

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, PhD

Yam Daabo/The Choice (1986)

Idrissa Ouédraogo (1954-2018)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Idrissa Ouédraogo was a Burkinabé filmmaker whose work critically examined the interplay between tradition and modernity within his country's evolving social landscape. Born on January 21, 1954, in Banfora, Burkina Faso, and raised in Ouahigouya, a northern town, he was the son of farmers. His rural upbringing profoundly shaped his artistic sensibilities, influencing his portrayal of social hierarchy, communal life, and cultural transformation in Burkinabé society. Ouédraogo pursued film studies in Ouagadougou, Kyiv, and Paris, culminating in his graduation from the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC) in 1985. His cinematic work offers nuanced explorations of identity, tradition, and societal change, frequently challenging established norms. His filmography includes *Yam Daabo (The Choice)* (1987), *Yaaba (Grandmother)* (1989), *Tilai (The Law)* (1990), *Karim and Sala* (1991), *Samba Traoré* (1993), *Le Cri du cœur (The Heart's Cry)* (1994), *Kini and Adams* (1997), *La Colère des dieux (Anger of the Gods)* (2003), and *Kato* (2006).

Film *Yam Daabo* is an 80-minute drama largely set in the rural landscapes of Burkina Faso, with brief scenes in the capital city of Ouagadougou. The film delves into the emotional and cultural crossroads faced by a rural Burkinabè family as they navigate love, responsibility, and survival. The film captures the rhythms of agrarian life and the tension between tradition and modernity. The film received the Georges-Sadoul Prize in 1986 and was officially selected for La Semaine de la Critique at the Cannes Film Festival in 1987.

Background *Yam Daabo* is the first feature-length film by Idrissa Ouédraogo. It was filmed in Burkina Faso using non-professional local performers, lending the story a naturalistic touch. Created during the revolutionary period under President Thomas Sankara, the film struck a powerful chord with audiences at home. Its themes of self-sufficiency, rural dignity, and rejection of foreign dependency echoed the foundational principles of Sankara's political ideology. The film became both a cinematic milestone and a reflection of the era's social consciousness. *Mooré*, the language of the Mossi people, who make up the largest ethnic group in the country, is the language used in the dialogues.

MAIN CHARACTERS

BINTOU (Aoua Guiraud) A young woman who is courted by two men, Tiga and Issa

ISSA (Moussa Bologo) The young man that Bintou chooses as her lover

TIGA (Rasmané Ouedraogo) A man consumed by jealousy and resentment for being rejected by Bintou

BINTOU'S FATHER (Oumarou Ouedraogo) The family patriarch and father of Bintou

SYNOPSIS

Yam Daabo centers on Bintou, a young woman from a village in Burkina Faso, whose family refuses international food aid in pursuit of independence and dignity. Led by Bintou's father, the family, including his wife, his daughter Bintou, and young son Ali, sets off for the capital, Ouagadougou, hoping for a better life. They are joined by Issa, Bintou's suitor. Upon arriving, they sell their donkey and cart to afford basic city goods, but tragedy strikes: Ali is hit by a car and dies instantly. Grieving and disillusioned, the family chooses to return to their village. With what little money remains, they hire a truck, but their fare only gets them halfway. After several days on foot, they settle near a lush riverbank in the savannah, where they begin to cultivate the land. Soon, they are joined by Tiga's family, another family from the village. Tiga, also drawn to Bintou, finds himself competing with Issa for her affection. Bintou chooses Issa, and when she becomes pregnant, her father reacts with fury, banishing Issa for dishonoring the family.

