

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Hyenas (1992)

Djibril Diop Mambéty (1945-1998)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Djibril Diop Mambéty was born in 1945, in Colobane, Senegal. He died in 1998 in Paris after a long battle with lung cancer. Mambéty's first artistic love was theater. He then transitioned to film though having no formal training in the trade. After a few shorts, Mambéty gained international recognition with *Touki Bouki*, which won him the International Critics Award at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival and the International Federation of Film Critics Prize (FIPRESCI Prize) at the 1973 Moscow International Film Festival. In 1992, Mambéty directed *Hyenas*, an adaptation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *The Visit*. He later directed *Le Franc* (1994) and *La Petite Vendeuse de Soleil/The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* (1999), both part of his unfinished trilogy *Contes des Petites Gens* (Tales of the Little People). Mambéty's films are celebrated for their non-linear narratives, surreal imagery, and sharp social criticism.

Film *Hyenas* was inspired by Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *The Visit* (1956), a satirical comedy about justice, revenge, and moral corruption. Mambéty's adaptation of the play tackles such themes as neocolonialism and consumerism, poverty, greed, disloyalty, exploitation, selfishness, and eco-piracy in Africa. *Hyenas* was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival and won the Special Jury Prize at the Chicago International Film Festival the same year.

Background *Hyenas* was filmed in Colobane, the birthplace of director Djibril Diop Mambéty. The cast comprised a mix of professional and local actors, including Mamadou Mahourédia Gueye, who had previously debuted in Ousmane Sembène's seminal work *Mandabi* (1968). Issa Samb, a prominent Senegalese artist and playwright, played the role of the teacher. Mambéty himself made an appearance as Gaana. The dialogue was primarily in Wolof.

SYNOPSIS

At the age of 17, Ramatou becomes pregnant with Dramaan, a young man from the town of Colobane. The people of Colobane, deeply attached to their ancestral moral values, banish the young girl from the village. Ramatou could have been saved if Dramaan, the man responsible for her pregnancy, had acknowledged it and married her. Instead, Dramaan pays two drunkards to testify that one of them might be the father, tarnishing Ramatou's reputation and making her unworthy of Colobane. With Ramatou exiled, Dramaan marries a wealthy woman from the town. But thirty years later, Ramatou returns to an impoverished Colobane, herself now extremely rich, richer than the World Bank, as people say, her body mutilated from a life of prostitution and a plane crash, and her heart filled with resentment and a thirst for vengeance. She offers Colobane a billion, but only if they deliver Dramaan to her, dead. Initially shocked, the townspeople outright reject the offer, but their greed proves stronger than their principles, and little by little, they succumb to Ramatou's offer. However, no one wants to dirty their hands by killing Dramaan. They prefer that he take his own life, but he refuses. Like in a classical tragedy that adheres to decorum, Dramaan's death is suggested rather than shown. His clothes are found in the desert, torn apart by hyenas. A modern airport rises in Colobane, and Ramatou, symbolizing the World Bank, reigns as the undisputed master of the town.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Ramatou (Ami Diakhate) A once-exiled woman, who returns to Colobane as a wealthy but vengeful figure, seeking retribution against those who wronged her.

Dramaan (Mansour Diouf) The man who impregnated and abandoned Ramatou, leading to her exile thirty years before.

The Townspeople The men and women of Colobane, who gradually succumb to greed, ultimately betraying their values for the money Ramatou gives them.

SCENES

The shopkeeper of Colobane Dramaan runs a store in the town of Colobane, which doubles as a bar. Dramaan's friends gather in his bar to drink, sing and dance in his company. Most of them are beggars, dressed in rags made from old, recycled rice sacks, with one hole for the head and two for the arms. Dramaan's wife does not welcome his friends, as Dramaan gives them free drinks.



The imminent return of Ramatou While Dramaan and his friends are celebrating, the village *griot* announces the return of Ramatou Linguère to Colobane after thirty years of exile. The news of Ramatou's return does not seem to please Dramaan, who stops singing and returns to his counter, looking grim. At Colobane town hall, a local council member tries in vain to prevent a notary from seizing the administration's property. The council member runs to warn the mayor of the "catastrophe" that has befallen Colobane. He also takes the opportunity to tell the mayor that the *griot* (the town's crier) has announced the imminent return of a wealthy woman, richer than the World Bank, by the name of Ramatou Linguère.



