

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, Ph.D.

MYSTICAL PROTECTION / Moolaadé (2003)

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), *Guelewaar* (1992), *Faat Kiné* (2001), *Moolaadé* (2003).

Film *Moolaadé* is a denunciation of clitoridectomy, a female genital mutilation practiced in several countries in the world, which consists in removing the clitoridean hood of young girls with a sharp object. This operation, which is usually done in unsanitary conditions and without any anesthetic, is the cause of the deaths by infection or hemorrhage of thousands of girls. Clitoridectomy stems from the social or religious belief (as is the case in *Moolaadé*) that girls are impure and unmarriageable until they have their clitorises removed. *Moolaadé* is a stance against this misconception that bears fatal consequences for girls and women. The film won Un Certain Regard Award and the Ecumenical Jury Prize, Special Mention at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival.

Background Shot in Djerisso, a village in Burkina Faso, *Moolaadé* is the second film of a trilogy entitled Daily Heroism. The first part of the sequence, *Faat Kine*, was shot in 2001. Sembène was not able to finish the third part of this project, *The Brotherhood of Rats* (a film denouncing political corruption in Dakar), before his death in 2007. *Moolaadé* is a multi-country co-production (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, France, Morocco, Tunisia). The main language spoken in the film is Bambara, with very little dialogue in French.

SYNOPSIS

Seven years ago, Collé, the second wife of a three-woman polygamist, refused to have her daughter Amsatou excised. So, when four little girls flee an excision camp to seek asylum, Collé places them under her 'mystical protection.' For the men of the village, to whom the village excisers complain about Collé's interference in the excision ceremony, Collé defies a proud thousand-year-old tradition and must be brought to order. So the men decide that Collé should be publicly whipped by her husband to get her to say the word that will exorcise the mystical protection (*moolaadé*) and enable the clitoridectomy of the girls. In addition, all the radios transmitting subversive ideas to women must be confiscated and destroyed. Amath, the elder brother of Ciré, the husband of Collé (and Hadjatou and Alima), places a whip in his brother's hand to punish Collé. Despite the lashes, Collé refuses to say the magic word. On the contrary, her ordeal rallies the women, who, in a revolt, shout their frustration, seize and throw into the flames the knives of the excisers, and swear that no more girls will be excised in the village. The village chief, whose son Doucouré has come from France to marry Amsatou, offers his son another girl, this one excised, in Amsatou's place. However, Doucouré disobeys his father and decides to marry Amsatou, proving the village elders wrong in their belief that a *bilakoro* (an unexcised girl) will never find a husband.

MAIN CHARACTERS

<i>COLLE GALLO ARDO SY</i>	Ciré Bathily's second wife, who offers sanctuary to four girls fleeing excision
<i>CIRÉ BATHILY</i>	A polygamous man, whose second wife defies the village tradition of excision
<i>AMATH BATHILY</i>	Ciré's elder brother, who urges his younger brother to be firm with his wife
<i>DOUGOUTIGUI</i>	The village chief, who forbids his son to marry a <i>bilakoro</i> (an unexcised girl).
<i>IBRAHIMA DOUKOURE</i>	The son of the village chief, who comes from Paris to marry an unexcised girl
<i>MERCENARY</i>	An itinerant shopkeeper, who sets up shop in the village.
<i>SANATA</i>	A single woman, who is known for her loose ways with men.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

CIRÉ BATHILY

Ciré is a malleable character. His older brother, Amath, draws him into domestic violence by telling him that he needs to maintain his manhood by beating his wife in public. However, this violence, which is contrary to Ciré's nature, leads him to rebel against the patriarchal order of society, and to take up the cause of his wife, Collé, and the women of the village.

Malleable Ciré is a man with no backbone, who is malleable. He lets his brother interfere in his family life and tell him how to treat his wives. His brother puts a whip in his hand and instructs him to whip his second wife in public. And this man, who has never laid a hand on a woman, lashes out at his wife until he himself is exhausted, regretting his act the next day.

Violent Ciré says he has never laid a hand on a woman. However, the violence with which he does so on the day he beats his wife for the first time is delirious. He beats Collé to exhaustion, beyond his own strength, encouraged by the men. And when a villager rips the whip from his hands, it's as if he, the executioner, were the victim of his act. It is his son, Balla, who carries him home, at the same time as the women also carry Collé to her home.

Rebellious At the end of the film, Ciré rebels against the assembly of men. Watching with an approving smile as his wife denounces the barbarity of men, Ciré stands up and instructs his son, Balla, to follow him. He thus divorces himself from the brotherhood of oppressors to join the camp of the oppressed, whose struggle he espouses. The violence he inflicts on a woman for the first time is paradoxically cathartic. It makes him rebel against patriarchy.

COLLE GALLO ARDO SY

Collé, Ciré's second wife, is submissive and respectful of her husband. However, she has convictions that her respect for Ciré cannot erase. She firmly believes that excision is an abuse against women that has no religious basis. Using her charisma and courage, she rallies the village women to stop the practice of clitoridectomy.

Fearless Collé is a fearless woman. When she decides to protect the girls who have put themselves under her wing, she goes all the way. Neither the threats of the excising group of women, nor the intimidation of the men, nor the lashings of her husband, Ciré, are able to dissuade her. Her strength of character rallies the women of the village to take action for change.

Charismatic Alone against the men, Collé speaks out and defends the women's cause. She finds counter-arguments to all the arguments put forward by the men to justify the practice of genital mutilation. She uses her personal experience to demonstrate the brutality and horror of excision. She cites the speech of the great Imam on the radio to dismantle the Islamic foundation's argument against excision. Her charisma wins her the admiration of Doucouré and a new appreciation from her husband, who nods at her every word.

Submissive Like her two co-wives, Collé is respectful and submissive to her husband. She greets and speaks to him on her knees. She also gives this respect to the eldest wife, Hadjatou, who scolds her and sends her back to her quarters in the family compound when she is not happy with her. In this respect, Collé is the perfect image of the traditional woman in a polygamous marriage.

DOUGOUTIGUI AND AMATH BATHILY

Dougoutigui, the village chief, and Amath, Ciré's older brother, are the prototypes of the old guard. They are violent and obtuse. For them, tradition must be maintained by instilling fear and whipping women. They try to keep the women isolated, preventing any outside information from reaching them over the airwaves. Doucouré, the chief's son, tells them that these efforts are useless, and that the village will change whether they like it or not.

Violent Dougoutigui and Amath are violent characters. Amath walks around with a leather whip strapped to his waist, which he uses to discipline his own wives. This is the whip he hands over to his brother Ciré, enjoining him to punish Collé. And when Ciré hesitates, saying he has never beaten a woman, Amath pushes him violently towards Collé, leaving Hadjatou and Alima stunned. When his son, Doucouré, asks him not to interfere in his private affairs, in particular his choice of a wife, Dougoutigui insults and hits him with his umbrella. When Ciré publicly flogs his wife, Dougoutigui is at the forefront of those cheering him on to beat her harder.

Narrow-minded Amath and Dougoutigui are narrow-minded characters. Guardians of age-old traditions that give preference to men, they refuse to see change coming and cling to the past. For them, women are inherently inferior and dirty, and need to be purified before marrying any man, so they insist on seeing all the girls in the village purified (excised). For them, the radio is an outside force that degrades women by bringing them modern and therefore harmful ideas. So they embark on a campaign to confiscate and destroy all the radios in the village, hoping, as Sanata, the known liberal woman in the village, puts it, to lock up the women's minds.

IBRAHIMA DOUCOURE

A generous character who respects his culture and his parents, Doucouré rebels when his father wants to control the private aspects of his life. For Doucouré, the choice of his wife is a decision for him alone to make. Doucouré draws his father's ire and rejection when he refuses to allow his father to interfere in his love life. To show his disapproval of his father's law, Doucouré chooses to marry an unexcised girl, the very one his father forbids him to marry.

Respectful Ibrahim Doucouré is a man who respects his cultural heritage and his parents. He takes the time to visit the cultural edifices in his village, and he tries to understand what they represent. He has a deep respect for his father, and will not contradict him. He lends himself to all the rituals his father, in his desire to appear important, subjects him to. He even turns off his television when his uncle tells him to, on the grounds that it corrupts the women's minds. There is, however, one aspect on which Doucouré will not compromise: his private life.

Rebellious Despite the respect Doucouré has for his father and uncle, he refuses to let them interfere in his private life, particularly his choice of wife. Twice, he tells his father, who wants to impose his cousin Fily on him, that the choice of wife is a private matter. Defying his father's anger, Doucouré pursues Amsatou and declares his love for her.

