



WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY PREVIEW

# Banel & Adama

## Banel & Adama

A film by: Ramata-Toulaye Sy

©: La Chauve Souris, Take Shelter, Astou Films, Astou Production, DS Productions, Canal+

International, ARTE France Cinéma

A La Chauve-Souris production: La Chauve-Souris

Production Company: La Chauve-Souris

In association with: Cinéma 17

A Take Shelter production: Take Shelter

In co-production with: Astou Films,

Astou Production, DS Productions,

Canal+ International, ARTE France Cinéma

With the financial contribution of:

Union Européenne

With the competition of: Groupe des États ACP

With the support of: Canal+, Centre national du

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Francophone, Fonds Image de la Francophonie,

Fonds de promotion de l'industrie

cinématographique et audiovisuelle du Sénégal

(FOPICA), Doha Film Institute

With the participation of: ARTE France, TV5Monde,

Ciné+

Produced by: Eric Névé, Maud Leclair Névé,

Margaux Juvénal

Co-produced by: Kébé Souleymane,

Oumar Gabar Sy, Andrey Samouté Diarra

Written by: Ramata-Toulaye Sy

Director of Photography: Amine Berrada

Visual Effects: Mac Guff

Production Designer: Oumar Sall

Costumes: Mariam Diop

Make-up - Hair: Marième Ngom

Original Music: Bachar Mar-Khalifé

Sound: Benjamin Silvestre

Re-recording Mixer: Jean-Pierre Laforce

Sound Editor: Olivier Voisin

Cast

Khady Mane (*Banel*)

Mamadou Diallo (*Adama*)

Binta Racine Sy (*mother*)

Moussa Sow (*Racine*)

Ndiabel Diallo (*Coudy*)

Oumar Samba Dia (*Abou Dia*)

Amadou Ndiaye (*Malik*)

France-Senegal-Mali 2023

87 mins

Digital

Courtesy of We Are Parable

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**SIGHT  
AND  
SOUND**

+ Q&A with director Ramata-Toulaye Sy

Banel and Adama are two young, passionate lovers living in a remote village in northern Senegal. When they decide they want to live away from their families and Adama declines his birth right position of village leader, chaos ensues in the community.

Ramata-Toulaye Sy's atmospheric debut feature is visually stunning, with bursts of colour weaving with magic realism, enveloping both the tender romance, and our bold and rebellious heroine Banel.

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*Banel & Adama* is not just the title of this gorgeously directed film by Ramata-Toulaye Sy, but a kind of mantra, a fervent prayer. The names of two married young lovers in a remote Senegalese village, the phrase is repeatedly whispered and written by Banel, the wife – at first with the naive infatuation of adolescence, and later with the desperation of the damned. The way this desire for an absolute, elevated togetherness collides with the broader community is the substance of Sy's well-executed – and Palme d'Or nominated – debut feature. The film is defined as much by visual lyricism as by the assertive performances of first-time actors Khady Mane and Mamadou Diallo, who play the couple trying to bring this faltering utterance into being.

Banel (Mane) is ardent and defiant, Adama (Diallo) reticent and responsible. The pair married after the death in an accident of Banel's first husband, Adama's older brother Yero. Now they dig up houses at the edge of the village that have been buried right up to their roofs from a sandstorm, hoping to live together on this social margin in an ideal, curated unity. But when Adama refuses to inherit the role of chief, a fault line quietly rips through the community. It's not melodramatic – the elders accept his decision, albeit with the forbidding warning, 'Being chief is in your blood; you can't change that' – but it's tectonic nonetheless, causing subtle drifts and sparking latent misgivings. Fingers point more firmly at Adama when the village succumbs to a cataclysmic spell of drought, and the interrupted bloodline is blamed. Adama's choice seems to come to bite him back on a nightmarish scale; he's no longer burrowing into the sand to discover a new life, but to dig new graves.

The film's elemental storyline gives it the air of a parable, its dignity and authority bolstered by Sy's epic images. When the dry spell hits, a wailing storm of birds, captured in an overhead shot, surges across the barren terrain like a rash erupting across the screen, while the excavated houses, flushed a deadly orange in a sandstorm, loom like temple gates. It's as if the apocalypse has chosen this tiny village, otherwise tranquil and far-flung, to receive its first signs of the end. Even in her feature debut, Sy's consummate eye for colour and composition is clear: the glowing horizon lines and sumptuous blue lakes of the first act give way to a stark, desaturated, drought-ridden palette,

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**Woman with a Movie Camera International Women's Day Preview: Banel & Adama** + Q&A with director Ramata-Toulaye Sy  
Fri 8 Mar 18:10

**Woman with a Movie Camera International Women's Day Preview: Elaha**

Fri 8 Mar 20:45

**TV Preview: Inside No. 9: The Final Series** + Q&A with Reece Shearsmith, Steve Pemberton and executive producer Adam Tandy  
Mon 11 Mar 18:15

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Mon 11 Mar 18:15

**TV Preview: Mandy** + Q&A with Diane Morgan  
Tue 12 Mar 18:10

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exquisitely rendered by Sy and her cinematographer Amine Berrada. But these formidable symbols lend themselves to a kind of monumental stasis: they unfold one by one for the viewer to be absorbed into them, to be beguiled by them, but they only haltingly come together in a proper narrative rhythm. Towards the end of the film, Sy's stack of splendid images strains to satisfy the symbolic possibilities it set up to begin with.

This narrative ambivalence is useful, however, in producing the film's smart, inconclusive message. A simple reading would accept Banel and Adama as star-crossed lovers foiled by conservative convention. But there is no fetishising binary here between the 'tradition' of village customs and the 'modernity' of independence. The lovers do seek to escape their social constraints – Banel itches at her mother-in-law's questions about children and domestic labour, just as Adama turns away from the prospect of becoming chief – but such is the force of Sy's imagery that the viewer, like the villagers, falls under a superstitious spell. Maybe the drought is not a coincidence, but indeed a form of cosmic revenge; maybe this is the cost of change. It's a brilliant example of seductive visuals complicating clean morals and narrative arcs. And the third act shrewdly diffuses the idea that we are witnessing trouble in paradise: the film discloses a violent streak in Banel, captured terrifically in Mane's wide-eyed, roving gazes, that suggests there was perhaps no paradise in the first place.

Sy has said that the film's influences ranged from classical Greek myths, like the stories of Medea and Antigone, to the figure of the West African griot, a bardlike storyteller and singer. But if these oral traditions can sometimes flatten individual personalities into ciphers and allegories, the humane presence of Banel and Adama themselves is always powerful and apparent. Mane makes Banel's strange descent into mania seem plausible, while Diallo vividly communicates Adama's guilt. Their coupledness, fraught and fatalistic, is wonderfully irresistible to us, too.

Annabel Bai Jackson, *Sight and Sound*, April 2024

French-senegalese **Ramata-Toulaye Sy** was born and raised in the Paris region. She joined La fémis in 2011 in the Screenwriting department, from which she graduated in 2015. Ramata-Toulaye worked, among others, as a screenwriter on the film *Sibel* (2018) by C. Zencirci and G. Giovanetti as well as on *Our Lady of the Nile* (2019) by A. Rahimi.

In 2020, Ramata-Toulaye directed her first short film, *Astel*, selected in more than 80 festivals and pre-selected for the 2023 César Awards. *Banel & Adama* is her first feature film.