Eventually, moved by remorse and the birth of his grandchild, Bintou's father forgives Issa, who returns to the fold. Tiga, devastated and enraged by Bintou's rejection, attempts to kill Issa but fails. For this act of violence, he is cast out by his own father and flees to Ouagadougou. There, he drifts into a life of crime. One day, while attempting to steal a moped, he is chased by its owner but is saved by Raogo, a former lover of his sister, who recognizes Tiga and cleverly leads the pursuer astray. Grateful, Tiga thanks Raogo and tells him that his sister still mourns his absence. Encouraged, Raogo decides to leave the city behind and return to the countryside. His arrival is met with joy, especially by Tiga's sister. The whole village celebrates his return, but the festivities are short-lived. Bintou's father soon calls out, "Let's go! Work awaits us!" and the villagers, ever guided by the rhythm of agrarian life, pick up their tools and head back to the fields.

SCENES

Work or stillness The film opens with blacksmiths at work, one hammering hot iron, another tending the bellows. The camera then pans to a group of villagers frozen in stillness, some holding empty containers, all gazing toward the arid horizon where majestic baobab trees stand tall.



International aid arrives A truck loaded with sacks and boxes of food bearing the insignia of international aid pulls into the village. As it stops, peasants rush forward with their containers, hoping to receive provisions. Men aboard the truck begin distributing small amounts of grain into each vessel. Watching from a distance with a look of disgust is the father of a young woman named Bintou.



Leaving out of dignity Bintou's father retrieves his mule and hitches it to a cart filled with the family's belongings. He gathers his wife, his daughter, Bintou, and his youngest son, Ali. Together, they push through the crowd of peasants and begin leaving the village.



The reality of scarcity After a long journey, the family rests in a clearing. The father asks for water, but when little Ali lifts the gourd, he discovers it has a hole, and all the water has escaped. Bintou sets out in search of water. After a long walk, she arrives at a family's campsite, where she's welcomed, given a drink, and has her gourd refilled. She then begins her journey back to her family's camp, where they await her return.



Issa arrives Issa, one of Bintou's suitors in the village, has been tracking the family. Issa finally reaches their campsite. From afar, little Ali spots him and runs to meet him. Issa kneels and speaks to the child, who is visibly happy to see him. Bintou returns to the camp and is happy to see Issa waiting for her. She greets him with a large smile and asks him to promise he will never leave her again. Issa makes that promise. He then joins Bintou's family and supports it as they continue their journey together.



The father sells his donkey and cart The family arrives in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. Bintou's father sells his donkey and cart, and the family treats itself to new clothes at the city market. Little Ali is visibly enchanted by the dazzling sights of the city.



Ali Dies Distracted by a movie poster, little Ali steps into the street. He is struck by a passing car. He loses his life. The family buries him in the cemetery of Ouagadougou. His mother refuses to leave his grave. Bintou comforts her and reminds her that they must carry on.



Return trip The family decides to return to the village. With the city behind it, the family gathers its few belongings and sets out for the village. They hire a truck for the long journey. But midway, the driver pulls over and tells them that their fare will not carry them any farther. With no choice left, they step down and begin the rest of the journey on foot. After a long walk, the family arrives in a lush region bathed by a river. Bintou is visibly amazed by the abundance of water in the area. They set down their bags, refresh themselves, and make the decision to settle there.



Meeting old acquaintances The family builds huts and begins preparing the land to cultivate crops. One day, they are startled by the sound of a gunshot. Issa and Bintou's father go to investigate and discover that it is a hunting party of familiar faces: Tiga and his father, who have also set up camp nearby. They greet one another with visible joy, but Tiga remains distant. His eyes cloud with resentment as he notices Issa and Bintou together. He spits on the ground at the sight of them and turns away without a word. Bintou, on the other hand, is happy as she reconnects with Tiga's sister, a friend she has not seen since their departure from the village.



A "white job" Bintou and Tiga's sister exchange updates. Tiga's sister is saddened to hear that Ali died in Ouagadougou. She shares with Bintou that her lover, Raogo, now has a "white job" (a job tied to the city). Issa overhears the phrase and finds it amusing.



