

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## Ousmane Sembène (1923-2007)

### LIFE

Senegalese writer, producer, and director Sembène Ousmane was born on January 1, 1923 in Ziguinchor, Senegal. He died on June 9, 2007, in Dakar, Senegal. Sembène attended both a qur'anic school and a French school until age thirteen. He then worked with his father, a fisherman, before moving to Dakar in 1938, where he did a number of odd jobs. In 1944, he was drafted into the corps of Senegalese *Tirailleurs* (*Sharpshooters*) and sent to France to fight in the Free French Forces. In 1944 and 1947, Sembène was involved in union strikes, respectively, in Senegal as a railroad worker, and in France as a dock worker and member of the Communist Party. Having dropped out of school early, Sembène had to teach himself to read and write properly. He went on to write several novels, some of which he adapted into films. Sembène's only film training was one year spent at the Moscow Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography, at the age of forty, under Soviet director Mark Donskoy.

### ACHIEVEMENTS

Ousmane Sembène is a novelist, a filmmaker, and a documentarist. Sembène published five novels and five collections of short stories, and he directed four shorts, nine features, and four documentary films. Sembène is often referred to as the father of African cinema. His films have won several awards at international film festivals.



Sembène on the set of *Emitaï*, Senegal, 1971

## FILMOGRAPHY

*Black Girl*, 1966  
*Mandabi/The Money Order*, 1968  
*Emitaï/God of Thunder*, 1971  
*Xala/The Curse* 1975  
*Ceddo/Outsiders*, 1977  
*Camp Thiaroye*, 1988  
*Guelwaar*, 1992  
*Faat Kiné*, 2000  
*Moolaadé/Mystical Protection*, 2004

## THEMES

**Colonization/colonial economy:** Sembène raises the important question of the colonial economy, a question which angers Western chancelleries, and which is one of the reasons, the revelation of colonial violence being the first, which led to the censorship of films like *Emitaï* and *Camp Thiaroye* in many countries. *Black girl* parodies Europe's rush to put its stamp of ownership on Africa.

*Black Girl* A major theme of the film, presented symbolically and largely in the background, is the colonization of Africa. Diouana is like the African continent whose body is coveted by Europe. Images of her fighting with Madame to retain her prized mask or images of her being kissed against her will by Madame's guest conjure up moments of not just the great rush to Africa by European powers to divide the continent into small shares, but also the determination of these European countries to remain in control of Africa after the continent's independence. Indeed, during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, most European countries raced to Africa to trade no longer in slaves as was hitherto the case, but in commodities: ivory, gold, timber, cocoa, coffee, rubber, palm oil, nuts, and tropical fruits. By the late 1800s, Africa became so crowded with European fortune-seekers that conflicts became inevitable. To better regulate trade in Africa and to avoid conflicts among the international actors in the region, the European powers held a conference in Berlin between November 15, 1884 and February 26, 1885, under the chairmanship of German Chancellor, Otto Von Bismarck. Having defined the rules of the game, European powers rushed to cut up large slices of the African pie. In the early 1960s, when *Black Girl* was made, most French African colonies, including Senegal, became independent. Nevertheless, France found schemes to remain in control of their former colonies' politics, military, and economy. This colonial history is the not-so-hidden undercurrent of the story in this film.

*Emitaï* This film shows that without the exploitation of Africa, France would be classified in the category of Third World countries because a country that does not have the resources to feed its people is a country in decline. And to feed and make its people work, both during its moments of crisis and during its moments of peace, France has always known how to twist the arm of Africa. In *Emitaï*, the peasants are forced to cede the fruits of their hard work to France. This is exploitation and pillage. The "battle for rice" is only a synecdoche of a monumental pillaging of Africa by France which lasted for centuries. Since the 1800s, France was able to sustain itself through a colonial economy of exploitation and plunder of Africa. This is what former French President Chirac revealed during an interview, in an extraordinary moment of sincerity, which does not happen often: "...a large part of the money that is in our wallet comes precisely from the exploitation, for centuries, of Africa. Not all of it. But a lot comes from the exploitation of Africa."

**Beauty:** Sembène tackles the issue of the relativity of beauty. Beauty is not just a matter physical attractiveness in the eyes of the beholder; beauty is also an inner quality. In *Black Girl*, Sembène shows how a body or an environment believed to be beautiful can nevertheless be inhumane and hostile. In *Camp Thiaroye*, however, the filmmaker focuses on the physical aspects of beauty, with assessment criteria that are Africa-specific.

