

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, PhD

THE JOURNEY OF THE HYENA / Touki Bouki (1973)

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 Cannes Film Festival. In 1992, he 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 *Touki Bouki* is a film characterized by its fragmented, non-linear rhythm. Its Wolof title, which translates to *The Journey of the Hyena*, serves as a critique of modern Senegalese society, portrayed as a shameless, undignified hyena relentlessly chasing wealth. The film explores themes such as oppression, class struggle, belief systems, love, sexuality, and the pursuit of happiness. The languages spoken in the film include Wolof, Arabic, and French.

Background *Touki Bouki* was filmed in Senegal, specifically in the capital city of Dakar and its suburbs. Most of the actors were novices, taking on their first roles in the film. The movie's \$30,000 budget was partially funded by the Senegalese government. While it was not widely embraced by the Senegalese public and press because of its unfamiliar narrative style, *Touki Bouki* later gained recognition as an innovative work in African cinema. The film was screened at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival and won the International Critics' Award, as well as the FIPRESCI Prize at the Moscow Film Festival.

MAIN CHARACTERS

MORY (Magaye Niang): A young Senegalese herder turned drifter, who dreams of immigrating to France and resorts to various illegal schemes to raise money for his journey

ANTA (Miriam Niang): Mory's girlfriend, who follows him through all his adventures

THE SORCERESS-RESTAURATEUR (Aminata Fall): A restaurateur to whom Mory owes money, and who curses him every time she sees him.

SYNOPSIS

Two young Senegalese, Mory, a herder's son who has led his last zebu to the slaughterhouse and now decorates his large motorcycle with its horns, and Anta, his girlfriend and a student at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, dream of escaping the misery of their Senegalese slum for a prosperous life in France. However, they need money for the journey. To obtain it, Mory drags Anta into his schemes of theft, fraud, and deception. Despite her mother's warnings to stay away from Mory—whom she despises for both his appearance and his criminal tendencies—Anta is deeply in love with him and willing to follow him in all his ventures. After several failed attempts to secure money for their trip, Mory and Anta finally rob Mr. Mapenda, a gay man infatuated with Mory. Before purchasing their tickets to Paris, Mory and Anta parade through their neighborhood, flaunting their stolen wealth in elegant clothes and riding in the car they stole from Mapenda. This display serves as their revenge against their former detractors, who,

now drawn to the fresh banknotes Mory eagerly hands out, sing his praises and dance in admiration. The couple finally purchase their ticket and head to the Dakar harbor. When the moment to board for Paris finally arrives, Mory has a sudden change of heart. He refuses to embark, leaving Anta to undertake the journey alone.

SCENES

The young shepherd Riding a zebu, a young shepherd boy, Mory, leads a herd of these large, horned beasts to the slaughterhouse. There, the animals are guided through a narrow doorway into a vast room, where they are brought down on a blood-soaked floor and slaughtered one by one by butchers. The carcasses are then hoisted onto hooks and cut.



Mory's unconventional bike The young shepherd returns to the village on his zebu, but without his herd. The camera fast-forwards. Mory is now a young man. He speeds down the road on a motorcycle, its handlebars adorned with what one might imagine to be the skull of his last zebu.



To the big city The camera shifts. In the foreground, a suburb of wooden houses with corrugated metal roofs and narrow streets. In the background, Dakar's business district with its characteristic skyscrapers. Mory bursts out of the slum at full speed, cheered on by the children, and heads toward the center of Dakar. A mail carrier, his satchel slung across his shoulder, walks across a pedestrian bridge, exuding a nonchalant air. The camera shifts. He pauses for a moment, contemplating the winding path ahead through the maze-like streets of the slum.



Anita's Mother Anta's mother is a vegetable vendor. Seated before her display of tomatoes and peppers, she watches the mail carrier pass by with a keen interest. Turning to one of her customers as a witness, she declares with certainty that the mail carrier is hiding a letter from her son, who is in Paris. "Nothing good comes from Paris!" The customer responds, insisting that Anta's mother should have listened and never let her son leave—because none of these immigrants ever return from Paris. And if they do, they come back with white women and diseases. The mother retorts that her son would never do such a thing; he is in France solely for his studies.