Tiga assaults Bintou Issa and Bintou are playing hide-and-seek in the bushes. Armed with a bow and arrows, Tiga stalks Issa. He shoots an arrow at Issa and misses. Tiga takes off running through the underbrush. Issa chases after him. Tiga eventually climbs into a tree and hides among the branches. As Bintou walks alone through the bush, Tiga secretly follows her. He suddenly steps into her path and confesses his love. Bintou rejects his advances. Visibly enraged, Tiga forcefully pins her down and begins to undress her against her will. Her screams reach Tiga's sister nearby. She rushes to intervene. Tiga lets go of Bintou and lashes out at his sister with curses, accusing her of betraying him by defending Bintou. Having learned what happened, Issa goes after Tiga and grabs him by the collar. He calls him a coward for attacking a defenseless woman and dares him to show the same brutality toward him as he did with Bintou. Issa then shoves Tiga into the river. Tiga, seething with rage, swears he will make Issa pay. Tiga's father comes to apologize on his son's behalf. Despite the two families working the land together, Tiga keeps his distance, refusing to take part in the communal effort. Instead, he withdraws into the bush, hoping to sharpen his archery skills, but his attempts are fruitless. He throws his arc and arrows and steals his father's gun.



Bintou is pregnant As Bintou and Issa quietly speak about the child they are expecting, Bintou's father overhears them. He accuses Issa of betrayal and his daughter of bringing shame upon the family. He tells Issa he never wants to see him near his campsite again and banishes him. Bintou's father ties her up and punishes her. But Bintou's mother confronts him, pleading for compassion. He refuses, declaring he no longer considers Bintou his daughter and washes his hands of her fate. Bintou's mother unties her, braids her hair with care, and secretly allows her to bring food to Issa, who now lives in solitude on the outskirts of the family's campsite.



Issa longs for the community Issa watches from a distance as the others work together. In the late hours of the evening, after the laborers have gone home, Issa enters the field alone and fulfills his share, tilling the communal land.



Bintou has a Boy Bintou struggles through intense pain. Tiga's father believes the difficulty stems from the unresolved anger of Bintou's father. He urges his friend to let go of his resentment and forgive both Bintou and Issa. Bintou's father sends someone to fetch Issa. Shortly after, Bintou delivers a baby boy. The community celebrates the birth of Bintou's child. But Tiga keeps his distance. Tiga's sister notices her brother acting oddly. Growing suspicious, she quietly follows him. She sees him retrieving their father's gun from a hiding place. She decides to inform the community.



A life of delinquency Unaware of any danger, Issa is crouched beside his bicycle, repairing a flat tire. Hidden nearby, Tiga takes aim, ready to strike. But before he can act, two figures appear, his father and Bintou's father. Alerted by Bintou, they arrive just in time to disarm Tiga, preventing the violence he had been about to unleash. Tiga's father banishes Tiga. Tiga heads to Ouagadougou, where he drifts aimlessly and falls into a life of petty crime. One day, while trying to steal a moped, Tiga is spotted by the owner and chased through the streets. Just when it seems like he will be caught, Raogo, who recognizes Tiga, distracts the pursuer and sends him off in the wrong direction, giving Tiga a chance to escape.



Raogo returns home Tiga thanks Raogo for saving him from going to prison. He tells Raogo that his sister misses him deeply and cries for him every day. Tiga urges Raogo to return to the countryside and reunite with the woman who loves him. Taking Tiga's advice to heart, Raogo decides to go back home.



"Let's go! Work awaits us." Raogo returns home. Tiga's sister welcomes him with joy. The village celebrates his homecoming. Raogo presents his beloved with a bracelet from the city. But soon, Bintou's father calls out, "Let's go! Work awaits us!" Immediately, the members of the community grab their tools and head to the fields, ready to resume the rhythm of rural life.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

TIGA

Driven by jealousy and rejection, Tiga lashes out violently, nearly killing Issa and shattering village trust. Cast into exile, he drifts into urban alienation.

