situates their experience in the larger social panorama of post-independence Africa.

Black Girl (La Noire de...)

Directed by Ousmane Sembene
Senegal 1965, 35mm, b/w, 65 min.

With Thérèse M'bissine Diop, Anne-Marie Jelinek, Robert Fontaine

French with English subtitles

REGARDED AS THE first major film in the evolution of African cinema, *Black Girl* chronicles the bitter and unambiguous story of a young Senegalese woman who is hired on the "maid market" in Dakar and taken to the Riviera by her white French employers. Under conditions that Sembene saw as a new form of slavery, she falls into the ultimate despair of isolation and invisibility. Inspired by a news story, the film made a profound impression at international film festivals in 1966. The first work by a sub-Saharan black director to have been seen outside the continent, *Black Girl* represents the essential first step in Sembene's self-described project to counter the "neocolonialism [that] is passed on culturally through the cinema."

Ousmane Sembene in Person May 3

◆ May 3 (Thursday) 7 pm

◆ May 7 (Monday) 9:15 pm

Mandabi (The Money Order)

Directed by Ousmane Sembene
Senegal 1968, 35mm, color, 90 min.

With Makhouredia Gueye, Ynousse

N'diaye, Isseu Niang

Wolof with English subtitles

SEMBENE'S FIRST COMEDY, his first film in color, and first work in Wolof—the language spoken by most of the population of Senegal—*Mandabi* is the deceptively simple story of a man whose initial good fortune leads to encounters with an intimidating barrage of Third World bureaucracy and an ancient civilization in the throes of change. Ibrahima Deng, a fifty-year-old Muslim with two wives and seven children who has been out of work for four years, one day receives a money order from a nephew in Paris with specific instructions on its division. As news of the money order circulates through the neighborhood, Deng's troubles begin.

Ousmane Sembene in Person

◆ May 3 (Thursday) 9:15 pm

Xala

Directed by Ousmane Sembene
Senegal 1974, 35mm, color, 123 min.

With Thierno Leye, Seune Samb,

Miriam Niang

Wolof and French with English subtitles

ZEROING IN ON the myth of African independence and on the capitulation to white colonial policies by newly empowered black African leaders, this savage and funny satire deals with a self-satisfied, half-Westernized black businessman who is suddenly struck down by the *xala*: a curse that renders its victim impotent. While he desperately chases after witch doctors and soothsayers in search of a cure, the character's condition becomes a mirror of the impotence of young African nations that are overdependent on white technology and bureaucratic structures.



Ousmane Sembene *Xala* 1974

DIRECTORS IN FOCUS



Ousmane Sembene *Ceddo* 1977

Ousmane Sembene in Person

◆ May 4 (Friday) 7 pm

Ceddo (Outsiders)

Directed by Ousmane Sembene
Senegal 1977, 35mm, color, 120 min.
With Tabara N'diaye, Ismaila Diagne,
Moustapha Yade

Wolof with English subtitles

BANNED IN SENEGAL on an absurd technicality, *Ceddo*, Sembene's most ambitious film, uses the story of a beautiful princess's kidnapping to examine the confrontation between opposing cultural forces: Muslim expansion, Christianity, and the slave trade. The "Ceddo"—or feudal class of common people—cling desperately to their customs and their fetishistic religion amidst the impending changes. Nominally set in the nineteenth century, *Ceddo* ranges far and wide to include philosophy, fantasy, militant politics, and a couple of electrifying leaps across the centuries to evoke the whole of the African experience.

Ousmane Sembene in Person May 5

◆ May 5 (Saturday) 7 pm

◆ May 7 (Monday) 7 pm

Faat-Kine

Directed by Ousmane Sembene
Senegal 2000, 35mm, color, 118 min.
With Venus Seye, Mame Ndoumbé Diop,
Tabara N'diaye

Wolof and French with English subtitles

OUSMANE SEMBENE'S LATEST release is a warm, often funny story of a single mother, her two children, two ex-husbands, aged mother, and assorted friends. *Faat-Kine*, the manager of a sparkling new gas station, drives an elegant car, lunches with fashionably dressed friends, and worries about her children passing their high school finals.

But Sembene contextualizes his heroine's thoroughly modern triumphs and anxieties within the complex culture and politics of Dakar, with its contrastive architecture of shantytowns and high-rises, streets crowded with cattle and Mercedes, and women whose lives have been shaped as much by tribal custom and male prejudice as by their twenty-first century aspirations. As it examines the changing roles of women in Senegalese society, *Faat-Kine* opens onto a new chapter in the career of this legendary director.

