

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE NOBLE ONE / Guelwaar (1992)

Ousmane Sembène

OVERVIEW

Auteur Senegalese writer, producer, and director Sembène Ousmane was born on January 1, 1923 in Ziguinchor, Senegal. He died on June 9, 2007, in Dakar, Senegal. Sembène attended both a qur'anic school and a French school until age thirteen. He then worked with his father, a fisherman, before moving to Dakar in 1938, where he did a number of odd jobs. In 1944, he was drafted into the corps of Senegalese *Tirailleurs* (*Sharpshooters*) and sent to France to fight in the Free French Forces. In 1944 and 1947, Sembène was involved in union strikes, respectively, in Senegal as a railroad worker, and in France as a dock worker and member of the Communist Party. Having dropped out of school early, Sembène had to teach himself to read and write properly. He went on to write several novels, some of which he adapted into films. Sembène's only film training was one year spent at the Moscow Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography, at the age of forty, under Soviet director Mark Donskoy. Sembène, who liked to refer himself as a griot, an African storyteller and historian, produced nine features: *Black Girl* (1966), *Mandabi* (1968), *Emitaï* (1971), *Xala* (1975), *Ceddo* (1977), *Camp Thiaroye* (1988), *Guelwaar* (1992), *Faat Kiné* (2001), *Moolaadé* (2003).

Film Senegal became an independent country on August 20, 1960. More than thirty years after its independence, at the time Sembène released *Guelwaar* (1992), the country was still struggling to kick-start its development. The Senegalese government seemed unable to find solutions to the country's problems, particularly that of achieving food self-sufficiency, and was seemingly content to play the degrading role of recipient of international food aid. Among other criticisms, including corruption, unemployment and inter-religious disharmony, *Guelwaar* is a satire of the failure of the Senegalese government, which had reduced its people to beggars. *Guelwaar* won the President of the Italian Senate's Gold Medal at the 49th Venice International Film Festival

Background *Guelwaar* (the 'noble one/s'), sometimes spelled *guelwar* *guelware*, *guelwar*, *guelware*, or *gelwar*, is a name that used to designate the Serer kingdom that existed in the western part of present-day Senegal, from the 14th century until 1969. *Guelwaar*, the film, was shot in Senegal with local actors, several of whom have appeared in Senegalese films. Contrary to some of Sembene's films, like *The Money Order* (1968) or *Xala* (1975), which were adapted from Sembene's novels, here, it is the film that will inspire a novel of the same title to be published in 1996. Shot in Wolof and French, the film is a Senegal-French co-production by Sembene's Filmi Domirev and Galatee Film, a French production company. The film's post-production took place in Morocco.

CHARACTERS

Pierre Henri Thioune / Guelwaar (Thierno Ndiaye): A Christian activist, who is assassinated for his political stance, and whose body disappears from the morgue

Barthelemy (Ndiawar Diop): Guelwaar's eldest son, who lives in France and wants to recover his father's body

Sophie (Marie Augustin Diatta) : Guelwaar's daughter, who works as a prostitute in Dakar

Imam Biram (Abou Camara): The Imam of the Muslim village where Guelwaar's body was buried by mistake

Gora (Omar Seck): A police officer, who tries to help the Christians recover the body of Guelwaar from the Muslim cemetery

SYNOPSIS

The film is set in 1990, in Senegal, thirty years after the country's independence from France. Pierre Henri Thioune, nicknamed Guelwaar, is a leader of his town's Christian community. He is a political activist, who speaks against corruption and the degrading effects of foreign aid. Guelwaar dies in mysterious conditions. For his funeral, his three children reunite in his town. Guelwaar's eldest son, Barthelemy, lives in France and is an impenitent Francophile, who will not speak the local Wolof language. Guelwaar's youngest son, Aloys, has been handicapped by a childhood accident and is unable to work. Guelwaar's daughter, Sophie, is a prostitute in Dakar and supports her mother, Nogoy Marie, and her brother, Aloys, financially. Barthelemy learns from the doctors who autopsied his father that the latter died as a consequence of multiple blows causing him internal hemorrhage. Even more tragic than that, Guelwaar's body has disappeared from the town's morgue, accidentally taken by a Muslim family, who buried him in another village. While Guelwaar's unsuspecting friends and relatives are waiting to take him to his final resting place, Barthelemy, aided by, Gora, the local police chief, is trying to locate his father's body. Furthermore, Barthelemy wants to understand the circumstances of his father's death. Barthelemy's disdain for Senegal's bureaucracy and for the Senegalese, whom he finds backward, annoys Gora. Nonetheless, Gora takes Barthelemy to investigate the matter in the Muslim village, where he thinks Guelwaar's body is buried. Gora discovers that, indeed, the body of a man was delivered at dusk by an unschooled morgue attendant, who could not read the death certificate, to an illiterate Muslim undertaker, who buried him in the dark, in the village Muslim cemetery. Gora's attempt to have the body exhumed to properly identify it is complicated by the conflict between the Muslims, who refuse to open the grave, and the Christians, who demand that the body of their brother in religion be returned to them.