Anta cannot concentrate and gets angry Seated at a table with her books spread before her, Anta studies her lessons in a courtyard within the slum. The call of the imam echoes through the air, mingling with the wails of a crying baby. From time to time, Anta lifts her head, glancing toward the source of the noise, her expression betrays her irritation. The customer helps herself to vegetables and promises to pay later. At the same moment, Anta, on her way to university, appears. She snatches the customer's basket and spills the vegetables onto the table. Anta tells the customer to pay her mother now or come back when she has the money for her groceries. Anta's mother apologizes to the customer and scolds her daughter. Anta tells her mother to stop being taken advantage of by the neighbors.



Mory is despised Anta tells her mother to inform Mory, in case he comes while she is away, to meet her at the university. Anta's mother replies that she does not understand what her daughter sees in Mory. She describes him as a man without class or shame, who dresses like a beggar. She



adds that whatever the university teaches Anta does not seem to be making her intelligent.

Water is scarce On her way to the university, Anta passes through the washerwomen's neighborhood. Women, young girls, and little children are busy hauling water in basins and scrubbing clothes. The search for water turns into jostling and heated disputes.



Anta is heckled At the university, a group of leftist students heckle Anta for refusing to take part in their revolutionary activities. They accuse her of being more interested in sex than in noble causes. Mory comes to fetch Anta. The leftist students arrest him. They accuse him of distracting Anta from political meetings. They attack Mory, tie him up and parade him in their pickup truck.



Mory is attacked The scene of Mory being harassed by the students is juxtaposed with two other striking moments: Anta, desperately running through the city in search of Mory, and a sacrificial sheep being slaughtered, its blood drained by two men. Anta asks the neighborhood restaurateur if she has seen Mory today. The restaurateur responds that Mory still owes her for an unpaid plate of rice and hopes he suffers from indigestion because of it. Anta then heads to one of her and Mory's hideouts by the rocky beach, where she finds him. They make love.



Let's go to France first Mory sits on a cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, his gaze fixed on the horizon. Anta lies on her back, resting her head on Mory's knees. Both are completely nude. Mory announces that a ship is departing for France tomorrow and suggests they take the opportunity. Anta replies that if he has money, he should first pay the sorceress-restaurateur. Mory counters that they should go to France and send her a check once they've made it. Mory says he has a plan for their departure. First, they need to find some cash, bribe a few people, spread money around, even to children, and create the impression that they are incredibly wealthy. That way, no one will question them at the port, and they'll be able to board the ship without suspicion. Mory promises that when they return, they will dominate everyone, and people will be so impressed that they'll make them presidents twice over. The two young lovers set off to find money for their scheme. Along the way, they run into the sorceress-restaurateur, who curses them.



'Paris, paradise on earth' Mory and Anta's ride is accompanied by the voice of Joséphine Baker, singing in the background, "Paris, Paris, Paris, a little piece of paradise on Earth." As they pass through a baobab forest, Mory ties his bike to a tree, and the young couple walks toward the riverbank. Mory notices some *gris-gris* (traditional charms) on the shore, and Anta advises him not to touch them.

Charms for every wish Mory ignores Anta's warnings. He sits on the riverbank and unties the charms, telling Anta that they come in all kinds—for syphilis, for broken hearts, for luck, for wealth, for love. After inspecting them, he carefully repacks the talismans and places them back where he found them. The two young lovers then return to the city.



Losing at Three-Card-Monte From the bridge overlooking the slum, Mory watches a crowd gathered around a hustler engaged in a game of Three-Card Monte. Tempted by the gamble, Mory decides to try his luck, wagering money he doesn't actually have. He loses and bolts, sprinting through the streets as the hustler and the crowd chase after him.



A corrupt cop Just when Mory believes he has outrun them, he finds himself face to face with a police officer, who gestures for him to come closer. Thinking fast, Mory offers the officer a cigarette. The policeman accepts the gesture and signals him to continue on his way.