Preparing to welcome Ramatou The mayor is visibly pleased with the news of Ramatou Linguère's return. He tells the council member that Ramatou is the solution to all their problems, and he requests that a meeting of the entire council be convened to discuss how Ramatou can be given a dignified welcome. The mayor and his advisors, including Dramaan and the schoolmaster, meet in conclave. The mayor wants to know about Ramatou's past in order to better craft his welcome speech. The teacher announces that Ramatou was a bad pupil, who got a zero in math. The mayor replies that zero in math has not prevented Ramatou from being richer than the World Bank. The mayor asks that Ramatou be given the best room in the best hotel in town.



Emphasize her positive traits The mayor asks that emphasis be placed on Ramatou's positive aspects, such as her initiative. He says that Ramatou is now their only chance of survival. The teacher pulls himself together and declares with a big smile that Ramatou did indeed have a gift for telling stories, and that in the field of storytelling, she was unbeatable. Clamours of approval and satisfaction rise from the council. Dramaan and Ramatou were lovers. The teacher announces that someone in this group knew Ramatou very well, and that everyone knows who he is referring to. All eyes turn to Dramaan. Dramaan takes a few steps towards the mayor. He announces that he and Ramatou loved each other passionately when they were young, only to be separated by the harsh realities of the city. He advises the mayor to mention Ramatou's passion for justice and kindness in his speech.



A future mayor The mayor takes Dramaan by the shoulders. He announces that he is thinking of retiring as mayor. He declares that Dramaan is a great citizen of Colobane, and a successful man. He says he would like Dramaan to be his successor. The council members cheer the mayor's decision, chanting Dramaan's name.



Dramaan assures his colleagues that he will convince Ramatou to invest her millions in Colobane. Dramaan will protect Colobane. On the balcony of the town hall, the mayor announces that Dramaan will be his successor. The citizens of Colobane celebrate in the streets, cheering Dramaan on. Dramaan thanks the people of Colobane for their support. He promises the people of Colobane that he will help them out of their misery. He says he will protect them.

Waiting for Ramatou Dressed in all their finery, the people of Colobane head to the station to welcome Ramatou. All the town's notables are there. Dramaan and his wives have a front-row seat, in large armchairs on the station's dirt floor. The town's photographer is also there to capture the moment. The mayor makes a speech. He asks his constituents to wave their handkerchiefs, express their joy and even shed a few tears as Ramatou's train approaches. The train whistles and stops far from the platform. People, visibly surprised, start running towards the train. The engineer gets off, visibly angry. He wants to know who pulled the emergency brake before the platform. Ramatou, standing with her retinue, announces that she will get off the train wherever she pleases.



Create an Association of Single Women The crowd finally joins Ramatou, led by the mayor. Ramatou orders her butler to give money to the mechanic and to the association of single women in Colobane. The mayor whispers in the mechanic's ear, who tells Ramatou that no such association exists in Colobane. Ramatou then orders that one be created.



Dramaan greets Ramatou Dramaan approaches and greets Ramatou by her name. The mechanic then realizes who he is dealing with and apologizes for his clumsiness. Ramatou dismisses the mechanic and asks that her luggage be unloaded. The villagers scurry to meet her request. The mayor begins his speech, but Ramatou cuts him short. Ramatou recognizes Dramaan. Ramatou calls out to him. Dramaan tells her that he is glad she has returned to Colobane. Ramatou replies that her only wish was to return to Colobane one day and see him again. She asks him if he remembers the little name he gave her, "my little wild cat". She tells him to repeat it. Dramaan replies that he also called her his 'little witch'. Dramaan tells Ramatou that she has not changed. She replies that he is lying, and that she is old and decrepit.



Ramatou tells of her life Ramatou tells Dramaan that she had an accident and has been wearing an artificial leg ever since. She lifts her dress and shows Dramaan her leg. Dramaan replies that if she had not shown him, he would not have guessed. Dramaan holds Ramatou's arm and helps her through the crowd, who applaud her with chants and clapping hands. Dramaan escorts Ramatou to the big American car waiting for her. He opens the door for her. She settles in. He walks around the car and settles down next to Ramatou. The car sets off for the Colobane hotel, where a retinue of porters brings Ramatou's luggage.



Dramaan complains about his life The mayor and his entourage arrive at Dramaan's bar. The beggars stand up and retreat against a wall. The mayor and his followers settle in and congratulate themselves on the fact that Colobane is rising from the ashes. Dramaan goes for a cart ride with Ramatou. She asks him about his family and children. He replies that his two children are good-for-nothing like all the children of Colobane. Dramaan laments that he has never left "the hole" of Colobane. Dramaan confides that he has never been happy in his marriage.



