OUSMANE SEMBÈNE AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURE

EDITED BY

LIFONGO VETINDE AND
AMADOU T. FOFANA

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Introduction

Cultural Politics in Senegal: A Quest for Relevance

Lifongo Vetinde

Culture in all its aspects is political. —Ousmane Sembène[1]

According to Nobert Elias, the German sociologist, "the concept of *Kultur* mirrors the self-consciousness of a nation which had constantly to seek out and constitute its boundaries anew, in a political as well as spiritual sense, and again, had to ask itself: 'What is really our identity?'" (1978: 5–6). I concur, for culture is the measure of what constitutes a people's specificity: their customs, traditional values, art, cuisine, forms of communication, and elements of social contract. It is indeed the window through which we can understand the way a society perceives itself in relation to others. The role of politics in shaping cultural practice has been the subject of discussion by social critics such as Antonio Gramsci who, in his discussion of the affinity between culture and hegemony, posits that the cultural values that are upheld in society are, for the most part, transmitted by the ruling class.

The nexus between culture and power is particularly evident in the colonial context where the devaluation and stigmatization of indigenous cultures constitute an important element in the apparatus of domination. Indeed, the repression of the subaltern's culture is an efficient method of domination. As Amilcar Cabral put it in his lecture, "National Liberation and Culture," delivered at Syracuse University, New York, in 1970:

> History teaches us that, in certain circumstances, it is very easy for the foreigner to impose his domination on a people. But it also teaches us that, whatever may be the material aspects of this domination, it can be maintained only by the permanent, organized repression of the cultural life of the people concerned. Implantation of foreign domination can be assured definitively only by physical liquidation of a significant part of the dominated population. . . . In fact, to take up arms to dominate a people is, above all, to take up arms to destroy, or at least to neutralize, to paralyze, its cultural life. (*Return to the Source*, 1988: 1973)

The French colonial policy aimed at driving the subject people to abandon their customs and values and replace them with French culture through repression and denigration.

This policy of cultural destruction was resisted by nationalists who experienced the arrogance of colonial ideology in their education and interaction with their masters. They understood that rehabilitating the cultures of their societies was an efficient strategy in the struggle against foreign domination, and used it as a weapon of resistance: The rehabilitation of the past was a necessary condition in the struggle against Western domination, for it is a liberating gesture that "triggers a change of fundamental importance in the colonized psycho-affective equilibrium," writes Frantz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* (1968: 148). He goes on to recommend that "National culture in the underdeveloped countries . . . must lie at the heart of the liberation struggle." (1968: 168).

When Senegal gained its independence from France in 1960, Léopold Sédar Senghor, the nation's first president, grounded his political ideology on Négritude. The movement seriously challenged the Eurocentrism of colonial ideology and privileged black culture as an instrument for both self-affirmation and development. In his belief that culture is at the heart of national development, Senghor invested a substantial amount of resources for the rehabilitation of Senegal's cultural patrimony. In 1966, he organized the first All Black Festival of Arts in Dakar, which was a source of pride for Africans on the mainland and the Diaspora alike. When he left office in 1980, he had laid a solid foundation for the development of the cultural patrimony of Senegal. Unfortunately, after Senghor, there doesn't appear to be a coherent cultural policy in place to support individual artistic initiatives and this deficit in government funding of the arts at the micro-level has most impacted the once vibrant Senegalese national cinema. Senghor's efforts in promoting the marketing of Senegalese culture by the state were halted by the Structural Adjustment Programs imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

It was in the context of the austerity measures imposed by the two international financial bodies that Senghor's successor, Abdou Diouf, took power. Diouf invested much less in the domain of national culture save for the launching of Dak'Art in 1990, a cultural festival of black artists held in Dakar every two years. Indeed, the twenty years of his presidency (1980–2000) were lean years in cultural investments as he focused more on the economy. Government attention and investment in the promotion of culture was revived with Abdoulaye Wade's accession to power in 2000. During his twelve years in office, he realized important projects such as the construction of "La Place du Souvenir Africain," the Grand Théâtre and the Monument of the African Renaissance designed by the Senegalese architect Pierre Goudiaby Atepa. Wade was criticized by many Senegalese who felt that much less could have been spent on

these cultural projects (the Monument of the African Renaissance for instance cost twenty-seven million dollars) and some of this money invested in much needed infrastructures such as educational and health facilities around the country. Despite these criticisms, Wade pursued his efforts in the promotion of cultural activities and Dakar hosted the third All Black African Festival of Arts in December 2010, forty-five years after his illustrious predecessor, Senghor, hosted the first edition under the auspices of UNESCO.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 1966 festival, Senghor noted:

> This festival *is not an antiquarian empty display*, it is an articulate demonstration of our deepest thought, of our most genuine culture. To whatever God, to whatever language they belong, the Nations are invited to this colloquy of Dakar to bridge the gaps of, to clear up the misunderstandings, to settle the differences. Partaking at all times—but at a distance and through intermediaries, united, reunited Africa offers the waitin [*sic*] world not a gigantic tattoo, but the sense of her artistic creation. (1977: 3) (emphasis added)

Senghor's affirmation of the pertinence of the festival to the lives of the people is reminiscent of Fanon's vision of the place culture should occupy in the erstwhile colonized countries:

> National culture is no folklore where an abstract populism is convinced it has uncovered the popular truth. It is not some congealed mass of noble gestures, in other words, less and less connected with the reality of the people. National culture is the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong. National culture in the underdeveloped countries, therefore, must lie at the very heart of the liberation struggle these countries are waging. (1968: 68)

Both Senghor and Fanon view culture as an all-encompassing concept which requires a holistic deployment. In this totalizing approach, Fanon and Senghor pay close attention to the impact of cultural practices on the daily lives of the people in ways that not only enhance their sense of belonging to the nation but also participate in the project of national construction. Even a cursory look at the execution of the cultural policies in many African countries would show that, despite the lofty speeches about the centrality of culture in national development, the focus has been more on cultural exhibitionism.

So much has been written about the role of culture in building African society. According to Chinweizu, for instance:

> the function of the artist in Africa, in keeping with our traditional needs, demands that the writer as a public voice assume a responsibility to reflect public concerns in his writings and not preoccupy himself with his puny ego. Because in Africa we recognize that art is in the

> public domain, a sense of social commitment is mandatory for the artist. (1975: 48)

There is no denying that African works of cultural production (literature, music, painting, songs, dance, and so on) play an important role in the social discourse of African societies. Senegalese literatures, traditional and modern alike, serve as vehicles through which Senegalese society is closely examined, painted, and critiqued. Drawing attention to the connection between literature and politics Ousmane Sembène asserts that "it is impossible to discuss the art and culture of living men in isolation from the men themselves. . . . So far as I am concerned, writing which is now my job, is a social necessity, like the jobs of the mason, the carpenter, or the iron maker" (1973: 34). Although Senegalese artists are not policy makers, they serve as catalysts for change as they point to the possibilities of a cultural policy that is relevant to the lives of the people. Writers, singers, and filmmakers such as Mariama Ba, Mariama Barry, Aminata Sow Fall, Nafissatou Dia Diouf, Aïda Samb, Coumba Gawlo Seck, and Amadou Seck draw attention to problems of corruption, gender inequality, excision, and poverty to mention but a few that plague the society. It is important to point out that most of these artists perform in the local languages despite the status of French as the official language of Senegal.

Some time ago, while I was directing our university's off-campus linguistic and cultural immersion program in Dakar, I met a young Gabonese student who was studying at the University Cheikh Anta Diop. When I told her that I was directing the Francophone seminar designed to help our students hone their skills in French and learn about an African culture she gave me a quizzical look and reproachingly observed that Dakar was not the right place for that kind of experience because of the high prevalence of Wolof. To be sure, the domination of Wolof as the *lingua franca* in Senegal especially in Dakar is a linguistic reality which is not common in most other francophone countries. However, what the Gabonese student lost sight of was that Francophonie is not exclusively about the French language as it is about its coexistence with indigenous languages.[2] The political choice by successive Senegalese administrations to maintain French as the sole official language could be explained by the complexity of the people's relationship toward the former colonial master's language. For many Senegalese, French is higher in status than national languages. This attitude is best captured by Senghor who was particularly enamored with the French language. When asked why he wrote in French, he replied:

> *Parce que nous sommes des métis culturels, parce que, si nous sentons en nègres, nous nous exprimons en français, parce que le français est une langue à vocation universelle, que notre message s'adresse aussi aux Français de France et aux autres hommes, parce que le français est une langue de gentillesse et d'honnêteté. . . .* Et puis le français nous a fait don de ses mots

> abstraits—si rares dans nos langues maternelles . . . où les larmes se font pierres précieuses. Chez nous, les mots sont naturellement nimbés d'un halo de sève et de sang; les mots du français rayonnent de mille feux, comme des diamants. Des fusées qui éclairent nos nuits. (*Ethiopiques* 1956: 27) (emphasis added)
>
> [*Because we are cultural métis, because although we are black we express ourselves in French, because French is a universal language, and our message is addressed to the French in France and other people, because French is a language of kindness and honesty*. . . . What is more French has offered us its abstract words—so rare in our mother tongues . . . where tears change into precious stones. In our milieu, words are naturally haloed, a sap and blood halo; French words shine with a thousand rays like diamonds. Rockets that brighten our nights.]

In this lyrical eulogy of the French language, Senghor in an unveiled manner declares the poverty and ineptitude of Senegalese languages to convey complex messages. African languages then become a foil against which he affirms the grandeur of French civilization and culture with virtues such as "honesty and kindness." Naturally, Sembène challenged Senghor's Eurocentric vision of French vis-à-vis native languages and this was key in the disagreement between them. He viewed Senghor not only as a lackey of France but as an exquisite product of the French colonial system; "*Senghor c'est le plus beau fruit du système colonial que la France ait pu nous offrir*," Sembène said in an interview with Aas-Rouxparis (2002: 574) [Senghor is the best fruit of the colonial system that France offered us]. In what was ostensibly a reaction against Senghor's enamored relationship with the French language, Sembène judiciously asserted that: "*toutes les langues recèlent de la richesse. Cela dépend de qui les emploie et comment on les emploie* (2002: 576) [All languages are rich. It depends on the user and how it is used]. Sembène advocated the teaching of national languages in schools along with foreign languages:

> *Dans nos écoles, au Sénégal, nous enseignons toutes les langues européennes. Il faut que le gouvernement décide que l'enseignement des langues africaines se fasse Ce n'est pas parce qu'on parle la langue que les choses vont changer. Seulement, ça permet aux idées de circuler, aux connaissances d'être plus répandues. La langue africaine est un outil plus approprié que la langue française pour nous actuellement. Ce n'est pas parce nous allons parler et enseigner une langue africaine: le wolof, le bambara, le toucouleur, par exemple, que nous allons rejeter l'anglais, l'allemand ou le russe*. (*Komparatsche Hefte* 1983: 57–58).
>
> [In our schools in Senegal, European languages are taught. The government needs to decide that African languages be taught. It is not because we speak the language that things will change. It would only allow the circulation of ideas and the spread of knowledge. An African language is a more appropriate tool than French for us at this time. It is not because we speak and teach an African language: Wolof, Bambara,

> Toucouleur, for example, that we should reject English, German or Russian.]

It is in the spirit of his linguistic vision that he was hostile to the concept of *francophonie* because the organization focuses on the promotion of the French language. Sembène understood, as Fanon affirms in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (1967: 18). Privileging the promotion and use of the French language as *la francophonie* clearly does is a form of neocolonialism which could threaten the survival of national languages and cultures.[3] He refused to be locked up in the "prison house" of French language and culture, saying "*Personnellement, je ne veux pas qu'on nous enferme dans la Francophonie*" (Aas Rouxparis 2002: 577) [Personally I don't want us to be locked up in Francophonie]. Although his averred hostility toward the organization was the resistance against French cultural domination, his rejection of the organization is consistent with his fight against imperialism for according to critics like Guy Ossito Midiohouan, "*Contrairement à ce qu'affirme l'idéologie dominante, le fondement de la francophonie n'est pas culturel. Elle répond à des intérêts politiques dont les liens culturels tissés par la langue française ne sont que l'alibi*" (1994: 49)[4] [Contrary to what the dominant ideology asserts, the foundation of Francophonie is not cultural. It caters to political interests which use "the cultural bond of the French language as a pretext].

Although he cautioned his readers and viewers that his novels and films should not be regarded as a magic wand that could bring about change in the society, his work is best appreciated through the lenses of a man who was committed to transforming his society through his work. Embedded in Sembène's ideological stance is his unwavering artistic militancy against oppression in all its forms and an insistence on identifying viable frameworks for the path of African liberation and progress through the deployment of culture. He extensively elaborated on the complex relationship between culture and African social praxis. At the core of his dialectical engagement of indigenous African institutions, he posited that the discourse of culture is indispensable to formulating progressive visions of African societies. In other words he firmly believed in the crucial role of culture in building African societies.

Sembène constantly challenged his readers and spectators to critically examine the inscriptions of power in the cultures of African societies. He viewed patriarchal hegemony, religions (Islam and Christianity), the State, and Western domination as the principal networks that shape African cultures and traditions. He denounced aspects of indigenous traditions and emerging cultural formations that compromise the progressive transformation of African societies, with equal fervor. He critically

examined the discourses of power in post-independence Africa and shed critical light on the ways in which Africa's power brokers, "traditional" and "modern," stymie Africa's economic, cultural, and political emancipation. An advocate of cultural openness, Sembène railed against the uncritical acceptance and integration of Western cultural values, as symptomatic of the dysfunctionality of the postcolonial state and partly responsible for Africa's uneven progress in many domains. In his view, the complicity of "traditional" and "modern" African elite perpetuate the continent's subaltern status: "*Si la revendication de l'ancienne culture est une cause juste, son imitation servile est un frein au progrès*" (1979: 22) [If laying claim to traditional culture is a just cause, a slavish adherence to it is an obstacle to progress]. For instance, he decried the pretentious discourse of African authenticity used to uphold practices such as excision in his *Moolaadé*.

There is hardly any aspect of Senegalese cultural life that does not go through his critical lenses. The thematic and critical trajectories of the essays collected in this volume cover a good deal of the cultural, sociopolitical, and aesthetic issues that are discernible in Sembène's novels and films. The contributors deal with the relevance of culture, its connection with power, and its deployment in the discourses of identity, resistance, autonomy, and development as they are articulated in Sembène's works.

PART ONE: CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

In the opening chapter, David Murphy discusses the debate on the relevance of Négritude as a cultural bulwark in the discourse of emancipation. He does so by revisiting the First All Black African Festival of Arts held in Dakar, Senegal, from April 1 to April 24, 1966. The festival sought to emphasize the significance of culture and the arts in defining a global role for Africa in the aftermath of empire. In his discussion of the debates surrounding the festival, as well as Sembène's role within it, Murphy not only explores the competing idealistic notions of culture that were at play in the aftermath of independence but also engages in a refreshing (re)evaluation of Senghorian Négritude in a way that dispels certain misconceptions of Senghor's approach to culture as an instrument of development. Murphy argues that Senghor's premium on the role of culture was consistent with the idealism of the period. In his discussion of Sembène's role in the festival Murphy highlights the overlaps between the two men's visions of culture. He concludes by positing that Sembène's disagreement with Senghor was probably due more to the approach to the deployment of culture than to their vision of culture as a crucial element of development: while the former, by virtue of being in power, tried to promote and sustain it vertically, the latter approached it horizontally.

In the next chapter, Lifongo Vetinde lends credence to Murphy's claim that the disagreement between Senghor and Sembène with regard to the role of culture in national construction was not as deep as it appeared from some of Sembène's statements about Négritude. Vetinde argues for a more nuanced appraisal of the Négritude movement and Senghor's thought in particular, for despite their much publicized disagreements, Senghor and Sembène had more in common than critics had acknowledged. In the first part of the essay, Vetinde does a brief overview of Senghorian Négritude against the backdrop of his detractors. In the second part of the essay, he juxtaposes their visions of culture and gleans evidence of a compelling concordance of views between the two men of culture. Using Sembène's second novel, *O pays mon beau peuple!* as a reference, Vetinde analyzes the ideological intersections between Senghor's and Sembène's visions of culture and argues that both intellectuals were cultural nationalists who believed that African culture had a key role to play in the liberation and development of the continent. Like Senghor, Sembène vied for the creation of an African cultural space from which to articulate a counterdiscourse asserting the right to difference. However, the difference between the two men was that while Senghor was reluctant to address the flaws of traditional African societies, Sembène's position was marked by ambivalence. In his dialectical approach, he denounced the problematic aspects of African culture and argued for the deployment of its positive aspects in the project of national development. Vetinde concludes that contrary to the claims of the detractors of Négritude, some of the precepts of the movement are as pertinent today as they were when the movement was launched in Paris in the 1930s.

Cherif Correa's chapter, "Islam and the Question of Identity in Ousmane Sembène's Film, *Ceddo*,"examines the ways in which Sembène addressed questions of cultural, religious, as well as gender identities within the framework of Islam in his attempt to redefine "colonial relationships" in postcolonial Senegal. In Correa's view, Sembène chose to capture a specific moment in the history of the ceddo when they went through a process of renewal of their identity. Quoting Homi Bhabha, who believes that the "post" in postcolonial should be re-defined as a liminal site for the negotiation of differences of race, gender, class, or religion, Correa argues that in *Ceddo*, the viewer does not know anything about the identity of the ceddo prior to the advent of Islam. According to him, what triggers their process of alterity takes place outside the spatial frame that the film covers. Therefore, the making of the ceddo group identity is incongruous with the history that produces them as a political entity. Consequently, for Correa, the ceddo, Maajoor and Joor reject Islam not because it is unfair to their traditional beliefs and customs, but mainly because it curbs their pre-Islamic prerogatives. Contrary to a widespread view among critics that *Ceddo* is harshly critical of Islam, Correa main-

tains that Sembène does not demonize Islam nor does he downplay the importance of seventh-century Arabia. Rather, he encourages viewers to look at Ijtihad, knowledge based on individual reasoning, in order to better understand the relationship between Islam and the formation of identities in postcolonial Senegal.

PART TWO: DISCOURSES

In her study of *La Noire de . . .* and *Faat Kiné*, Dayna Oscherwitz notes that although radically different, the films may actually be two different versions of the same exploration of the postcolonial relationship between Senegal and France, Africa and the West. Moreover, in both films the relationship between Africa and the West is depicted not only through the events of the narrative and the circumstances of the principal character's life, but also through a complex play with genre that serves to both frame and shape the spectator's interpretation of the narrative. Oscherwitz explores the interconnections between these two films that bookend Sembène's career as a filmmaker arguing that *La Noire de . . .* functions as an early warning, issued at approximately the moment of decolonization, of the perpetuation in the post-independence era of the inequality of the structural relations between France and Africa. She argues that *La Noire de . . .* relies on a play with the detective genre or film noir to suggest that Europe's exploitation of Africa will not only continue post-independence, but that it will expand beyond Africa into Europe and will ultimately go not merely unpunished, but unremarked. In her reading, *Faat Kiné*, in contrast, constitutes a utopian rethinking of the relationship between Africa and the West to propose alternatives to the current system of inequality and concludes that through an appropriation and reworking of the melodrama, as well as through a number of visual references to *La Noire de . . .* , Sembène suggests that it is still possible for Africa to renegotiate its place in the world and that such renegotiation must begin in Africa itself.

Mathew Brown reads the final scene of Sembène's *Xala* against another famous moment in African literature, namely the rain and shelter metaphor from Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*. He argues that if we consider the spit in the final scene of *Xala* as an example of rain being brought inside the shelter of the state, then we find that Sembène's Marxist agenda is not as rigid as some have accused his work of being (Harrow 2004). After all, rather than pull the soft drinks from El Hadji's refrigerator and smash them on the ground, the beggars open the drinks, take a seat on the couch, and enjoy the fetish commodities of a capitalist order. Therefore, rather than overturn that order, what the beggars have done is bring its inequities into the structures of the state—refusing to leave that structure until such inequities have been addressed. Brown sets up a

conversation between Sembène's work and Achebe's, and extends a novel reading of *Xala*'s final scene by engaging with various discourses of political science in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world.

In "Women in Sembène's films: Spatial Reconfigurations and Cultural Meanings," Moussa Sow examines how physical space is reconfigured and what cultural meanings are associated with space for women in particular in Sembène's cinema. Focusing mainly on five of Sembène's films, *Black Girl*, *Ceddo*, *Xala*, *Faat Kiné*, and *Moolaadé*, Sow explains how women challenge the status quo to renegotiate their place and function in the male-dominated spaces that historically excluded them. According to Sow, given that these masculinized cultural spaces have usually eclipsed women, the quest for a true historical African narrative should begin with the recognition of women as active agents in the historical process. Sow goes on to argue that in African film in general, and in Sembène's work in particular, the negotiation of space is critical to the definition of individual experiences and the reclaiming of female agency. Sow maintains that women in Sembène's films typically challenge these heterotopias (exclusive spaces), and emerge as powerful figures of resistance and agents of social change as exemplified by Diouana, Princess Dior, Rama, Faat Kiné, and Colle Ardo.

Based on a newspaper story of the suicide of a depressed African immigrant worker, *Black Girl* is at once a complex allegorical exploration of the postcolonial relations between the colonized and the colonizer, and a brilliant psychological exploration of the African immigrant condition. The film's central character, Diouana, a migrant worker, is trapped and eventually crushed by the legacy of colonialism and the trauma of migration. Lyell Davies explores Sembène's portrait of Diouana as a migrant worker and colonial subject, her collapsing sense of self as she struggles to come to terms with her status as a colonial subject, her initial romanticized image of France, her confused image of her African homeland, and the racism she experiences. Diouana's troubled "voice," heard in the form of her narration, tells of her experiences when she is forced to serve as a maid, rather than as a nanny; and the tragedy of her death as she is eventually overcome by the historical conditions she is forced to live in as a postcolonial subject. Released in 1966, when the mass movement of formerly colonized peoples to the metropolitan colonial centers was a relatively recent phenomenon, Davies argues that the lessons of the film remain relevant in this era of globalization characterized by large-scale movement of the formerly colonized to the metropolitan centers of the West, for it gives us insights into experiences of migrant workers today.

PART THREE: LANGUAGE AND AESTHETICS

Augustine Uka Nwanyanwu reads *God's Bits of Wood* through the lenses of Bakhtinian dialogism, noting the dialogic interaction in which plural voices conflate, and explores how discourse styles interact with a number of conflicting voices and how these in turn represent diverse interests and cultural attitudes. He argues that ideological representations in the novel serve primarily to propagate the complex power structures of domination and subordination, which characterize the society paying special attention to the effect of the dialogic system on different versions of voices and how they are synchronized in the consciousness of some of the characters. Nwanyanwu explores the way the dialogic structure seeks to express commitment to the transformation of the social order. This social order, he argues exploits the "Other" on grounds of race and class, adopting as its tools a hegemonic moral system and a socioeconomic ideology. He argues that these two systems contradict each other and adds that it is what brings about a rebalancing in worldview, ensconced in the rhetoric of liberation. In dialogic systems we have various contradictory values, experienced through different "ideological models." These models generate a new ideological construction. The ideological model corresponds with investigating the language of the text in relation to the economic nuances that bring it to being.

In her study of the trans-formal aesthetics and cultural impact on the novel and filmic versions of *Xala*, Rachael Diang'a argues that Sembène uses these forms of art to expose the neocolonial maladies that have befallen many post-independent African governments. He encapsulates these problems in a symbolic narration of a story on *Xala*, a curse which renders men impotent in the Wolof community. The specific stylistic dimensions of the two media of expression pre-empt an amount of aesthetic loss or gain in the process of adaptation from one form to the other. Yet, there are certainly other artistic aspects of *Xala* which transcend the conventional formal frontiers, finding existence in both the novel's and cinema's presentation. Diang'a argues that the latter are propelled more by the culture that produces the cultural artifacts, the film and the novel, than by the forms adopted to express story, and therefore the stylistic choices in Sembène's *Xala* are arguably products of the two possibilities. She elucidates the extent to which these two apply with regard to both Sembène's novel and film, *Xala*. Diang'a pays specific attention to the general aspects of both the novel and cinema as cultural products, focusing more on thematic inclination, characterization, story, conflict and its resolution.

In "An Onomastic Reading of Ousmane Sembène's *Faat Kiné*" Mouhamédoul A. Niang argues that Ousmane Sembène's films are grounded on a political praxis of linguistic discourse that correlates the title or *paratext* and the body of the filmic text itself. A mirroring effect between

title and content then takes place and permeates Sembène's commitment to African languages and to speaking out against sociocultural obstacles to freedom. Niang argues that Sembène's choice of titles is far from being fortuitous; it is as political as his engagement with language. Indeed, the naming of the film *Faat Kiné* encompasses two of its most essential themes, namely sexuality as a sign of an emancipation that verges on vulgarity along with a physical or emotional violence. The Wolof word *faat* means murder, while *kiné*, if reversed in a *verlain*-like fashion, births *niké* or "niquer" in French. This onomastic reading of the film through its title is reinforced by its beginning and ending. The film opens with a murderous intent and ends with sexual intercourse between a "Muslim" woman and a Christian man, both being almost equally shocking. Moreover, the double "*aa*" in *faat* also highlights three other significant components of the film, viz. polygamy, linguistic coexistence, and the confrontation between two generations. The double *aa* is a recurring pattern in Sembène's film titles, as shown in *Moolaadé*, *Taaw*, and *Guelwaar*. Sembène's choice of titles is politically and aesthetically driven. Niang concludes that this aesthetic sets Sembène's cinema apart as one that embraces hybridity and depicts violence and the liberating discourse of renewal.

PART FOUR: TESTIMONIES

Part four is a collection of recent interviews with Sembène's close collaborators and associates who worked with him in various capacities. These conversations provide novel and illuminating perspectives on Sembène's life and work as well as his attitudes on a variety of cinematic matters that engaged and challenged him throughout his career. The interlocutors include Makhète Diallo, who was Sembène's technical assistant for over two decades and involved in the production of *Camp de Thioraye* and *Guelwaar*, Fatoumata Kandé Senghor, a Senegalese artist, documentary filmmaker, and feminist activist who collaborated with Sembène for over a decade and was the costume designer for the film *Faat Kiné*, and Pathé Diagne, a renowned linguist and historian with whom Sembène founded the journal *Kaddu*.

NOTES

1. Ousmane Sembène in *Man is Culture* p. 8.
2. I owe this insight to a discussion with Amadou Fofana.
3. However, language use in Senegal shows that the local languages, especially Wolof, are not endangered by the use of French. See Fiona McLaughlin, "The Ascent of Wolof as an Urban Vernacular and National Lingua Franca in Senegal," in *Globalization and Language Vitality: Perspectives from Africa*.

4. Amadou Fofana makes a similar argument in his book *The Films of Ousmane Sembène: Discourse, Culture and Politics*.

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I

Culture and Development

ONE

Culture, Development, and the African Renaissance

Ousmane Sembène and Léopold Senghor at the World Festival of Negro Arts (Dakar 1966)

David Murphy

INTRODUCTION

The Premier Festival Mondial des arts nègres [First World Festival of Negro Arts] took place in Dakar from April 1 to April 24, 1966: it was organized in the middle of a period extending from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s during which a wide range of organizations and events—cultural, sporting, and political—informed by pan-Africanist ideals were created. For instance, the 1966 festival was followed by major pan-African cultural festivals in Algiers (Algeria) in 1969 and in Lagos (Nigeria) in 1977. The international forum provided by the Dakar Festival showcased a wide array of arts and was attended by such celebrated luminaries as Duke Ellington, Josephine Baker, Aimé Césaire, André Malraux, and Wole Soyinka. Described by its principal architect, Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor, as "the elaboration of a new humanism which this time will include all of humanity on the whole of our planet earth" (cited in Flather 1966, 57), the festival sought to emphasize the significance of culture and the arts in defining a global role for Africa in the aftermath of empire. In particular, the Festival was designed as a showcase for Senghor's concept of Negritude as the fundamental expres-

sion of "black" identity, one that highlighted rhythm, spontaneity and emotion, and also a certain understanding of art as "high culture."

Ironically, however, it was the self-educated, Marxist novelist Ousmane Sembène who won one of the Festival's literary prizes for his novella, *Le Mandat* (*The Money Order*), an ironic critique of the failures of independence in Senegal (of which Senghor was President, let us not forget). Sembène, then just beginning to develop a parallel career as a filmmaker, also won the cinema prize for his haunting film, *La Noire de . . .* (*Black Girl*), about the powerful hold that France continued to play on the imagination of Francophone Africans. Sembène was a compatriot and arch-enemy of Senghor, both politically and culturally: he was a virulent opponent of Negritude, which he viewed as an obfuscating, essentialist discourse that had no answers for a contemporary Africa emerging from the trauma of colonial rule. In his scathing film *Xala* (1974), Sembène denounced what he saw as the hypocrisy of Senghor's "African socialism," while his novel, *Le Dernier de l'empire* (*The Last of the Empire*) (1981) included vitriolic caricatures of both Senghor and Negritude. In turn, Senghor clearly saw Sembène as an uncouth and unrefined rabble-rouser: "*Nous souhaitons seulement que ses films soient moins superficiels, moins politiques, donc plus nègres, plus culturels—au sens de la profondeur. . . . J'aimerais qu'il y eût un cinéma fidèle aux valeurs de la Négritude*" (Senghor 1980, 231) [We only wish that his films were less superficial, less political, and therefore more black, more cultivated—with more depth. . . . If only there were a cinema that was faithful to the values of Negritude]. For his part, Sembène was highly aware that he was locked into an ambiguous relationship with his more powerful fellow artist. As he stated in a 1969 interview:

> *Je me rends parfaitement compte que je sers pour le moment d'alibi à Senghor qui peut laisser entendre à l'étranger: "Voyez comme je suis libéral: je laisse Sembène faire des films de contestation." C'est une contradiction que j'essaie d'utiliser au mieux*. (cited in Murphy 2000, 225)
> [I understand completely that I serve as an alibi for Senghor because he can say to the outside world: "See how liberal I am: I let Sembène make oppositional films." I'm in a contradictory position but I try to make the best of it.]

Within this complex political and cultural relationship, Sembène and Senghor were rivals who shared more ideas than they would ever allow in public. This is not to deny the fact that they were diametrically opposed in terms of their understanding of the modes of expression appropriate to this process, and also in terms of the form that development should take. However, despite their cultural and political differences, they shared a profound belief in the significance of culture as central to the development of post-independence Africa. Their views on culture represent not only their individual opinions but, more importantly, a

wider set of cultural debates that marked the era of decolonization. This chapter thus uses the debates surrounding the meaning of culture and development at Dakar 1966, as well as Sembène's role within the festival, to explore the competing idealistic notions that were at play more widely in the aftermath of African, and, particularly, Senegalese independence. What exactly do Sembène and Senghor understand by the role of culture in the development of postcolonial Africa?

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Before sketching out some tentative responses to these questions, it is necessary to engage briefly with recent scholarship on the spate of cultural festivals that marked the 1960s and 1970s in Africa. Despite the overwhelming success of the Dakar festival and the subsequent pan-African festivals in Algiers and Lagos, these international exhibitions of a global African culture have received surprisingly little sustained critical attention.[1] The one major, book-length study to have appeared in this field is Andrew Apter's *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (2005). This volume examines the politics of FESTAC 1977, which was explicitly billed as the successor to Dakar 1966. (A third world festival of negro arts, which was widely referred to as FESMAN 2010, was held in Dakar in December 2010.) From the 1980s onward, a wide body of work by historians such as Annie E. Coombes (1994), Herman Lebovics (1994), and Patricia Morton (2000) had begun to explore the exhibitionary practices that had marked Europe's attempts to represent the colonial world to the populations of the metropolitan center. Following on from their work, Apter perceives his volume as "a new kind of ethnography . . . one that extended a developing literature on world's fairs and expositions to postcolonial Africa; engaged new debates on translocal and transnational forms of community; confronted the state; and addressed the mysterious relationship between nationalism, modernity, money, and value" (Apter 2005, 3). Basically, Apter seeks to explore how the postcolonial Nigerian state, flush with oil revenues, attempted to project a pan-African culture that was truly global but that positioned Nigeria as the center of this culture: "Nigeria's black and African world was clearly an imagined community, national in idiom yet Pan-African in proportion, with a racialized sense of shared history, blood and culture" (2005, 6).

Although he began the project by reading FESTAC as the antithesis of colonial exhibitions—"transforming the gaze of othering into one of collective self-apprehension" (2005, 5)—Apter soon found a more complex set of relationships between the exhibitionary practices of the colonial and postcolonial periods. He invokes Terence Ranger's well-known discussion from *The Invention of Tradition* (1992) of the role played by Victo-

rian colonial culture in "inventing" an African traditional culture, as well as Jean and John Comaroff's ideas (see Comaroff 1991) on the role of ceremonies created by the colonial powers in southern Africa in reinforcing colonizer-colonized and tribal divisions: "[FESTAC's] [a]rtistic directors and cultural officers invented traditions with precolonial pedigrees. . . . [I]n a fundamental sense, the customary culture which FESTAC resurrected was always already mediated by the colonial encounter, and in some degree was produced by it" (Apter 2005, 6).

Although the context in Dakar in 1966 was in certain respects rather different—Senegal was a small country, with no oil boom to boost its economy or self-esteem—it witnessed similar attempts to project a "new" African culture that was predicated upon rather problematic colonial-era notions of racial and ethnic identity. Unlike Nigeria, it had a single, creative mind behind its construction, that of Léopold Sédar Senghor,[2] who appears to have envisioned the festival as the embodiment of his own poetic and philosophical reflections on the creation of a "Universal Civilization" in which "black" culture would once again (after centuries of slavery and colonisation) have a central role to play. How then did Senghor's festival seek to represent a pan-African culture?

DAKAR 1966 AS CULTURAL RENAISSANCE: LOOKING BACK OR LOOKING FORWARD?

A U.S. visitor to the Dakar Festival, Newell Flather, wrote of his impressions a month later in *Africa Report* (May 1966):

> Visitors to the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar had an exhilarating immersion in the sights and sounds of Africa and the Negro World, of the old and avant-garde in dance and drama, poetry and painting. Dr Léopold Sédar Senghor, President of Senegal and principal architect of the festival, told the audience on opening night that its purpose was the "defense and illustration of negritude"—"the elaboration of a new humanism which this time will include all of humanity on the whole of our planet earth." (57)

It is no coincidence that this quote from Senghor manages to refer both to Negritude and to the work of Joachim DuBellay, author of a "defense and illustration of the French language," promoting vernacular French against the then dominant cultural and scientific language of Latin in sixteenth-century France. For Negritude was never conceived of by Senghor as an end in itself, a simple retreat into a self-contained and self-isolated "blackness," which is why one also needs to consider the term in relation to the concepts of *francité* and *civilisation de l'universel*. In Senghor's view, *francité* is expressed most clearly in the cultural domain, and he defines it as "*l'ensemble des valeurs de la langue et de la culture, partant de la civilisation française*" (1988, 158) [the collected values of the language

and culture that emanate from French civilization]. The future of Francophone Africa lies in a Franco-African cultural hybridity of which he and his fellow *évolués* will serve as a sort of avant-garde, bridging the divide between negritude and *francité*, and somehow combining to forge a "Universal Civilization." The reference to DuBellay also signals the parallels that Senghor is drawing between what he views as the current African renaissance and the European renaissance several centuries earlier: it is through an increased awareness of the cultural importance of the past that a great, modern culture will emerge.

At the opening ceremony of the 1966 Dakar festival, Senghor reiterated his fundamental belief in both a deep sense of identity and the need for dialogue and exchange:

> *[P]our dialoguer avec les autres, pour participer à l'œuvre commune des hommes de conscience et de volonté qui se lèvent de partout dans le monde . . . il nous faut, nous Nègres, être enfin, nous-mêmes dans notre dignité: notre identité recouvrée*. (Senghor 1977, 62)
> [In order to dialogue with others, to participate in the common goal of men of conscience and goodwill from across the world . . . we, Negroes, must remain ourselves in order to retain our dignity: to recover our identity.]

Appropriately, then, the centerpiece of the Festival was the apparent juxtaposition of so-called traditional African arts and European high modernist art, which were simultaneously designed to illustrate both difference and complementarity. As Senghor had so famously and controversially stated in his best-known maxim, Africa was emotion and rhythm, while Europe was rationality and science, but each needed the other. Senghor had deployed all of his political and cultural capital to bring to Dakar—housed in the specially constructed and dramatically situated Musée Dynamique, perched on the Corniche—a touring exhibition of some of the finest examples of "traditional" African art: that is, African masks and sculptures borrowed from the great collections of European museums such as the Musée de l'homme in Paris and the British Museum in London. These were (apparently) exhibited alongside reproductions of works by Picasso, Léger, Modigliani (among others), in what must have been a fascinating contrapuntal play between traditional sources and the modern masterpieces inspired by them:[3] once again, we can see that Africa's classical art is positioned as central to twentieth-century modernity.

For Senghor, this exhibition was "*la base solide du Festival*" [the fundamental basis of the Festival] due to the correlation that it revealed between what he termed "*les classiques de la Négritude, d'une part, et d'autre part, l'art contemporain, je veux dire Picasso et ses émules*" (cited in Rous 1967, 78) [the classics of Negritude, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the contemporary art of Picasso and his followers]. It is highly

significant that it is traditional/classical African art that is elevated by Senghor to the status of high art. Meanwhile, at the Palais de Justice, an exhibition of artworks by young African painters, left him "disappointed," but understanding, for these were, he stated, the first, stumbling steps of a new art attempting to engage with Western modernity in a new visual language. A similar approach was taken to dance and music, which remain at the heart of so much popular creativity in Africa. At the national stadium in Dakar, there were during the festival daily displays by "national dance troupes." The phenomenon of national dance troupes was a common feature of the period, as national governments sought to create an officially sanctioned version of authentic local dance. Almost inevitably, these troupes created a hybrid interpretation of a range of ethnic dance traditions that often differed greatly from folk and popular music and dance, which were both a marginal presence throughout the Festival.

Why this insistence by Senghor on what he understood as Africa's "Classical" tradition, often held in opposition to its actually existing folk and popular traditions? I would argue that, despite his oft-repeated support for a new, hybrid culture, Senghor remained throughout his life a Classicist—we should not forget that his training was in Greek and Latin civilization—and he seemed temperamentally inclined to view modern arts with relative suspicion.[4] (Similar claims could be made about many European-educated African intellectuals and politicians of that era.) As was mentioned above, Senghor believed that a newly liberated Africa would contribute to an emerging globalized *Civilisation de l'Universel*, in which each part of the world would have an equal role to play (thereby replacing a discredited Western universalism based solely on the values of what he perceived as a cold, rational, industrial modernity). Senghor borrowed his conception of a *Civilisation de l'Universel* from the French Jesuit palaeontologist, theologian, and mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: this vision posits a common source of humanity as emerging from the first forms of human life in Africa. Senghor was clearly inspired by archaeological discoveries in the second half of the twentieth century that had begun to trace patterns of human evolution in which Africa was seen as the "original" source of global cultural diversity. However, despite recurring references in his essays to the "*brassage*" [mixing] of various peoples, it is remarkable that his work never manages (or seriously attempts) to develop a compelling historical narrative of change. Cultural and racial "mixing" may have taken place throughout the history of mankind but Senghor perceives a deep-seated and immutable foundation to culture. For instance, in his late essay, "*Ce que je crois*," laying out the fundamental beliefs that had marked his career, he takes the reader on a one-hundred-page detour through the prehistory of Africa, stressing the continuities in African cultural expression as a "necessary" prelude to introducing the concept of negritude: moreover, there is an extremely

dangerous biological determinism at work in his vision of the unity of black African culture, which suggests that he never fully freed himself from the legacy of 1930s racialized thought. Senghor's education in the classics and his linguistic work on the development of African languages gave him an important "long view" on the process of cultural evolution but this results in a largely static view of cultures as fundamentally unchanging: his visions of both Africa and Europe are remarkably monolithic for someone who believed so forcefully in the notion of *métissage*. This enables him to develop an authoritative and empowering image of blackness that rejects the cold rationality of the modernist project; but its images of this blackness are all turned toward the past with little sense of the very real engagements with Western-dominated modernity taking place throughout Africa.

To return then to the 1966 Festival, I would argue that Senghor is seeking to "perform," through his writing and through the festival, an African renaissance, to define an African classical age that can act as an inspiration for the future. For example, in speeches made prior to the Festival, he made remarkable comparisons between contemporary Senegal and ancient Greece:

> *Nous ne pouvons prétendre à être une grande nation au sens de la puissance matérielle. Nous n'avons l'étendue, la population, ni de la République du Nigéria . . . ni de l'Ethiopie, pas même du Maroc ou de l'Algérie. Nous ne pouvons prétendre à la puissance de Rome: à la quantité. Le peuple que je vous propose en exemple, c'est donc le peuple grec, le peuple héllène, comme il s'appellait lui-même. Il habitait un pays pauvre, fait de plaines étroites et de collines caillouteuses. Mais, comme le peuple sénégalais, il avait la mer en face de lui et des céréales sur ses plaines et de l'huile sur ses collines et du marbre dans son sol. Le peuple grec, en son temps, a préféré la qualité à la quantité. Il a tout sacrifié à l'amour de la liberté et de la vérité, au goût de la vie et de la beauté. Il a cultivé, avec amour, les lettres et les arts . . . les mathématiques et la philosophie. . . . C'est pourquoi, si longtemps que vivront des hommes sur notre planète, ils parleront de la civilisation grecque comme d'un monde de lumière et de beauté: le monde de l'homme*. (Speech to Senghor's UPS party congress in January 1966; cited in Rous 1967, 76–77)
>
> [We cannot claim to be a great nation in terms of material wealth/strength. We possess neither the land mass nor the population of Nigeria . . . or Ethiopia, nor even that of Morocco or Algeria. We cannot claim to rival the grandeur of Rome (not in terms of the sheer quantity of art it produced). The country that I thus lay before you as an example for Senegal to follow is (ancient) Greece. The Greeks lived in a poor country of narrow plains and rocky hills. But, like the Senegalese people, they had the sea beside them, cereals on the plains, oil in the hills and marble in the soil. At the high point of their civilisation, the Greek people preferred quality to quantity. They sacrificed everything for the love of liberty and truth, for the love of life and beauty. They lovingly cultivated literature and the arts . . . mathematics and philosophy.

> That's why, as long as Men are alive on this planet, they will speak of Greek civilisation as a world of light and beauty: the world of men.]

This is, in many ways, a typical piece of Senghor prose and no doubt far-removed from the day-to-day concerns of many of his people, though it is consistent with the profound (and inspirational) idealism of the era of decolonization that he was able to imagine such a vision for a newly independent, small country on the westernmost tip of Africa. Most importantly, this quotation from Senghor raises fundamental questions about the role of culture in the development of postcolonial Africa. Is Senghor in effect here placing greater emphasis on culture than on the modern industrial and technological development of his homeland? And, if so, does this logic not lead to a situation in which culture is posited as a form of compensation for the absence of material development? Is the argument here that culture is more important than development or is it rather the case that culture in itself is here being held up as proof of development?

CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

The notion of an African cultural renaissance in 1960s Africa (or at least in Francophone Africa) is often closely associated with Senghorian Negritude, that is with a certain conception of independence as turned toward the past, the break with European imperial control signalling the re-emergence of a previously oppressed culture. As I have attempted to illustrate, Senghor's vision of post-independence African culture is more complex than such critical views allow. However, it is crucial to note that the theme of cultural renaissance was also at the heart of much left-wing thinking about Africa in this period: although certain strands of this thought heralded independence as a radical break with the past and the entrance of the continent into a new socialist modernity, it is striking that so many left-wing politicians and artists of the period—from Frantz Fanon to Amilcar Cabral to Sembène—also engaged with notions of a cultural renaissance that necessitated a turn to the past that would eventually lead toward the path of development. In Sembène's case, this is not simply a question of restating his commitment to his art in the face of the old canard that he was more interested in the political message than the artistic form of his work but rather of underlining his vision of culture as an integral part of lived experience.[5] Before examining Sembène's ideas on the relationship between culture and development, I would like very briefly to look more generally at the ways in which Africa was imagined in the idealistic discourse of the era of decolonization. In particular, it is illuminating to compare and contrast Dakar 1966 with the Algiers Festival of 1969, for the two are often cast (somewhat misleadingly, in my view) as opposing visions of Africa and decolonization.

Senghor's vision of a pan-African culture was racially defined and delimited, which meant that North Africa was largely, if not entirely, omitted. (Performers and artists from "non-black" countries were allowed an observer status at the 1966 festival.) Senghor also chose to exclude representatives of the liberation movements that were at that time still fighting against racist colonial regimes in the settler colonies of Southern Africa, as well as in Lusophone Africa. At the *Premier Festival Culturel Panafricain*, held in Algiers in July 1969, both of these omissions were "rectified" as the organizers explicitly sought to include the entire continent, including representatives from various liberation movements in Africa, as well as the Black Panthers from the United States, and the PLO, thereby unambiguously linking pan-African culture with an ongoing process of political liberation. Although the Algiers Festival may have been more overt in its support for the radical politics of the day, this should not be taken in itself as proof that its vision of culture was fundamentally different to that expressed in Dakar three years earlier. (Decisions regarding the invitees to any such event are, of course, highly significant but, in this instance, the value of the 'radical' nature of certain invitees would appear to be more symbolic than substantive.) In the opening speech of the Festival, President Houari Boumedienne (a military general with no great cultural pretensions) asked:

> *Quel sens, quel rôle, quelle fonction pourrions-nous accorder à la culture, à l'enseignement et à nos arts, si ce n'est de rendre la vie meilleure à l'ensemble de nos peuples libérés . . . si ce n'est, d'une façon ou d'une autre, de participer à l'entreprise universelle de réhabilitation de l'homme par l'homme*. (*Le Premier Festival* 1970, 9)
>
> [What meaning, what role, what function should we give to culture, education and the arts, if they do not serve to make life better for all of our newly liberated peoples . . . if they do not participate in the universal task of rehabilitating man through his own actions.]

Although there is more of a socialist flavour to the wording, there is also a fundamental continuity with the thinking of a Senghor (who is in fact widely quoted in the official Algiers festival book) in terms of the role that culture should play in creating a new, universal civilization. This is the territory explored by Fanon in the conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961): in the aftermath of empire, a new humanism is required and culture is given a fundamental role in that process: the trouble lies in attempting to define the practical ways in which culture might in reality bring about such a change.

For instance, at the National Congress of his UPS party in late 1966, Senghor's speech dealt with various budgetary matters and justified the expenditure set aside for the Festival in the following terms:

> "*Les sacrifices financiers que le Festival nous a coûtés, nous ne devons pas le regretter parce qu'il s'agit de la culture et qu'encore une fois, la culture est au commencement et à la fin du développement*." (cited in Rous 1967, 81)
> [The financial sacrifices that the Festival has cost us should not be a source of regret because this is a question of culture, and let me repeat it again, culture is the beginning and the conclusion of development.]

In a country entering a vicious cycle of drought and famine that would devastate large sections of the rural population, was expenditure on the Festival merely a frivolous and irrelevant extravagance? This is not to suggest that the pan-African festivals of the 1960s and 1970s were grandiose but fundamentally empty political gestures. For even if their strength lies primarily in their idealism and their rhetoric, that alone makes for a powerful legacy, as the ongoing relevance and inspiration of Fanon's work has proven. What interests me is the question of whether culture really is so central to development; and what exactly is the conception of culture that is being promoted?

SEMBÈNE, SENGHOR, AND POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN MODERNITY

As was stated above, by 1966, Sembène was well established as a writer—*Le Mandat*, which he entered in the festival's literary competition, was his sixth published work—and he was gradually developing a parallel reputation as a pioneering figure in sub-Saharan African cinema—*La Noire de . . .* , which won the film prize in Dakar, was his third film and his first feature. A committed Marxist who had found his way into the artistic sphere via the trade union movement in France, he had emerged in the early 1960s as a firm opponent of Negritude, which he viewed as outdated and unhelpful in the post-independence era. In his novella *Véhi-Ciosane* (*White Genesis*), published alongside *The Money Order*, he uses a story of incest in a dying Senegalese village as a metaphor for the inability of post-independence Africa to face up to its ills, imprisoned as it is within a racialized opposition with its former imperial masters. Indeed, in the preface to the novella, Sembène claims that unnamed figures have asked him not to shine this harsh light on Africa for fear of how this would play to external perceptions of the continent. However, he denounces such views as a fundamental barrier to progress in what is clearly designed in part as a sideswipe at Negritude: "*Quand cesserons-nous de recevoir, d'approuver nos conduites, non en fonction de Notre Moi d'Homme, mais de la couleur des autres*" (15; emphasis in original) [when will we stop acknowledging and approving our actions in terms of the other's colour, rather than in terms of Our Own Humanity].

Sembène's unconventional education and literary background meant that he had absolutely no investment in Senghorian notions of a Classical

African tradition, which is not to say that he was uninterested in "traditional" African culture but his was a fundamentally historicized—and, I should add, highly contentious—interpretation of that tradition, which sought to explain it in light of the material circumstances of trade, war, slavery, and colonialism, illustrated most clearly in his powerful essay, "Man is Culture," which will be examined below. Although primarily concerned with the social and political issues facing contemporary Africa, Sembène refused to concede discussion of the pre-colonial past to supporters of Negritude, and he sought throughout his career to embed his ideas within a radical reading of "traditional" African societies. The clearest expression of this is his celebration of the "ceddo," those he problematically perceived as the common people, resisting all forms of domination in his 1976 film, *Ceddo*.

Sembène's most extended reflection on tradition, culture, and history in Africa is to be found in "Man is Culture," which is taken from a lecture he delivered at a U.S. university in 1975.[6] From the very beginning, Sembène refuses to view art as a separate sphere of human activity: "Where I come from art is not adornment. The word 'art' does not exist in any of the languages of West Africa. On the other hand, Man is the symbol of art. He himself is art" (1979, 1). Culture is deemed to be an integral part of daily, lived experience. This places it within the realm of history and not in terms of the timeless essence of an imagined cultural authenticity. Sembène celebrates the survival of certain elements of black African culture as a symbol of African resistance to European domination but he refuses the blind celebration of all things African: "If the demand for the ancient culture was a just cause, the servile imitation of it checks progress. The obligation to do today as the ancestors did is a sign of intellectual deficiency. What is worse, it reflects a lack of control over daily life" (1979, 9). The African past offers meaning and value but not a template to be copied for the future.

As one might expect in a festival masterminded by Senghor, literature played a central role in Dakar 1966. There were poetry readings and performances of plays by Césaire and Soyinka, and there were also literary competitions covering various categories (poetry, fiction, theatre). It was thus something of a shock when Sembène won one of the major prizes for literature, not least because the story told in *Le Mandat* was that of independence betrayed. In the brief span of its one hundred pages, Sembène provides a comic, entertaining but fundamentally pessimistic account of deceit and hypocrisy in Dakar, as various parties fight to gain access to the money order of the title. Independence has ushered in the era of capitalist modernity: in place of progress and development, the reader is invited to see exploitation and corruption.

The success of Sembène's work at the Festival created something of a problem for those critics, scholars, and journalists who had built up the event as the apotheosis of Negritude. For example, in the June 1966 edi-

tion of the monthly cultural magazine *Bingo*, Paulin Joachim sought to engage in a less than subtle process of recuperation in his somewhat ambiguously titled editorial, "*La Négritude, connais pas*" [Negritude, never heard of it]. He claims that Wole Soyinka, Tchicaya U'Tamsi, and Sembène, all of whom had previously signalled their disapproval of Negritude but who had now won prizes at the Dakar Festival, have been forced to see the error of their ways, as though winning prizes at what he explicitly views as a Festival of Negritude is clear evidence of their false consciousness.

The tenuous nature of Joachim's argument is all the more apparent in a profile of Sembène later in the same issue of the magazine. Attempting to gloss over Sembène's hostility to Senghor and his ideas, Joachim announces that "*Sembène Ousmane ne condamne pas la Négritude*" [Sembène Ousmane does not condemn Negritude] but Sembène's own words create a far more ambiguous picture:

> "*Je retiens", dit-il* [Sembène], *"le service rendu par ce mouvement historique [la Négritude] à des milliers de consciences vidées d'elles-mêmes pour être remplies de la densité des autres. Mais le moment est venu de mettre un contenu nouveau dans le concept de la Négritude. Il faut dépasser la Négritude et ouvrir sur l'Universel*." (Joachim 1966b, 47)
> ["I acknowledge", says Sembène, "the achievements of this historic movement (la Négritude) on behalf of thousands of consciences that were hollowed out and filled with the ideas of other peoples. But the time has come to give Negritude a new meaning. It's time to go beyond Negritude and open up to the Universal.]

It should be acknowledged that Sembène is far more charitable here than he is in many of his other statements on Negritude; however, the quotation is consistent with Sembène's usual Fanonian reading of Negritude as a historically contingent concept whose time had passed with the achievement of independence. What is perhaps most remarkable is that Joachim appears to share Sembène's reading of Negritude, for in an article within the main body of the magazine, tellingly titled "*Où va la culture négro-africaine*?" [Where is Black African Culture Heading?], Joachim positions the Dakar Festival both as a celebration and the culmination of Negritude. Having outlined the nature of "classical" black civilization, Africa can now look to the future:

> *Ce Festival des Arts est un tournant. La nuit tombe . . . sur une étape [dans notre développement] qui fut certes douloureuse, mais exultante. Le jour se lève sur une nouvelle ère où il ne sera plus question d'encenser éperdument le Nègre . . . ni de chanter l'Afrique comme la terre préservée ou comme le berceau de l'humanité. . . . Alors, il nous faut aujourd'hui exprimer un art de métissage culturel, sinon de métissage biologique*. (Joachim 1966, 13)
> [This Festival of the Arts is a turning point. Night is now falling . . . on a stage (in our development) that was painful but exhilarating. The dawn of a new era is upon us, one in which it will no longer be a question of

> mindlessly praising the Black man . . . nor will we constantly be obliged to praise Africa as the promised land or the cradle of humanity. . . . Today, we must express the art of cultural *métissage* if not of biological *métissage*.]

Essentially, for Joachim, the Festival was the real enactment of the metaphorical process that Senghor had often evoked in relation to Negritude, that of storing Africa's soul (for which we can read its Classical past) in a safe place in order to meet the challenges of a future globalized world.

Once again, we see here the difficulty of establishing any forward-looking or even contemporary-looking vision of Negritude, for it is fundamentally perceived, even by its supporters, as the celebration of Africa's Classical era. Joachim's desire to gloss over the success of Negritude's opponents in the arts competitions sponsored by the Festival is highly problematic precisely because it seeks to erase any sense of the present-day, postcolonial concerns of Soyinka, U'Tamsi, or Sembène. Where Senghor saw the Festival as the embodiment of his conception of an emerging Pan-African culture and the expression of Negritude, the prizes awarded to the socially and politically committed fiction of Sembène illustrated the extent to which rival visions of African culture were coming to the fore: for Sembène, racial solidarity counted far less than socioeconomic ties linking together the poor and the exploited. If culture is linked to development for Sembène, it is culture that emerges from below rather than culture imposed from on high.

CONCLUSION

In December 2010, Dakar hosted a third edition of the Festival Mondial des arts nègres. Was FESMAN 2010 able to summon any of the idealism of 1966 or was it just one more stopping-off point on the more adventurous end of the cultural tourism market? Can the expenditure on the Festival be justified when Senegal's economic position is, in certain respects, worse than it was forty years ago? Does the fact that Dakar 2010 was launched by former President Wade at a symposium in Paris (at the Sorbonne of all places) indicate that Francophone Africa is still in thrall to the cultural superiority of its former colonial master? It is highly significant that the 2010 Festival took for its main theme the now slightly tarnished notion of an "African Renaissance" that first emerged from the early years of post-apartheid South Africa: once again, the future of the continent is identified as a rebirth, the renaissance of a glorious past, taking Africa from an uncertain present to a brighter future. That President Wade should choose to commission a monumental bronze-cast Stalinist statue, built by North Korea, as the centerpiece of his vision of an African Renaissance simply underlines the complex contemporary and nationalist politics that underpin any attempt to imagine an idealized

version of the African continent's past, present and future: antiquity and postcolonial modernity continue to be evoked in problematic, complex, but often highly innovative ways.[7]

Equally, it was intriguing that discourse surrounding the 2010 Festival continued to underline the links between culture and development but in subtly different ways to the discourse of the 1960s. In an article significantly titled "Africa, Culture and Progress," published shortly before FESMAN 2010 in the weekly magazine *Jeune Afrique*, Cheikh Yérim Seck argues that:

> *Plus que tout autre, l'homme africain a besoin de création et de créativité. Après avoir été dominatrice pendant des siècles, sa culture a été rattrapée voire surpassée par les autres. Le continent africain doit renouer avec l'inventivité, l'efficacité, le travail. Max Weber l'a démontré depuis 1904 dans L'Ethique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme: aucun peuple qui ne croit en son génie créateur ne peut se développer. Les Chinois, qui sont en passe de domineer le monde, ont assimilé l'enseignement de Confucius (vers 551–479 av. J.-C.): "Seules la créativité dans l'art et l'ardeur dans le travail élèvent l'homme". Les Africains gagneraient à s'inspirer de cette culture de progrès*. (Seck 2010, 72)
> [More than anything else, Africa needs creation and creativity. After centuries of domination, other continents have caught up with and surpassed Africa. The African continent must re-engage with invention, efficiency and hard work. Max Weber illustrated this in 1904 in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: a people that does not believe in its creative genius can never develop. The Chinese, who are on the way to world domination, have assimilated the teachings of Confucius (around 551–479 BC): "Only creativity through the art and arduousness of work can elevate Man." Africans could learn a lot if they allowed themselves to be inspired by this culture of progress.]

In this vision, art and the spirit of entrepreneurialism go hand in hand. Far from the top-down vision of state-sponsored high art as promoted by Senghor or Sembène's sense of a communal culture that expresses the spirit of resistance of a people, we are here asked to admire a more generalized sense of culture as a spirit of creativity that informs all areas of life (which chimes with President Wade's promotion of free-market culture during his twelve-year presidency from 2000–2012). We can see thus see that notions intimately linking culture and development persist in the African context but it also appears clear that the 2010 Dakar Festival signals both rupture and continuity with the ideas that were promoted and challenged back in 1966.

In this chapter, I have attempted to trace the divergences but also the continuities between the differing conceptions of the relationship between culture and development promoted respectively by Senghor and Sembène. Rather than an absolute polarity, their positions reveal clear areas of overlap on key issues. In a recent article, Richard Watts (2009) cites Mongo Beti and Odile Tobner's *Dictionnaire de la Négritude* (1989) as

an attempt to situate Negritude as an ongoing project constantly in need of reinvigoration: in light of this, we might wish to read the career of Sembène, the proud black nationalist, as an attempt to realign the project of Negritude, a notion that Sembène himself proposes in the 1966 *Bingo* interview cited above. This is not to suggest that we should fundamentally (and simplistically) recast Sembène and Senghor as allies in a shared project (many of their differences were on questions of genuine substance rather than mere form), for the significance of Sembène's dissenting voice, opposing any form of "official" discourse, is crucial to our understanding of his work: his creative practice is marked by the blending of narrative styles, a profound understanding of human strengths and weaknesses, and a constant desire to make his audience leave the cinema with questions ringing in their head through his exploration of dissenting voices within African society. Essentially, Sembène believed that the work of art should launch a process of debate and reflection rather than seeking to provide all the answers; his work was fundamentally questioning and anti-elitist. The value of such dissent was revealed by its absence at FESMAN 2010: if the festival might be posited as a contemporary attempt to determine the meaning of blackness by the official apparatus of the postcolonial state, then it is a tragedy that no cultural figure of the stature of Sembène was present in Dakar in December 2010 to present an alternative vision of culture and development for the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. This gap in the existing scholarship is being addressed by a major research project currently being conducted by scholars at the EHESS and the CNRS in Paris, which seeks to archive four major pan-African festivals: Dakar 1966, Algiers 1969, Kinshasa 1974, Lagos 1977.

2. Alioune Diop, founder of the Paris-based publishing house Présence Africaine, was the official chair of the festival organizing committee, but Senghor was the figure who did most to promote the specific cultural vision at the heart of the festival.

3. I say "apparently" as various sources refer to this contrapuntal play but I have found no evidence in the archives or the official festival documentation to suggest that the originals of these paintings were exhibited. It might also be noted in passing that it seems almost impossible today to imagine a touring program of Western-owned African art of this kind beginning in an African capital. . . .

4. See Murphy 2009 for a more sustained engagement with Senghor's cultural philosophy.

5. Sembène's views on art and politics can be found in the highly entertaining collection of interviews published by Busch and Annas (2008).

6. For an extended discussion of this text, see Murphy 2000, 29–36.

7. For a very thorough analysis of the Monument de la Renaissance Africaine in relation to Wade's overall pan-Africanist policy, see de Jong and Foucher 2010.

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TWO

Ousmane Sembène and the Aesthetics of Négritude

Lifongo Vetinde

Founded in the 1930s in the Latin Quarter of Paris under the impulsion of Leopold Sedar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Leon Damas, and other black students from the French colonial territories, the Négritude movement was at once a rejection of the Eurocentrism of colonial discourse and an unapologetic identification with black cultures and civilizations. The movement thus created a discursive space for the articulation of a counterhegemonic discourse that significantly contributed to the awakening of black consciousness, a sense of pride in Afrocentric values, and a reversal of the Western gaze.

Richard Terdiman has written that all counterdiscourse "is intensely if surreptitiously parasitic upon its antagonist" (1985: 19). In their contestation of the Eurocentism of colonial ideology, the disciples of Négritude in many respects reproduced some of the most enduring stereotypical representations of Africa and the black world in the Western imaginary. Senghor was particularly prone to this contradiction as he projected a pristine version of traditional Africa which largely replicated European anthropological images of the continent. He took pleasure in reading depictions such as that of Frobenius which evoked memories of the so-called Edenic childhood milieu:

> *Quand je lisais les premières pages de l'Histoire de la civilisation africaine par Leo Frobenius, je revivais mon enfance serère, au royaume de Sine, encore que celui-ci fut réduit à un protectorat. Je revivais, entre autres scènes, la visite du roi Koumba Ndofène à mon père où tout sentiment était noble, toute manière polie et toute parole belle*. (cited in Condé, 1977, 143)

> [When I read the opening pages of the *Histoire of Civilization* by Leo Frobenius, I relived my Serere childhood in the kingdom of Sene, which was reduced to a protectorate. I relived, among other scenes, the visit of Koumba Ndofène to my father when every feeling was noble, every manner polished and every word noble.]

Négritude writers were criticized for the quasi-ethnographic tenor of their works that focused on the tranquil and Edenic nature of African environment while eliding the ambient problems inherent in the society as well as the evil of colonial domination. Alexandre Biyidi, for instance, took Camara Laye to task not only for the apolitical tenor of *L'Enfant noir* but also for its reinforcement of Western stereotypes about the continent. Maryse Condé criticized Senghor for engaging in representations of traditional African society that disingenuously occluded its flaws:

> *Nous demandons si la vision senghorienne de l'antique Afrique résiste à l'examen lucide du chercheur. La vieille Afrique avait ses tares et ses vertus. A s'appesantir sur les dernières, à reléguer systématiquement les premières dans l'ombre, nous versons dans un excès qui risque fort de manquer son but. Car enfin se demande le Noir, cette Afrique tant vantée, quels vices contenait-elle pour que l'échafaudage de sa civilisation s'effondre si totalement? Quelles faiblesses internes, quelles carences, quels manques*? (1977: 6)
> [I wonder whether the Senghorian vision of ancient Africa could withstand a clear examination of a researcher. Ancient Africa had its vices and virtues. By focusing on the latter, and to systematically relegate the former to the background, we fall into an exaggeration that runs the risk of missing its goal. For in the end the black man would ask himself, what were the vices of this much vaunted Africa that let the structure of its civilization crumble so totally? What internal weaknesses, what shortcomings, what lack?]

René Menil, Ebénézer Njoh-Mouelle, Stanlislas Adotevi, René Despestre, and Marcien Towa denounced what they perceived as the movement's essentialist and totalizing approach to race, African spaces, and identities. Condé's critique was particularly poignant. Denouncing the claim of homogeneity of the Négritude discourse on race aimed at mobilizing racial solidarity in the struggle against colonial domination, Condé points to the fallacy of such a unifying vision arguing that each society has its specificities dictated by the realities of the milieu. Failing to recognize that, she notes, unwittingly endorses colonialist thinking about the black race:

> *Je remets en question le fait que la Négritude perpétue la notion que tous les Noirs sont pareils. C'est une attitude totalement raciste héritée en fait des Blancs qui croient que tous les nègres se ressemblent et que tous les nègres sont égaux. C'est faux. Chaque société est différente des autres*. (1977: 10)
> [I question the fact that Negritude perpetuates the idea that all Black people are the same. It's a totally racist attitude inherited from whites

> who believe that all blacks look alike and are equal. It's false. Each society is different from the other.]

For Ebenezer Njoh-Mouelle, the movement was misguided in its focus on the past at the expense of pressing contemporary realities. In his historicist appraisal of the movement, he argues that it had outlived its relevance: "*Le mouvement de la Négritude a terminé sa mission, et il est temps de libérer la pensée pour une créativité qu'exigent les conditions d'existence d'aujourd'hui*" (1975:21) [The mission of the Negritude movement is over and it is time for a free thinking needed for today's living conditions]. The concept of the return to the sources, he argued, was counterproductive and constituted a veritable obstacle to progress.

Ousmane Sembène was a staunch critic of the Négritude movement, which he once described as "*une espèce d'intoxication dont se sert la nouvelle bourgeoisie en Afrique pour leurrer les masses et les intellectuels progressistes*" [A kind of intoxication used by the new bourgeoisie to fool the masses and progressive intellectuals]. He rejected blind racial solidarity which he argued tends to elide the problems and vices of African societies. In the preface to *Vehi-Ciosane* he decried the fact that many Africans indulge in unprogressive practices in the name of difference:

> *La débilité de l'HOMME CHEZ NOUS—qu'on nomme notre AFRICANITE, notre NÉGRITUDE . . . et qui, au lieu de favoriser l'assujettissement de la nature par les sciences, maintient l'oppression, développe la vénalité, le népotisme, la gabegie et ces infirmités par lesquelles on tente de couvrir les bas instincts de l'homme*. (16)
> [The debility of man in our society—that we call Africanity, our Négritude . . . and which instead of fostering the domination of nature through science, maintain oppression, develop venality, nepotism, waste and these weaknesses through which we try to cover up man's basic instincts.]

This was a critique of African leaders such as Mobutu Sese Sekou of Zaïre, Jean Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic, and Idi Amin of Uganda, whose oppressive cultural separatist policies they hypocritically claimed were designed to preserve African difference and authenticity in the face of Western cultural hegemony.

Despite its flaws, some of the criticism of the Négritude movement was wrongheaded. The concept of return to the sources, for instance, was not necessarily a bad idea, for it provided Africans a sense of the status of their culture before the onset of colonial domination during which African cultures were cast in a negative light. Chinua Achebe offered a powerful counterargument to the charge that the search for roots was an unproductive engagement in his essay "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation," where he argued that it is only a good grasp of African history that would help expose the falsity of European discourse on Africa and rehabilitate its values:

> This is my answer to those who say that a writer should be writing about contemporary issues . . . about politics in 1964, about city life, about the last coup d'état. Of course, these are legitimate themes for the writer but as far as I am concerned the fundamental theme must first be disposed of. This theme, put quite simply, is that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, they had poetry and above all dignity. It is that dignity that many African peoples all but lost in the colonial period and it is this dignity they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. There is a saying in Igbo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them. (1973: 44)

Like Achebe, Fanon argues that the psychological damage dealt to the self-esteem of the colonized peoples through years of systematic negation and denigration of their cultures and values under the colonial regime could only be corrected by a backward plunge into their history for the reaffirmation of the existence of their own world. African intellectuals had to distance themselves from Western civilization in order to achieve this goal. It is through this gesture that they discovered they had a past they could look back to with pride. Considering the logic of colonialism that perniciously degraded anything indigenous, Fanon notes that:

> *La revendication d'une culture nationale passée ne réhabilite pas seulement, ne fait pas que justifier une culture nationale future. Sur le plan de l'équilibre psycho-affectif elle provoque chez le colonisé une mutation d'une importance fondamentale*. (1991: 281)
> [Reclaiming the past does not only rehabilitate or justify the promise on national culture. It triggers a change of fundamental importance in the psycho-effective equilibrium of the colonized subject. (*Wretched of the Earth*, p. 148)]

The reaffirmation of a national culture helped the native intellectuals to regain the confidence they lost in themselves and hence their dignity. Fanon, however, urged the disciples of the movement to move the discourse of cultural liberation forward instead of settling on mere cultural exhibitionism that mummified the past. He decried what he saw as a tendency to stagnate in a meaningless search for exoticism in the people's quest for a historically grounded traditional identity which irrationally rejected everything from the colonizer. The discourse of the rehabilitation of African culture, he argues, can only be productive in the broader context of national liberation.

Sembène's critical stance against the movement naturally put him at odds with his powerful compatriot Senghor, who was the president of

Senegal at the time. Senghor qualified Sembène's virulent and relentless criticism of Négritude as attacks from a dissident superficial filmmaker who could do better by focusing on his societal values:

> *Nous souhaitons seulement que ses films soient moins superficiels, moins politiques, donc plus nègres, plus culturels—au sens de la profondeur. . . . J'aimerais qu'il y eût un cinéma fidèle aux valeurs de la Négritude*. (Senghor 1980, 231)
> [We only wish that his films were less superficial, less political, and therefore more black, more cultivated—with more depth. . . . We only wish there were a cinema that was faithful to the values of Négritude.]

Senghor only needed to watch more critically with an open mind to find that his wish was indeed met in Sembène's works. Their conflictual relationship took a ridiculous turn in the disagreement over the spelling of *Ceddo*—whether it was spelled with one "d" or two "d"s. Senghor used the power of the presidency to prohibit the projection of the film in Senegal because of that orthographic difference. However, despite their differences, Sembène and Senghor had much in common. There has been little or no criticism juxtaposing both men in a sustained comparative study of their positions on African culture and politics. This chapter is an attempt at filling that gap in studies of Sembène and Senghor. It discusses Sembène's work in light of the aesthetics of Senghorian Négritude through a reading of a few of his works of creative fiction, notably *O Pays mon beau peuple!*, his second novel, to tease out the thematic intersections and the parallels in the ideological and philosophical anchors of both men of culture.

Published in 1957, three years before Senegal gained its independence from France, a period when the critique of colonialism was a categorical imperative for the African writer, this novel was Sembène's first expression of his political and cultural nationalism. The protagonist, Oumar Faye, returns to his native land after spending eight years in Europe fighting for the French army. Upon his return he sets out to liberate his country through economic development of the Casamance. He creates a model farm, uses modern techniques in his work, and also creates a cooperative for the sale of the produce from the farm at decent prices. His ambitious program is regarded unfavorably by the colonial settlers for whom it is a threat to their survival in the colony. They assassinate him. But the elimination of Faye does not shake the determination of his compatriots to carry on his project.

CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Both Senghor and Sembène underscored the centrality of culture in the process of decolonization and placed a high premium on culture in their discourse of nationhood and national development. According to Sen-

ghor, "*la culture est supérieure à la politique, dont elle est la condition préalable et le but ultime. En d'autres termes, que l'homme est au commencement et à la fin du développement*" (1996: 97) [Culture is superior to politics for which is the precondition and the goal. In other words, man is at the beginning and end of development]. In this humanist vision of culture which places human beings at the center of all development in society, he invites Africans to rethink their condition and to come up with a cultural, economic, and political model that draws from Négritude. Sembène elaborately enunciates his vision in "Man is Culture," a lecture he delivered at Indiana University in 1975 as part of the Hans Wolf Memorial Lecture. He posits, "Culture is political in every respect. It's also the sum total of man's needs, material as well as spiritual. It is the link between the cradle and the tomb." (19). The difference between the two men resides in the way they relate to African cultures. While Senghor seemed to consider black values as sacrosanct, emphasizing exclusively their positive aspects, Sembène's approach to African culture was much more critical. He did not hesitate to expose and criticize the negative aspects of his native culture. As he put it, "*si la revendication de l'ancienne culture est une cause juste, son imitation servile est un frein au progrès*" [If the claim to old culture is a just cause, its servile imitation is an obstacle to progress (920)].

Oumar Faye, the protagonist of the novel, values his society's culture and traditions but does not hesitate to distance himself from practices that he finds unprogressive. In traditional Senegalese society professions are associated with families and ethnic groups such that, in most cases, last names were a good indicator of the family's trade. Children are expected to take up the profession associated with the name of the family and the ethnic group. In other words, professions were bound with the people's identity. Faye is Lebou, an ethnic group of fishermen and the expectation is that he too would become a fisherman like his father, but he elects to become a farmer instead. His choice of agriculture for a profession challenges the traditional methods since he is aware that the traditional approach would not be adequate to jump-start the economy of the region. He opts for large scale instead of traditional subsistence agriculture through the use of modern techniques. But he does so in the spirit of the tradition of his society. His economic vision is a reflection of the communal spirit that his wife Isabelle describes in her letter to her parents: "Tout est en communauté, on n'a rien à soi et lorsqu'on donne, c'est avec l'idée que si demain on a besoin de prendre on pourra le faire" (77) [Everything belongs to the community, no one owns anything, with the idea that if one needs something the following day he can have it].

In "Ce que l'homme noir apporte" [The Black's Contribution] (1939), Senghor draws attention to the fundamental difference between the vision of work in Africa and capitalist societies of the West. Senghor finds European society dehumanizing and observes that: "In the elaboration of a more human world, we should be able to request of each people the

best parts of itself. In a world divided between democratic individualism and totalitarian collectivism, black people will not come empty-handed to the political and social rendez-vous" (1939: 307). Work in traditional Africa is for the general good and the tools of production belong to the entire community. Senghor criticizes the capitalist system and affirms that the African "*avait résolu ce problème dans un sens humaniste*" (29) [had solved this problem in a humanist sense] by proposing African socialism in its place. Sembène's humanism is clearly evident in his novels and films. Indeed, as Françoise Pfaff has observed, Sembène is "a humanist trying to reshape Africa" (1984: 158). Like Senghor, he is a proponent of a socialism steeped in the values of his society, an African socialism one of the hallmarks of which is the spirit of communal solidarity. Faye demonstrates this spirit of solidarity by offering seeds to the planters when the locusts devastate their farms, "*Maintenant chacun peut rentrer chez lui. Je peux fournir la semence à ceux qui en veulent*" (156). [Now everyone can go back home. I can provide the seeds for those who need them.] This communal spirit of sharing which is a crucial part of traditional African culture is also an important tool in the anti-colonial struggle as well as national development to which Senghor draws attention: "*quand la récolte est mûre, dit le wolof, elle appartient à tous*" (1957: 30) [the Wolof say that when the harvest is ready, it belongs to everybody].

The choice of agriculture as a means of fixing the economy furnishes insights into Sembène's vision of the relationship between man and nature. It is not a totally harmonious relationship as many writers, especially poets, of the Négritude movement claimed. Faye calls attention to the duality of Mother Nature, who is sometimes benevolent and on occasion unleashes her forces of destruction: "*c'était une bonne mère et brave femme. Mais par moments, elle se révolte, car elle aime la brutalité répétée de la petite konko*" (76) [She is a good and brave mother. But sometimes, she rebels for she likes the brutality of the little hoe]. He underscores the need for the intervention of humans with the use of tools, no matter how rudimentary, in their dealing with nature. It is worth noting that while Senghor failed to encourage scientific and technological development in his works, Sembène drew attention to the need for the appropriate adoption of Western technology in the task of national development. This is only logical for the machine has become inseparably linked to the people's lives. His belief in the indispensability of the machine in the lives of Africans is highlighted in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, where it transforms the characters into a new breed of men and women with a sharper awareness of their destiny. "*En vérité la machine était en train de faire d'eux des hommes nouveaux*" (1960: 63). [In reality, the machine had turned them into a new breed of men.] They need Western technology to acquire the economic power on which their freedom depends in the new capitalist order that has replaced their traditional pre-capitalist forms of production. In *O pays*, Faye uses a tractor for his model farm project. He pleads with the

colonial settlers to spray the locusts that are devastating the native's crop. Sembène, far from totally adopting Western technology, vies for the fusion of traditional and modern practices to tackle the problem. Even as he calls for the deployment of Western technology to eliminate the insects he does not abandon the traditional beliefs of the people because he doesn't believe the two are necessarily incongruent. The elders think that it is because they haven't made sacrifices to the gods that this catastrophe befalls them and ask that the mysterious Cangourang be called upon to solve the problem. Despite being a progressive, Faye tells them to call on the services of the superman if they believed it would be helpful: "*Sortez le cangourang si vous y croyez*" (150) [get out the cangourang if you believe in it]. Sembène thus argues for the potential complementarity between traditional and Western approaches to solve Africa's problems.

His advocacy for this twin approach is especially evident in the domain of health. Traditional medicine has been marginalized in modern African health infrastructures for it is considered by many as not only being unscientific but also practiced by charlatans who play on the psychology of the patients' superstitious mind-set. This vision of traditional medicine has contributed to its progressive neglect on the continent. Sembène was a vocal advocate of the practice of traditional medicine alongside Western medicine. In a 1983 interview with *Komparatisce Hefte*, he observed that:

> *Avant même que l'existence des pharmaciens se développe en Afrique, les Africains utilisaient des racines des plantes médicinales pour se soigner. . . . Cette médecine africaine peut-être considérée comme un complément de la médicine européenne. Dans notre état de faiblesse économique, il faudrait utiliser le plantes médicinales qui peuvent nous aider*. (55)
> [Before the arrival of pharmacists in Africa, Africans used roots and medicinal plants to treat themselves. . . . African medicine can be considered as a complement of European medicine. In our state of economic weakness, we need to use plants which can help us.]

Prior to his marriage to Isabelle, a doctor had warned Faye: "*Ta femme ne pourra pas avoir d'enfant ou alors au risque de sa vie, car elle est trop étroite*" (161) [Your wife will not be able to bear children or she will endanger her life because she is too narrow]. The young couple was thus resigned to the idea that they would be childless. But Rokhaya, like the typical Senegalese mother-in-law, wanted to be a grandmother. Barely a year after her son's marriage she began asking questions of her daughter in-law; "*Bientôt un an qu'ils étaient mariés et elle n'avait décelé aucun signe de grossesse*" (122). [It was almost a year since they got married and she hadn't noticed any sign of pregnancy]. Rokhya, who was reputed for being a good traditional healer, especially in cases of infertility, decided that she would treat her daughter-in-law. In order to treat Isabelle's infertility, she performs a ritual after which she serves her with concoctions from the

bark of trees. Not long after this traditional treatment her daughter-in-law became pregnant. The successful treatment of Isabelle could be read as a victory for African traditional medicine where modern medicine had failed. Traditional African and Western medicine, the narrative suggests, should be used in tandem. This approach makes a lot of financial sense considering that the majority of Africans cannot afford the high cost of Western medicine. What is more, this harmonious approach is not only a step in the right direction for the continent's economic independence but more importantly it affirms the value of Africa's traditional medical practices without shunning Western modernity. Sembène's accommodationist approach to medicine resonates with what Gary Wilder has described as Senghor's "non-separatist nationalism" (234) grounded in the concept of *enracinement* (rootedness) and *ouverture* (openess). In discussing the question of hybridity, Senghor observed that, "Our milieu is no longer West African, it is also French, it is international; we should say, it is Afro-French" (quoted in Wilder, 235). In projecting the African pharmacopeia in such a positive light, Sembène, like Senghor, challenges "the universalizing and particularizing dimension" (Wilder, 252–253) of European thinking about non-Western values.

MÉTISSAGE AND DIALOGUE OF CULTURES

One of the key tenets of Senghorian Négritude is the concept of métissage, a theory for which he was criticized by many black intellectuals notably, Léon Laleau, who saw it as a code word for the transformation of African cultures through colonial education in which schoolchildren were led to believe that their ancestors were French as they famously recited inane lines like "nos ancêtres les Gaulois." He was accused of riding on the crest of the problematic French policy of assimilation. But a close examination of Senghor's politics of culture would show that he was not really a total sellout to French culture and civilization as many of his detractors have charged. Drawing on the metaphor of digestion, his approach to assimilation was based on the idea of assimilating without being assimilated. (Vues 1945). Senghor saw métissage as a strategy for leveling the cultural landscape that had been confiscated by French imperial ideology. For him, cultural métissage is an economy of cultures that freely borrows from each other and finally dilute themselves to produce an ideal civilization that he calls "Universal Civilization" (13). He argued that great civilizations were inherently hybrid, even biologically: "*L'anthropologie et l'histoire démontrent que toutes les grandes civilizations sont des métissages, biologique et culturel*" (Senghor, *La Poésie de l'action*, 92) [Anthropology and history of all great civilizations are biological and cultural metis]. He saw the mélange of African and French cultures as potentially beneficial, for it is only through such an approach of free

exchange that African civilization could bring forward its contribution for the building of a world culture that transcends racial and geographical barriers. A universal civilization would be beneficial not only to the colonized but to the French colonizers as well. He believed that "foreign elements . . . enrich a civilization, they give it another quality not another direction" (quoted in Wilder, 236). Bernard Dadié recalls that:

> this attitude, in the colonial context, was seen as subversive. It was proof of [cultural] personality. Inadmissible . . . one could try to remain true to oneself without becoming anti-French. . . . Senghor thus made himself the cultural leader of those who wanted to remain themselves in a world that organized the rules for foreign lives. (Dadié, quoted in Wilder, 237)

Sembène's approach to culture resonates with the concept of métissage albeit in a more nuanced fashion than Senghor's unbridled optimism about its virtues. Like Françoise Lionnet, he views métissage as "the site of undecidability and indeterminacy" (Lionnet, 17). He draws attention to the potential downside of métissage in *Xala* through the depiction of El Hadj Kader Bèye, a perfect example of the ambiguity in the lives of a cultural metis. El Hadj is engaged in ambiguous adventure as he tries to live simultaneously in both worlds. A successful businessman, with Western education, he lives a Western life-style and remains attached to his African culture. When he takes a third wife, the president of the Chamber of Commerce has nothing but praise for El Hadji's sense of traditional values. The president reminds his colleagues that modernity should not necessarily sound the death knell for their cultural values: "*Si nous sommes pour la modernité, cela ne veut pas dire que nous avons renoncé à notre africanité*" (*Xala*, 9). [If we are for modernity, that doesn't mean that we have given up our Africanity.] But he shuttles between both worlds selectively in a self-serving manner. El Hadji refuses to perform the traditional ritual of sitting on the mortar before meeting his young bride but goes to see the medicine man in the outskirts of the city in his Mercedez Benz, to cure his sexual impotence. At the moment of crisis he opts to speak Wolof instead of French after he had persistently refused speaking Wolof to his daughter Rama. In short, Sembène presents a flawed individual who navigates between the two cultures:

> *El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye était, si on peut dire, la synthèse de deux cultures. Formation bourgeoise européenne, éducation féodale africaine. Il savait comme ses pairs, se servir adroitement de ses deux pôles. La fusion n'était pas complète*. (*Xala*, 11)
> [El Hadji Kader Bèye was, one can say, the synthesis of two cultures. A European bourgeois training and a feudal African education. Like his colleagues, he was adept at using both. The fusion was incomplete.]

Unlike El Hadji who approached both cultures opportunistically for his selfish ends, Faye, the protagonist of *O Pays mon beau peuple*, draws on the

quintessence of Western and African cultures for the development of his people. Despite his long sojourn in Europe he does not distance himself from his native society: "*Faye sur de nombreux points, avait parfaitement assimilé les modes de pensée, les réactions des Blancs tout en ayant conservé au plus profond de lui l'héritage de son peuple*" (14–15). [Faye, in many respects had perfectly assimilated the modes of thought and the reactions of Whites while preserving deep down his people's heritage.] African societies are generally gerontocratic and under this regime of the rule of the elders young voices are stifled. Although he is a progressive, Faye displays a deep sense of respect for elders in accordance with the requirement of the culture. For instance when his father decides to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca, Faye accepts that his father goes on the trip although he was against the idea, thus bending to paternal authority. "*Oumar s'inclina sans mot dire. Il savait que son père avait raison et que lui qui atteignait la trentaine n'avait qu'à obéir*" (164). [Oumar acquiesced without saying a word. He knew that his father was right and he who was approaching thirty only had to obey.] He decides to consult old Gomis and convince him to be part of the project. Faye intelligently draws on the positive aspects of both cultures to help his people to progress and move from a traditional to a modern society.

Sembène and Senghor shared to a certain degree, the same vision about African languages and foreign languages. In "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source" [Like the lamantins are going to drink from the source], the postface to *Ethiopiques*, Senghor explains why he wrote in French instead of his native Serere: "*Mais on me posera la question: pourquoi, dès lors, écrivez-vous en français? Parce que nous sommes des métis culturels*" [But I will be asked the question: why do you write in French? Because we are cultural metis]. Sembène too advocated the productive coexistence of foreign and indigenous languages in Africa:

> *La langue africaine est un outil plus approprié que la langue française actuellement. Ce n'est pas parce que nous allons parler une langue africain: le wolof, le bambara, le toucouleur, par exemple, que nous allons rejeter l'anglais, l'allemand, le chinois ou le russe*. (55)
> [African language is a more appropriate tool than French now. It is not because we speak an African language: Wolof, Bambara, Toucouleur, for example, that we are going to reject English, German, Chinese or Russian.]

Isabelle learns Diola, a language of the Casamance, while her mother-in-law learns French. Sembène, like many African writers, Africanizes the language not only at the level of syntax but also in the use of Wolof words. We read, for example, "*Pardonne-moi fils de Guet-Ndar si je coupe ton cou*" (18). [Pardon me son of Saint-Louis for interrupting you.] The proponents of the Négritude movement sought to decolonize the form, content, and style of works by black writers in an effort to subvert the

models of dominant culture in their writing. This approach to writing that asserts the identity of the writer is very common in the works of Senghor, Césaire, Sembène, and other black writers. Although, they use French, the colonial master's language, they modify the language to reflect their environment culturally and linguistically. In a discussion about his subversive use of French in an interview with René Depestre, Aimé Césaire stated: "*Je voulais faire un français antillais, c'est-à-dire un français 'nègre' qui, tout en étant du français, porte la marque nègre*" (1980: 69). [I wanted to create an Antillan French, that is a "negro" French, which while being French, carries the negro imprint.] This linguistic strategy is deployed by postcolonial writers to challenge the hegemony of the colonial language. Examples of this subversive attitude vis-à-vis the French language as a strategy of self-affirmation abound in the works of Sembène. In "Un amour de la rue sablonneuse," in the collection of short stories *Voltaique*, we read, "*Dès Timis, El Hadj Mar entouré de ses sourgueux grimpait sur la terrasse*" (15). A "sourga" is an agricultural worker in Wolof and Sembène coins the word sourgueux without translating it for the French reader as he does with the word "Ndeysan" (a hapless person) in "Niiwam," one of his other short stories. Furthermore, he emphasizes the vibrancy of Wolof in many of his novels by simply informing the reader that one of the characters spoke in Wolof thus underscoring the "diglossic" (22) nature of postcolonial African societies.