Mory steals the chest Mory and Anta sit in the stands of a wrestling arena. Anta remarks that on Sundays, a lot of money flows through the venue, and she suggests they rob the arena's earnings. The following Sunday, a wrestling match is held to raise funds for the construction of a memorial in honor of the French general Charles de Gaulle, meant to "celebrate the sacred bonds that unite France and Senegal." The event draws Senegal's elite, and the arena is packed with spectators. The wrestlers, their bodies adorned with gris-gris, face off after coating themselves in mystical liquids. Mory and Anta spot two heavily guarded chests. They suspect that one contains the day's earnings. After some hesitation, while all eyes remain fixed on the wrestlers, Mory and Anta decide to take their chance and go for one of the chests. They load it onto a taxi, with Anta hopping in. Mory follows closely behind on his motorcycle.



The wrong chest Anta drives the taxi to an old, abandoned fort. The driver, increasingly uneasy in the eerie surroundings, grows fearful and considers turning back. They soon arrive at a large, dilapidated house fort. As the driver carries the chest up the stairs, it slips from his grasp, causing the latch to break. Overcome by curiosity, he decides to take a look inside. The moment the driver opens the chest, he screams in horror. Inside rests a human skull, its hollow gaze staring back at him. Overwhelmed with fear, he bolts, leaving Mory and Anta behind. Only then do they realize their mistake: instead of stealing a fortune, they have taken a wrestler's chest filled with gris-gris.



Mory robs Mapenda Mory and Anta return to the beach to rethink their plans. Mory suggests visiting Mapenda, a wealthy gay man who has a crush on him. Upon seeing Mory, Mapenda is visibly delighted and eagerly invites him into his home. While Mapenda takes a shower, preparing himself for what he hopes will be an intimate encounter, Mory seizes the opportunity to rob him. Mory then instructs Mapenda's chauffeur to drive him back to the city in Mapenda's American car. In Mapenda's American convertible, Mory discards his worn-out clothes and dons the stolen garments taken from Mapenda's home. Dressed in his newfound attire, he raises his fist in the style of the Black Panthers.



Newfound fame Mory and Anta, seated in Mapenda's convertible, exude an air of newfound luxury, Mory with a cigar clenched between his teeth, Anta elegantly smoking a cigarette from a long holder, both dressed in freshly stolen attire. As they cruise through the streets, they unexpectedly find themselves swept into a parade, surrounded by majestic horses and the rhythmic energy of a marching band. The crowd erupts in admiration, cheering them on. Mory and Anta arrive in their neighborhood aboard Mapenda's American convertible. A large crowd awaits them, stopping them in their tracks. The people erupt into song and dance, celebrating their arrival. Among them, the sorceress-restaurateur, once their relentless critic, now praises them with compliments and rhythmic dance moves. With an air of arrogance, Mory flashes his wealth, handing out banknotes to the crowd. The people part into two lines, allowing him and Anta to pass. Meanwhile, in his empty home, Mapenda is completely nude. He calls the police, reporting his losses and denouncing Mory and Anta.



Mory changes his mind Mory and Anta purchase their tickets to France. Anta boards the ship first, but when it's Mory's turn, he hesitates, changes his mind, and runs out of the port. Anta waits for him in vain as the ship departs, taking her to France while Mory remains behind.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

MORY Mory is a disillusioned dreamer, yearning for escape yet ultimately unable to break free from his reality. His rebellious nature manifests in his rejection of societal norms, while his opportunism drives him to deception and theft in pursuit of his idealized vision of Paris.

Dreamer Mory embodies the aspirations of many young Africans portrayed in the films of Sembène, Sissako, and other African filmmakers, whose works critique the illusionary dreams of escaping to Europe. Mory's most fervent desire is to integrate into European society, a vision shaped primarily by Europe's glamorous and fantastical aspects that Josephine Baker's recurrent song epitomizes in the film. Mory is convinced that life in France will offer him the freedom and prosperity he cannot find in Dakar.

Rebel A liar, a thief, and a swindler, Mory is a rebellious figure who exists on the fringes of the Senegalese society. His physical appearance, clothing, and his mode of transportation (his loud, imposing motorcycle adorned with the skull of his family's last zebu) mark his refusal to conform. Both Anta's mother and the sorceress-restaurateur criticize him, positioning him further outside social norms and reinforcing his rejection of familial and societal expectations.

Opportunist In pursuit of his dream, Mory resorts to deception, fraud, theft, and even prostitution. Although his schemes do not always yield success, they reveal a certain resourcefulness and opportunism. His willingness to manipulate situations in his favor underscores his relentless determination yet also highlights the precariousness of his aspirations.

