

Educational sheet - Africa2020

Sauve qui peut le court métrage - Centre Yennenga



ASTEL

2021 / France, Senegal

Ramata-Toulaye Sy

Special Jury Prize, National Competition, Clermont-Fd Short Film Festival 2022

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Design & publication: SQPLCM - Centre Yennenga



INSTITUT
FRANÇAIS

THE FILM

Crew

Director: Ramata Toulaye Sy

Script: Ramata Toulaye Sy

Editing: Nathan Jacquard

DOP: Amine Berrada

Sound : Ousmane Coly

Cast

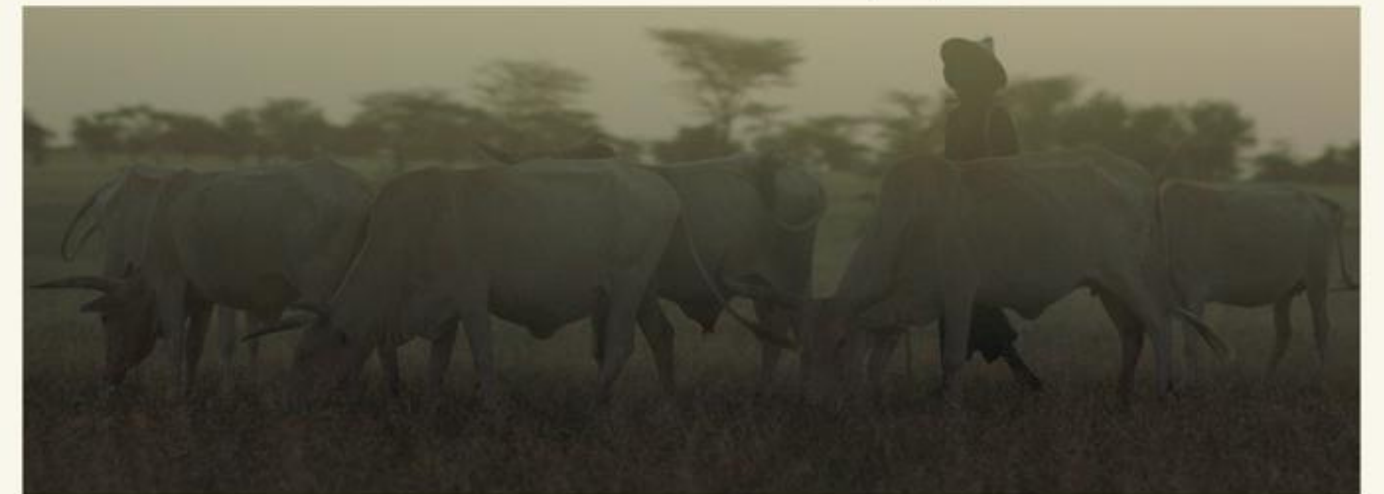
Hawa Mamadou, Dia Cherif, Amadou Diallo, Alassane Hamet Ly

In Fouta-Toro, a remote region of northern Senegal, 13 year-old Astel accompanies her father into the bush every day. Together they look after their herd of cattle. One day, a meeting between the girl and a shepherd disrupts their peaceful life.



ASTEL

Un film de Ramata-Toulaye Sy



LA CHAUVÉ-SOURIS, KAZAK PRODUCTIONS ET ASTOU PRODUCTION PRÉSENTENT ASTEL AVEC HAWA MAMADOU DIA, CHERIF AMADOU DIALLO, ALASSANE HAMET LY, KHADY DIALLO
SCÉNARIO RAMATA-TOULAYE SY PRODUCTION MARGAUX JUVÉNAL, MAUD LECLAIR-NÉVÉ, AMAURY OUISE, JEAN-CHRISTOPHE REYMOND, SOULEYMANE KEBE DIRECTION DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE
AMINE BERRADA SON OUSMANE COLY, OLIVIER VOISIN, ROMAIN OZANNE DÉCORS MOHAMED SIRADJI SOW COSTUMES SO'FATOU MONTAGE NATHAN JACQUARD MUSIQUE AMINE BOUHAFI

LA CHAUVÉ-SOURIS

KAZAK
PRODUCTIONS

ASTOU
PRODUCTION

france-tv

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PICA

THE DIRECTOR

After graduating from the scriptwriting department of the Femis (Paris) in 2015, **Ramata-Toulaye Sy** co-wrote a number of feature film scripts: *Sibel* (2018) by Çagla Zencirci and Guillaume Giovanetti, as well as *Notre-Dame du Nil* (2019) by Atiq Rahimi.