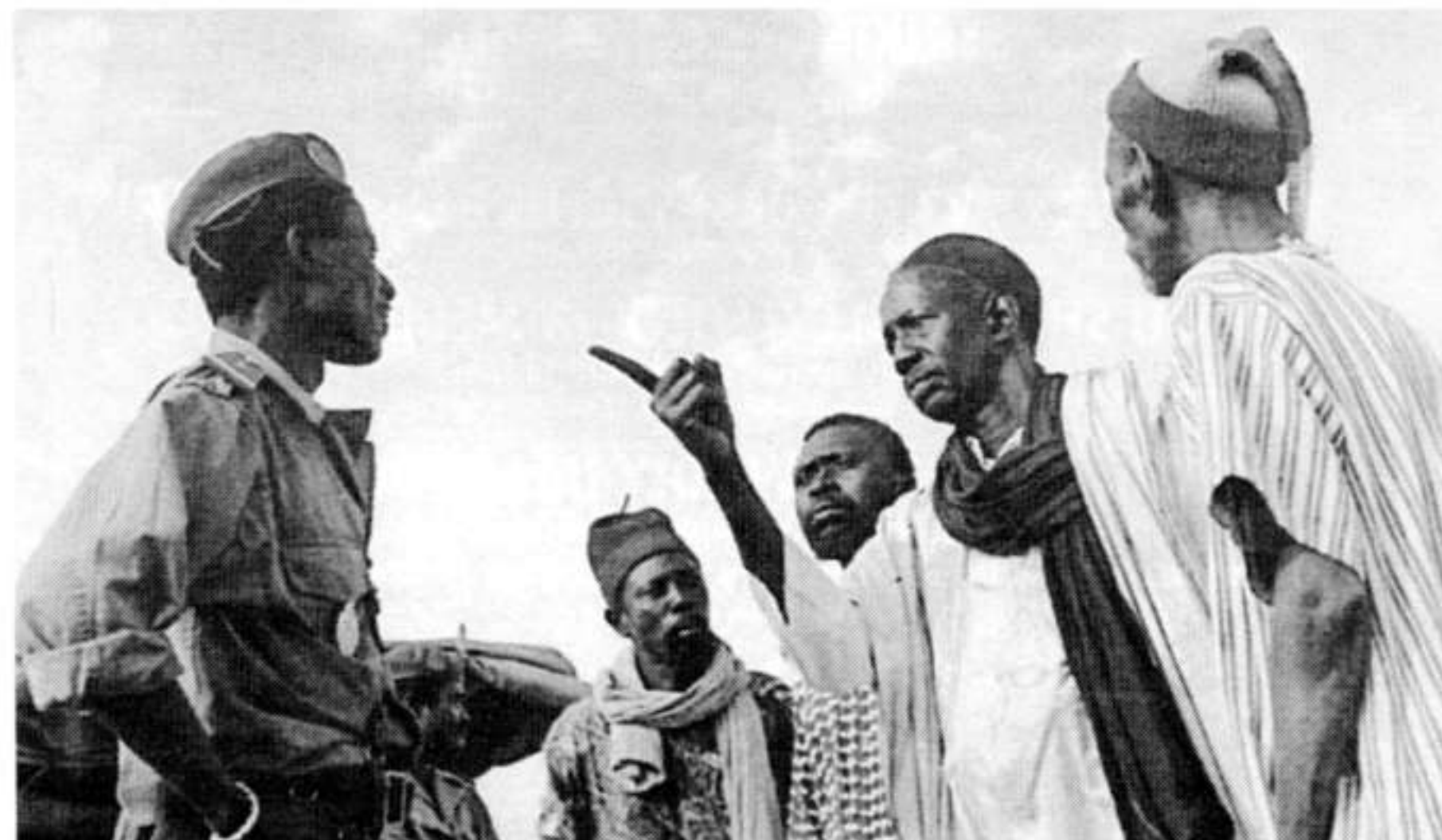
◆ May 8 (Tuesday) 7 pm

Guelwaar

Directed by Ousmane Sembene
Senegal 1993, 35mm, color, 115 min.
With Thierno N'diaye, Ndiawar Diop,
Myriam Niang

French and Wolof with English subtitles

GUELWAAR REVOLVES AROUND the mysterious death and even more mysterious post-death disappearance of Pierre Henri Thioune (called "Guelwaar," the Noble One), a political activist, philandering patriarch, and pillar of the local Christian community. To the horror of his fellow Christians, it is discovered that Guelwaar's errant corpse was misidentified and mistakenly buried in a Muslim cemetery. This sets off a tempest of bureaucratic red tape, family conflicts, and religious factionalism that culminates in a tense standoff at the disputed grave site. As usual with Sembene, *Guelwaar* is many films in one: black comedy, political allegory, social satire, family drama, and, at the end, thunderous indictment of the twin evils of homegrown African corruption and neocolonial Western aid.



Ousmane Sembene *Guelwaar* 1993