Dramaan rationalizes Ramatou's exile Dramaan and Ramatou stop between two large boulders in the sand dunes. Ramatou reminds Dramaan that it was at this spot that he first undressed her



when she was 17. She reminds him that he abandoned her to marry his current wife for her money, which drove her into exile. Dramaan retorts that she would have been poor like everyone else in Colobane if he had married her.

Are you entirely of steel? The oracle of Colobane advises Dramaan's wife to sacrifice bulls to ward off the evil that has been hanging over her since Ramatou's arrival. Dramaan tells Ramatou that Colobane needs millions. She replies that she considers it small change. Dramaan realizes that Ramatou's hands are also artificial. He asks her if she is made entirely of steel. She explains that she was the only survivor of a plane crash.



Ramatou recalls her childhood The mayor has the opportunity to read the speech he has prepared for Ramatou. After the applause and drumbeats, Ramatou speaks again. She says that she is touched by the welcome she has received, but rejects the embellishments made to her childhood. She says that as a child, she stole with Dramaan's complicity just for the pleasure of sleeping with Dramaan.

Ramatou wants ownership of the courthouse Ramatou announces that she will offer 2 billion francs to Colobane, one billion for the town council and another billion for the population to share among themselves; on condition, she explains, that the courthouse is sold to her. The mayor replies that the courthouse is not for sale. Ramatou retorts that everything can be bought.

Dramaan is unmasked Ramatou's butler reveals his true identity by taking off his dark glasses. The crowd recognizes him. It is Gaana, the former president of the Colobane courthouse. Gaana says it is time to clear Ramatou's name. He reveals that 30 years ago, to escape responsibility for impregnating Ramatou, Dramaan produced two false witnesses who stated that it was they who had slept with Ramatou. Gaana produces the two witnesses, who confess to the crime.



Ramatou wants Dramaan dead Gaana tells Ramatou to explain to the people of Colobane what happened to the child Dramaan refused to recognize. Ramatou explains that the child died after a year, and that she became an intercontinental prostitute because the Colobane court of justice had stigmatized and banished her. She says that for the billion she is offering, she demands control of the court and Dramaan's death. Dramaan protests that this is ancient history. He tells Ramatou that she has survived all this, and that she should forget. Ramatou replies that she will never forget the pain of his betrayal engraved in her heart.



Colobane rejects Ramatou's offer The mayor takes the floor to tell Ramatou that Colobane rejects her immoral offer. Ramatou replies that she is in no hurry at all, and that she can wait. Ramatou and her retinue withdraw. So does the crowd.



Expensive wines and new, yellow shoes Dramaan's store is taken over by the city's beggars. Some order expensive packs of cigarettes, others fine wines. Dramaan notices that the beggars are all wearing new yellow shoes. He asks them if they have come upon a sudden fortune. Then come the women. They also order imported rice provisions and items that were once beyond their means. Dramaan asks them how they intend to pay for their goods. They mockingly reply that he knows very well who will pay for them. Dramaan proceeds to ransack his own store.



The hyenas have come out From the window of her hotel room, which gives her a bird's-eye view of Dramaan's store, Ramatou watches the scene with obvious pleasure. She exclaims that she never thought that the reign of the hyenas would come so soon.

The Police Dramaan goes to the police in Colobane to put himself under the protection of the authorities. He says that Colobane's beggars are now wearing new yellow shoes, and he fears for his life. The chief of police shows him his shoes and tells him that he, too, is wearing yellow shoes, that it is the fashion, and that this in no way proves that Dramaan is in danger. Dramaan notices that the police chief is now wearing a new gold tooth. The officer laughs at Dramaan's remark and replies that he is crazy to suspect everyone. He throws a rifle at Dramaan and tells him to defend himself while he gathers his troops for a mission to escort a convoy of goods offered by Ramatou.



The Mayor The mayor's wife tells him Colobane has just received some brand-new household appliances. She gives him a list of what she wants: 7 refrigerators, 7 washing machines and 7 televisions. She asks her husband to approve her list. He asks her who will pay for all this. She replies that he knows very well who will. On her way out of the mayor's office, the mayor's wife bumps into Dramaan coming up the stairs. She hisses at him in disdain. Dramaan finds the mayor at his desk, a fat cigar in his mouth and wearing a large straw hat. The mayor tells Dramaan that he now smokes Havana cigars. Dramaan confides in the mayor that he is afraid for his life. He tells the mayor that he wants to put himself under his protection. The mayor suggests that Dramaan go to the police. Dramaan replies that the chief of police has a gold tooth, and that he no longer trusts him. The mayor retorts that the people of Colobane are not savages, and that even the Queen of England visited Colobane in the company of Senghor, the first president of Senegal. While the mayor is talking, his assistant shows him the new typing machine donated to the town hall by Ramatou. Dramaan insists that Ramatou be arrested for putting a bounty on his head and for bribing the people of Colobane. The mayor asks Dramaan to be objective and examine for himself what he has done to this woman and the two drunkards he has bribed to tell lies about her. The mayor tells Dramaan that Ramatou's resentment is quite understandable. The mayor announces to Dramaan that he is withdrawing his proposal to make him his successor. The mayor's employee brings the mayor a model of the future Colobane town hall. Dramaan laments that the whole town is falling under Ramatou's influence. The mayor replies that he should be happy that good things are being done for Colobane.



