

Humanities Institute
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SCRAP HEAP / Tableau Ferraille (1996)

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Contents (Overview-Synopsis-Characters-Character Analysis-Themes-Scenes)

OVERVIEW

The suburb of Tableau Ferraille is an African tragedy. Its polluted beach shows the extent to which Africa has become the dumping ground for the West's toxic waste. However, the filmmaker seems to hint that this environmental racism is the consequence of endogenous depravity: the African elites' alienation from traditional values of collectivism and their adoption of capitalist imperfections of greed, corruption, dishonesty, and disloyalty towards the lower classes have made them a public menace. Hence, these themes become the focus of the film. *Tableau Ferraille* was shot on location, about twenty miles from the Senegalese capital city of Dakar. In 1997, it was selected as Best Francophone Film at the Namur International Festival of French-Speaking Film and for Best Cinematography at the Ouagadougou Panafrican Film and Television Festival.

SYNOPSIS

Tableau Ferraille is a suburb of Dakar, Senegal, with a chaotic face. The neighborhood ('Scrap Heap') takes its name from the metal wastes that litter its beach. Daam, a son of the neighborhood, wants to bring order to the mess of his district. Thus, he is running in the legislative elections to be a deputy in the Senegalese National Assembly. Daam sums up his program in one phrase: "escape from chaos." However, the people with whom Daam surrounds himself lead him into greater chaos than he could have imagined. When his second wife is bribed by his friend President, a crooked businessman, to steal and sell him information that wins him a bridge construction contract, Daam prefers to resign and go into exile rather than defend himself in a legal battle that would smear the mother of his children.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Daam (Ismael Lo):	A polygamous member of parliament and Minister of Development in Senegal.
Gagnesiri (AKA Gagne) (Fatou Ndiaye):	Daam's first wife
Kiné (Ndeye Bineta Diop):	Daam's second wife
Gora (Amadou Diop):	Daam's right-hand man and Gagne's cousin
President (Thierno Ndiaye):	A crooked businessman and friend of Daam's
Anta (Isseu Niang):	Gagne's best friend
Ndoubbé (Seynabou Céline Sarr):	Anta's daughter

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Daam Emotional (*Hard-working, Spontaneous, Honest*)

Daam is the tragic hero who fails to find a balance between rural and urban values. The former values are in the mode of mutual aid, sharing, compassion, honesty, and collectivism. The latter values are in the mode of egoism, gain, every person for themselves, disloyalty, and unbridled capitalism. His first wife, who embodies rural values, was drowned out by the plethora of agents of capitalism that gravitated around him. She could not help him. He paid the price for the choice of his entourage.

Hard-working Daam was convinced that he could change the face of his hometown, and he worked selflessly at it. Indeed, President and Daam's second wife reproached him for working too much. But he was convinced that only arduous work could erase the chaos of his community. To Ndoubbé, who complained about the working conditions imposed by President in the factory, Daam answered that everyone had to do their part in the collective sacrifice. The tragedy is that while Daam was working

arduously, corrupt individuals around him, like President, Ndiaye, and Diop Dollar (one of President's men) were looking for effortless ways to get rich, and in doing so, they undermined all his efforts.

Spontaneous Daam is a character who often acts spontaneously, sometimes even on a whim. When he decides to marry Gagne, it is on a whim. After having seen her only for a few minutes, he proposes marriage to her. Similarly, it is after a lap on the dance floor with Kiné that he decides to make her his second wife and introduces her to Gagne. And when he goes to confront President at the factory, it is by ignoring the advice of his friend Gora, who offered him a rather thoughtful legal defense against President's treachery. His unplanned response to President did not serve him well. In fact, it precipitated his demise.

Honest On the day of his election to the National Assembly, Daam's friends and collaborators were already submitting to him a list of favours they expected from him. President wanted the management of the canning factory and the contract to build the new bridge. Immediately after his appointment as Minister of Development, the pressures increased. It was no longer just President who became demanding, it was also Daam's second wife, who insisted on having pleasure trips abroad, an art gallery, and companies in her name, and who advised him to cheat to enrich himself in order to offer her those caprices. Daam resisted all these pressures, convinced that they were the cause of the chaos of African societies. They are scarce, these African elites, who like Daam, choose to live on their salaries and not on corruption and influence peddling.

