

**Women and Gender in International Films**  
**Fall 2009 Series**

Sept. 30      **“Tuya’s Marriage” (Mongolia)**

Life on the plains of Inner Mongolia is a constant struggle. We meet Tuya as she tends sheep, lugs water from distant wells and tries with all her strength to take care of her family. The terrain is both beautiful and inhospitable. Even in the most developed societies, survival becomes daunting when illness or accident strikes, but in the stark, rural conditions of Mongolia, a crisis of this type poses very limited options. As Tuya examines her choices surrounding unforeseen events, she shows us both a familiar and unique gendered landscape and a cast of characters motivated by a range of understandable emotions and desires. Themes include: gender roles in marriage and the domestic economy; how marriage and economic realities connect; attraction and repulsion; alcohol issues; glimpses of the effects of industrialization as it encroaches on life in Mongolia.

Oct. 7      **“4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days” (Romania)**

This film is set in 1987 Romania, just two years before the brutal dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, was executed. Otilia and Gabita are struggling college roommates, getting by in life through trade and barter. Gabita, who is less worldly, less responsible and arguably more self absorbed than Otilia, needs to arrange for an illegal abortion. The events that follow over a 24 hour period are graphic and gripping. Although this film is unique to Romania, the crisis of an unwanted pregnancy in a country that bans abortion has happened and continues to happen worldwide. Themes include gendered outcomes of the suspension of human rights to reach political objectives; social class and gender interests; female friendship; manipulation in couple relationships.

Oct. 14      **“Karmen Gei” (Senegal)**

Karmen Gei is the first African adaptation of Bizet’s French opera “Carmen,” (1875), one of the world’s most performed operas complete with over 50 film interpretations. Like other versions, Karmen Gei is about the conflict between convention and the desire for complete freedom. Director Joseph Gai Ramaka replaces Bizet’s score with music and dance indigenous to Senegal, sets up a corrupt political background and takes the bold step of making Karmen bisexual. The seductions of beautiful, imposing Karmen speak to notions (in Senegal and elsewhere) of women’s power through eroticism. Of love, she sings: “if you cage it, it will fly away.” Themes include: transgressing feminine gender boundaries; womanhood in Senegalese culture; life in a woman’s prison; female bonding; Karmen commanding respect; love, jealousy and death; expression through dance.

Oct. 21      **“The Secrets” (Israel)**

The movie opens with Naomi asking her father, a respected Israeli Orthodox rabbi, to postpone her upcoming marriage to Michael, an arrogant man who is her father’s protégé. She wants permission to go to Safed, the birthplace of Kabbalah, to study religion in an all female seminary. It is here that she meets the rebellious Michelle and their original hostile relationship changes dramatically as they both provide aid to Anouk, an ill and distraught French woman. The story is fast moving and entertaining, but its significance goes deeper as it reveals many ways in which patriarchal religious tradition subverts women’s contributions and silences important questions. Themes include: gender roles within Orthodox Judaism; father and daughter relationships; mother and daughter relationships; female bonding; lesbian love and sexual experimentation; feminist debates on a range of topics.

Oct. 28      **“Volver” (Spain)**

Although “Volver” employs techniques of magical realism, this film is really about women’s everyday responsibilities and concerns. Care giving duties extend beyond this life. For example, we are first introduced to the enchanting cast of female characters as they join others in La Mancha, in the annual ritual of cleaning the tombstones of their deceased loved ones. Director Pedro Almodovar’s early movies were problematic from a feminist point of view, but he has largely redeemed himself with a recent string of films that communicate the fabric of what constitutes the lives of many women, with particular emphasis on Spanish and Latin cultural norms. Themes include: women’s life sustaining activities of cleaning, cooking, care giving; women’s bonds and loyalty; dealing with secrets, cheating and deception; the continuity of existence that transcends life on earth.

*This event meets in 102 Gore Hall on Wednesday afternoons from 3:35 - 6:35 p.m. for 5 weeks in October. It is open to the public and is also a one-credit, P/F course (WOMS 290.010).*

*Coordinated by Suzanne Cherrin: 831-1899; scherrin@udel.edu*