

C&T Discussion Notes for 10/8/08

I. Recommended scenes for consideration at beginning of class

- a) The Ending (Food Aid)
- b) Funeral (The body is missing)
- c) Muslim Wives
- d) Gelewaar's Speech
- e) Body Collector
- f) Mayor
- g) Sophie's occupation as a prostitute
- h) Begging (as a theme)
- i) Languages (French, Arabic, local dialect)
- j) Religions (Islam, Christianity, local tribal)
- k) Tension between locals and the "white/black man"
- l) Mor Ciss and his mistress

II. Discussions

A. Begging/Sophie's Job

1. Begging was worse than having a prostitute daughter to Gelewaar. It was actually better to die than to beg.
2. Sophie is a registered prostitute (the class took this in and of itself to be an odd concept). Despite its legality and Gelewaar's approval, prostitution seems to still carry an extremely powerful element of shame.
3. The question was posed: "Is Sophie's prostitution justified because it provides for her family?"
 - Gelewaar says yes, while his wife says absolutely not.
 - The class came to no real consensus, and the question was ultimately left unanswered.

B. The "White/Black Man"

1. The son who permanently moved to France never once spoke his native language throughout the entire film. He would only speak French.
 - The class hypothesized that this may be because he forgot his own language or that he thought it sounded inferior or represented an inferior way of life.
2. Parents do not want their children to emigrate to European nations, but this is an increasingly common occurrence.
 - Why don't the parents want their children to emigrate?
 - The class proposed a few hypotheses: (a) the parents expected the children to aid the family, and that would be complicated with the children in a foreign

nation (b) the parents wanted the children to be saturated in the local culture in order to preserve it

C. Mor Ciss and his Mistress

1. As the wrong body had been buried in the Muslim cemetery, the mistress could not even mourn her husband.
2. The mistress plans to leave her children behind with Mor Ciss, and shows absolutely no interest in their fate.
 - It was noted that she possessed a multitude of European magazines which she referred to as "her things".
 - The mistress was seen by the class as the foil of Nnu Ego of "The Joys of Motherhood", as Nnu Ego held a vast interest in her children's fate and sacrificed her own happiness for their future. The suggestion was inferred that the magazines the mistress had served as a symbol of her alteration by European culture into a cold individualist.

D. Misplacement of the Body

1. The class was particularly interested in exactly how it was that a human body could be mistakenly removed from a morgue and buried in the improper cemetery.
 - It was proposed that either (a) gross negligence or (b) a language barrier created the problem. It was also given as a suggestion that the error was intentional, motivated by corrupt politicians and carried out by citizens subservient to them in order to humiliate a political enemy (Gelewaar).
2. Professor Helman stated that an attempt should be made to tie the misplacement of the corpse of Gelewaar to the disappearance of the Sorcerer King portrayed in "Sundiata".

E. Mor Ciss's Stubbornness

1. It was proposed that Mor Ciss may have simply been looking to begin a conflict between the Muslims and the Christians.
2. It was also proposed that Mor Ciss may have been stubborn about exhuming Gelewaar's corpse in order to cover his compatriots, whether to hide their involvement in a government conspiracy (see item 1 of section D) or to help them evade trouble for negligence while tending to a corpse. No consensus was reached.

F. The Funeral

1. For a brief period, the distinctly European nature of the funeral was discussed. A particularly noteworthy feature appeared to be the drinking of European beers rather than local alcoholic brews (traditional tribal wines, presumably.)
2. Though it was not actually mentioned in the class, I figured I may as well point out another distinct feature about the deceased I noted as I could not speak during class. I am uncertain about Muslim codes for a proper burial, but it stood out to me that Gelewaar was buried by the Muslims not in a coffin, but in a burlap wrapping tied with rope. If there is nothing in Islamic Law regarding this practice, such a feature is distinctly suggestive of foul play with regard to the misplacement of Gelewaar (see item 1 section D.) If this is a part of Islamic Law, then it is simply a stark contrast between the Christian and Muslim ways of life, and is noteworthy if for nothing else then for interest.

G. Languages

1. It was noted that language was firmly grounded in who was speaking and in what situation.
 - Both Muslims and Christians spoke the local tribal dialect
 - Muslims also spoke Arabic
 - Police, government officials, and the "white/black man" spoke French, though the police and government officials also spoke the local dialect

H. Corruption in the Government

1. The people decry corrupt officials, but still obey them and allow them to hold positions of power. It was proposed that food aid was used as leverage over the people, such that they really had no power to defend themselves against corruption's effects.
2. A power struggle between Gelewaar and the government officials was noted:
 - Officials are using aid to forward their own personal agendas
 - Gelewaar sought to obtain national self-sufficiency for Senegal and denounced food aid as "begging". It was his view that acceptance of aid lowered Senegal, and that aid should be harshly rejected.
3. The ultimate result of the struggle was that the officials are still able to use food aid as leverage over the people successfully, though Gelewaar managed to reach the hearts and minds of others (more on this later).
4. The corrupt, single-party government is receiving European backing. This was mentioned, but not explored. It is included here for consideration purposes.

5. The portrayal of the military in this film is a stark contrast to its portrayal in "The Joys of Motherhood".

-In "Joys", the military was a distant force fighting some unknown and often decidedly irrelevant enemy (it seemed to serve no purpose)

-In the film, we note a closer relationship to the military's actions, giving it a utilitarian sense of purpose

-In "Joys", soldiers were described as conquerors and rapists, and generally received absolutely no respect or reverence

-In the film, soldiers were portrayed more as neutral peacekeepers, residing within the area for the common good

I. Analysis of the Film's Ending

1. Gelewaar's speech has motivated the children to defy the leverage of the corrupted officials by dumping rice and grain sent as aid on the ground and driving Gelewaar's coffin over it.

2. Was Gelewaar right about foreign aid?

-Accepting aid on a constant basis was suggested to lead to a loss of one's own ability to function and results in reliance upon others for all one's needs

-Aid appears to do more harm than good to the societies it was meant to heal

3. The question was asked: "What was Gelewaar doing about the situation aside from simply ranting about the evils of foreign aid?"

J. General Response to the Film

1. Commentary on the extraordinarily poor filmography and shoddy acting (the class consensus, just reporting as it was said Professor Helman!) led to complaints that the film's overall effectiveness was negatively affected.

III. General Information Disclaimer

I as a note-taker have attempted to report the class discussion in the most accurate and easily understandable manner possible. If I have misrepresented the overall class views or your own personal views in any way, I apologize forthrightly and admit my capacity for error. If I have been unclear in my representation of any particular subject's discussion, I would ask that queries be posed to me during any class period. The express purpose of these notes is to enable the class to readily review discussion topics and results in a simple and efficient manner, and I am prepared to live up to that duty.