SCENES

Father is dead Aloys, Guelwaar's handicapped son, comes home from the hospital, where his father was admitted. He tells his mother, Nogoy Marie, and his sister, Sophie, that his father, Pierre Henri Thioune (a.k.a. Guelwaar) has died. He gives his father's wedding ring to his mother. Nogoy wails. Sophie consoles her.

The body has disappeared A funeral mass is taking place at the chapel of the local funeral home. Guelwaar's empty coffin is placed on a catafalque. Friends and family have come to convey their condolences to Guelwaar's wife and children. The well-wishers do not know that the coffin is empty. Aloys takes the priest aside and tells him that his father's body has disappeared from the morgue. Barthelemy, Guelwaar's eldest son, is at the police station to file a missing body report. He tells the police that his father, Pierre Henri Thioune (Guelwaar), died in his arms, and now the body is nowhere to be found at the morgue. The police chief, Gora, decides to go investigate at the hospital's morgue. The police chief roughens the morgue attendant to tell him to whom he sold the missing body. The attendant swears that he does not know what the police chief is talking about. Barthelemy is puzzled. His brother, Aloys, explains to him that some people steal and sell bodies for mystical rituals. The news of Guelwaar's missing body is starting to spread in town. Gora discovers that Guelwaar's body was removed from the morgue in error by another grieving family, a Muslim family, and taken to their village. Barthelemy is shocked and angry. The priest reminds him that even in France these errors are common.

A mysterious death The police chief and Barthelemy drive to the village where Guelwaar's cadaver was taken. Barthelemy tells the police chief that the autopsy revealed that his father died as the result of hemorrhage caused by multiple blows to his stomach. The police chief replies that no one pressed charges for assault. The police chief tells Barthelemy that he vaguely remembers his father. He recalls Barthelemy's father, Guelwaar, coming to his office to file a report about young delinquents intimidating Catholic women who meet at his house to talk about social and political issues in Senegal. Gora recalls that Guelwaar was labeled a troublemaker.



Funeral Feast At Guelwaar's home, well-wishers bring offerings in food stuff to the family to prepare for the funeral feast. Some people bring grains, and others bring chickens, goats and drinks. Hélène, a friend of Sophie's, walks past the mourners. Hélène is wearing a bare-backed sleeveless camisole over a skirt. She is holding a cigarette in one hand and a bottle of beer in the other. A political authority, who has come to say his condolences, is scandalized by Hélène's accoutrement and asks the priest what kind of society they live in. The priest replies that this is Senegal, all right. The priest asks the girl who she is and if her parents are still alive. She tells him that she is Hélène, that her parents are alive, and that she comes from a large family. She explains that after she obtained her diploma, she looked for a job in vain in Dakar. So, she became a prostitute. Helene tells the priest that she has a professional ID card, which allows her a weekly visit at the doctor's office. She tells him that she is afraid of catching AIDS, but she cannot stop working because she must send some money home every month to her family. The priest tells her that he is not judging her, but only asks that she dress appropriately for the occasion.



You buried the wrong body In the Muslim village, Barthelémy waits outside while Gora goes to speak to the villagers. Gora asks the family of Meyssa Ciss, a deceased Muslim man, to show him the death certificate of the body they buried four days earlier. Gora realizes that it is the death certificate of Guelwaar, and he tells the villagers that they buried the wrong body, that of a Catholic man. Mors Ciss is shocked and accuses Gora of blasphemy. Yamar Ciss, another brother of Meyssa Ciss, threatens to smash Gora's head. Mbaye Aly, the village chief and a member of the ruling party, suggests that they call the undertaker to clarify the matter. The undertaker explains that he collected a body that was wrapped in a sheet at dusk. He tells Gora that he could not properly identify the corpse he buried because it was dark, and he was convinced that he was handed the correct body by the morgue attendant. Meyssa's relatives want to know what Gora plans to do. The police officer tells them that they will have to open the tomb and return Guelwaar's body. Mor Ciss asks Gora and everyone else to leave his compound and never come back.