Dramaan goes to church The mayor points out some stairs to Dramaan. He tells him they lead to heaven. Dramaan descends the stairs and finds himself in a kind of chapel with a statue of a black virgin and a TV set on the altar. Images of starving black women and children flash across the screen. Dramaan joins the chapel priest in prayer. The priest tells Dramaan never to lose faith. He advises him to take the next train and leave Colobane this evening. Just as Dramaan is about to leave the chapel, he sees workers hanging a large chandelier on the church ceiling. Outside, the Colobane sky lights up with fireworks.



Colobane is coming back to life Colobane's population sing and dance in the streets around the mayor, who plays the saxophone in a Mardi-gras-like parade. Others enjoy themselves in Colobane's new amusement park. A member of the council announces that Colobane is coming back to life thanks to Ramatou. A woman asks the women of Colobane to get rid of their old fans, because from now on, thanks to Ramatou, they will all have air conditioners from Europe. The richly dressed wives of Dramaan are among Ramatou's new followers.



Dramaan is killed after an unanimous vote Dramaan, in a final attempt to save himself, confronts Ramatou, but she remains unwavering. She insists that he be killed and buried where she has chosen to be buried upon her death. The men of Colobane, led by the mayor, await Dramaan in the desert. They are dressed in their old sacks and wear judges' wigs. After delivering a speech on the virtues of the people of Colobane, the mayor asks all those in favor of Dramaan's death to raise their hands. Dramaan's execution is unanimously approved. The men swear that it is not for the money but for the sake of truth. As Ramatou descends into a crypt, the priest announces that Dramaan's time has come. He requests that a cigarette be offered to Dramaan, and the mayor obliges. The men advance, surrounding and enclosing him. Then, they withdraw, leaving only Dramaan's clothes on the ground, fought over by hyenas in the night. Meanwhile, construction of a new airport begins in Colobane.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

DRAMAAN Dramaan is selfish, abandoning Ramatou to protect his own future. He is corrupt, manipulating others for personal gain. His naivety blinds him to the consequences of his actions, leading to his betrayal and downfall.

Disloyal Dramaan exemplifies disloyalty through his betrayal of Ramatou in their youth. After impregnating Ramatou, Dramaan abandons her to marry a wealthy woman. Alone, Ramatou had to face the townspeople's intolerance, exile from Colobane, and caring for their sick child for two years without Dramaan's support. Although Dramaan claims that he loved Ramatou, he never defended her when she needed him most. He even bribed two drunkards to claim that they might be the fathers of Ramatou's child.

Selfish Dramaan is a selfishness man. His abandonment of Ramatou is primarily driven by his desire to preserve his image and personal ambitions. He refuses to take responsibility for fathering a child out of wedlock, choosing instead to distance himself from Ramatou to maintain his status in the community. Aware of the poverty in Colobane, he seeks to secure his future by marrying a wealthy woman, demonstrating that he values material comfort over emotional commitments.

Corrupt Dramaan is a morally corrupt character whose actions are driven entirely by dishonesty. He offers drinks to beggars not out of generosity, but to safeguard his dark secret. He gives credit to the village women to keep their families under his control, ensuring their dependency and silence over his past faults. Even when Ramatou returns, he pretends to be her protector, but his true intention is to shield himself from any form of retribution she might seek. His corruption lies in his manipulation of others for personal gain, always disguising his self-serving motives as kindness.

Naïve Dramaan foolishly believes that handing out bottles of wine to the city's beggars will safeguard his secret and secure him a stable life. He fails to see that he is fueling blackmail, making himself vulnerable to betrayal. His greatest act of naivety, however, is assuming that Ramatou will forgive him for the deep betrayal of his past.

RAMATOU Ramatou is powerful and arrogant, demanding control over Colobane. She is vengeful, seeking retribution for past wrongs, yet resilient, overcoming exile and suffering to return stronger than ever.