Chaotic Daam's goal in becoming an MP for Tableau Ferraille was to clean up the chaos in which his hometown had engulfed itself in thirty years of independence. It is ironic that in the end, Daam invited more chaos than there was when he became an MP. In his domestic sphere, he invited chaos by marrying Kiné, his second wife, who transformed his home into a zone of constant tensions. In the economic and social spheres, the choice of his friends and the questionable morality of his second wife gave way to crooked characters, such as President and his collaborators, who turned Tableau Ferraille into a place of exploitation of the working masses and a dumping ground for the toxic waste of the West.

Gagnesiri (Gagne) *Open (Traditional, Frugal, Motherly)*
Gagne symbolizes the rural virtue that has remained immaculate in the material and moral chaos of the urban center. Despite all the temptations to betray her principles, she was able to retain her generosity, loyalty and sober attitude toward money. At the end of the film, as if to purify herself from having rubbed shoulders with too many evils, she boards a pirogue back to her village, escorted by the Mouride brotherhood.

Traditional The first time Daam set his eyes on Gagne, he was campaigning in her village, and she was on her way to the village well to collect water for her extended family. The second time he met her, she was serving the men who had gathered in her father's house to listen to Daam's campaign program. When Daam proposed to her, she was on collecting water again; and when he told her that he wanted to marry her, Gagne advised Daam to first speak to her father. Gagne is a rural woman. She lives by a traditional code that has defined boundaries and roles for womanhood, which entails discharge of domestic chores, respect of the patriarchal authority, and chastity as honor reflecting on the patriarch. On her nuptial night, the blood-stained sheet exhibited by the women of the neighborhood is a testament that she has honored her family, and most of all, her patriarch.

Frugal Not once in the movie has Gagne asked her husband to indulge her with gifts. She has frugal tastes and believe that money destroys relationships. Her marriage was performed in the simplest traditional manner. She lived in the simplest way and was content with what she had.

Motherly Gagne was never able to conceive. However, she was a caring mother to other people's children. When Kiné announced that she was pregnant, Gagne's first reactions were to put her ear on the belly of Kiné and call with joy, "We are going to become mothers." And when the children of Kiné came into the world, she raised them as if they were her own. Similarly, she took under her wing Ndoumbé, Anta's daughter, whom she protected and advised before and after Anta's death.

Kine Disagreeable (*Envious , Disloyal*)

Kine's envy and untrustworthiness is what precipitates her husband's demise. Daam was surrounded by dishonest characters, but to get to him they needed someone to open the door to his most private space. Kine played that role for monetary gain.

Envious On the day of the announcement of Daam's victory in the legislative election, while everyone in Tableau Ferraille was in joy, Kiné was ruminating in her corner. She had nothing to be happy about. However, she had some aggressive reflections directed at Gagne, whom she suspected of having engineered her marriage to Daam whose promising future she had perceived and to which she wanted to tether herself. And since that day, she never ceased to eye the position of Gagne, the wife of the deputy. Kiné managed to seduce Daam thanks to President and N'diaye's calculating schemes. Once established in Daam's home as his second wife, her gaze turned to what the people around her possessed and what she didn't have. She wanted a gallery like the one in which she worked. She wanted a husband as rich as the other ministers, and she advised Daam to use the dubious methods of his colleagues to enrich himself like them. She wanted to travel like the wives of the other ministers and, like them, own businesses. Kiné was an unhappy woman because she was consumed by envy.

Disloyal Kine's insatiability, her penchant for material possessions, put her at the mercy of cooptation by those who could satisfy her fancies, even if it meant betraying her family. Thus, when the time came to choose between her loyalty to her family and the money President offered her to betray her husband, Kiné chose the second alternative. She fled to a hefty bank account in Switzerland, leaving Daam and Gagne to defend themselves against the wickedness of President and the vacillating allegiance of the populations of Tableau Ferraille.

President Disagreeable (*Greedy, Corrupt, Untrustworthy*)

President condenses the flaws of the crooked capitalist. He has no friends, only interests. Ready to enrich himself at all costs, he corrupts, betrays, and destroys everything that stands in his way to wealth accumulation.