Jealous Tiga is deeply jealous of Issa, especially after Bintou chooses Issa as her partner. His jealousy intensifies when Bintou becomes pregnant, leading him to feel rejected and humiliated. This emotional turmoil drives much of his destructive behavior, including his eventual attempt to kill Issa.

Impulsive/violent Tiga's actions are marked by impulsivity and aggression. Rather than processing his emotions or seeking reconciliation, he resorts to violence. His attempt to shoot Issa is a rash and dangerous act that threatens the safety and stability of the entire community. This impulsiveness ultimately leads to his banishment.

Alienated After being expelled from the village, Tiga becomes a symbol of alienation. In the city, he is disconnected from his roots and turns to petty crime, attempting to steal a motorbike. His isolation reflects a loss of identity and belonging, a kind of social death.

ISSA

Issa's devotion to Bintou and his commitment to village life reflect a loving spirit rooted in emotional maturity and resilience. Patient and respectful, he endures rejection without retaliation, quietly honoring tradition and

familial authority. His work ethic and calm demeanor ultimately restore trust, positioning him as a pillar of community and compassion.

Loving Issa is portrayed as genuinely affectionate and emotionally committed to Bintou. Their relationship is tender and sincere, and his love for her is evident in his willingness to return to the village despite being banished. His presence during Bintou's labor and his acceptance by her family underscore his devotion and emotional maturity.

Patient Unlike Tiga, who reacts impulsively and violently to rejection, Issa remains calm and composed. Even after being expelled from the household, he does not retaliate or confront Bintou's father. His patience is rewarded when he is eventually welcomed back.

Hardworking Issa is part of the rural community's daily labor, farming, fishing, and contributing to survival. His role in the village reflects a strong work ethic and a commitment to communal life. He doesn't seek escape in the city like Tiga; instead, he remains grounded in the values of rural subsistence.

Respectful Issa respects both Bintou's autonomy and her family's authority. Even when faced with hostility, he does not challenge the elders aggressively. His respectful demeanor helps him earn trust and eventually reintegrate into the family, especially during the birth of his child.

BINTOU

Bintou emerges as a fiercely independent and emotionally resilient figure, challenging tradition with mature self-possession and clarity. Her intelligent navigation of romantic and familial tensions reveals a woman grounded in conviction, capable of enduring pain without compromising her autonomy.

Independent Bintou demonstrates a strong sense of independence, especially in her romantic choices. Despite the expectations of her family and the pressure from Tiga, she chooses Issa as her partner. This decision, though controversial, reflects her desire to assert control over her own life and body. Her independence challenges traditional norms and sets the stage for the film's central conflict.

Resilient Throughout the film, Bintou faces emotional and social challenges, of which her pregnancy, her father's anger, and the tension between her suitors. Yet she remains emotionally strong and grounded. Her resilience is especially evident during her labor, when she endures physical pain and emotional uncertainty, ultimately bringing new life into a fractured family.

Intelligent Bintou navigates complex relationships with sensitivity and awareness. She understands the emotional stakes of her choices and responds with maturity. Her interactions with Issa are tender and sincere, while her rejection of Tiga is firm.

BINTOU'S FATHER

Initially rigid and resistant to Bintou's autonomy, her father embodies the weight of tradition and patriarchal authority, struggling to reconcile cultural expectations with personal change. Yet as Bintou endures and asserts her path, he gradually softens, revealing a capacity for growth and reconciliation that restores familial balance.

Authoritative Bintou's father embodies traditional patriarchal authority. He makes critical decisions for the family, such as banishing Issa after discovering Bintou's pregnancy and choosing to sell the donkey and cart to survive. His role reflects the weight of responsibility and control often placed on male heads of households in rural communities. His authority is unquestioned, but it is also challenged by the emotional realities of his daughter's choices.

Pragmatic Despite his initial anger and rigid stance, Bintou's father shows a capacity for practical reasoning. When Bintou goes into labor, he sets aside his pride and allows Issa to return, recognizing the need for unity and support. His decision to sell the family's cart and donkey, though painful, is driven by economic necessity. These moments reveal a man who, while steeped in tradition, is capable of adapting when survival and family welfare demand it.