Senghor saw race as a crucial factor in the formation of a Negro-African nation. His vision was challenged for not only being simplistic but problematically eschewing major differences between black peoples especially those on the mainland and the Diaspora. The uneasy relationship between Africans and Martinicians escaped his attention. The current situation in many African countries which are ravaged by civil wars shows the shortsightedness in an essentialist approach that assumes that people will necessarily get along because of their race. In *O pays*, Sembène alludes to Pan-africanism but the text suggests that neither racial nor ethnic belonging is a guarantee for the achievement of the much needed spirit of black solidarity. The region of Casamance in which the novel is set is very heterogeneous, as evidenced by the many local languages spoken by the people: "*dans leurs discussions, ils employaient les idioms les plus divers: diola, portugais, oulof, français*" (96). [In their discussions they used diverse languages: Diola, Portuguese, Wolof, French.] The heterogeneity of the area is further presented in a traditional wrestling sporting event: "*Peu à peu l'enervement gagnait les autres groupes ethniques venus en spectateurs: les Balantas plus nerveux; les sereres plus rusés, les gens du sud plus brutaux*" (126). [Gradually the other ethnic groups among the spectators became nervous: the Balantas were more nervous, the Serres more cunning, the Southerners more brutal.] Sembène clearly lays out the ethnic composition of the region not only to show the composite nature of the population but to underscore the fact that despite their race

there were still ruled by sectarian attitudes that needed to be eliminated if there was going to be any national solidarity let alone the realization of the pan-African project: "*Il en était même venu à juger sans indulgence ses frères de race: leur sectarisme, leurs prejugés de castes qui semblaient rendre illusoire toute possibilité de progrès social, leur particularisme et jusqu'à la puérilité de certaines de leurs réactions anti-blancs*" (14–15). [He even began to judge his people without reservation: their sectarian spirit, their caste prejudices which seemed to render any possibility of progress illusory, the particularisms as far as the puerility of some of their anti-white behavior.] Faye's return to his native land with French allows Sembène to draw attention to black and white racism. However, Faye's mother's initial opposition to his marriage to a French woman is based more on cultural differences than on race, for once they understand each other there is no evidence of friction between them. They both make an effort to learn each other's language to ensure a more harmonious relationship.

CONCLUSION

"Critics of the movement seemed to have underestimated the variety and complexity of the Négritude cultural project," as Wilder has rightly pointed out. In this chapter, I have drawn attention to the reductive appraisal of the detractors of the movement such as Condé, who projected a truncated vision of the movement which elided any positive contribution of Négritude to the discourse of Afrocentricity: "*Nous devons nous débarasser de l'idée que quelque chose de valable est arrivé au cours de ce mouvement et qui a aidé les peuples noirs*" (24) [We must abandon the notion that anything positive which helped Blacks came out of this movement]. In her harsh and sweeping critique of the movement failed to see anything postive in its doctrine. Interestingly, many aspects of their works fall within the thematic framework of the Négritude movement. Senghorian Négritude proposed African socialism as an alternative to the ruggedly capitalist system of the West and challenged the universalizing reductionism of colonial ideology as it vied for a non-separatist decenteredness in clearing a vital space for difference and alterity. A cultural humanist and activist like his illustrious compatriot, Sembène, despite his critical stance against the Negritude movement, articulated a politics of culture that had many commonalities with Senghor's. In fact, the ideological differences between the two Senegalese men of letters notwithstanding, there is more that unites than separates them. Both of them point to the indispensability of culture in human society and since Negritude is about black cultural patrimony one cannot but concur with Aimé Césaire that "*La négritude existera tant qu'il y aura des Nègres un peu partout*" (1989: 56) [Negritude will exist as long as there are negroes almost everywhere] and will outpace the detractors who had a strictly teleological view of the movement

and decreed its irrelevance after a certain moment in the history of black people. As evidenced by their works, there is no question that both Sembène and Senghor would concur with Janheinz Jahn's assertion that "*Le problème de l'avenir de l'Afrique est lié à celui de l'existence d'une culture africaine*" (1961: 8) [The problem of Africa's future is linked to the existence of an african culture]. It is not simply the existence of an African culture but one in dialogue with others as both men have shown in their works. It would be worthwhile for contemporary cultural critics with an interest in the direction and future of African cultures to examine the novel configurations of Senghor's Négritude and explore how best to harness its quintessence to the project of national development in African nations.

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THREE

Islam and the Question of Identity in Ousmane Sembène's Film *Ceddo*

Cherif A. Correa

Many critics have argued that Ousmane Sembène's film *Ceddo*,[1] presents his harshest criticism of Islam in Senegal (Cham, Makward, Daney, and so on). Some claim that Islam is represented as a foreign religion that seeks to replace or destroy pre-Islamic beliefs and practices, while others argue that, "[m]ore than an anti-Islamic film, *Ceddo* is anti-clerical."[2] In a more nuanced position, Edris Makward asserts that Sembène's harsh attitude toward Islam is rather unusual, compared to how other Senegalese artists have represented Islam in their work. However, Papa Samba Diop contends, "*Dans un élan de remise en cause de l'ambiguïté de l'Islam dans l'espace culturel Wolof, certains romanciers lui nient toute vertu positive, l'assimilant à une force de destruction des croyances et pratiques hypoculturelles*."[3] [In an attempt to foreground the ambiguity of Islam within the Wolof cultural sphere, some novelists deny Islam any virtue it might have. They rather see it as a foreign force destructive to the local beliefs and practices.][4] For Diop, many Senegalese artists share Sembène's attitude toward Islam. Nevertheless, these various claims and accusations reveal that, with *Ceddo*, Sembène has touched a very sensitive nerve of Senegalese Muslims' beliefs and has questioned their perceptions of who they are. Leila Ahmad writes, "Islam, like any other religion or ideology, has a contingent nature and is the product of its articulation with indigenous cultures and societies. In fact, the spatio-temporal existence of Islam points to the heterogeneity of 'Islamic culture.'"[5] This claim explains why both Ahmad and Sembène emphasize context in their attempt to reopen babal Ijtihad (the gates of interpretation). In *Ceddo*, Sembène looks at the

formation of identity in relation to Islam from the point of view of both the center (the Islamic text) and the periphery (its new Senegalese/ African context); in so doing, he reveals that Islam in Senegal is the result of its enmeshment with local cultures in a context of mutual transformation and adaptation.

Islam occupies an important place in Senegalese society and plays a crucial role in such fields as history, politics, economics, literature and film, to name a few. Because Senegal is predominantly Muslim (more than 90 percent of the population) when studying any aspect of Senegalese society it is useful to pay particular attention to the role of Islam or religion in general. According to Abbe Leon Diouf, of the Senegalese Catholic Church, "*Au Sénégal nous vivons le dialogue au jour le jour*." ["In Senegal the dialogue (between Islam and Christianity) is part of everyday life."]

In his essay, "Islam in Senegalese Literature and Film," Mbye Cham offers a broad and useful analysis of the ways in which Islam has been represented in Senegalese literature and film. He writes:

> On the right pole is that ensemble of attitudes shaped by zealous embrace and vigorous advocacy of Islam as the best, indeed the only, legitimate and effective vehicle for the integration of the individual and society; while the left pole posits a fundamentally materialist ideology and artistic creed which portrays Islam as colonial in nature and therefore, an impediment to secular individual and social fulfillment.[6]

To these two categories Cham adds a third group that vacillates between reverence and mockery of Islamic holy men. This second group adds some fluidity to Cham's otherwise rigid categorization of Senegalese artists' creative response to Islam. Even though we can categorize the artists' creative response to Islam, it would be misleading to group them in any rigid way. For example, Cham puts Sembène in a separate category of his own and describes him as an apostate because of the way he represents Islam in *Ceddo*. This kind of categorization does not do justice to the fluidity and flexibility of Sembène's positioning in relation to Islam and the question of cultural identities. Such a categorization fails to recognize the artists' ability to move from one position to another depending on what aspects of Islam they are representing in their work. In *Ceddo*, Sembène's attitude toward Islam is not that of an apostate but rather someone who questions the representation of Islam as plenitude, especially in the postcolonial context.

The second group, whom Cham calls "the irreverents," is more ambivalent than irreverent. This group is concerned with the complex relationship between Islam and the African people resulting from the various ways in which Islam is introduced and spread across Africa. For instance, when an artist represents an imam in a negative way, that does not necessarily imply that he or she is attacking Islam. An artist who does so

probably recognizes that Islam does not condone the deeds of a corrupt imam, as well as the fact that the image of the imam is not uniform throughout the history of Islam. Therefore, by criticizing an imam or portraying him in a negative way, the artist is also restoring the "true" image of the imam in Islam. In both *Ceddo* and *Guelwaar*, Islam occupies center stage; Sembène takes a thorough look at the influence of Islam in the negotiation of cultural identities in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Senegal. These two films reveal Sembène's various positioning in relation to Islam. In some of his other works, such as the short story "Her Three Days," the novel *God's Bits of Wood*, and the films *Borom Sarret* and *Faat Kiné*, even though Islam is not the main topic it is nonetheless one of the cultural elements that define most of the characters and their actions.

The initial contact between Islam and Senegalese cultures is more often than not represented, especially in the oral tradition, as mutual acceptance and a highly celebrated union of two cultures joined by a divine decree. Therefore, to question that sacred union is, for many, blasphemous. Sembène's questioning of the relationship between Islam and Senegalese identities is not confined to *Ceddo*. Papa Samba Diop remarks that, "[Sembène] *se sert d'évènements qui ont eu lieu réellement, mais qu'il s'applique à deformer*"[7] (P. S. Diop 193). [Sembène uses real events which he deliberately alters.][8] In *Ceddo*, Sembène looks at the role that history plays in the formation of individual as well as group identities, and foregrounds the need to accept the plurality of Islam, which is a result of its changing faces and positioning as it comes into contact with other cultures. Or, what Ann Elizabeth Willey calls "Sembène's increasingly complex representation of a plurivocal Senegalese context in both his films and his novel."[9] In an attempt to better understand the relationship between Islam and the formation of Senegalese identities we should place *Ceddo* within the postcolonial context and postcolonial theory. In my analysis of *Ceddo*, I emphasize the various ways in which Sembène addresses questions of cultural, religious, and gender identities within the framework of Islam in his attempt to redefine "colonial relationships" in postcolonial Senegal.

Albert Memmi describes his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, "as portraits of the two protagonists of the colonial drama and the relationship that binds them."[10] Memmi defines the colonial enterprise as a racist machine whose sole purpose was to exploit the colonized and keep them in a state of dependency. Writing about the colonial experience in Tunisia, Memmi concludes that the same situation applies almost in any other colony. Colonization began as a myth, to bring Christianity and commerce to the Third World, but in reality the situation was different. Even though under French rule France encouraged its colonized subjects to assimilate, Memmi argues that it was not possible. This would have led to the "disappearance of the colonial relationships," which he describes as the domination and exploitation of the colonized by the colonizer. For

Memmi, the preservation of the colonial machine was not possible without the colonizer's creation of the colonized. The colonizer erases the colonized and his past, creates laws to rewrite his history and legitimatize his presence in the world. Because of the nature of the colonial relationships the colonized have always tried to reclaim their history and rewrite themselves into history. Postcolonial theory deals with the ways in which the colonizer and the colonized try to renegotiate "colonial relationships."

Writing about the renegotiation of "colonial relationships" in the postcolonial context Homi Bhabha ponders:

> How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings, and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?[11]

Bhabha's concept of "shared histories of deprivation and discrimination" in postcolonial societies might give the impression that he views the colonial experience as a homogeneous process. "The exchange of values," which also produces a new set of beliefs, is at times collaborative and dialogical and at times antagonistic and conflictual because postcolonial societies have a history that predates the colonial enterprise. There have always been histories of deprivation and discrimination imposed by one group of people over another group at various times and in different locales before the advent of colonization. In order to explore Bhabha's question more effectively we need to place it within the context of former colonial societies, such as Senegal, where the advent of colonization does not necessarily turn everybody into a victim. For some, the advent of colonization put an end to a long history of deprivation and discrimination while for others it augurs the beginning of a long fall into chaos and endless subjugation.

Bhabha asserts, "What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference—be it class, gender or race."[12] In other words, Bhabha argues that there has to be a liminal space, a third locus, where the articulation of difference takes place; the liminal space also "signifies spatial distance, marks of progress, promises the future."[13] It is a movement beyond, a moment of suture and disjunction that also reveals, "The present can no longer be simply envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and the future, no longer a synchronic presence: our proximate self-presence, our public image, comes to be revealed for its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities."[14] The negotiation of "colonial relationships" (Memmi) or "exchange of values" (Bhabha) creates new identities, thereby revealing that

identity is not fixed and stable; it is not pre-given, nor pre-determined by history, race, or culture. Identity is transitional. "Increasingly, the issue of cultural difference emerges at points of social crises, and the question of identity that it raises are agonistic; identity is claimed either from a position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the center: in both senses, ex-centric."[15]

Ania Loomba agrees with Bhabha's claim that neither colonized nor colonizer is independent of the other, and that "colonial identities are unstable, agonized and in constant flux." "However," she argues, "despite the accent on hybridity and liminality, Bhabha generalizes and universalizes the colonial encounter."[16] For Loomba, Bhabha does not pay attention to the plurality that characterizes "colonial relationships."

> The colonial presence was felt differently by various subjects of the Empire—some never even saw Europeans in all their lives, and for them authority still wore a native face. For others, the foreign presence was daily visible but space was still divided into "their" sphere and "our." For others still, colonialism had penetrated still deeper into their everyday existence. Thus the resonances of both "hybridity" and mimicry are enormously variable.[17]

Loomba makes a good point in her discussion of the need to look at the colonial experience from multiple perspectives in order to better theorize the web of identities that result from it. She further contends, "We cannot appreciate the specific nature of diverse hybridities if we do not attend to the nuances of each of the cultures that come together or clash during the colonial encounter."[18] As Loomba duly observes, these colonial cultures do not form a monolithic, original, local entity that confronts a foreign, invading, monolithic other, nor are they fractured by the colonial enterprise. In this regard, Loomba commends Arif Dirlik for his treatment of the question of identity. According to Loomba, Dirlik shifts the focus from the binary opposition, postcolonial subject versus First World, to calling our attention to the relationship between one postcolonial subject and another. Loomba's critique of Bhabha's theory of hybridity points out a recurrent remark on many postcolonial critics' focus on migrant subjects within the First World. Loomba and Dirlik suggest that by looking at the relationship between postcolonial subjects within the former colonies we can gain a better understanding of hybridity in the postcolonial context. However, Bhabha's internationalization of hybridity, as Loomba calls it, does in no way invalidate his contribution to the ways in which we can theorize identity differences or their negotiation in the postcolonial context. While Bhabha focuses on Migrant groups in his theory of hybridity, he emphasizes the liminal negotiation of cultural identity across differences of class, race, gender, cultural, and religious traditions.

Bhabha may not focus on the relationship among postcolonial subjects within former colonies, but his concept of the third locus as a site where cultural and identity differences are negotiated helps us look at "colonial relationships" in a more integrated way. He states, "The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation."[19]

These moments of historical transformation are not limited to the encounters between colonizers and colonized, the West and the East, First World and Third World; they can also refer to cultural clashes within postcolonial societies. In the postcolonial context cultural hybridities are the result of the confrontation and interaction between new hegemonic and minority groups that seek to coexist, and sometimes annihilate each other, within the new nation.

Homi Bhabha's articulation of the production of cultural and identity differences highlights the shortcomings of essentialism or nativism, and reveals that, in the postcolonial context, questions of identity cannot be resolved without a respect and acceptance of difference. This rejection of essentialism is also present in postmodern criticism. For instance, bell hooks argues, "Postmodern critiques of essentialism which challenge notions of universality and static over-determined identity within mass culture and mass consciousness can open up new possibilities for the construction of self and the assertion of agency."[20] Postcolonial theory pushes the possibilities further by giving formerly colonized subjects the means to challenge their former colonial masters. As Bhabha argues, most of the assaults in postcolonial theory are launched from the periphery in an attempt to have access to the center and finally control it. Claims of cultural, racial, social, or gender differences should not aim at recreating imaginary, original identities; we should rather focus on those moments or processes of becoming. Bhabha's biggest contribution to the redefinition of "colonial relationships" in the postcolonial context is his insistence on the negotiation of cultural and identity differences rather than their negation. His theory of the third locus, liminality, and hybridity are important for our understanding of the negotiation of cultural and identity differences; in Islam, his argument is complemented by Richard Bulliet's "view from the edge."[21]

Bulliet begins his argument with a discussion of the limitations of the "view from the center," which he defines as the grand narratives of Islamic history from the perspective of the Caliphate. This view of Islam always begins with the Prophet Muhammad, as the central figure of Islam, and proceeds to discuss the important role of his companions, his descendants, etc. Bulliet defines the "view from the edge" as a way of looking at the history of Islam from the perspective of the masses and those who are marginalized by "the grand narratives" of history. He focuses his study on Iran to emphasize the importance of discursive plu-

rality in the formation of the Islamic text and Muslim identities. Bulliet challenges any attempt to control the interpretation of the Islamic text by proposing a redefinition of key concepts in the development of the Islamic text. Bulliet states, "The view from the edge starts from the fact that most Muslims outside the Arabian Peninsula proper are not descendants of the Arabs who participated in the Islamic conquests."[22] For example, "the view from the center" does not leave any room for *Ijtihad*,[23] which is simply defined as the search for knowledge based on individual reasoning. Most Muslims who are removed from the context of seventh-century Arabia need a more flexible definition of *Ijtihad* in order to develop a better understanding of Islam. In addition to the fact that they are not descendants of Arabs, African Muslims have a history that is independent from the Islamic conquests.

In *Faces of Islam in African Literature* Kenneth Harrow writes, "Despite the common understanding of the term, Islam varies considerably with time, place, and text—reflecting all the diversities of African culture, as well as particular idiosyncracies of individual authors."[24] This argument is further substantiated by Bulliet, who writes, "It must also be apparent that the view from the edge can never be seen whole. There are too many fragmented stories, too many different locales, and, most important, too little data."[25] The question of identity is more acute in the postcolonial context where there is the presence of a third element such as Islam. As Harrow argues, "Common features of history, and similar institutional patterns, allow us to postulate the existence of an African Islamic culture and literature." Therefore, a combination of Homi Bhabha's theory of *liminality* and *the third locus*, Richard Bulliet's *view from the edge*, and *Ijtihad*, yields a better understanding of the role of Islam in the formation of identities in the postcolonial context of Senegal as represented in Ousmane Sembène's *Ceddo*. These three concepts allow us to look at the question of identity from new perspectives by shifting the focus from the center to the periphery. While Bhabha concludes that identity is never whole and static, thus challenging the claim that Islam can be represented as plenitude, Bulliet implicitly argues that the view from the edge is the surest way to recover *Ijtihad*, which focuses on the individual's relationship with Islam, rather than forcing Muslim subjects to conform to their political/religious leaders' volition. The combination of these three theories of cultural and religious identities reveals a strong and useful link between Islam and postcolonial theory.

In Ousmane Sembène's film *Ceddo*, the "ceddo" are not a specific ethnic group or people but it is what they stand for in the face of the introduction and expansion of Islam that gives them their seemingly heroic status. They are people who refuse to submit to the domination of another religion and culture. Their refusal to accept subjugation by a foreign invader changes them from brutal looters into resistance heroes. In the Wolof society of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the ceddo

are former *jaami buur*, the king's slaves, who have attained a certain status for working in the king's army and his court.[26] As is the case in the practice of domestic slavery in most traditional African cultures, slaves can climb up the social ladder and buy their freedom to become important members of their society. But the ceddo have the reputation of bullying the population and looting people due to the new position of power that the Wolof monarchy has conferred upon them. With the advent of Islam and the conversion of Wolof kings, after their defeat by the European colonial enterprise, the ceddo lose their position of privilege and most of their prerogatives. With the arrival of Islam, the ceddo are more preoccupied with preserving their position of power than safeguarding the interests of the people in general. In the film, Sembène highlights the ceddo refusal to convert to Islam and downplays the brutality they visit on their own people. What Sembène shows in this situation is that identity is closely related to context. The advent of Islam, another ambiguous moment in the history of the Wolof of Kayoor and Baol, changes the ceddo into heroes who resist the onslaught of a foreign religion and culture.

The ceddo, Majoor and Joor Yaasin, are clear examples by which Sembène reveals that identity is never stable nor is it whole. Sembène is accused of tampering with history because he does not depict the ceddo as an unscrupulous class that was violent to the masses. Some critics argue that the ceddo embody the resistance of a culture and a traditional way of life to the encroachments of Islam, Christianity, and colonialism. In his film, Sembène chooses to capture a moment when the ceddo go through a process of alterity to become something else. They are no longer the ruthless people who loot and bully the masses, but a strong group of indigenous people who proudly defend their land and customs. They are going through a process of change and renewal that gives them a new sense of who they are. In the film, the word ceddo is a catachresis; it signifies anybody who is proud and attempts to preserve his "original" pre-Islamic identity, rather than a heathen non-Muslim. In this sense, there is nothing derogatory about the word ceddo, whereas, in its popular usage in Senegal, the term refers to the infidels and is equated with paganism. Sembène deliberately challenges such a usage and gives the term a "positive" meaning whereby anything contrary to the ceddo is negative. Yet, as discussed previously, Sembène does not represent identity in a Manichean way, whereby the ceddo are good and the Muslims are bad. Many of the ceddo practices are degrading and their lack of ethics is sometimes manifest. This is shown in their practice of slavery and the selling of their own sons and daughters in order to buy weapons from the European trader. In *Ceddo*, the viewer does not know anything about the identity of the ceddo prior to the advent of Islam. What triggers their process of alterity takes place outside the spatial frame that the film covers.

The making of the ceddo identity (as a group) is incongruous with the history that produces them as a political entity. On the other hand, Maajoor's and Joor's process of otherness participates in what Bhabha calls "[agencies] that seek revision and re-inscription: the attempt to renegotiate the third locus, the inter-subjective realm."[27] Maajoor and Joor negotiate the ambivalent boundaries that delineate their identity, first, as members of the royal family (prior to Islam), second, as Muslims (following the advent of Islam), and finally as apostates (after Islam has denied them their agency). The spatial realm that recreates them and cast them out of their previous royal class marks the making of their identity. The ceddo, Maajoor and Joor, are what Bhabha calls a subaltern or minority agency who "may attempt to interrogate and rearticulate the 'inter-est' of society that marginalizes its interests."[28] Maajoor and Joor reject Islam not because it is unfair to their traditional beliefs and customs, but mainly because it curbs their pre-Islamic prerogatives. In other words Islam marginalizes their interests.

The making of identity cannot be complete without the inscription of new signs and symbols that mark the subject's transference to a new identity polity. Yet, the marking of the new ceddo identity is marred by ambiguity. As soon as Maajoor strips himself of the signs and symbols that confine him to a particular identity polity, he seems to be unrestrained by the discursive closures that the imam's text has erected. Since both the white priest and the Bible are muted in *Ceddo* there seems to be no discursive closure as far as the presence of Christianity is concerned. It is through the use of a "flash forward" technique that Sembène highlights the fact that, at this particular moment in history, the ceddo adoption of a Christian identity is a project to be realized in the future, as depicted in *Guelwaar*. The viewer learns about the process of formation of Maajoor's new identity through Maajoor's own eyes: he is no longer constructed by a text (Islam) nor a culture (ceddo). Maajoor becomes the product of his own action marked by his enunciative apostasy, which reflects Bhabha's contention that identity is performative. By verbally rejecting Islam, Maajoor breaks away from the discursive closures that the imam has imposed upon the ceddo and the new converts. Maajoor uses new signs and markers that set him apart in a new identity polity that has yet to be named or located in a clearly delineated locus. Maajoor's movement "beyond" confirms Bhabha's argument that "our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary—the very act of going beyond—are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the 'present' which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced."[29] Whereas Maajoor is in search for a new locus where he can challenge any form of hegemonic discourse that tries to confine him to a particular place and identity polity, Joor Yaasin's locus is determined by her kidnapper, who physically delineates her new boundaries. It is mostly through Joor's character that Sembène reveals the impossibility of reducing identity to an authentic whole.

After Joor Yaasin's abduction, her kidnapper tells her in the presence of Fara, his griot and witness, "*Këfu ma ko ngir def ko jabar, waaye mugël ngii ñu teg ceddo yi laa bëgg ñu dindi ko, ñun du ñu ay julit*" [I didn't kidnap her to take her as a wife, but to put an end to our subjugation. We are not Muslims and will never accept to be subjugated by their religion]. Joor Yaasin's kidnapper's action is an attempt to fight back and reclaim his people's autonomy. At the same time it is a means through which Sembène critiques his failure to unmask his true enemy. Joor says to him, "*Jaam ag malla rekk la ñuy yeew te moyu la*" [Only slaves and animals deserve to be tied down, and you are the only slave here]. In this instance, Joor is talking from the perspective of a member of the royal class and not that of a Muslim, which points to the fact that the subjugation of the ceddo (in this case Joor's kidnapper) predates the advent of Islam. Joor Yaasin's kidnapper (mis)places Joor within an Islamic identity polity that has already excluded her from its main locus by means of the introduction of a new discourse that robs her of her pre-Islamic rights and prerogatives. Leila Ahmed writes, "[Women's] autonomy and participation were curtailed in the establishment of Islam, its institutions of matrilineal, patriarchal marriage as solely legitimate, and the social transformation that ensued."[30] Joor had already been kidnapped by the text that the imam had introduced to her people; therefore, her physical kidnapping by the ceddo, as an attempt to fight Islam, is doomed. Instead of being a real abduction, Joor's kidnapping becomes a tool by which Sembène protects her and the female subject against the discursive closure of both Islam and her ceddo, pre-Islamic heritage.

Joor Yaasin's kidnapping and her removal to the outskirts of the village remind her of her subjectivity and points to the fact that she cannot liberate herself without liberating the ceddo in whose subjugation she has unwittingly participated as a member of the pre-Islamic aristocracy. In this regard, the formation of identity as a process of alterity opens up new avenues for the renegotiation of differences, be they political, cultural, or religious. Joor Yaasin's kidnapper places a rope on the ground as a visible line that indicates the physical boundary of her new locus. The rope also reminds Yoor Yaasin of her intersubjectivity. In fact, on the other side of the rope lies the discursive closure of the imam's text, which has excluded the ceddo kidnapper from the village. Though Joor Yaasin lives in confinement, she finds a new freedom and has regained control over her body. She bathes topless in the lake to cleanse herself of her life prior to her kidnapping, and any role she may have played in the subjugation of the ceddo. Away from the village she witnesses the killing of her own brother and the brave Saaxewar, whose death symbolizes the fall of the last ceddo. However, she sees these events from the position of an outsider or someone who is marginalized. In that sense, she looks at the spread of Islam (in the hands of a despotic imam) from the edge, thus

is able to challenge any representation that the view from the center might present.

The process of alterity that marks the formation of identity is best expressed in the creation of the third locus, the inter-subjective realm, where difference is inscribed (Bhabha). The third space, which is liminal, creates a neutral ground where identity differences are negotiated. When Joor is kidnapped she keeps reminding her kidnapper that she is a princess, and thus has more power and authority than he does. But in this new space that her ceddo kidnapper has delineated, her authority is nil and she has to abide by his command. Joor has to alienate herself, or is forced to do so, from her culture so as to challenge the new Islamic order that has supplanted the ceddo culture. It is her position as a kidnap victim, both physically (by the ceddo) and discursively (by Islam) that makes Joor aware of her subjectivity and the need to rebel. At the end of the film Joor's action (when she shoots the imam) is not different from Maajoor and the ceddo's rejection of Islam; their marginalized interests trigger their reactions. Their respective contexts determine their actions, not because Islam is inherently unfair or because they do not accept to be ruled by a foreign religion and culture.

Once the subject becomes aware of the threat to agency that the imam's discursive closure poses, they move to the periphery in an attempt to reclaim their lost privileges and renegotiate their differences. As Maajoor proclaims, after his enunciative apostasy, "*Suul ker du ko tere feeñ*" [You cannot cover up your shadow—as soon as the sun shines it will reappear]. Islam is a layer set over an African context that can resurface at any moment. In that respect identity is never static, nor whole, it is the product of a process of alterity. Sembène implicitly reveals that if people wish to change their present or their future they would have to change their history first.

Sembène's dealing with Islam and the question of identity in *Ceddo* shows that there has always been an exchange of values between Islam and the Wolof people. For the most part, Senegalese Muslims adopt aspects of Islam that are more suitable to their immediate culture. As a matter of fact, Islam gave rise to Senegalese religious leaders who understand the Qur'an, the context of seventh-century Arabia, and their own society and culture. In that sense they are in a better position to interpret the Qur'an without having to rely on Muslim scholars who have no understanding of the Wolof history and culture. Sembène does not demonize Islam nor does he downplay the importance of seventh-century Arabia. However, he encourages people to look at Ijtihad, knowledge based on individual reasoning, in order to better understand the relationship between Islam and the formation of identities in postcolonial Senegal. The ceddo who have survived the onslaught of the imam cannot go back to their past. However, some of their beliefs and rituals will be integrated in Islam. This process of adaptation and re-signification, or

what Memmi calls the negotiation of colonial relationships, helps them retain their sense of identity while allowing Islam to grow and gain more adherents in postcolonial Senegal while respecting other religions, as shown in *Guelwaar*.

By the time Sembène made *Guelwaar* in 1992, Islam and Christianity had already become important components of Senegalese identities. However, Sembène warns that the two religious identities should not overshadow the African cultures that predate both of them:

> *Nous avons beau être musulmans ou catholiques, notre substrat culturel reste néanmoins profondément ancrer dans ce monde des* ceddo. *Et cela, c'est très important. Ceci veut dire que notre culture est encore vivante, très forte. Nous pouvons accepter les autres, les utiliser et nous adapter sans rien perdre.*[31]
> [Despite the fact that we are Muslim or Christian, we remain deeply rooted in the universe of the *ceddo*. This is of paramount importance; it means that our culture is very much alive and strong. We can adopt other cultures and use them without losing our own.][32]

As postcolonial mediator-translator, Sembène does not address the question of identity by pitting the foreign against the indigenous, but by emphasizing their interdependence in their negotiation of cultural and identity differences.

Identity and the ways in which people represent themselves and other people always change and adapt to the demands of history and culture. In order to better understand the question of identity in the postcolonial context, one has to pay particular attention to history and the shifting nature of culture and society. Homi Bhabha claims that postcolonial theory opens up new avenues, new ways of looking at differences that exist within postcolonial societies. He writes, "What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences."[33] Stuart Hall asserts that cultural identities are "the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourse of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning."[34] Both Hall and Bhabha reveal that the articulation of difference is a moment of witnessing the formation of identity. In so doing, they reject any claim to an originary, fixed past that gives birth to the present. Bhabha's theory that cultural differences are constructed from a position of alterity helps to show how *Ceddo* reveals a web of complex and ambivalent identities that are constantly being constructed and deconstructed to adapt to shifting modes of identification.

Both Bhabha and Albert Memmi posit that the colonizer and the colonized should not be viewed as separate entities that define themselves independently. The colonial enterprise created them, and their "colonial relationships" help them cross the boundaries that separated them prior

to their encounter. Because we cannot undo these boundaries, Bhabha suggests that the "post" in postcolonial should be redefined as a liminal site for the negotiation of differences of race, gender, class, or religion. For Bhabha this liminal space is a hybrid site that witnesses the production of cultural and identity differences. In this liminal space the colonizer and the colonized exchange values and redefine themselves not in opposition, but in relation to each other. The postcolonial context creates a new dynamic in the interaction between colonizers and colonized, as well as renewed relationships among formerly colonized subjects. Postcolonial theory does not just concern itself with the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, it also addresses issues relating to the new world order that the colonial enterprise (be it European or Muslim) has created. As is the case in Ousmane Sembène's *Ceddo*, the postcolonial subject is constantly recreating his or her identity, and in the process realizes the instability of the boundaries that delineate and define him or her.

In *Islam, The View from the Edge*, Richard Bulliet maintains that Islam itself, and especially the Qur'an, is the product of a process of resignification. The prophet Muhammad integrated many aspects of pre-Islamic Arab as well as Christian and Jewish rituals into the fabric of Islam. Some signs are borrowed from the Jewish and Christian traditions and are assigned new meanings in Islam. Moreover, Bulliet implicitly argues that the view from the edge reveals that Muslim identity is performative. Islam is defined by the way people practice it not by traditions that are frozen in seventh-century Arabia. For example, in the Wolof language the word *julit* means Muslim. *Julit* is derived for the verb *juli*, to pray. Literally, a *julit* is someone who prays. In Wolof there is a strong correlation between being Muslim and fulfilling one of the five pillars of Islam, prayer. Therefore, someone who does not pray has implicitly acquitted himself of an important precept of Islam, an act that would erase his Muslim identity until he repents and resumes praying. The possibility of erasing someone's identity, albeit temporarily, challenges any notion that Islam is plenitude, and urges us to think about those liminal, in-between spaces where differences are negotiated. In the postcolonial context hybridity is the product of the exchange of cultural values, and collective as well as individual identities are unstable and are constantly reassigned new meanings.

NOTES

1. Ousmane Sembène, *Ceddo* (Senegal: 1976), 120 min.
2. Serge Daney, *Ceddo, Cahiers du cinéma* (Paris: 1976).
3. Papa S. Diop, *Archéologie Littéraire du Roman Sénégalais. Ecriture Romanesque et Cultures Régionales au Sénégal, Des Origines a 1992* (Frankfurt: 1993), 193.
4. My translation.

5. Leila Ahmad, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 17.
6. Mbye Cham, "Islam in Senegalese Literature and Film." *Faces of Islam in African Literature*. Ed. Kenneth Harrow (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), 163.
7. Papa S. Diop, *Archéologie Littéraire du Roman Sénégalais*, 193.
8. My translation.
9. Ann Elizabeth Willey, "Language Use and Representation of the Senegalese Subject in the Written Work of Ousmane Sembène," in *A Call to Action: The Films of Ousmane Sembène* (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 118.
10. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (New York: Orion Press, 1965), 145.
11. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.
12. Ibid., 219.
13. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 4.
14. Ibid., 4.
15. Ibid., 117.
16. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism: the New Critical Idiom* (London & New York: Routlege, 1998), 179.
17. Ania Loomba, 178.
18. Ibid., 180.
19. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 2.
20. bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, 421.
21. Richard Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
22. Bulliet, *View from the Edge*, 9.
23. In this paper I do not use Arabic script; instead I use an English transcription of Arabic terms. Sometimes *Ijtihad* is spelled with two "aa" to help with pronunciation. *Ijtihad* is simply defined as interpretation based on personal reasoning, knowledge of the *Qur'an*, the *hadith*, and *Sunnah* (personal teaching and way of life) of the Prophet Muhammad. However, in literature, *Ijtihad* refers to a means to give every thinking subject the ability to challenge any form of discursive hegemony.
24. Kenneth Harrow, ed., *Faces of Islam in African Literature* (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 1991), 3.
25. Bulliet, *View from the Edge*, 9.
26. Abdoulaye B. Diop, *La Societe Wolof: Tradition et changement, les systèmes d'inégalité et de domination* (Paris: Karthala, 1981). Mamadou Diouf, *Le Kajoor au XIX: Pouvoir Ceddo et Conquete Coloniale* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1990).
27. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 191.
28. Ibid., 191.
29. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 4.
30. Leila Ahmad, 42.
31. Samba Gadjigo, et al., eds. *Ousmane Sembène: Dialogues with Critics and Writers* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 96.
32. My translation.
33. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 1.
34. Stuart Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 395.

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II

Discourses

FOUR
A Twice-Told Tale

The Postcolonial Allegory of La Noire de . . . *and* Faat Kiné

Dayna Oscherwitz

Karl Marx once asserted that history repeats itself, "the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."[1] In the case of Ousmane Sembène, history repeated itself, first as film noir and then as melodrama. Sembène's 1966 debut feature *La Noire de . . .* and his 2001 feature *Faat Kiné* can be read as two depictions of the postcolonial relationship between Africa and the West, the one a noir-esque exploration of the relationship as murder and the other a melodramatic rendering as unequal romance. There are a number of reasons to read *Faat Kiné* as a retelling or re-exploration of the questions and themes explored in *La Noire de . . .* Both films have women as their protagonists, the titles of both films refer to these female protagonists, both films were shot in French, and both deal with economic empowerment or disempowerment and the place of women in society. There are also a number of stylistic and visual similarities that seem to suggest a connection between the two.

NOIR AND MELODRAMA: GENDERING SOCIAL CRISIS

Before exploring the films, I would like to consider the characteristics of film noir and melodrama and the points of intersection between the two forms. I will sidestep the question of whether noir constitutes a genre, style, or as James Naremore has argued, a discourse, and assume, that something called film noir does exist and that it has certain tendencies

and characteristics that filmmakers, spectators, and scholars recognize.[2] The term "film noir" was coined in 1955 by French critics Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton.[3] It was applied to certain American films produced after World War II, films regarded as darker in tone and visual content than previous Hollywood films. The concept of noir was not a studio-produced category, as in the case of many cinematic genres, but a visual and thematic paradigm applied by critics and scholars after the fact. It became widely used only in the 1970s, and has since been applied to films of different periods and provenance.[4]

Among the characteristics of film noir are chiaroscuro lighting, the evident use of shadow, expressionistic camera angles, tight framing that conveys a sense of claustrophobia or entrapment, and shots that foreground modernity, including close-ups of cars, radios, telephones, and televisions, and close-in shots of city streets. Film noir often involves criminals, police, and violence. It tends to be told through flashback, with voice-over narration, and frequently has "an investigative structure" that revolves around the resolution of a crime, often murder.[5] Many of the characters in film noir are working class, although bourgeois characters, particularly women, also appear. Thematically, film noir has been asserted as exploring class relations, and specifically the disempowerment of the working class in the modern era,[6] as reflecting a crisis of masculinity produced by modernity,[7] as expressing anxiety about women's economic and social empowerment,[8] and as critiquing the economic and social order.[9]

Melodrama, like film noir, has parameters that are not entirely agreed upon. It is, at least in current scholarship, associated with female-centered films in which emotions and desire play a central role. Melodrama is often presumed to be targeted toward a female audience, to produce strong emotional affect, and to foreground conflict and internal contradiction.[10] Many feminist scholars read melodrama as defined by a "surface realism" that is ultimately undermined by the emotional excesses associated with it.[11] Melodrama is also punctuated by dislocations of time and space that function to enhance the emotional affect of the film through a "form of mistiming, a bad timing" that "allows the slippage between what is and what should have been to become visible."[12] It is an anti-realist genre that masquerades as a realist genre, and it often functions to criticize the existing social order, particularly capitalism and patriarchy.

Both film noir and melodrama are regarded as critiquing the existing social and economic order through visual style and narrative structure. Both center on male-female relationships, although the one is more closely associated with female desire and the other with male violence provoked by desire. Steve Neale suggests that the fundamental difference between film noir and melodrama is that the former records "a crisis of the social order" and the latter "a crisis within the social order."[13] Chris-

topher Orr, on the other hand, argues that both noir and melodrama are rooted in heterosexual desire and specifically a blockage of that desire, and that the difference between them resides in whether attempts "to resolve that blockage of desire take place within or outside the law."[14]

LA NOIRE DE . . . : A FEMINIZED, AFRICAN NEO-NOIR

I will return to these points of convergence in noir and melodrama, but I would first like to explore the elements of film noir in *La Noire de . . .* and their potential significance. It should come as no surprise that a genre associated with a crisis of patriarchal order and critiques of capitalism might be of interest to an African filmmaker exploring issues of independence and autonomy in the post-independence era. Although Sembène's films are often associated with Third Cinema, which rejects classical Hollywood aesthetics as well as the idea of cinema as spectacle, Sembène's vision of African film is not identical to that of Third Cinema. It is true, as David Murphy has suggested, that Sembène expressed a strong desire to make socially and politically engaged African films for an African public, but it is also true that he never went so far as to describe his own films as Third Cinema, nor to a desire to break with European or Hollywood filmmaking practice altogether. In fact, I would suggest that what Sembène sought in his cinema was a form of engagement with European and Hollywood cinema, a type of re-appropriation that would allow the African cinema he was working to create to stand as an alternative to the cinemas of Europe and Hollywood, but not necessarily as an antithesis. For that reason, film noir, with its roots in French filmmaking of the 1930s, its development in Hollywood by expatriate German expressionists, its renewal by French filmmakers of the New Wave, its subversive and potentially anti-capitalist underpinnings, its close associations with the modern condition, and its questions of gender roles and relations, might have seemed a very attractive form with which to play.

Sembène is not the only African director or author to recognize the potential of noir to comment upon the experiences of Africans in the post-independence era. A number of African writers, including Mongo Beti of Cameroon and Driss Chraïbi of Morocco, have used detective fiction as a vehicle to critique neocolonialism, and African filmmakers such as Jean-Pierre Bekolo of Cameroon and Oliver Schmitz of South Africa have used elements of film noir to explore distinctly African themes. In fact, Pim Higginson has suggested that the crime novel (and we can add the crime or noir film) has become one of the preeminent narratives used by African writers and filmmakers to explore and critique postcolonial Africa.[15] Moreover, African American directors, such as Spike Lee, have used film noir to explore contemporary race relations in the United States because the visual style of film noir, with its strong

contrasts between light and dark, provides an opportunity to explore and recast the relationship between black and white off-screen.[16]

La Noire de . . . is based on an eponymous short story by Sembène, originally published in the collection *Voltaïque* (1962).[17] In both the film and the short story, a young Senegalese woman named Diouana finds herself lured to France by the French family for whom she works in Dakar. Diouna is persuaded to go with the family partly because she buys into the stories she has heard about France being a land of prosperity, and partly because Madame, the wife of the family, subtly suggests to Diouana that prosperity awaits her by giving her secondhand dresses and shoes. The combination of the myth of France as promised land and the (used) consumer goods given as a lure to Diouana symbolize the neoliberal economic promises that undergird globalization—namely that in the exchange of commodities and labor between wealthy and less wealthy countries, all sides will prosper. Diouana leaves behind Senegal and everyone she knows to be a domestic worker in France, but she finds that the reality of this process of exchange is radically different than the promise, at least for those from the so-called developing world. Rather than becoming wealthy and successful, Diouana finds herself trapped and defenseless, a prisoner and in her words "a slave," her dream voyage to the West no longer a dream but a nightmare, an ending foreshadowed in the short story by references to the Island of Gorée, an infamous slaving station, as Diouana departs for France.[18]

Diouana's experience echoes or perhaps anticipates the experiences of countless immigrants to the West. The forces of what we now term globalization—the progressive integration of local and regional economies throughout the world accompanied by the rise in consumer capitalism—is, as Subhrabata Bobby Banerjee and Stephen Linstead have suggested, merely the continuation of colonialism in the postcolonial era and in many ways the logical consequence of decolonization itself. "First World" nations, unable to exploit the resources and labor of the colonies on-site in precisely the way they did in the colonial era, have found new ways to develop their economies at the expense of those from economically less prosperous nations.[19] *La Noire de . . .*, made at a moment when the connection between colonialism and globalization was not yet clear, anticipated in many ways what was to come.

