



REBEL CINEMA: OUSMANE SEMBÈNE AT 100

Emitai

Emitai

Director: Ousmane Sembène

Production Company: Filmi Doomireew

Released by: New Yorker Films

Participation: Ministère de la Coopération

Producer: Paulin Soumanou Vieya

Assistant Director: Pap Sow

Screenplay: Ousmane Sembène

Director of Photography: Georges Caristan

Editor: Gilbert Kikoïne

Sound: El Hadji Mbow

Cast:

Robert Fontaine (*commandant*)

Michel Remaudeau (*lieutenant*)

Pierre Blanchard (*colonel*)

Andoujo Diahou (*sergeant*)

Fodé Cambay (*corporal*)

Ibou Camara (*villager*)

Ousmane Camara, Joseph Diatta, Dji Niasebanor,

Sibesalang, Kalifa, Etienne Mané, Anlio Bassene,

Abdoulaye Diallo, Alphonse Diatta (*children*)

Thérèse N'bissine Diop

Senegal-France 1971©

103 mins

The screening on Sat 26 Aug features a pre-recorded intro by season programmer Chrystel Oloukoï

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SIGHT AND SOUND

Emitai recounts the state-sanctioned massacre of members of the village of Diola, towards the end of the Second World War, who rebelled against colonial rule and the imposition of taxes. An epic political work, the film's premiere was attended by Bissau-Guinean anti-colonialist and freedom fighter Amílcar Cabral. It prompted tax strikes in some Senegalese villages and was eventually banned for five years.

A contemporary review

Shot on a shoestring budget, Sembène's magnificent film is also exemplary political cinema, ranking with early Glauber Rocha. The camera is directed to capture the struggle from the tribe's perspective and depicts without sentimentality the demolition of a colonised culture. If the film is weighted, it is towards the two young brothers who take upon themselves the responsibility of caring for the people – picking up the belongings of the two 'recruits', bringing water and shade to the women put out in the sun, silently and solemnly.

Emitai can also be seen schematically as a final conflict between two modes of living – one rich in its own mythology. The African tribe is depicted with an almost anthropological eye: its sexual division of labour, its tradition of patriarchal authority, its relationship to the gods through ritual ceremony (leading to the appearance and denunciation of the same gods) are recorded with deep respect. What the colonial regime has to offer is impoverished by comparison: a new father, Pétain (there is a brilliant scene in which Pétain is exchanged for de Gaulle), marching songs and a new uniform; while African recruits are transformed by the Army into an indistinguishable troop of mercenaries.

The two cultures are interlocked in a representation of a constantly repeated experience within colonised countries. Attachment to traditional forms leaves the tribe helpless; not only does calling on the gods bring no respite, but going out to struggle – although more heroic – brings little success. The tribe responds to the French as if at war with another village and, inevitably, superior rifle-power overcomes them. The sensual and pacific nature of the relationship between the tribe and its environment – soon ruptured by the intervention of the oppressive forces – is conveyed in the sequence where two young men pass one after the other down a country road bordered by long grass and are then ambushed by hiding soldiers. This close relationship is also emphasised in a lyrical scene of the women planting and harvesting the rice.

Anyone interested in how to make a film from the point of view of the oppressed should see *Emitai*.

Rosalind Delmar, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1973