Emotionally Complex Although he appears stern and inflexible, Bintou's father undergoes a subtle emotional transformation. His reconciliation with Issa and his participation in the celebration of his grandson's birth show a softer, more compassionate side. His final line, "Let's go, work awaits us," captures both his resilience and his quiet acceptance of life's burdens. He is a man caught between tradition and change, pride and love.

THEMES

Aid vs independence International aid often arrives as a lifeline to communities in distress, driven by humanitarian urgency and global solidarity. Yet, when such assistance becomes routine and unbalanced, it risks undermining the very independence it aims to provide. Reliance on external help can slowly displace local initiative, turning survival into passive expectation and weakening a community's ability to shape its own future. Dignity may erode when rhythms of life are dictated not by personal or collective choice, but by outside schedules and donor priorities. Aid, then, must be reimagined, not as perpetual sustenance, but as a catalyst for renewal and empowerment. The core question remains: how can generosity preserve autonomy rather than replace it? In *Yam Daabo*, this tension crystallizes in the story of Bintou's father, whose decision to walk away from dependency becomes a quiet act of resistance and reclamation.

Illustrative moment: Bintou's father looks on with disgust as the villagers, baskets in hand, suspend all activity each day to await the arrival of a truck carrying food aid from the international community. When it finally comes, the villagers push and shove without dignity, stretching out their containers for meager portions of grain. Over time, the villagers have lost all sense of independence. Their daily rhythm no longer belongs to them but is dictated by the institutions behind the donations. Determined to reclaim control over his time and actions, Bintou's father decides to leave the village and head for Ouagadougou. From that moment forward, even though fate later deals him the tragic death of young Ali and forces a return to the village, he at least governs his own choices. He settles on more arable land and begins to cultivate it on his own terms, choosing when to work and when to rest. He tells his family, "Let's go! Work awaits us!" And that work, earned by their own hands, restores the independence and dignity that had been lost in the village where others still wait for handouts.



Dignity/Pride Pride and dignity are essential threads in the fabric of human identity. They mark our sense of worth, our autonomy, and our place in the world. These values transcend material conditions; they are bound to our capacity to shape our own destinies and live by principles we deem just. Whether through labor, creativity, or resistance, individuals and communities often find dignity in reclaiming control over their lives. In contexts where external forces undermine this autonomy, such as persistent dependency on foreign aid, pursuing self-reliance becomes an act of prideful defiance. This belief is vividly embodied by Bintou's family, who reject passive waiting and embrace action. Disillusioned by the numbing effects of international assistance, they choose motion over stagnation, carving out a life rooted in ingenuity and resilience, and, thus, restoring not only their physical lives but also their dignity and pride.

Illustrative moment: For Bintou's family, true dignity stems from self-determination. Disillusioned by the cycle of foreign aid that has dulled the will of his people, Bintou's father chooses to break away, sparing his wife and children from the inertia of waiting for international handouts. Unlike the villagers who remain stagnant, his family moves forward, searching for a place that calls on their creativity and agricultural ingenuity. Once settled, they cultivate the land, construct shelters, and shape a future with their own hands.



Through this deliberate reclaiming of time and labor, they restore their sense of pride and autonomy, quietly resisting the systems that have reduced others to passive dependence.

Choice Choice is often considered a measure of freedom. Yet, in many contexts, it emerges not from liberty but from necessity. Under conditions of scarcity and pressure, the act of choosing becomes fraught. Options exist, but they are shaped by limitations, and each path carries its own set of compromises. When survival is at stake, decisions may feel more like obligations than expressions of free will. Social expectations, economic hardship, and unpredictable circumstances blur the line between agency and constraint. Even intentional decisions are rarely free from influence. This tension comes into focus in the story of Bintou's family: though they appear to choose, leaving behind aid dependency or selecting romantic partners, these choices are deeply conditioned by poverty, loss, and disruption, revealing how freedom can be shadowed by forces beyond one's control.