I am French Barthelémy is upset to be kept waiting all this time in the sun, and he complains to Gora, who asks him to be patient, like a Senegalese. Barthelémy shows Gora his French passport and tells him that he is not a Senegalese. Gora replies that, in this case, Barthelémy must ask his embassy for help. Mbaye Aly, the village chief, asks Gora why the people in authority like to speak French to each other instead of Wolof in front of the peasants. Gora tells him that Barthelémy is a "black white man," who does not understand a single word of Wolof. Gora has had enough of Barthelémy's snobbish ways and constant complaining. He drops Barthelémy somewhere in town and tells him to manage to get to his hotel or call the French ambassador to the rescue. Barthelémy tells his family that their father's body is buried in a Muslim cemetery. They are shocked. Guelwaar's wife insists that her husband's body be retrieved, for his wish was to be buried in a Catholic cemetery.



Oumy will leave Meyssa's widow, Oumy, tells her brother-in-law, Mor Ciss, that she will not be mourning Meyssa Ciss one day more, and that she will be returning to her parents. Mor Ciss tells her that she cannot leave until the imam confirms that she is not pregnant. Oumy gets upset and asks her brother-in-law if he means pregnant from him. Mor Ciss begs Oumy to stay. He tells her that he is ready to renounce his four wives to have her as his wife. Oumy tells Mor that she wants nothing to do with him anymore. He threatens her. She tells him that if he touches her, she will scream and talk. He tells her that she is a whore. Oumy replies to Mor that she was a whore for sleeping with him. She tells him that her last two children are from him, and that the whole village knows and talks about it. Oumy's co-wife, Aminata, arrives and Oumy and Mor cut their fight short.



Getting back Guelwaar's body Guelwaar's family and friends, led by Gor Mag (the Christian elder) and the priest (Father Leon), come to Mbaye Aly's village with an empty coffin to take possession of Guelwaar's body. Some men are ready to look for the freshest grave and dig up the corpse in it. The eldest of the group recommends that they go speak with the village chief first. The priest, Barthelemy, Aloys, and the eldest Christian man are designated to go talk to the chief.



Better a prostitute than a beggar Nogoy looks at the graveyard and recalls the time she told Guelwaar that their daughter, Sophie, supported them by working as a prostitute in Dakar. Guelwaar replied that he would rather Sophie be a prostitute than a beggar. Nogoy tells him that she would rather live on charity. He replies that he would rather die than wait for his family's food to come from someone else. Nogoy looks towards the tombs and calls her deceased husband's name, asking him what she will become without him, her hero. Sophie tells her mother that she will never abandon her, and she asks her mother to come live with her in Dakar. Nogoy replies that she will never come to terms with Sophie's lifestyle, let alone living with her.



Muslims object the opening of the grave Without being invited, Muslims from neighboring villages instantly congregate in Mbaye Aly's village for the meeting. Gora starts the meeting by saying that Sharia law allows the body to be unearthed if there is doubt about its identity. Mor Ciss, interrupts him and swears that no one, not even the police, will defile the tomb of his elder brother, Meyssa. The village chief, Mbaye Aly suggests that the body be left where it is. He adds that as per Muslim law, whoever is in this grave, even if it is a Christian, is already absolved by Allah by being buried there. Aloys stand up, furious, and ask the Muslims if they would accept that their fathers' bodies be buried in a Catholic cemetery. A clamor of outrage and indignation rises from the Muslims. The undertaker is about to smash the priest's head with a huge club. The police chief pulls his gun and fires a warning shot. Then, he asks the Christians to hurry out of the village.



Accusing the Imam The Christians scurry out of the village, with the Muslims chasing them with clubs. The Ciss brothers turn against the Imam, accusing him of being bought by the atheists (Christians). They tell him that they no longer recognize him as their Imam. Someone comes to the village shouting that the Christians are desecrating their cemetery. The violent crowd head to the cemetery.



Recalling Guelwaar's trick Unaware that the Muslims are coming for them, the Christian men at the cemetery joke about how Guelwaar used to disguise himself like an old woman and come to that very Muslim village and sleep with the muezzin's wife under the muezzin's nose. That is, until the day his game was discovered and he ran out of the village completely naked.



Father Leon is hurt The Christian delegation arrives at the cemetery in Gora's car. The priest is wounded. Sophie tends to him. Barthelemy wants to know why the police chief is doing nothing. Gora tells him that he just saved him from death.



The Muslims and Christians both accuse Gora The Muslim crowd reaches the cemetery. Gora tries to reason with them. They accuse Gora of teaming up with the Christians to desecrate their cemetery. Mor Ciss threatens to denounce Gora to the authorities for misappropriation of funds intended to help the peasants. Gora rushes to stop the Christians congregating near the Muslims. The Christians accuse Gora of taking side with the Muslims because he is a Muslim like them. The priest calms down the Christian crowd.