In the short story, Sembène is careful to tie Diouana's death to the end of empire and the beginning of the Fifth Republic. Diouana's death takes place at Antibes, on the French-Mediterranean coast on June 23, 1958, three weeks after Charles De Gaulle was granted emergency powers to stabilize the French government in the wake of rising violence in Algeria, and the collapse of the French Fourth Republic, and the referendum on colonial independence. In the story's opening paragraph, the narrator remarks that "neither the destiny of the Republic, nor the future of Algeria or the territories under colonial rule was on the minds of those who

were on the beach at Antibes" that day, thereby making the colonial political context part of the story's setting. The opening also juxtaposes the bodies of the French bourgeoisie sitting on the beach and Diouana's bleeding corpse in the bathtub. This functions to suggest that the economic prosperity and rise of leisure in France during this period referred to as the "Thirty Glorious Years" was paid for by African labor and ultimately African blood.

It is never stated why Madame and her family leave Africa, but the references to Algeria suggest that this may be part of the migration of French settlers back to Europe on the eve of decolonization. Moreover, it is fairly clear that Madame and the family are reluctant to leave Senegal, a fact made evident by the number of "souvenirs" of Africa that adorn the house in France and by Madame's fear, prior to leaving Africa, that no French maid will serve her in the way to which she has become accustomed. Madame's reluctant return to France and her fear that she will not be "properly served" suggests a loss of formal and economic power that characterized both colonial settlers who returned to the *métropole* and the Republic itself. However Madame, and France by extension, counter this loss of power by bringing colonial Africa back to France, in the form of African workers, who, like Diouana, labored and labor almost invisibly for the prosperity of the Republic, while being denied even the most basic Republican and often human rights. Far from ending colonial domination, therefore, the end of empire, Sembène's story warns, precipitates the displacement of the colonial order and its reconstitution at the metropolitan center.

What follows the opening paragraph describing the bathers on the beach is the arrival of two police inspectors, a magistrate and a coroner. Typically, in detective fiction, a crime occurs and the arrival of the detectives signals an investigation of the recent past and of the relationships among the various suspects and the person who is dead. In Sembène's story, all of these suspects have connections to France's colonies. Madame and her family have recently returned from West Africa, and their neighbor, the Commandant, is a former marine who also spent time in colonial Africa. The conventions of the detective genre (the necessity of an investigation of the past) and the colonial ties that bind all of the potential suspects would seem to suggest that the detectives ought to interrogate the colonial context that structures the relationship between Diouana and her employers. However, no such interrogation occurs and in the end, the magistrate rules that no crime was committed, despite the fact that the events as they are described in the text suggest otherwise.

Through his appropriation and modification of the detective story, therefore, Sembène suggests that in the eyes of the Republic (both the Colonial Fourth Republic that is ending and the [post]colonial Fifth Republic that is emerging), Madame has done nothing wrong. Her engagement of Diouana in Africa and her transportation and exploitation of

Diouana in France is a process that is at least sanctioned and perhaps endorsed by the official, legal institutions of the state. If a crime has been committed, this verdict suggests, it was Diouana herself who committed it by taking her own life and therefore removing herself from Madame's service. This suggestion is reinforced by the account of her death published in the local newspaper, which describes Diouana as "nostalgique" or "nostalgic," suggesting that her death is her failure to accept her place in the new political and economic order. However, this version of events is unsatisfactory and the story therefore places the burden of resolving this crime on the reader, in "a deliberate attempt to replace [the detectives' and journalists'] interpretation with a different and more complex account."[20]

The film version of *La Noire de . . .* deals with this issue somewhat differently. The film is set later in the post-independence era, as clear references are made to Senghor's government and to his cooperation with France as well as to the transition of power in Senegal from Senghor to Abdou Diouf. Moreover, during discussions among the white, French characters in the film, it is directly stated that Senghor has assured the relations between France and Senegal will not be disrupted with that transition. This makes manifest the short story's more implicit assertion that Diouana's condition in France is merely the importation of colonial hierarchies in the aftermath of decolonization. More interestingly, the inspectors and the magistrate are altogether absent from the film, although the newspaper account of Diouana's death is not. This suggests that Diouana's situation in France is so accepted, so "normal" it does not even merit an official inquiry. Despite the absence of the detectives, however, the film version of *La Noire de . . .* retains some of the key components of the detective film or *film policier*, as well as several of noir's visual elements.

The film begins, for example, with the arrival of a ship into a port and then cuts to a scene with Diouana riding in a car with Monsieur toward Antibes. The setting is clearly modern and urban, as is typical of noir films, and the presence of the car, and of a man and woman riding in a car, suggest film noir, since shots of cars and roads feature prominently at the beginning of noir films.[21] The film then cuts to the apartment where Diouana lives and works. There are no scenes of the town or coast again until the end, except for two shots in which Antibes is visible through a window of the apartment. This, too, is typical of film noir, creating a sense of entrapment or claustrophobia through the juxtaposition of interior and exterior spaces, and shots in which windows and views through windows figure prominently. Moreover, one of the two shots of Antibes is a night shot, and urban, nighttime scenes are classic elements of noir.

The lighting in the scenes in the apartment feature strong contrasts between light and dark and obvious shadows projected on the walls, particularly behind Diouana. What is more, despite the fact that the cam-

era is largely static, as it is in most of Sembène's films, there is a notable use of expressionistic camera angles or dramatic close-ups used in typical noir fashion to suggest pessimism and unease,[22] thus reinserting the short story's suggestion that something is not quite right in Diouana's condition. Thus, *La Noire de . . .* contains one of the central themes of noir films, the exploitation of the working classes.[23] The film is also narrated through voice-over, by Diouana, and it may be understood as a long flashback sequence, except that the frame of the present has been entirely removed. In fact, the action of the film constitutes a type of investigation or explanation into Diouana's death, even if that death is not revealed until near the end of the film.

Interestingly, in place of *le noir* (as film noir is sometimes called), this film is *la noire*, a feminized neo-noir film that focuses not on the threat of a powerful woman to patriarchal order but rather on the subjugation of a black woman by a white woman, or an exploration of black and white in black and white.[24] Madame is, in some ways, the classic *femme fatale*, ambiguous, powerful, self-serving, dangerous, but it is Diouana and not a male protagonist to whom her power is a threat. Moreover, Madame's power is wielded not as a danger to Western patriarchal society, but in tandem with it. The powerful woman of (post)colonial Europe, Sembène's film suggests, derives her power from the subjugation of "other" women, just as man in the patriarchal order derives his power from the subjugation of woman. Moreover, Monsieur's distinct lack of power in the film suggests a sort of emasculation or crisis of masculinity that reflects France's own loss of power at the end of empire, a loss of power compensated for by Madame's re-establishment of the colonial hierarchies in her own domestic space. The film reinforces this sense of emasculation and powerlessness by showing Monsieur, drunk and passed out on a bed, filmed through low-key lighting in classic noir, chiaroscuro style.

La Noire de . . . feminizes the archetypal narrative of film noir in other ways as well. What lures Diouana to France is her desire to emulate the women she sees in French magazines. For her, the clothes and shoes she sees on these women are emblems of a social and economic power she believes she can attain by leaving Senegal for France. In many ways, this is the promise of Western consumer culture—that by acquiring "things" a person can obtain status, presumably equated with agency. Similarly, Madame brings Diouana back with her to France in an effort to maintain the status and position that decolonization, in some sense, took away.[25] The two women, therefore, are in competition in some respect, and Madame must keep Diouna from becoming empowered in order to maintain her own power. Sembène's feminized noir then is the story of the competing desires of two women for the same (unattainable) ideal of agency, rather than the story of the competing desires of two men for the same woman, and it can be understood, among other things, as an exploration of the relationship between race and gender and as a critique of a West-

ern feminism that "liberates" the white, bourgeois woman at the expense of her black maid.[26]

If this seems atypical of classical *film noir*, it must be noted that film noir is also driven by the female desire for independence and power in a "psychotically gendered world."[27] Such a dynamic, for example, drives Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1946), often regarded as one of the archetypal examples of classic noir. On the surface, *Laura* is the story of two men competing for the interest of the same woman, Laura Hunt, a successful and beautiful advertising executive. However, beneath the surface, what drives *Laura* is as much the desire of other women *to be* Laura or to take her place as men's desire *for* Laura. In fact, the murdered person in *Laura* is not actually Laura, but a young model named Diane who wishes to take Laura's place, a model who is killed dressed in Laura's clothing and inside Laura's home. At one point in the film, Laura even claims that it was she who killed Diane, not, she says, because of what she did but because of what she did not do. Diouana, it must be noted, is seen wearing Madame's clothes, and she is also killed (or kills herself) inside Madame's house. The case, therefore, could quite easily be made that Madame is guilty of Diouana's death, both because of what she does and what she does not do. In both *Laura* and *La Noire de . . .* , then, the bourgeois woman is alive at the end of the film, while the female employee who sought to emulate her is dead. Moreover, in both cases, it is as much the social order that is responsible as the person who pulls the trigger or wields the knife.

The film version of *La Noire de . . .* also uses Diouana's death to suggest that the prosperity of France is due in part to the exploitation of its (post)colonial subjects. As in the short story, the beach at Antibes appears in the film in a montage sequence that features first Diouana's bloody body and then the bathers on the beach. The juxtaposition of the two sets of images, according to classical montage theory, suggests a causal relationship between the two. Moreover, the beach sequence, which is accompanied by light jazz, is filmed in such a way that it evokes Jacques Tati's *Les Vacances de M. Hulot*, a film that may also be read as a critique of the bourgeoisie. The relationship between sacrificed Africans and European prosperity is also suggested elsewhere in the film. Diouana, talking about going to France while walking with her boyfriend, traverses first the Place de l'Independence and then the monument to the African soldiers who fought for France in World War II. The juxtaposition of these two images suggests that little has changed since independence, that Africans can still be called upon and compelled to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of France. Moreover, because Diouana walks across the top of the war monument, she becomes connected to it and what it represents, and the film therefore suggests while Diouana is still in Dakar, what her ultimate fate will be. The monument, then, stands in for the film

itself, a stark warning about the unequal relationship between France and its former colonies in Africa and elsewhere.

BLURRING BOUNDARIES: *FAAT KINÉ* AS NATIONAL MELODRAMA

Sembène's *Faat Kiné*, interestingly, also exhibits elements of film noir. The film recounts the story of Fatou Kiné N'Diaye Diop, an unwed mother, born in the year of Senegal's independence, who manages to overcome adversity to become the manager of a Total station in Dakar. The film opens with Kiné and her children on the day they learn the results of the children's baccalaureate exam. It then moves forward, progressively toward the party celebrating the children's success at the exam, but it also periodically flashes back in order to reveal how Kiné went from being kicked out of school for becoming pregnant by one of her teachers to becoming a successful, bourgeois head of household. In this way, the film may be read as an investigation or exploration of Kiné's identity and status, which is a common narrative device in film noir. The difference in *Faat Kiné* is that the investigation is of the life of a woman who is still alive. Kiné also exhibits certain characteristics of the film noir femme fatale. Men find her attractive, she is financially independent, and she is not afraid to use force to get her way. She also smokes, which is one of the classic hallmarks of a femme fatale.[28] Moreover, Kiné's relentless struggle to attain economic and social independence for herself and her children makes of her a woman similar to the classic femme fatale.

Visually, *Faat Kiné* also shares certain elements of noir. The film is punctuated with shots of cars and streets, all classic elements of noir, and in fact the car, a key sign of Kiné's mobility, figures prominently in the film. The film is also structured in many ways around the contrast of interior and exterior spaces, although the spaces in question are much more open than in classic film noir. In places, the film also features the stark contrasts of light and shadow associated with chiaroscuro lighting, particularly when Kiné is behind her desk at work. In several of those shots, in fact, her shadow projects against the wall in much the same way as Diouana's in *La Noire de . . .* Despite these elements, *Faat Kiné* could most easily be classified as melodrama. The film is largely about Kiné's struggles as a single mother and melodrama, as Marcia Landy has asserted, is the preeminent mode for exploring issues associated with motherhood.[29] Carmela Garritano argues that the film is characterized by Hollywood aesthetics and that the figure of Faat Kiné signifies the contradiction and excess typically associated with Hollywood melodrama.[30] Ken Harrow calls the world of the film that of "flat-out melodrama" and says it is dominated by sentiment and family romance.[31]

A number of critics have highlighted the female-centered nature of the film, and have argued that the film is a transformational narrative of

women's struggle and triumph.[32] [33] And despite the fact that Jude Akudinobe does not regard the film as sentimental, the flashbacks that elucidate Kiné's character and her past for the spectator are all triggered by emotional responses either on her part or the part of her mother. Moreover, as Akudinobe points out, the film is realist, but not in an unproblematic way. It is not a day-in-the-life film, which "would have been too restrictive in generating meanings and spaces of suberversion."[34] Rather, the film has a surface realism punctuated by moments of anti-realism, which is a principal characteristic of melodrama. There are also a number of temporal and spatial dislocations in *Faat Kiné*. It is not entirely clear, for example, how much time elapses in the narrative. It could be as little as a few days or as long as a few weeks. We also move, with Kiné, around Dakar, going from her place of business, to her home, to the bank, to a café, and back home again. It is also fairly clear, at least in part, that what drives the narrative is heterosexual desire. Desire is what led Kiné to become an unwed mother, and the relationship between Kiné and various men, most notably Jean Guèye, the suitor with whom she appears in the film's final scene, functions as an important structuring device.

Despite its apparent female-centered focus, *Faat Kiné* is really a film about men and women, the relationships between them, and their various roles in the society and family.[35] The critical confrontation scene near the end of the film functions as a critique of patriarchal power, but not a critique necessarily of masculinity and femininity or of heterosexual love.[36] The fathers of Kiné's children, in fact, are taken to task for not fulfilling their proper masculine roles, for abusing the privileges of masculinity without accepting its responsibilities. The crisis narrated, then, is precisely a crisis within the social order, not a crisis of the social order, which is consistent with Steve Neale's definition of melodrama.

But what does the film have to say about relations between Africa and the West in the postcolonial era? Many critics have been troubled by this aspect of the film, regarding it as markedly different from Sembène's previous work. Carmela Garritano, for example, says that Faat Kiné, as a character, is "a replica of the bourgeois individual empowered by the capitalist system that in his large body of work. . . . [Sembène] has sought to condemn."[37] Harrow says that the film moves "far from the rhetoric of national liberation or anti-neocolonialism."[38] It is true that Kiné prospers by working for a multinational corporation, but does it therefore follow that the film contradicts or renounces Sembène's earlier positions on such issues?

Reading the film against *La Noire de . . .* suggests otherwise. First of all, while it is true that Kiné prospers working in a capitalist context, it is also true that Kiné remains in Senegal whereas Diouana, who was exploited by a capitalist system, leaves for France. This difference may seem insignificant, but it is in fact crucial. The film seems to posit two possibilities for capitalism, one African and the other European. For example, at the

Credit Lyonnais, which is a French institution, Kiné refuses a loan because the terms are, in her words, "usurious." This form of "banking" is juxtaposed against that of the *tontine*, which is a uniquely African system, a system that is depicted in the film as communitarian and equitable, and a system from which Kiné benefits. Similarly, Kiné refuses to accept European currency at her gas station, and there is a key sequence in which a female customer, attempting to use European currency, accuses Kiné of doing business in a "black" way, using "une manière de négresse." This reinforces this idea that there are two different ways of operating in a market economy, and since the European currency the woman tries to use is counterfeit, it functions as a clear indictment of a particular way of doing business and implies that European capitalism makes promises that it does not keep, which is a message very similar to that of *La Noire de . . .*

Another important and related aspect is the effect Kiné's money has on others. Because Kiné is in Senegal, for example, what she earns also stays in Senegal. This allows her money to circulate to others, from the flower seller who frequents her office to the owner of the café where she and her friends eat ice cream. Diouana, on the other hand, is in France, and her money is in France. *La Noire de . . .* makes it clear that the money does not make it home to her family until after her death, and it does not benefit Diouana either, because she has no freedom to leave the apartment, even if she is paid. So while it is true that both of them are participating in a global-capitalist system, their respective positions in that system is different. This reading may explain the elements of noir in *Faat Kiné* and the overall dominance of melodrama despite those effects. What the film recounts, at the level of narrative, is a woman's triumph after negotiating and to some extent feminizing an essentially patriarchal order. This is a process that Sembène mirrors in the film's generic composition, since the noir elements appear largely at the beginning of the film, but they are progressively effaced by elements of melodrama.

The contrasts and differences between Kiné and Diouana are also made manifest by an interesting visual and narrative emphasis on their shoes and feet. In *La Noire de . . .* shoes are one of the lures Madame uses to persuade Diouana to go to France. In this way, they represent the material promises made by an exploitative capitalist system. However, once in France, Diouana is ordered to remove her shoes, and in fact, she is told she is "only a maid" and should not be wearing such shoes. This reinforces the idea that the West's promise of prosperity is, for Africans, totally empty and that, in fact, the realization of that promise constitutes some sort of threat to the existing order.

In *Faat Kiné*, shoes and feet convey a completely different message. Kiné removes her shoes in her office for personal comfort, and Sagna, one of her employees, reminds her not to forget them. Her ability to go barefoot in that context is a sign of power, and the shoes she wears a sign of

her femininity. Therefore, the same gesture—going barefoot—has opposite meanings in the two films, and the opposite signification is a direct result of the geographical location of the women. Similarly, the final shot in *Faat Kiné* is of Kiné's bare feet, as she sits in her bedroom with her lover, Jean. This shot has elicited much critical commentary, and is widely read as Sembène's assertion of Kiné's status and her ability to control and direct her desire, rather than having that desire controlled and directed for her. There is a similar shot of Diouana's bare feet in her bedroom in *La Noire de . . .* but again, it suggests Diouana's lack of power and lack of agency, because Diouna is lying on her bed exhausted from working, a reflection of her powerlessness.

The contrasting representations of bare feet in the two films also reveal the ways in which the contrasting genres shape the meanings of the films. In *La Noire de . . .* the focus of the narrative is the abusive system in which Diouana finds herself imprisoned and her secondhand shoes and bare feet are emblematic images of her powerlessness, which is a classic theme of film noir. In *Faat Kiné*, in contrast, shoes and bare feet symbolize both feminine power and female desire, both of which are classic elements of melodrama. Read one against the other, the two films suggest that Sembène did not, as some critics have suggested, rewrite or sell out his views to make *Faat Kiné*. Rather, he worked in the two films to create two different visions of Africa's engagement with the global marketplace. It is also perhaps also worth remembering in considering how to understand *Faat Kiné*, in particular, that melodrama is considered largely antirealist. The world in which Kiné moves looks, to the untrained eye, like the "real" world. However, the film is actually somewhat utopian. Kiné's rise is far more plausible in a Senegal that might come to be, but does not yet exist. This suggests that another way to understand the relationship between *La Noire de . . .* and *Faat Kiné* is as a pair of films, one that deals with Africa's relationship to the global economy as it is (or was at a particular moment in time), and the other that explores that relationship as it could be. Just as Kiné is able to transform gender roles to incorporate elements of the masculine into the feminine and the feminine into the masculine in order to rework romantic relations between men and women, so too, the film suggests, does Africa have the capacity to incorporate elements of capitalism into a socialized African economy and to infuse Western neoliberal capitalism with uniquely African elements in order to negotiate a type of economic and political equality for Africa in an increasingly globalized world.

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FIVE

Bringing the Rain Indoors

Rereading the National Allegory in Ousmane Sembène's Xala

Matthew H. Brown

Ousmane Sembène's 1975 film (1974 novel), *Xala*, is—as Fredric Jameson has argued—a national allegory. It is obviously perilous to accept Jameson's sweeping generalization that "*All* third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as . . . national allegories," but there can be no doubt that Jameson cites *Xala* as an example of national allegory because it so succinctly and poignantly satirizes the postcolonial African nation-state.[1] Not only does the narrative offer up its allegorical metaphors efficiently, but Sembène has provided allegorical interpretations of the narrative in numerous interviews.[2] Therefore, besides a few skeptics,[3] critics take for granted a more-or-less straightforward formulation of narratological equivalences, including the Chamber of Commerce as state, El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye as comprador bourgeoisie, his daughter Rama as budding "national consciousness," the beggars and villagers as the "wretched of the earth," and the *xala* as the impotence of the African bourgeoisie and/or the curse of the poor. The final scene, in which the beggars cure El Hadji's *xala* by humiliating him, is often read as the dramatization of class revolution. For example, Marcia Landy writes that, "The beggars, the dispossessed, surrogates for peasants, fishermen, farmers, and workers, revenge themselves against the bourgeois opportunist typified by El Hadji, and they succeed. This "cure" is elevated by Sembène to an act of revolution."[4] Marxian readings like this are standard fare, and for good reason. They

conform to Sembène's self-proclaimed politico-economic orientations and best explain his metaphors. Furthermore, I have used Fanonian terms like "national consciousness" and "wretched of the earth" because of the well-known debt to Fanon's thinking that Sembène's work owes.

While I have no intention of disputing readings that follow from Marxist and Fanonist premises, I wonder if it might not be useful to update our ways of deploying Sembène in the face of geopolitical and economic developments. What, for instance, might *Xala* have to say about neoliberalism? Does it work best as a proscription of post-radical politics, calling us back again to the fundamental reasons for and methods of resisting the triumph of capital? Does the well-known position of the filmmaker deny the possibility that his work can make practical interventions in evolving political and economic landscapes? I would argue that the very form of the narrative—allegory—makes *Xala* especially ripe for reinterpretation. Here again, I draw on Jameson:

> [T]he allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol. Our traditional conception of allegory . . . is that of an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one table of equivalences: this is, so to speak, a one-dimensional view of this signifying process, which might only be set in motion and complexified were we willing to entertain the more alarming notion that such equivalences are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text.[5]

It is in the realm of symbolic "change and transformation" that I wish to make an intervention with this chapter. Through the proposal of new equivalences, arrived at by "complexifying" the signification process, I will attempt to constitute yet another present for Sembène's allegory. I will begin with the final scene of the film/novel and review some of the equivalences that other critics have proposed. I will then invoke a second national allegory, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*, and review the equivalences that Achebe proposes for describing the postcolonial African nation-state.[6] Then, through a paradigmatic substitution, I will compare Achebe's allegory to Sembène's, thereby expanding on previous readings of *Xala*. Finally, I will return to the specific signs in both allegories and, through a more systematic exploration of core concepts of political analysis, attempt to account for the ways in which *Xala* may speak to the ever-changing present.

QUESTIONS RAISED BY PREVIOUS READINGS

The most literal way to read the final scene of *Xala* is as a restoration of manhood. In the concluding moments of the narrative, we learn that the

curse of impotence from which El Hadji suffers was inflicted by a blind beggar who often sang outside El Hadji's office and who El Hadji once cheated out of a parcel of land. The beggar claims that, if El Hadji wants to be sexually potent once again, he must remove his clothes and submit to being spat upon by the other beggars and peasants assembled in his wife's home. I have noted the revolutionary metaphors that are usually read into this act, but if the revolution includes the restoration of El Hadji's manhood, then it becomes difficult to maintain a traditional socialist-realist reading. If he is potent once again, will El Hadji return to his position in the bourgeoisie? Will his comprador transactions resume—tempered only by the knowledge that he must henceforth work within the legal parameters of the state? What kind of revolution is that?

Previous readings of *Xala* leave unanswered a number of similar questions. David Uru Iyam, for example, attempts a different kind of Marxist reading by placing the emphasis not on El Hadji, and whatever it is that he receives from the ritual, but on the beggars and therefore on the trajectory of the oppressed rather than the trajectory of the oppressor. He writes:

> Sembène, therefore, sets his silent characters free by breaking down the limits that define their typicalness. In doing so, he leads them on to consciousness where they awaken to the realities of their situation. Here, non-recognition is divested from the strength of silence. The consequence is an explosion of the burden of oppression.[7]

Though Iyam is concerned with the beggars' achievement of consciousness, he argues that El Hadji is "purified" by the spitting ritual, rather than overthrown, which, he contends, "effectively resolves the confrontational elements of the story."[8] However, assuming that the comprador bourgeoisie at the helm of the postcolonial African state can be made "pure," and that doing so simply "resolves" class confrontation, is far too uncritical for engaging with Sembène's studiously committed agenda. What exactly is a "pure" elite?

In a more recent article, Thomas J. Lynn provides a similar reading by invoking Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque.

> [T]he disabled and dispossessed band led by the blind beggar coerce El Hadji to atone ritually for his transgressions by becoming the object of their collective act of making the internal external: spitting. The subversive, carnivalesque atmosphere of this scene is heightened, moreover, by the narrator's frank descriptions not only of the grotesque body and its functions, but also the coarseness, commotion, and laughter of the outcasts.[9]

By taking the Bakhtinian approach, Lynn also focuses on ordinary people, but again leaves the subject of El Hadji's prospects in the realm of the abstract. If the elite atone for their violations against the masses, will that inflect their subsequent actions? What happens when the carnival ends

and they return to their citadels of power? Should those citadels be addressed?

I will return to the carnivalesque and the question of "citadels" shortly, but I want to account for the proliferation of concepts like "purification" and "atonement" in these analyses. Concepts like these seem to have particular relevance for readings that seek *Xala*'s resolution within an ethnologized African cultural environment. Iyam writes that, "The act of spitting on a human being in many African societies means that the person being spat upon is worthless and is spat upon to neutralize the evil responsible for this unworthiness."[10] Aaron Mushengyezi reads the final scene as a kind of ritual cleansing, after which El Hadji is "reborn."[11] And Kenneth Harrow reads it as the reestablishment of the community, a sort of sacrifice in which El Hadji becomes "the sign of the limen," mediating between cosmic order and human society.[12] While sacrificial and cleansing rituals are common enough in the various religious traditions of Africa, both Mushengyezi and Harrow seem at pains to find a specific referent for it in the Senegalese context. Mushengyezi questions the "authenticity" of spitting, while Harrow reads it in terms of a marabout's blessing.[13] Iyam's insights may resolve the issue, but where does that leave us? By grasping for real-world rituals, these interpretations seem to be distinctly literal. If the beggar's act is supernatural and symbolic, then it is already a ritual, and translating it that way divests the scene of its allegorical significance. If the components of an allegory and their real world referents are related by connotation, rather than denotation, then the beggars' ritual might be translated not as "Ritual," but as something else entirely.

While knowledge of ethnic and religious culture is essential to understanding power relations in postcolonial Africa, as anywhere, ethnographic interpretations of the spitting scene seem to have taken us only so far. If *Xala* is a national allegory, then an approach likely to take us further might be an approach that draws on the idiom of national political discourse. Lynn attempts to give his reading this kind of political dimension when, invoking Fanon, he writes that, "Colonialism and its legacy shaped generations of El Hadjis—individuals motivated primarily by individual gain, who forgot how to think and act for the collective good."[14] This is a pointed critique of postcolonial elites, which aptly includes references to historical triggers, but it remains incomplete. The idea that El Hadji has "*forgot* how to think and act for the collective good"—or that El Hadji, as Lynn writes elsewhere, is part of a "venal" class that must "atone for [their] transgressions"—makes the critique more personal than structural.[15] Even if the structure of the postcolony allows elites to lose sight of the collective good—in fact, especially if it is so—remedies ought not be applied merely to the elites themselves, but to the configurations of power that actuate and authorize them. The problem with deploying concepts like purification, cleansing, and atonement

is that they reinforce the notion that Africa's crisis can be settled at the executive level—such as electing, once and for all, "moral" leaders—when adjustments are required throughout the political, social, and economic organization of each nation-state and each state's relationship to the rest of the world. This is not to say that critiques of political (im)morality are entirely unedifying. Instead, I want to argue that, especially in the case of national allegory, we must not lose sight of structural social and economic relationships due to the presence of cultural symbols or strong personalities. Allegory, with its affinity for paradigmatic substitutions, is an invitation to structural analysis just as much as it is an invitation to symbolic analysis. Beyond considerations of El Hadji's manhood, his transgressions, or the agency of the beggars, therefore, an analysis of national allegory will ask how the structural relationship between the bourgeoisie and the beggars might change because of the spitting ritual.

The rest of this essay is an attempt to exhume the structural critique embedded in Sembène's narrative by importing a sign system from Achebe's *A Man of the People* and considering two things: 1) how the signs can be decoded and 2) how they relate to one another. This importation reveals that *Xala* places the responsibility for political crisis not on the individuals who run the state so much as on the nature of the state itself. Furthermore, bound up with this critique is the possibility that the political action called for may be ideologically divergent from the conventional characterization of Sembène's vision.

IMPORTING ACHEBE'S ALLEGORY

Early in *A Man of the People*—Achebe's prophetic novel about seeking and occupying political office in an unnamed, newly independent, African nation—Odili, the novel's narrator, is invited to stay for a few days in the home of "Chief the Honorable M. A. Nanga, M.P." Nanga is Odili's former schoolteacher, lately become the nation's Minister of Culture. One night, as Odili reclines on a large bed that seems to "ride on a cushion of air," he wonders if he could ever abandon such luxury once he had learned to enjoy it. He concludes that it would certainly be difficult, since:

> A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time. The trouble with our new nation—as I saw it then lying on that bed—was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say "To hell with it." We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us—the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best—had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. And from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous

> loudspeakers, that the first phase of the struggle had been won and that the next phase—the extension of our house—was even more important and called for new and original tactics; it required that all argument should cease and the whole people speak with one voice and that any more dissent and argument outside the door of the shelter would subvert and bring down the whole house.[16]

Odili's extended reflection on the nature of postcolonial politics is also a national allegory. Furthermore, because the nation that features in Odili's story is unnamed, Achebe provides a national allegory that can be easily extended to any postcolonial nation or to the postcolonial nation-state in generic terms. The "smart" and "lucky" are equivalences for the class of Western-educated nationalists who took over the colony at independence, that is, the national bourgeoisie. Those left "outside the door of the shelter" are the ordinary citizens, that is, "the wretched of the earth." Of course, these elements of the allegory are straightforward, but what exactly is the shelter and what does it mean to be left in the rain? Rather than straightforward, rigorous interrogation reveals that these two metaphors invite a range of possible formulations. Before I get to some of them, however, I need to import Achebe's allegory into Sembène's.

In *Xala*, it is obviously El Hadji who typifies "the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best." Both book and film versions of *Xala* make reference to the fact that he was a devoted nationalist prior to independence and, as the film's opening scene reveals, he and his nationalist friends have occupied the newly emptied shelters built by colonialists. The people on the street—some dancing, others merely watching—have been left outside where rain could very well fall on their heads. However, in Achebe's allegory, being left out in the rain seems to have something to do with relative discomfort, given the references to dryness within the shelter, and particularly given the luxurious setting of Odili's reverie. In *Xala*, therefore, we should look for examples of discomfort to further identify those left in the rain.

Coincidentally, Sembène uses contrasting water metaphors to draw the contours of postcolonial discomfort. El Hadji drinks only Evian, and puts only Evian in his car's radiator, while the blind beggar performs next to a place where women dump their waste water. Furthermore, Rama refuses to drink Evian, therefore identifying a distinction between El Hadji's water and the water of the people. El Hadji's water is foreign and sanitized; while the people's is local and, it is implied, unsanitary. When we correlate Achebe's symbols with Sembène's, we find that—even though they are actually suffering from a drought in *Xala*—it must be the beggars and peasants who have been left out in the rain. The local water is something they must endure, while El Hadji is "sheltered" from local water by an imported commodity, a fact that suggests macroeconomic processes. Indeed, the people acquire their water through their labor, but their labor cannot "enrich" them because the state has not

implemented mechanisms to render the water potable. The beggars then become constituted of that under which they suffer, reproducing them as a class, as it were. However, when they enter El Hadji's house and spit on him, the beggars bring the people's water into the structure that El Hadji occupies, causing it to rain down upon his body. In a remarkable act of revolution, the beggars bring the rain indoors and force elites to suffer the conditions under which the vulnerable labor.

Like the revelers of Bakhtin's carnival, Sembène's beggars invert social relations within official spaces, but, more than that, they subvert the very purpose for which official spaces have been constructed. After all, Bakhtin's celebration of the carnivalesque is a theory of both time *and* space.[17] Along with the focus on what El Hadji was, is, and will be, importing Achebe's allegory into Sembène's encourages us to appreciate the fact that the very space within which El Hadji operates is essential to his relationship with the beggars. After the spitting ritual, there is no "citadel" for El Hadji to return to, but not because it has been torn down. Rather, El Hadji is forced to share his shelter with those who were left outside, as well as with the rain under which they have been toiling, therefore negating its status as a shelter. However, the shelter is also a place where the beggars find nourishment and comfort. Thus, by adding to El Hadji's discomfort, but also by alleviating some of their own, the beggars turn the shelter into a space in which the gap between rich and poor is narrowed. Again, all of this is accomplished without ever compromising the foundations on which the structure is built.

Reading *Xala*'s final scene as an example of rain being brought indoors adds the necessary political dimension for which so many psychological and ethnographic readings of the scene seem to be groping. We move from contemplating the events that befall El Hadji to contemplating the events that befall his house. More than a ritual of personal purification or atonement, more than the humiliation of the bourgeoisie or the gaining of mass consciousness, the ceremony that the beggars perform is a kind of calculated structural subversion, an act meant to reclaim the system by which El Hadji and his collaborators have been allowed to hijack the nation. Nevertheless, the allegorical equivalences of the act still remain intriguingly nebulous. Just as Jameson describes allegory, the symbolism in *Xala* is open to a number of interpretations. I will pursue some of them below in an attempt to both prove Jameson's point and illustrate the kind of political imperatives that my reading suggests.

REREADING THE SIGNS

Now that I have substituted Achebe's signs—shelter and rain—for Sembène's signs—house and spit—the concepts for which they stand can be related to one another syntagmatically. Since my argument is that the

meanings produced ought to be interpreted in overtly political terms, I turn to some of the fundamental building blocks of political analysis. These concepts—which include "political community," "political accountability," "the state," "civil society," and "production"—are thoroughly articulated in Patrick Chabal's *Power in Africa: An Essay in Political Interpretation*, and so I rely on his work for building my analysis. It turns out that the rain/shelter metaphor can be elaborated and elucidated by examining each concept, but no single concept makes the allegory whole. Rather, after exploring each concept individually—and the sometimes inconsistent interpretations of the metaphor that each concept makes possible—I will bring the interpretations together in order to formulate an account of the kind of revolution that the beggars' spitting ritual might imply.

Like all of these concepts, the concept of "political community" is an abstraction that only makes sense in a historical context. In this case, Achebe's allegory is about the moment of decolonization, about which Chabal writes:

> The way in which [nationalists] went about ousting the colonial power and the manner in which they took power varied in the different colonies and at different periods. What never varied was the process by which they attempted to create a modern political community. This process involved at least three steps: the creation of a national vision, the nationalist myth; the setting up of a national organization, the nationalist party; and the aggregation of local support for the nationalist project, that is, the invention of unity.[18]

If the nationalists who took power at independence had to create a political community, the foundations for it had already been laid by colonization, which established national territories and implemented systems to bind them together. However, African nationalists discovered that the foundations had been laid poorly. European-style, class-based parliamentary systems of representation were ill-equipped to deal with the ethnic and territorial rivalries that centuries of unequal trading with Europe had encouraged.[19] When national myths and representative systems of government failed to create the political communities that they imagined, nationalists turned back into their parties and, in Achebe's words, "required that all argument should cease and the whole people speak with one voice." As I noted earlier, a similar moment is depicted in Sembène's allegory during the opening scenes of the film. The Chamber of Commerce, formerly occupied by the French, is taken over by indigenous businessmen while the disembodied voice of their president preaches a series of nationalist clichés. Then, as soon as the new leaders are settled inside, the police are brought out to drive onlookers from the Chamber's steps. Both Achebe's and Sembène's depictions of this process are unsympathetic to the nationalist class and imply that the tendency to

proclaim unity is not at all the same as striving to build it. Moreover, if dissent and argument—the truth of ethnic, religious, and class difference—have for too long been shut out of the nationalist conception of the political community, then the act of brining the rain indoors would be the act, not of overthrowing or dismantling the nationalist party, but of making it reflect the diversity of the people it is supposed to represent. Assuming that the older generation of nationalists can no longer be counted on to create such inclusivity themselves, the people need to break in and spew their lack of representation all over the body politic. This act of reform, as abstract and even utopian as it might sound, cannot be practicalized without considering other political concepts. Furthermore, the nationalist inclusivity deficit is symptomatic of a crisis concerning political accountability.

"Political accountability" explains the interactions between nationalist parties and their subjects.[20] Since shelters are built to obstruct rain, and the rain in our metaphor is a sense of postcolonial discomfort, then the shelter becomes a means of keeping discomfort from having a regular impact on national politics. The citizenry, of course, is well aware of postcolonial discomfort, so sheltering the state from discomfort cannot be an effective route to achieving accountability. Rather, the elite must constantly reiterate that they plan on extending the shelter some day. Manifestations of this form of accountability vary widely in Africa, and political scientists have often been concerned with describing them in detail.[21] For our allegorical understanding of the generic African state, we can be confident that most examples offer narrow conceptions of the communities to which elites are responsible. Chabal notes that this narrowness has played out in the rise of independently powerful bureaucrats who have realized that, because politicians have limited legitimacy, politicians have little control over the way state institutions operate.[22] Thus, the extension of state structures to the people is also undermined by the struggle for power that ensues between politicians and bureaucrats. One way to restore accountability would be to destroy the shelter, or to drag elites out of it, so that they can be fully entrenched in the day-to-day tribulations of the nation. Sembène's beggars, however, choose to enter El Hadji's shelter. When they do, they could take his Western luxuries—his packages of yogurt and his soft drinks—from the refrigerator and smash them on the ground; instead, they sit down with El Hadji's family, on his beautiful furniture, and enjoy his delicious refreshments. By doing so, they gain in comfort, while, as soon as they spit, El Hadji's comfort is diminished. When this happens, the elite can no longer claim to be occupying the shelter in order to extend it to the people someday. In fact, the only way the elite can still claim legitimacy in the aftermath of the spitting ritual is to address the problem of rain directly. In this formulation, elites may remain elite, in the sense that they remain owners of the shelter and they control decision-making (about when the police should

intervene, for example, as El Hadji does). But after this form of revolution, elites must ensure the continued integrity of the shelter while attempting to keep the rain off their own heads and the heads of the masses. Political accountability may thus be restored by making the relationship between people and rulers one of similar discomfort or, to put it positively, of greater economic equality.

The concept of "the state" follows from the previous two. Chabal writes that, "The post-colonial state is the outcome of a protracted historical process by which various political communities and various principles of political accountability have combined to give birth to the independent, and now sacrosanct, nation-state."[23] This process includes the creation of the colonial state, which was built to manage the various territories over which European powers had arbitrarily claimed authority. Through their bureaucratic apparatuses, colonial states gave birth to the Westernized elite in Africa, which subsequently took up the cause of African nationalism. After independence, nationalists assumed control of the former colonial bureaucracies, which quickly became their refuge, while they commenced competing for control of the institutions that ensured their reproduction as a class. Thus, one way to think of the shelter is as the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. Imported to Sembène's allegory, this conception of the shelter invites us to think of the beggars' spitting ritual as an attempt to put the bureaucratic reproduction of elites to an end. Once the discomfort of postcolonial social and economic reality enters the bureaucracy, and once the bureaucracy is no longer a refuge for the elite, it cannot exist merely to reproduce a limited bourgeoisie. By bringing the rain indoors, the beggars force the bureaucracy to take them into consideration and produce a new social relationship. However, Chabal insists that the contemporary African state cannot be understood in and of itself, but only in its dialectical relationship with civil society.

In postcolonial Africa, "civil society" may be used to refer to all the institutions that exist apart from the state. Civil society includes traditional religious and social institutions, professional guilds, labor unions, Christian and Islamic organizations, intellectuals, and all the people who gather in barber shops, motor parks, video stalls, or on street corners to discuss and interpret national politics. Chabal argues that, at the moment of decolonization, civil society had some degree of access to formal political authority, but the language of the postcolonial state has alienated civil society to the degree that it has become characterized by its "capacity to resist, penetrate or neutralize the state, and thereby to re-appropriate some (informal) power."[24] For this reason, contemporary African politics are often depicted as a battle between the state and civil society.[25] Chabal writes that, "The state aims at political and economic hegemony," that, "Civil society is the object of this hegemonic appropriation," and that, "The African post-colonial state has sought since independence to capture as much of civil society as it can manage."[26] In Achebe's rain/shelter

metaphor, this process might be thought of as the "extension of [the] house," the encompassing of civil society by the bureaucracy. However, as we have seen, the nationalists occupying the state made the mistake of thinking that "any more dissent and argument outside the door of the shelter would subvert and bring down the whole house," meaning that an oppositional civil society did not fit into the shelter. Meanwhile, in most political science discourse, debates with civil society are not necessarily seen as threatening to the state, but instead often result in strengthening its structures. Thus, the African state's failure has been the path it followed in pursuit of hegemony. Rather than alienating and then capturing civil society, it might have labored to absorb civil society by professionalizing it. In allegorical terms, conceiving of those in the rain as civil society makes the beggars more than just citizens in search of state amenities. When they bring their rain indoors, they are actually doing the state a service that it has been unable to do for itself. The moment in *Xala* that makes this explicit is the moment when a member of the state police attempts to throw the beggars out of El Hadji's house. Rama, who has identified with civil society throughout the narrative, assures the guard that there is nothing to be worried about. El Hadji then grudgingly agrees and dismisses the guard. In that moment, El Hadji accepts analysis of civil society regarding state action. That he then submits to the spitting ritual exhibits his realization that, indeed, he cannot be potent without civil society. It is therefore not the state's attempts to capture civil society which prevail, but civil society's recognition that incorporation is necessary, its ability to convince the state of the same, and the act of doing so on its own terms.

As I have so far developed it, the rain/shelter metaphor is more than simply a contrast between "government" and "people." Instead, the metaphor is about the state's achievement of hegemony by either circumventing civil society or by allowing the incorporation of civil society into the state's various apparatuses. Yet, the relationship between the state and civil society can only be partially explained in these terms. As Chabal writes, "The modes of production, the forms of production, the means of production, the relations of production and the appropriation of production are at the heart of the political dialectics between state and civil society, in Africa as elsewhere."[27] The incorporation of civil society into the state cannot happen merely by fiat or rhetoric. The economy of the nation-state must be reorganized in order to make the incorporation substantive and enduring. However, neither Achebe's nor Sembène's allegory offers a clear insight for the realization of this economic reorganization. It must be deduced from the way that I have so far constructed their allegories.

One of the key points that Chabal makes in his discussion of production is that colonial decisions were not often economic decisions. Certainly, European powers were interested in the productive (and consump-

tive) capacities of Africa, but, according to Chabal, "There can be few examples of greater systematic arbitrariness than the division of Africa into colonies."[28] If the shelter is first of all a weak political community, then the shelter is the acceptance of an arbitrarily delineated economic zone and an attempt to justify it rhetorically. If the relationship of shelter to rain is described by political accountability, then the economically arbitrary nation-state must use a form of political legitimacy to create an economy, rather than—as it works elsewhere—using an economy to create legitimacy. The state is tasked with making this happen, but the fact that it is modeled on the arbitrary colonial state means it is already disadvantaged. The state quickly turns inward, loses political accountability, and, therefore, loses the opportunity to work with the various potential actors in the national economy. Civil society rises in opposition to the state and fosters a productive system outside the orbit of statist policy. The result is a dual economy in which the state trades in certain goods and services while civil society trades in others—a formal economy and an informal one. The integration of the two economies is, in essence, the reintroduction of civil society back into the state. To bring the rain inside the shelter, therefore, is to reject the notion that the African nation-state must remain an economically arbitrary and divided formation.