Illustrative moment: Bintou's family is faced with various instances where they must choose one of several things: Between depending on foreign aid or leaving to carve a life for themselves, the family chooses the latter path. Of her two suitors, Tiga and Issa, Bintou chooses Issa. However, while the characters appear to make decisions, they also seem to be haunted by undecidability, that is, by something that evades their free will. The family deciding to sell their donkey and cart, the tragic death of Ali in the city of Ouagadougou, Bintou's pregnancy that disrupts the family's equilibrium and harmony, Tiga running to Ouagadougou and slipping into a life of crime, all are circumstances dictated by poverty, social expectations, and survival pressures, which seems to suggest that choice is often an illusion in contexts of deprivation.



Rural vs. Urban Life The contrast between village and city life is often shaped by differing rhythms, values, and social structures. The village typically offers familiarity, shared history, and a deep sense of community rooted in tradition. Daily life may be marked by scarcity, but relationships tend to be strong, and collective responsibility often prevails. In contrast, the city promises economic opportunity, modern conveniences, and upward mobility, but it can also breed isolation, competition, and vulnerability. Urban environments frequently demand the sacrifice of social bonds for the pursuit of survival, making inhabitants more exposed to danger, indifference, and loss. While the village sustains emotional grounding through community ties, the city challenges this stability with its fast-paced demands and unpredictable systems. These themes emerge in *Yam Daabo*, where Bintou's family leaves their village in search of a better life but encounters hardship, disintegration, and tragedy in the city, only to rediscover unity and hope upon returning to a rural way of life.

Illustrative moment: Despite economic hardship, Bintou's family remains united and embarks together on the journey to the city. Throughout their trip, their actions reflect a strong sense of collectivism: Side by side, they push their cart, drawn by the family's mule, over the rocky paths leading to Ouagadougou. But urban life soon reveals its harsh cost: the family is stripped of its means, forced to sell both its donkey and cart. The family's unity is shattered by tragedy when young Ali is fatally hit by a car. Even basic empathy is lacking, as seen in the truck driver, who abandons the family midway through the return journey for lack of fare. Ultimately, it is in the rural landscape that the community is restored, through the joyful meeting with Tiga's father, collective labor, and the birth of Bintou and Issa's child. Although the city offers opportunities, "white jobs," as Tiga's sister calls them, it also carries dangers that may never match the comfort and resilience of village life.



Poverty and determination More than the absence of money, poverty is a condition that shapes lives, limits possibilities, and influences everyday choices. It can deprive people of education, healthcare, and opportunity, trapping communities in cycles of struggle. Yet even in the face of overwhelming hardship, determination can spark change. Many individuals confront poverty not with resignation but with courage and persistence, using their resilience as a tool for survival and progress. When systems fail and support is scarce, hope and hard work become the foundations for transformation. This idea comes to life in *Yam Daabo*, where poverty dominates the dusty savannah, but one family refuses to be defeated. Through

determination and labor, it rises from despair to reclaim dignity and a future, proving that poverty, while powerful, is not absolute.

Illustrative moment: In *Yam Daabo*, poverty looms large as a constant force shaping both the environment and the lives of its people. The barren, sun-scorched savannah, where only the enduring baobab trees rise from the dust, reflects a landscape steeped in hardship. This physical desolation imprints itself onto the villagers, visible in their worn clothing, blank expressions, and passive routine of waiting for foreign aid. Determined to reclaim dignity, Bintou's family leaves the village in search of better prospects in Ouagadougou. Yet, the city only deepens the family's struggle: it is forced to sell its donkey and cart just to survive and can only afford a half-way fare when it decides to return to the village. Disillusioned but not defeated, the family eventually settles elsewhere, where it begins to cultivate new land. The family's success proves that poverty need not be a permanent condition. Through collective labor, resilience, and determination, they carve a path forward. As Bintou's father declares, "Let's go! Work awaits us!"