Greedy President is a money-hungry individual for whom all means are good to earn money. He bribes his friend's wife to sell him information that allows him to win an important construction contract. Putting forward profit and not the protection of populations, he accepts money from industrialized countries to recover their barrels of toxic waste, which he dumps in the sea and on the beaches of Tableau Ferraille.

Corrupt For President and his cronies, Daam's position as MP and Minister of Development should make it easier for them to obtain juicy government contracts. President's insistence that Daam use his influence to his advantage turns to harassment. He does not understand that Daam refuses to see things his way. Daam's honesty is for President a character flaw. So, he pursues Daam in his office and at home hoping to get him to change his mind. When Daam obstinately refuses to give him access to privileged information that would help him obtain the bridge construction contract, he bribes Kiné for it.

Untrustworthy President prepared the entry of Kiné into the life of his friend Daam as a Trojan horse, with the intention of using her against him. Whenever Daam, in the euphoria of love, exulted, President rubbed his hands, convinced that he was approaching his goal. When he decided to move to his ultimate act of betrayal, President had no remorse. He destroyed his friend's career, family, and reputation.

THEMES

SOCIETY (capitalism, collectivism, patriarchy, tradition, modernity)

Capitalism President is the personification of American capitalism. The Texan hat he wears and his neat suit revive the image of Larry Hagman in his role of J.R. Ewing, the unscrupulous capitalist of the American television series Dallas, which in the 1990s gathered West African families around their television sets on Friday nights. The Uncle Sam doll that President offers as a gift to Kiné's newborn child confirms

that President is a follower of American capitalism, the economic doctrine that takes no hostages but destroys all adversity in the pursuit of profit. Here, the collectivism advocated by Gagne, and which demands that compassion inspire President so that Ndoumbé can recover her job, is not appropriate. Here, profit trumps decency and friendship. Here, the end justifies the means. Kiné, in her greed for money, has been converted to unbridled capitalism by President. It is not accidental that her money awaits her in a Swiss bank, an institution that has the reputation in Africa of securing the dirty finances of the world's most culpable capitalists.

Collectivism In contrast to the ruthless and selfish capitalism of which President and Kiné are the agents, there is another form of life in society that promotes collectivism, which the populations on the periphery of power embrace more easily. This collectivism is illustrated by village life, where the family gathers around a common dish, where the women's chatter and laughter animate the water well. This is the kind of life that Gagne enjoyed in her village before coming to Tableau Ferraille. In Tableau Ferraille, though to a lesser degree, this collectivism is also illustrated in the common courtyards where several families share the same living space, trade stories and comfort each other, go to the open markets together to bargain for articles, exchange gifts and heal each other. It is in this kind of environment that Gagne, her husband, her mother-in-law, and her friend Anta and Anta's family lived before Daam moved up in society and shifted his family to their large, enclosed, private villa in Dakar. It is this communalism that constitutes the cornerstone of the Mouride brotherhood that appears at the baptism of Kine's first child and at the end of the film to take Gagne to the open sea. One can assume that the Mourides have taken Gagne far from the alienating urban values of Dakar and Tableau Ferraille, to the cradle of communal, rural life: back to her village.

Patriarchy When Daam told his friend and collaborator Gora that he wanted Gora's cousin Gagne to be his wife, Gora told him not to worry, that he would speak with his uncle, Gagne's father. When Daam proposed marriage to Gagne, she asked him to consult with her father. The father in the traditional Senegalese family holds a crucial role. He seats at the top of a hierarchized family structure, from where he defines each family member's roles and spaces. His authority is absolute, and the decisions he makes in resolving familial conflicts are rarely controvertible. The glory of the extended family is based on the honor of the father, which the women must preserve with exemplary behavior in society. Gagne has preserved her father's, and through him her family's, honor by remaining virtuous until marriage as evidenced by the blood-stained bedsheet that the women of Tableau Ferraille exhibit as proof of her morality. As for Ndoumbé, she has sullied her father's honor by getting pregnant before marriage. She is a dishonor to patriarchy. To keep his honor intact, Ndoumbé's father disowns her and her mother.