*Black Girl* "France is a lovely country." This is one of the first sentences that Monsieur utters to Diouana on the day she arrives in France, as he drives her from the harbor to his home. France, Diouana concludes, is certainly a beautiful place, but it is inhabited by ugly people. Indeed, the few French people that Diouana encounters in France—as her condition allows her little freedom of movement—have a disgraceful story to

tell about the French. As Diouana discovers, Monsieur is a drunk who fantasizes about her when Madame is not looking. Madame is a mean, racist, and irritable woman, who wore the mask of a kind person when she was in Senegal, and who, in France, cannot help but show her true, repugnant self. Madame and Monsieur's guests are racist. One of Madame's female guests compares Diouana to an animal that acts instinctively rather than a human being who reasons. Another guest uses her as an object of experiment to fulfill his long-held dream of kissing a "negress." A third guest will not visit Senegal because, for him, the African continent is a war-ridden, dangerous place. France might be a lovely place according to Monsieur. For Diouana, however, it is an ugly place, the land of a people whose hearts have hardened to the point that they cannot see that, beyond superficial racial differences, she is one of their fellow human beings.

*Camp Thiaroye* Each year, the Ivorians elect the most beautiful women of the country in two different events: an election of Miss Cote d'Ivoire, which follows Western standards of beauty, and an election of Miss Awoulaba, which follows typical traditional African standards of beauty. In the first event, the qualities sought in the contestants are, among others, thinness and height. In the second event, the qualities sought are plumpness and curviness. Thus, in *Camp Thiaroye*, an Ivorian soldier decides to have a dress sewn for his sweetheart by a Nigerian soldier, who has bought a machine and taught himself tailoring. The client asks the tailor to sew him two dresses, the first for a slim woman and the second for a plump woman. The customer tells his tailor that his wife, who has been thinning since he left for France, will regain her curves when she sees him again. Here, thinness is the figure of depression and sorrow, and plumpness is the figure of happiness. So, the African beauty celebrated is that of the full-figured woman. This African standard of beauty, which the Ivorian soldier yearns to find in his village, is certainly different from what he had the opportunity to discover during his European stay.

**Class/gender:** In his first feature, *Black Girl*, Sembène subtly raises the issue of gender as it relates to employment and class. He shows how difficult it is for the Senegalese woman to find work outside the home, and abusive her employers can be when she does find work. Yet women in Africa are often the backbone of the family, and it would be in the interest of African nations to educate them and find them decent, protected jobs that neither puts them down nor silences them. It would even be better if the African woman could find support from her Western counterpart, which is not the case. In *Emitai* and *Faat Kiné*, Sembène shows women in positions of power whose assertiveness intimidates men.

*Black Girl* For Diouana, a subaltern in Senegalese society who, as the writer Gayatri Spivak would say, has no voice, the crucial question is first of all to find a job that will allow her to survive. To do this, like many other Senegalese women, Diouana goes to sit in the sun, in the square where job-seekers gather to wait for a heavenly employer. This providential employer arrives in the form of Madame, a white woman, who, in her cultural space, has already obtained the right to speak, but who, paradoxically, chooses Diouana among all the women precisely because Diouana is the least talkative and the least agitated of them. It would seem that Madame, this white woman, who gained her voice thanks to women's fight for freedom of expression, a voice that she uses all day long to cover Monsieur with insults, does not want female competition. She prefers a mute and submissive woman as an employee. For Madame, the slogan seems to be: "No solidarity possible among women. Every woman is a competitor to be defeated, a rival to be kept at the bottom of the social ladder." And Madame works hard to ensure that Diouana never emancipates herself.

*Emitai* In *Emitai*, Sembène reveals the assertiveness and resilience of women and the important role they play in Diola society as the backbone of the community and the carriers of culture. The social economy of the Diola is largely based on the work of women. After the men have turned the land, it is mainly the women and young girls who enrich it with fertilizer, who sow the rice, who protect it from predators, harvest it, hull it, and store it. The women are also the ones responsible for funeral ceremonies in which rice plays a primordial and sacred role. When the colonial army decides to seize the Diolas' rice harvest, the women are the first to hide it in the mangroves. To punish them, the colonial troops gather the women in the sun on a large square, from where they will only leave if they reveal the hiding place of the rice. While men deliberate whether they should submit to the law of the colonial authorities, wait for an intervention from the gods, or go straight to confrontation against the colonial army, and while the position of men remains uncertain, that of women is inflexible. They would rather suffer reprisals from the army, whatever they may be, than give in to blackmail and humiliation. As the women were sitting in the sun under the watch of the

colonial army, they had in their arms some infants that they were breastfeeding. With their men killed by the French army or sent by force to go to war in Europe to defend France from Germany, it falls to the resilient women to ensure the continuance of the Diola culture. Here, Sembène underlines the primordial role of women in carrying on tradition.