What happened to our people? The imam and the Christian elders meet away from their excited followers. The imam returns the hat to the priest that the undertaker knocked off his head during the mayhem. The imam asks Gor Mag, the Christian elder, what have become of their people. Gor Mag tells the imam that their people have drifted and have made immorality and theft their new moral principles. Gor Mag tells Imam Biram that Guelwaar was the people's spokesperson for denouncing the leaders' abuses. Guelwaar was killed for that, and the people remained silent out of cowardice. Gor Mag asks the imam if their cowardice should also carry over to refusing Guelwaar the burial he wished for?



You must open the tomb Imam Biram walks to Mor Ciss and tells him that Meyssa Ciss's tomb must be opened. The Ciss brothers block the cemetery's entrance under the cheers of some of the Muslims. The imam and the Ciss brothers start pushing and shoving. The imam knocks down Yamar Ciss.



The prefect and the mayor arrive The mayor arrives, accompanied by the prefect. The mayor instructs his driver to park his Mercedes in the shade, and walks towards the crowd. Gora explains the situation to the prefect, who is very embarrassed to know that the contentious body is that of a known troublemaker, Guelwaar.



Guelwaar's political activism Guelwaar goes to aid and donation ceremonies, and when given the floor by unsuspecting officials, he castigates the country's leaders for their politics of begging that kills the Senegalese dignity and pride. Gora asks the prefect about the circumstances of Guelwaar's death. He will not discuss that, but he tells Gora that Guelwaar's words were largely reprinted by some international media, and that the country's authorities were not pleased. The prefect advises Gora to resolve the issue quickly and quietly.



Islam is our traditional religion The mayor accuses the Christians of trying to destabilize his region. He tells them that Guelwaar's body is not in this cemetery and asks them to respect Islam, the traditional religion of Senegal. Barthelemy asks the mayor why the followers of this so-called traditional religion go to pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia and not in an African country.



Gora calls for back up Gor Mag tells the mayor that they will not leave until they retrieve Guelwaar's body. The mayor asks to see proof that Guelwaar's body is in this cemetery. Gora shows him the death certificate proving that the person buried in this cemetery is Guelwaar and tells him that Meyssa Ciss's body is still at the morgue. Gora calls for backup.



Think of your re-election The prefect convinces the mayor that it is in his interest to speak to the Muslims and resolve the case quietly. He reminds him that the circumstances of Guelwaar's death are still being rumored as an assassination, and that the international press might pick that up and ruin his chances in the upcoming re-election.



The grave is opened The imam knows the gravesite and asks volunteers to open it. The imam gets to work under the watch of the prefect, the mayor, the soldiers and the Christian and Muslim communities. The imam asks Mor Ciss, Mbaye Aly, the prefect, and the mayor to come and identify the body. The witnesses agree that it is not Meysa Ciss's body. It is Guelwaar's.



The mayor takes credit The mayor publicly and loudly admonishes Mor Ciss of almost causing an interreligious war in Senegal. The mayor takes credit for arriving in time to prevent this calamity. The mayor gathers the Muslims and tells them that he has found them some aid in sugar, milk, and rice to be distributed in the village when they return. The crowd cheers him.



We cannot grow on aid The Christians collect Guelwaar's body. On their way home, the Christian youth stop a truckload of food aid headed to the village. They rip open the sacks of food and spread the content on the road, saying they cannot live on aid. Then they have the donkey cart carrying Guelwaar's coffin roll over the food.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

GUELWAAR Guelwaar is an eccentric, proud, and bold character. His acceptance of his daughter's profession as a prostitute defies the morals of the religious community of which he is a leader, just as his adulterous life is not in agreement with religious morality. However, the dignity, and courage with which Guelwaar fights the anticorruption war seem to dwarf his flaws.

Eccentric Guelwaar is an eccentric character, sometimes misunderstood by his own family. His daughter, Sophie, supports him with money from prostitution, one of the most reprehensible sins in local society. However, much to the surprise of his wife, Nogoy, Guelwaar declares that his daughter's profession is a noble one, far more respectable than the profession of the politicians who, for over thirty years of so-called independence, continue to stretch out their hands to Western countries for food aid. His views are truly eccentric in Senegalese society.

Proud Guelwaar is a proud man who refuses international aid. He is convinced that waiting for international handouts is a form of begging, which kills any effort for dignity made by the Senegalese. Guelwaar raises the people's awareness against this aid. He condemns the government, which has established itself in the management of aid rather than in the search for solutions to the issues of unemployment, drought and famine, which undermine Senegalese society. In his fight to restore the dignity of the Senegalese people, Guelwaar trains young people who, the day his body was removed from a Muslim cemetery, seem to have taken the full measure of his struggle by destroying a shipment of food aid.

Bold In a political environment as dangerous as Senegal's, where dissenters are hunted down and eliminated, Guelwaar is, nevertheless, not afraid to voice his opposition. He speaks out at political rallies, denouncing the government's begging, which has become national policy. Guelwaar's audacity extends to his private life, when he disguises himself as an old woman and goes to a Muslim village to sleep with the muezzin's wife under the muezzin's nose.