Tradition One of the ways the filmmaker stages the conflict between tradition and modernity is through the opposition of Daam's two wives, Gagne and Kiné. Gagne is a woman from the village, brought to the urban center by her marriage with Daam. Her values are rural values, up to then unblemished by the chaotic life of Tableau Ferraille. She weds according to tradition, and she proves her communal worth by disclosing her most intimate moment on her nuptial night. She is the pride of the women of Tableau Ferraille, who celebrate her virtue and praise her for upholding a traditional Senegalese value that is fast disappearing in the urban space. By abiding to the tradition of disclosure, by making public her intimate sexual condition, she agrees to continue in the urban space a communal management of life in society learned in the village. She makes herself available to her neighbors, such as asking her husband to intervene to have Ndoumbé recover her job in the factory when President dismisses her for organizing a strike, such as agreeing to be the godmother of Ndoumbé's child, which infuriates her husband, who tells her to think about having a child of her own, and such as nursing Anta and paying Anta's bills when she becomes single and falls ill. When, after two years of marriage, she is unable to conceive a child, she advises Daam to take a second wife. Faithful to the traditional maxim that it takes a village to raise a child, Gagne scolds her co-spouse when she puts her unborn child in danger by drinking alcohol, and, despite Kiné's wickedness towards her, she raises her co-spouse's children as if they were her own. When everything collapses around Daam, when his friends stab him in the back, when he is forced to resign so as not to sully the reputation of his second wife, it is Gagne, who dutifully goes to look for him in the bars where he now gives himself to alcohol, and who stays with him in his moments of decline.

If the filmmaker has made Gagne a childless woman, while Kiné has given Daam two children, it is to signal the end of an era, that of traditional values, and the advent of a new era, that of modernism and the law of the jungle, governed by money.

Modernity In contrast to Gagne, there is Kiné, a modern woman, shaped by the chaos of the urban space that Daam promises, as a deputy, to clean up. By marrying Kiné, Daam paradoxically invites chaos into both his familial and professional spaces. Kiné is a woman whose virginity the women of Tableau Ferraille did not need to prove. The company Kiné keeps suggests that this would be a waste of time. She is a woman of the world, used to dance floors and glasses of alcohol, whose chastity Daam himself has no illusions about when his friends introduce her to him. He marries her because she is attractive, not for her virtues. She is a woman envious of Gagne's position, preoccupied with her own social ascension rather than her husband's success, and obsessed with the money she must earn at any cost, even at the cost of her family's disgrace. So, when Daam cannot satisfy her demands for money, she steals some documents from his office and sells them to his enemies. As her husband's career is destroyed, she flees to Switzerland where a large bank account awaits her, leaving behind more chaos than Daam could have envisioned when he was campaigning to bring order to Tableau Ferraille.

RELATIONSHIP (polygamy, gender relation)

Polygamy Polygamy, for a man to have more than one wife, has a long history in Senegal. Before Senegal's adoption of Islam, there were no restrictions on the number of wives a man could have. As agriculture was the main occupation, men married several wives to have a large family with many helping hands on the farm. With the arrival of Islam in Senegal around the 11th century, the number of wives a man could have was limited to four. The religious tradition of polygamy found its way in the legal system and established polygamy as another marriage option alongside monogamy. The visit of the first wives to Gagne on the day her husband became an MP augurs dark days for her. It announces that Gagne will not remain her husband's only wife for long, and that another woman will soon join her. What is interesting is the casual way in which the first wives and Gagne approach the situation, as a *fait accompli*, as if they were resigned to it. The first wives seem to be warning Gagne that with her husband's rise in stature, she must ready herself to living with a co-spouse. Their predictions come true very quickly, when, Gagne, unable to get pregnant, proposes to her husband, whose frustration was becoming conspicuous, that he marry a second wife who will give him an heir. And although Daam hesitates for a moment, pretending to find the idea absurd, he gives in when his calculating friends push Kiné into his arms.

Gender relations If the condescension with which the husbands treat their wives is disconcerting, the casualness with which the wives accept their treatment by their husbands is even more intriguing. On the question of polygamy, for instance, the first wives' casual approach is noteworthy. At the baptism of Ndoumbé's child, after a lap on the dance floor with Kiné, Daam makes her sit with him near Gagne and announces without frills: "Here is Kiné. I want to marry her." It is in the same way that Anta's husband announces his second marriage. Returning from a successful business trip, he brings two chickens to his wife for dinner. And when she inquires as to the reason for his good humor, he tells her that he has just married his cousin so as not to frustrate his uncle, who insisted that he take his daughter in marriage. Gagne's and Anta's lackadaisical approvals of their respective husbands' announcements is surprising. One would think that even for a society that has accepted polygamy such announcements would be made with much more consideration towards women. This lack of consideration for women coming from men denotes a certain boorishness in men, which they unfortunately take for a manly quality.