Astel is her first professional short and marks her transition into directing. In April 2020, during the first COVID-related lockdown, the idea behind *ASTEL* emerged. Her producers from French company *La Chauve-Souris* urge her to direct a short before moving on to her first feature ***Banel & Adama*** (Official Competition at Cannes 2023).

Through her cinematography, she explores her Senegalese origins and skilfully films the peulh community that she is from.



DELVING INTO PEULH LAND



Astel was shot in the Podor and Matam regions in the North of Senegal, an area largely populated by the peulhs. This traditionally nomadic people is known for its pastoralism. Ramata-Toulaye Sy pays tribute to this way of life through beautiful framing. It's also this very polished aesthetic which is also imbues the film *Timbuktu* by Abderrahmane Sissako (2014): wide shots that expose the huge landscapes. In that film, it was the Touareg culture that was celebrated, another nomadic people from the Sahel.

The director tells the story of a family trying **to resist the new Sharia law** imposed by the Islamists that have invaded Timbuktu. The long shots allow the characters to be anchored in their environment - the grandiose landscape of the Sahel - in way that translates their intimate relationship with this territory that they've been living in for generations. This aesthetic gives the film a slow and contemplative rhythm, as we are invited to live this story to the same tune as the characters and their herds.

DELVING INTO PEULH LAND



In [Astel](#), the characters speak Peulh, the language spoken by around twenty countries in West Africa and the Sahel, as well as Central Africa. Ramata-Toulaye Sy's choice of language preserves **the authenticity of the tale**, along with the natural scenery. The Peulh community has been gaining ground in the world of film recently, with films like [Nafi's Father](#) by Mamadou Dia (2019) and [Tirailleurs](#) by Mathieu Vadepied (2023). Here as well, the film is in Peulh, with the father played by Omar Sy, of Halpulhar background.

A FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP



Tirailleurs depicts a conflicting relationship between Bakary and his son Thierno. The French army drafts the young men in from their villages to swell the ranks of the French troops in their war against Germany. Bakary voluntarily enrolls to try and protect his son. Their relationship will be tested by the violence of the conflict. In Astel, the father-daughter relationship is particularly tender and evolves throughout the film. The **bond** between Astel and her father is strikingly clear from the onset, alongside the unfolding landscape through the panoramic shot. The camera pivots from left to right. We discover the village through the rising sun at dawn and see a father very gently wake his daughter up.

The young girl picks up a bucket to collect water. She pauses briefly to watch her father pray with a great deal of admiration. Their bond is also evident as he guides their herd through the field. The tight editing highlights the various mischievous and amused looks and glances between father and daughter. This tenderness is all the more obvious in the scene where the two of them are sitting under a tree, sharing food. The father is concerned about his daughter's eating habits. He lightly tells her off for not eating enough, punctuating his words with jokes and games. The depiction of a father-daughter relationship with such tenderness and sensitivity is a rare sight in cinema.



A 'COMING OF AGE' STORY A CONSERVATIVE PEULH SOCIETY

A **coming of age** story is a cinematographic genre, which focuses on the key moments of a character's personal growth, **the passage from childhood or adolescence to adulthood**. It tells the tale, sometimes dramatically, sometimes amusingly, of those pivotal moments when humans, often brutally, leave behind the innocence that protected their youth to enter an unknown and confusing adult world. This is what Astel navigates, as she is forced to change the course of her life from one day to the next.

In *Tirailleurs*, the coming of age angle is illustrated in the fate of young Thierno who, at 17, learns how to become a man in the French trenches of the First World War. With Astel, the young heroin is dealing with a transition in which **her freedom is curtailed by the social codes of a conservative society**. This is highlighted when her mother asks her to tie her pagne correctly, in a way that hints at the necessity to look smart and the need to practice pre-marital abstinence. In fact, Astel has reached puberty and will soon reach marrying age. Her sensuality will be revealed by the look the herder gives her when their cross paths in the field. The man can't seem to get his cow to move. Astel observes him from afar, sitting next to her sleeping father. She gets up to help him. She caresses the animal, following the curves of her body, before whispering in her ear: "*Why don't you want to move?*"

A 'COMING OF AGE' STORY A CONSERVATIVE PEULH SOCIETY



Astel acts in a carefree manner, **without any hint of a seductive attitude**. However, the tight editing, which tracks her movements, the slow motion, the light that envelops the characters, the montage showing the young shepherd's gaze all hint at the sensuality that the young girl exudes. This is also what dawns on her father who is watching the scene.