BARTHELEMY Barthelémy, Guelwaar's oldest son, is both alienated and supportive. At the start of the film, nothing in Senegal seems to move him. Everything disgusts him. However, as Barthelémy invests himself in the search for his father's body, he becomes one of the pillars on which his family and his Christian community rest. He comes to appreciate and reconcile with his country, and his compatriots, in turn, learn to value him.

Alienated Barthelémy is the caricature of the alienated postcolonial subject, for whom civilization is nowhere but in the West. Under the hot tropical sun, he dresses in a suit and sweats profusely. To those who remind him of his Senegalese origins, he replies that he is French and shows off his French passport. He neither speaks nor understands any of Senegal's 30 or so languages, and he complains that everything

in the country is slow and inefficient. However, police chief's Gora's determination and efficiency win him over at the end of the film.

Supportive Whatever one may think of Barthelemy, there is no denying how supportive he is of his family and the Christian community. It is his complaint to the police that sets in motion the investigation to locate his father's body. Acting as Gora's assistant, he accompanies the police chief in all his enquiries. As a member of the Christian delegation in the Muslim village, Barthelemy is attacked by the Ciss brothers and their followers. The rebuttal he gives the deputy mayor undermines the latter's argument on the superiority of Islam, and leads him to understand that he is facing a man determined to return with his father's body. This forces the mayor to tune down his anti-Christian rhetoric and order the opening of the grave.

GORA Police chief Gora is an impartial and determined character. Committed to seeing through the investigation he has begun to find Guelwaar's body, he is not swayed by either the Muslim or Christian accusations of bias. However, allegations of corruption raised by the Ciss brothers hang over Gora. Gora doesn't deny them one bit, which might suggest that they are true.

Impartial Police chief Gora is a man of balanced judgment. He is a Muslim. However, when he discovers that the body lying in the Muslim cemetery is that of Guelwaar and not Meyssa Ciss, he does everything in his power to help Guelwaar's family recover it. His fairness makes him a target for Muslims, who accuse him of treason and threaten to expose him for his corrupt ways. None of this detracts from Gora's desire to help the Christians regain possession of the body of one of their own.

Determined In his desire to uncover the truth and help the Christians regain possession of Guelwaar's corpse, Gora braves assaults from all sides. First of all, he meets with disdain and snobbery from Barthelemy. This in no way diminishes his determination to accomplish his mission. Then it is his own Muslim bothers and the Christian community that, in turn, accuse him of partiality, and that he must both reassure and rebuff. Gora's determination pays off when the Christians return home with Guelwaar's corpse, and the Muslims realize the Ciss brothers' manipulation.

Corrupt Despite his positive attributes, Gora, like most civil servants in his country, is also entangled in corruption. The Ciss brothers, who claim that people only keep their jobs because they hold their tongues, threaten Gora. They accuse him of embezzling much of the food aid, and threaten to expose him if he continues to support the Christian cause. Gora, curiously, says nothing in his defense, other than that the Ciss brothers have nothing to get excited about, as no Christian has entered the Muslim cemetery.

THE CISS BROTHERS The Ciss brothers are unreasonable and violent characters. They would rather live in the illusion of what they believe to be true than seek to verify the veracity of their beliefs. The fact that their brother's body remains unclaimed in the morgue is less important to them than believing that a body lying in a Muslim cemetery, which may not be their brother's, is indeed their brother's body. They become enraged and physically threaten anyone who might challenge their convictions: the village chief, the police officer and the Christians.

Unreasonable A Christian corpse is buried in the Muslim cemetery. All the evidence points to this. For the Ciss brothers, however, exhuming the body and returning it to its rightful owners would be a breach of their religion, a denial of their faith. So they prefer to continue convincing themselves that no mistake has been made, that the corpse mistakenly buried in the Muslim cemetery is indeed that of their brother, and that the corpse waiting in the morgue to be claimed is not that of their brother. They reject the idea that the Muslim cemetery has been entered by a foreign body. The lie reinforces their faith. The truth shatters their faith. Their logic is *ubuesque*.

Violent The Ciss brothers are violent. To maintain their illusion of religious purity, they incite all the surrounding Muslim villages to prevent the opening of the tomb to verify the identity of the corpse buried there. They beat Father Léon; they threaten to crush Gora's head. They get the Muslims to chant anti-Christian songs, and set off on a hunt for Christians. With words and clubs, they attack anyone who dares to suggest that an identification of the buried corpse is needed to get to the truth. In the end, Yamar Ciss's fury is quelled by the exasperated Imam's club.