SCENES

TWO WIVES

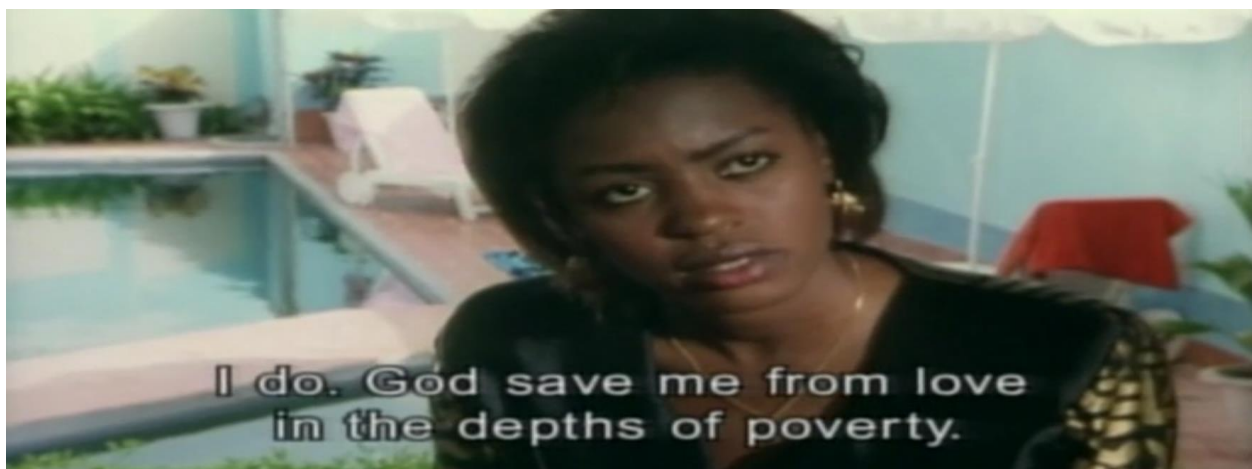
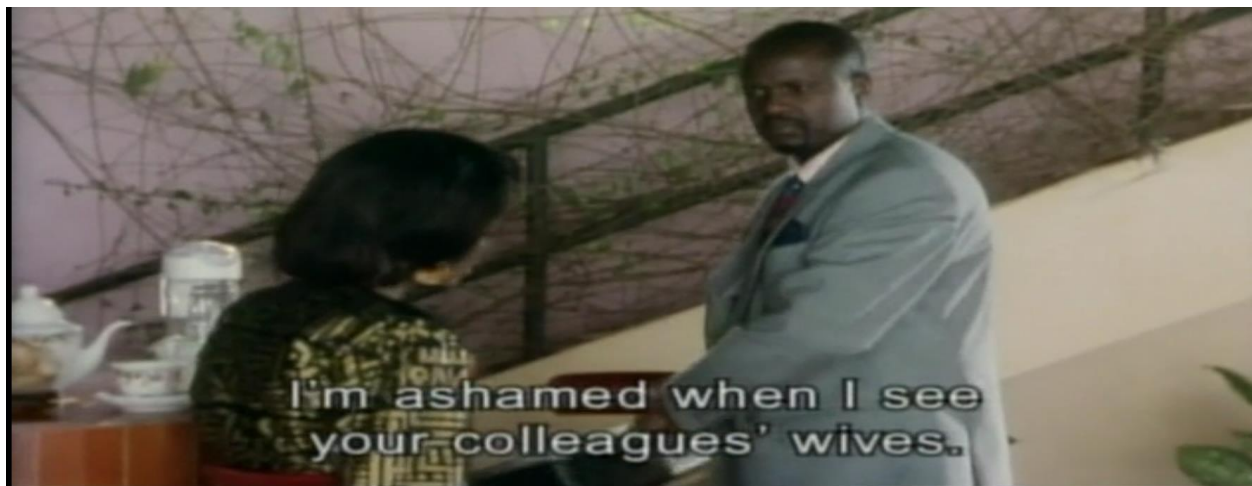
First wife: Gagne. On the wedding night, the women stand guard in front of the nuptial chamber and spy on the couple to verify two things: that the husband is virile, and that the bride has remained pure until marriage. One woman retrieves the blood-stained nuptial bedsheet, which she exhibits as proof of Gagne's purity for all to see. The women dance around the white cloth stained with Gagne's blood.