Disillusioned At the port of Dakar, as Mory watches passengers board, vivid images of zebras being led through a narrow passage to the slaughterhouse flood his mind. Confronted with the unsettling parallel between his escape and the fate of these animals, Mory ultimately abandons his journey. Disillusioned by Europe, which now evokes imagery of oppression and servitude, Mory realizes the inescapable constraints of his existence.

ANTA Anta epitomizes ambition and rebellion. She defies societal expectations and resists traditional gender roles. As a transitional figure, she ultimately asserts her independence by leaving Senegal alone, marking a decisive break from the restrictions that had previously shaped her identity as a young woman.

Ambitious Unlike Mory, Anta pursues higher education, embodying aspirations for intellectual growth and personal advancement. Her determination to forge her own path reflects a rejection of conventional gender roles and societal constraints. However, as both her mother and university peers point out, she appears overly influenced by Mory, suggesting a tension between her autonomy and her attachment to him.

Rebellious Anta defies traditional gender roles by asserting agency in spaces where women are typically expected to be passive. Her involvement in Mory's schemes reflects a deliberate rejection of societal expectations, positioning her as a figure of defiance and autonomy. By embracing risk, she takes control of her own narrative, challenging prescribed limitations on female behavior.

Transitional While Mory hesitates at the threshold of departure, Anta remains committed to their plan, boarding the ship to France as intended. She waits for Mory, yet his absence forces her to confront the reality of forging her own path. Defying expectations that she will once again follow his lead, she makes the decisive choice to leave Senegal alone. Her unwavering resolve underscores her pragmatism and willingness to embrace change, even at the cost of abandoning the familiar for the unknown.

THE SORCERESS-RESTAURATEUR The sorceress-restaurateur represents both mysticism and moral ambiguity. She commands both fear; but she also serves as a symbol of corruption and shifting loyalties, revealing how power and ethics are routinely sacrificed for financial advantage in Senegal.

Enigmatic The sorceress-restaurateur operates within an eerie world of blood and mystical incantations. Mory, indebted to her over an unpaid meal, becomes the target of her curses and verbal attacks. Her hands, perpetually immersed in the blood and entrails of the animals she slaughters, reinforce her image as both a feared figure and an outcast within society.

Marginal The sorceress-restaurateur defies traditional gender roles, positioning herself outside the norms of Senegalese society. While men typically handle slaughter and butchering, she takes command with a tattooed face and a knife always in hand. Her actions challenge conventional femininity as she immerses herself in the entrails of the animals she kills.

Corrupt Through the reversal of the sorceress-restaurateur, Mambéty exposes the moral instability of a Senegalese society steeped in corruption. The moment Mory offers her a few banknotes, she immediately retracts her insults and shifts to praising him. Her actions embody a society that is both opportunistic and morally compromised, where principles are easily discarded in the face of financial gain.

THEMES

Classes Class warfare emerges through the divide between the privileged and the poor, where wealth dictates access, opportunity, and social status. In societies marked by inequality, the elite maintain dominance while the marginalized fight for visibility and recognition. Those born into poverty often face barriers that prevent upward mobility, forcing them to navigate economic hardships while watching prosperity flourish just beyond their reach. This battle is not merely about financial survival but also asserting dignity in a world that favors those in power. Djibril Diop Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* vividly illustrates this conflict through Mory and Anta, whose journey exposes the disparities between Dakar's impoverished communities and its towering business districts. Their quest for escape is not only driven by a desire for wealth but by a need to claim space in a system that has long excluded them.

Illustrative moment: The theme of class warfare emerges from the very beginning of the film, as the director juxtaposes the shantytown where Anta and Mory live and the business district of Dakar. The former is a dense cluster of wooden houses with rusted metal roofs, accessible only through narrow, winding dirt alleyways. Life here is marked by the reckless games of children chasing cars, the exhausting labor of washerwomen scrubbing clothes in large basins of water fetched at great effort and amid constant disputes, the desperate crowds swarming hustlers who promise fortune through precarious games of Three-Card Monte, and the corrupt policemen who overlook crimes in exchange for cigarettes. Towering over this struggling community are shimmering glass skyscrapers, behind which civil servants dressed in three-piece suits may not be visible, but are certainly imagined, seated behind polished desks. This is the world Mory and Anta aspire to reach. When Mory mounts his motorcycle and speeds toward the business district and the upscale neighborhoods of Dakar, he is engaging in a battle for recognition, confronting the holders of wealth and power using the only means available to him. His journey is not just about escaping poverty but about claiming a place in a world that has long been out of reach.