If we accept my importation of Achebe's allegory into Sembène's, and if Chabal's five concepts have illuminated them sufficiently, then one way we can read the beggars' spitting ritual is as the recognition and formalization of the informal economic sector. This is somewhat different from the traditional formula for class revolution. Certainly, Sembène puts the onus of social restructuring on laboring people, and they must take their fight to the bourgeoisie, but working people ask not for the keys to the state, or its withering away, but rather for the state to feel what they feel, experience what they experience. Along the way, the state remains intact, as does the bourgeoisie. In fact, we assume that El Hadji will be fully potent now that he has had the "cure." Furthermore, Sembène's allegory is silent about the beggars' exact intentions regarding the means of production after their ritual. But if the rain is their discomfort, or their informality, and they bring it into the structure of the state, where it falls on the heads of the bourgeoisie, then the bourgeoisie seems to be presented with a choice. It can either seek vengeance, and once again alienate civil society, or, if it wants to avoid another *xala*, it can work to formalize the informal sector. Since the allegory is silent on the next step, I will close only with the basic notion of how a postcolonial state might absorb and formalize its informal economic sectors.

CONCLUSION

I realize that leaving Africa's El Hadjis in power, fully potent, may never actually appeal to Africa's revolutionaries. As the events of the 2011 "Arab Spring" have shown, those seeking reform tend to start at the top. Yet, that fact may point us to one of the key insights of Sembène's national allegory—its insistence on deep structural subversion. Despite El Hadji's humiliation, the most thorough reforms proposed in *Xala* are the reforms directed at his house. Indeed, as Achebe's national allegory illustrates, new leaders may very well move into old structures and begin the process of economic exclusion all over again. Revolutionaries, therefore, will constantly need to address state structures, as Lenin made quite clear.[29] They will have to ask themselves if the structures should be torn down, kept the same, modified, or somehow reoriented. My rereading of *Xala*'s final scene is an invitation to consider the ways that structures may be kept intact, but reimagined.

Such reimagining has become the objective of many developmentalist discourses in recent decades. For example, in the 1990s, following the publication of two influential volumes, *The Mystery of Capital* and *The Other Path*, the Peruvian economist and purported neoliberal apologist Hernando de Soto has brought a great deal of attention to people's movements for land tenure rights and the formalization of informal economic activities.[30] These developments coincide, of course, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the loss, therefore, of the world's most influential anti-capitalist super power. The argument that de Soto and others like him have made is that, for the working poor, class antagonism may not be as productive as class aspiration. The idea is that gaining formalized access to property rights may allow the poor to, rather than subvert the capitalist economy, enter it and begin to accumulate some degree of potent capital. This is essentially an argument not about forging a new system, but making the current system work fairly. A few of de Soto's strategies have been put to the test in Africa, but the jury is still out on whether they have produced tangible results. It is not for this essay to weigh in on the debate, necessarily, but I do hope to bring older works of African literature and film into the discussion.

The concept of formalizing informal urban sectors did not feature in many of the developmental discourses circulating when Sembène composed *Xala*, nor was it a key argument in cultural theory. The theorists against whom Sembène's work is often read did pay some attention to the urban working sector, often prematurely referring to it as Africa's "lumpenproletariat," but those theorists did not always see urban workers as the source of revolutionary energy. Fanon, for instance, saw far more potential in the peasant classes living outside commercial capitals and expressed little sympathy for those who migrated townward, referring to them as "ideologically weak."[31] Africa's masses have since not

been proletarianized, but they are also less and less rural peasants. Today's under-class comprises an explosion of entrepreneurs and laborers who, much like the beggars in *Xala*, have left their farms in droves to toil in the fragmented, informal urban and suburban economic sectors. Just like the workers that de Soto observes in Peru, African workers aspire to labor in the formal sector, as is evident from the semiformal institutions they construct all around themselves. However, without titles to their rural land or property in the cities, these workers will have no way to accumulate capital and enter the national, and ultimately, global economy.

More than overturn the global economy, then, the average worker desperately seeks the accrual of even the humblest amount of capital, as well as the institutions necessary to protect it. What Sembène's allegory may mean is that, as a group, urban workers are in the position to begin reclaiming wealth by taking their informal economic activities and spitting them onto the formal activities of the state. They may be able to pressure the state, through campaigns for land titles, business licenses, and more transparent bureaucracies to bring the activities of poor people inside the activities of the state, which is otherwise dominated by concessions to industries like mining and oil extraction. Furthermore, this inclusion can only happen through a spitting kind of gesture because the state cannot be counted on to bring informality within its orbit. As it is depicted in *Xala*, El Hadji was able to steal land from the blind beggar precisely because the beggar's clan did not understand how to title it. Nevertheless, the people might promote their revolutionary program less as a form of vengeance than as the return of potency to elites. If they can convince the state that reform is in the best interests of the bourgeoisie, the program is more likely to gain traction. As de Soto puts it in the Peruvian context, "The nation's mercantilist elites find it culturally impossible to believe or understand that today's impoverished masses could become the most important source of prosperity."[32]

My rereading of *Xala*'s national allegory seemingly points to a kind of "Third Way" politics of which neither Sembène, nor Jameson were proponents. However, my goal is to avoid aligning with either camp—whether hard left or postideological—but certainly not to avoid the political. Rather, the politics of rereading *Xala* is the politics precisely of trying to keep pace with the flexible nature of capital. While the global finance empire has had a persistent agenda, it has changed its tactics—in some cases quite radically—over time, and our responses must obviously change as well. I confess to not being capable of advancing a successful set of tactics here, but I hope to make it clear that our tactics need not be formulated only in new visions, but in reinterpretations of older visions. *Xala* is singularly impressive in its allegorical depiction of economic relations in postcolonial Africa, but when it comes to the kind of revolution that these depictions imply, constant rereading may prove to be fruitful.

It is a testament to Sembène, *and* Achebe, that, as their national allegories encounter new presents, the equivalences that they offer resiliently undergo change and transformation.

NOTES

1. Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 69; emphasis mine. Certainly, Jameson's argument merits more consideration than I can undertake here. For more, see Imre Szeman, "Who's Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100: 3 (2001): 803–827.
2. See David Murphy, *Sembène: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000) 99; and Sada Niang and Samba Gadjigo, "Interview with Ousmane Sembène," *Research in African Literatures* 26: 3 (1995): 174–178.
3. See, for example, Matiu N'noruka, "Une lecture de *Xala* de Sembène Ousmane," *Peuples noirs/Peuples africains* 6: 36 (1983): 57–75; or Emeka Abanime, "Le symbolism de l'impuissance dans *Xala* d'Ousmane Sembène," *Présence Francophone* 19 (1979): 29–35.
4. Marcia Landy, "Political Allegory and 'Engaged Cinema': Sembène's 'Xala,'" *Cinema Journal* 23: 3 (1984): 37.
5. Jameson, "Third-World Literature," 73.
6. I am not the first critic to notice the correlation between these two narratives, or even the particular passages that I explore. However, the semiotic substitutions that I perform and the conclusions they lead to are, as far as I know, completely original. See Sam Roditlhalo, "Beggars' Description: 'Xala,' the Prophetic Voice, and the Post-independent African State," *English in Africa* 32: 2 (2005): 169–84.
7. David Uru Iyam, "The Silent Revolutionaries: Ousmane Sembène's *Emitai*, *Xala*, and *Ceddo*," *African Studies Review* 29: 4 (1986): 85.
8. Iyam, "The Silent Revolutionaries 84.
9. Thomas J. Lynn, "Community, Carnival, and the Colonial Legacy in Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*," *Cincinnati Romance Review* 23 (2004): 69.
10. Iyam, "The Silent Revolutionaries," 84.
11. Aaron Mushengyezi, "Reimagining Gender and African Tradition? Ousmane Sembène's *Xala* Revisited," *Africa Today* 51: 1 (2004): 57.
12. Kenneth Harrow, "The Failed Trickster," *Focus on African Films*, ed. Francoise Pfaff (Bloomington [IN]: Indiana University Press, 2004), 138–139.
13. Harrow, "The Failed Trickster,"137.
14. Lynn, "Community, Carnival, and the Colonial Legacy," 70.
15. Lynn, "Community, Carnival, and the Colonial Legacy," 61.
16. Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 37.
17. Bakhtin has found numerous applications in African cultural studies, particularly in Karin Barber's work on the "popular arts." See "Popular Arts in Africa," *African Studies Review* 30: 3 (1987): 1–78.
18. Patrick Chabal, *Power in Africa: An Essay in Political Interpretation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 47.
19. See Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (London: Currey, 1992), 205.
20. Chabal, *Power in Africa*, 54.
21. These include practices such as nationalism, prebendalism, neopatrimonialism, rent seeking, direct democracy, and so on. For an overview of some examples, see Chabal, 136–149.
22. Chabal, *Power in Africa*, 67.
23. Chabal, *Power in Africa*, 68.
24. Chabal, *Power in Africa*, 83–84.

25. Though it has been expanded upon and contested, the classic formulation of this battle is outlined by Peter P. Ekeh in "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17:1 (1975): 91–112.
26. Chabal, *Power in Africa*, 84.
27. Chabal, *Power in Africa*, 98.
28. Chabal, *Power in Africa*, 102.
29. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, trans. Robert Service (London: Penguin, 1992).
30. See Hernando de Soto, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* (London: Bantam Press, 2000); and *The Other Path: The Economic Answer to Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).
31. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 2001), 109.
32. de Soto, *The Other Path*, xx.

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SIX

Women in Sembène's Films

Spatial Reconfigurations and Cultural Meanings

Moussa Sow

The cultural issues addressed in Ousmane Sembène's cinema resonate with what Frank Ukadike calls "the urge of historical accuracy and communicability" (Ukadike, 298). The urgency of historical veracity opposes the ethnographic kind of cinema that had for a long time represented Africa from a Eurocentric perspective that contributed little to a true understanding of the peoples and nature of the continent. Unlike their European predecessors of colonialist cinema, African filmmakers have focused on representing African space as an important grid for a better and novel understanding of the cultural realities of the continent. Henri Lefevbre has argued that "*L'espace est . . . un enjeu politique dans le sens où il est le support, l'instrument et un objet de luttes et de conflits* (Lefebvre 1973, 35–36). [Space has political implications in the sense that it is the support, the instrument of struggles and conflicts.] In Sembène's films, the occupation of space is both related to the nature of gender relations and the power dynamics prescribed by the culture of the society and the reconfiguration of these spaces go hand in hand with the change in gender relations. Sembène is famous for making films that often portray inept men and multiple facets of strong women operating successfully in a male-dominated society. Critics of Sembène's films have paid much attention to the theme of female resistance to certain traditions but have paid little attention to the appropriation of discourse by these women. This article sets out to examine the redefinition of spaces and their cultural meanings in the representation of major female characters in Sembène's cinema.

Focusing mainly on five films (*Black Girl* [1966], *Xala* [1974], *Ceddo* [1977], *Faat Kiné* [2000], and *Moolaadé* [2004]) it sets out to elucidate the process of spatial reconfiguration to show how female figures emerge and redefine their social and cultural roles. Spaces in Sembène's films are either public or private: while the former is the site for meetings and the announcement of important decisions, the latter is the domain of the family. Spaces are gendered as in the case of the public fountain where typically only women feature. Exclusively male spaces undergo a reconfiguration linked to women's claim to a discourse aimed at the progressive removal of old cultural barriers that stifle their voices. The contestation of male domination presents a subtle and constant re-composition of these spaces. Sembène seems to offer a reconstruction of a cultural history altered by Islamization and colonization through female figures. This move taps into an endogenous African culture of matrilinearity and crystallizes the enunciation of a filmic discourse that gives meaning to a historical past. In a generational continuum which reflects the maturity of filmic processes as well as that of the female characters, we find a close link between all the main female characters across Sembène's work. In *Ceddo* (1977) Princess Dior liberates her people from Islamic domination. In *Black Girl* (1966) Diouana refuses submission and warns Africans against the obsession with French space which is seen as an Eldorado. Rama, the daughter of El Hadji Kader Beye in *Xala* (1974), critiques some of the patriarchal African traditions, and Faat Kiné in *Faat Kiné* turns into the mature woman who asserts her independence vis-à-vis men and the entire society. Finally, in *Moolaadé*, Colle Ardo initiates the Moolaadé (protection) to protect girls who do not want to undergo excision and openly challenges this cultural practice which has caused a lot of harm in her society. The common thread that runs through all these films is the process of maturation of the characters who clear a physical as well as a mental space from which they articulate their rejection of certain traditional cultural practices.

Like Henri Lefevbre, for whom space is an "instrument and object of struggles and conflicts," in Sembène's films spaces are often represented as battlegrounds. Sembène maintains that the masculinization of African spaces through colonization and Islam has constantly eclipsed the place of women across the African historical process. In his reflection on gender equity prior to colonization he notes: "The ancient statues always represented a man and a woman. Since we drafted into the Christian civilization, the woman has disappeared from the representation" (*Africultures*). Sembène's main contention is that African societies in general and Wolof ethnic group in particular are essentially matrilineal and indeed have been disfigured by Islam and Christianity which both are grounded in a patriarchal vision that erodes female power in society. This nullification of the pivotal role of women as agents of change is brought back in a reconstitution process that retraces her evolution through

African and Senegalese histories. Sembène is well aware of the fact that old Africa cannot be revived but a fusion needs to take place to regenerate a new Africa with the remnant of old female presence in the African space. The transformation of the female figure occurs in major symbolic places whose changes suggest a new cultural dynamic.

Michel de Certeau draws a dialectical difference between place and space. According to De Certeau, place is a site of established order where everyone understands the rules. Space on the other hand is the appropriation of the place with the potential to change it, as it is practiced by human beings. He notes "*Est un lieu, l'ordre (quel qu'il soit) selon lequel des éléments sont distribués dans des rapports de coexistence. Il y a espace, dès qu'on prend en considération des vecteurs de direction, des quantités de vitesse et la variable temps. L'espace est un croisement de mobiles. . . . En somme, l'espace est un lieu pratiqué*. (De Certeau, 172–173). [A place is the order (whatever it is) according to which elements in a society are distributed in their relationship of coexistence. There is space as soon as we take into consideration vectors of direction, numerous speed and time variables. Space is a crossing of intentions. . . . In sum, space is a practiced place]. In Sembène's view "a society that does not produce a new culture is bound to disappear" (*Africultures*). It is important to add that production of culture is tied to the production of space.

The five films under discussion abound in sites that have been reclaimed and reconfigured by women. Sembène established very early that Wolof society is matrilineal, an idea supported by Searling, who has written that "Wolof dynasties were matrilineal clans, whose members traced their descent through the female line" (2002, 7). Sembène drew inspiration from pre-Islamic and pre-colonial era cultures. For example, in *Ceddo*, spaces and power structures are remapped and the magnified role of woman evokes the residual pre-Islamic and pre-colonial African traditions.

PUBLIC SPACE AND ISLAM IN *CEDDO*

Ceddo is a historical film that recaptures Africa in the first period of Islamization and slave trade. The Koranic school, places of worship, and the imam leading prayers as well as conversion ceremonies are all cleverly and intricately woven in the film to illustrate that historic moment in Africa. *Ceddo* is equally a political and social commentary taking aim at the changes imposed by Islam that a nephew will no longer inherit the throne from his uncle; only the son will.

The Pënc (public square) in the film dramatizes the reconfiguration of space. The king, Demba War, after inviting his subjects to meet at the Pënc, listens to the grievances of the Ceddo (those who did not convert to Islam) one of which is their marginalization since the arrival of Islam. For

instance, because of their refusal to convert to Islam, they are excluded from the King's council. While the whole village is at the Pënc to discuss the new political realities—centered around patriarchy and Islam—as well as how to free Dior Yacine (kidnapped by the Ceddo), only the men speak. No woman sits among the King's Council either. Women are seen with their stacks of wood brought to help light the Koranic School at night. In other words, the Pënc as a decision-making site is clear of women even when a woman's issue is central to the agenda, as in the case of the kidnapping of Dior Yacine. It is clear that the public space of the Pënc is a site of power, where women rarely interact with men, and when it is the case, it has to be an invitation or an express call for presence to serve as a witness on a given matter as male elders deliberate. The Pënc is a space where male authority is exerted with the deliberate exclusion of women except during festivals. It is unlike the fountain where Jeggemay—single young women—or women of all ages can exchange ideas. The symbolic nodal point in *Ceddo*, which participates in the resolution of the conflict in the film, is when Dior Yacine conquers the Pënc with the help of the Ceddo. The reconfiguration of this space is the result of Dior Yacine's courageous decision to avenge her father, whose mysterious death seems to have been masterminded by the imam with the complicity of his followers. For Dior Yacine, the imam and his disciples are the root of the problem of the kingdom. Indeed, as Sheila Petty has pointed out, "Sembène clearly demonstrates that institutionalized religion is often an empty shell of rites and practices, serving to conserve a certain order: the authority and privileges of men" (Petty, 102).

The refusal of domination this time embodied by the Ceddo at the head of whom we have a female figure is dear to the filmmaker himself, who was always averse to any submission to foreign cultures, be they Arab or Western. *Ceddo* thus celebrates the return to matrilineality through Dior Yacine taking the throne by default as the ending of the film suggests. Dior Yacine's appropriation of the political space and her innate authority seems to reflect Sembène's attempt at remapping African and Senegalese spaces. Sembène deconstructs the ways in which patriarchy has slowly removed the cultural and political foundations of some African societies, as is the case in *Ceddo*. The newly established spaces put women in the shadows, behind their quarters inside their compounds, as we will see later in *Moolaadé*, a film about resistance against these phallocentric structures.

In addition to the influence of Islam, Christianity and colonialism shaped the physical and mental spaces of colonial subjects. Colonial ideology participated in Africans' assimilation of Western ideals and their subsequent idealization. *Black Girl*, Sembène's first feature film, deals with the illusion brewed out of the French colonial discourse as well as its impact on the Senegalese colonized mind.

BLACK GIRL AND THE IMMIGRANT SPACE

Melissa Thackway has noted that "many of the first wave films focus on the sense of disillusionment experienced when immigrant characters find themselves confronted with the realities of life in Europe and notably its hostile, discriminatory climate" (Thackway, 124). Sembène's *Black Girl* can be read as a tragic detour of a young African woman to the immigrant space that deconstructs the myth about the Metropole as an Eldorado. Diouana, working as a maid for a French expatriate family in Dakar, decides to go to France with her French employers to be a nanny. Her experience in France is one of utter disillusionment, for she ends up in a closed apartment on the French Rivera instead of enjoying the splendors of the France she saw in the French magazines. Fed up with her confinement, the ambient racism, and poor treatment by her bosses, she commits suicide and her body is taken back to Senegal. In *Black Girl*, Sembène puts in poignant images of Africans immigrating to Europe and the often tragic aftermath of such a trans-Atlantic adventure. *Black Girl*, then, is an iconic film that at once draws attention to the sense of disillusionment most immigrants feel and calls for a thorough rethinking of the realities of immigrant life.

Sembène carefully weaves in the discourse of the reappropriation and revalorization of African space and culture in *Black Girl*. The recuperation of the mask that Diouana had offered as a gift to her bosses could be interpreted as a symbolic repossession of her cultural wealth, which can only find its full meaning in the African space. The French immigrant space of confinement is contrasted with the free space of Dakar, where Diouana was running cheerfully, celebrating her anticipated trip to France at the beginning of the film. The reason of her anger and subsequent suicide at the end of the film can be explained by the fact that the French cultural space is closed to her. While she offers her French patrons her culinary culture, she receives in exchange disrespectful treatment as an exotic girl from the tropics that some of their guests fantasize about as much as they savor her Senegalese cooking. She finds the space in her hosts' apartment very stifling and her movement from her room to the kitchen and to the bathroom does not alleviate this feeling.

Manthia Diawara offers a compelling explanation to the determination of Diouana to rise against her treatment in France. For him, it is a way to reject assimilation, an important stage in the process of the construction of a cultural African space. According to Diawara, Sembène brings African people into the Western narrative space while at the same time warning them about the dangers of the illusions about France, the erstwhile colonial power.

> The genius of Sembène is to have pushed aside the stereotyped representation of the Black people in Western narratives; he shows Diouana

> as a tall and beautiful black woman dressed in bright clothes and with a scarf blowing in the wind. It is possible that, by opting for such a representation Sembène had wanted to deconstruct the illusions of assimilation harbored by many Africans on their way to France. (2010, 28)

The film marks a conscious return to Africa from a mental perspective thus taking pride in a space and culture that the French colonial discourse of assimilation has devalued. Many of Sembène's subsequent films will pursue this process of demystifying the mirage of the West in the African mind and invent a space for indigenous cultural empowerment.

In *Xala*, besides the much discussed theme of impotence of African leadership, the character of Rama, daughter of the El Hadji Kader Beye, equally carries the consciousness of an African culture that reclaims its space through language. Rama seems to symbolically reincarnate Diouana in her attachment to the Wolof language and African attire throughout the film. Rama's father and his colleagues of the Senegalese Chamber of Commerce, symbols of the new assimilated African elite, speak only in French. Their acculturation is evident in their preference for imported commodities: El Hadji drinks only Evian bottled water imported from the French Alps. Such a parody shows the different manifestations of El Hadji's alienation from his indigenous culture. For El Hadji, France is the only reference and speaking French guarantees his superiority vis-à-vis his people. Rama makes it a point to address her father only in Wolof, much to the frustration and bewilderment of the acculturated man. Rama is part of a new generation of African women who are proud of their heritage: she exhibits pride in that culture, as much as she rejects Evian, which is not local water.

The use of indigenous languages corroborates the effort to fill the linguistic space that French had seized. Sembène shares this conviction to return to African languages with the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in his book, *Decolonizing the Mind*. The symbolic occupation of the postcolonial mind by the French language and culture of the early African elite in general and El Hadji in *Xala* is challenged by Rama's generation. The reconfiguration of spaces which is also mental is expressed through the revival of African languages. Rama's determination to wear the African garb and speak to her father in Wolof is very telling. We find subtlety in the character of Rama who, like Sembène, advocates the active participation of Africans in changing their society instead of being inactive and constantly blaming the stagnation and lack of progress on foreign influences. Indeed, as Vetinde points out in a rare study of *Vehi-Ciosane* by Sembène, the "constant shifting of blame for Africa's problems onto outsiders is counter-productive because it takes away the initiative for a genuine process of national development" (Vetinde, 443). In *Xala*, that

bold initiative is fully seized by Rama, and it has to start, according to her, with the love of her mother tongue as well as the pride to speak it. However, I must point out that it has never been Sembène's intention to replace French with Wolof. As a defender of African culture he advocated the coexistence of Senegalese national languages and French. Unfortunately, the postcolonial educational system in Senegal, which is a throwback to the colonial system, does not promote the teaching of local languages in schools.

THE CITY: MATRIX OF SPATIAL CHANGE

Drawing on Michel de Certeau's approach to the city, Patrick Garcia notes that "la ville est habitée, elle est transhumante, métaphorique. . . . La ville tissée des parcours de ses habitants" (228). [The town is inhabited, it is transhuman, metaphoric. . . . The town woven with itineraries.] Sembène chooses to explore the itineraries of urban African women and how they negotiate the power structure in the urban space. *Faat Kiné* is Sembène's next-to-last film and the name of the main character of the film. This film is another work that is in line with the evolution of the female character as imagined by Sembène, which continues its conquest of spaces that are often confiscated by men. Faat Kiné comes from a low-income family from the suburb that is often associated with poverty in the city of Dakar. In the room that looks like a warehouse with a single lightbulb, it is difficult to distinguish the bedroom and the kitchen from the living room. This socially and economically marked space is the point of departure of Faat Kiné's experience with poverty which serves as an incentive to succeed in the city by all means. Faat Kiné goes on to occupy the more affluent spaces, surviving a lot of hardships, which makes her success even more glorious. As a gas station manager in the affluent neighborhood of Point E in Dakar, she transgresses the professional urban space, where women are not used to holding managerial positions.

Her personal home is unlike her old father's dingy house from which she was ousted with her mother, after she became pregnant with her second baby Djib. Located in a wealthy neighborhood of Dakar with beautiful houses, Faat Kiné's house is fenced by immaculate high white walls. The acquisition of this bigger space in a rich part of the city breaks away from the space of the traditional submissive woman. Faat Kiné is a modern woman who cruises around the city of Dakar in her car. She symbolizes all the "ruptures" (Ngandu, 336) that the city brings into traditional African life. Faat Kiné conquers male space through her position managing a gas station. Her mother and kids take pride in her success and new social status exemplified by her house. She epitomizes in different ways the reconfiguration of spaces and the changing urban culture where women like Faat Kiné can succeed.

From the city space in *Faat Kiné*, which is inherently conducive to change and where women feel freer to challenge the status quo, Sembène's last film *Moolaadé* (2004) takes us to a rural African village. The central issue in the film is excision, an important sociocultural issue. The key philosophical question in the film remains how to move forward and generate a new culture. The divisive issue of excision, or female genital mutilation (FGM) as it is graphically referred in the Western feminist discourse, or even "purification" as it is euphemistically called in the film *Moolaadé*, addresses a transnational and cultural issue in Africa. The story begins when four girls flee a "purification" ritual and seek protection (Moolaadé) with Collé Ardo Gallo Sow, a rebellious woman who refused to have her own daughter cut. She has a duty to protect the girls from being taken away. The Salindana who perform excision insist on capturing the girls and threaten to lay a curse on Collé. According to Wesley Morris, Collé's character "doesn't relent, tying yarn across a doorway as a sort of supernatural tripwire to keep the kids in and her harassers out" (Morris, 74). Collé is placing what she calls Moolaadé, a shielding, on the girls which will ensure their safety. This act of protection is Collé's strategy for creating a space free of excision, a practice that has harmed many people in her village and elsewhere in Africa. As Collé shows the audience a scar from the caesarian she was forced to have due to her poorly healed excision. Collé exhibits her body and shows the marks of pressure the social body exerted on her. After listening to the radio, Collé quotes the grand imam contending that this cultural practice is not required in Islam and does more harm than good.

The media is therefore another tool that helps in the reconfiguration of spaces in *Moolaadé* as they bring waves of ideas and seeds of change, they empower women, diversify the sources of information. Ousmane Sembène feels that media is an important aspect of modernity because it allows for content that creates "new avenues of choice" (Lindo 119). The members of the community in *Moolaadé* resist this change at the beginning. Ibrahima, the son of the chief, who has just returned from France to get married, notes that the winds of change are unstoppable: "today, everywhere in the world, radios and televisions are parts of life. We cannot cut ourselves off from the progress of the world." Choice is key in a more and more multifaceted world, where women question their condition and the meaning of debatable, if not outdated, cultural practices such as excision. Collé is an ordinary woman who lost two children to a practice that she felt needed to be changed and utilized the radio, an icon of modernity, to support her in the resistance.

The public square in *Moolaadé* mirrors that of the Pënc in *Ceddo*, and is the place where Collé Ardo undergoes public humiliation to force her to utter the word that would end her protection of the girls. It is equally the place where she refused to utter that very word and becomes the heroine of all the women who support her new vision. Collé challenges the elders

and makes a speech in the public sphere to bury the practice of excision and usher in a new era in the village. The apotheosis of that scene is when a woman de facto becomes the griot—here a praise singer—of Collé Ardo and appropriates the public place by women in elation who sing in chorus. Collé's power of persuasion stems from what we can call an exceptional individual body that resists the symbolic social body and convinces the latter to move into a new cultural norm. For Sembène, Africa is at a crossroads and needs "to create a new culture. (Sembène, *Africultures*).

Collé is an agent of change who, through unforeseen circumstances, becomes the role model of a whole community. Her courage as she undergoes a public beating by her husband earns her the sympathy and solidarity of a number of women, including the youth of her village, except the Salindana who are entitled to perform excision. Through a fear of girls to be "cut" and a woman who is willing to protect them, using some of the wisdom of the traditional culture, the Moolaadé, Sembène capitalized on the circumstance to create a fearless heroine, who, after all, could be any woman. Cultural renewal occurs here through fusion and synthesis, but also through the individual body defying the social body. Sembène seems to suggest that media that allows circulation and access to knowledge is essential in bringing about change. The radio, which can help create avenues of choices as it offers a new vision of the world, is symbolic of spatial reconfiguration.

The reconfiguration of spaces in Sembène's filmic narrative involves a clash of the female and the social body. The first, while often oppressed by institutionalized practices that maintain male domination, as Petty argues, seeks new avenues to emancipate itself from a stifling social body that is bound to follow the current of change if its culture is to survive. Renewing culture through rebellious women is perceptible in the constant reconfiguration of spaces changing the dynamics in the sites of power. Dior Yacine embodies the space of royalty when she reclaims the throne as suggested in *Ceddo*. Like Aline Sitoë in Casamance, Dior Yacine symbolizes a strong female figures who fought against colonial occupation.

Rethinking history to renew the relations between a father and his daughter is another reading that Sembène offers in *Xala*, through the character of Rama. A cultural renaissance does not mean turning back history to unearth an imagined culture, but taking the old and mixing it with the new, and that is what Africa faced after independence. Sembène believed in women and their ability to change Africa by taking over the spaces of leadership long held by men. In his films Sembène clearly expresses his belief in an Africa with liberated women. Leadership is tied to symbolic spaces of power that have to undergo reconfigurations to match the more visible role of women in a constantly changing African culture.

Through the study of female figures and the spaces they invest in Sembène's films, we understand how spaces are reconfigured to reflect the vibrancy of the cultures. Inscribed in a dynamic mode, spaces in Sembène's films speak to female heroines who are bearers of change. These processes of spatial remapping validate the unique aesthetic qualities of Sembène's cinema. Collé Ardo seems to synthesize the idiosyncrasies of most of the female characters in Sembène's earlier films; her courage and heroism can be associated with the ultimate sacrifice of Diouana, the social struggles of Faat Kiné, the thoughtful statements and political stands of Rama, and indeed the strong warrior-like demeanor of Princess Dior Yacine. These female characters share a common determination to refuse fatalism, to renew African culture, and to actively play a role in its development. Throughout his career, Sembène passionately tried to put his artistic creation in the service of the reconstruction of an African space solidly anchored in African cultural values. However, in his call for a return to African cultural roots, he does not suggest that Africans should uncritically reject foreign cultures, but rather that they should embrace them with confidence and lucidity.

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SEVEN

Why Does Diouana Die?

Facing History, Migration, and Trauma in Black Girl

Lyell Davies

In the film *Black Girl*, director Ousmane Sembène has created one of the cinema's most enduring depictions of the impact of colonization on the colonized or formerly colonized. Deceptively simple in its formal construction, the film offers both a complex allegorical exploration of the relations between Europe and Africa in the immediate aftermath of decolonization, and a devastating portrayal of the migration of a young Senegalese worker as she journeys from Senegal to France in the hope of fulfilling her dreams. As with many other African political filmmakers working during the post–World War II decolonization period, Sembène saw committed filmmaking as a means by which to raise the consciousness of his viewers and he described radical film as a "night school" for the transformation of society.[1] But unlike some among his peers, Sembène was not content to make films that served only as anti-colonial protest films, instead setting as his task the goal of making films that deliver strategies that can be used to change the conditions in which African people are forced to live.[2] In the instance of *Black Girl*, the rich layering of literal and allegorical interpretations that the film demands of its viewers distinguishes it from other more directly agitprop films of the period. However, as I propose to discuss in this essay, Sembène's desire to present his audiences with strategies they can use to change their circumstances is only provisionally realized in *Black Girl.* Instead, the confused actions and eventual suicide of the film's main protagonist deliver for viewers a profoundly ambivalent message about the ability of

the formerly colonized to free themselves from the chains of neocolonial dependency. Thus, instead of offering solutions, the film offers a forewarning of the hurdles that the colonized must overcome if they are to achieve genuine liberation.

The storyline of the film is an adaptation of Sembène's story "La Noire de . . . " from the collection of short stories *Voltaïque*, published in French in 1962. The collection was subsequently published in English under the title *Tribal Scars and Other Stories*, with "La Noire de . . . " renamed "The Promised Land."[3] Inspiration for the short story came from a news article describing the suicide of an African migrant worker in France, published in 1958 in the *Nice-Matin* newspaper, with additional inspiration drawn from Sembène's own life experience. With regard to the latter, like Sembène, the story's main protagonist is a native of Casamance in southern Senegal and, in a manner that parallels Sembène's own journey from Senegal to Marseilles, this character migrates from a poor section of Dakar in the hope of fulfilling her dreams in France only to find herself facing grinding working conditions and racism at the hands of her European masters.[4] Sembène stated that he preferred the written word to other forms of communication since writing provides a reader with clear opportunities to reflect on the narrative as it unfolds. However, he turned to filmmaking because he determined that the low rates of literacy in sub-Saharan Africa made film a better means to communicate with mass audiences.[5] For the making of the film *Black Girl*, the move from the written page to the cinema screen entailed shedding many elements that are present in the original short story, including a more textured portrait of the main protagonist's origins in Senegal prior to her migration, as well as a more explicit account of this character's mistreatment at the hands of her French employers. Conversely, in the filmed version of the story, Sembène shows his conversance with the visual and aural attributes of the film medium and added important new elements to the narrative, including the mask, to serve as a visual metaphor for African culture, as well as a lamenting musical score and an effective use of mise-en-scène. Interestingly, between the inception of the short story in the 1950s and the making of the film in the mid 1960s, Senegal gained its independence from France. Thus, while the short story depicts the final years of direct French rule of Senegal, the film depicts the early post-independence period. Nonetheless, despite the emergence of Senegal as an independent nation between the publication of the story and the making of the film, the basic narrative is unchanged in the film since, "[f]or Sembène, Senegal's present [post-independence] political and economic systems are identical to those of a colonized country."[6]

The film begins with its main protagonist, Diouana (played by Mbissine Thérese Diop, an aspiring actor who had herself been a migrant to France), arriving on a dockside in Marseilles. She is met by Monsieur, the patriarch of the French family (played by Robert Fontaine, a French thea-

ter actor and one of the few professional actors to appear in Sembène's films), and driven to the family's apartment-tower residence in the Côte d'Azur. From this point on, the remainder of the narrative unfolds in the claustrophobic environment of the family's residence save for, first, a pair of flashbacks (the first flashback begins eleven minutes into the film and occupies the screen for nine minutes; the second begins thirty-nine minutes into the film and lasts for five minutes) in which Diouana appears to look back at events from her life in Senegal prior to her migration. And second, after Diouana's death, the film's final coda sequence where Monsieur returns to Dakar to deliver Diouana's possessions to her mother. Françoise Pfaff reports that when Sembène first proposed the film his plan was to create a work running about seventy minutes in length, which is roughly ten minutes longer than the version completed.[7] The additional screen time was to include a color sequence depicting Diouana's journey along the Rivera after her arrival in France; the sequence would reveal "the gap between the main protagonist's dreams and what she was about to experience during her subsequent stay in France,"[8] but it was not filmed because of the limited budget available to the director for the production.

Made with few technical resources and its simple storyline, the richness of *Black Girl* as a work of cinema lies in the constant oscillation it exhibits as its narrative and mise-en-scène shift between two intermingled levels of meaning. On the first of these levels, the film presents, in allegorical form, a scathing depiction of the neocolonial conditions that define relations between Europe and Africa *after* the end of direct colonial rule. Through the use of allegory in Sembène's work, the actions and experiences of individual characters are translated into another code or level of experience;[9] in this way, his work does "not lock spectatorial comprehension into an individually unique set of perceptions, memories, dreams, fantasies and desires," and his individual characters are often "insufficient" to the narrative's overall message, interpretation, and trajectory.[10] On a second level, the film delivers a captivating literal depiction of an individual migrant worker's journey from Africa to Europe where, upon her arrival, she faces psychological collapse as her dreams of a better life are demolished by the day-to-day reality of her overseas existence. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra argues:

> [t]he film's attraction is that it can be read at several levels: that of the story, which in itself is already thought provoking, and then that of the symbolism of the images. The richness of their possible interpretation leads us to deeper analysis of the social situations and politico-economic relations of African and European societies.[11]

At the nexus of these two layers of meaning is the figure of Diouana, who, in a disarmingly understated performance by Diop, emerges as both an allegorically loaded and a psychologically complex figure. As the

bearer of multiple layers of meaning, she serves to represent an Africa that is being destroyed by false consciousness and the crushing weight of ongoing neocolonial exploitation. While at the same time, her character serves as a portrait of the psychology of an individual migrant worker teetering on the brink of annihilation in light of, and eventually annihilated by, the neocolonial frameworks from which she cannot extract herself.

Over the years, a variety of features of *Black Girl* have been studied by scholars, including: the film's production process;[12] Sembène's use of allegory and the symbolism of the African mask;[13] orality and language in the film;[14] and Sembène's depiction of nationhood in the film.[15] In my study, attention will be focused on Diouana's suicide and the events and conditions that drive her to her death. The suicide of this young woman, forty-eight minutes into the narrative, is shocking and disorienting for the viewer. In part, because it presents a despairing account of the end of an individual migrant's life, but also because it seems to suggest that the colonized will be unable to free themselves from the shackles of neocolonial domination. To understand Diouana's suicide, I propose we need to explore her role as an allegorical figure within the narrative while also acknowledging that in the figure of Diouana the director has brought to the screen a brilliant study of the impact of colonialism, racism, and migration on the psyche of an individual human being. Within this exploration, I will argue that Sembène's depiction of Diouana's troubled life and suicide remains highly relevant today, since it tells us much about the hardships of migration and the legacy of colonialism as experienced by contemporary immigrants, exiles, and refugees. But in addition, I propose to argue that Sembène's decision to construct his narrative around suicide of a migrant worker must be questioned, since he may have underestimated the figure he has created and, by refusing to have Diouana emerge as an individual who is empowered by her border-crossing experiences rather than disempowered by them, fails to acknowledge the power that can be vested in diasporic subjectivities.

DIOUANA'S DEATH AS ALLEGORY

Diouana's death is a horrifying event in the film: her suicide is unexpected and the suddenness with which she kills herself is shocking and disorienting. Why did Sembène script this end for the main protagonist of his film? In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon argues that a black colonial subject who migrates to Europe must inevitably be shaken to the core by the experience. Describing the lives of African students who arrive in Paris, Fanon writes, "[i]t takes them several weeks to recognize that contact with Europe compels them to face a certain number of problems that until their arrival had never touched them. And yet these problems were by no means invisible."[16] When Diouana arrives at the Antibes

home of her French employers she finds herself cheek by jowl with realities she faced but did not recognize prior to her migration. She realizes that Monsieur and Madame have brought her to France to work and not, as she had hoped, to live as they do, and she sees for the first time that in the eyes of Europeans she is defined by the color of her skin. As Fanon's example of the African students in Paris illustrates, through the act of migration the emerging diasporic subject may for the first time be compelled to recognize their place in history and examine how their movement (whether they were *pushed* from their homeland or *pulled* to an overseas location) was defined by economic and historical trajectories that are larger than their own individual impulse to migrate. So compelled, the immigrant, refugee, or exile is not entering history for the first time; rather, they are for the first time made aware of a history they have always been within, albeit unknowingly.

Hired as a nanny to supervise the French couple's three children, on her arrival in France Diouana discovers that the children are away and instead of caring for them she is expected to cook, clean, and perform every other kind of domestic chore for Monsieur and his often bad-tempered wife, who is indentified only as Madame (played by Anne-Marie Jelinck). As a live-in maid in a foreign country with none of the rights held by a native French worker, Diouana has little choice but to acquiesce to the slave-like conditions the couple have constructed for her. The extent to which Madame and Monsieur planned the domestic servitude Diouana faces in France is not as clearly stated in the film as it is in the short story, and it's therefore illuminating to refer to the text of *The Promised Land* to see the depths of the exploitation Sembène conceives for Diouana at the hands of her master and mistress. In the short story, Madame brings Diouana to France because she wants a maid who will be easier to control, and who can be forced to work harder, than the French maids she has employed in the past. French workers, muses Madame, are too expensive and troublesome. One of her previous maids "even insisted on a day off each week," while a second, with children of her own at home, "refused to look after the children and live in."[17] While the European colonial powers were capable of being liberal in their domestic policies, allowing for the formation of trade unions, endorsing freedom of expression, and so on, no such rights were typically extended to the colonized in their home regions. Madame has brought Diouana to France because she knows the young woman can be made to work harder, while being paid less money, than a comparable French worker since, as a transplanted colonial subject, she does not understand or possess the rights held by native workers.

In the film, while the premeditated exploitation of Diouana by Madame is less explicitly stated than it is in the short story, it is no less a feature of the narrative. In the first of the film's two flashback sequences Diouana remembers her initial meeting with Madame. Seeking work, she

crosses the sanitary cordon built during the colonial period to segregate the African-occupied neighborhoods of Dakar from the city's European-occupied administrative and residential districts. Going from door to door in an affluent high-rise residence, her search for a job is unsuccessful. But on leaving the tower block she is approached by the young well-dressed Senegalese bureaucrat who had a few moments earlier helped her enter the building's elevator and, hearing that she is searching for work, he takes her to a section of the city where women seeking employment with Europeans wait at a street corner maid-market. At this location, in a sequence that strongly alludes to the operation of slave markets of earlier times, Madame arrives and, coolly surveying the women through her dark glasses, brushes aside the appeals of the more mature and assertive job-seekers to offer the position of nanny to Diouana, the most timid and least self-assured woman among the group. Chosen by Madame because she will be easy to govern, once she is established in the couple's French home Diouana quickly realizes that from her master and mistress' perspective her value is the cheap labor she provides for them; cheap labor that allows them to lead a comfortable life of leisure far removed from the life lived by Diouana or her compatriots back in Senegal.

In tandem with her discovery that she will occupy only a lowly position in France, following her overseas migration Diouana is for the first time explicitly faced with the historicity of her skin color. At a dinner party hosted by the French couple, a male guest stands and, announcing that he has never kissed a "negress" before, kisses Diouana on both cheeks as she passively serves the food she has prepared for the visitors. Angered by her treatment by the dinner guests, Diouana retreats to the kitchen, musing that Monsieur and Madame's behavior has changed since the couple reverse-migrated to the security of their home country. In Senegal, Madame had sought to ingratiate herself to Diouana, giving the young woman stylish hand-me-down clothes to wear; "as a foreigner in an environment familiar to her maid, Madame could not afford to be ungenerous to Diouana, and the latter never questions the power relations between giver and receiver."[18] Once they return to France, the couple view Diouana as a lowly domestic worker, while also fetishizing her as an exotic curiosity that they have brought back from Africa. Like the African mask now hanging on the wall of the apartment, Diouana has become an object to be exhibited by the couple as a souvenir of their overseas travel; a trophy that will, the couple thinks, show that they are open-minded about nonwhites and France's post-independence relationship with its former colonies.[19] Caged within the conditions created for her by Monsieur and Madame, Diouana cannot escape the subservient and desperate place that she has been assigned by history. At the same time, Monsieur and Madame evade any acknowledgment that colonial

relations define their relationship with Diouana, including the colonial mind-set they themselves hold and propagate.

On a day-to-day basis, Diouana faces her harshest treatment from Madame, who is depicted as a constantly oppressive presence in Diouana's life as she nags, badgers, and criticizes her at every turn. Early in his life, when working as a construction helper for his uncle, Sembène learned that exploitation can be an intimate and banal affair in the day-to-day, and the oppressive structure of the African family is a common theme in the director's work.[20] Within the hierarchical organization of the French family depicted in the film, Madame's role is as an intermediary who translates the patriarchal power of her husband to Diouana; Madame serves as "a good petite bourgeois functionary, she is the kind of subaltern who governs the colonized laborer in the domestic sphere."[21] Like Diouana, Madame holds only lowly status within the family and she too is unable to articulate or properly analyze her oppression, so it is expressed unconsciously through the resentment and anger she directs toward her husband and Diouana. Exacerbating Madame's resentment is the inference, only alluded to in the film but explicitly stated in the short story, that Monsieur has been sexually involved with Diouana.