Generous Doucouré is a generous man. He is the benefactor not only of his extended family, but also of many families in the village. He has paid for a water pump so that the village women can ease their water chores. He is the breadwinner of his family, and it is paradoxical that his father, whose debts he pays and to whom he sends money, disinherits him for upsetting him.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Patriarchy Life in this little Burkina Faso village is organized around the assumed superiority of men. Girls, the elders say, are naturally impure and must be purified before they can enter into union with men. Girls are purified by an operation that removes their clitoris. This conception of women's nature stems from a misinterpretation of the Qur'an, which Collé denounces when a village dignitary accuses her of disobeying Islamic law by granting sanctuary to four girls who have escaped from the excision camp. To make Collé break the mystical invocation that protects the girls the men of the village suggest that her husband, who says he has never laid a hand on a woman, flog her in public. For the men, Collé's opposition to female excision is a challenge to their authority. Collé's brother-in-law, Amath, tells his younger brother that the latter's wife has made him the laughingstock of the community and disgraced his family; and he gives his brother a leather whip to beat his wife in public to assert his male authority and force her to release the girls. This gives away the real reason why men insist on clitoridectomy. The clitoris is that organ which, by its constitution and shape, imitates the penis and therefore threatens patriarchal authority. To guarantee the authority of man over woman, the clitoris must be removed before marriage. Religion has nothing to do with clitoridectomy. The clitoris is the sign of patriarchy's malaise, which must be eliminated so that patriarchy can be sure of ruling as sole master.

Collectivism vs individualism When Ciré summons his wife, Collé, in the presence of his brother, Amath, and tells her that he would never have married her if she were a *bilakoro*, Collé reminds her husband that such conversations would be better held in private. Collé's words hurt Amath, who, as he gets up to leave Ciré and his wife's room, complains to his brother that his wife has just driven him out of his home. Ciré apologizes to his brother and asks him to stay. Then, turning to Collé, Ciré admonishes his wife for disrespecting his elder brother. Similarly, when his father, Dougoutigui, tells Doucouré that he refuses to let him marry Amsatou because she is a *bilakoro*, and proposes his niece Fily instead of Amsatou, Doucouré respectfully replies to his father that his marriage is a private matter, and that only he can choose his wife. Like Amath, Dougoutigui loses his temper and hits his son with his umbrella. Doucouré then tells his father that the era of tyrants is over. What we see in these two scenes is the confrontation between the collectivism of traditional Africa and individualism. Amath considers that all matters concerning his brother's family concern him and that he should meddle. He goes so far as to instruct Ciré on how to punish his wife, even putting a whip in Ciré's hand and ordering him to beat her in public. Similarly, when Doucouré returns from Paris, the whole community rallies to welcome him, and his family compound is packed with well-wishers and *griots*. By opposing his father's injunction to marry Fily instead of Amsatou, Doucouré breaks his ties with the collectivism of which his father is the guarantor as village chief. For Collé, it is her husband who, leaving the assembly of dignitaries and taking his son Balla with him, indirectly declares that from now on all family matters are private and will never again be discussed in the public square.

Postcoloniality The small village in *Moolaadé* can easily be understood as a representation of the postcolonial state. What is this postcolonial state? First of all, with the arrival of Mercenary, it is a plastic state, where nothing that is produced can last. Although it sparkles in all sorts of colors, it is only certain to pollute. It would be redundant here to point out the difficulties Africa has in ridding itself of this pollution. Secondly, it is an alienated state. Even in this small, remote village, which produces millet and sorghum, the French baguette, this colonial staple, is what everyone wants, and Mercenary does know it and does not hesitate to raise the price of the French bread he sells, much to Doucouré's exasperation. The postcolonial state is also a state of violence and violations of human rights, particularly women's rights, as they are beaten, mutilated, and silenced. The postcolonial state is also the state of impunity, where people like Mercenary, who dare to defend the weakest, find themselves murdered without any investigation to establish responsibility. The postcolonial state is the state of muzzled people, of their isolation from sources of information, and of their programming by the state propaganda machine. The postcolonial state is the state of endless, pointless palaver that keep the nation in inertia, like these interminable and fruitless meetings presided over by Dougoutigui. But fortunately, the postcolonial state is the state that still has a great deal of room for progress, and whose young human resources, like those four little girls who defied excision to put themselves under the protection of a fearless woman, are ready to launch into the future. The small village of *Moolaadé* reflects the impediments, tribulations and aspirations of the postcolonial state.

Superstition Superstition is a major aspect of life in this small village. If the 150-year-old mosque in the village and the children's day at the village Koranic school are anything to go by, the inhabitants are theoretically all Muslims. Indeed, the men of the village justify the practice of clitoridectomy on the basis of Islam. And yet, what seems to regulate the lives of the villagers is more superstition than belief in Allah. The *moolaadé* under whose mystical protection Collé places the children is a pagan belief that the excising women dare not defy for fear of being struck by misfortune. Clitoridectomy itself is subject to superstition. A *bilakoro* or unexcised woman, is believed in this community to be an impure woman, whom men must avoid, because she cannot bear them children. This naïve belief has been instilled in the population with such success that Collé, who opposes it, is considered crazy, irrational and even possessed by satanic power. Balla, Ciré's eldest son, tells his mother Hadjatou that Collé is a madwoman. And when Collé confronts the men at the assembly to tell them that clitoridectomy does more harm than good to women, one of the elders calls her possessed and a Satan. In this community, where superstition rather than logic guides people's actions, it's Collé, the rational woman, who is called irrational.

Change "They will no longer cut anyone" is the battle cry of the village women. "They", of course, refers to the men, even if it is the women excisers that do the work on their behalf. They will no longer cut anyone, unless, as Collé warns, they agree to allow chaos, fire and blood to prevail in the village. This is the call for change. Women will no longer accept being trampled, called impure, and mutilated for the sake of the pride of an insecure masculinity. This change, this freedom, was won by women through the lashes, wounds and the blood of Collé. And if men want to take this freedom away from women, they will have to agree to reclaim it in blood and fire. This is what Collé is telling the men, and through Collé's voice, this is what all the women in the village are saying. The village is no longer the same. The change is such that young Amsatou tells Doucouré that she is and will remain a *bilakoro*, an unexcised girl. Take it or leave it. It is not hard to imagine that Doucouré has already made his choice: it will be Amsatou and not little Fily, as proposed to him by his father, disgusted by Amsatou's impurity. Doucouré himself had already initiated the change since the day he told his father that his marriage was a private matter in which he should not interfere. He had already taken up the cause of women when he told his uncle that confiscating women's radios was a lost cause, because radio and TV were now an inescapable part of human society and no hegemonic will could eliminate them, and that his own TV would stay on as long as he wanted it to. The little village in Burkina Faso was on the bandwagon of change. Patriarchy could either reform, adapt, and make room for itself, or remain frozen in its century-old dogmas and vanish.

POLITICS

Power In order to better exercise their power over the women of the village, the men want to ensure that nothing, either material or abstract, can stand in the way of their indoctrination of the women. For many years, the women have been formatted to believe that they are impure and inferior to men. This successful propaganda has allowed men to control women's lives, unchallenged. Then, with globalization and the democratization of the news through the media arises the real threat for men of seeing their power challenged. The radio became a common fixture in every home and companion to the women, who learned from it that their men have been feeding them untruths. Collé tells the dignitary who likens her to Satan that the Grand Imam said on the radio that purification (excision) is not mandated by the Qur'an. She tells him that many of the women who go to the holy site of Mecca are not excised. And when the men start confiscating their radios, the women, by Sanata's voice, declare that the purpose is to lock up their minds to better rule them. "How can the men think that they can lock up something invisible?" This is the question that one of the women asks. Indeed, how can they lock up something so invisible and so fluid as the mind? What these women are pointing out is men's illusion of power. What these women are saying is that nothing can stop women's flow of awareness, not even taking their radios away from them. What these women are saying is that the process of reevaluation of patriarchal values is taking hold, and men's power rests on shaky grounds.

Oppression/abuse When Amath orders his brother, Ciré, to whip his wife, Collé, in public to get her to speak the word that will break the protection, Ciré replies that he has never laid a hand on a woman. Ciré's response shocks Amath, for whom beating his wife for the slightest incident is part of the normal order of things. For Amath, in a society where men need to assert their superiority over women, where men have to make sure every day that no obstacle, however small, threatens the permanence of this superiority, the crack of the whip becomes the dissuasive instrument to any insurgency. And the quintessential insurgents,

as far as patriarchy is concerned, are women. This is why many traditional households become the stage for all kinds of abuse against women. Men are convinced that to be respected, they must be violent. Amath walks around with a whip girded around his waist like a belt. For him, his younger brother's attitude towards his wife, Collé, is abnormal. Not only does she put his brother at peril, but she also dishonors his extended family, to which he belongs, and the male gender of which he is also a member. His words tell it like it is: "Why do you want to dishonor us?" he asks Collé. "Your wife has made you the laughingstock of the village," he tells his brother. To regain control and save his family's honor and the respectability of the men, Amath advises his reluctant brother to whip his wife in public. And the agitation of the men, cheering Ciré on with each blow he delivers to his wife—"Beat her! Tame her!"—is delirious. How can anyone be so hatred-filled towards someone they claim to love? The traditional African woman is the man's frustration outlet. The abusive situation in which traditional women live is multiplied tenfold in Muslim communities with their oft-distorted interpretation of the woman's place in the Qur'an. There, it is not uncommon for the father-in-law to place a whip in his son-in-law's hand, telling him, "Beat your wife every morning. If you do not know why, she does."