*Faat Kiné* The social expectations placed on men and women by Senegalese tradition reflect gender inequality. While women are expected to have a sober sexuality, exercised within the strict framework of marriage, and preferably for procreation, men can give free rein to their sexual impulses. For example, Kiné, an unmarried woman but financially responsible for an entire family, is treated like a child by her mother. She is not allowed to bring a man into her own home. She is not even allowed to smoke in her own home when her mother's husband visits. And Kiné's occasional encounters with men when she craves sexual pleasure stigmatize her as a flighty woman of unbridled immorality. Kiné also has to watch her language, at the risk of being called vulgar by the men or frustrated by her children. All these social restrictions to which Kiné is subjected do not apply to the men. BOP, Massamba, and Gaye are all polygamists, always on the lookout for women to add to their harem. Despite Kiné's refusal to be pinned down by the social restrictions erected by men for the benefit of men, the social pressure is such that Kiné ends up buckling. She falls for Jean, and as she offers herself to him on the night of her children's graduation party, it is easy to imagine that in this conservative society, their union will end in marriage, thus tidying Kiné up and saving her from her wandering.

**Oppression/defiance/rebellion:** Sembène tackles the issues of oppression, defiance, and rebellion from various angles: In *Black girl*, and *Emitai*, he shows that despite appearances, Africa is not a continent that endures Europe's assaults without rebelling. Africa had its great fighters, who stood up against the oppression of racist Europe, but whose struggles, unfortunately, were lost to the technological advances of Western weaponry. Sembène goes one step further in *Emitai* and *Moolaadé* by suggesting that endogenous, domestic oppression is equally as bad as oppression by external forces, and must be resisted and defeated.

*Black Girl* Sembène dramatizes Africa's defiance to Europe through Diouana's boldness. In France, where Diouana has no other support than herself, no other alliance than the one she can form with her own will to resistance, the young Senegalese woman rebels against Madame's abuse. When Madame forbids her to eat unless she does work which was not stipulated in the gentleman contract that binds them, the young woman decides that she will no longer do anything in the house, not even watch the children. She sleeps in, leaving Madame to get frustrated with her children and burn her clumsy fingers on the coffee maker. And when Madame pushes the outrage to the point of calling Diouana 'lazy', like any other African and beating her, Diouana considers this humiliation as the straw that breaks the camel's back. In a gesture which is an allegory of the return of the oppressed to their dignity and their native land, Diouana snatches the mask that she offered Madame from her employer's hands, packs her bags, telling herself that Madame will never again have the opportunity to humiliate her, and opens her veins in the bathtub. In this ultimate act of defiance, Diouana disposes of her own life, wrests from Madame all control over her, gains the last word over Madame, like those proud slaves who suffocated themselves by swallowing their own tongues rather than submit to slavery.

*Emitai* The Diola revolt against the French colonial administration came about because the people were tired of being subjected to the assaults of the French government, which, thousands of kilometers away, was trampling the rights of Africans. Sembène's criticism of that abuse is valid not only when these acts are exogenous (France exploiting its colonial empires), but also when they are endogenous (the exploitation of the Diola people by its alienated sons and gods). As a good unionist, Sembène suggests that when a government levies abusive taxes on its people, or when the royalties and contributions paid by the people to its representatives do not accrue to the people in terms of social benefits, it is within the people's right to rebel. For the Diola, the taxes imposed on them by the colonial administration are unjust and illegal. Just as the Diola rebels against the French colonial administration for unfair taxes, Djimeko, the Diola chief, rebels against his traditional gods for their neglect of the Diola people. Djimeko considers that the offerings made to the gods who govern them no longer have any reason to exist, insofar as the returns expected from making these offerings do not materialize.

*Camp Thiaroye* Captain Labrousse passing his fellow French soldiers a note about Sergeant Diatta being a “communist”, as the latter complains about the soldiers’ mistreatment, is indicative of France’s mode of operation in extending its control in Africa. Indeed, France stigmatizes African dissenters as mutineers and rioters paid by, or manipulated by, forces hostile to France’s capitalistic ambition. Then, France uses this pretext to crush peaceful dissents as dangerous armed rebellions. For imperialist France, Diatta and his soldiers are “troublemakers”. The fate of Diatta and his soldiers was replayed countless times in Africa. For instance, in the early 1990s, French oil extraction company, Shell, contaminated the Ogoni people’s fishing areas, farmlands, and drinking water in the Niger Delta. A native of the region, Ken Saro-Wiwa, who organized his people under the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), to force Shell to be more environmentally conscious, was arrested, tried in a kangaroo court and executed by his government on Shell’s demands. In Cote d’Ivoire, in 2004 and then in 2011, the French army shot and killed hundreds of unarmed demonstrators protesting France’s injustice and stranglehold in their country. And the man who, according to France’s determination, was at the source of the protests, former Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo, was arrested, deported to the International Criminal Court, and after ten years of a kangaroo trial, cleared of all charges. By then, France had already installed a malleable president to carry on its exploitation of Cote d’Ivoire. In Africa, questioning France’s unjust practices is almost always viewed in Paris as an armed rebellion to be crushed in blood. And it is the victims who pay for the crime of the victimizers.