Neo-colonialism Neocolonialism describes the enduring dominance of former colonial powers over newly independent states through economic, political, and cultural dependencies. Although direct colonial rule has ended, imperial influence persists through trade policies, economic structures, and ideological frameworks that prioritize the interests of the colonizer rather than the needs of the local population. These mechanisms limit genuine autonomy, ensuring that global power hierarchies remain intact and disproportionately benefit former imperial states. Djibril Diop Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* critiques this dynamic by exposing elite complicity in sustaining neocolonial control. In postcolonial Senegal, the ruling class continues to align with French interests, valuing personal status and wealth over national sovereignty and development. Instead of advocating for policies that address widespread poverty and infrastructure deficits, the elite participates in symbolic gestures of allegiance to colonial institutions, reinforcing foreign influence while neglecting local progress.

Illustrative moment: A wrestling match is organized by the Dakar elite in order to raise money for a monument honoring General Charles de Gaulle. In the meantime, most Senegalese endure poverty in the slums, facing inadequate housing, lack of education, clean water and healthcare. The upper class's gathering for the event offers no tangible benefits. The children chasing Mory's bike in Mory and Anta's slum need school and hospital. The washerwomen fighting each other for water need clean, running water. The people trying their luck at three-card monte need reliable jobs. A monument honoring General Charles de Gaulle, does not address the people's existential issues.

Exile The rise of Africa's first elites was deeply intertwined with colonial education and, in many cases, European exile. Among the most striking examples is Léopold Sédar Senghor, Senegal's former president. Raised in a Catholic school from an early age, he later moved to Paris, where he excelled academically. His achievements eventually led him to the French Parliament as Senegal's representative before he became the country's first president. While Senghor was celebrated for his social success, he was also criticized for his cultural alienation, particularly his fervent admiration for French civilization and language. Yet, for many Senegalese, he remained a symbol of aspiration, someone to emulate in the pursuit of upward mobility. Of course, not everyone could rise to the level of deputy or president, but exile was widely seen as a path to transformation, a cleansing journey that offered the possibility of reinvention and prosperity. In the 1970s, migrating to Europe, though challenging, was still an attainable dream. Today, however, that dream has become increasingly out of reach, as Europe tightens its borders, growing more resistant to what it perceives as a "Black invasion."

Illustrative moment: Mory, his last zebu slaughtered, is drowning in debt, relentlessly pursued by his creditor, the sorceress-restaurateur, who never misses an opportunity to hurl insults at him. He confides in Anta his dream of fleeing to Europe. There, he believes, he will finally be able to send a check to settle his debts. Yet, Mory does not intend to remain abroad. His vision is grander. He sees his return as a transformation, a rebirth into a man of stature and respect, perhaps even a future president. He imagines himself mocking those who once humiliated him, proving them wrong. To fund this exile, which he considers a necessary step in his metamorphosis, he resorts to all kinds of deception and fraud. While Mory views his journey to the West as an initiation, Anta's mother, who has lost all contact with her own exiled son and anxiously awaits a letter from him each day, perceives exile as a tragic loss. Her neighbor takes an even grimmer view, insisting that exile brings nothing but disease upon one's return.

Appearance Appearance can serve as a powerful tool for social mobility, allowing individuals to construct identities that align with societal ideals of wealth and status. Clothing, accessories, and symbols of affluence often dictate perceptions, enabling those who adopt them to navigate spaces that would otherwise remain inaccessible. In communities where economic advancement is limited, visual markers of success can substitute for actual wealth, granting individuals a temporary sense of belonging among the privileged. This phenomenon highlights the performative nature of class, where outward presentation can overshadow lived realities. Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* illustrates this through Mory, who reinvents himself by adopting the garments and possessions of another, instantly altering how his community perceives him. His transformation exposes the illusion of respectability, revealing that acceptance and admiration are often contingent not on one's true status, but on the ability to project an image of success.