Rebellion *Moolaadé*, is the story of a village rebellion against an age-old institution that is discriminatory against women, female genital mutilation. This rebellion begins when Collé refuses to subject her daughter, Amsatou, to the sacrosanct practice of female excision. Amsatou's condition, which in the village's imagination makes her unmarriageable, is kept a secret among the older women. This secret is eventually revealed at the village well by some gossips and get into the ears of six little girls soon to be excised. The girls realize that contrary to the common belief, Amsatou's condition of unexcised did not prevent her from being sought by a rich son of the village, who lives in Paris. So, on the day of their excision, the girls flee the excision camp, and four of them place themselves under the protection of Amsatou's mother, Collé. The village is then divided between those who, like the Excising women, Amath, Dougoutigui and the elders, insist on the continuity of the excision tradition, and those who, following in the footsteps of Collé, Amsatou and gradually all the other women in the village, want an end to a practice they consider useless and barbaric. The conflict is brutal. Collé is publicly flogged to get her to change her mind, but she resists, and her resistance turns into an action-oriented movement supported by all the women of the village and some men, including her husband, Ciré, and Amsatou's Parisian fiancé, Doucouré. This newly-formed coalition against female genital mutilation defeats the old, abusive order.

Feminism/Emancipation The struggle of Collé and the women of the village is not just a campaign to stop the mutilation of young girls. This struggle is multifaceted. It is a super-struggle for the total emancipation of women. Through this action, the women free themselves, among other things, from domestic violence, social stigmatization, silencing, sexual confinement, and more. Collé's resistance to her husband's whippings overcame domestic violence. When long minutes of intense lashings fail to subdue Collé to the men's will, they withdraw from the assembly, disappointed, beaten, exclaiming, "what a failure! it is a real blow!". The men's disappointment comes from their realization that violence cannot break the will of women. Ciré is comforted in his position that being empathetic to his wives, treating them as partners deserving of his respect, is not a sign of weakness but something to be proud of. As Ciré removes from the phallogocentric assembly his eldest son, Balla, who has been spending too much time with Amath, his violent and misogynist uncle, Ciré passes onto Balla his ethics of compassion that he almost allowed Amath to corrupt. With this experience, Balla is less likely to reproduce the order of discourse that has just been defeated by Collé and the women and more likely to be a man of compromise—although misogyny is known to have a thick skin. This battle also puts an end to stigmatization. The derogatory term of *bilakoro* is put on its head when Amsatou tells Doucouré, "*Bilakoro* I am, *bilakoro* I will remain." Doucouré's smile, accepting his fiancée as she is, is a sign that the term is no longer a stigmatizing one, but one that simply marks a difference that is no longer qualitative but nominal. Similarly, Sanata, the woman stigmatized as promiscuous for her sexual freedom, breaks free from the stigma of negativity when she speaks out, denounces men, exposes their attempt to muzzle women and control their thoughts by seizing their radios, sings the praises of Collé, and throws the excisers' knives into the flames. Sanata's role as spokesperson for the struggle puts an end to the intellectual and sexual exclusion imposed on women. The women's struggle in *Moolaadé* is, in all these respects, a struggle for the total emancipation of women. It is a feminist endeavor.

Selfishness In *Moolaadé*, the advocates of female circumcision/excision justify the practice on religious grounds. The men repeatedly mention excision as a practice dictated by Islam. Collé refutes this, telling them that this is not what the Grand Imam says on the radio. If clitoridectomy is not an edict of the Qur'an, why are the men so determined to enforce it in their village? In fact, the men's determination to remove the women's clitorises stems quite simply from sexual egoism. Men want a monopoly on pleasure. Having convinced themselves that the clitoris is a penis in miniature, men have concluded that this organ is the erogenous center for women, just as the penis is for men. In a society where men are convinced of their superiority due to the protuberant nature of their anatomy, and of women's inferiority due to the cavernous nature of their anatomy, the clitoris, because of its resemblance to the penis, is an organ that challenges male superiority. In the male imagination, the clitoris delivers women to the unbridled pursuit of sexual pleasure. Yet pleasure should only be the province of men. Women's sexuality must be reduced to its strict reproductive function within the institution of marriage. For this to happen, the women's clitoris must be removed, taking away their pleasure drive. The aim of female genital mutilation is to reinforce man's uneducated feeling that he is the only recipient of pleasure, having removed that pleasure from the woman. This pointless, selfish mutilation reflects men's ignorance of the female body, and men's belief that the clitoris is women's only erogenous zone. Sembène is, thus, justified to say that "... mentally it is not African women who need liberation so much as African men."

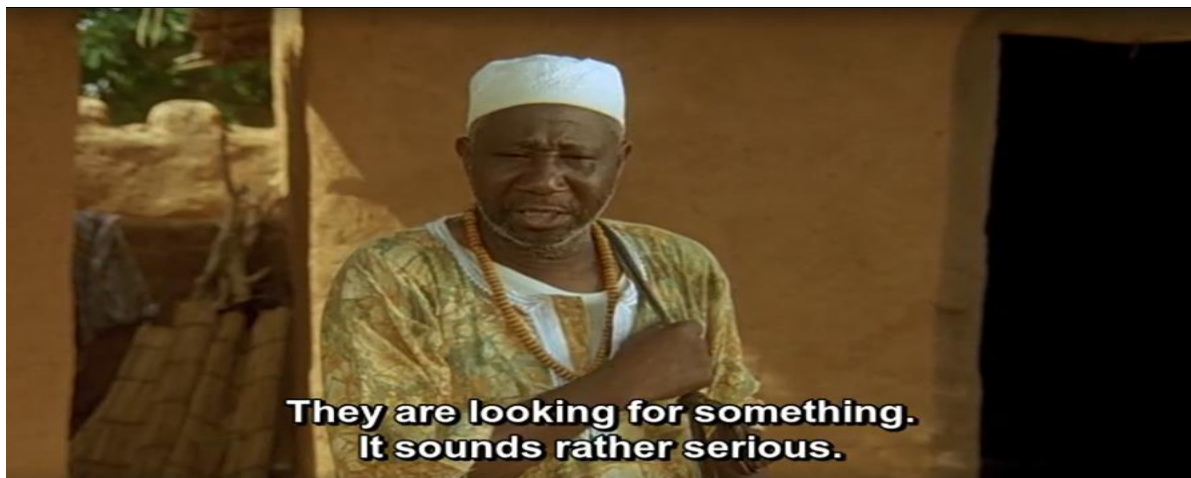
Intergenerational conflict The conflict between Collé and the village elders, as well as the conflict between Doucouré and his father, Dougoutigui, is intergenerational. Collé is an excised woman. However, she has experienced and continues to experience the harmful consequences of the practice. Her difficult deliveries and painful sexual relations are the results of her genital mutilation. So Collé, reassured by the Grand Imam's radiophonic declarations on the uselessness of clitoridectomy, convinces her husband, Ciré, to spare their daughter Amsatou from the ordeal. As a result, Amsatou remains uncircumcised, creating an uproar among the village elders when they learn of Amsatou's *bilakoro* (unexcised) status. Dougoutigui decides that his son, Doucouré, will no longer marry Amsatou. However, Doucouré, who has been educated in Europe and lives there, is amused by the villagers' superstition. He jokingly tells the little girls who have come under Collé's protection that they will not have husbands. Yet, he rewards the bravery of these rebellious children by handing out sweets. And to his father, who forbids him to see Amsatou, Doucouré twice reminds him that his choice of wife is not a community affair but a private decision. Doucouré marks his break with the past, represented by his father, when he tells his father, who intends to stamp his authority on him by hitting him with his umbrella, that his time, the time of tyrants, is over. With Collé, the little fugitives, Amsatou, and Doucouré, a new generation opposes the old generation represented by Dougoutigui, Amath, the excising group of women, and the council of elders.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What social and political metaphors do the characters Dougoutigui, Doucouré and Collé stand for?
2. How can Amath's behavior be described as regressive?
3. In which way is Collé's behavior progressive?
4. Religious syncretism is the fusion of beliefs, practiced simultaneously by a community. Where is religious syncretism apparent in the film?
5. Why is the radio such a source of anxiety for men?
6. What do people think of television and radio in your culture? Are they seen as positive or negative media? Explain.
7. Besides television and radio, are there other modes of communication that are mistrusted or loved in your society or family? What are they? What makes people like or distrust these modes of communication?

SCENES

Four little fugitives In one of the village compounds, Ciré Bathily's three wives and children go on with their daily chores. Four little girls rush in the compound calling for Collé, Bathily's second wife. The girls kneel by Collé's feet and beg for her protection. The girls have run away from the excision ceremony. Ciré's two other wives are scandalized. Ciré emerges from his room. His three wives and daughter hide the girls and kneel to greet him. He wonders what the drumbeats he hears in the distance are about. He listens attentively and explains that it is a search for six fugitives.



We do not want to be cut A friend of Ciré comes to fetch him. Ciré tells his wives that he is going on a journey. They wish him a safe journey. Ciré gone, the girls emerge from their hideout and beg Collé to protect them against excision. They tell Collé that they do not want to be cut.



We do not wish to be cut.

Alima is worried Ciré's youngest wife, Alima, tells Collé that if she helps the girls, she will be accused of having incited them to run away. Collé's daughter, Amsatou, asks her mother not to refuse asylum to the girls. Collé swears that tomorrow she will bring the girls' case to the public square.