Love Across many societies, love often unfolds within the boundaries of tradition, where relationships are shaped by communal expectations and long-held customs. Marriage serves not merely as a romantic milestone but as a symbol of duty, honor, and social order. Those who fall in love must often navigate a path laid out by others, where personal feelings are weighed against reputation, family obligations, and cultural rules. In such contexts, persistence in love is not passive; it becomes a quiet strength, allowing connection to endure without rejecting the values surrounding it. This kind of love grows in tension, not in effortlessness, learning to bend without breaking, to adapt without surrendering. It seeks to balance the private and the public, heart and heritage, longing and loyalty. This theme echoes in the story of Bintou and Issa, whose love persists despite, and through, the pressures of the world around them.

Illustrative moment: Bintou and Issa conceive a child out of wedlock. For their violation of societal norms, Bintou is punished by her father and Issa is banished from the community. Although Bintou and Issa face shame and rejection, their bond endures. Bintou's mother becomes love's quiet champion: she unties her daughter; she braids her hair in the manner of expecting mothers, and she allows her daughter to continue seeing Issa in secret in his hiding place on the outskirts of the village. Though pushed away, Issa is nourished by Bintou's secret offerings and unwavering loyalty. Their love is not perfect; it goes against the grains of social expectations. However, it is persistent, seeking warmth in hiding, hope through heartbreak, and strength within silence.



Patriarchy Patriarchy, as a system of male-centered authority, has long shaped social structures, family hierarchies, and cultural expectations across many societies. It functions by placing men, particularly fathers, at the center of decision-making, controlling resources, regulating relationships, and upholding communal standards of honor and morality. At its strongest, patriarchy provides order and stability, but it often does so at the cost of silencing other voices, especially those of women and youth. Its power is rooted in tradition and reinforced through institutions that treat male authority as both natural and necessary. However, its limitations become clear when human emotions, needs, and vulnerabilities challenge the rigidity of patriarchal control. Moments of crisis or transformation, such as, birth, love, or loss, reveal that control is not absolute, and that compassion, compromise, and interdependence can override dominance. This tension is central to *Yam Daabo*, where father figures like Bintou's and Tiga's wield traditional authority. Yet, as Bintou's father navigates issues of love, pregnancy, and family survival, his role exposes both the strength and the fragility of patriarchy.

Illustrative moment: Bintou's father makes decisions about his daughter's relationships and the family's economic survival. It is Bintou's father who decides to leave the village and seek a better social situation for his entire family in the city of Ouagadougou. It is he, again, who decides to sell the family's donkey and cart to acquire city goods. For this decision, Bintou's father does not ask for the women's opinions, as he is the sole proprietor of the family's goods and the one



to decide where to place these assets. He is thus the comptroller of the family's finances. His initial rejection of Issa after discovering Bintou's pregnancy reflects a patriarchal impulse to control Bintou's sexuality and preserve family honor. Yet, his eventual acceptance of Issa during Bintou's labor reveals the limitations of his rigid authority when confronted with human vulnerability. Bintou's agency in choosing her partner also signals a quiet resistance to patriarchal control, suggesting a generational shift toward autonomy.

Marriage Beyond being a romantic union, marriage serves as a key social institution rooted in tradition and communal expectations. In many societies, it is seen as a moral obligation that upholds family honor and community stability. Sexual relationships and childbearing are expected to occur within this framework; without marriage, such actions are often viewed as transgressions. While love may spark a connection, formal recognition through marriage is what grants social legitimacy. This reveals a broader tension between personal freedom and collective norms, where individual emotions are sometimes overshadowed by societal duty. In this light, marriage becomes a negotiated space, one that balances private desire with public approval. This dynamic sets the stage for stories like Bintou and Issa's, where their love must navigate a landscape shaped by cultural values and familial expectations.