Second wife: Kiné Daam confronts President about Ndoumbé's firing from the factory. The conversation gets heated, and President suggests that Daam has been nervous lately because Gagne has been incapable of giving him a child. He asks Daam to take another wife. President invites Kiné to a business meeting at a restaurant. Daam cannot keep his eyes off her. Ndiaye, President's right-hand man, tries to convince Daam that Kiné is the right woman for him. Daam is apprehensive. However after a tour on the dance floor with Kiné, he introduces her to Gagne and announces that he will marry Kiné. Daam and Kiné's wedding is celebrated in the Western tradition. Kiné announces to Gagne that she is pregnant. Gagne is happy and shouts, "We're going to be mommies." They celebrate the news with Gagne's friend Anta. The Mourides, a Sufi brotherhood in Senegal committed to hard work, honor, and solidarity, come to bless the Kiné's newborn. President and his collaborators arrive with a present, a giant doll of Uncle Sam, which President says he received from an important American client of his.



Kiné becomes greedy and creates problems Daam and his family have moved out of Tableau Ferraille into a luxurious villa in Dakar. Kiné is expecting a second child, but she spends her days drinking. She complains to Daam that she is bored. She wants a career for herself. **Gagne and Kiné fight** Gagne is visiting Anta, who is ill. Kiné tries to entice Daam on Gagne's scheduled day with him. Gagne Comes back and sees Kine's sitting in Daam's lap. She attacks Kiné, and the two women get into a scuffle. **greedy** She complains to her husband that instead of thinking of work all the time, he should think of getting rich, like his colleagues, whose wives have businesses and travel whenever they please. Daam replies that he does not regret being an honest minister.