*Moolaadé* When Amath orders his brother, Ciré, to whip his wife, Collé, in public to get her to speak the word that will break the protection, Ciré replies that he has never laid a hand on a woman. Ciré’s response shocks Amath, for whom beating his wife for the slightest incident is part of the normal order of things. For Amath, in a society where men need to assert their superiority over women, where men have to make sure every day that no obstacle, however small, threatens the permanence of this superiority, the crack of the whip becomes the dissuasive instrument to any insurgency. And the quintessential insurgents, as far as patriarchy is concerned, are women. This is why many traditional households become the stage for all kinds of abuse against women. Men are convinced that to be respected, they must be violent. Amath walks around with a whip girded around his waist like a belt. For him, his younger brother’s attitude towards his wife, Collé, is abnormal. Not only does she put his brother at peril, but she also dishonors his extended family, to which he belongs, and the male gender of which he is also a member. To regain control and save his family’s honor and the respectability of the men, Amath advises his reluctant brother to whip his wife in public. The abusive situation in which traditional women live is multiplied tenfold in Muslim communities with their oft-distorted interpretation of the woman’s place in the *Qur’an*. There, it is not uncommon for the father-in-law to place a whip in his son-in-law’s hand, telling him, “Beat your wife every morning. If you do not know why, she does.”

*Moolaadé* *Moolaadé*, is the story of a village rebellion against an age-old institution that is discriminatory against women— female genital mutilation. This rebellion begins when Collé refuses to subject her daughter, Amsatou, to the sacrosanct practice of female excision. Amsatou’s condition, which in the village’s imagination makes her unmarriageable, is kept a secret among the older women. This secret is eventually revealed at the village well by some gossips and get into the ears of six little girls soon to be excised. The girls realize that contrary to the common belief, Amsatou’s condition of unexcised did not prevent her from being sought by a rich son of the village, who lives in Paris. So, on the day of their excision, the girls flee the excision camp, and four of them place themselves under the protection of Amsatou’s mother, Collé. The village is then divided between those who, like the Excising women, Amath, Dougoutigui and the elders, insist on the continuity of the excision tradition, and those who, following in the footsteps of Collé, Amsatou and gradually all the other women in the village, want an end to a practice they consider useless and barbaric. The conflict is brutal. Collé is publicly flogged to get her to change her mind, but she resists, and her resistance turns into an action-oriented movement supported by all the women of the village and some men, among whom her husband, Ciré, Amsatou’s Parisian fiancé, Doucouré. This newly-formed coalition against female genital mutilation defeats the old, abusive order.

**Appearance** Sembène shows in *Black Girl* how by pretending to be Africa’s benefactor, by playing on insincerity, dissimulation and concealment, France is making Africa accept its slag and harmful waste. The filmmaker carries on with his critique of France’s insincerity in *Camp Thiaroye*. There, he denounces the deception by France of the African soldiers who help it defeat the Germans during WW 2. Though

theoretically considered French while they were needed to fight the Germans, in reality, for France, the African soldier is not French. He is the inferior other who allows France to live out its dream of superiority.

*Black Girl* In fact, Diouana followed Madame and Monsieur to France on the promise they made her in Senegal that she would work as a babysitter for their three children, and that she would have free time now and then to go out and do her own shopping or visit the country. Upon her arrival, Diouana noticed that the only knowledge she would have of France would be the view of the town of Antibes from her bedroom window and whatever scenery she could catch on her way to and from the grocers. Most of her time would be spent working to the wee hours, cleaning, cooking, and washing under the abusive words and blows of Madame. Now, Diouana realizes that Madame is not the nice woman she pretended to be, and that she is in reality a heartless woman that brought her in France to be a slave to her family. Diouana starts questioning the motives of Madame in every act of kindness the latter posed back in Senegal. Diouana concludes that in Senegal, Madame was not honest. She was putting on an act. She wore a mask of deception. Why, then, did Madame give her the leftovers from her dinner table to take home? Why, then, did Madame give Diouana her old clothes to wear? Diouana is convinced that she has found the answer to Madame's apparent act of kindness: Madame was just using her as a dumping ground, a place to dispose of things she did not need. She was just a convenient recycling bin for Madame. Sembène's critique here is subtle and poignant. Africa is France's dumping ground, a place to get rid of its scrap metal and old chemicals and clothes.