THEMES

INTERRELIGIOUS CONFLICTS What happens when Christians and Muslims go after each other with clubs? Answer: the political elite reap the benefits of this conflict. For the political elite, who are up to their necks in embezzling international food aid, it is better that the eyes of international observers and journalists are turned away from them. It is better that the rhetoric of endless religious and tribal conflicts dominates the headlines rather than investigations into where foreign donations to Senegal end up. From an internal point of view, a population who is busy waging war against itself and killing its own brothers and sisters over religious considerations has less time to devote to finding the origins of its social woes. Senegal has serious problems, including the troubles of its youth reduced to prostitution, like Guelwaar's daughter, Sophie, and her friend, Hélène; or reduced to unemployment, like Guelwaar's second son, Aloys, who is disabled and is called useless, even by his mother, Nogoy Marie. Senegalese peasants are often victims of droughts, which significantly reduce their harvests and plunge them into precarity. International food aid, which is supposed to bring relief to the people, is misappropriated by a class of selfish leaders who are indifferent to the plight of the masses. For this uncaring and corrupt class, it is a good thing for the people to occupy themselves with interethnic, intercommunal or interreligious squabbles. It is a diversion that allows the elite to rob the people in total tranquility. This conflict between Muslims and Christians over a dead body is allegorical for the Marxist-Leninist Sembène: it is the drug offered to the proletariat by the rulers, which prevents the proletariat from understanding the real causes of its exploitation.

RELIGIOUS CARICATURES Senegal is a predominantly Muslim nation. 95% of Senegalese are Muslims, compared to only 5% of Catholics, leading some people, like the deputy mayor, to incorrectly assume that Islam is Senegal's traditional religion, while, as Sembène has shown in several of his films, the traditional religion of Senegal is animism, the belief that elements of nature are endowed with spirits and can be worshipped. In reality, Islam first gained a foothold in sub-Saharan Africa with the Moroccan Almoravid conquest around the 11th century, by Moroccan Almoravids, followed four centuries later by Christianity. The large majority of the Muslim religion makes the Muslim electorate a coveted commodity for politicians, who court religious leaders and their followers. At election time, populism dictates that politicians invoke Islam as the traditional religion. This deliberate confusion of a predominantly illiterate population, ignorant of the history of religions, is a dishonest strategy of connivance by which politicians seek to win the sympathy of the Muslim constituency. Sembène, himself a Muslim, but with a Muslim faith diluted by his Marxist-Leninist militancy, reframes Muslim fanatics as well as those who manipulate them. The Ciss brothers are poor examples of piety. They are both violent and ignorant of the Qur'an. Mor Ciss, in particular, is an adulterer, sleeping with his brother's wife, to the point of having two children by her and then threatening her as soon as she decides to stop their immoral relationship. The deputy mayor is also an egotist, ignorant of the history of the religion he believes he masters, and who has the origin of his own religion explained to him by Barthelemy, Guelwaar's eldest Christian son. However, these false believers, ignorant of the laws of the Qur'an, are the very ones who are the first to pour gasoline on the fire of interreligious conflicts. The Ciss brothers beat up the Catholic priest and rally a mob of violent Muslims against the Christians. The mayor, who is supposed to be calming tensions, sees no other solution than to accuse the police chief, Gora, of inciting hatred against the Muslims, thus undermining Gora's tireless effort to resolve the conflict. Alongside these caricatures of Muslims, Sembène presents us with more balanced, fairer, more rational practitioners of the Muslim faith, such as Gora, the police chief, and the Imam, Biram.

WORK Senegal was a country where begging was on the rise. For Sembène, this inclination to wait for a handout from others is a habit inherited from the government, which has elevated it to the status of national policy, killing any effort on the part of Senegalese to achieve dignity. The filmmaker urges his compatriots to earn their living through their work, whatever that may be, and not to demean themselves by begging. Indeed, Sophie, Guelwaar's daughter, works as a prostitute in Dakar. The money she earns from selling her body enables her to support her parents and her brother, Aloys. Sophie's friend, also a prostitute, pays for her brother's medical studies and supports her parents and many other siblings. When Sophie's mother, Nogoy, reveals to her husband that their daughter supports them through prostitution, Guelwaar naturally replies that he prefers his daughter to be a prostitute than a beggar. For Guelwaar, as immoral as some people may see Sophie's profession, at least she earns her bread by the sweat of her brow and does not spend her days begging. It is a noble activity, which Guelwaar contrasts with the shameful and dishonorable begging of the Senegalese rulers who, since independence, have waited every day for international aid to feed their people. To make this critique of the dereliction of duty of the Senegalese, and African, rulers, Sembène chooses the most offensive work in a Muslim society,

prostitution, to which he attributes a meliorative value in the face of the resignation of the ruling class. Guelwaar, undoubtedly Sembène's spokesman on this subject, has this to say: "Shame on the man who, with his children, expects his livelihood from others." Indeed, this echoes the words of Sembène, who in an interview declared: "The country cannot survive from begging raised into a state policy." For Sembène, the behavior of Africa's governing class, which has surrendered in the search for solutions, and which waits every day for international food aid, is beneath prostitution. The anti-aid struggle Guelwaar waged, and for which he was assassinated by his country's politicians, is carried on by the youths he inspired. On the day Guelwaar's body is recovered from the Muslim cemetery, young men intercept a truckload of food aid. They rip open the sacks of rice and sugar, spill their contents onto the dirt road. The young men then have the donkey cart carrying Guelwaar's body roll over the spilled food.

