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London F.F. '88



SENEGAL/TUNISIA/ALGERIA 1987

Camp Thiaroye

Camp de Thiaroye

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Directors: Ousmane Sembène, Thierno Faty Sow

Production Company: SNPC (Senegal)/SATPEC (Tunisia)/Enaproc (Algeria)

Producers: Mamadou Mbengue, Moustapha Ben Jamia

Screenplay: Ousmane Sembène, Thierno Faty Sow

Photography (Colour): Ismail Lakhdar Hamina

Export Agent: SIDECA, 12 rue Berenger Ferrand, Dakar

Leading Players: Ibrahima Sane, Sijiri Bakaba, Gustava Sorgho

Running Time: 140 mins

Festival: Venice

The Camp Thiaroye in Ousmane Sembène's film is a repatriation camp for African soldiers in 1944; men from different tribes and religions who have all experienced five years of war in Europe, which has heightened their political consciousness. The central character, Sergeant-Major Diatta, is an educated man (studying law and married to a French woman) who is contrasted with the generally racist and bigoted French officers. Tensions between French and Africans eventually reach a climax at the camp when the French try to swindle the soldiers out of half of their back pay. Sembène, working with Thierno Faty Sow, has made a simple, yet effective account of the emerging culture and birth of national feelings, and whilst probably overlong for some European tastes, and rather episodic, it is held together by a fine central performance by Ibrahima Sane which gives it dignity and true feeling. The atmosphere of the camp and the tension before the climactic massacre are finely worked up.—Peter Cargin.

Camp Thiaroye

(Camp de Thiaroye)

Senegal/Tunisia/Algeria, 1987



Dir: Ousmane Sembène, Thierno Faty Sow. *Prod:* Mamadou Mbengue, Moustapha Ben Jamia. *Scr:* Ousmane Sembène, Thierno Faty Sow. *Phot. (colour):* Ismail Lakhdar Hamina. *Ed:* Kahena Attia Riveill. *Mus:* Ismaïla Lo. *Sd:* Rachid Bouafia. *Prod. co:* SNPC (Senegal)/SATPEC (Tunisia)/Enaproc (Algeria), with Filmi Doomi Reew (Senegal) and Filmi Kajoor (Senegal). *Source:* SIDEDEC, 12 rue Berenger Ferrand, Dakar, Senegal. *R.t:* 140 mins.

Cast: Ibrahima Sane (*Sergeant-Major Diatta*), Sijiri Bakaba, Gustave Sorgho, Camara Dansogho Mohamed, Gabriel Zahon, Casimir Zoba dit Zao, Mohamed Camara, Jean-Daniel Simon, Pierre Orma, Ismaïla Cisse, Ababacar Sy Cisse, Moussa Cissoko, Eloi Coly, Ismaïla Lo, El Hadj Ndiaye, Thierno Ndiaye, Doumarou Naino, Daniel Odimbossoukou, Koffi Saturnin Zinga.

Background

The year is 1944. Troops of Senegalese *tirailleurs* (as the African infantrymen were called) are being repatriated to their home base in Dakar from which they had left for Europe five years previously, in 1939.

Some have been prisoners in German concentration camps along with their French officers, whom they have seen stripped of every bit of arrogance. Others have taken part in the Resistance, alongside the underground forces, in the French towns and countryside.

Others spearheaded the Second Armoured Division led by General Leclerc, which left Fort Lamy (Chad) to fight with the Italian army in the Libyan Desert and the German army in the Sahara, and heroically freed Paris before marching on Germany.

Daily life in the camps, where they were imprisoned along with white soldiers and officers, active participation beside the French forces in the Underground, the long march from Fort Lamy to Paris and then on to the liberation of all of France – the sum total of their experience has changed the outlook of

the soldiers and heightened their consciousness: the myth of the white man as a "superior being" has been destroyed. Henceforth, these Senegalese riflemen are no longer "good niggers" grovelling before the white man.

Back on African soil, in the transit camp at Thiaroye, they have waited days and days to get their back pay and are engaging in lengthy negotiations with the colonial military authorities.

Camp Thiaroye as the month of November 1944 draws to a close. Tragedy strikes. . .

– Venice Festival programme

(*Eldest Son*) (short), *Emitai*. 1972: *Basket africain aux jeux olympiques de Munich R.F.A.* (short), *L'Afrique aux Olympiades* (short). 1974: *Xala (Impotence)*. 1976: *Ceddo*. 1987: *Camp de Thiaroye (Camp Thiaroye)* (co-dir.).



Thierno Faty SOW was born at Thiès, Senegal, on 23 December 1941. After studying at the Conservatoire du Cinéma Française in Paris, he spent five years from 1964 as an assistant director at ORTF (French radio & TV). From 1969 to 1974, he worked as a director in TV in Senegal. He was a founder member and official of CINESEAS, the Association of Senegalese film-makers, and FEPAC, the Panafrikan Federation of Film-Makers. His current project is a film adaptation of *Excellence, vos Epouses* by Cheickh N'Dao.

Films: 1971: *Gorée, petite île, grande histoire* (short). 1974: *L'option*. 1975: *Les feux de brousse* (short), *Romkh ou l'exode rural* (short), *Sunu Coope* (short), *Le cheptel au Sénégal* (short), *L'éducation sanitaire au Sénégal* (short). 1979: *L'Oeil*. 1987: *Camp de Thiaroye (Camp Thiaroye)* (co-dir.).

Ousmane SEMBÈNE was born at Ziguinchor, a village in Senegal, on 8 January 1923. He worked as a fisherman on the Casamance coast, then took various manual jobs in Dakar until joining the Free French Army in 1942 and taking part in the invasion of Italy. He worked after the war as a docker in Marseilles, becoming a union activist, and began his self-education in French. He became secretary of the Blacks in France Association (comprising workers and students). His first, semi-autobiographical novel, *Le Docker Noir*, was published in 1955. His later novels include *O Pays, mon beau peuple* (1957), *Les bouts du bois de Dieu (God's Bits of Wood)* (1960), *Voltaïque (Tribal Scars)* (1962), *L'Harmattan* (1964) and *Xala* (1974) (which he filmed). After deciding in 1960 to take up film-making, he spent a year in Moscow studying how to do it. He made three shorts and a feature in French, then switched to his native language, Wolof, and other local languages. Work for TV includes the shorts *Traumatisme de la femme face à la polygamie* (1969, for programme *3 colonnes à la Une*) and *Les dérivés du chômage* (both 1969). His most recent project is a TV series, titled *Samori*, in 20 episodes.

Films: 1963: *L'Empire Souria, Songhays* (unfinished docu. short), *Borom sarret (The Cart Driver)* (short). 1964: *Nyave* (short). 1966: *La noire de . . . (Black Girl)*. 1968: *Mandabi (The Money Order)*. 1971: *Taaw*