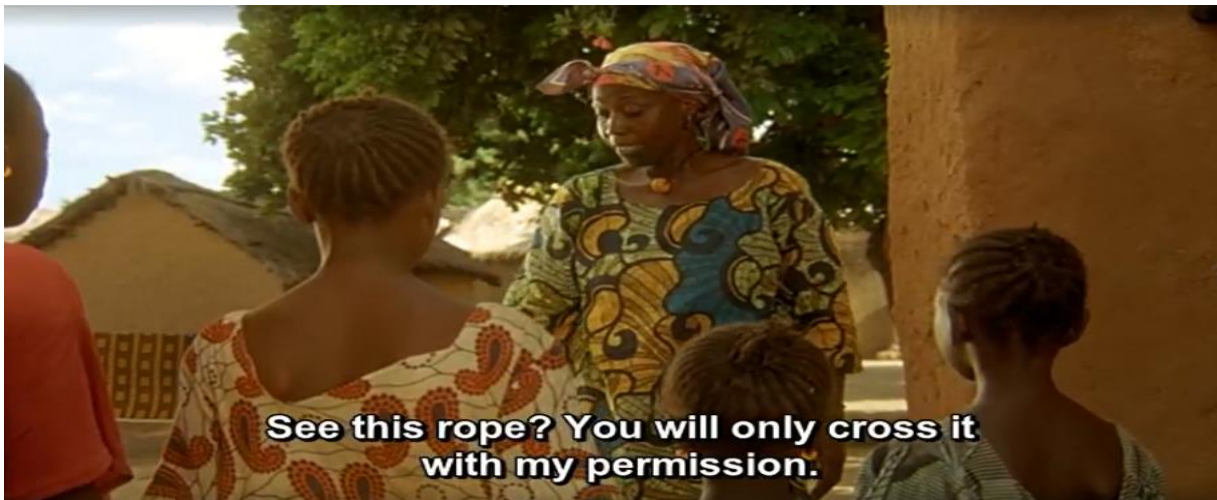


My elder, if you grant them protection,



Mother, do not deny them.

The *moolaadé* Collé ties a colorful mystic protection rope (*moolaadé*) across the entrance of her compound and instructs the girls not to cross it or go out without her permission. She tells them that whoever violates this rule will be killed by the *moolaadé*.



MERCENARY

Mercenary has arrived An itinerant shopkeeper nicknamed Mercenary has just arrived in a small Burkina Faso village with his goods carried on a four-wheel stand pulled by a bicycle. Mercenary quenches his thirst with water from a clay pot placed under a big, shaded tree and sets up shop under that tree. He casts a glance at the open-air Qur'anic school near the mosque, where some children are reciting verses under the direction of their teacher.



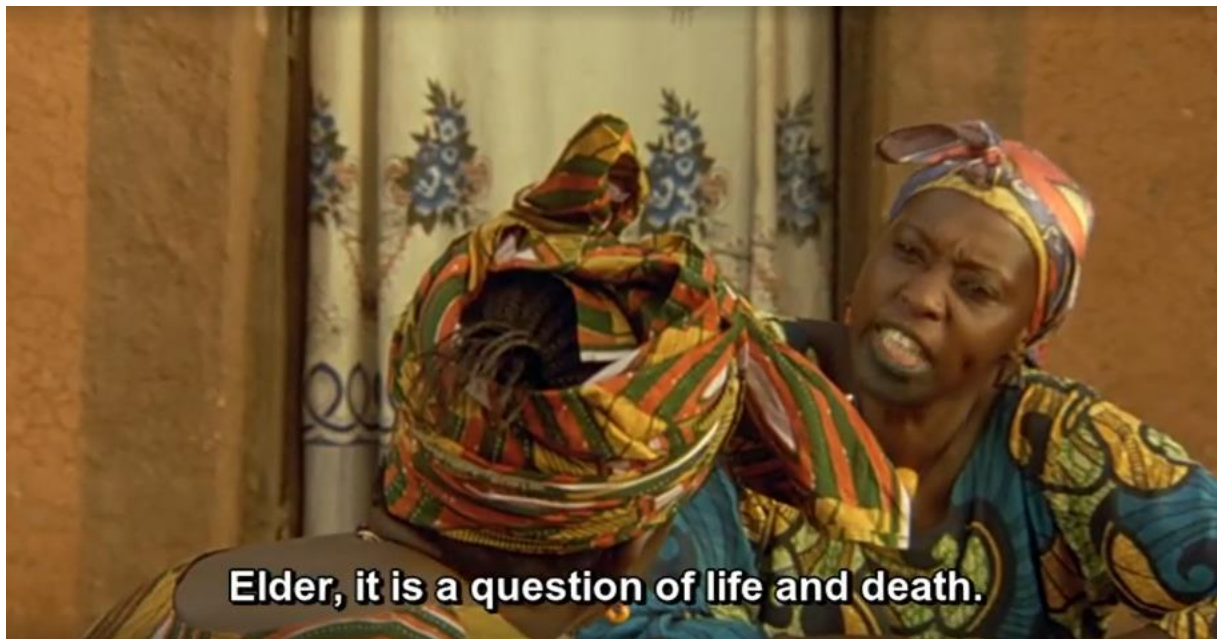
Mercenary flirts with Amsatou Mercenary's colorful plastic merchandise have a lot of success among the village people. Mercenary flirts with almost every female customer that comes near his stand. He tries his charm on Amsatou, but she is not impressed. She tells him that she has a rich fiancé who lives in France.



Can *bilakoro* have children? Collé wants to know why the girls came to her for protection. One of them tells her that they heard at the village well that she refused to have her daughter, Amsatou, excised. Another girl tells Collé that her sister died of an infection from her excision. Another girl says that Amsatou not being excised did not prevent her from having a rich fiancé from France. One of the girls asks if it is true that *bilakoros* (unexcised women) cannot have children. Collé tells her that it is not true.



A matter of life and death Amsatou and her stepmother, Hadjatou, return, loaded with merchandise from Mercenary's store. Amsatou's stepmother tells Collé that they got it on credit for Amsatou's fiancé to pay when he comes. Hadjatou asks Collé if she is aware of what she is getting herself into. Collé replies that helping the girls is a matter of life and death.



The excising women want the girls back The excisers have come to get the girls back to the “purification” (excision) camp. They stop at the threshold of the compound and hail Collé, asking her why she wants to prevent the girls’ purification. Collé tells them that she had two miscarriages and one caesarean because of complication from her excision, and that she will not let these girls that came to her become victims of excision.



The mothers accuse Collé of manipulation Some of the mothers accuse Collé of wanting to make their girls *bilakoro*, as she did Amsatou. Collé calls the four little girls over and asks them to cross the rope if they want to be excised. None of them does. Some mothers try to get their daughters to cross the rope, in vain. They accuse Collé of manipulating their daughters.



**You want our daughters to remain
a bilakoro like your Amsatou.**



**if you want to be cut
cross this rope.**

Two girls are missing Of the six missing children, only four have placed themselves under Collé's protection. The mothers of the other two girls are starting to turn against the excision priestess, asking her to find their daughters. Collé, the girls, her daughter, and her co-spouses celebrate their victory.



Now, let's go find the two missing children.



Balla thinks Colle is crazy Ciré's eldest son, Balla, asks his mother, Hadjatou, to persuade Collé to return the children to the excising group of women. His mother asks him to go tell Collé himself. He refuses on the ground that Collé is a crazy woman.



**She manipulates them.
She refused to have Amsatou purified.**

This is a serious case The leader of the excising women tells the other excisers that Collé, who refused to have her daughter purified (excised) seven years ago, is on a mission to defy the community's tradition. She thinks that Collé is trying to wrest power from them. One of the excising women proposes that they go talk to the village chief. The excisers take their case before the village chief and dignitaries. The leader of the excisers tells the village council that Collé, who had refused to have her daughter purified (excised) seven years ago, is once again defying their long-held tradition by giving sanctuary to four girls who refuse to be purified. Amath, Collé's brother-in-law (the older brother of her husband), tells the excising women that his brother is out of town, but he is in charge. Therefore, he gives the excising women permission to remove the girls from Collé's protection and purify them.