*Camp Thiaroye* The Senegalese soldiers are the victims of lies. After they took the French general hostage, they were promised that their dues would be paid. This was nothing more than a ploy designed to make them let down their guards. During the night, as the soldiers slept, they were simply murdered by the French army. The French officers were proud of the fact that their deed had been approved at the highest level of the French administration, which makes their crime a state crime. Diatta denounces this deception on the part of France, which has been playing them for fools from the very start of their demobilization until their arrival in Africa. Why this state dishonesty? The French officers explain it in no uncertain terms: France would be ruined if it honored its commitments to the Africans. So, to lie, to conceal one's true intentions, is the hallmark of France in its determination to maintain its position on the world stage as a strong nation. From this distorted perspective, it is Africa that needs France, not the other way around. Thus, the soldiers are told that it is an honor to invite them to fight for France. They are told that France is their motherland and that the sacrifices they make to defend it are those of a son for his mother. In the field, however, the reality is quite different. The *tirailleur* soldier is the symptom of France's malaise, its whipping boy, its punching bag, the one on whom France vented its anxieties.

**Freedom/bondage** Sembène criticizes the North-South encounter as one that is built on insincerity, precisely because the dream of the North is to keep the South in bondage. In *Black Girl*, Sembène cleverly shows how the Africans' naïveté and unchecked trust in the Europeans help make this dream true. In *Guelwaar*, the filmmaker denounces Western food aid programs as the North's ploys to realize this dream of dominance through acts of donation.

*Black Girl* Diouana purchases an African mask from a Senegalese boy, which she offers to her French employers, who take it to France. The journey of Diouana's mask, from Senegal to France, resembles the journey of the slave from Africa to Europe. Once free individuals in their communities, the slaves are captured or purchased by an African slave dealer, then sold to a European slave dealer, who holds them in a locked space with other slaves before transporting them to Europe as goods. Without suspecting it, Diouana undertook the trip of the slave to France as a slave herself. Her mask on the wall of her employers' living room, on which her gaze lingered the first day she arrived in France, was an ominous message to her that she, like it, was henceforth a slave that had just lost her freedom of movement. In fact, before she left Senegal for France, Diouana was told by her employers that she would have ample opportunities to visit France and shop in nice boutiques. However, once in France, she became a slave whose movement and actions were controlled by her employers. She could only dress the way they wanted; she could only go to the grocers, and she could only eat what she was given and when she was allowed to eat. In fact, at one point, she was refused food. When Diouana understood that her life was but that of a slave, she claimed back her mask from Madame, went to her room and packed her suitcase, vowing to never again be treated as a slave. And, in a gesture that symbolized the (improbable) voluntary return to

her native land, she cut her own throat in the bathtub. Diouana decided that she would not live under bondage.

*Guelwaar* Through *Guelwaar*, Sembène paints a caricature of Africa's independence. When Senegal became independent in 1960, the Senegalese leaders boast of their autonomy and shout it from the rooftops. However, these same leaders still reach out to the ex-colonizers from whom they parted with much ado, asking for alms in the form of money to pay their employees' salaries and food aid to feed their populations. Having become aid addicts, the leaders devote no effort to finding a strategy for self-sufficiency. They have become not only managers of international aid, but also embezzlers of this aid, which they sell back to their populations to pad their own bank accounts. The ingenuity of these national beggars can be summed up in the stylistic devices they use to persuade donors to increase their aid. For Pierre Thioune or Guelwaar, who appears uninvited at the big donation meetings and takes the floor to criticize what he defines as begging, begging leaders not only kill any dignity in the Senegalese, they also kill the Senegalese's vital impulse, removing from them any will to fight for their independence. Aid makes the Senegalese a dependent being, without pride, who spends his days saying thank you to the West for its magnanimity. This is where Guelwaar proves to be a sharp political satire. Here, Sembène does not blame the West for the problems of Senegal and Africa. Africa is a victim of the turpitude and dishonor of its leaders, who take pleasure in the role of professional beggars and keep it in economic, social and political dependence.

