



REBEL CINEMA: OUSMANE SEMBÈNE AT 100

Moolaadé

Moolaadé

Director: Ousmane Sembène

©/Presented by: Filmi Doomireew

Co-produced by:

Direction de la Cinématographie Nationale,
Centre Cinématographique Marocain, CinéTéléfilms,
Films de la Terre Africaine

French Production: Ciné-Sud Promotion

With the contribution of: European Commission,

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Participation: Agence du Système des Nations
Unies au Sénégal, United Nations Development

Fund for Women, FNUAP, United Nations
Development Programme, UNICEF, Organisation

Mondiale de la Santé, Stanley Thomas Johnson
Stiftung, Church Development Service (EED),

ABP, EZEF

Production Manager: Bertrand Michel Kabore

Unit Production Manager: Drissa Aouba

Location Manager: Gustave Sorgho

Unit Manager: Eric Pare

1st Assistant Director: Clarence Thomas Delgado

2nd Assistant Director: Dominique T. Zeida

Script Supervisor: Sophie Dwernicki

CASTING DIRECTOR: Georgette Paré

Screenplay: Ousmane Sembène

Director of Photography: Dominique Gentil

2nd Camera: Moussa Diakité

Key Grip: Sylvain Bardoux

Gaffer: Hassane Maïga

Editor: Abdellatif Raïss

Art Director: Joseph Kpobly

Costumes: Sidi Aamadou Ouedraogo,
Jean-Marie Zongo, Adama Sawadogo

Make-up: Aminata Zoure Sissokho

Hair: Aminata Soura

Titles: Ercidan

Colour Timer: Hamid Bayzou

Music: Boncana Maïga

Additional Music (Radio): Ajda Soumano,

Aïcha Kone, Omar Pene, Oumou Sangaré,

Abdoulaye Diabate

Song "Jaatu" by: Lala Drabo

Sound Recordist: Denis Guilhem

Sound Re-recording: Jean-Guy Véran, Mactari

Sound Editor: Jean-Pierre Bordiau

Sound Effects: Christian Germain

Bamanan Language Supervisors:

Maimouna Hélène Diarra,

Ibrahima Sory Koita (Bomba)

Cast:

Fatoumata Coulibaly (*Colle Ardo Gallo Sy*)

Maimouna Hélène Diarra (*Hadjatou*)

Salimata Traore (*Amsatou*)

Aminata Dao (*Alima Ba*)

Dominique T. Zeida (*'Mercenaire'*)

Mah Compaore (*lead purifier*)

Rasmané Ouedraogo (*Ciré Bathily*)

Ousmane Konate (*Amath Bathily*)

Bakaramoko Sanogo (*Abdou*)

Modibo Sangare (*Balla Bathily*)

Joseph Traoré (*Dugutigi (Alpha Doukouré)*)

Moussa Théophile Sowie (*Ibrahima Doukouré*)

Habib Dembele (*sacristan*)

Gustave Sorgho (*Bakary*)

Cheikh Oumar Maïga (*Kémo Tiékura*)

Ibrahima Sory Koita (Bomba) (*Kéma Ansumana*)

Aly Sanon (*Konaté*)

Moussa Sanogo (*Konaté's son*)

Naki Sy Savane (*Sanata*)

Stéphanie Nikiema (*Mâh*)

In *Moolaadé*, the villagers who support the practice of excision – the slicing away of most of the clitoris and labia of young girls, said to promote chastity and discourage female lust – invoke tradition in their cause: girls, they insist, have always been cut. (Whether this is true, or whether the practice is – as history seems to suggest – of fairly recent origin, is another matter.) But at the same time the film's heroine Mama Colle can turn tradition to her own ends. When four pre-adolescent girls who have fled the cutting ceremony come begging her for protection, she's able to grant them impregnable sanctuary simply by stringing a multicoloured cord a few inches off the ground across the entrance to her courtyard. This flimsy barrier signifies the *moolaadé* (protection) of the film's title. To emphasise its insubstantiality, Sembène repeatedly shows small children and animals hopping over it or crawling under it, yet not even the village chief, petty tyrant though he is, dare flout it. A more 'enlightened', westernised individual might well condemn the mutilation of the girls but would equally, no doubt blithely, ignore the *moolaadé*. Gains and losses.

The opening of *Moolaadé* shows Sembène's affectionate, intimate view of African village life. In a brief couple of minutes before the arrival of the four fugitive girls sets the plot in motion, the roaming camera of Dominique Gentil (Sembène's regular DoP since *Guelwaar*) draws us into the texture, the sounds, sights and colours – almost, it's easy to imagine, the smells – of this organic community. Women carry water in bowls on their heads. A baby cries as it's bathed. Goats bleat, chickens and cows roam about. Birds sing; somewhere a radio plays; women chant while they sweep or sew. Everywhere are the rich primary colours of dyed robes and hangings; the deep ochre of the earth and warm sandy hues of the huts contrast with the bright plastic of bowls and buckets. Quite apart from anything else, Sembène's films offer a useful corrective to received western ideas of Africa as a starved, helpless continent, devoid of dignity and self-sufficiency.