That evening, back in the village, Astel's father asks her to go eat with the women. The next day, he will head out to the cows to graze without her. Astel's routine is thus reframed by the people around her, to regain her place as a woman working the field instead of shepherding the animals.

The very pared down dialogue points to a society that is very **reserved, not to say prudish**. Nobody explains the situation to her and she experiences her father's attitude as a humiliation and a betrayal. It's against the gendered assignation of tasks that Astel rebels against. She refuses to tend to the fields and runs away. She finds the tree, which she had sat under with her father only a day earlier. She decides to wait for him there, in tears, but he doesn't come. Instead, the young shepherd turns up and leads her back to the village.

THE ELOQUENCE OF SILENCE



At the cinema, silences acquire *dramatic value* when they're imposed unexpectedly to highlight the rest of the dialogue or ramp up the tension. They stress intimacy, allows us to read **psychological** reactions and emotions on the characters' faces. Silence is a form of communication in itself. But given its meaning can be very deep and variable, we don't always interpret it as we should. However, it is fair to say that the director succeeds in conveying the full meaning of those silences in *Astel*, with its **very expressive faces** that imbue the message with so much meaning. The silences even seem to have more value than the words that are spoken. In fact, although it is important to master the language, knowing when to be quiet, at the right time and in the right way requires a lot of strength. In our chatterbox society, silence always enjoys a slightly impressive presence. Which makes it all the more powerful in this film.

It is enhanced by the soft and dynamic music of Amine Bouhafa, a famous Tunisian composer, also behind the music of Abderrahmane Sissako's *Timbuktu*. But the silence is also a lead weight for *Astel*, who doesn't understand what is happening and cannot express her anger. She is unfortunately forced to resign herself to the situation. This is what seems to suggest Ramata Toulaye Sy who situates her story in a village where destinies seem to be decided in advance. Will *Astel* know how to escape that trap? Despite the love and kindness of her parents who love her and care for her, she is **stuck by the strength of the tradition**. But in *Astel's* proud and determined gaze, a glimmer of hope seems possible. She may be able to forge herself a destiny that will fulfill her dreams, her shepherd's crook in hand.

A FEMINIST GAZE



Ramata Toulaye-Sy's film focuses on the future of women in this rural society. This is a feminist issue. **Feminism can be considered a political movement, which aims to end sexism, and sexist exploitation and oppression and instore full equality between the sexes in law and in practice.** Women have the right to autonomy, respect and freedom, women have the potential and ability to be in control of their own lives and make the decisions that are in their interests.

It is this affirmation that the young heroin seeks to manifest in Astel. Ramata-Toulaye Sy sheds light on the rebellion of a **young Peulh woman** who set her sights on **becoming a shepherdess** and following the footsteps of her father. This dream is taken from her in a patriarchal society in which the path of young women is already established as if by prophecy.

Ramata-Toulaye Sy is part of a *lineage of a African women filmmakers* who have placed **feminist resistance figures** at the heart of their stories.

A FEMINIST GAZE

Astel could bring to mind the young heroin in Mossane (1996), directed by Safi Faye, one of the first female filmmakers on the continent. Mossane (which means *beauty* in Serer) is a beautiful young 14-year old girl living in a village in Senegal.

Like Astel, she is loved by all the members of her family and enjoys a happy childhood. But everything changes when she is told that she has been promised to the wealthy Diogaye.

Mossane defies her parents' plans for her by declaring her love for Fara, a poor student from the village. The day of her wedding, she refuses to marry Diogaye and decides to join Fara. Unlike Astel, the film has a tragic ending and Mossane loses her life in the process of following her own wishes.

Astel also tries to resist when her parents order her to follow her destiny as a woman. But social codes and traditions **don't leave her much of a choice**. Now, she can no longer eat with the men but with the women, she can no longer take the animals grazing with her father, but has to tend to the fields with the village women, she can no longer wear her shepherdess hat but a headscarf like her mother. In the face of such injustice and her own powerlessness, she keeps her crook that she snatches from the hands of her younger brother. This is the symbol of her rebellion. Astel wants to free herself from the weight of tradition, to take charge of her **autonomy** and **free will** without turning her back on her community. She dreams of becoming a shepherdess, free and emancipated.



TO FIND OUT MORE



Written interview (French):
<https://clermont-filmfest.org/astel/>



Written interview (English):
<https://clermont-filmfest.org/en/astel/>



French video interview:
<https://clermont-filmfest.org/cafe-court-ramata-toulaye-sy/>



English video interview:
<https://clermont-filmfest.org/en/short-talk-ramata-toulaye-sy/>



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