SELFISHNESS When Police Chief Gora starts his search in the Muslim village to locate Guelwaar's body, Mbaye Aly, the village chief, is the first person who tries to help him by playing the role of the intermediary between the Muslim villagers and the Christians. So conciliatory and understanding at the beginning, Mbaye Aly changes his stance when the Ciss brothers start threatening to expose him for misappropriation of public aid if he continues to defend the idea that it is Guelwaar's body, and not that of their brother, Meyssa Ciss, that is buried in the Muslim cemetery. To protect himself and preserve his position, Mbaye Aly turns completely against Gora and accuses him of plotting against the Muslims. This spectacular U-turn by Mbaye Aly can only be explained by his selfish instinct to avoid humiliation and preserve his privileges. Similarly, the Ciss brothers' refusal to admit their mistake is an egotistical move to save face amongst the Muslims. Like the Ciss brothers and the village chief, the deputy mayor's sole aim is to be re-elected to the position that allows him to enrich himself by embezzling public assets. In fact, when the mayor is called in by the village chief and arrives at a place where Christians and Muslims are about to throw themselves against each other, he gives a populist speech that plays on the Muslims' religious and traditionalist sensibilities. The mayor knows the weight of the Muslim electorate and wants to surf on it, taking up the cause of Muslims against Christians. However, when the prefect reminds the mayor, in private, that delaying the handover of Guelwaar's body to the Christians could alert the newspapers and jeopardize his re-election, the mayor orders that the tomb be opened. The opening of the grave having proved that the buried body is indeed that of Guelwaar, the mayor scolds the Ciss brothers for having almost created an interreligious war, and congratulates himself on having made it possible to avoid the worst. Sembène criticizes selfishness as one of the main driving principles of people, especially people in power.

TRADITION Sembène's camera lingers on the comings and goings of friends who have come to express their condolences to Guelwaar's grieving family, but above all on the offerings made to the family in anticipation of the funeral feast. Indeed, African funerals are often ruinous for bereaved families. In addition to the pain of burying a loved one, these families have to deal with the multitude of friends who arrive to support them, but many of whom actually come because there is an opportunity to feast. Several sacks of grain, dozens of poultry, sheep and goats are prepared for the funeral feast. The burden is heavy for the grieving families, who are often obliged to postpone the date of the funeral until they can gather the necessary funds. This is a vicious circle of indebtedness. As the body sits in the morgue waiting for the funeral funds to be raised, it continues to accumulate costs. So, to help grieving families, friends contribute to the expenses by donating money and food. In the film, the eldest Christian, Gor Mag, insists that part of the money from the Christian community's *tontine* (common fund) be made available to Guelwaar's family. In addition, members of Guelwaar's extended family provide food. It is only through this solidarity that Guelwaar's funeral will successfully take place and his family's honor will be guaranteed.

ALIENATION/RESTORATION Witnessing a lively discussion between Gora and Barthelemy, the Muslim village chief, Mbaye Aly, asks Gora why the Senegalese elite like to speak French in front of the peasants rather than the local languages. Gora replies that Barthelemy is a black white man who neither understands nor speaks any of the local languages. Similarly, when the deputy mayor and Barthelemy are in the middle of a discussion at the Muslim village cemetery, the Christian gets angry and asks them to speak in the local language. Wolof is Senegal's national language, understood and spoken by nearly all Senegalese, although the country has over thirty other languages. However, to distinguish themselves from the common people, Senegal's post-colonial elite prefer to speak French, the language inherited from colonization. This mimetism is a point of contention for Sembène, who campaigned for the promotion of local languages. Barthelemy, Guelwaar's eldest son, who lives in France, proudly displays his French passport and looks down on the Senegalese, is the Senegalese alienated from his people and culture. Sembène portrays him

as a clown, the subject of mockery by the people. The priest scolds him for his insensitivity; Gora puts up with him in spite of himself; and the Muslim village chief calls him a failed copy of the white man. At the end of the film, however, this man who goes to great lengths to find his father's body, finally becomes one with his people and proudly declares himself Senegalese. Barthelemy, then, is the alienated man who restores himself, who rediscovers his roots. All he has to do now is learn his national language to complete his journey of initiation. If Barthelemy has reformed, this is not the case as regards the corrupt ruling class, alienated from the realities of Senegal, which they have never sought to understand, because they are too busy embezzling public funds and food aid and mimicking the white man. The deputy mayor reflects this class. To change it, Sembène sees only radical actions, such as those undertaken by Guelwaar and the young people Guelwaar trained.