**Racism/Exoticization** Africa has always fascinated the West, either by feeding racist imaginations or by being the world in which it would fulfill its wildest dreams. In *Black Girl*, Diouana symbolizes the object of Europe's racism and exoticism. She is hated for her African origins, but fascinating for her strangeness. This racism and exoticism are also apparent in *Emitai* and *Camp Thiaroye*, precisely in the image Europeans have of black soldiers as endowed with a strength that is both savage and enviable.

*Black Girl* At a dinner, while Diouana is serving Madame's guests, one of them gazes at her intently. Finally, the guest walks to Diouana unexpectedly and kisses her without her consent, exclaiming, with the smile of someone who senses that he is about to experience something extraordinary, since he had never kissed a "Negress" before. For that guest, Diouana is a mere object of experiment. He has certainly heard recounted many times the adventures of white explorers in the "heart of darkness," which tend to represent the natives in sexual terms. The guest's words ("kissing a Negress") and the act that follows these words (the kiss that the guest violently plants on Diouana's cheek) are not devoid of sexual insinuations. Even though Madame came to the kitchen later to apologize to Diouana on behalf of her guest, telling Diouana that the man was just joking, the guest's words and gesture are charged with the ambiguities that govern the relationship between the white colonizer and the black colonized. Why would kissing a black woman be different from kissing a white woman? What could be the inference behind the thinking of Madame's guest other than sexual? Madame's guest is representative of the imperial mentalities that come to the colony with the outlook of the "discoverer," their heads filled with fantasies about the natives and their environments, usually sexual fantasies that they hope to fulfill.

*Emitai* After being kidnapped by the French army's black troops, the young Diola men are herded onto a parade ground, where they listen to a speech by the French commander. The commander congratulates them on volunteering to serve their homeland, France. He tells them they should feel honored by the opportunity France has given them to demonstrate their value and attachment to France. He tells them that they should prove themselves worthy of their fathers, who before them demonstrated their courage on the battlefields of the First World War. Indeed, the notion of the black soldier's extraordinary courage on the battlefield, which was attached to the fathers of these kidnapped young people, and which the commander now expects of them, has a history that is fraught with racism. During the First European War, French war engineers were convinced that blacks had warlike predispositions that could serve the French army in its fight against Germany. In fact, they were convinced that particular tribes had particular innate aggressive abilities. It was hoped that thanks to their "natural warlike abilities" the black soldiers, with the technical support of their French counterparts, would be formidable fighters against the Germans. Actually, French war engineers were so convinced that warlike abilities were innate to particular tribes that they recommended recruiting in specific tribal proportions. Senegal was the field of predilection of the racist recruiters, thus the term *Senegalese tirailleurs* (sharpshooters) (which will later be used to characterize any troops from French colonies). In fact, to frighten their enemies (the Germans) into fleeing the battleground,

French newspapers depicted the *tirailleurs* as cannibalistic, beastly creatures, half-men half-animals, charging at the German soldiers with extraordinary savagery. Some French cartoons portrayed African soldiers as savages and barbarians wearing necklaces made of German soldiers' ears. Likewise, German propaganda papers accused France of introducing black soldiers into a white war, thus sullyng a civilized white war fought on white soil with black, dark, bestial blood. From those for whom they fought, as well as from those against whom they fought, black soldiers suffered racism; they were beasts that could be disposed of without having to account to anyone. In *Emitai*, the newly arrived white lieutenant, who, ever since he was assigned to the Diola region, has been dying to torture the Diola women to have them say where they hid the rice, who dreamed of going on a rampage against the Diola, and who asked his colleague if they could not just kill all the Diola and get over with it, finally finds satisfaction. At the end of the film, in a horrific scene that the French authorities cut for screenings in France, he gives the order to open fire on harmless peasants lined up along a dirt road.

*Camp Thiaroye* In this film, the extent of colonial racism is all the greater because the French people and French soldiers cannot see the soldiers who defended them against German aggression as equal human beings. In fact, it is as if the French felt diminished by having been liberated by blacks, and that acting callously towards blacks would mark the French's supposed superiority. Already during the landing of the soldiers, Captain Labrousse expressed his displeasure at seeing them so well dressed in American uniforms. And gleefully, he later orders the soldiers' American uniforms to be exchanged for the more degrading outfits of the African soldiers. From the racist whites' perspective, the soldiers must not be allowed to believe that they are on an equal footing with the whites, that they can be entitled to the same privileges as the whites. Therefore, Diatta is chased out of a brothel as soon as it is discovered that he is not American but African. An African-American soldier would have been tolerated. Diatta is a mere African. In the European imagination, Africa is the continent of primitiveness, and it must remain so. However, Sembène detests facile generalizations. Captain Raymond is a defender of the soldiers' rights. Diatta has a white wife and an interracial daughter. This is Sembène's way of telling us that not all French people or not all Europeans are racist, and that the judgment on European racism must be nuanced.