Powerful We are told that Ramatou is wealthier than the World Bank. Ramatou's immense wealth gives her a level of financial power comparable to major global institutions like the World Bank. This grants her the ability to influence and manipulate those around her, using money as a tool for control. She demonstrates this when she demands control over Colobane, specifically targeting its judicial system, showcasing how wealth can override justice and morality.

Arrogant Ramatou's arrogance is evident from the moment she demands that the train stop for her before reaching the station, signaling that she sees herself above conventional rules. Her wealth gives her unchecked power, allowing her to dictate the fate of Colobane and seize control of its judicial system. She takes whatever she desires, possessions, loyalty, even the souls of the townspeople, without hesitation or remorse. With absolute confidence, she grants herself the right to decide Dramaan's fate, positioning herself as a force beyond morality, where justice bends to her will.

Vengeful Revenge is a dish best served cold, as the saying goes, and Ramatou, filled with resentment, proves it. She waits thirty years to take her revenge on Colobane, and her sentence is final. It is through the moral corruption of the town's inhabitants that she seeks her retaliation. When they hesitate to yield to her will, she calmly reminds them that she has all the time she needs. In the end, Colobane succumbs to Ramatou's relentless desire for vengeance.

Resilient No matter what one can say about Ramatou, her resilience cannot be denied. Exiled from Colobane in her teenage years, she returns thirty years later, wealthy and powerful. Her journey has been anything but easy. She has endured the destruction of her dignity and the mutilation of her body. Yet, she comes back wearing metal prosthetics, symbols not only of her suffering but of her strength in overcoming life's trials.

THE TOWNSPEOPLE The people of Colobane are disloyal, abandoning their initial promises to protect Dramaan when Ramatou tempts them with wealth. Their cowardice is evident as they refuse to take direct action against him, instead pressuring him to end his own life. Driven by greed, they eagerly accept Ramatou's gifts, sacrificing their morals for material gain.

Disloyal The people of Colobane, who initially swore not to betray Dramaan by accepting Ramatou's offer, prove to be unreliable allies. Their loyalties shift according to their interests. The mayor welcomes new equipment and the promise of a new building, the priest accepts new statues and a chandelier for his church, and the children embrace a new amusement park. Even the women, including Dramaan's own wives, accept household appliances and seem content with the thought of his imminent death.

Cowardly For the promised gifts to keep arriving in Colobane, Dramaan must die. The townspeople accept this principle, but they are too cowardly to carry out his execution themselves. No one wants blood on their hands. The priest urges Dramaan to leave town, while the mayor asks him to show some dignity and end his own life. All of them push him toward death while avoiding responsibility for it.

Greedy When Ramatou dazzles the people of Colobane with her money and lavish gifts, their greed takes over, and their grand declarations about ancestral moral values quickly fade. They abandon Dramaan without hesitation, eager to embrace the luxury Ramatou offers. But Ramatou is not fooled. She calls them 'hyenas', ready to turn against one another, just as they did against her thirty years before.

THEMES

Neocolonialism Neocolonialism is the modern continuation of colonial control, where powerful nations dominate weaker ones through economic dependency rather than direct rule. Institutions like the World Bank provide loans under strict conditions that benefit foreign interests, keeping recipient nations trapped in cycles of debt and austerity. Former colonial powers still shape global policies, ensuring that post-colonial states remain vulnerable and financially dependent. *Hyenas* illustrates this reality through Ramatou Linguère, who returns to her ruined hometown offering wealth, but only with a devastating conditionality. Just like foreign financial aid, her offer is not true generosity but a calculated tool of control, forcing the desperate to betray their own. The film critiques how economic "help" can strip communities of dignity and self-determination, showing that neocolonialism does not liberate nations; it manipulates them into submission, ensuring their survival is always conditional.

Illustrative moment Ramatou offers Colobane a billion francs to restore the town, but her generosity comes with a brutal condition: the people must execute Dramaan, her former lover, who once abandoned her for a wealthier woman. At first, the townspeople reject the demand, refusing to compromise their morals. But as hunger and deprivation grip the community, their resistance weakens, and they ultimately

yield to Ramatou's offer. The people's association of Ramatou with neocolonial financial institutions is unmistakable: Ramatou's immense wealth is repeatedly compared to that of the World Bank, and her entourage includes both national and international operatives. She is driven in a large American car, and she has a Japanese agent among her retinue, which reinforces the idea that Ramatou embodies neocolonial interests, manipulating Dramaan's friends and family against Dramaan.