Before this, though, under the credits, we see the arrival of the itinerant pedlar Mercenaire. The only outsider in the village, this character goes through more of an arc than any other in the film. Initially he's seen as a comic rogue, almost a clown, tirelessly chatting up every woman who comes to his stall, blandly justifying his excessive prices. Gradually deeper, more sombre aspects emerge. There are whispers that he was jailed and dishonourably discharged from the army, and Colle's daughter Amasatou uses his nickname as an insult, saying it means 'a man who kills women and children.' But it turns out that Mercenaire was a member of a UN peacekeeping force, that he hates violence, and that he was jailed on a trumped-up charge when he exposed officers misappropriating the wages of his fellow-soldiers. And when Colle's husband Ciré publicly flogs her, it's only Mercenaire who dares tear the whip from Ciré's hand. For this he's hounded out of the village and murdered: his nocturnal departure, pursued by a silent group of men bearing torches, their faces painted as white ghostly masks, makes a sinister contrast with his joyful, sunlit arrival, cheered by laughing women.

It comes at the darkest moment of the film. Events are already shadowed by the deaths of three of the six girls who fled the excision ceremony: two, thought to have escaped to the city, are found dead at the bottom of a well, while another, enticed over the protecting cord by her own mother, dies under

Marie Augustine Yameogo, Mabintou Baro,
Tata Konate, Fatoumata Sanogo,
Macjara Konate, Fatoumata Konate ('purifiers')
Fatoumata Sanou (*Nafissatou*)
Mamissa Sanogo (*Oumy*)
Maminata Sanogo (*Hawa*)
Mariama Souabo (*Jaatu*)
Lala Drabo (*Saalba*)
Georgette Paré (*Niassi*)
Assita Soura (*Seynabou*)
Alimatou Traore (*Binetour*)
Edith Nana Kabore (*Ibatou*)
Maminata Sanogo (*Coumba*)
Nadjeta Sanogo (*Yaya*)
Sanata Sanogo ('queen mother')
Mafirma Sanogo (*Fily*)
Senegal-Burkina Faso (Upper Volta)-Morocco-
Tunisia-Cameroon 2004©
124 mins

The screening on Wed 30 Aug features
an introduction

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the knife. The mother Saalba weeps helplessly; it turns out that this is the second daughter she has lost to the excisers' knives. But there's no reproach from the other women, only sympathy. These deaths, the flogging of Colle, and the men's pig-headed pettiness in confiscating and burning the women's prized radios ('Our men want to lock up our minds,' one woman exclaims) all bring matters to a head and lead to the final dramatic confrontation. Sembène – who has always acclaimed the resilience of women and plans *Moolaadé* as the second in a loose trilogy of films embodying 'heroism in everyday life' (in the first, 2000's *Faat Kiné*, a woman surmounts the stigma of unwed motherhood) – unmistakably intends a celebration of female solidarity. And whatever its dramatic plausibility, the sheer liberating exhilaration of this ending is all but impossible to resist.

Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, June 2005

Ousmane Sembène on 'Moolaadé'

Moolaadé takes place in a rural setting, in a village that is symbolic of a green Africa. This Africa, all the while living its own life, is linked to 'others.' Thus, we have some external elements whose arrival allows the African to know herself or himself better. In *Moolaadé*, two values are in conflict. One is traditional: female excision. It goes back a long time. Before Jesus Christ, before Mohammed, back to the time of Herodotus. It's a tradition. It has been made a value in order – in my opinion – to subjugate women. The other value, as ancient as human existence, is the right to grant protection to the most vulnerable. When these two values meet, cross each other, multiply, run up against each other – there is the symbol of our society: elements of modernity, elements which belong to our cultural subtext.

You've said that Moolaadé is the most African of all your films.

I said it in the sense that here we are in the cultural substratum of Africa. Obviously, with elements that come from the outside. But everything occurs within the interior of a language, of a culture, with its metaphors and symbols. We observe the arrival of two figures from the outside: one is a former soldier. He has, in the name of Humanity, participated in all the peacekeeping efforts. The other is someone who exiled himself to Europe (for his own interest).

Of the 54 African countries, 38 practice excision. Why did you choose Burkina Faso and Djerisso?

I was simply seeking a village that answered to my creative desire. Why would I paint a rose black? I travelled thousands of kilometres. I investigated Burkina, Mali, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau. But when I saw this village, I said to myself: here's my village! But there's more: this mosque in hedgehog style in the middle of the village. This architecture, it wasn't a person that inspired it; we owe it to the termites, to the termite mound that was the source of inspiration for the symbol of *Moolaadé*. There's the reason for the choice of Djerisso.

Following Faat Kiné (2000) and Moolaadé (2004), what will be the third panel of the triptych?

This time we'll be in the city: how we are governed: *The Brotherhood of Rats*.

Interview with Samba Gadgigo, *Moolaadé* production notes