Illustrative moments: Mory achieves social ascension by mimicking the attire of Westerners. Mory robs Mapenda, a Senegalese gay man in love with him, deceives Mapenda's chauffeur into working for him, sheds his poor man's clothing, and dons Mapenda's luxurious garments. Mory then returns to his impoverished neighborhood in the suburbs of Dakar, seated alongside Anta in Mapenda's American convertible, him smoking a cigar, her holding a cigarette in an elegant cigarette holder. At his sight, the crowd that once harbored hostility toward him, including even the sorceress-restaurateur who had cursed him just days before, now cheers and dances for him in front of "his car." Mory distributes banknotes to the crowd, which parts to let him pass between two lines of applause and blessings. Thus, the outcast who once embodied rejection now moves through his community as a celebrated figure on account of his appearance.



Love/sexuality Love and sexuality are deeply intertwined with cultural and societal expectations, shaping how individuals navigate relationships and desire. In many communities, notions of morality dictate acceptable forms of intimacy, reinforcing standards that often clash with personal freedom. When relationships defy tradition, they become sites of scrutiny, with lovers judged not only for their feelings but for the social implications of their choices. Sexuality, especially when expressed outside of marriage or conventional norms, is often met with criticism, revealing underlying fears about control, reputation, and identity. Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* examines these tensions in 1970s Muslim Senegal, where Anta and Mory's relationship scandalizes their community. Their defiance of societal expectations exposes the restrictive attitudes toward sexuality, demonstrating how deeply ingrained moral codes shape perceptions of love, rebellion, and self-expression.

Illustrative moment: Through the scene of Mory and Mapenda, Mambéty puts on trial a sexuality that is taboo in Senegal: homosexuality. In search of money for his trip, Mory goes to see Mapenda. He finds him in the swimming pool of his big villa, flirting with a young man whom he dismisses without regard as soon as Mory appears. But as he takes a shower to get ready with Mory, the young man steals all his belongings and drives off in his car, leaving him totally naked in his room. Mambéty astutely subjects the homosexual to the judgment of his victims, caricaturing the homosexual as a promiscuous and predatory fool.



Corruption Corruption thrives where power is unchecked, turning access, justice, and survival into commodities that can be bought and sold. It undermines fairness, allowing those with wealth or influence to manipulate systems for their own benefit while leaving the vulnerable at a disadvantage. In such environments, bribery becomes a routine exchange, eroding trust in institutions and reinforcing cycles of inequality. Whether in politics, law enforcement, or everyday transactions, corruption distorts societal structures, making integrity seem optional rather than essential. Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* illustrates this reality, showing how Mory navigates a world where money dictates outcomes. His encounters reveal a system where even escape requires payment, emphasizing how deeply ingrained corruption is within social and economic frameworks. Through this portrayal, Mambéty critiques the way power operates, highlighting how financial leverage can override ethics and make deception a necessary survival tool.

Illustrative moment: Corruption is illustrated in a key scene where Mory is chased by a furious crowd after swindling a hustler out of 1,000 francs. Just when he believes he has escaped, he finds himself face-to-face with a policeman signaling him to approach. However, a half-smoked cigarette, casually offered to the officer, is enough to secure Mory's release, allowing him to evade his pursuers. In Senegal, it seems, even innocence has a price. Mory is aware of this reality. He tells Anta that in order to execute their plan to emigrate, they will need money to distribute at every step of the journey, purchasing access wherever necessary. Eventually, they manage to obtain the funds, which not only enable them to appear more respectable and less threatening but also secure a ticket for their passage. Not only do Mory and Anta successfully slip through the heavily guarded gates of the Port Autonome de Dakar, but they also manage to smuggle in a man who had previously been denied entry by a zealous armed guard wielding a baton. Through this, Mambéty seems to suggest that in Senegal, money corrupts souls and opens every door.