Quest A quest often brings change, driven by ambition, justice, or survival. It can lead to discovery or destruction, shaping both individuals and communities. Some pursue prosperity, sacrificing their values, while others return to reclaim dignity or seek revenge. Entire societies may abandon morality for the promise of a better future, exposing the tension between integrity and desire. The pursuit of wealth or justice often forces people into difficult choices, revealing how easily principles bend under pressure. *Hyenas* explores these themes through a story of betrayal, justice, and the devastating cost of fortune, showing how desperation can turn an entire town against its own moral foundations.

Illustrative moment: Dramaan, once full of promise, betrays Ramatou to secure his future, denying their child and bribing witnesses to erase his past. His selfish pursuit of stability leads to devastating consequences through Ramatou's own quest. Decades later, Ramatou returns, not as the heartbroken young woman but as a wealthy force. Draped in gold and followed by servants, she embarks on a quest for justice and revenge, offering riches in exchange for Dramaan's life. The townspeople, struggling with poverty, face their own quest, one for fortune and escape. Initially reluctant, they soon abandon morality, dressing in yellow, fashionable shoes to symbolize their complicity. The theme of quest unfolds through three intertwined journeys, shaped by ambition, justice, and desperation.



Poverty Poverty strips away dignity, forcing people into situations where survival outweighs pride. It is a cycle that keeps individuals dependent, desperate, and often willing to endure humiliation for the mere hope of relief. Mambéty's *Hyenas* captures this painful reality through the beggars of Colobane, who, despite the contempt they face, repeatedly return to Dramaan's bar because hunger leaves them no choice. Poverty forces not only the destitute but also the town's supposed elite, officials who cling to symbolic authority despite Colobane's collapse, to reveal their moral fragility. Their desperation is no different, just masked by illusions of status.

Illustrative moment: The French adage, "Poverty has no charm," is well illustrated here. The beggars of Colobane, compelled by economic desperation, frequent Dramaan's bar despite the indignities they endure at the hands of his wife. The arrival of the mayor and his advisors further accentuates Colobane's social hierarchy. Clad in tattered garments, fashioned from recycled rice sacks, the beggars instinctively vacate their seats to accommodate the town's so-called elite. Yet, this elite status is illusory, as Colobane is economically defunct. The municipal furniture has been repossessed, and the town's factories are closed. The town is financially dead, which makes the leadership figures symbols of authority without substance. When Ramatou makes her immoral offer, the town's elite and its destitute inhabitants all together forsake their principles for financial gain. They all work hand in hand, albeit with no pride, for the death of Dramaan, illustrating how the relentless pursuit of money can erode people's self-respect and moral integrity.



Greed Greed is a force that reshapes communities, eat away at values and turn morality into a commodity. Greed thrives in desperation, enticing individuals to forsake principles for material gain. When wealth becomes the ultimate power, social bonds fracture, and ethical boundaries blur. Those once driven by unity and fairness may find themselves consumed by self-interest, willing to betray others for personal benefit. Mambéty's *Hyenas* illustrate this reality through the town of Colobane, where

Ramatou's return exposes greed's influence on human behavior. As her fortune dangles before them, the townspeople abandon their sense of justice, transforming into scavengers who circle their prey without hesitation.

Illustrative moment: The return of Ramatou to Colobane exposes the town's susceptibility to greed, as financial incentives quickly destroys communal ethics. Having amassed immense wealth, described as being "as rich as the World Bank", Ramatou uses her fortune to manipulate the town. She offers monetary rewards in exchange for Dramaan's life. The townspeople, once bound by social cohesion, abandon their principles and succumb to the allure of material gain. They start plotting for Dramaan's death, and Ramatou likens them to hyenas circling their prey. Even Dramaan's wife, rather than defending her husband, embraces the changes Ramatou's wealth brings. She accepts Ramatou's gifts, enjoys Ramatou's amusement park, celebrates the transformation of the town, and jokes about Dramaan's forthcoming death. The filmmaker thus critiques the corrosive effects of unchecked greed.



Disloyalty Disloyalty destroys trust, creating cycles of betrayal that spread through individuals and entire communities. When self-interest outweighs integrity, loyalty becomes fragile, and relationships crumble under the weight of deception. Mambéty's *Hyeenas* examines this through Dramaan's past betrayal of Ramatou, a choice driven by ambition and fear. He sacrifices her dignity for his own survival, abandoning her when she needs him most. Years later, the town mirrors his actions, turning against Dramaan in pursuit of wealth. Mambéty shows that when loyalty is treated as unessential, morality fades, and justice becomes impossible.

