

## 1958

By Jean-Pierre Rehm (FID Marseille)

1958 marks two events: first, the birth of the film maker in Senegal; second, the beginning, in the Lebanon, his parents' native country, of a serious internal conflict that will result in the long series of civil wars. An intertwining then, of a private history with national histories that mix themes covering exile, colonization, Lebanese politics as much as linguistic diversity. Yet a figure gradually begins to stand out as the centre of this maelstrom: the mother of Ghassan Salhab. It is around her, her face, her evocations that the images of the events of that time in the Lebanon and in Africa take shape, and shapes too the images of today as much as the thoughts carried by the director's voice. It is she too who allows each piece of information to be handed over incarnate, perceptible, charged with an unusual and heady physical presence.

The film is polyphonic, woven (its imagery as much, we insist, as its sound), asserting all the complexity of a story that continues to unfold, and in which the director's autobiography can no longer be distinguished, such is its fate and that of its context. But it is a polyphony whose secret heart is distilled into an ode to the mother. She too, this mother, had to function in turn as a symbol of her native country, her native language, even the sea that concludes the film. In fact, in the middle of these return journeys between past and present, from one country to another, there is paradoxically no movement: the epic hovers, so to speak. If the director, whom we always see from behind, faces a stretch of coast, like the bow of a ship sailing to oblivion, it's so he can better pivot round and confront Beirut once again in an encounter that he has never abandoned.