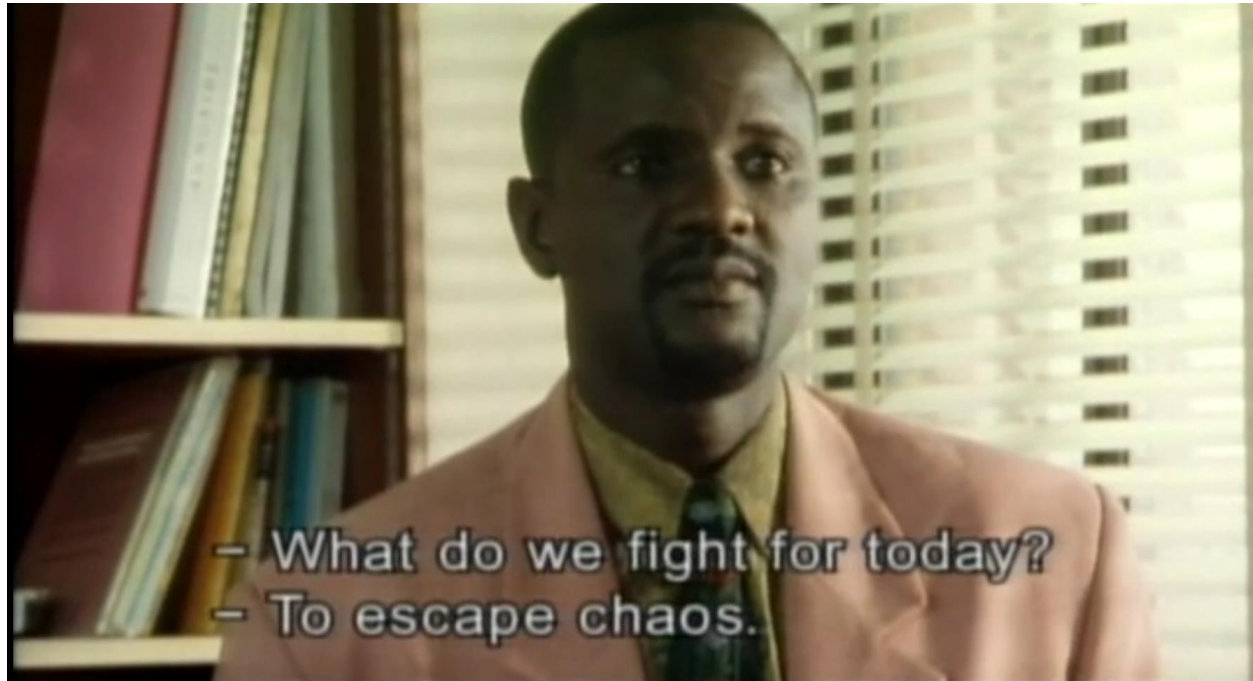


Both wives leave Daam Kiné retrieves some information from her husband's office and sells them to President to get him the bridge construction bid. As suspicions of corruption start mounting against her family, Kiné decides to leave the country. President has made sure that the money of her betrayal is waiting for her in a Swiss bank account. Gagne abandons Daam. Daam is humiliated by President and abandoned by the people of Tableau Ferraille, and he decide to go into exile. On the way to exile, Gagne asks Biraama, the cart driver, to stop by the graveyard so she can bid goodbye to her friend Anta. She disregards the tradition that forbids women from the cemetery and goes through the gate. Gagne takes a long time to get out of the cemetery. Biraama is impatient and unloads his cart to go make money hauling radioactive barrels for President. Gagne leaves Daam and walks to the beach where the Mouride brotherhood takes her to the sea towards an unspecified destination.



POLITICIAN'S RISE

Daam becomes a member of the parliament and then a minister Daam's hometown, Tableau Ferraille, presents a chaotic image. Daam is running a political campaign to be a member of parliament in Senegal's National Assembly. He has a single campaign promise: to escape chaos. He arrives in a small village for a political rally and falls in love with Gagnesiri (Gagne), the cousin of his right-hand man Gora. He asks her to marry him. She advises him to talk to her father. Daam wins the election and is now a deputy. He comes home with his campaign staff to celebrate his victory with Gagne. Kiné, a young woman from the neighborhood, mutters that Gagne is a calculating person who married Daam for money. Later on, Daam is named Minister of Development, and his promotion stirs up new desires. Kiné wants her husband to buy her an arts gallery. President wants the contract for the construction of the new bridge.



BUSINESSMEN

Daam's friends make demands Daam's friends see his election as an opportunity for them to move up the social ladder. So, they devise new jobs and contracts for themselves. President makes the boldest request: he wants to manage a new canning factory. He also wants the contract to build the new bridge. President gets his first wish: Daam inaugurates a new canning factory that President will manage. President and his collaborators arrive uninvited at Daam's home to talk business. President wants the bid for the new bridge. Daam is not happy to see them at his domicile for a matter that should be treated in his office during working hours. President can't understand how Daam will not have some time for his friends.