Illustrative moment: In his youth, Dramaan prioritizes social and economic advancement over personal responsibility. He abandons Ramatou, a girl he impregnated, to marry a wealthy woman. When suspicion of his paternity arises, he orchestrates a deceitful scheme to protect his reputation, bribing two local drunkards to falsely testify against Ramatou's character. Dramaan sacrifices Ramatou's dignity for self-preservation. He remains indifferent to her banishment from Colobane. Decades later, the people of Colobane echo Dramaan's disloyalty. They turn against him when Ramatou returns with wealth. The beggars, the mayor, and Dramaan's wives, who once lived in harmony with Dramaan, conspire against him. Dramaan's betrayal begets betrayal.



Consumerism Consumerism, often seen as progress, can subtly destroy cultural values and deepen social inequalities. It fosters a cycle where material wealth defines success, pushing communities to prioritize consumption over sustainability or tradition. In post-colonial societies, consumerism is frequently intertwined with neo-colonial control, reinforcing dependency on foreign goods and economic systems. The introduction of luxury items and extravagant lifestyles can shift mentalities, making traditional ways of life seem outdated or inadequate. This transformation is not always organic but often imposed through economic structures that favor external interests. Mambéty's *Hyeenas* critiques this phenomenon, showing how unchecked consumerism disrupts communal balance and reshapes identity.

Illustrative moment: In Colobane, a town marked by financial hardship, communal solidarity prevails. Those with more offer assistance to those with less. The women purchase goods on credit from Dramaan's store, settling their debts only when they are able. Similarly, beggars receive drinks at Dramaan's bar, either on credit or for free. This fragile equilibrium is disrupted when remnants of colonial systems intervene, exemplified by the notary's seizure of municipal furniture, a forewarning of the more profound upheaval to come. The arrival of Ramatou, a clear metaphor for the World Bank as a Western financial institution, signals the infiltration of unchecked consumerism. Her presence radically transforms Colobane, saturating the community with extravagance: fireworks punctuate the night sky, neon lights

illuminate amusement parks, and refrigerators and washing machines introduce aspirations of luxury among the women. The men, eager to embrace global modernity, adopt yellow shoes as a symbol of their newfound ambition. Ramatou, as a vestige of consumer culture, alters the people's mentalities.

Exploitation (sexual and emotional) Mambéty addresses exploitation as a force that reinforces societal inequality, trapping individuals in cycles of suffering. In patriarchal systems, women often endure the consequences while men evade accountability, leaving victims burdened by shame. When survival demands submission, autonomy disappears, turning people into commodities within systems that thrive on their vulnerability. This abuse shapes identities and dictates futures, limiting choices to necessity rather than empowerment. Those affected navigate a world that values them only for what can be taken, sustaining a cycle that remains largely unchallenged.”

Illustrative moment: Ramatou's suffering begins with emotional and sexual exploitation. She is seduced by Dramaan, who takes her virginity, impregnates her, and subsequently abandons her, leaving her to bear the consequences of their relationship alone, as she is singled out as immoral and banished from Colobane. Dramaan's actions remain unchallenged, while Ramatou is left to navigate the social stigma attached to her victimhood. In fact, in the patriarchal organization of Colobane, Dramaan not only escapes accountability, but he even gains fame. He becomes one of the town's elites, whereas Ramatou's abandonment sets her on a path dictated by survival rather than choice, forcing her into prostitution, where her body becomes a commodity in the economic system that thrives on female suffering. As Ramatou returns to Colobane thirty years later, her body is unrecognizable. She wears metal prostheses, prompting Dramaan to ask her if she is entirely made of steel. To which she responds that her life has been one of toil and exploitation.



Dehumanization/objectification Dehumanization and objectification strip individuals of their autonomy, reducing them to instruments for others' gain. When people are viewed as commodities rather than human beings, their worth is measured by what they provide rather than who they are. This leads to exploitation, where personal dignity becomes secondary to economic or social utility. In patriarchal and oppressive systems, objectification is also a form of exploitation that supports discrimination, making victims disposable while absolving their oppressors of accountability. Those who are objectified are often denied recognition, their voices drowned out by the systems that benefit from their subjugation.

Illustrative moment: “Are you entirely made of steel,” is the question that Dramaan asks Ramatou, as he realizes that half of her body is made of prosthesis. Ramatou shows Dramaan her arms and legs, no longer of flesh or bones, but of cold metal. Ramatou returns to Colobane years after her banishment a broken woman with metal body parts. Ramatou's physical metamorphosis into a body welded together with metal underscores the theme of female objectification, marking a transition from being seen as human to being treated as an artifact.