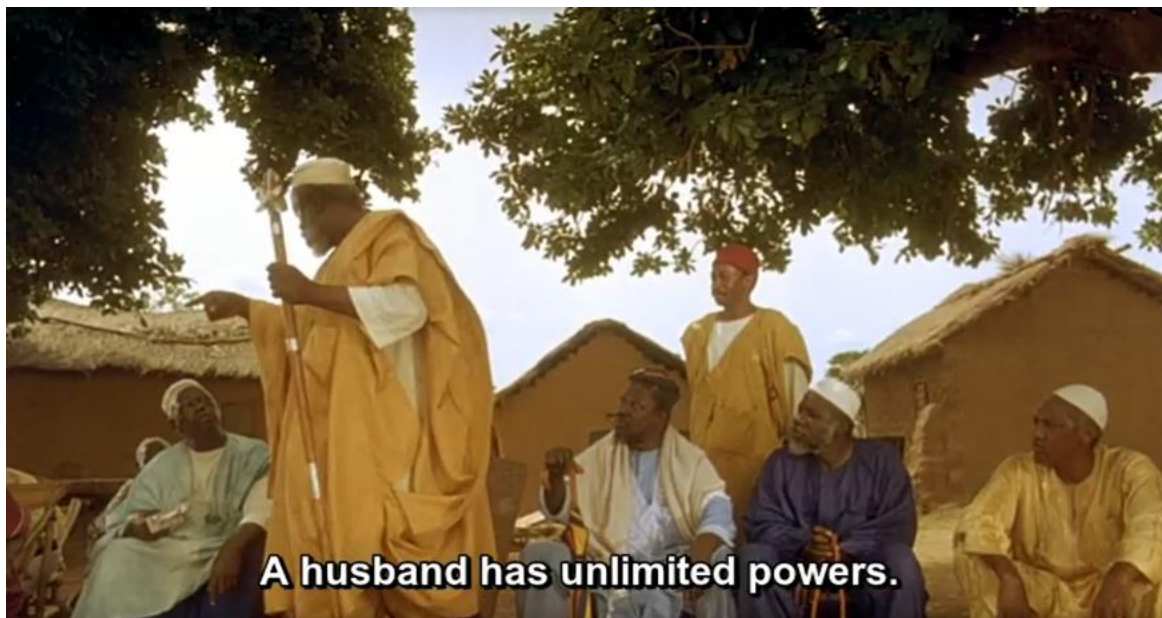
Would you marry a *bilakoro*? The leader of the excising group of women presses on. She asks the councilmen if any of them would ever accept a *bilakoro* (an unexcised woman) as a wife. The men respond in unison that they will never ever marry a *bilakoro*. The *griot* tells the excising women that they have Amath's permission to go get the girls.



My son will not marry Amsatou The leader of the excisers replies that Collé granted the girls *moolaadé* (mystic protection). This revelation raises a clamor of disapproval from the council. Dougoutigui, the village chief, declares that his son will not marry Amsatou, a *bilakoro*. The leader of the excisers tells Dougoutigui that Amsatou can still be purified, along with the other girls and get married fifteen days later. Dougoutigui quips that his son, who is arriving in two days, will have a hard time keeping an erection for fifteen days. The assembly laughs.



Collé must say the word One of the council members explains that it will be impossible to remove the girls from Collé's care unless she utters "the word" (to undo the *moolaadé*). Another council member explains that there is a way around it. Collé's husband can publicly force her to say the word. From his kiosk, Mercenary follows the whole discussion.



A staring duel The excising women come to the threshold of Collé's home. The girls are frightened and call for Collé. Collé and her co-wives confront the excisers. They and the excisers lock eyes in a staring duel. The excisers leave.

Amath scolds Collé Hadjatou, the first wife, informs Collé that the excising women took their case to the village chief. Collé's brother-in-law comes to tell Collé to release the girls, in vain. He scolds Collé for her "bad manners." He complains that the tradition of purification dates back centuries, and he will not allow Collé to challenge it.

Doucouré has arrived The youngest wife, Alima, tells Hadjatou that she will not bear the brunt of Collé's actions. Hadjatou gets upset and scolds her. The next day, Amsatou's fiancé arrives in the village with a pick-up truck loaded with luggage. Hadjatou and Alima prepare to go greet him, but Collé tells them that she is busy and will not be there. Doucouré, Amsatou's fiancé, is welcomed with joy by the whole village. The village *griots* praise his noble ancestry. Doucouré distributes money to them. Doucouré enters his father's compound under the adulation of the villagers and the praises of the *griots* (traditional praise singers). Doucouré's parents proudly hug their son. Doucouré greets the village dignitaries.

Doucouré is praised Doucouré enters his father's compound under the adulation of the villagers and the praises of the griots. Doucouré's parents proudly hugs their son. Doucouré greets the village dignitaries.

Fily serves the welcoming water Instead of Amsatou, Doucouré's cousin, Fily, is chosen to present Doucouré with the welcoming water. Doucouré's compound is crowded with guests. Mercenary is there, too, and flirts with a woman, Sanata, which the *griot* does not seem to appreciate.



Why am I not purified? Amsatou asks her mother why she refused to have her purified. She wishes she had given Doucouré the welcoming water. Collé tells her daughter to feel no shame of being a *bilakoro*. She explains how she lost her previous children during childbirth, and how she had to be cut open to save Amsatou from the same plight. She tells Amsatou that genital mutilation is a bad thing. Amsatou tears up a picture of Doucouré she has been keeping proudly.



Doucouré promises to visit Amsatou's parents Doucouré asks Hadjatou about Collé and Amsatou. Hadjatou tells Doucouré that Collé and her daughter send him their greetings. Doucouré promises Hadjatou that he will come visit them later. The village dignitaries look at each other, visibly unhappy that Doucouré wants to see Amsatou.

The suicides The welcoming party is disrupted by some women wailing. They explain that the two missing girls threw themselves in a well. The *griot* brings the chief the bad news. The chief orders that the well be filled in. Doucouré is troubled by the event.



The

Radio is a bad influence The village men decide that the radio has a bad influence on women. They decide that the women's radios must be confiscated and destroyed. Ciré is back from his trip, and the *griot* urges Ciré's brother, Amath to explain to Ciré that his wife, Collé, is responsible for the girls' deaths. The *griot* also tells Ciré that Dougoutigui has changed his mind about marrying his son to Ciré's daughter, Amsatou, because she is a *bilakoro*.



Ciré is angry with his wives Ciré summons his wives. He blames Hadjatou, his first wife, for allowing Collé to defy tradition. Ciré tells Collé that he accepted her demand not to have their daughter purified, but this does not give her the right to make all the girls *bilakoro*.

Ciré forbids the radio in his home Ciré tells Collé that she has defied his authority. He orders her to say the word that will break the *moolaadé* and have the girls, including their daughter Amsatou, purified. He also tells her that he no longer wants to hear the sound of the radio in his house.

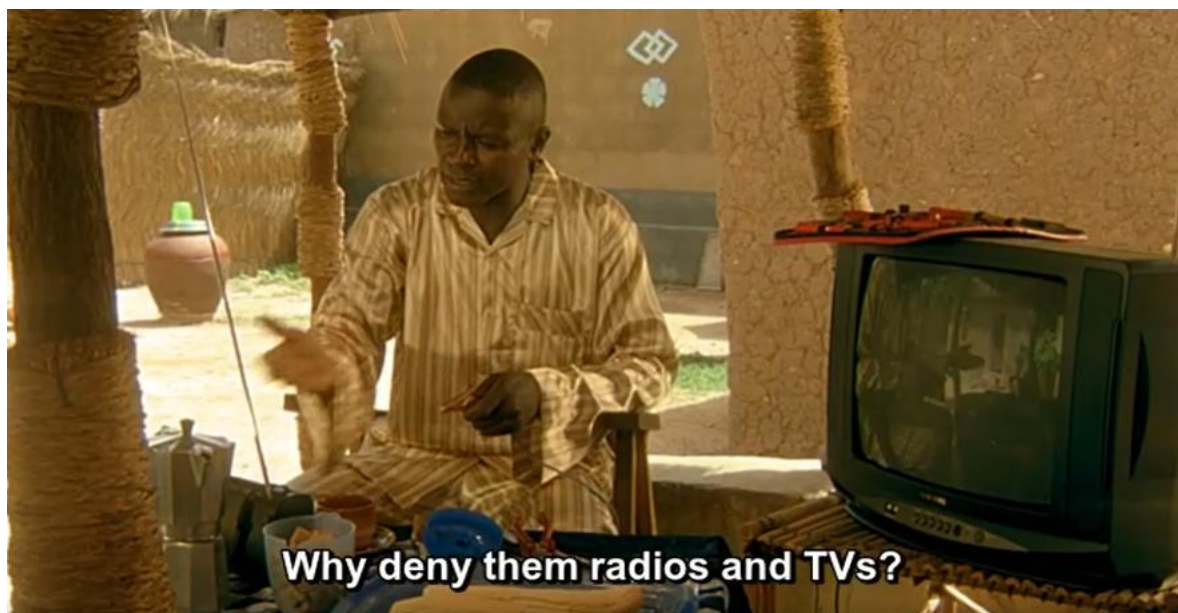
Do not utter the word Hadjatou tells Collé that their brother-in-law, Amath, has been urging the village men to confiscate their wives' radios. Hadjatou encourages Collé to not say the word that will break the *moolaadé*. Hadjatou tells Collé that she supports her struggle.

Turn off your TV Doucouré is having a breakfast of coffee and French bread. His relatives tell him that he has the blessing of the villagers for his charity work for the village. Doucouré's uncle tells him that he cannot turn on his TV in front of the women, as the women are no longer allowed to listen to the radio.



