

Buying a Whole Town And a Death Sentence

"Hyenas" was shown as part of the 1992 New York Film Festival. Following are excerpts from Stephen Holden's review, which appeared in *The New York Times* on Oct. 3, 1992. The film — in Wolof with English subtitles — opens today at the Papp Public Theater, 425 Lafayette Street, East Village.

Anyone can be bought if the price is right. That is the message of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's viciously misanthropic drama "The Visit," in which a woman buys an entire town to wreak revenge on the lover who betrayed her decades earlier. In "Hyenas," Djibril Diop Mambety's pungent film adaptation of the story, the setting has been moved from Europe to Africa.

Although the film by this Senegalese director keeps the outlines of the Dürrenmatt play intact, the change of locale lends the tale a new political dimension. The vengeance that the richest woman in the world brings to the dusty African village of her birth is an avalanche of irresistible Western paraphernalia that will eradicate the area's tribal culture.

The social center of the destitute desert town of Colobane is a scantily



Kino International

Ami Diakhate, left, and Mansour Diouf in "Hyenas."

stocked market run by its most popular resident, Dramaan Drameh (Mansour Diouf), a jolly white-bearded grocer. The village would probably go on wasting away on the fringe of the Sahara were it not for the return of Linguere Ramatou (Ami Diakhate), a woman who left the town in disgrace 30 years earlier. Linguere, who was Dramaan's lover at the time, has mysteriously emerged as the world's richest woman. The townspeople, hoping that she will end their poverty, fall over themselves to offer her a welcome-home banquet.

Though Dramaan is married, he woos Linguere obsequiously. At the height of the celebration, she announces that she intends to donate "one hundred thousand millions" to the town. But there is a catch. She produces witnesses who swear that 30 years ago Dramaan paid them to testify that they had slept with her so he could deny the paternity of her unborn child. Before the town can get its reward, Dramaan must pay with his life. Deeply insulted, the townspeople at first side with the grocer. But as greed eats away at their souls, their mood slowly shifts.

"Hyenas" inflects the drama with an edge of carnival humor. That may explain why the central performances are not very gripping. Ms. Diakhate's Linguere, though imposingly grotesque, is something less than the fearsome apotheosis of revenge. And when she declaims the play's crucial lines — "The world made a whore of me; I want to turn the world into a whorehouse" — they ring slightly flat.

Today's Film Reviews

THE BABY-SITTERS CLUB, directed by Melanie Mayron; starring Peter Horton and Ellen Burstyn. C6

HYENAS, a Wolof-language film directed by Djibril Diop Mambety; starring Mansour Diouf and Ami Diakhate. C6

JUPITER'S WIFE, a documentary directed by Michel Negroponte. C8

MORTAL KOMBAT, which opens today, is not reviewed because there were no screenings for critics. The review will appear tomorrow.