Hypocrisy/selfishness Hypocrisy and selfishness often drive people to abandon their values when personal gain is at stake. Those who once condemned injustice may later embrace it if it benefits them, proving that moral convictions are often fragile when confronted with opportunity. In societies shaped by materialism, ethical integrity can quickly erode, replaced by the desire for wealth and status. When comfort and prosperity outweigh principles, exploitation is overlooked, and past wrongs are conveniently forgotten. Djibril Diop Mambéty's *Hyenas* vividly illustrates this phenomenon through the town of Colobane, where citizens who once rejected Ramatou eagerly accept her wealth, disregarding the suffering that made it possible. Their complicity reveals how self-interest can override morality, exposing the unsettling ease with which communities sacrifice integrity for financial gain.

Illustrative moment: The people of Colobane rush to get a piece of Ramatou's gifts. The Mayor gets a new building and equipment, the children get an amusement park, the beggars get expensive yellow shoes, good wine and cigarettes, the police chief gets a golden tooth, and the women get new, modern

appliances. Despite the suffering Ramatou has endured, Colobane's citizens hypocritically embrace the wealth she brings, eagerly succumbing to the materialism she introduces while overlooking the injustice that created it. The very community that once shunned her now welcomes her extravagant gifts and is ready to help her kill Dramaan. This reveals the selfishness of Colobane's people, who discard moral considerations in favor of economic gain.

Eco-piracy When ownership is extended beyond land and resources to justice, history, and even human bodies, what is left untouched? What remains beyond the reach of capital? When economies, legal systems, and governance structures revolve around the logic of financial control, the very essence of belonging and identity is rewritten. Communities lose the ability to define their own spaces, as ownership shifts into the hands of distant entities with little connection to the land or people. Such is one of the criticisms that Mambéty's *Hyenas* tackles. The filmmaker's critique goes beyond Colobane. It speaks of broader struggles across Africa, where multinational corporations and financial institutions encroach on local economies, extract resources, and dictate policies in exchange for loans and development programs.

Illustrative moment: As Dramaan comes to see Ramatou one last time in the hope that she changes her mind and withdraws the bounty she put on his head, she asks him, "what are you doing by my ocean?" This is not merely rhetorical. It signals the troubling reality of global financial institutions extending their reach into natural and cultural spaces once shared by communities. The ocean, a symbol of openness and collective survival, is now branded with ownership, as if it were an asset to be acquired rather than a living entity. A few moments later, Ramatou points to an island in the distance and tells Dramaan that she will take him there, to her island, to live by her after he is killed. Ramatou, representing the World Bank, has not only appropriated landmarks but has imposed a new order where even the body of Dramaan, once free, once belonging to himself, becomes part of her acquisitions. The woman who is as rich as the World Bank's arrives in Colobane under the guise of economic development, only to privatize the sea, the land, and even the people's souls and bodies. Nothing remains untouched by Ramatou's financial conquest.

Global capitalism and identity: Financial imperialism exerts control not just through economic systems, but by erasing the cultural foundations of communities. The power of financial institutions extends beyond land acquisition; it infiltrates the collective memory, severing the links between people and their inherited traditions. Cultural practices, once organically developed and passed down through generations, are now extracted, commodified, and repurposed for profitability, transforming heritage into a spectacle for mass consumption rather than a source of communal identity. Financial imperialism dictates identities. Communities may persist, but their endurance comes at a cost: the fight to reclaim their narratives, their traditions, and the integrity of their histories. To resist is to recognize the theft for what it is, refusing to allow profit-driven interests to dictate the meaning of culture.

Illustrative moment: Ramatou claims ownership on the courthouse. She buys the ocean. She acquires the land, and she takes possession of Dramaan's body. Dramaan's inevitable fate, where even his corpse will be taken by Ramatou, mirrors the broader reality of how African nations have faced waves of extraction and domination. The island on the horizon, one of many landmarks Ramatou declares ownership over, is more than a physical place. It is a metaphor for colonial and neocolonial systems that continue to seize and commodify cultural heritage. Ramatou now owns the land that was once collectively cared for and freely accessible. Ramatou is an emblem of global financial power that dictates the fate of societies.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you explain the title of the film?
2. How does Ramatou subvert traditional images of womanhood?
3. In what ways does Dramaan represent moral weakness and societal hypocrisy?
4. In what ways does Dramaan's wife reflect the struggle of loyalty and survival in a corrupt society?
5. How does the film critique Africa's dependency on neocolonial economic system?