Sembène is one of the first African writers to place women in leading roles in his creative work, a move that illustrates "his commitment to women's liberation."[22] His female characters occupy a broad range of roles across the body of his work, so no easy generalization about Sembène's depiction of women can be made.[23] However, a troubling feature of *Black Girl* is that it is clear that the two main female characters are positioned to embody the worst of colonialism and its history. Madame is depicted as being more brutal, irrational, and dangerous than her husband, while Diouana is more unconscious, more irrational and helpless, more self-destructive, and more thoroughly colonized than the male figures depicted (such as her Senegalese boyfriend [played by Momar Nar Sene] or the teacher and letter writer [played by Sembène himself] seen in the Dakar sequences). Throughout the film, Sembène's depiction of Diouana is harsh. She exhibits false consciousness, holds trivial consumer fantasies of the life she hopes to lead in France and, with no developed ability to transform her circumstances, shoulders the brutality of neocolonialism alone. In the two female characters at the fore of *Black Girl*, Sembène offers a depiction of the two sides of the colonial equation, the colonizer and the colonized, both irrational, both dizzy with confusion, and both profoundly psychologically damaged by the colonialism-shaped habitus they occupy. We must ponder why Sembène, a committed supporter of women's liberation, chose to invest the two female characters as the film's two starkest illustrations of the irrational brutality of colonialism, with Madame as the violator and Diouana as the victim, instead of concentrating on the portrayal of assertive or independent female characters more in line with the image of women proposed by his

socialist beliefs. The upshot of this depiction is that the figure of Diouana elicits sympathy from the viewer in light of the treatment she receives from her master and mistress, but she is not a figure of admiration. Serving as an allegory for post-independence Africa, Diouana is depicted as a victim of history and false consciousness, and not as a character possessing the agency necessary to bring about real change.

By midway through *Black Girl*, Diouana's despair at the conditions she faces is all encompassing and, immobilized by depression, she is deeply in crisis. Nonetheless, her death still comes as a surprise to the viewer since there are some signs that she is beginning to understand how she has been trapped by the historical conditions she occupies, as well as indicators that she is beginning to seek ways to resist the situation she finds herself within. In the film's second flashback it is clearly evident that Diouana now doubts her motivation for migrating to France and she seems to recognize that the forces that torment her in the present were already in place before she left Senegal. In the lead-in to the second flashback, as she sits alone in the tiny bedchamber she views as a prison cell, Diouana narrates, "I haven't eaten, I won't work. I'm not my mistress' plaything. . . . Why did I want to come to France?" The flashback depicts Diouana walking with her boyfriend in Dakar's Place de l'Indépendance. When a photographer takes a picture of the couple, her boyfriend touches her breast and they begin to quarrel. Then, sitting on the edge of a memorial honoring soldiers killed fighting for France in the 1914–1918 and 1939–1945 wars, Diouana asks her boyfriend, "Do you think France will be prettier than this?" To this her boyfriend replies, "How do I know? I've never been there." In the narration, Diouana remembers anticipating that when she tells her boyfriend that Madame has asked her to go to France, he will be angry and say, "That's domestic slavery!" Then, in a sequence that illustrates Diouana's growing awareness that colonization can create irreconcilable contradictions in the mind of the colonized, she remembers that although her boyfriend believes she will become a slave in France, when she danced on the top of the French war memorial he angrily demanded she come down since he considered her actions disrespectful. Indeed, her boyfriend's contradictory viewpoint vis-à-vis France was evident earlier in the film when, during the film's first flashback, it is him who delivered Diouana to the street-corner hiring-site where Madame recruits her, thereby setting in motion the chain of events that lead to her enslavement and eventual death.

Following the second flashback, in the minutes leading up to her suicide, Diouana seems for the first time to be taking action to liberate herself. First, she re-adopts her African clothing and, in a physical struggle with Madame, liberates the mask she had earlier given away to the mistress. Then, further illustrating her defiance, she throws her apron to the ground at Monsieur's feet and when he pays her for her services, she returns the money in a gesture that suggests that she now also rejects her

status as a wage laborer.[24] In the final seconds before her death, Diouana packs her suitcase and is heard in the narration to angrily state, "Never again will the mistress scold me. Never again will she say, 'Diouana, make coffee'. . . . Never again, 'Diouana, you're lazy.' Never will I be a slave." Then, removing the wig she has been wearing and fixing her hair into the same natural braids that she wore when we first see her in Senegal, Diouana lays the mask on top of her case as though preparing to travel home. To the viewer's horror, instead of leaving the apartment, she undresses, cuts her wrists with a razor, and dies in Monsieur and Madame's bathtub.

For Diouana, as both an allegorical figure and a literal individual character, the journey from Senegal to France is a journey to nowhere. Imprisoned in the French family's home, forced to fulfill her employers' every whim, treated with derision, and presented to dinner guests as a curiosity, Diouana's experiences serve as a damning indictment of the colonial structures and mind-set that are still operative in both Europe and Africa after the end of direct colonial rule. Made at a time when regions throughout Africa were shaking off the shackles of colonialism, *Black Girl's* depiction of Diouana's self-destructive death serves as a distressing statement about the failure of Africa to gain genuine independence. In Sembène's portrayal of Diouana, much as Fanon also predicted, for the newly independent nations of Africa the end of colonial rule has not brought "the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people," delivering instead, "a crude and fragile travesty of what might have been."[25] Indeed, if Diouana's death is viewed through an objective historicity of colonialism it will come as less of a surprise to the viewer, since under colonial rule violence and death are not exceptional events, but rather, are a feature of everyday life. As Achille Mbembe contends, colonial rule operates in a "spirit of violence" where "violence insinuates itself into the economy, domestic life, language, consciousness. It does more than penetrate every space: it pursues the colonized even in sleep and dream."[26] Thus, in seeking to understand Diouana's suicide there is some utility in suggesting that she commits suicide because she recognizes that she is already dead; she has been annihilated by a colonial system within which even her thoughts and dreams have never been her own. Recognizing this for the first time, she takes her own life because she sees that she has always been a slave and suicide is the only route of resistance that will liberate her from slavery.[27]

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF A MIGRANT WORKER

In tandem with examining Diouana as an allegorical figure who stands in for the experience of Senegal or Africa under neocolonial rule, to gain a full understanding of her suicide we must also examine the figure of

Diouana on the quotidian level of her standing as a flesh-and-bone migrant worker possessing a set of psychological characteristics and behaviors. At the level of a realist narrative of migration, Diouana's psychological collapse in the film is attributable to the web of neocolonial relations she finds herself entrapped within, coupled with a heightening of the destructive force of these relations by virtue of the repositioning she experiences through her overseas migration. After her move to Europe, Diouana is unmoored from familiar surroundings and peer group and must cope with the irreconcilable gulf that exists between the life she hoped to have in France, and the day-to-day lived reality she actually experiences. Bombarded by conditions she could not have imagined prior to her migration, the circumstances Diouana faces post-migration undermine everything she previously believed about herself and her place in the world. In their examination of the psychology of migrants, León and Rebeca Grinberg argue that migration is:

> [a] change of such magnitude that it not only puts one's identity on the line but puts it at risk. One experiences a wholesale loss of one's meaningful and valued objects: people, things, places, language, culture, customs, climate, sometimes professional or economic/social milieu. . . . Not only does the emigrant lose his attachments to these objects, but he is in danger of losing part of his self as well.[28]

Grinberg and Grinberg propose that the psychological shock that can come with migration must be understood as a form of trauma and, in terms that almost diagrammatically illustrate Diouana's state of mind by midway through the film, they argue that as the migrant struggles to establish themselves in a new place they face, "confusion and anxiety . . . one no longer knows who is friend and who is enemy, where one can succeed and where one can fail, how to discriminate between the useful and the harmful, how to discriminate between love and hate, life and death."[29] Contributing to her confusion, in France Diouana sees her job downgraded from children's nanny to the position of an unskilled domestic tasked with obeying all of Monsieur and Madame's instructions. Stripped by this downgrade of her sense of who she is as a worker, Diouana's vocational identity is eroded, leading her to experience the psychic "withering away" and vocational "impotence" experienced by migrant workers who find themselves denied work in their expected fields of employment.[30]

Marginalized and exploited by Monsieur and Madame, the terminal dramatic event that sends Diouana to her death is the arrival of a letter from her mother. In Sembène's work, written documents often symbolize the disenfranchisement of Africans and their arrival is the trigger for dramatic turns of events. While, in contrast, the spoken language and the oral circulation of rumors are frequently depicted as empowering.[31] In the instance of *Black Girl*, neither the spoken nor the written word offer

Diouana any solace and, since she is unable to read or write, when the letter from her mother arrives she can only sit and listen as Monsieur reads it for her as Madame blithely looks on. Denied the possibility of a private communion with her mother's communication, the content of the letter is interpreted for Diouana by the couple, including a statement from her mother indicating that Diouana should be thankful for the job she has and the accusation that by not sending remittance money home Diouana is failing in her familial obligations. Following the reading of the letter, Monsieur begins to write a reply in Diouana's name, in the process both patronizing Diouana and further co-opting communication between mother and daughter. These events place Diouana in an impossible position: her inability to read prevents her from actively investigating the substance of the letter, while her mother's comments press her to honor the people who are mistreating her. In the narration, Diouana muses that the letter cannot be real since her mother cannot write and, believing it must have been forged as another ruse to further disenfranchise her, she tears it up.[32]

The unhappiness expressed in the letter by Diouana's mother draws our attention to a further ongoing legacy of colonialism as it is borne by both individual migrants and by the social network of people who remain behind in a home country. While migrants who undertake the kind of journey traveled by Diouana may experience the trauma associated with feelings of dislocation or loss, for those who are left behind in the home country the departure of friends or family may also be experienced as a traumatic loss. The anger and resentment expressed by Diouana's mother toward Diouana is motivated by the abandonment she feels following Diouana's departure; a departure that leaves her to fend for herself in Senegal. Grinberg and Grinberg propose:

> The reactions of those who remain behind when others emigrate, and the nature of their feelings, depend upon the quality and intensity of the bonds that unite them with those who are leaving. Inevitably there is a sense of loss and abandonment when close relatives separate. Those who remain feel overcome by sorrow and depressive feelings and are not free of hostility toward the departing person for the suffering he is causing. Sometimes, if circumstances preclude a rapid return or a trip from the first is planned as definitive, the separation is experienced as death.[33]

They conclude, "The one who leaves dies, and so does the one who stays behind."[34] The scene with the letter reveals a triangulation within Diouana's experience: instead of serving as a means to escape from the poverty she faces in an African country underdeveloped by colonialism, her migration from Senegal to France is simply another facet of colonialism; one that strips her of her identity while undermining the future development

of an independent Senegal as the social fabric of the fledgling nation is eroded by the overseas migration of its citizens.

A FAILURE OF THE DIRECTOR'S IMAGINATION?

Within the narrative Sembène has constructed for us, Diouana's suicide serves as a catalyst for the launch of the film's somewhat more uplifting six-minute end coda sequence in which Monsieur visits Diouana's mother in Dakar to deliver her wages and possessions. Here, reversing the despairing message presented by Diouana's death, the mask, previously seen hanging limply on the French couple's wall, is returned to Diouana's younger brother (who we see Diouana take it from in the film's first flashback). The boy lifts the mask to his face, reanimating it, and proceeds to chase Monsieur out of the Diouana's home neighborhood. It is a hopeful sequence as Diouana's death is seen to nourish future resistance against European domination, and here Sembène is "conveying the message of an insurgent Africa, crying for vengeance . . . the director seems to be saying that justice will be done one day."[35] In relation to this sequence, Diouana's suicide moments earlier serves as a final brutal indictment of the harm colonialism rains down upon all those caught within its predatory grip, thereby providing even greater impetus to the argument that the colonial mind-set as it is held by both the colonizer and colonized must be broken if African people are to gain genuine freedom. In this way, and in contrast to committed films that present prescriptive or inspirational responses to political problems, *Black Girl* offers the viewer little guidance about how change can occur aside from clearly arguing that we must refuse to accept the ways of thinking that are illustrated by the various characters in the film. The absence of a simple prescriptive call by the film for the advancement of a particular practical response to colonialism is not a weakness of the film or a failing on the part of its maker. On the contrary, one of the strengths of *Black Girl* is that rather than proposing prescriptive solutions to neocolonial dilemmas, the film targets and attacks the false consciousness and lingering colonial mind-set that sustain the ongoing, neocolonial domination of Africa. Indeed, the profound questions the film poses about our ability to fundamentally eradicate patterns of thought that encourage the colonial domination of others continue to merit our attention today, just as this colonial mind-set continues to haunt present-day geopolitical realities.

But taking a different approach to the figure of Diouana, and if we ignore for a moment the usefulness of her suicide as a climax within the film's dramatic narrative, it is instructive to ask whether by having Diouana's life end in the way that he does the director has underestimated the power that she might have acquired through her border-crossing journey. It is clear from Sembène's early work, most notably his first

novel *The Black Docker*, that the director is keenly aware of the pressures that define the lives of migrant workers, including feelings of homelessness or hopelessness of the kind that seem to drive Diouana to suicide. For her, life in France is an unlivable source of suffering as her sense of who she is disintegrates in the face of the still intact apparatus of colonialism. But if we contrast Sembène's depiction of Diouana's life with contemporary thinking on postcolonial or diasporic subjectivities, a different picture of migrant life and diasporic identity emerges. As a range of scholars have argued, the hybridization of identity that occurs through acts of migration must not be seen solely in terms of loss, since hybridization in this way can lead to the emergence of new identities and new forms of political subjectivity; ones that are freed from the fixed positionalities engendered by permanent occupancy of a stable home site.[36] While border-crossing migration may bring the pain of numerous uncertainties for those involved, it can also open up new ways of looking at the world, including the emergence of "double vision" and an ability to navigate multiple codes and languages.[37]

In the film, the two flashback sequences serve as acts of remembrance on the part of Diouana as she replays her memories of life in Senegal prior to her migration to France. Here, using a retrospective gaze, Diouana's is able to examine her life in Senegal through a lens informed by her experiences in France, while also examining her experiences in France from a position that is not stably sited in France. In the moments leading up to her suicide, as is highlighted in the second flashback and its immediate aftermath, Diouana is beginning to exhibit signs indicating that she is emerging as a diasporic subject who is able to examine her present and past life from a third subject position, one that is not contained by either a Senegalese or a French subjectivity. However, the full emergence of a hyphenated subjectivity born of her diasporic experience is abruptly curtailed by her suicide. Thus, for Diouana, migration and border crossing brings only death, not a rebirth from which she can emerge as a fully fledged diasporic subject who is able to understand and resist the conditions in which she finds herself.

Ironically, in counterpoint to Diouana's fictional demise is the example of Sembène's own life as a migrant worker, an experience that contributed to his emergence as a writer, filmmaker, and political activist. Like Diouana, Sembène had little formal education growing up in Senegal, and early in life he too exhibited an ambivalent relationship to his colonial masters, as is manifest in his willingness to serve in the French colonial army during World War II. His own anti-colonial stance and engagement with socialism emerged when he began to journey beyond his regional home in Senegal; his passionate hatred of colonialism developed when, "[t]he discrimination he experienced in the French army led him to the realization that he was not a member of the French nation,"[38] and his subsequent coming of age as a political organizer occurred in

Marseilles, where, as a member of French Communist Party, he participated in dockside labor organizing and efforts to end French colonial rule in Algeria and Indochina.[39] As with Diouana, in France Sembène experienced harsh working conditions and bore the weight of colonialism's legacy of racism and exploitation. But in contrast to the end he scripted for her, Sembène was able to draw from his experience the insight and political awareness that underpinned his lifelong career as a militant artist. The film's depiction of Diouana's suicide and the coda sequence that immediately follows it seem to suggest that Sembène views the hybrid identity Diouana possesses by virtue of her overseas migration as being less powerful than the purer African identity attained by her young brother when he raises the African mask to his face. Made during the post independence nation-building period of the 1960s, the coda sequence's linkage of a pure African identity (symbolized by the mask), with African liberation is perhaps understandable (although in many ways it is an ahistorical linkage insofar that the liberation of colonized countries as diverse as Ireland, Haiti, and Spanish-controlled Cuba was massively influenced by the political clout of their respective overseas diasporas). But for us today, living in a world characterized by globalization and global migrations, Diouana's suicide is troubling in that there is a need to identify and nurture the power that is invested in diasporic subjectivities, and to thereby ensure that immigrants, refugees, and exiles can become agents of political change. Thus, while the story of Diouana's exploitation in Europe still resonates deeply with us today, her suicide curtails an examination of how diasporic subjectivities can be empowered by their experience in ways that will enable them to press for justice, rather than descend into self-destruction as Diouana does.

CONCLUSION

Today, five decades after it first screened, *Black Girl* continues to offer viewers a powerful depiction of the economic, cultural, and psychological impact of colonization on the colonized. As an artifact born of a particular period in history, the film offers insight into the challenges faced by the revolutionary architects of African independence in the aftermath of direct European rule as the shackling of neocolonialism began to be felt. But the film serves as much more than a historical artifact: in our age, a staggering percentage of the world's population lives in shantytowns not dissimilar from the one Diouana sought to escape,[40] and migrant workers are moving around the globe in numbers never before seen as they service the labor needs of neoliberal globalization. The film's depiction of Diouana's journey from a Dakar shantytown to a life of domestic servitude in France presents for us today a nearly pitch-perfect counterpoint through which to examine the challenges faced by millions of our age's

migrant workers, many of whom will be separated from their homelands for years or decades while experiencing super-exploitation of the kind depicted in the film. Indeed, in actual lives that mimic the experience of Diouana, many of these migrants are moving from impoverished regions of Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, or Africa, that were once the imperial holdings of the metropolitan nations to which these individuals now migrate. In the self-destructive end Sembène scripted for Diouana, the director perhaps underestimated the way hybrid subjectivities born of border crossings can emerge as new and powerful political subject positions—ones that we will need today if migrant workers and the formerly colonized are to achieve justice. But this does not diminish how, in the figure of Diouana, Sembène has presented for us a powerful depiction of the injustice millions of the world's peoples have faced under colonialism and continue to face today under neoliberal globalization and the reverberations of ongoing neocolonialism. While it's appropriate to recognize and applaud the ongoing relevance of the themes depicted by Sembène in *Black Girl,* in doing so we must not overlook the elegance of *Black Girl* as a work of cinema. Following his permanent return to Senegal in 1960, Sembène declined to join political parties and determined instead that he would be a "militant through his art."[41] The intricate and charged array of literal and allegorical messages *Black Girl* presents to the viewer is testament to Sembène's determination to use film as a means to confront the complex legacy and cruel realities of colonial domination; they are also a testament to Sembène's mastery of the film medium.

NOTES

1. Mbye B. Cham, "Introduction," in *African Experiences of Cinema*, ed. Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham (London: British Film Institute, 1996), 2.

2. See Vetinde J. Lifongo, *Nationalism and National Consciousness in the Novels of Ousmane Sembène* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1994), and Roy Armes, *Third World Filmmaking and the West.* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1987).

3. Throughout this essay I use English titles for Sembène's works. The story's French title "La Noire de . . . " translates literally as "the black girl of . . . " This has a somewhat different meaning than the English title, indicating both Diouana's homelessness and that she is owned by someone or something; possibly by Monsieur and Madame, or by history itself.

4. Samba Gadjido, *Ousmane Sembène: The Making of a Militant Artist* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 5.

5. Sheila Petty, "Towards a Changing Africa: Women's Roles in the Films of Ousmane Sembène," in *A Call To Action: The Films of Ousmane Sembène*, ed. Sheila Petty (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1995), 3.

6. Françoise Pfaff, *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembène: A Pioneer of African Film* (Westport, Connecticut & London, England: Greenwood Press, 1984), 114.

7. Ibid.

8. Pfaff, *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembène*, 113.

9. In the instance of *Black Girl*, Diouana's standing as an allegorical figure is also sustained at the level of film form. As Sheila Petty argues in "Towards a Changing

Africa," 74, the director's minimal use of close-up shots subverts Diouana's psychology while distancing the spectator from what might otherwise be viewed as a melodrama. Similarly, although the oral narration heard throughout the film appears to be an autobiographical account of Diouana's thoughts, feelings, and experiences, is it delivered in a voice that suggests that none of what is heard by the viewer is fully hers. As Françoise Pfaff argues in *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembène*, 114, this sense is compounded by the delivery of the narration in French, a language it is unlikely that a Senegalese maid would speak.

10. Philip Rosen, "Nation, Inter-Nation and Narration in Ousmane Sembène's Films," in *A Call To Action: The Films of Ousmane Sembène*, ed. Sheila Petty (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1996) 35–37. Rosen notes, there are risks attached to interpreting Sembène's work as allegory (as with the interpretation of the works of other African directors in this way) since it homogenizes African cinema stylistically while underestimating the operation of allegory in Euro-American cinema.

11. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Five Major Films by Sembène Ousmane," in *Film and Politics in the Third World,* ed. John D. H. Downing (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1987), 33.

12. Pfaff, *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembène.*

13. See Roy Armes, *Third World Filmmaking and the West.* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1987), and Vieyra, "Five Major Films by Sembène Ousmane."

14. Sada Niang, "Orality in the Films of Ousmane Sembène." In *A Call To Action: The Films of Ousmane Sembène*, ed. Sheila Petty (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1996).

15. Rosen, "Nation, Inter-Nation and Narration in Ousmane Sembène's Films."

16. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967), 153.

17. Ousmane Sembène, *Tribal Scars* (Portsmouth New Hampshire & London, England: Heinemann Educational Books, 1962), 88.

18. Petty, "Towards a Changing Africa," 73.

19. In *The Promised Land*, Sembène depicts Monsieur as an airline official with a collection of African artifacts, thereby making explicit that he is a hunter and collector of trophies. In contrast, in *Black Girl*, Monsieur is depicted as a French development advisor working in post-independence Senegal, and as an individual who is, at least superficially, sympathetic to Diouana. By constructing this character in this way, Sembène highlights how the stated good intentions of the French toward Africa after decolonization obscured the reality that French thinking about the continent was still defined by colonialism.

20. Gadjido, *Ousmane Sembène*, 48.

21. Rosen, "Nation, Inter-Nation and Narration in Ousmane Sembène's Films," 40.

22. Lifongo, *Nationalism and National Consciousness in the Novels of Ousmane Sembène,* 241.

23. Petty, "Towards a Changing Africa," 68.

24. Philip Rosen argues in "Nation, Inter-Nation and Narration in Ousmane Sembène's Films," 34, that there are signs of resistance on the part of Diouana earlier in the film. He proposes, her silence throughout the film can interpreted as a form of resistance, and "a refusal of the privileges of language."

25. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 148.

26. Achille Mbembe, *On The Postcolony* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2001), 175.

27. There is utility in proposing that in symbolic terms Diouana does not die. Instead, her spirit lives on in the form of the mask; Françoise Pfaff argues in *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembène*, 124, by entering the ancestors' world, Diouana "remains in constant contact with the terrestrial cycle of life and influences it."

28. León Grinberg and Rebeca Grinberg, *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Migration and Exile* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 26.

29. Grinberg and Grinberg, *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Migration and Exile*, 9.

30. Salman Akhtar, *Immigration and Identity: Turmoil, Treatment, and Transformation* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1999), 25.
31. Niang, "Orality in the Films of Ousmane Sembène," 56.
32. There is ambiguity about the veracity of the letter. In *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembène*, Françoise Pfaff argues that the letter is likely a forgery concocted by the French couple. To support this argument he proposes that, "later in the film, the mother's reaction as she refuses the money from Diouana's employer conveys the impression that Diouana's doubts [about the letter] were well founded," 118. This is not a convincing argument since there is a qualitative difference between Diouana's mother's demand for remittance money from her daughter, and her refusal to accept blood money from Monsieur as compensation for her daughter's death.
33. Grinberg and Grinberg, *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Migration and Exile*, 67.
34. Ibid.
35. Vieyra, "Five Major Films by Sembène Ousmane," 33.
36. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), and Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalizations and Ethnicity," in *Dangerous Liasons: Gender, Nation, & Postcolonial Perspectives,* ed. Anne McClintock, Aanir Mufti, & Ella Shohat (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
37. See Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
38. Lifongo, *Nationalism and National Consciousness in the Novels of Ousmane Sembène,* 24.
39. Gadjido, *Ousmane Sembène*, 132.
40. Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London & New York: Verso, 2006).
41. Gadjido, *Ousmane Sembène*, 155.

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III

Language and Aesthetics

EIGHT

Language, Racial Difference, and Dialogic Consciousness

Sembène's God's Bits of Wood

Augustine Uka Nwanyanwu

Published in 1960, *God's Bits of Wood* is generally regarded as Sembène's masterpiece, as well as his most complex and artistically coherent work. It is a novel popularly regarded as a symbol of popular culture for its concern with the oppressive nature of the forces of production, which capitalist Europe unleashed on the working African masses.[1] Emmanuel Ngara describes it as "a novel about the power of collective bargaining."[2] This brings to mind the historical context of the narrative. It is based on the 1947–1948 strike of the railway workers on the Dakar-Niger line in the former French West African colony. The strike is because of the conflict between the management of the Dakar-Niger line and the railway workers over their inability to agree on some key demands by the workers. These include family allowances, the matter of pension, increase in salary, and proper housing, among others.

Indeed, one cannot help being aware of the echoes of dialogic interaction in which plural voices and consciousnesses conflate. The intersection of worldviews pervades Bakhtin's entire philosophy and his theory of novelistic discourse. Bakhtin affirms that "every novel is a dialogized system made up of images of 'languages,' styles and consciousnesses that are concrete and inseparable from language."[3] The dialogic principle looks at the relationship between cultural and ideological systems. The mingling-point of oneself and someone else in dialogue has its roots in the dialogic structure. Bakhtin's central thesis is that in every discourse

there is the interpenetration of external and personal speech. Rolf Kloepfer demonstrates that "[w]hen in dialogue one's own and someone else's words and language are brought to unfold simultaneously, then this also means that one's own language or one's own actually ongoing speaking is being talked about."[4] The interpenetration of "external and personal speech" is what leads to multiple perspectives.

The concept of *dialogicity* in literary criticism has not been fully explored. In the words of Palmer, a good understanding of the "dialogic activity" could bring an enhanced understanding of the social nature of thought and the way it works in fictional minds.[5] The concern with the understanding of the inner rumblings of consciousness has recently attracted the attention of critics. Commenting on the role of consciousness in narrative fiction, Sotirova asserts that "[w]riting consciousness in narrative means capturing the minute details of a fictional mind and presenting them so that they retain the quality of verisimilitude with what we experience in our minds."[6] Because critics are beginning to realize that cognition and emotions are linked inextricably, it has become important to study how linguistic choices reflect ideology. This is one aspect of style, which sociolinguistic study of language emphasizes, interpreting texts from their sociocultural contexts. Fowler explains that "it is a theory of varieties, of correlations between distinctive linguistic choices and particular sociocultural circumstances . . . interpreted in relation to the stylistic conventions which generate it and the historical and sociological situation which brought it into existence."[7]

However, over the years critics have paid scant attention to how discourse styles intersect with conflicting voices and consciousnesses, and how these in turn represent diverse interests. This failure therefore undermines the significance of Sembène's counternarrative style in the cultural praxis and its theoretical speculation on the "dialogic" as synchronized in collective and individual consciousnesses.

This essay explores how ideological representations serve primarily to propagate the complex power structure and the effect of the dialogic system in the language of Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood*. Because the dialogic system seeks to express commitment to the transformation of the social order, it appropriates Bakhtin's notion of "dialogic consciousnesses" in its exploration of ideological crises in the text. Bakhtinian dialogism views narrative discourses as forms of social exchanges that locate the "very bases" of "individual and social behaviour" within conflicting worldviews.[8] These are issues replicated in the language of the novel, mostly in the form of Free Indirect Discourse (FID) and other forms of linguistic expressions ensconced in the rhetoric of liberation and struggle.

Essentially, Sembène's narrative is the site of culture conflict, exploitation, and oppression—its tempo is exacerbated by economic oppression. Sembène's identification with popular culture has a great influence on the language of the novel. According to Ngara,

> Ousmane's style strives to penetrate into the depths of human psyche, to probe thinking processes of the masses of French West Africa who were compelled by the circumstances to contemplate on their present predicament, to reflect on their social condition.[9]

The "social conditions" constitute the very bases of the dialogic in *God's Bits of Wood*. In the narratives of consciousness, the Bakhtinian notion of the dialogic is defined as communication:

> The very being of man . . . is *the deepest communion*. To be *means to communicate*. . . . To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another*.[10]

The central figure in *God's Bits of Wood*, Ibrahim Bakayoko, emerges as the leader of the workers' union activities, fighting alongside Lahbib, Doudou, and others against European and indigenous imperialism and oppression, but we never meet him until the narrative nears to a climax. Before this, Sembène artistically weaves the various contending issues into the inner rumblings of some of the characters. It is significant that the novel opens with Old Niakoro, who symbolizes the old generation, musing and reflecting on the strike and its consequences. She was visibly worried and disturbed because they young people were deciding on a strike without consulting their elders—"Did they know what would happen?"[11]

Here, Niakoro is the focalizer. Her emotions, thoughts and perceptions dominate. It is a form of self-dialogue, but its form shows a communication with self and others. However, there is also a dual voice, the narrator's, who shows limited awareness of everything that goes on in the mind of Niakoro. There is the overflow of the social into Niakoro's consciousness, but her consciousness is also communally constituted, with knowledge of history and culture. The *verba sentendi*, or words of feeling ("Did they know what would happen?"), are crucial to her interpretation and understanding of events.

In fact, we are put in the frame of Niakoro's interior, and read the extract from her perspective. There are certain expressive elements that support the claim that it is the narrated perception of Old Niakoro. She "had been worried" and agitated by the social implications of the strike and critically evaluates its outcome. Niakoro's consciousness polyphonically assumes and interrogates the voice of the workers. By doing so, she assumes a psychological distance from the strike because of the brutality imperialist forces will unleash on the masses. Her objection is that the workers, in this case, the young generation "did not know" the consequences of embarking on a strike against imperialists. Niakoro's opposition stems from her knowledge of a similar strike during which she lost a husband and a son. That history, drenched in blood, frightens her. Her

focalization therefore generates an "internal polemic," which shows that there are conflicting views embedded in her consciousness.[12]

Interestingly, Niakoro's dual voice is fused linguistically. The negative construction, "Did they even know what would happen?" highlights the increasing anxiety of the old woman. She is opposed to the decision of "the young people," because she had seen a previous "terrible strike." It seems that her voice and that of the workers intersect, but in spite of this, the workers' voices suggest the enthronement of a new phase.

In the epic struggle against oppression, Sembène erects certain linguistic formats, especially the use of free indirect discourse. He makes use of this technique to probe the effects of economic exploitation and the struggle against it in the minds of the people whose lives and daily fears are shaped by the historical moment. The dialogic system strikes us fully when we consider how it affects human relations. Self and other appear to us in the form of dual consciousness and this is what complicates the crisis of personal survival. This complication, for the lame gateman, Sounkaré, metaphorically is captured in the symbolic act of being eaten by the rats, ostensibly because he had questioned the values of group existence. Sounkaré's tragedy brings to the fore the interplay between self and other and the reality of communality.

His consciousness demonstrates something more profound about human thoughts and the impulses behind outward actions. This tendency to hold imagined conversation between the self and other is at the core of Sembène's narrative style. For instance, the narrator ironically gives a hint of Sounkaré's imminent death by describing his thoughts and reflections concerning his hunger and solitude: "Looking slowly around him. . . . The old watchman felt his heart shrink within him. . . ."[13]

Sounkaré's thoughts and feelings of hunger and loneliness is the subject of the discourse. In fact, there is a remarkable awareness of what is going through his mind—he negotiates his loneliness and reaction to the strike in his consciousness. He registers his objection through the adverb of contrast "but" and the proximal deictic "this." These linguistic choices enable the reader to identify with Sounkaré. The language of the factory dominates his consciousness ("dead machines," "flywheels," "electric bulbs," and "switches"). The "dead machines" symbolically activate Sounkaré's impending death and he "felt his heart shrink," largely because of the "bonds between him and this sleeping metal." The expressions foreground his participation in the historical process and emphasize his affinity with the old order. Nevertheless, it is an affinity that does not show resistance and that is why his consciousness excludes the necessity for active transformation.

Incidentally, Sounkaré's senses are alert, both visually ("looking slowly around him") and tactilely ("He felt his heart shrink"). Apparently, he sees the vulnerability of the machines as projecting his own mortality and this increases his resistance and anxiety over the strike. Given Sembène's

cultural affiliation, Sounkaré's consciousness reveals the social tensions and injustices that characterize the relations between the workers and the European employers of labor. The language that dominates Sounkaré's consciousness is predictably the language of survival and self-preservation. As Bradford asserts, "language is always dependent upon its historical context. The conventions of speaking and writing reflect or engage with the social, political or ideological. . . ."[14]

The "ideological resonances" implicit in language are replicated in Ramatoulaye's consciousness. The workers' strike, therefore, presents an opportunity for the participation of women in the transformation of the social order. Ramatoulaye, Penda, Maimouna, and Mame Sofi all through their involvement help in the transformation of the social order. Ramatoulaye, for instance, presents the image of resistance to the forces of economic exploitation. Her participation comes in Free Direct Speech (FDS), but it also appropriates features of the dialogic. The killing of El Hadji Mabigue's ram, Vendredi, for her, constitutes the physical plane of victory over the forces of oppression. She insists that "we must find our own strength somehow, and force ourselves to be heard."[15]

The author represents Ramatoulaye's language with a particular worldview. Implicated in Ramatoulaye's discourse are the linguistic signs of social and economic marginalization and the necessity for its transformation. Therefore, the killing of Vendredi is partly framed as an act of cleansing. In addition, the various images of struggle bring to the fore the politics of culture. This means that cultural expressions and their ideological equivalents are characterized by "metamorphic repetition."

Ramatoulaye's thoughts smack of belief systems and one is conscious of the author's linguistic consciousness. Judging by its syntactic markers, Ramatoulaye's speech incorporates elements of popular culture. It is dominated by the deictic pronoun ("you") and its related form ("yours"). Essentially, these pronouns, which talk about others, are for self-identification and proximity ("we," "our"), as if, the speaker (Ramatoulaye) is speaking for, and to them.

Although, the utterance is in direct speech (DS), it clearly represents not what Ramatoulaye says but what she thinks. It is rooted in the dreadful agony of the moment in which it is difficult to find food. There are three perspectives in her speech: that of Ramatoulaye, her addressee (comprising mainly the wives of the striking workers and children), and the detached onlooker. Her verbalization of the common sentiments is realized through evaluative words and *verba sentiendi* ("force ourselves to be heard"). These words convey her state of mind and give the passage a heightened significance since they also imply an acute consciousness of the socioeconomic conditions. The discourse pragmatically indicates that the old order requires transformation. While Niakoro conceives change as torturous, Ramatoulaye stresses the need for struggle in spite of the difficulties. Ramatoulaye's feelings draw the reader into the reality of the

world and the social conditions she is fighting against. The deictic ("you," "we," "our," "ourselves") "presupposes the presence of a reader in the context of the story."[16] Ramatoulaye talks to the second person with immediacy, using *verba sentiendi* ("your life and your spirit"). These are also modality words. *Modality* includes words that provide "speakers with the linguistic means to express degrees of commitment to the truth or validity of what they are talking *about* and to mitigate the effect of their words on the people they are talking *to*."[17]

Exclusion and marginalization constitute the organization of thought of European characters. This provokes the interlinked multilingual consciousnesses that interpolate the historical significance of Ramatoulaye's consciousness: "The women were *on the verge of panic* . . . and *they asked themselves* where she had found *this new strength*."[18]

Linguistic markers in the text, such as verbs of cognition and expressive features, reveal multiple perceptions. However, what is relevant here is the way the narrative fuses multiple voices of the characters. In terms of linguistic selections, the words bring out Ramatoulaye's character positively. What is noticeable is the presence of the collective consciousness of the women in her consciousness. Multiple consciousnesses give the impression of exchanges with another character or in more completed pattern, with the same character's consciousness.[19] Ramatoulaye's consciousness decries the exploitation that exists. There is a self-dialogue in the mind of the women about the transformation of Ramatoulaye into active consciousness. Besides, what we have is not a single reflector, but plural reflectors ("they scarcely recognized," "they asked themselves"). Through these reflections, they, like she, also question capitalist and imperialist tactics. The reflective consciousness of the women almost imperceptibly reveals a contrast in worldviews. The chief device through which Sembène achieves this is the use of Free Indirect Speech (FIS). This is a strand of Free Indirect Discourse (FID). It happens when "the character's voice constantly filters through the narrator's viewpoint."[20]

The crucial issue in *God's Bits of Wood* is the politics of oppression versus liberation. These concerns take a firmer intersection between the conflicting cultures. That is why the novel has come to be regarded as an anti-imperialist novel. Cultural imperialism and the struggle against it devolve in the language of the two classes in the novel. This is evident in the ideologically contrasting discourses of Dejean and Lahbib. Again, Dejean's consciousness is in free indirect discourse:

> "Polygamy is a matter which is of concern to us too". . . . Dejean had stood up and was shouting at him. "I know that pack of lies—you are led by a bunch of Bolsheviks". . . . Lahbib said, "you do not represent a nation or a people here, but a class."[21]

The quotation provides a glimpse of the cultural and ideological differences, rendered in Bakhtinian intersection of worldviews. Dejean's and

Lahbib's views are alternated and they disagree on how to end the strike. The narrator reports Dejean's views, as well as mocks those views. In 4, Lahbib's views appear in direct speech. He uses linguistic contrast to re-contextualize the issues of class struggle underlining the strike. The point is that there is a sense of the dialogic in which the two perspectives clash. While Dejean's worldview is race-oriented, Lahbib refocuses attention on class stratification that informs Dejean's perception.

In practical terms, this clash displays features of class consciousness. Dejean, for instance, speaks as a representative of the bourgeoisie, and brings in issues of nationality into the discourse. On the other hand, Lahbib swiftly exposes his pretences and redirects his speech to issues of class and race. Dejean appropriates the personal pronoun ("I") plus the verb of cognition ("know") to situate himself. He uses the same method to classify Lahbib and the other workers as the "other." Dejean's consciousness beholds the "other" as "inferior beings" and goes on to identify them specifically as "Negroes." These are signs of reference, which for him, makes equality inconceivable. Interestingly, what provides "visibility" to the exercise of power is skin color and Bhabha identifies this construction "as a signifier of discrimination."[22] He further identifies color in colonial discourse "as the cultural/political sign of inferiority or degeneracy."[23] This is what informs Djean's attitude toward the black workers.

The importance of FID in the text is the ability to convey irony and empathy. Joe Bray brilliantly explains these two concepts. He posits that narrative point of view "does affect mental representation,"[24] and that the technique of free indirect discourse (FID) generates not only the "dual voice" in a text but also shows how readers experience the "dual voice" when reacting to texts in which both the narrator's and character's "point of view appear to be present."[25]

Bray further proposes that the technique of free indirect discourse can produce two contradictory effects in the reader. Indeed, one of the most keenly contested issues in literary criticism is whether FID contains a "dual voice" of narrator and character. Bray is one of the critics who argued that FID articulates a "dual voice."[26] The effects it produces, that is, empathy and irony, enable readers to achieve a "higher interpretative plane."[27] This is why we both identify with Sounkaré and at the same time distance ourselves from him. In the previous passage, Lahbib properly exposes the irony in Dejean's consciousness. For Oltean, "the natural conjunction of irony with FID arises from the fact that FID articulates a double significance produced by the contrast of values associated with the two positions."[28] The irony in Dejean's discourse is when he implies that black workers cannot lead themselves ("you are led by a bunch of Bolsheviks"). This is where Lahbib confronts him and in the process exposes his ignorance of history and the dynamism of culture.

God's Bits of Wood therefore undermines the racially and economically constituted social order by resting on the ideology of struggle and resistance. Culture, in Sembènean terms, is people-oriented. Sembène explains that it is rare to see a developed culture without human agency, because the very structure of human development is based on the principle of human transformation. He further articulates the concept of man as the symbol of art.[29] This concept seeks to inscribe and transform the totality of the individual being without which culture is a fantasized projection. That is why "man is the finality of life"[30] and culture the "moral possession of one's identity."[31]

Edward Said raises a similar argument when he interrogates culture as "a sort of theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another."[32] Lahbib's assertions express indignation against the brutal tactics of the employers of labor. The social order that Dejean, Isnard, and Edouard represent must be transformed since it is based on exclusion and oppression. For Bhabha, the "possession of one's identity" is what gives culture authenticity: it "affirms its human significance, the authority of its address."[33] In a discussion with Dramé, Doudou asks: "why should the white men have ten minutes for their tea when we don't?" When the story gets to him, Isnard retorts: "Go and make yourself white and you can have ten minutes, too!"[34] Isnard's response is what Bhabha calls mimicry—the idea of skin color as the basis of differences in identity and distribution of privileges. This again is what leads to the denunciation of the identity of the black workers. The struggle of the workers therefore creates a discursive space through which they demonstrate that the capacity of culture lies in the survival of the individual.

The strike also reverberates on the entire social fabric. Its ramifications transcend the individual psyche and generate an ideological crisis in the relationship between "self" and "other" (for example, Ramatoulaye and his brother, Mbigue). The strike creates a split in the consciousness of Sounkare. Significantly, the strike undercuts the class consciousnesses of characters like Isnard, Beatrice, Bachirou, and Bernadini on the one hand, and Mame Sofi, Bakayoko, Lahbib, Fa Keita, Penda, and Doudou on the other.

In a measured and poetic language, the author describes the physical entrance of Bakayoko into the narrative. His consciousness is crucial in the trajectory of popular consciousness as he was seen walking "through the tangle of alleyways."[35]

Sembène constructs the image of Bakayoko as a credible individual who understands the historical necessity of social transformation; he is accused by his uncle Bakary of not having "a heart," because he could not find "some sign of emotion" in him.[36] It is precisely for his integrity that Grandmother Fatou Wade assures him "There will always be a place for you."[37]

Bakayoko's commitment and struggles are authentic and actual. His consciousness is dominated by socioeconomic problems caused by imperialism. In terms of values, his image provides a counterpoise to Edouard, whose language spotlights the background for the strike. Edouard's discourse is significant as rhetoric of deceit:

> if you restrict your claims now, the management will do everything in its power, after you return to work . . . and all of the questions held in abeyance can be worked out by degrees.[38]

The reader constructs Edouard's identity as an imperialist, exhibiting a paternalistic attitude. His linguistic expressions demonstrate his paternalist vision and convey the subjective nature of his worldview.

Edouard's hypocrisy generates a contrasting rhetorical style, as Bakayoko, aware of the exploitative tendencies of the capitalist class Edouard represents, swiftly rebuffs his offer when he says: "Is he sincere when he says he wants to help us?"[39]

Ramatoulaye's active consciousness re-echoes here. "Is he sincere?" interpolates another's voice. It expresses simultaneously two intentions, Bakayoko's as well as the refracted intensions of the author. Indeed, Bakayoko's speech is relevant in terms of the linguistic features. He constructs his speech using interpersonal structures and reflexives ("us," "ourselves") and proximity deictic ("this strike") to share affinity with the workers. The distal deictic ("that he has been") marks Edouard as the "other" while permutations of semantic features ("the obstacle that has made us afraid"), the temporal phrase ("the gentleman beside me here") and the highly cognitive expression ("he must know") give the impression of Edouard's defective consciousness.