Illustrative moment: Bintou and Issa are in love, and their relationship is warmly accepted by Bintou's family, so much so that her father naturally invites Issa to join their journey to Ouagadougou and support their efforts. However, since the young couple is not yet married, any sexual relationship between them, let alone a pregnancy, is considered unacceptable and a serious violation of the community's moral codes. When Bintou becomes pregnant, her father responds with harsh discipline: he punishes his daughter and banishes Issa from the household. The conflict reveals the powerful weight placed on marital propriety as a measure of legitimacy and honor within the social order. Their romantic bond clashes with communal expectations, exposing the tension between personal agency and societal obligations. Ultimately, the reconciliation between Issa and Bintou's family becomes a negotiated middle ground, suggesting that marriage functions as a symbolic space where individual desires and collective values must be reconciled.



Banishment Banishment has long served as a tool of social regulation, especially within tightly knit traditional communities. It functions not merely as a form of punishment but as a symbolic act that reinforces communal norms, delineating acceptable behavior and reaffirming collective identity. By expelling those who violate moral boundaries, the community publicly denounces their actions and asserts its authority to maintain social cohesion. This exclusion often carries severe emotional and existential consequences, stripping the individual of kinship ties, identity, and the moral support network that upholds personal integrity. Ouedraogo tackles this issue by showing how social severance can accelerate personal alienation and ethical deterioration.

Illustrative moment: Motivated by jealousy, Tiga commits violent acts against Bintou and twice tries to murder Issa. These transgressions prompt the village, represented by his father, to see him as having breached the community's moral code. In response, Tiga's father apologizes publicly and exiles him, a powerful gesture that underscores the society's boundaries and values. The banishment, reinforced by his father's harsh words labeling him "a damned child," strips Tiga of his identity and sense of belonging. This form of punishment aligns with the community's traditional way of enforcing justice through exclusion and shame. Disconnected from his roots, Tiga ends up in Ouagadougou, where he turns to theft and becomes increasingly alienated. Tiga's exile from his community leads him to deeper moral and social decay.

Social Death Social death occurs when individuals become isolated from the relationships, roles, and communal bonds that give life coherence and meaning. It is not marked by physical demise, but rather by exclusion, being denied recognition, dignity, and social participation. Whether through exile, imprisonment, or emotional estrangement, this severance erodes identity and belonging, leaving a person psychologically adrift. Communities often enforce social death to maintain norms, but its consequences can be deeply dehumanizing. Lacking connection, the individual may lose purpose and turn toward self-destructive behaviors or moral disengagement. The unraveling of one's social self can be as devastating as literal death, because it severs ties that tether a person to humanity. This concept becomes especially visible in

the story of Tiga, whose banishment from his village initiates a descent into alienation, crime, and a hollow existence, his actions revealing the slow erasure of self through social abandonment.

Illustrative moment: Once an integral member of the village, Tiga commits violent acts that lead to his expulsion: he assaults Bintou and attempts to kill his rival, Issa, first with a bow, then with a gun. In response, Tiga's father banishes him for violating the moral codes of communal life. Stripped of kinship and belonging, Tiga relocates to the city, where he descends into petty crime, a reflection of his unraveling social identity now severed from communal values and relationships. His exile marks the symbolic beginning of his death: a disconnection from the social fabric that once gave him meaning. When he later encourages Raogo to return to the village and reunite with his sister, it becomes a poignant gesture, a warning born of regret, and an effort to spare Raogo the same fate of isolation and lost selfhood.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the significance of the title of the film *Yam Daabo* (The Choice).
2. To what extent does the film suggest that belonging to a community is essential to moral and psychological stability?
3. How does *Yam Daabo* portray the clash between private love and public morality?
4. In what ways does Bintou's quiet resistance challenge tradition?
5. How does the film suggest that true freedom lies in reclaiming control over time, movement, and labor?
6. How does Bintou's father's declaration, "Let's go! Work awaits us" function as a moral and political stance?