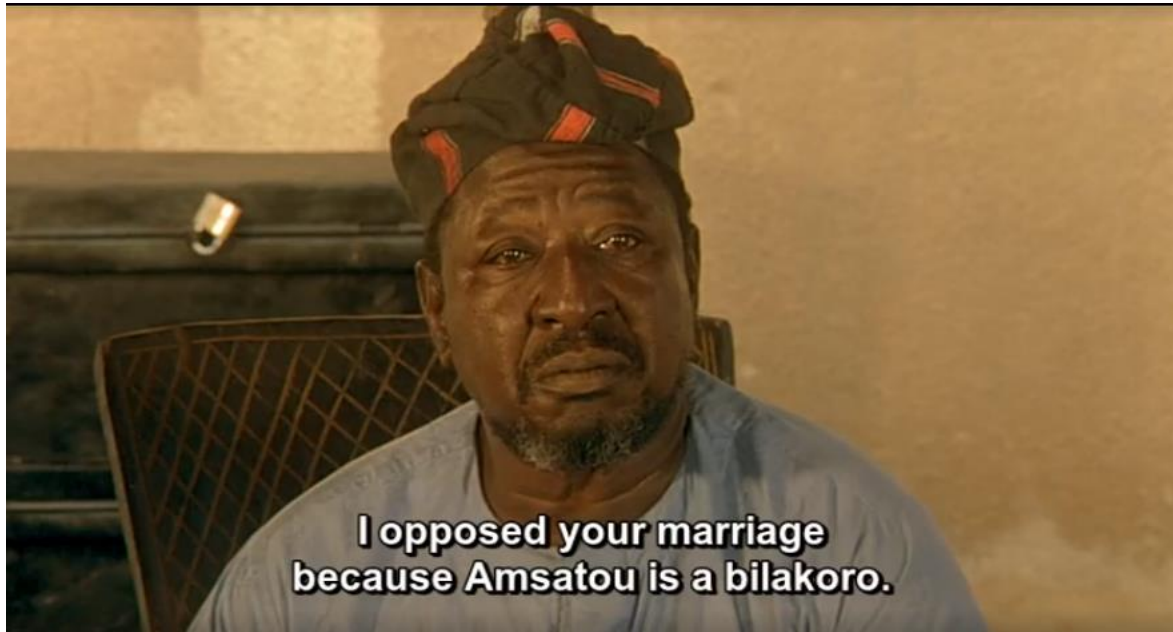
You

cannot silence the media Doucouré is puzzled that the women are forbidden to listen to the radio. Doucouré tells his uncle and father that they cannot silence the media. He tells them that these media are part of their lives now.



My marriage is strictly personal

Doucouré's father tells him that he opposes his marriage with Amsatou because she is a *bilakoro*. His uncle tells him that Collé, Amsatou's mother, is defying the tradition of purification. Dougoutigui calls Doucouré's little cousin, Fily, over. He tells Doucouré that Fily will be his wife, and that the marriage has already been blessed at the mosque by the elders. Doucouré replies to his father that although he respects and honors him, he must not meddle in his marriage, which is a strictly personal matter.



Dougoutigui is angry with Doucouré

Dougoutigui gets angry and violently curses his son. He tells Doucouré that he is his father, and that Doucouré will marry the girl he tells him to marry. Doucouré is about to reply, but his mother gestures him to keep quiet.



Doucouré visits Mercenary Doucouré goes to Mercenary to pay off his father's debt. Mercenary greets him in French and the two men start a conversation in French. Doucouré admires the village mosque. Doucouré sees men piling up radios in the village square.

Mercenary is dishonest Doucouré accuses Mercenary of dishonest commercial practices. Mercenary replies that for someone like him, who lives in Europe, Doucouré must understand what globalization and the free market mean. Doucouré laughs and pays his father's debt. Mercenary tells Doucouré that Amsatou has also left him a bill to pay. Doucouré replies that he will not pay for Mercenary's forcing his junk ware on people. Mercenary tells him to go explain that to Hadjatou.



Doucouré visit Ciré's family Hadjatou asks Amsatou to bring him the welcoming water. Amsatou is reluctant but complies. Hadjatou explains that she took a few things on credit at Mercenary's shop and asks that he pay for them. Doucouré promises to pay.

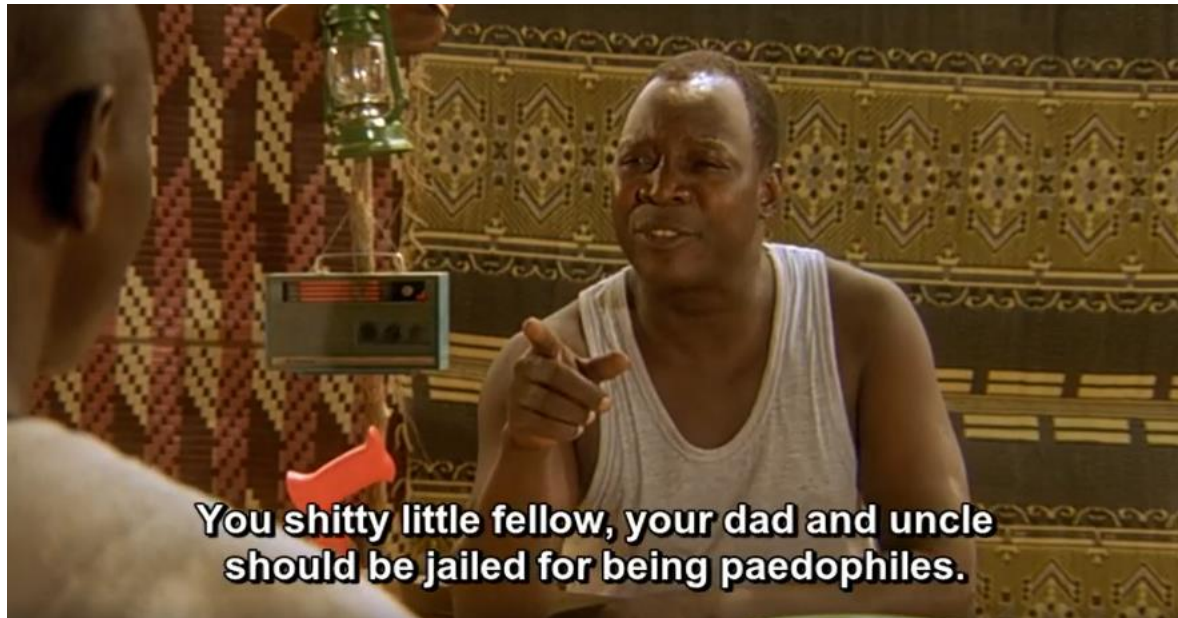


The radio police The men have now gathered all the radios into a big pile in the village square. The women ask Sanata, known in the village for her loose relationships with men, to explain what the men hope to do by confiscating the women's radios. Sanata explains that the men hope to lock up the women's minds. One woman asks how the men can lock up something invisible.



Venting The women gather at night to vent their frustration. Some women say that it is difficult for them to go to sleep without their radio programs. Several women intervene to say that no one has the right to dictate to them what to listen to. They complain that these radios were bought with their own money.

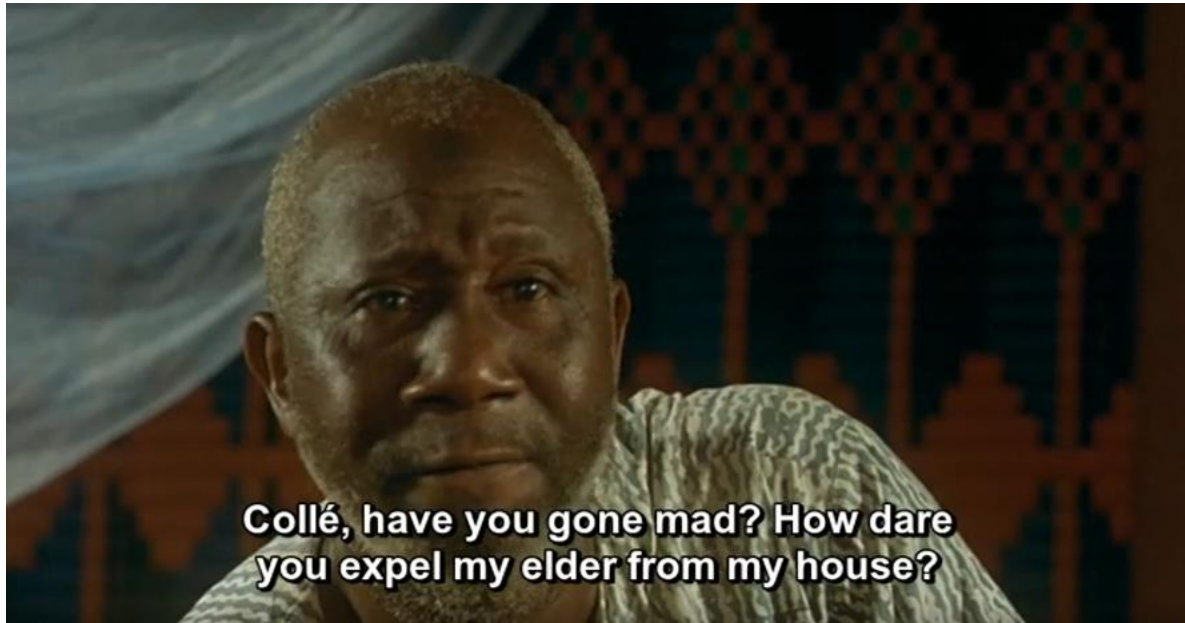
You are all pedophiles Doucouré tells Mercenary that his father wants him to marry his eleven-year-old cousin, Fily. Mercenary replies that Fily is a mere child. Mercenary accuses Doucouré, his father, and his uncle of pedophilia. Doucouré does not like the characterization.