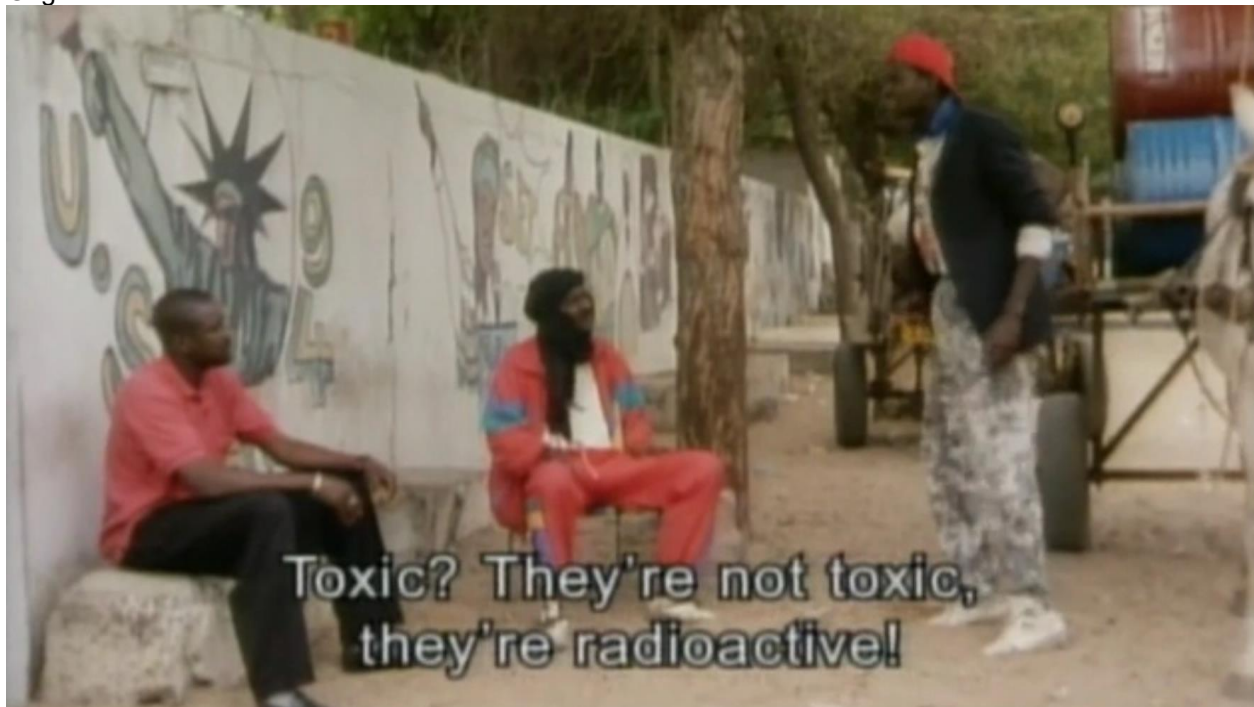
President's offer to Kiné President and his collaborators want Gora to look at their bid before the evaluation commission meets. Gora tells them that it would be inappropriate for him to do that, and that all the bids must be examined and decided on by the appropriate commission. President meets with Kiné at a secret location. He tells her that he has a business proposition that can make her a lot of money: He needs some information for which he is disposed to pay her \$300,000.



President wins the construction bid Kiné enters Daam's office and retrieves the files of all the bidders, which she takes to President. President has his collaborators reframe their own bid according to their competitors' and return it to Kiné to take back to Daam's office before the commission's meeting. To the dismay of Daam and Gora, the selection commission votes to give President the contract.



President dumps toxic wastes on the beach An unsuspecting boy carrying his handmade toy car plays on the contaminated beach of Tableau Ferraille. Heaps of metal scrap and barrels litter the beach. The barrels are containers of radioactive waste that President pays cart drivers to haul and dump. Unwary recyclers burn the contents of the barrels to recuperate the empty receptacles, which they use for various domestic purposes. The child runs on the beach scavenging for crabs that he secures in the toy car. Then, he enters Tableau Ferraille and makes his way through a crowd of curious onlookers near Daam and Gagne's home.



President becomes a powerful man The crowd of onlookers has gathered to see the spectacle at Daam and Gagne's home. Gagne and Daam have decided to go into exile. They load their possessions on Biraama's donkey cart. As the couple leave, the curious crowd turns its attention towards President and his collaborators. President, still wearing bandages from his fight with Daam, is inaugurating a new asphalt road he built for Tableau Ferraille.



POLITICIAN'S DECLINE

Daam is suspected of corruption The newspaper reports accuse Daam of influence peddling and corruption for handing the contract to President, who is his friend and a resident of his hometown. Also, thanks to President's intervention, Kiné has been selected as the new director of the National Museum, which level allegations of influence peddling against Daam.



Daam confronts President and gets humiliated Daam realizes that Kiné has sold some information to President for him to get the contract. Gora urges Daam to defend himself, but Daam does not want to implicate Kiné. Instead, he goes directly to the factory to confront President. They get into a fight. Daam is hurt by President's right-hand man Ndiaye, who comes to President's defense. Gagne and his mother help Daam to his feet. His mother urges him to stay away from people like President. Disgraced, Daam resigns and takes to drinking. Gagne and he are back to living in their old shack in Tableau Ferraille. The club of the first wives, who had previously accepted Gagne in their midst as the first wife of Daam, sides with President, who is now the most powerful man in Tableau Ferraille. The first wives humiliate and expel Gagne from the club.