**Work:** Sembène emphasizes work as an essential element in human development. Just as work validates a person, unemployment kills individual self-worth. Female unemployment is an even more damaging for African nations when African women, as Sembène often points out, are the backbone of the continent. That is why Sembène sees unemployment as one of postcolonial African governments' greatest failures.

*Black Girl* The film opens with Diouana stepping out of her family's backyard and announcing to the school teacher (played by Sembène) that she is going to look for work. Diouana goes up and down the residential districts of Dakar, ringing in vain at the doors of residents disdainful of such soliciting. Finally, she lands in the "Maids' Square." There, she realizes that she is not the only woman looking for work, and that under the arid Dakar sun, dozens of women are waiting to be hired as maids. All these women could have waited, as tradition dictates, for a man to marry them and be their protector and provider. All too often, however, this assumption of responsibility for women by men comes at the price of the loss of women's dignity and freedom. The joy with which Diouana runs through the streets of Dakar, the lightness with which she twirls around the water fetchers to celebrate her new job, the self-assurance with which she announces the news to the school teacher and her mother are all signs of the satisfaction of knowing that she can preserve her dignity and freedom by taking charge of her life. In this way, Sembène calls on decision-makers to address the issue of women's work in the same way as they do for men. He seems to be saying that women's dignity must be preserved. However, let it not only be through a maid's work, acquired after hours of combing the streets and being grilled by the African sun, but dignified work for which women are prepared through equal education.

*Mandabi* Ibrahima has been unemployed for four years, and feeds his family only with alms from neighbors and groceries obtained on credit from the grocer, Mbarka. Like his uncle, young Abdou was unable to land a job back home after graduating. So, he decided to go into exile in France as a street sweeper, and to take evening classes in Business Studies in the hope of eventually moving into commercial activities. The scourge of unemployment seems so endemic that it defines people's lives. Apart from the women, who are busy with household chores or at the local markets, most of the men seem to sink into



indolence, watching out for the slightest fortune from their neighbor so that they, too, can take advantage of it. Ibrahima's compound, for example, becomes the theater of the needy as soon as news of the money order spreads. His idle friend decides to accompany him to the post office, hoping for a loan of 5,000 francs in return. The imam also comes to him for a loan of 5,000 francs. Madiagne comes to beg for ten kilograms of rice. And all these unemployed men, in their daily activities, are ultimately nothing more than professional beggars. Here Sembène takes secret aim at African governments addicted to international aid. They are just like all those men who have their hands stretched out every day and must devise begging strategies to feed their families.

*Guelwaar* Senegal was a country where begging was on the rise. For Sembène, this inclination to wait for a handout from others is a habit inherited from the government, which has elevated it to the status of national policy, killing any effort on the part of Senegalese to achieve dignity. The filmmaker urges his compatriots to earn their living through their work, whatever that may be, and not to demean themselves by begging. Indeed, Sophie, Guelwaar's daughter, works as a prostitute in Dakar. The money she earns from selling her body enables her to support her parents and her brother, Aloys. Sophie's friend, also a prostitute, pays for her brother's medical studies and supports her parents and many other siblings. When Sophie's mother, Nogoy, reveals to her husband that their daughter supports them through prostitution, Guelwaar naturally replies that he prefers his daughter to be a prostitute than a beggar. For Guelwaar, as immoral as some people may see Sophie's profession, at least she earns her bread by the sweat of her brow and does not spend her days begging. It is a noble activity, which Guelwaar contrasts with the shameful and dishonorable begging of the Senegalese rulers who, since independence, have waited every day for international aid to feed their people. To make this critique of the dereliction of duty of the Senegalese, and African, rulers, Sembène chooses the most offensive work in a Muslim society, prostitution, to which he attributes a meliorative value in the face of the resignation of the ruling class. Guelwaar, undoubtedly Sembène's spokesman on this subject, has this to say: "Shame on the man who, with his children, expects his livelihood from others." Indeed, this echoes the words of Sembène, who in an interview declared: "The country cannot survive from begging raised into a state policy." For Sembène, the behavior of Africa's governing class, which has surrendered in the search for solutions, and which waits every day for international food aid, is beneath prostitution.

**Education** Critics rarely mention Sembène's name without adding that he is self-taught. Indeed, Sembène dropped out of school at the age of twelve. Everything he learned after that, he taught himself. Sembène's informal education and his membership in the Communist Party made him a champion of the struggle for workers' rights, which he led both in Dakar against the railway company and in France on the Marseilles docks. For Sembène, then, education of the masses is important, as educated workers know their rights and are better equipped to fight the abuse that powerful and malevolent employers can exert on their employees. Sembène explores the tension between employee and employer in *Black Girl*.