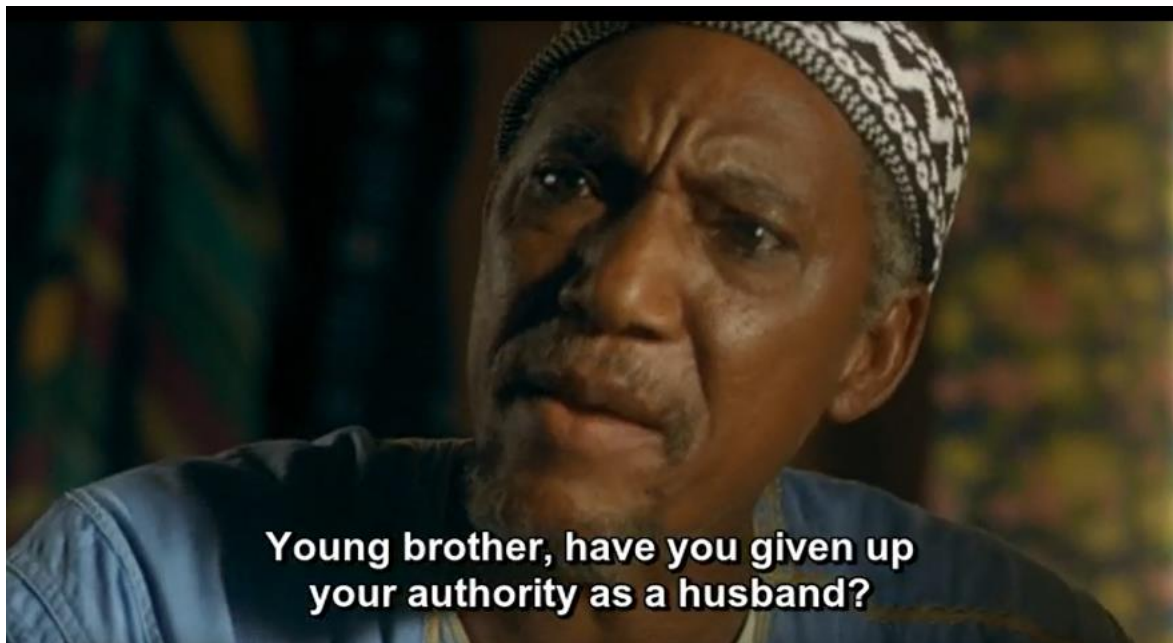
Mercenary's story Mercenary tells the story of how he got his nickname. A few years ago, he led a soldiers' protest against their superior stealing from their allowances. He was targeted, jailed for 5 years, kicked out of the army for dishonorable behavior, and given the nickname of Mercenary.



This is a private matter Ciré tells Collé, in the presence of Amath, that he would not have married her if she were a *bilakoro*. Collé replies that this is a private conversation that does not need the presence of a witness. Amath gets up, accusing Collé of expelling him from his brother's house. Ciré apologizes to his brother and scolds Collé.



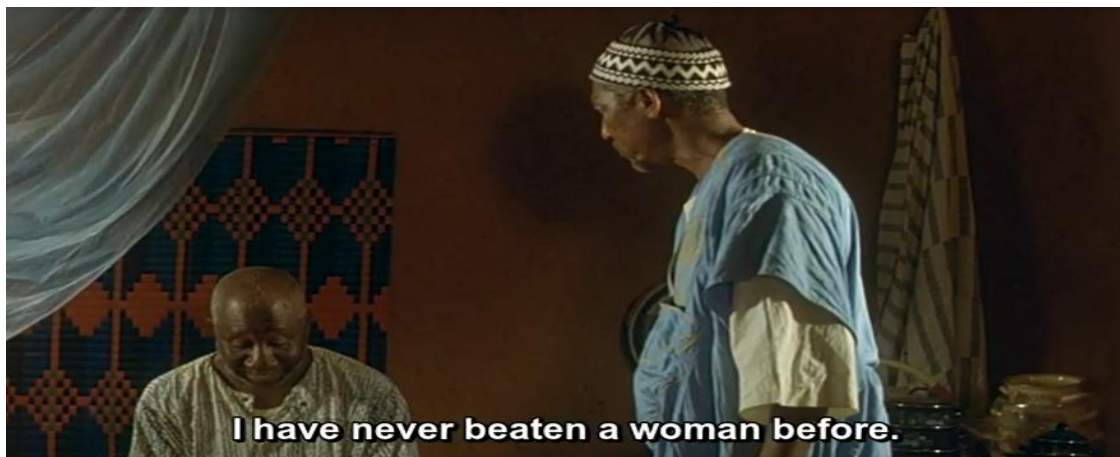
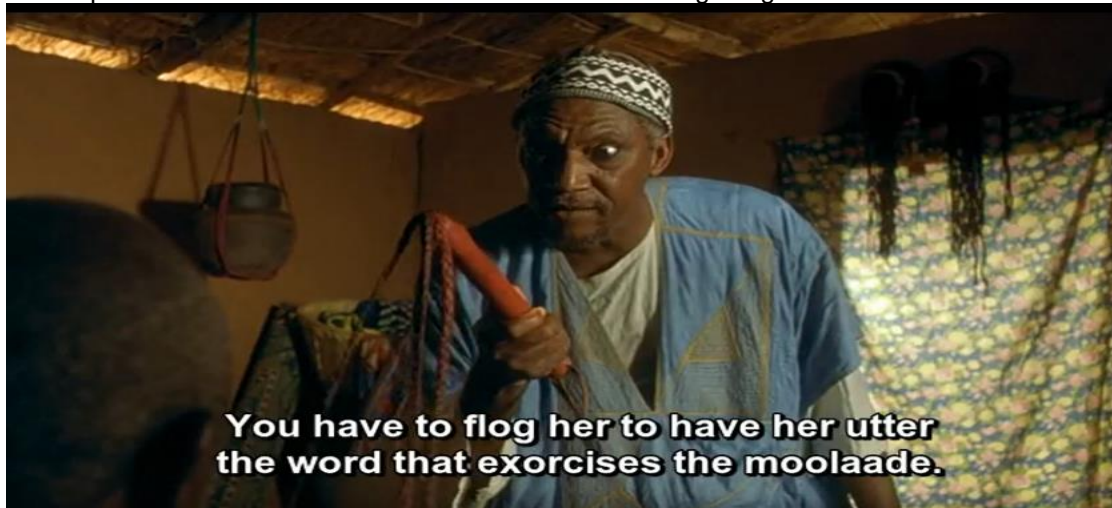
Amath accuses Collé of dishonor Amath asks his brother, Ciré, if he has abdicated his authority to Collé. Amath reminds Collé that purification is a long-held Islamic tradition. Amath accuses Collé of dishonoring their family.



You are the laughingstock of the village Amath tells his brother that Collé is making him the laughingstock of the village. He tells his brother that the solution for him to regain his authority is to repudiate Collé, release the four girls under her protection, and have his daughter, Amsatou, purified.



Go flog her Amath gives his brother a leather whip. He asks him to whip Collé in public until she utters the word that exorcises the *moolaadé*. Ciré will not take the whip. His brother puts it in his hand. Ciré tells his brother that he has never beaten a woman before. Amath is shocked by the revelation. Amath pushes his brother out of the hut and orders him to go flog Collé.



Ciré flogs his wife Ciré flogs his wife, under the encouragements of the excising women and the men. The other women shout encouragements at Collé to hold strong and to not say the word. Exhausted by his effort and feeling sorry for beating his wife, Ciré begs his Collé to say the word to stop the flogging. She will not.



Mercenary steps in Mercenary wrests the whip from Ciré's hand. Collé is exhausted and about to collapse. The women beg her to stand up and not collapse. Amath rushes against Mercenary, asking him not to meddle. Mercenary throws Amath to the ground. The women cheer.



Mercenary is murdered The elders accuse Mercenary of perverting their women. They order that he be taken out of the village and disposed of. During the night, some young men wearing white masks chase Mercenary out of the village. In the morning, Mercenary's body is circled over by vultures. Mercenary's radio is put on the pile of radios in the village square.



One of the girls dies Collé is tended for by Hadjatou and Alima. Hadjatou swears that she will never allow another girl to be excised. Hadjatou tells Collé that one of the girls was snatched from the compound during the flogging. She was excised and died of hemorrhage. Collé also learns of Mercenary's murder. She feels sorry for Mercenary.



Ciré is remorseful The village women bring some gifts to Collé. Hadjatou tells the women that her husband is remorseful. She tells them that he was manipulated by his brother, Amath. The girls are reunited with their mothers. The women congratulate Collé and tell her that they admire and support her struggle against excision.



Salba feels regrets Salba is inconsolable. She mourns her daughter, Diattou, who died from her excision. Salba painfully recalls how she tricked her daughter and removed her from Collé's compound to deliver her to the excising women.

This one will not be cut After mosque, the men torch the pile of radios on the public square. Salba comes before the men's assembly. She lifts her newborn goddaughter in the air and declares, "This one will not be cut." Hadjatou and Collé add, "No girl will ever again be cut." The women repeat in chorus, "No girl will ever again be cut."