However the inclusive person deictic ("us," "we") demonstrate that there is a party opposed to "he." Besides, "we" and "us," as well as the reflexive ("ourselves") appeal to the unity of Bakayoko and the striking African workers through their common bond since they all suffer the same form of exploitation at the hands of Europeans and their black collaborators like the "deputies" and the religious imams. In sentence 1, "we cannot let ourselves be stopped by it" is a confident assertion, as well as a rallying cry to the workers against the paternalistic and hypocritical attitudes of people like Edouard. The speech constitutes a dialogue with "he" while providing a contrast in their perspectives. Through this strategy, Bakayoko thrusts himself forward as a man who possesses the attributes of the knowledge of truth ("it is impossible for us to think that he has been on our side all along") and by so doing, maintains a dialogic interaction with the reader, as well as indicates his psychological closeness with the workers.

Bakayoko's ability to maintain affinity with the workers endears him to others. He is able to inspire Penda, who shrugs off her "infamous" past to play a positive role in the great march to enthrone a new social order

based on equality and respect. That is why Bakayoko felt the pangs of disappointment at the news of her death as "discouragement stabbed at him like the claws of a hawk plunging on its prey."[40]

Bakayoko's mental state subsists in the personification, "discouragement stabbed at him." The interpolation of consciousness has deeper philosophical significance in Bakhtinian dialectic; "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another," Bakhtin asserts.[41]

Through Bakayoko's consciousness, we register the tragic significance of Penda's death. However, her death at the city gate is equally symbolic because it provides a moral dimension to the story. It is an act of purification, just as Samba's death is also an act of self-atonement for abandoning the blind woman, Maimouna. Samba's moment of cognition is double-voiced: "Was it pity for the weak and the infirm or was it for the mother and the child . . . his child."[42]

This is an example of free indirect thought, "a variety of free indirect discourse" (FID). It "allows the novelist to give intimate access to a character's thoughts."[43] Samba's affection takes a solid stance following his cognition ("he remembered") and his new perception ("he watched") gives hint to his point of view. There is a clearer indication of his total acceptance of his responsibility and the evaluative phrase, "his child," is a key marker of his identification with mother and child.

Within the structural framework of the novel, Sembené weaves in the dialectic of violence. This form serves to perpetuate European cultural imperialism. Among its agents are Isnard, Victor, Dejean, Pierre. However, it is the dipsomaniac, Leblanc, who possesses "the insight into the true nature of things."[44] Leblanc underscores the criminality in the senseless killing of the apprentices by Isnard. Indeed, the attack on the apprentices led by Magatte is quite revealing. The irony is deepened after Isnard's shooting incident: "For a moment Isnard just stood there, dazed, his arm still stretched out in front of him, holding the smoking gun. . . . They were shooting at me!"[45]

Isnard's emotional imbalance after the shooting is marked by an exclamation mark ("They were shooting at me!"). This exclamation registers Isnard's interpretation of events, which the authorial perception contests. According to Bhabha, Isnard's reaction is a kind of copula that seems to point at Western imperialism's preservation of self. The strategic articulation of racial difference is inscribed in Isnard's imagination and that is the consciousness which Europe illuminates through its agents. This difference, Bhabha suggests, "turns the colonial subject into a misfit—a grotesque mimicry . . . that threatens to split the soul and whole."[46] Mimicry is "the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal."[47]

There is a picturesque presentation of Isnard's brutality. By the act of shooting, Isnard registers his perception of the African workers and his

propensity for violence against blacks. His repeated exclamations demonstrates the duplicity of his claim. Two phrases are crucial to his moral indictment: "his arm still stretched out in front of him," and "holding the smoking gun." Sembène makes use of these expressions to dredge up Isnard's limitations and to trigger the definition of himself as haunted, and in the process, constructs a vicious image of the apprentices. However, given the picturesque display of the scene, Isnard's direct utterances ("They were shooting at me!") cannot be honest. Besides, these words suggest that the narrator knows that Isnard, in spite of his outward show, is as much dipsomaniac as Leblanc.

The tension inherent in the strike situation helps to structure *God's Bits of Wood*. Sembène appropriates the artistic complexity inherent in "dialogic activity" to give the work a coherent shape. Interacting with others' consciousness involves questioning, provoking and interrogating multiple and contrasting worldviews. These interactions are much more complex. For example, one old man says at the trial of Diara: "We are not ashamed to admit that it is the women who are supporting us now."[48] In another instance, Mame Sofi remarks to N'Deye Touti: "You'll see—the men will consult us before they go out on another strike. Before this, they thought they owned the earth just because they fed us, and now it is the women who are feeding them."[49] This shows the alteration of old relations. Toward the very end of the novel, even N'Deye Touti, pejoratively called *mademoiselle,* adjusts her romantic dreams of Paris. She abandons her vision "of trips in automobiles, yachting trips and vacations abroad."[50] Her newfound consciousness is immersed in the culture of her people and that enables her to reject Beaugosse. Sitirova affirms that the "dialogic relationship is a complex dialectical process in which the self is constituted with one's own and with others' eyes simultaneously."[51] These intersections are resplendent in the splendid language of ancient wisdom, through which the old man, Fa Keita, adumbrates on the lessons of the strike and its moral structure in the context of the novel. What matters for the old man is that "you will never again be forced to bow down to anyone, but also that no one shall be forced to bow down before you. . . . Hatred must not dwell with you."[52]

The focus of Fa Keita's discourse is on the triumph of the collective spirit over brutal force. It also expresses certain key propositions: forgiveness ("Hatred must not dwell with you") and democratic tenets. These values encoded in his speech are what will transform the world Bernadini represents. Fa Keita dissociates himself from the ideology of hatred and proposes a humane counterforce in order to transform it. The old man's discourse is like a parable: the demonic power is changeable by the spirit of forgiveness. This parabolic style reinvigorates a new vision in the collective consciousness. Indeed, the speech shapes the moral structure of the narrative because it acquires some significance in the overall desire to transform society for public interest. Its moral undertone is strengthened

by logical connectives ("so that no man dares to strike you," "so that you will never again be forced," "but also that no one shall be forced"). Fa Keita states the point of disagreement using the adverb of contrast: "But if you were to kill him . . ." The conditional "if" is an indication that the opposing view would be counterproductive.

Fa Keita's discourse recognizes the diversity of perspectives and the different consciousnesses encoded in diverse experiences. His voice at this point merges with the author's perspective, and, in fact, provides the coda for a vision of a new social order. The coda epiphanizes for Ad'jibid'ji an answer to grandmother Niakoro's earlier riddle: "what is it that washes water?" For the child, therefore, she can confidently answer: "It is the spirit. The water is clear and pure, but the spirit is purer still."[53] Ad'jibid'ji's epiphany encodes a new moral consciousness.

In conclusion, the dialogic system projects alternative viewpoints. It is a narrative where a multiplicity of voices struggle and compete in a limited space, each shaping its own identity—emphasizing the impossibility of a monolithic culture which Dejean and Isnard represent. Thus, *God's Bits of Wood* is an encrypted narrative of split identity as we have seen in the case of Sounkaré. As we have shown, Sembène uses the dialogic style as an "enunciative" technique of questioning European imperialism. In this context, "dialogic reverberations" become sites of specification of identity and of exploring the abnormalities of Western imperialism. Through this discourse, Bakayoko, Lahbib, Ramatoulaye, Penda, Maimouna, and Mame Sofi emerge into the social realm. The alternative and ideological intersections reinvigorate the social order and in the process transform it. Using the features of language, Sembène finds causal patterns in the way social and ideological issues correlate in *God's Bits of Wood*, but it is the split echoes that provide a reinscription of order through which in the end Sembène interrogates the imperialistic nature of Western civilization.

NOTES

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4. Rolf Kloepfer, The Dialogic Principle, *Poetics Today* 1, no. 4 (1980): 125–26.
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6. Violeta Sotirova, "Woolf's Experiment with Consciousness in Fiction," *Contemporary Stylistics*, edited by Marina Lambrou and Peter Stockwell (London: Continuum Press, 2007), 8.
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12. Bakhtin, *Problems*, 203.
13. Ousmane, *God's*, 2.
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15. Ousmane, God's, 69.
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19. Bradford, *Stylistics*, 67.
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32. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xiii.
33. Bhabha, *The Location*, 149.
34. Ousmane, *God's*, 194.
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NINE

An Onomastic Reading of Ousmane Sembène's *Faat Kiné*

Mouhamédoul A. Niang

The invention of an African cinema emancipated from "*des histories d'une plate stupidité étrangère à notre vie*"[1] is central to Ousmane Sembène's conception of *le septième art*. In fact, his ultimate diagnosis of exotic cinema accordingly highlighted a filmic discourse of Western paternalism that infantilizes the African subject. Sembène was not the first African filmmaker to lambaste this state of affairs, however. As a pioneer in subaltern cinema, *Afrique sur Seine* (1955), a short film credited to le Groupe Africain de Cinéma, founded by "*quelques étudiants et stagiaires africains inscrits pour la plupart à l'École de Vaugirard et à l'Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques de Paris [en 1952],*"[2] was part of the first wave of attempts to invent an African cinema by and for Africans. If this historic contribution deserves credit for its content and perspective—it deals with the lives of Blacks in Paris—it was a bit distant from African realities on the continent. Sembène tackled the issues of distance and inauthenticity as he transitioned from fiction writing to filmmaking. Consequently, his ultimate choice of discursive and aesthetic authenticity testifies to his commitment to a fruitful and direct interaction with the Senegalese people in particular.[3] He accordingly set forth a filmic practice that offers an antidote to foreignness, paternalism, and the silencing of the African voice through a linguistic and formulaic politicization of the film title or *paratext*.

As a site for the politicization of language, the film title removes the feeling of foreignness while carving out a more genuine cinematic space for the local in Sembène's cinematic practice. Here lies the particularity of

his aesthetics. Ushered in by his first film *Borom Sarret* (*The Cart Driver*, 1963), the linguistic indigenization of the title constantly reflects a localized content; it also became a continuing pattern in his filmic and literary career. The evidence is shown in *Niaye*, the filmic adaptation of the short story "Vehi-Ciosane" ("White Genesis") published in 1964; it is also a classic feature in *Taaw* (*The Oldest Child*, 1970), *Xala* (*The Curse*, 1974), *Ceddo* (*Pagan*, 1976) (a film adapted from the first novel Sembène has written entirely in Wolof), *Guelwaar* (*The Noble One*, 1992), *Faat Kiné*(2000), and *Moolaadé* (*Protection*, 2004). Alioune Tine notes to this effect: "*Dans les années 60, la plupart des œuvres de Sembène portent un titre bilingue dans un français wolofisé ou simplement en wolof. Là se manifeste le premier indice d'un processus de 'wolofisation' de la production littéraire de Sembène*."[4] Sembène thus ends the pejorative and colonial perception of African languages as "baragouins" and "charagouins" by infusing them with "*[une] force de caractérisation*," "*[des] potentiels politiques*," and "*[un] pouvoir phénoménologique*."[5] Tine dates the filmmaker's linguistic awakening back to 1960, when he returned to Africa after a long absence. Up until this time, Sembène relied on French as his medium of literary expression away from the continent. Thus Tine observes, "*[d]ans les années 50, où l'on peut situer les débuts de la production littéraire de Sembène, le problème de la réception de l'œuvre et du rapport au public africain ne s'est jamais posé*."[6] It was in this period that the need to resort to filmmaking dawned on Sembène. This awakening occurred soon after he became cognizant of his relative failure as a writer of fiction. His symbolic turnabout led to a staunch championing of the Wolof language in audiovisual and textual media. Ann Elizabeth Willey has duly noted the filmmaker's launching of the journal *Kaddu* (*Discourse*) in 1971 with the Senegalese linguist Pathé Diagne; this initiative partakes in his fight to "make Wolof a more accepted language for written texts."[7] It echoed in the political realm with some degree of controversy.

The disagreement between Senghor and Sembène over the spelling of the word *ceddo* speaks volumes about the filmmaker's philosophical support of an authentic African cinema grounded in African realities and languages. In a reference to this incident, Sembène criticizes what he perceived as a lack of judgment and sense of authenticity in Senghor's part:

> The word "ceddo" comes from pulaar and there is gemination [i.e., a double "d," not a single "d" as Senghor argued]. There were African linguists working with us on the newspaper *Kaddu* and Senghor has an Australian linguist as his advisor. We were right. Why listen to a European? This was an African matter.[8]

Sembène has a knack for the orchestration of authenticity and mirroring effects. The Wolof language continued to play a significant part in this aesthetic practice of doubling through naming, which actually enables

the filmmaker to bring to the screen themes pertaining to the woman's condition in the Senegalese society. Sembène's choice of *Faat Kiné* for the titling or naming of his film crystallizes all these elements. The correlation between words and images as an expression of "la vitalité du peuple"[9] in his films has not gone unnoticed. Referring to the main character's name as a "sobriquet,"[10] Sembène acknowledges himself the dynamic parallelism between title and thematic content in *Faat Kiné*. A sobriquet mirrors or carries some characteristics of its bearer, and if *Faat* is a heavily loaded term, so also is *kiné* when its syllables are inverted after the fashion of the French back slang or *verlan*. Sembène gives a whole new meaning to *Kiné* and the main protagonist acts as its vehicle in a specific and changing Senegalese cultural context. Ultimately, both terms feature in the general scope of an Africanist aesthetics that Jean-Claude Blachère describes as "négrification" with respect to literary works: "*J'appelle "négrification" l'utilisation, dans le français littéraire, d'un ensemble de procédés stylistiques présentés comme spécifiquement négro-africains, visant à conférer à l'œuvre un cachet d'authenticité, à traduire l'être-nègre et à contester l'hégémonie du français de France*."[11] Faat Kiné exhibits this trait, as this essay will show.

I then propose an onomastic reading of *Faat Kiné*, an engagement with its language, filmic content, and other aesthetic features. Such a study would focus mainly on visible doubling, murder, or the symbolic beginning of an end, and the iconoclastic discourse on sexuality. That Sembène should choose such a title is far from gratuitous, and, as noted earlier, this work highlights the ways in which the title is substantiated throughout the film. It also underscores his empowering and shocking or infuriating use of language as a part of the political portrayal of women's socioeconomic and corporeal emancipation. The first of this essay engages with the isolated Wolof word *faat* as in Faat Kiné; the second part offers a tentative reassessment of the Wolof name *kiné*. As the diminutive of *Fatou* and the transformation of Fatimata, the forename pertains to what Kyallo W. Wamitila describes as "instances of hypocoristic forms where there are variants normally through abbreviations."[12] Emphasizing the significance of literary onomastics for the interpretation of fictional works featuring the issue of names and naming, Wamitila draws attention to the nexus between name and culture or the "social contextuality of naming."[13] My analysis of *faat* and *kiné* bears out their Senegalese and Wolof cultural contextuality. It also outlines these naming components as "expressions of experience, attitude and senses."[14]

FAAT OR THE TRANSLATION OF MURDER AND THE END OF PATRIARCHAL IRRESPONSIBILITY

Sembène has deplored the lack of studies on the aesthetic and technical aspects of his films.[15] Although this essay does not pretend to provide a definitive answer to Sembène's request, it addresses the technicality and practicality of the *paratext* or *peritext* as a microcosmic representation of the textual content. The *paratext Faat Kiné* is technical in itself; it can be viewed as a cinematic screen on which one gets the first glimpse of the film's content. Upon seeing the title, the culturally immersed spectator, just as in the case of the film *Ceddo*, expects the upcoming images to feature a character of that type or with that name. A Wolof and French-speaking audience would do even better in its interpretation of the title after seeing the entire film. The *paratext* would seem less innocent and more loaded given both its visible doubling of the *a* or gemination, a recurrent phonological pattern in his indigenization of the title, and the meaning of the Wolof word *faat*.

Faat Kiné revolves around the eponymous character, her two children, house, mother, friends, former lovers, and the gas station she owns. The film opens with a panoramic view of the Plateau neighborhood in downtown Dakar, as the camera closely follows a queue of silent Senegalese women carrying large buckets on their heads and moving through traffic on foot. The resounding voice of the great Yandé Codou Sène, Senghor's defunct *griot*, accompanies them along the way. Her song is believed to exemplify the nexus between the social realist genre and popular forms of performance.[16] Sembène's infatuation with the *griot* and his outlining of a "Senegalese subjectivity" are thus fleshed out.[17] The first scene of the film is followed by the introduction of Faat Kiné and her two children. These two scenes give the viewer an insight into two of Sembène's key filming techniques, namely doubling, a source of conflict with Senghor during the *ceddo* affair, and contrasting. They corroborate the status of the title as a reflection of the film's thematic content, namely the celebration of lower and middle-class women. Senegalese women play a significant role in *Faat Kiné*, and their introduction in the first scenes occurs in a way that highlights the technical trait of the visualized double *aa* or gemination in *Faat*. The visibility of the double *aa* concerns women in the first place. Indeed, a woman sings as women walk, and another stops at the pedestrian crossing in order for the same women to move from one side of the street to the other. The middle woman sees her double in the women with the buckets whose female voice resounds through Yandé Codou Sène's traditional song. In addition, the scene featuring the first appearance of the flower lady and Pathé is characterized by the repetition of the *aa* as in *Paaté*, and the Wolof exclamation *aah*. The doubling is mainly feminine, the flower lady lending her voice to it. Furthermore,

doubling is a sign of multiplicity that characterizes women who are more significant in the film. Faat Kiné's house is predominantly female.

It is also worth noting that the camera focus on Faat Kiné's eyes, evidences more doubling which actually pertains to the technique of contrasting. Sembène presents contrasted representations of women right from the outset. Indeed, to the first group of women carrying buckets on their heads and walking on foot, the filmmaker opposes the image of a modern woman driving her car with her daughter in the passenger seat and her son, the first male figure to appear in the film, in the backseat. It is to this woman that Sembène gives two of the greatest privileges and most coveted powers, namely speech and authority. Faat Kiné speaks from a position of authority; she tells her children that she cannot drive them to school, and she is unwavering despite her daughter's remonstrance. She denies Professor Gaye her space, but offers her body to whom she pleases. That the filmmaker chooses to focus on this particular woman during most of the film's sequences underscores his respect for her socioeconomic status and revolutionary attitude. This becomes evident in the title, which can be read as a tribute to an achieving woman proffered by the modern *griot* Sembène. The first significant interaction at Faat Kiné's workplace, the gas station, occurs between her and a disabled man named Paaté. Faat Kiné sits behind her office, a position of authority, listening to a crawling disabled man in a posture of powerlessness and lack. His wheelchair, which Faat Kiné and others had contributed to buy him, had just been stolen. His body is a reflection of this lack because he has lost a modern means of mobility that confers a certain dignity. He has been debased. It is ironically through this male character that the theme of violence is introduced for the first time. He reveals his murderous intent to the eponymous character whose very diminutive first name, Faat, denotes killing or the violent ending of a life. The issue of immoral sexuality, a significant trait in the film, comes also to the fore with his character. Seeking revenge against his girlfriend who cheated on him with another disabled man, Paaté's intent serves as pretext to frame the role the main female character will play as an iconoclastic and exceptional figure of progress and freedom.

If Paaté's discourse of violence is to be taken literally in its targeting of both a woman and a man, that of Faat Kiné the iconoclast stops at the level of the figurative and the symbolic. This difference is seen in her awe at learning about the disabled man's arrest upon carrying out his murderous intent later on in the film. Unlike Paaté's gruesome act, Faat Kiné's practice of violence as inscribed in her name is oral, behavioral, and corporeal. It carries a deep sense of complexity and meaningfulness. Paaté is not the only male character directly revolving around Faat Kiné to refer to the act of killing. Faat Kiné's son, Djib, who is ironically named after the voice of revelation and truth in Islam, the leading Archangel

Djibril namely, also uses the Wolof word *raw* or *faat* in a conversation regarding his dishonest father and his mother's potential husbands.

As the theme of marriage is addressed, Djib and Aby are told by their grandmother that a husband should be found for Faat Kiné. The expression of the need to find a husband for the main character occurs during a traditional Senegalese game known as *wouré* and is uttered by a traditional woman, Faat Kiné's own mother and savior. The players vie in this game, which the grandmother won, just as they do with respect to the choice of an honest man for Faat Kiné to marry. It is within this cultural context of a traditional game doubled with a verbal joust over the import of marriage that Djib unequivocally casts out his father Bob as a potential husband for his father/sister. He is even ready to take his father's life, an act that seems sacrilegious to his relatively conservative grandmother. However, Djib's threat differs from Paaté's vindictive act in the sense that it is directed to a sacred figure in the traditional African imaginary, namely the father. His stance echoes the way in which his mother symbolically and pragmatically deals with bogus or unscrupulous father figures. One is even tempted to say subversively "like mother like son," Djib having grown up away from his father. The last male character to make reference to what can be perceived as an honor killing with respect to Faat Kiné is her very conservative father. Upon learning of his daughter's pregnancy, the old man threatens to burn her to death and acts accordingly. Faat Kiné owes her life to her brave mother who is left scarred by this violent and traumatic incident. She thus lived her very name *faat* as a victim of the Wolof patriarchal system and would assume this status to end unjust practices that prove detrimental to women. Through Faat Kiné and the murderous intentions of certain characters around her, Sembène achieves the paralleling of naming and characterization, and thus acts as "[t]he writer actually [who] encapsulates the vicissitudes of his protagonist's name in the very name he chooses for her."[18]

On a symbolic level, Faat Kiné's adult life celebrates the end of polygamy as well as the sanctification of monogamy and overt enjoyment of premarital sexual pleasure, a cultural taboo for Senegalese women. Indeed, throughout the film, the viewer can assume that she will marry Jean, a man whose very religion makes it impossible to become polygamous. Monogamy and Christianity go hand in hand, and her ultimate choice signifies the end of religious prejudice in matters pertaining to the intimate realm of love. Jean and Faat Kiné's love affair at the end of the film may then be read as an orchestration that translates this possibility into the reality of new beginnings. Faat Kiné negates hereby a practice of doubling ironically inscribed in her name through the geminated *a*. The correlation between the *paratext* and the thematic content of the film comes to the fore once more at this juncture. Polygamy marks the intimate sharing of a single person by at least two individuals of the same gender. This sharing is often done in close proximity. The film provides

another instance in which Faat Kiné speaks out against polygamous men. In a rare moment of unmarried female companionship, she derides one of her close female friends for agreeing to remarry a husband who had already betrayed her by taking a second wife.

The significance of the incident narrated above lies in what appears to be a diagnosis of a backward problem and its solution. In spite of her age, Faat Kiné's friend agrees to remarry her former husband just to please and appease her aging parents. According to Faat Kiné, who deplores this familial pressure, women who are experiencing this cultural burden can regain a certain level of social agency by opting to live away from their parents. They need to find a "room of their own," a convenient space of individual freedom. She attempts to end a situation of social dependency that favors parental interventionism in personal matters. Her name proves truly meaningful, for she acts consequentially as the living embodiment of it. I would ultimately argue that Sembène's play with the camera in a "social realist tendency" also mirrors his treatment of words.[19] In fact, his main character displays a strong sensitivity when it comes to the political use of words in both French and Wolof. Valérie Orlando actually draws attention to Faat Kiné's political choice of language in the film. Djib's mother addresses the poor and the disabled in Wolof. French, on the other hand, is the language in which Faat Kiné denounces "the evils of polygamy and the economic hardships large families bring."[20] Words are a weapon she uses against the pretentious, the uprooted, the ungrateful, the helpless, the corrupt, etc., without solely relying on the oral, however. Just like her words, her gaze projects intense expressiveness.

Faat Kiné is not simply a woman of words; she is also an entrepreneur whose actions and contrasting behavioral patterns reflect resolve, obedience, disgust, or contentment for the most part. Although her most powerful act in the film can be read as a remnant of a feeling of hatred she has not been able to vanquish, it also corroborates her role as a social deconstructionist of patriarchal privileges. After driving Djib and Aby to the vicinity of their exam centers in the beginning of the film, Faat Kiné returns to her gas station preoccupied. As she gets the news of her children's success, her former philosophy professor and unscrupulous lover arrives to inquire about their daughter's results. He readies to sit in a chair in her office only to be directed to act otherwise. Faat Kiné resorts to a very phallic means, her wagging finger, to deny a basic privilege to her former teacher. She ends a privilege taken as a given by a man who had once shattered her dreams, and she does so with determination and authority. The damage Professor Guèye had done to her with his insatiable phallus by impregnating her meets its match through the phallic image of the wagging finger, which deprives him of his patriarchal right over his daughter in this scene. Faat Kiné has killed his hopes by repudiating his hypocritical claim of parenthood. It is important to note that such "hope

killing" was started by Professor Guèye himself when Faat Kiné was a high-school student. Just as she was kicked out of her school, Faat Kiné sees to it that he gets out of her office in a shameful state and with a guilty conscience. Rejection is a recurrent motif in Sembène's filmic and written production. Willey has conducted a study of the French language as integrated in his novel, *Le Docker noir* (*The Black Dockworker*, 1956).[21] This also applies to *Taaw*, a novel in which the main character's mother "kicks her husband out and claims the right to rule her own household."[22] As for Faat Kiné, it should be noted that her name speaks of her victimization, rejection and an attained agency that is reflected through a contrast between her interaction with Professor Guèye and Faat Kiné's dialogue with Jean in the same office. Unlike in the previous scene, the couple looks each other in the eye and holds hands lovingly. The searing fire of hatred is quelled by the shining promise of love. Both situations exemplify the extent to which the method of contrasting scenes is part and parcel of Sembène's cinematic art.

The filmmaker does not solely pit characters of opposite gender against one another; he puts female characters in confrontation. The bitter exchange between Faat Kiné and the Black woman with a black skin and a white mask at the gas station is a case in point. This dispute fits within the general plot of the film as reflected by *Faat* and *Kiné*. Just as patriarchal dominance suffers a deadly blow in the hands of the main character, so would the confidence of an uprooted woman who derives power through language and arrogant allegiance to whiteness. As an example of the Black man who, according to Frantz Fanon, strives to be white "*en faisant sienne la langue française*"[23] and by displaying "*ce souci d'être puissant comme le Blanc*,"[24] the Black woman acts almost as the colonizer by using a language tainted with racism. Indeed, she expresses her disgust at Faat Kiné's lack of manners by pointing to what she terms "*des manières de négresse*,"[25] as if she were not one herself. Her attitude and articulated use of the French language include her among "those from the periphery [who] immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to be more "[more French than the French]."[26] True to her name, Faat Kiné defeats the cultural deviant by assuming an unsettling and unexpected authority over her space. She counters her condescending attitude with a bawdy use of language that mixes racial denigration and sexual humiliation. Faat Kiné reestablishes authenticity and justice through a dismissal of the abject[27] in manner akin to her name. Her act in this scene somewhat echoes the position of postcolonial literatures, which, in a similar vein, "asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre."[28]

Faat Kiné clearly distinguishes herself from the Black woman with the white mask and, along with her trusted employee who does not fall for the scam of counterfeited currency, sends a strong message of political

awakening and moral integrity to the former colonizing power and its renegade allies. She nips any neocolonial pretense and metropolitan complex of superiority in the bud thanks to "the mimicry of the centre"[29] carried out through a French language spoken with a Wolof accent. This pertains to the appropriation of language by postcolonial writers (and filmmakers), which the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* have highlighted.[30] Yet, in spite of speaking for the periphery vis-à-vis or against the center, Faat Kiné is herself an abject if one takes into account the issue of perspective as shown in the film.

The film depicts a traumatic dialogue between the present and the past; in fact, its narrative sequences feature a great deal of flashbacks. The woman's perspective dominates in this process. Remembering is indeed a dominant female trait in the film as opposed to what seems to be a deliberate effort of forgetting among men. Jean is an exception since his love for his deceased wife stands against the test of time and the frailty of memory. The act of remembering participates in the contrasting of images and fleshes out the ending of an unfavorable state for women. As many critics have noted, *Faat Kiné* deals with the role of women in the development of Africa and the reformation of certain social mores. Such a process occurs through Faat Kiné's rebirth.

LANGUAGE, SEXUAL PERFORMANCE, AND FEMALE DOMINANCE

Faat Kiné's performance and social mobility may have prompted the striking argument according to which "[t]he present is now the age of the women; the past remains under the Law of the Father."[31] The present is however not exclusively the age of women; it also belongs to the young generation of high school graduates including Aby and her brother Djib or Presi. Regarding this latter character, Harrow convincingly observes: "[t]he apparent reign of the woman is temporary, and is reversed at the end with the ascendancy of Presi."[32] In this painting of the present, older men are relegated to the lowly position of luscious beholders, condescending patriarchs, and undesirable traitors. These three categories refer respectively to the two men libidinously eying the trio at the ice-cream parlor/bar, the two traditionally dressed patriarchs with walking sticks, and finally Aby and Djib's fathers who invite themselves to the graduation party at Faat Kiné's house where they face humiliation and disgrace. The present is a temporal space that celebrates the emancipation of the female body and her freedom of speech. Sembène highlights this evolution through Faat Kiné's use of language in relation to the sensitive issue of sexuality.

There are many instances of bawdy language as a reflection of new beginnings for women. Faat Kiné appears in each of the instances whereby sexually charged words and female freedom are staged solely through

the woman's perspective. She openly gives credit to Massamba Wade for his stallion-like sexual performances at her gas station. She vulgarly uses a sexual Wolof syntagm[33] designating animals mating when her daughter Aby openly takes pride in having lost her virginity. This is a crucial moment in the film since it substantiates the emancipation of the female body, which frees itself from the patriarchal discourse on chastity and verbal restraint. Furthermore, when accused of adultery by Massamba Wade's wife, Faat Kiné not only assaults her with a pepper spray; she also reiterates her intent to "get laid" by the victimized woman's crook of a husband whenever she so desires. Upon arriving at the ice-cream parlor/bar where her two friends have already been seated, Faat Kiné loses no time in telling them that she fired her male gigolo, Mass. Here the dialogue turns into a "panegyric" of the condom in the name of its protective virtues. The words *éjaculer* and *condom de qualité* are the highlights of this interaction. As the same friends leave the graduation party, Faat Kiné confesses to them her secret sexual intercourse with Jean at a hotel, much to their delight. Prior to leaving the graduation party or *arrosage*, one of Faat Kiné's female friends recounts the deflation of her husband's phallus as a result of the imposed condom. The challenging of the male privilege affects his corporeal performance. To cap the climax, Faat Kiné is shown pushing Jean into her room where the camera focuses on her toes wiggling with pleasure.

There is nothing romantic about the narrative of sexual encounter in *Faat Kiné*. The act simply boils down to the carnal. This is true of Aby, who does not make mention of a loving boyfriend and only dwells on the loss of virginity. Mademba's wife is not even sure she still loves him, and there is also no love lost between Massamba Wade and Faat Kiné.

CONCLUSION

The dialogue between the *paratext* and the text is orchestrated in a way that answers Sembène's call for a study of the most formal aspects of his films. For one, the eponymous title *Faat Kiné* carries sociocultural meanings woven at the intersection of the Wolof and the French language. Meaning is fleshed out through actions inscribed in *faat* as doubling, contrasting, killing[34] and ending. Its main agent is none other than the eponymous character who is engaged in a process of self-empowerment that mirrors a new era of existential agency for women. In a film that also revolves around the importance of education, the double *a*, the first letter of the alphabet, proves very meaningful. Faat Kiné acts through and in light of her name in all these instances. The intensity of her gaze cannot go unnoticed. The *aa* translates Faat Kiné's intense eye contact and fearlessness in her quest for freedom. She breaks or seduces men with her eyes. Her assault on patriarchy passes through a combination of the cor-

poreal and a scandalous oral discourse. Kiné speaks about her sexual performance, which she initiates and thus reverses the gender roles. The inner workings of the title then unveil one of the ways in which Sembène orchestrates the mirroring pattern of the *paratext* and the text. This technique gives an African/Senegalese cachet to his filmic art both in its thematic and formal conceptualization.

NOTES

1. Elikia M'Bokolo, *Afrique noire: Histoire et civilisation*. Tome II. XIXe siècles (Paris: Hatier-AUPELF, 1992), 535.
2. Ibid., 535.
3. Ann Elizabeth Willey, "Language Use and Representation of the Senegalese Subject in the Written Work of Sembène Ousmane," in *A Call to Action: The Films of Ousmane Sembène* , ed. Sheila Petty (Wesport: Praeger, 1996), 132.
4. Alioune Tine, "Wolof ou le français: le choix d'Ousmane Sembène." *Notre Librairie* 81 (1985): 46.
5. Sada Niang, "Langues, cinéma et création littéraire chez Ousmane Sembène et Assia Djebar," in *Littérature et cinéma en Afrique francophone*, edited by Sada Niang (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 102.
6. Tine, "Wolof ou le français," 45.
7. Willey, "Language Use and Representation," 133.
8. David Murphy, *Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction* (Trenton: Africa World Press), 236.
9. Suzanne Crosta, "Stratégies de subversion et de libération: l'inscription et les enjeux de l'auditif et du visuel chez Assia Djebar et Ousmane Sembène," in *Littérature et cinéma en Afrique francophone*, 63.
10. Nicole Aas-Rouxparis, "Conversation avec Ousmane Sembène," *The French Review* 75, no. 3 (2002): 578.
11. Jean-Claude Blachère, *Négritures. Les écrivains d'Afrique noire et la langue française* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993), 116.
12. Kyallo Wadi Wamitila, "What's in a Name: Towards Literary Onomastics in Kiswahili Literature," *AAP* 60 (1999): 36.
13. Ibid., 37.
14. Ibid., 36.
15. David Murphy, *Imagining Alternatives*, 236.
16. Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 141.
17. Willey, "Language Use and Representation," 118.
18. Wamitila, "What's in a Name," 38.
19. Sembène's cinematic practice falls within the category of the "social realist narratives," which Diawara explains as follows: "[this] tendency . . . defines itself by thematizing current sociocultural issues. The films in this category draw on contemporary experiences, and they oppose tradition and modernity, oral and written, agrarian and customary communities to urban and industrialized systems, and subsistence economies to highly productive economies. The filmmakers use a traditional position to criticize and link certain forms of modernity to neocolonialism and cultural imperialism. From a modernist point of view, they also debunk the attempt to romanticize traditional values as pure and original." Diawara, *African Cinema*, 141.
20. Valérie Orlando, "The Afrocentric Paradigm and Womanist Agendas in Ousmane Sembène's *Faat Kiné* (2001)," *Contemporary Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26.2 (2006): 220.
21. Willey, "Language and Representation," 120.

22. Ibid., 143.
23. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 14.
24. Ibid., 42.
25. Ousmane Sembène, *Faat Kiné* (Dakar, Senegal: Filmi Doom Reew, 2000), DVD.
26. Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 4.
27. The abject, a term theorized by Kristeva, "*serait d'ailleurs tout ce qui dérange l'identité, le système social et plus généralement l'ordre*." Michela Marzano, *Dictionnaire du corps* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), 1.
28. Ashcroft et al., *The Empire*, 2.
29. Ibid., 4.
30. Ibid., 7-8.
31. Kenneth Harrow, *Postcolonial African Cinema: From Political Engagement to Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 102.
32. Ibid., 104.
33. The syntagm itself is *teubou ngueu*, which means "you got laid."
34. With respect to this word, one should note that the walls of Faat Kiné's house are decorated with photos of legendary African leaders who have either been murdered or deprived of their freedom.

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TEN

Trans-Formal Aesthetics and Cultural Impact on Ousmane Sembène's Explication of *Xala*

Rachael Diang'a

Ousmane Sembène features prominently in debates on African film and literature. His undaunted success as a committed creative writer is exemplified in his novels such as *The Black Docker* (1956), *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), *Xala* (1973), and *The Last of the Empire* (1981). When he ventured into filmmaking, his rendition of similar messages only got better. To him, film was the most conducive medium by which to speak to a largely illiterate community such as the African. He says, "in Africa, especially in Senegal, even a blind person will go to the cinema and pay for an extra seat for a young person to sit and explain for him the film . . . there is one thing you can't take away from the African masses, and that is having seen something."[1] With this view, Sembène based most of his filmic works like *La Noire de . . .* (1966), *Moolaadé* (2004), and *Xala* (1974) on his earlier literary texts, enabling those who could not access his literary messages to see the messages in film.

As a filmmaker, Sembène indeed appealed to larger audiences who were initially locked out of his literary texts. Although a few literary artists in Africa have attempted filmmaking, Sembène's prowess in the two arts stands out from the rest of the artists who have tried to combine the two. He views an African filmmaker as a storyteller because their stories are closely attached to their culture.[2] He finds cinema "an evening school" akin to the traditional round the fire storytelling sessions in traditional African setup.[3] But even as he embraced the audiovisual art in the 1960s, Sembène did not turn his back on literary art. He continued to

competently communicate positive social messages through the two mediums, excelling in both. In literature, his numerous texts span across decades and genres. In film, he emerges as a gifted screenwriter, director, and producer of films spanning over five decades. One of his masterpiece novels, and audiovisual works, *Xala*, remains widely relevant in the critical discourses on postcolonial cultural artifacts in Africa.

This study delves into a comparative analysis of the different modes of expression employed by Sembène Ousmane in his novel and film *Xala*. The specific stylistic dimensions of the two media of expression pre-empt an amount of aesthetic and content loss or gain in the process of adaptation from one form to the other. The study pays less attention to the debate on the autonomy of these two texts, given the fact that they have a strong intertextual relation. Rather, it focuses more on how the film and the novel's formal differences inform their focus and aesthetics in narrating what the author symbolically refers to as *xala*. However, each of these two texts undergoes a translation from one "language" or semiotic system to another. Nonetheless, the process can be viewed as translation only if the latter text remains fully loyal to the former text. Otherwise, Rifkin's concept of transcoding—"the recording of one type of communication act, issued by an addresser, according to certain codes and systems of expression, into a second type of communication act with its own unique codes and system"—becomes applicable.[4] In the narration of *Xala*, Sembène employs more transcoding than translation. In the film text, he does not strive to remain loyal to the earlier fictional text. This makes the adaptation of the two texts more productive as it is not just a mere re-production of the other. The question of adaptation is rather unique in the case of *Xala;* it is seen more as looping rather than adapting the story. Even though the novel got published earlier than the film, it is the film script that Sembène had written earlier that gave rise to the literary text, before he could produce the film text a year after publishing the novel.[5] Therefore, both texts, in one way or another, draw from each other.

Probably, the most prolific novelist and filmmaker in the sub-Saharan African region, Sembène's social concerns rendered via these two popular modes of communication started influencing African audiences opportunely at a time when Senegal was heading into independence with the publishing of his first novel *The Black Docker* in 1956.[6] Most of his creative works were published between 1956–2004, with a higher concentration in the 1960s and 1970s, a time when cultural products in the post-independent Africa were starting to be explored for their role in vocalizing different issues of social importance in the region. "A significant portion of what constitutes African cultural, symbolic and intellectual thought and practices—be they oral, written, dramatic, visual or filmic—can be characterized as responses to, and interventions in, the factors and forces that have shaped Africa over time."[7] Yet, three main factors seem

to cut across as the main initiators of the didactic stance taken by most of the early African films and novels, including Sembène's works. With deepest roots—of the three—is the indigenous oral cultural tradition in the continent. This tradition has been in existence for as long as Africa's populace has existed. The others, closely related, are the impact of colonial contact and its aftermath. Colonial aftermath, though much newer, has drastically intertwined its way into the continent's cultural fabric.[8] The contribution of socially committed cultural artifacts has thus been inevitable in the struggle for cultural and political emancipation from the colonial dominance that characterized the period of Sembène's artistic production.

Sembène's works reflect all the three factors above. His focus on addressing different historical, cultural, political and socioeconomic issues in the society can be seen throughout his writing period. Within the five decades of active social commitment through cultural products, Sembène's creation and narration of *Xala* both in a novel, 1973, and in a film in 1974, offer a remarkable opportunity for an inquiry into the manner in which the two media impact on the rendition of *xala,* a form of curse that renders men impotent. Curses formed a crucial part of the indigenous African oral tradition. A curse is a form of affliction inflicted upon a person or a group of people following a certain social transgression on the part of the victim(s). The belief in curses was passed down verbally through many generations in a community. A curse could be inflicted upon an individual by a person close to them, say, a relative or an older person. It can be specific to a clan or ethnic communities while some curses cut across communities. They are curable, yet they can also be fatal if divine assistance is not sought.

For the early African filmmakers, the Algiers Charter on African Cinema (1975) and the Niamey Manifesto (1982) provided a supposed guideline on the nature and function of African Cinema.[9] For Sembène, the two documents were only re-stating much of what he had been practicing since the early 1960s. Sembène's earliest attempt at undertaking what he later came to refer to as "the mouth and the ears of his people"[10] could be traced back to his earlier films such as *Borom Sarret* (1963), *Niaye* (1964), and *La Noire de . . .* (1966). In these films, Sembène explores the questions of the negative impacts of the colonial process on African communities, disillusionment of the Africans in the face of racism, colonialism, and lost hope occasioned by crushed identity. However, his social commitment remained strongly present in his works up to his last production, *Moolaadé* (2004), which revolves around female genital cutting practice as a metonym of the cultural crisis in the post-independent Sub-Saharan Africa.

SYMBOLIC EMBODIMENT IN *XALA*

The story of *xala* is presented as a parable both in the novel and the film.[11] *Xala*'s primary concerns are larger than the experiences of El Hadji's family. Behind the symbolic narrative, Sembène concretizes the socioeconomic and political mishaps emanating from the meanness of the leadership of the day through El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye's family, and, more importantly, on what holds the entire family together: Beye's sexual virility, a symbol of leadership at the family level.

In the event that this leadership ability is contested, Abdou Kader Beye's socioeconomic status is questioned as he spends a lot of cash and business time searching for cure. He also faces much embarrassment as his most private affair is ripped open to the public. The impromptu expenditures he has to incur looking for a cure come at a time when he has just been spending too much on his wedding to a third wife, N'gone. Through what befalls El Hadji, we see the unconstructive effects of capitalist leadership in the post-independent African states exemplified by Senegal. Sembène uses a pathetic collective sight of amputated beggars whose physical state could as well symbolize that of the country.[12]

The importance placed on the male genitalia remains crucial both in the novel and film. The symbolic representation of Senegal's socioeconomic overexploitation by the few bourgeois leaders represented by El Hadji strongly runs through at the core of both the novel and the film.

Yet, the film *Xala* presents a major departure from the novel both in terms of its target audience occasioned by the structural, narrative, point-of-view, and thematic adjustments that take place in the process of adapting the novel into a film. Gugler and Diop (1998) in their study of *Xala* as film and fiction indicate that since the two texts tend to focus on different areas, their audiences cannot be the same. Since Sembène chooses to use two disparate modes, he has a different audience for each. The difference between these audiences may not be geographical. First, Sembène believes that a lesser population had access to literature, at the time the novel was published. He mentions that only 20 percent of Africans—his geographical target audience—could read. Thus, in turning to film, the scope of his target audience increased. At the same time, the change from fiction to film directly implies deviation in focus, both thematically and aesthetically. This study marks a major departure from Gugler's and Diop's work as it lays more emphasis on the aesthetic shifts in the novel and film *Xala*.

The bourgeoisie exert more than necessary force on the otherwise weak and helpless members of the society, symbolized by the beggars and N'gone. They use the police as ready tools for silencing this group; the police are called upon to clear the streets of the beggars and keep them away from the "freedom" of independence. When the beggars invade Adja Awa Astou's villa, even without finding out why they visit, El

Hadji threatens to call the police to keep the beggars out of the affluent neighborhood. The mere mention of the word "police" sends several beggars shivering. The police's ruthlessness is well known to the beggars. The viewer gets to see a bit of this when the beggars are being deported from the streets. It is through the earlier experiences in the hands of the police that El Hadji's beggar-cousin leads the life he leads today.[13] On the contrary, Sembène empowers the beggars, bringing them out as potent partners of the political leaders in deciding the health state of the country. They have an ability to curse and cure at will and at no monetary cost.