Beliefs Belief shapes identities, communities, and personal choices, offering guidance in uncertain times. It is rarely rigid, adapting to history, culture, and individual experiences. In many societies, religious devotion exists alongside other spiritual traditions, creating a blend of faith and practicality. This combination can reflect either a natural evolution or a contradiction, where formal teachings are supplemented by personal rituals. People often turn to belief not just for faith but for comfort, protection, or direction in life's struggles. Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* explores this complexity, showing how Senegalese spirituality merges Islamic devotion with mystical practices. The film raises thought-provoking questions about faith, highlighting how it evolves in response to history, poverty, and personal aspirations.

Illustrative moment: From the very first moments of *Touki Bouki*, the film offers a bird's-eye view of the shantytown where Anta and Mory live. Among the scenes depicted, men gather in prayer outside a mosque that has grown too small to accommodate all its faithful. Mambéty contrasts this image of devout faith with another: Mory, seated by the water, unwrapping packages filled with mystical texts prepared by marabouts, guides who offer spiritual protections, blessings, healing, or retributions for those seeking vengeance. Rather than embracing the talismans, Mory discards them, choosing instead to chase prosperity through deception. This juxtaposition hints that in a society shaped by colonialism, economic hardship, and existential uncertainty, the pursuit of meaning goes beyond rigid religious confines. Here, faith and pragmatism intertwine.

Quest Whether seeking freedom, success, or happiness, those who embark on quests for better lives must overcome obstacles that challenge their resolve. The path is rarely straightforward. Sacrifices must be made, and individuals may resort to deception or defiance to break free from limitations. This struggle reflects both desperation and hope, as people push against societal constraints in search of a new reality. Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* captures this theme through Mory and Anta, who refuse to accept their circumstances and instead chase an idealized future. Their journey is more than about leaving Dakar. It is mainly about believing in the possibility of a different life, even when the road to achieving it is uncertain and filled with compromise.

Illustrative moment: The film employs dramatic imagery to underscore this struggle. The juxtaposition of scenes depicting the slaughter of animals with moments of adversity faced by the two protagonists serves as a metaphor for their social suffocation. As Anta searches desperately for Mory, what she encounters instead is the bloodied knife of the sorceress-restaurateur, brutally butchering a sheep. Mory himself is harassed by leftist students who accuse him of diverting Anta from their revolutionary cause. His suffering is visually mirrored by another scene of a sheep being slaughtered. Mambéty suggests that life is suffocating, cruel, and even murderous. To escape it, Mory, the son of a herder, trades his last zebu for a motorcycle, symbol of flight and freedom. Together, he and his girlfriend Anta set off toward Dakar, with their ultimate goal being France, the final conquest of happiness.



Oppression-suffering Djibril Diop Mambéty's filmmaking draws a compelling parallel between human oppression and animal suffering, using powerful visual contrasts to highlight systemic domination. His work demonstrates how societal hierarchies dictate the fate of both individuals and creatures, framing violence as an enduring force that shapes existence. By juxtaposing images of human struggle with ritualized sacrifice, Mambéty underscores the cyclical nature of exploitation, where power determines who endures hardship and who is cast aside. This fusion of human and animal metaphors broadens the scope of oppression, revealing how suffering is ingrained in cultural, economic, and social structures.

Illustrative moment: The sequence depicting Mory's harassment by the students is strategically juxtaposed with two other significant visual moments: Anta's frantic search for Mory throughout the city and the ritual slaughter of a sheep, its blood systematically drained by two men. This parallel editing serves to heighten the emotional intensity of the narrative, creating a poignant analogy between human suffering and ritualized violence. The symbolic interplay between these scenes reinforces themes of fate, oppression, and existential struggle. The sheep's sacrifice, an act embedded in tradition, mirrors Mory's humiliation, suggesting that both individuals and animals can be subjected to predetermined cycles of subjugation. Meanwhile, Anta's desperate movement conveys an urgent yet futile resistance to these entrenched forces.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the film say about dreams of leaving home and seeking a better life elsewhere?
2. How does *Touki Bouki* portray life in Senegal, and how does that compare to expectations of life in France?
3. Why do you think Mory hesitates at the end instead of boarding the ship with Anta?
4. In what ways does *Touki Bouki* challenge conventional storytelling and filmmaking?
5. How does *Touki Bouki* address issues of colonial influence and modern aspirations?
6. How does the film remain relevant today, especially in discussions about migration and identity?