Surrendering the knives The men vow that no man will ever marry a *bilakoro*. The women jeer at and threaten the excising women. The women call the excising women child killers, and they order them to give up their knives. The excising women surrender their knives. The women shout victory. Now, Collé decides to confront the men.



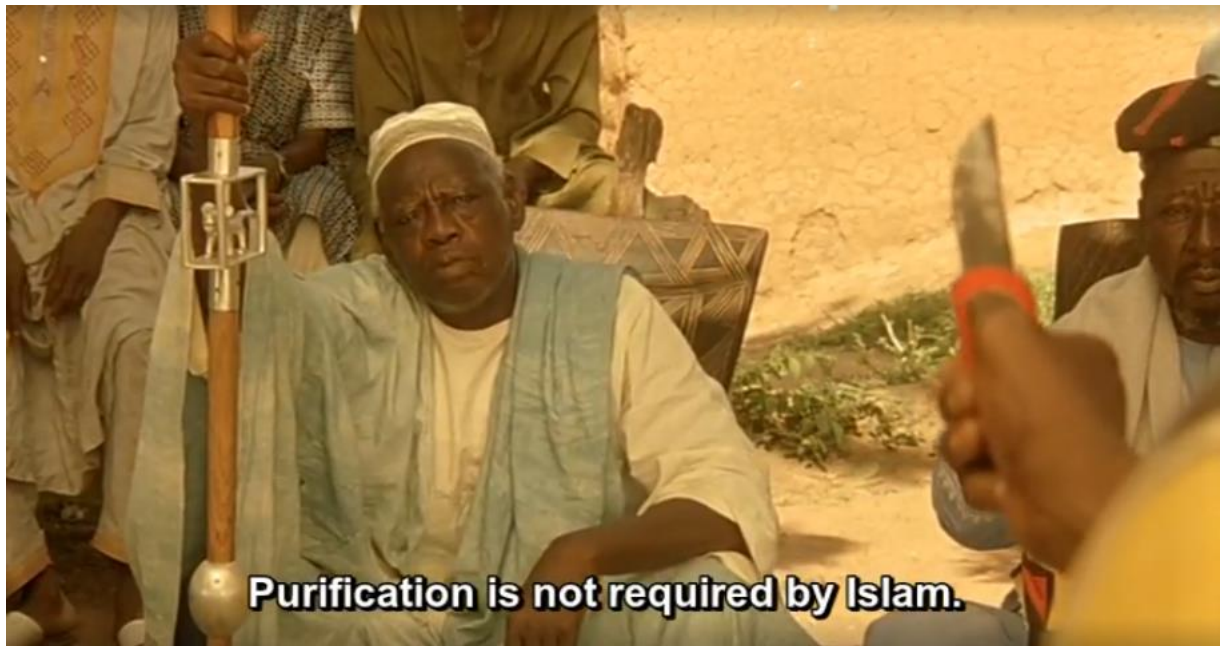
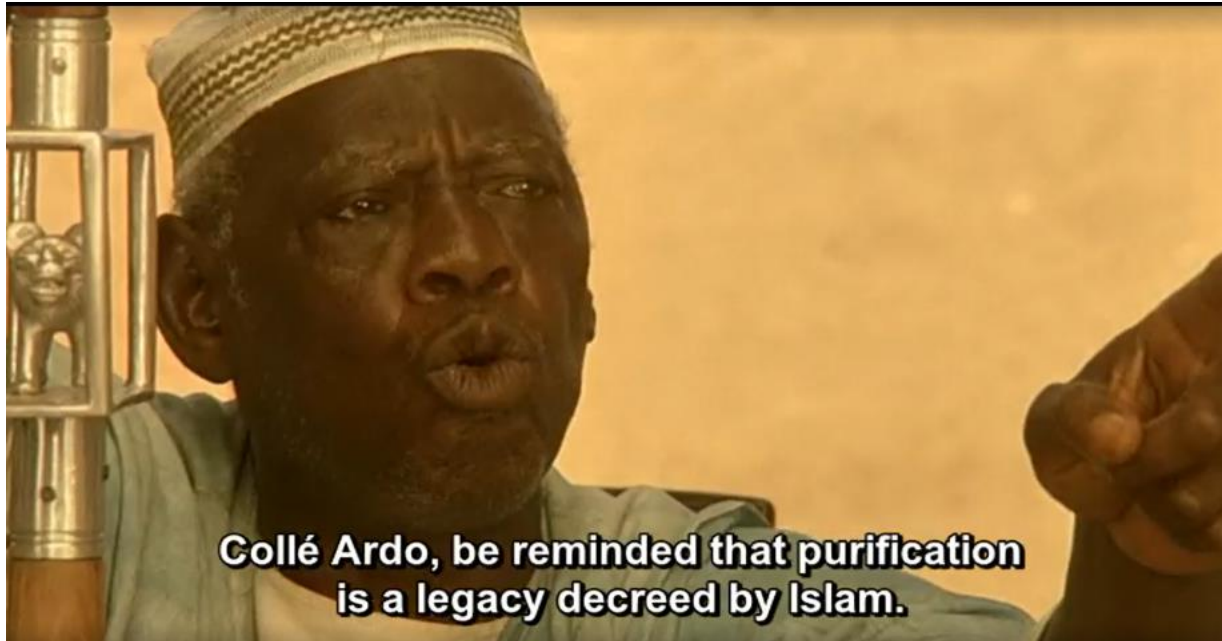
Ciré defies Amath Collé takes all the knives and places them in front of the men's assembly. Amath tells his brother to control his wife or he will. Ciré retorts to Amath that he will find him on his way if he ever touches his wife. Collé threatens to bring mayhem to the village if Amath ever raises his hand on her.



Ciré likes his wife's stance Ciré nods his head in approval of his wife's stand. Sanata praises Collé as a great warrior and launches into a praise song for Collé. Dougoutigui tries to shut Sanata up, in vain.



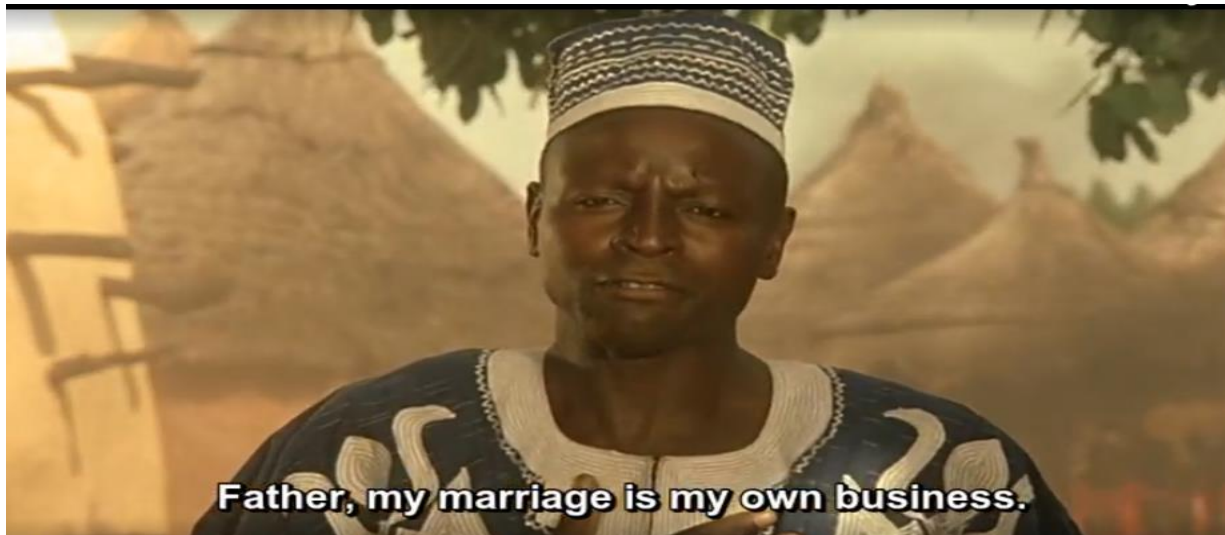
Not a law of Islam An elder accuses Collé of defying Islam. Collé replies that excision is not a law of Islam. She adds that millions of unexcised women go to Mecca for pilgrimage each year and that they are not committing sin for that.



It takes more than a pair of balls Amath tells his brother that he is a disgrace to manhood for allowing Collé to say such things. Ciré replies that it takes more than a pair of balls to be a man. The women celebrate Collé's audacity. Sanata throws the excisers' knives in the radio bonfire.



Dougoutigui hits his son Doucouré sees Amsatou and goes after her. His father tells him to stay away from this *bilakoro*. Doucouré reiterates that his marriage is his private business. Dougoutigui threatens to disown his son, and he hits Doucouré with his umbrella.



The era of tyrants is over Doucouré tells his father that the era of tyrants is over. He tells him that from now on, he will always have his TV on. And he walks towards Amsatou. She tells him that she will be a *bilakoro* forever. Doucouré smiles at her. The camera shot switches from the 150-year-old ostrich egg on top of the mosque to a modern-day TV antenna.