(IN)DEPENDENCE Through Guelwaar, Sembène paints a caricature of Africa's independence. Senegal became independent in 1960. The Senegalese leaders boast of their autonomy and shout it from the rooftops. However, these same leaders still reach out to the ex-colonizers from whom they parted with much ado, asking for alms in the form of money to pay their employees' salaries and food aid to feed their populations. Having become aid addicts, the leaders devote no effort to finding a strategy for self-sufficiency. They have become not only managers of international aid, but also embezzlers of this aid, which they sell back to their populations to pad their own bank accounts. The ingenuity of these national beggars can be summed up in the stylistic devices they use to persuade donors to increase their aid. For Pierre Thioune or Guelwaar, who appears uninvited at the big donation meetings and takes the floor to criticize what he defines as begging, begging leaders not only kill any dignity in the Senegalese, they also kill the Senegalese's vital impulse, removing from them any will to fight for their independence. Aid makes the Senegalese a dependent being, without pride, who spends his days saying thank you to the West for its magnanimity. This is where Guelwaar proves to be a sharp political satire. Here, Sembène does not blame the West for the problems of Senegal and Africa. Africa is a victim of the turpitude and dishonor of its leaders, who take pleasure in the role of professional beggars and keep it in economic, social and political dependence.

CORRUPTION All the people in power seem to be corrupt. The Muslims and the Christians, who are fighting one another on the ground of religious faith, seem to have more in common than they are aware of. They are all the victims of their leaders' immorality. They are being fleeced by the greedy and egoistical elite of Senegal. In the film, political leaders turn the distribution of international food aid into political rallies, where they pass it off as the result of their own perspicacity. Despite this self-congratulation, which passes them off as rulers concerned about the welfare of their populations, the leaders divert most of the aid, which they sell on local markets and in the private stores they have opened for that purpose. Thus, international food aid, which is supposed to be distributed free of charge to the population, is sold to the same population by the elite. In a trickle-down effect, senior government officials, village and district chiefs, and middle-level civil servants all benefit at the expense of the little people. Embezzlement of aid has become endemic in Senegal. The Ciss brothers denounce the misappropriation of aid by the village chief and police chief. But Guelwaar denounces embezzlement at the highest level, by regional and national leaders. And it is Guelwaar's denunciation that leads to his assassination. However, Guelwaar's assassination does not stop his fight against corruption and indignity. The youth he trained take up the torch. This is Sembène's hope for a nobler, less corrupt Senegal.

HYPOCRISY Sembène criticizes Senegalese hypocrisy. Those who like to give moral lessons to others are not always exemplary people. Often, in fact, they are the worst kind of human beings. Sophie's friend Hélène, who comes to support her during her father's funeral, shocks a member of the government, who takes offence at the fact that she has her shoulders, arms, and back uncovered. The political leader's outrage is laughable for those who know that this man belongs to the class of lazy leaders who embezzle public funds and international food aid, whom Guelwaar denounces. The activist, if he were still alive and had not been eliminated by the political authorities, would certainly have accorded more respect to Hélène than to this politician, who, for him, is part of the elite that are eroding the respect of the Senegalese people by their propensity to expect their daily bread from the West. Hypocrisy does not only manifest itself in the political class. The little people, too, are afflicted with this evil. Thus, Mor Ciss, the man who portrays himself as a pious Muslim and a character mourning the death of his brother Meyssa Ciss, is no paragon of virtue. He secretly slept with his brother's wife, Oumy, and even fathered two of her children. He is also a blackmailer, hoping to use the compromising information he has on certain people to make them do what

he wants. Sembène goes even further in denouncing hypocrisy: Guelwaar, this champion of Senegalese dignity and respectability, is also a paradoxical being. He is a violent man who has broken delinquents' arms and an adulterer who slept with the wife of a muezzin.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The film is focused on the search for Guelwaar's body. What does that body symbolize in Senegalese society?
2. How are Barthelemy's efforts to recover his father's body a journey of restoration?
3. What is your understanding of this phrase by Guelwaar: "If you want to kill a man of great dignity, give him every day what he needs to live and you will make a serf of him"?
4. What is paradoxical in Guelwaar's family receiving donations for his funeral?
5. What is the symbolism in the scene where the donkey cart carrying Guelwaar's body rolls over the spilled contents of the food aid?