N'gone is another delicate character for whom excessive strength is reserved. El Hadji invests so much in preparing to consummate his marriage to her. His colleague, Laye, gives him "the stuff" that Laye had brought from The Gambia to enable El Hadji have "strength" the whole night. A viewer/reader wonders why El Hadji should solicit extra strength in order to "deflower" his virgin, as the president of the businessmen's group puts it. Deflowering is an act requiring minimal strength. Immediately after this statement, the president announces to the rest that El Hadji is off to go and "pierce his fair lady."[14] Piercing also insinuates that the act is going to meet resistance yet N'gone does not possess the ability to refuse to give in. She is metaphorically referred to as a sacrificial lamb. If anything, a sacrifice does not possess any power to save itself, let alone resist the operation. Even in N'gone's harmless state, El Hadji still, ironically, seeks the help of the "stuff" not wanting to fail at any cost.

AESTHETIC DYNAMICS IN *XALA*

The honorable colleagues are very excited about this "piercing" in a way that reminds the reader of the excitement we see at the earlier scene where the members are handed briefcases full of cash. Each of the members looks at the cash with a gluttonous smile. The president who is drunk is supported by the MP, thus showing how the power-drunk leaders of the country only see Senegal as a commodity for consumption, symbolized by the young helpless N'gone. Sembène exposes the greed of the new African elite early in the novel for the reader to understand before presenting the symbolism of El Hadji's *xala*. The author puts it clearly as the novel begins before he quickly turns to El Hadji's symbolic story. The introduction helps draw the reader's attention to the allegoric relationship between El Hadji's narrative and the changes and expectations at the Chambers.

> The appointment of one of their number as President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry gave them renewed hope. For the men gathered together on this auspicious day, the road was now open that led to certain wealth. It meant access to the heart of the country's economy, a

> foothold in the world of high finance and, of course, a right to walk with head held high.[15]

Further to this direct reference, Sembène repeatedly alludes to the outrageous gluttony of the "honorable colleagues" through allegoric expressions throughout the novel. The colleagues' jubilation is well brought out encapsulated in figurative language, which film cannot employ given its image-based semiotic system. The use of phrases such as "to deflower his virgin," an activity the colleagues term a "delicate operation" are linguistic manipulations that help create imagery in the novel yet are difficult to translate into an audiovisual language system without losing a part of the concept being expressed. Sembène employs figurative language further in similes. For instance, N'gone is said to be "crossing her legs like a large pair of scissors." In transcoding this linguistic element into film language, a film director's impression may not necessarily reflect a viewer's relation of N'gone's way of lying on the bed to a large pair of scissors. The meaning embedded in such an element is thus likely to be lost in the new text.[16]

The transcoding process may lead to aesthetic loss whereby some elements present in the novel do not appear in the film. Even though film is a unique mode of expression with features which set it apart from other cultural artifacts, like literary arts, painting, and sculpture, among others, it still remains a powerful tool or means of storytelling, more closely related to the literary arts like fiction, poetry, and drama. However, the differing aesthetic approaches of the novel and the film media offer powerful examples of the diverse range of ways available for Sembène to approach his ideological concerns in the two texts.

The novel, given its open-ended nature, has a lot of room for detailed explanations. Forster believes that the "fundamental aspect of the novel is its story telling aspect."[17] The narrator takes the reader on a tour that culminates into the ultimate agreement between the reader and the narrator that the comprador bourgeoisie represented by El Hadji indeed deserve to be spat on. The filmic developments are rather hastened, so much so that the viewer who has not read the novel to fill up the gaps may find it less necessary, though comic, that El Hadji's cure from *xala* can only come from the beggars' spittle. Yet, the audiovisual medium relies more on inferences than exposition. The film's telling images can show but are unable to explain the detailed observation of the omniscient narrator whose perspective highly influences the reader's reception of the information he provides. The speaking images are not only objective—showing what needs to be seen and not expounding on the pictures' motivations or effects—but also at times, get dumb. When faced with several point-of-view choices, film's very nature can only allow for a certain degree of POV shots. These should be semantically juxtaposed within other non-POV shots. When they are equally present and compete

for attention, the scene components become silent, letting the viewer choose what to consider worth focusing on.

Rand contrasts narration to dramatization saying that lack of narration pre-empts presence of dramatization as she posits that "narrative is that which is not dramatized."[18] Yet, a silent action—if described in detail—becomes dramatic. The kind of imagery emanating from such descriptions can visualize the scene in a way that the reader almost "sees" every bit of the activities taking place as if in a cinema theater. However, the audiovisual phenomenon does not get into detail of the scene adorned with similes which draws the reader's attention to each of the objects in the scene. The narrator has a way of leading the reader to areas of concern. This enables Sembène to detail the impact of *xala* in the novel, in a way that the film medium does not allow. For instance, the narrator leaves the reader with no questions about what happened to the Mercedes for El Hadji and Modu to be riding on a horse-drawn cart. He explains these as the events unfold. In the film text, however, a lot of blanks are filled only through retrospection, though not fully. A keen spectator, who may not have read the novel, will observe that the Mercedes can drive through the route on which we see the horse cart. He will, therefore, remain wondering about the necessity of the cart transport for some time.

The novel, as a form, has a greater advantage as it may devote a line, a paragraph, or pages to explaining a phenomenon deemed relevant for the reader's understanding of the ongoing events. The prose writer will weigh out the depth of the detail required and decide the space given to that insertion. For example, the role of the narrator in the novel cannot be translated into the film's language. In a film, we cannot tell whether the magazine El Hadji flips through in Oumi's bedroom is a woman's or not. This however comes out well in the novel. The novel thus gives the reader this hint as what informs Oumi's exuberance and jealousy. As such, the novel devotes some time to explain to the reader what becomes of Oumi after she leaves the bankrupt El Hadji.

Some new elements emerge in the film text that did not have a basis in the novel. Dramatization of all the parts otherwise described in the novel is a major formal requirement for the film. A good aspect of the film is that it dramatizes, quite well, important events that the reader is merely told about in the novel. For instance, Sembène brings out the role of *Kaddu*, the Wolof newspaper that Rama simply mentions in the novel. Yet in the film, the newspaper vendor becomes significant in spreading the news about the latest happenings in Dakar. At one point, his timely arrival at El Hadji's business premises and selling a copy to the receptionist causes anxiety in the viewer. It is almost evident that the lady is going to read about her employer's *xala* in the newspaper. Dramatization emphasizes a story's rendition, hence reception. As the film focuses more on the general post-independent problems that come with the new all-African

regime in Senegal, the novel presents a harsh critique of the lives of the comprador bourgeoisies who are not only metonymically represented by El-hadji, but also symbolically equated to the *xala* befalling the head of such a large family as El Hadji's. The film concentrates mostly on the conflict resulting from El Hadji's *xala*, giving less attention to the social and family relations that truly shape a lot of the events and characters in both film and the novel. For example, N'gone's aunt does all she probably can to see her niece's marriage succeed. Viewing the film, one may not fully understand why she is so concerned with the wedding. The Badyen's concern is explained in depth in the novel. The reader has a full understanding of what is at stake for her and N'gone's family. It is an opportunity for N'gone's family to gain access to a better life after many years of economic depression. The Badyen has invested so much in this marriage that she cannot afford to see it unconsummated. The Badyen, in the film, acts with much the same vigor as her counterpart in the novel. Yet, the film viewer does not understand why she is so involved. The more the gaps in a creative work, the more meaning gets interrupted or delayed. The viewer may not understand whether the Badyen is N'gone's mother or aunt. Yet, on the other hand, the cultural background of N'gone's community is given in the novel. The film viewer, however, does not have information.

To give details as seen above, Sembène uses exposition—prior to or within an event—to skillfully hold the novel's narrative together. A film's semiotic structure lacks room for detailing the extraneous information that the viewer may (not necessarily) require in order to understand what informs a scene. This only leaves film with visual images almost "loosely" connected together by editing. Editing techniques may have a highly creative and fictitious input in the final product. They may create illusions that bring out a director's hidden meanings. However, the coherence created from the aesthetic manipulation of words, considering the more varied syntagmatic as well as paradigmatic options a writer can explore, remains undaunted.

Film language has a range of techniques available for a filmmaker to tell a story. Therefore, the form of any film, "the manner in which content is presented," is determined by the way the film's story is told, and it comprises style and content.[19] Content is the outcome of narrative while style is shaped by the film techniques employed. It is a combination of these two that produces meaning, which is integral in any communication process. Film then offers Sembène an option to manipulate his audience's view of certain thoughts he puts forth. Using technical film elements, he reinforces his points and his characters' traits. In the scenes depicting the middle class' exuberance, for instance, close-up shots dominate. For instance, the close-up shots of members of the Chambers, of El Hadji's car radiator being filled with imported mineral water, and of El Hadji being driven by Modu may, on the one hand, exhibit detail, while

on the other hand show a Westernized ambience which focuses more on the individual entity, be it a character, an aspect in the setting or prop, or in the case of extreme close-up, the individual features of certain parts of that individual being zeroed in on. The more proletarian scenes tend to move away from the close-up shots. Scenes with the beggars tend to employ long shots, depicting their communal actions and creating an uncomfortable distance between the viewer and the events, limiting his interaction with them. Similarly, Rama's independence (of mind) is much highly represented by shots of her alone while all the other women in the film receive less of this. The other women tend to share the frame with other characters. Frame presence, being as important as stage presence in theater, is thus emphasized in these close-ups, giving Rama the powerful persona she projects throughout the story.

Since film communicates by way of *mise-en-shot*, or simply put, images, a lot of inferences are made yet the viewer is not clearly directed on the line of thinking he should take in trying to make sense of the images.[20] As such, meanings generated by the viewer can take any form since he is free to interpret the images in different ways. Yet, the novelist can even suggest to the reader what to think in some situations. For instance, rhetorical questions may be used to invoke the reader's thoughts and suggest possible lines of thinking. Adja refuses to get into Oumi's villa claiming that she is Oumi's elder, so the latter should come to her. "Adja Awa Astou had not lowered her eyes. Etiquette?"[21] This helps redirect the reader from thinking that Adja could get out of the car as a sign of etiquette. It further intensifies the reader's suspicion that Adja could be acting out of jealousy or pride. At certain times, the novel even gives the reader what may not even be going on in the character's mind, but what the narrator considers common knowledge between him and the reader. Thus, in the novel, the narrator goes a long way trying to construct the characters. In the film, both the role of character and that of the narrator—to make the reader follow the story—rest upon the character and is realized or put into action by the actor. Therefore, the film's character gets overburdened, and the actor, who is a living being, can only try to represent this already overworked character. This puts more pressure on the film's actor.

Finally, during transcoding, certain elements reappear in the film but in a transformed state. These changes come about mainly due to the particular requirements of the different media of expression. Each of the two media that Sembène uses to narrate *Xala* has its own media-specific codes and conventions of communication. Therefore, the language used in each has its own requirements in terms of packaging and disseminating meaning. Thus a novel, for example, will narrate a scene, which when directly transcribed into a film scene lacks not only visual appeal but also relevance. Sembène recreates some of the novel's scenes in the film so that they look more appealing as part of an audiovisual text. The film's

opening scene exemplifies this. It opens in a highly celebratory mood. There is dance, music, and jubilation; for the first time, the Senegalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry has an African president. The scene is recreated into a more dramatic and xenophobic one, making it in tandem with the theme of the story. In this scene, Sembène introduces the two Frenchmen who do not say much throughout the film. Their presence, however, helps reinforce the film's satirical antagonistic stand against imperial rule in the country. This is emphasized through the reversal of roles whereby the two have a serving role to the president throughout the film, except at the wedding reception.

Apart from the opening scene, Sembène also recreates a scene depicting the deteriorating state of El Hadji's business. The novel's description of the situation is an extremely different version of what the film shows. In the novel, other related ideas such as the nonpayment of utility bills and workers' wages are evoked in order to show the gruesome picture of El Hadji's financial status.

> The restocking of the shop had become a matter of urgency: there was nothing left. There were also the wages of his employees to be paid. She, Madame Diouf had not been paid for more than two months. Why had she not reminded him? He sent for his chauffeur. The same story. They turned to the domestic side: petrol bills to pay, grocery bills (each wife had her own grocer), servants' wages, water and electricity. It was thanks to the intervention of a cousin of Madame Diouf that the latter had not been cut off. The water and electricity bills would have to be settled straight away. As for the shop, it was empty. The retailers were going elsewhere. The manufacturers and other suppliers were all refusing to deliver goods. The picture was bleak.[22]

Yet, within the film's semiotic structure, the viewer is presented with an equivalent of that scene whereby a customer comes in and expresses surprise to Madame Diouf as the latter peruses the nearly empty shop. A film cannot connect the emptiness of the shop to the recent destination of the trailers, the manufacturers' change of interests, the unpaid employees, grocers, and utility bills. The medium of film only shows the "bleak" situation. However, watching the film without having read the novel, a spectator may not easily make out the function of that scene until the customer talks. It, therefore, emerges that description in a novel does not necessarily translate to action in a film script. For, even if it does, the levels at which they involve the audience are different.

CONCLUSION

Given the foregoing, *Xala*—both in novel and film form—emerges as Sembène's most acclaimed political satire. Knowing the conventions of the two forms, Sembène successfully crafts the story to present what is

conventionally possible within the two distinct genres. The two media, therefore, pre-empt a difference in what the story foregrounds. Governed by disparate semiotic systems, the two display different aesthetic preferences in telling the story of *Xala*. The difference in target audiences also bears heavily on Sembène's aesthetic as well as content streamlining, based on the two media. In a nutshell, changes that Sembène makes in the two texts can be summarized as cultural, linguistic, or media specific. Generally, cultural adjustment in the two texts is minimal. Trans-cultural changes occasioned by the adaptation process in works of art are usually mainly constructed by the two authors' cultural and historical contexts of writing and reception. An author's ideological context at the time of authorship or adaptation can also alter the cultural standpoints taken by a particular work. Published and produced in Africa in the early 1970s, Sembène's book and film, respectively, just like other contemporary cultural products were to come out as tools for emphasizing the need for cultural emancipation from the dominant Western gaze.

Despite vocalizing his preference for the film medium over the literary one, Sembène still continued to publish literary works. Thus, he worked with the two media concurrently. Whichever form Sembène chose, he believed in the didactic role of the arts as tools of self-examination and social change,[23] thus, viewing cinema as "an instrument of political action."[24] Yet, there are certainly other artistic aspects of *Xala* which transcend the conventional formal frontiers, finding existence in both the novel's and cinematic presentation of Sembène's story. It is my submission that information loss should not be seen as a translation weakness and be made the basis of our judgment of the translator's success.

NOTES

1. Ousmane Sembène, "Multiversity blog."
2. Sembène, "with Michael and Klauss."
3. Sembène, "The Future of Man."
4. Rifkin, *Semiotics of Narration*, gives a deeper discussion on adaptation from prose to film as "translation" and better still, "trascoding."
5. Murphy, *Imagining Alternatives*.
6. Senegal was to gain independence four years later. Some of the main concerns in this novel reflect the day to day experiences of most indigenous populations in the hands of the colonial master.
7. Cham, "African Cinema," 48.
8. For Mazrui, *Africans*, these factors are largely categorised as indigenous, Arab/Islamic and Euro-Christian. These forces have defined different regions of Africa in varying degrees. For example, the impact of Euro-Christian factor is much less felt in Northern Africa much as the Arab-Islamic factor least affects the Southern African countries. How these factors interact and coexist amid many tensions and conflicts emerging from this coexistence have resulted in the cultural shape of Africa as we know it today. The society shapes the cultural artefacts it produces. Filmmakers, like the other artists, strive to produce what is relevant to their target audience. Therefore,

this multifaceted background of the continent dictates what the filmmakers produce for their audiences.

9. From the early 1970s, African filmmakers and other prominent cineastes sought to build a common approach to African filmmaking exemplified by the Algiers Charter on African Cinema (1973) which called upon the individual governments to "take a leading role in building a national cinema" (Mbye and Bakari, 1996, 26) and the Niamey Manifesto of African Filmmakers (1982) whose participants observed that African cinema needed a commitment for it to assert the cultural identity of the Africans. It also recommended that governments should support national film industries in terms of policies, financial assistance, and distribution of films in particular countries. The governments were also to establish national film corporations to centralize all matters pertaining to cinema in these countries. All these recommendations focus on the need for African, indeed third world, filmmakers to use cinema to liberate and represent themselves to the world.

10. Sembène embraced film with the hope that "motion pictures would be an effective means of reaching out to the largely illiterate African masses" (Pfaff 1992, 36). In this, he would be more like a traditional *griot* who performs a multiplicity of tasks in informing, entertaining, and cautioning his community. African communities highly valued *griots* as they were viewed as living archives and links to the past (Wilson, 2003).

11. Pfaff, "West African Filmmakers" and Gugler and Diop, "Sembène's *Xala*" also attest to this.

12. Pfaff, *Cinema of Ousmane* and Gugler and Diop, Ibid.

13. Some of these observations are shared with Gugler and Diop, Ibid., 150.

14. Sembène, *Xala*, 26.

15. Ibid, 1.

16. Ibid. 26–27.

17. Forster, *The Novel*, 40.

18. Rand, *Fiction*, 145.

19. Rabiger, *Directing*, 201.

20. The term *mise-en-shot*, components of a frame, covers what is initially part of the older and wider concept of *mise-en-scène* which comprises the components of a scene.

21. Sembène, *Xala*, 14.

22. Ibid. 83–84.

23. Pfaff, "West African Filmmakers," 37.

24. Sembène, "with Guy Hennebelle."

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Appendix

Testimonies on Ousmane Sembène: Makhète Diallo, Pathé Diagne, and Fatou Kandé Senghor

Interviews conducted by Lifongo Vetinde

Despite his fame as one of the most influential novelists and film directors from Francophone Africa, little is known about the life of Ousmane Sembène. The public knows more about the artist and little about the man. As we were putting together this collection, I travelled to Dakar in August 2011, where I met some of his closest collaborators. In my conversations conducted over a week I gleaned their views of Sembène as a family man, his relationship with his entourage and people in power, especially Leopold Sedar Senghor, his vision of neocolonial relationships, religion, and cultural politics, as well the impact of his work on the Senegalese cultural landscape. From these testimonies, it is evident that Sembène's work remains one of the richest chapters in the terrain of African cultural production. His oeuvre offers rich insights into the nature of cultural politics and its relationship to power in his native Senegal and Africa at large.

I met with Makhète Diallo, who was Sembène's technical assistant for over two decades and involved in the production of many of his films such as *Camp de Thioraye* and *Guelwaar*; Fatoumata Kandé Senghor, a Senegalese artist, documentary filmmaker, and feminist activist who worked with Sembène for over a decade and was the costume designer for the film *Faat Kiné*; Pathé Diagne, a renowned linguist and historian with whom he founded the journal *Kaddu*; Momar Thiam, the Dean of African cinema; and Seydou Ndiaye, the founder and managing editor of Papyrus Afrique, a publishing house in Dakar. Excerpts of the conversations with the last two have unfortunately not been included here due to the very poor audio quality.

INTERVIEW WITH MAKHÈTE DIALLO

Lifongo Vetinde: Could you introduce yourself?

Makhète Diallo: My name is Makhète Diallo. I have been a cinema technician since 1973 when I first met Ousmane Sembène. I was his image

technician over a considerable long period of time: from *Camp de Tchaoré* through *Ceddo* to his last film *Moolaadé*. The man always entrusted me with the technical aspects of his films. Whenever he engaged the services of a co-producer he asked me to supervise them and give the green light for the filming to begin.

LV: What do you know about his family life?

MD: Sembène was a very private man. There were few people who had access to his family life. In my interactions with him, I gathered that he was very close to his relatives who live here in Dakar and visited them quite frequently. Sembène was married and divorced several times. He was first married to a Senegalese woman, his second wife was European, French I believe, and his third wife was an American who was renamed Keremou. We Senegalese are so possessive that we give Senegalese names to foreign-born wives. And then his last wife with whom he had a child was Senegalese.

He had children and led a very dignified family life which he carefully separated from his professional career. In his last days, Sembène was sick for a long time. He underwent surgery after which he was doing very well. He was discharged and was convalescing quite well then one day he fell in his bathroom and had a shock from which he did not recover.

LV: Sembène was originally from the Casamance but this region does not feature much in his works apart from his novel *O pays mon beau peuple* and his film *Emitai*. How did he relate to the Casamance after he emigrated to Dakar and what did he think about the conflict in the Casamance?

MD: He did not make frequent visits to the Casamance since the family had settled in Dakar. But he did not forget his roots. As far as I know, the problem bothered him a great deal. He knew that the problem could be easily solved and regretted that there were people who had an interest in keeping the conflict alive. What hurt him most was the fact that schools were closed and many people especially children lost their legs by stepping on mines. He regretted the fact that the common folks were losers in the conflict which, unfortunately, is supported by some Western powers.

LV: What was Sembène's stance vis-à-vis religion? Was he religious?

MD: Yes. I knew him as a Muslim. Being a Muslim is not written on one's forehead, being Muslim is not the Tchador that one wears. . . . Sembène was religious. Remember that he attached a lot of importance to his privacy. He told me that as a child he used to spend much time filling water jars that worshippers used for their ablutions in the mosque. During the feast of Tabaski, Sembène bought lamb that he offered to people.

LV: What kind of working relationship did you have with Sembène? What was his work ethic?

MD: I had a good working relationship with Sembène and was able to work closely with him for a long time. Many people wondered how I was able to do so for many years because they thought his fiery temperament

made it difficult to get along with him. But I understood the man. He had great sense of what the Senegalese people call *nawulé* which means knowing what one wants and sharing his desire. It is the safeguarding of mutual interests be they moral or material. It is considering your adversary as mine. Sembène's interests and mine coincided and we were always searching for the "truth."

He was a very demanding and disciplined man who did not mix work with play. Sembène would not hesitate to snatch a newspaper from a participant on the plateau and shred it. He did not tolerate people who were not focused on the scenario even when they were not involved. Some people found him too hard, too tough. Sembène believed that every individual must hold his or her head high that is must be driven by what the Senegalese call *sigui* (head held high). He set up very high expectations for himself as well as others in his productions. He believed in a sustained excellence in achievement and when he did not reach a certain level of performance on a given day he would simply postpone filming.

LV: So much has been made of the fact that Sembène did not get along with Leopold Sedar Senghor, the first president of the Republic of Senegal? Could you say something about their relationship?

MD: Sembène and Senghor were two very influential national cultural figures who respected each other despite their disagreements. Their differences were most evident in the use of language. I was witness to the banning of *Ceddo* because of a single letter. Sembène spelled *ceddo* with two "ds" while Senghor insisted that the word should be written with one "d" and banned the film when Sembène refused to change the spelling. The ban caused an uproar which, I believe, served as a publicity for the film for the foreign press jumped on the story. When the film was released people rushed to the theaters to watch it. Everyone talked about the story of one or two ds. What did it matter writing ceddo with one or two ds. The conflict was a smokescreen for a larger disagreement between the two with regard to the place of national languages in the country. Sembène was a co-founder of the journal Wolof journal *Kaddu*, along with the linguist Pathé Diagne, an initiative that didn't sit well with Senghor who was widely considered as negro wearing a white mask. In other words, in their view Senghor was a white black man.

However, the hostility between the two men did not stop Sembène from benefiting from some of the institutions of Senghor's government. For instance he had recourse to the government-run agency Société Nationale de Cinématopgraphie (SNC), which invested money in the Senegalese film industry at the time of the production of *Ceddo*. When Abdou Diouf became president of Senegal he delegated administrative control of the structure to the SNC and named Sembène chair of the Board of Administrators. That structure contributed in the production of *Camp de Thioraye*. I recall that Sembène was Abdou Diouf's guest every year during his presidency.

LV: What separates Sembène from other filmmakers of his generation?

MD: Sembène never stopped learning and was very eager to have his films and message reach a wide audience especially in the Senegalese heartland. A week prior to his death, we discussed the possibility of projecting his films in the villages as we used to do in the past. Film producers of my generation such as Moussa Yelle Baouli [and] Ousmane William Mbaye were his students. We were lucky to have the privilege of working with him. He opened his doors to many young aspiring filmmakers and also slammed them on some when he noticed a lack of seriousness and engagement in the conception of their work. Unlike many of his fellow filmmakers, he was very uncomfortable with the dictates of his sponsors and this caused a lot of tension.

LV: That is interesting. Could you elaborate?

MD: Sembène sought to rehabilitate national languages through his films and that made it difficult for him to benefit from European sponsorship. He had a real problem with the fact that he had to write in French to be understood by Europeans. The strategic choice of French over Wolof which he saw as an expression of his Afrocentricity caused him a lot of grief. The challenges of competitiveness and profitability placed him between a rock and a hard place, but he circumvented the linguistic problem by using Wolof and French in his films.

LV: What other difficulties did he face with his sponsors beside the language problem?

MD: The French who were his principal sponsors contributed at least 25 percent to the cost of production. Key members of his technical team were French and he resented the fact that France imposed French technicians on him. Despite this imposition, there is no question that Sembène was 100 percent in charge of the conception of his films; he made the costumes, supervised the makeup, and prepared the accessories. The base of his technical team was Senegalese but he recruited talented people from all over the continent and created a certain synergy among the technicians.

LV: Is there any incident you particularly remember in working with Sembène?

MD: Yes. I recall an incident that took place during the filming of *Guelewaar*. In the representation of the conflictual relationship between Muslims and Catholics over the burial of Guelwaar, Sembène elected to use hot and cold colors to reflect the theme effectively: hot for the Muslims and cold for the Christians. The French technician who had been imposed on him did not understand the meaning of hot and cold: when the first sequence of the film came out the colors were not right due to the choices he made. The scene with the gendarmes turned yellow. Sembène was livid and dramatized the situation. He called Jacques Perrin, his associate who had chosen the technician. The director who wasn't very

honest blamed it on the laboratory but the lab technicians said they had only followed his instructions to have the colors turn yellow.

INTERVIEW WITH PATHÉ DIAGNE

Lifongo Vetinde: You did a lot of work with Ousmane Sembène. Could you talk about your collaboration with him?

Pathé Diagne: That is true. I had a long-standing collaboration with Sembène especially in the area of language at a time when African languages were a major preoccupation. We created the Wolof journal *Kaddu* to which he makes reference in his novel and film *Xala.* Ousmane Sembène was very interested in this issue and spear-headed the effort to write in African languages. This was extremely important to him.

LV*:* With your interest in languages you were clearly militants in the preservation of African cultural heritage. Why were you both opposed to Léopold Sédar Senghor when you shared a common interest?

PD: The truth of the matter is that at that time opposition to Senghor was our driving force, it is what galvanized us; he was our source of inspiration. We did not dislike him. As I wrote in *L. S. Senghor ou la Négritude Servante de la Francophonie*, [*L. S. Senghor or Négritude at the Service of La Francophonie*] we were critical of his politics and not the university intellectual and artist that he was. It is the word Négritude that Sembène didn't like but they practically had a common cause. The concept bothered a lot of people because of its focus on skin color. Using the term Négritude was defining oneself as black in an essentialist fashion although the condition of the Negro was a fact. I think it was a political problem. We distanced ourselves from Senghor for political and not for cultural or artistic reasons. Senghor was only a reference but it is certain that many of those who attacked him respected and agreed with him on his ideas on culture and the struggle to gain recognition and respectability for African cultures. You see, nobody was against the Negro Arts Festival which he organized. It was a great idea. And a great success.

LV: There is a certain degree of hostility towards religion in his works. Was he anti-religious in real life?

PD: Sembène was a secularist coming out of the Communist party from a family of fishermen who did not pay much to attention to Islam. He wasn't anti-religious. He practiced religion like anybody else but was not a fanatic. There is also another problem because the African Islam he grew in is pluralistic and very liberal. It is not the Oriental Islam or the exclusivist Islam of the Maghreb. He wouldn't go on the pilgrimage to Mecca. He shared this spiritual autonomy with Senghor and the rest of his generation, even Cheikh Anta Diop. Religion was a major part of his thinking. He lived that reality and it is only natural that it is reflected in his works.

LV: Originally from the Casamance, did he maintain contact with his native region? In what ways does his connection with the Casamance come across in his works?

MD: He didn't quite maintain close contacts with the region because his family had moved to Dakar. The film *Emitai* is a representation of the rebellion in the Casamance that resisted colonization, and Christianization. He was aware of this spirit of resistance from a very young age and was partisan to Casamancian nationalism even though he did not align himself with dissidents who clamored for independence.

LV: I am surprised you are saying this because Sembène did not make any public statements about the problem of the Casamance. One would think that he was indifferent to the issue.

PD: Not at all. He knew the people. He was absolutely not indifferent to the problem but at the same time he saw a kind of hopelessness in the issue as young men and women needlessly lost their lives in a conflict with no viable solution in sight. Like his contemporaries Cheikh Anta Diop, Ki Zerbo, and other African intellectuals, Sembène believed, unconditionally, in African unity. He rejected the Balkanization of Africa, be it Central Africa or Senegal and thus was not sympathetic with the separatist discourse of the rebels but sympathized with their nationalist demands which are quite different from those of the Fouta or Konyangi. You see the Fouta is a relatively homogenous cultural entity in Senegal. Fouta is a culture. Wolof is a culture. East Mandigo is a culture. The Casamance is also a cultural entity but more complex and heterogeneous from a certain perspective. If approached from that perspective Sembène was sympathetic to the rebellion as a claim to the plurality of identities like the Joola, Peul, or Konyangi. We wrote *Kaddu* in Wolof and worked on Diola because we could not accept sacrificing the linguistic and cultural plurality of Senegal. Although Sembène was for every struggle that involved the reclaiming and preservation of cultural identity he deplored the fact that people would kill each other for the cause.

LV: As a militant writer and filmmaker, one could have expected him to take a stance, propose a solution?

PD: But the solution was not secession from the rest of Senegal in any case.

LV: What is at bottom the problem of the Casamance?

PD: Listen, it is a complex problem. The Casamance was the last region to be conquered by France with the support of soldiers from the North. The region is culturally very cohesive and traditional. It was slightly Christianized but had no Islamic influence at the time of the conquest. It remains Diola country. There is a Casamancian nationalism as the people distinguish themselves ethnically but have no problem living with other groups. They are very hospitable to strangers as long as they respect them. Indeed, the people give strangers the liberty that they envision for themselves. Sembène sympathized with this Casamance

which is for the preservation of its identity. But he did not go as far supporting the secessionist movement because he believed in greater entities for the an economic revolution which he believed could not happen in small hamlets.

LV: Is there an aspect in his life that he wrongly neglected?

PD: I believe his relationship with women was tenuous. I am not sure what his problem with women was. The women he married did not contribute much to his growth as he was quite a domineering husband. The one woman he had a real rapport with was Kari who was part of his production team. She was an intellectual. I wonder whether that did not generate the conflict between them that led to their separation.

LV: In his works he comes across as a feminist championing women's causes. Is this not paradoxical?

PD: Living with a woman is totally different from the way you think about them in fiction. In real life Sembène related to women differently except Kari his American wife. The period during which they lived together was a very productive one. She contributed enormously to his work.

LV: In Senegal, there is little discussion of Sembène's film, of African films in general for that matter. How does one explain the absence of African films in the African cinematographic landscape?

PD: We no longer talk about African films here. There was a time when there were lots of film festivals, when there was a lot of creativity. Sembène opened the doors for his generation. It was the golden age of the production of Senegalese films after which production dropped considerably except in Burkina Faso. At first, film theaters were run by the State, so no profits were asked of those who ran them. Then came the economic crisis and the theaters were privatized. The private owners who bought them transformed the spaces. You see, the film industry is poorly developed in Africa. Babacar Samb had good ideas for the development of the industry but unfortunately he died prematurely. Sembène worked with the film industry but organization was his problem.

LV: What was Sembène's position vis-à-vis *la francophonie*?

PD: This takes us back to Senghor's cultural politics. Sembène advocated the plurality of cultures and the coexistence of languages. Senghor was hostage to French interests such that if a film was made in one of the national languages and the French objected to it because it didn't participate in the growth and spread of the French language he could be opposed to its diffusion. Senghor was a remarkable man in the beginning. He even worked in the defense and development of national languages (Serere grammar, Wolof grammar, etc.). He changed dramatically when he became a political figure. He became a different person. The stakes were high in those days. Unlike today, writing in Wolof or in Bambara or any other African language in the 1950s and 1960s was a big deal. There were deaths during the black festival in Algers because of positions

against Francophonie which many people saw as a neocolonialist establishment. Senghor was trapped in this political and ideological issue. There was a geopolitical interest that was initiated by de Gaulle . . . you know de Gaulle was a political structure by itself . . . he had tentacles. It was de Gaulle who decided on issues about national language and the question was not on the agenda. Senghor, like his friends, aligned with the policy. Sembène was different. He was the one who kept the struggle alive. He was the representative of the struggle for the survival of national languages. He made his films in national languages. Through his success and the quality of his films, Sembène led the way for the use of popular languages. He worked with peasants who did not even speak French. Sembène wasn't a francophone like Cheikh Hamidou Kane. He spoke his own kind of French.

LV: What separates Sembène from other filmmakers of his generation?

PD: He made films in which people could identify themselves. They were coherent, extraordinary, and very practical films as Sembène was a great observer of reality. Sembène studied his regional space and recreated its peoples and cultures in his films. The sense of extraordinary realism in his films had a great impact on his times. People who went to watch his films identified with them. The world of *La Noire de . . .* is a milieu that he knew only too well. But when we watch *Le Mandat*, we find that he was working with people who understood the urban milieu of Dakar better than him. The success of this film is owed to the actors he worked with because they had the kind of intimate understanding of the milieu that Sembène did not have. The cooperation between him and these people was fantastic. *La Noire de . . .* and *Le Mandat* attained a certain level of perfection in their making. He did not have the same level of direction in *Ceddo* and that comes across in the film.

LV: Thank you

PD: My pleasure.

INTERVIEW WITH FATOUMATA KANDÉ SENGHOR

Lifongo Vetinde: How did you meet Sembène? Tell me about your work with him.

Fatoumata Kandé Senghor: I met him by chance and we clicked very quickly due to, I believe, a shared nonconformist attitude. Shortly after we met he asked me to join his team. When he was about to begin work on the filming of *Faat Kiné*, I wanted to be part of the production team but he asked me to be the costume designer with little or no budget. I was very disappointed and I told him it would be difficult for me to design the costumes since I didn't know how to sew. He understood my disappointment but encouraged me by reminding me of my talents as a de-

signer, my experience with visual arts, and my studies at University of Lille where I studied screenwriting. "You make documentaries, there is no one more qualified than you to do this kind of work." I found that too easy; clothing is a woman's thing in Senegal. I resisted but he managed to convince me to take on the task.

LV: You accepted after much hesitation. How did the work go?

FKS: With some bitterness, I took the invitation as a challenge and an honor. The position of costume designer suffers a lot here for it is not funded. Each time my name appears on the credits as the costume designer, I am dissatisfied because I cannot claim total responsibility for the conception of the costumes. I am able to tell which costumes were borrowed from the actors. In the case of *Faat Kiné*, Sembène who saved everything handed me all the costumes that were used in previous films. He knew the people to whom they belonged and in what roles they were used. When I told him they were old, he responded saying that it is with the old that we create new things. I had to work with nothing and be creative. He pushed me to create and have respect for those costumes. He was one who had a certain logic of work that I completely understood.

LV: What was his relationship with other filmmakers?

FKS: It is no secret that Sembène didn't have much respect for filmmakers whose work he did not appreciate. He produced militant films and strongly believed in this approach to filmmaking. He was no partisan of art for art's sake or frivolous stories in cinema. I think he believed that people should earn the right to produce films and needed to delve deep to make them for their people. He made us work very hard and always asked us whether we were sure we wanted to be in the business of film making. Sembène refused that French cooperation make the rules for, and regulate, African cinema. I recall that he was once invited to participate in discussion on African cinema along with other Senegalese filmmakers to debate on a Francophone TV channel. He was very angry and minimalist during the program and openly regretted to have accepted the invitation. He had no respect for his contemporaries who were all about appearance. He was a confrontational man, dry and even difficult but he was also a sensitive and good man. Sembène liked work that was well done. For instance, he liked the work of Mansour Sora Wade whose cinema he found poetic and esthetically well done. He called him SORA. He also like the films of Jo Gaye Ramaka. Sembène had little dialogue with people he thought were mediocre but was not a snob. He had no attribute of a Sob. His temperament must have been the product of his career trajectory.

LV: What is the most memorable incident in your collaboration with Sembène?

FKS: There were several but I particularly recall a couple which encapsulate his character: frankness and the desire to be in complete control of his work. The first was the speech he delivered in a reception at the

French ambassador to Senegal residence in Dakar. Normally, a huge number of Dakar residents were invited but upon his insistence only a very select group was invited this time. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the medal of knight of honor to Sembène which he finally agreed to accept after much persuasion from his friends. After accepting the medal, he took the floor for his thank you speech. When he took the floor for his speech he addressed his message to Jacques Chirac. He asked him to break the relational interpretation of our culture and the nature of cooperation with our poor countries. He repeated, "you need to break, you need to break. You cannot say colonization is over and pass through the window. Do not be involved in our cultural politics to come and sit on us." One would have expected a guest of honor to receive a medal at the ambassador's residence to be more graceful. But that was not Sembène. He never minced his words. He was always himself and his frankness came from within. He wasn't hypocritical.

A second incident was during the filming of *Faat Kiné* in which I was involved. He was simply a man who liked to be in control, to manage his affairs. His plateau (stage) was well organized and his technical team was composed of both white and black technicians who knew how to work with him. I remember the chief operator Dominique Gentil asking him "Ousmane can we stop at the flower at the end of the travelling instead of going up to the end of the calabash?" Sembène responded, "a flower has a meaning in your culture, I would like that we end at the calabash." I have been part of filming teams and have never heard a film director take such a strong position on such an apparently minor detail. Sembène thus obliged the director of photography to search for a new aesthetics which was not Western.

LV: So he had a very strong sense of his African film aesthetics?

FKS: Exactly. Sembène was a strong man who opened our eyes and warned us against participating in the destruction of our own good values. One day he asked me what I thought about one of his films. I can't remember the title. I told him it was slow. He asked me it was slow compared to what? "I tell a story and you want me to go fast. I present you an actor and you want him to kiss a girl immediately. . . . Why?" I believe he was right. African filmmakers are copying so much from Hollywood style cinema. Each of his films speaks to the continent. They tell beautiful stories that touch everyone. The world is sensitive to good stories . . . every human being likes stories that are well told.

LV: So there are no foreign influences on his cinema?

FKS: Of course. We are all the sum total of our life experiences. And we are touched by the poetry of others. But Sembène insisted on giving an African cachet to his films. He did not accept being drowned by foreign aesthetics and ideology.

LV: What do you know about his family life?

FKS: Not much. We did not talk about his family life but I think he failed in this domain because he sacrificed himself. In conversations, this came up furtively and we quickly switched to something else. The women he loved suffered a lot although he certainly loved them. Even his children suffered in his hands. He was very demanding and expected the highest standards from everyone including his children. I think that toward the end of his life he missed being visited. During his funeral, his last son Maktar who was very upset reproached us saying, "you are all here today around my father's corpse but we stayed entire days without anybody stopping by." We adapted to the structure of his work schedule. He did not go to his office to waste time or receive visits. We were conscious of that when we entered his work space. It was a space for creation. We didn't pay him frequent visits out of respect. But I spoke to him on the phone. Every Monday at ten in the morning I had to call him through his secretary. It was magic. We did so for years. Sembène suffered a lot because he took on too much on himself.

LV: In what respects?

FKS: The problems of the continent. For instance he took the genocidal wars in Burundi and Rwanda very personally and suffered enormously from the conflicts and the ugliness of their aftermath.

LV: What about the Casamance? What did he think about the region?

FKS: He didn't go there frequently. The house where he was born is still standing there. He said nothing about it. I think he considered the Casamancian problem a nonissue.

LV: What was his relationship with political figures?

FK: Not wonderful. When he was planning his last film, *The Republic of Rats*, he told me he had written to Abdoulaye Wade to grant him permission to use the presidential palace as a decor but the former president turned down the request. They had some interesting exchanges with lots of humor and sarcasm. He kept abreast with political events by reading newspapers. Discussing the news was our icebreaker when I went to his office. It is from him that I learned the expression "le torchon brûle" ("the torch burns").

LV: We meet beggars in many of his films. What was his attitude towards beggars in real life?

FKS: The situation of beggars naturally brought up the issue of the role of religion in society. He didn't accept that religion should be a source of division. He knew many beggars and wasn't quite generous to them when they asked him for money in the street. The steering wheel of his car was on the right which means that when he was driving he was always on the side of the beggars which surprised them. He knew them all. He looked at the handicapped and said, for example, "you have only one arm but you can use the other to work." He did not hate them. I think that, on the contrary, he liked them but he teased and reproached them to engage in a dialogue with them. He did not like to see people beg. In any

case he thought beggars were lazy fellows who were taking advantage of the precepts of Islam. Sembène resented the fact that religion encouraged begging in the streets and didn't accept that religion should be a source of social inequalities, class divisions that kept people apart.

LV: Do you think there is a film that he particularly liked in his film production?

FKS: I believe *Guelwaar* is his preferred film. It is a film that many people like because it is very powerful. It's like a fireball. In his other films, there are moments when one is involved and others when one just waits. Not so in *Guelwaar*. The spectator is constantly on his or her toes to the very end. In it you find the religious problem, insults, street language, the challenge of harmonious relationships regardless of religion or other forms of identity in the village, prostitution, and rural exodus. In short, all the problems and challenges of society. His love for the film translated into a real affection for Thierno Ndiaye Doze, the great comedian who acted the role of Guelwaar, the eponymous protagonist of the film. Instead of calling him by his name, he affectionately called him Guelwaar.

LV: Is Faat Kiné a typical Senegalese woman?

FKS: There are thousands like her. What does Faat Kiné have? Nothing. She respects everything she has to but this does not work because she lives in an occupied world not in the world organized by her community. Her teacher seduces her because he is in a position of power and masters the text of the society. By impregnating her, he prevents her from sitting for the high school diploma (Bac), she goes back home and she is kicked out. She meets another person when she has her own little means of survival, thus opening up a good window of opportunity for her. They find that she has a baby but that doesn't matter which might not have been possible in a village context.

LV: Do children look for husbands or partners for their mothers in Senegalese society as we find in *Faat Kiné*?

FKS: Here in Senegal everyone looks for a husband or wife for everyone. I look for husbands for friends who are single all the time. When we meet someone who has a clear idea of who he is, we know immediately the kind of woman who will be a good match for him. The problem is the man to know the kind of woman who will fall for him. We do this because you don't want to be all by yourself at a certain age. You need a companion but not just anybody. You notice that Parfait is neither a Muslim nor a polygamist because Faat Kiné's children did not want just anybody for their mother. In Senegal we also find men who look for successful women. They move into the woman's home and live peacefully abandoning their other homes. You find every aspect of Senegalese life in *Faat Kiné.* There are people who get married and agree to do so just between themselves. We call this practice *Takku suus* that is marriage behind closed doors with about four witnesses. These are adult marriages.

LV: What happens with the property in the event of death?

FKS: Nothing. Nobody gives anything. Its only people who are well settled economically and otherwise who contract these kind of marriages. Everything is clear from the outset . . . there is no ambiguity whatsoever. The man and woman own their property and do not depend on the other's. Sembène loved this subversive side of the Senegalese culture where good Muslims create new rules that do not adhere to dogma.

LV: Thanks for these enlightening insights into Sembène's life and work.

FKS: It's my pleasure.

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Notes on the Contributors and Editors

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