*Black Girl* Madame takes advantage of the fact that Diouana is far from home and, above everything else, due to her lack of education, that Diouana does not have the resources to denounce her employers and officially claim her rights against excessive working hours imposed on her and the psychological and physical abuses she endures. Diouana knows she is being exploited. She understands that the terms of the contract between her and her employers are not respected. She understands that the language and behavior of her employers and their friends towards her are abusive. And she revolts. However, Diouana's revolt is hampered by her lack of information and exit strategies. Rather than make her tormentors pay, the young woman kills herself. Diouana's situation is comparable to that of many victims of abuse in the workplace who prefer to remain silent or blame themselves for the abuse of power by their employers, a situation that education on employee rights could significantly reduce and perhaps even eliminate. Seven years before President Nixon signed the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Sembène, the activist and trade unionist, made a film calling for safe and healthful working conditions for workers. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Sembène was among the precursors of the struggle for education and workers' rights.

**Power (abuse):** In theory, individuals seek political power in order to put it at the disposal of the people, to become agents of development committed to improving the living conditions of the people and protecting the people. In practice, however, this is rarely the case. All too often, power is seized for the selfish purpose of personal self-aggrandizement and for crushing others. This seems to be one of Sembène's major

criticisms in *Ceddo*. In *Camp Thiaroye*. The filmmaker shows that the French army is the armed wing of an abusive French administration towards its colonies. In *Moolaadé*, it is by formatting women's brains that the men of a small village hope to exercise their power on them.

*Ceddo* The king, for instance, has no qualms about overturning the matrilineal system on which the stability of his kingdom rests as soon as he is given the opportunity of passing the baton of governance of the kingdom to his son rather than to his nephew. The king's attitude has at its core a selfish motive. While the rules of the kingdom require him to make his nephew his heir, he picks his son, allegedly the blood of his blood, over his nephew. As a result, he shifts from being the protector of ancestral traditions to the protector of his own petty interests. Instead of being the protector of his people, he becomes their tormentor, dividing the kingdom into categories of insiders and outsiders and enslaving the latter. The Imam who convinces the king of this change presents himself as a man inspired by the wisdom of Allah. In truth, the Imam's hidden objective is to seize power for his own personal aggrandizement, that is, to become king in the place of the king, to reign as absolute master over a submissive populace. The Imam's subterfuges to achieve this goal are brutal. He has the king assassinated and wages war in the name of Allah against those who oppose his authority. Alongside the king and the Imam, there are also the petty players of the court, the nobles, who do not want to lose their advantages, and who, to preserve those advantages, backstab ancestral institutions as well as the king. This selfish quest for power, or the antisocial exercise of power, which Sembène criticizes, made *Ceddo* a target for religious leaders and political rulers alike, who banned the film in Senegal for eight years.

*Camp Thiaroye* When the white officers sit around a table to decide whether or not to pay the soldiers their wages and demobilization money, and exchange the soldiers' French banknotes at the right rate, one of them argues that this would ruin France, which is currently experiencing post-war austerity. To which, captain Raymond replies that France must not build itself up by swindling a thousand Africans. Here, Sembène's criticism is very clear. It is not just a condemnation of the injustice done to the Senegalese soldiers, but it is also a criticism of the entire French engineered economic apparatus built on power abuse, which helps France maintain its hegemony in Africa. During the colonial period, France mandated free entry of French goods in the French African colonies and imposed tariffs on colonial goods entering France. This decision had the obvious consequence of impoverishing the colonies while enriching the metropolis. France also forbade its colonies to export certain products to foreign markets, thus forcing those foreign countries to purchase only from France products that would otherwise be available in the colonies. In addition, France placed duties on some foreign imports competing with colonial goods entering France. These abusive limitations on the colonies were enforced by France's military in a clear case of abuse of military power.

*Moolaadé* In order to better exercise their power over the women of the village, the men want to ensure that nothing, either material or abstract, can stand in the way of their indoctrination of the women. For many years, the women have been formatted to believe that they are impure and inferior to men. This successful propaganda has allowed men to control women's lives, unchallenged. Then, with globalization and the democratization of the news through the media arises the real threat for men of seeing their power challenged. The radio became a common fixture in every home and companion to the women, who learned from it that their men have been feeding them untruths. Collé tells the dignitary who likens her to Satan that the Grand Imam said on the radio that purification (excision) is not mandated by the Qur'an. She tells him that many of the women who go to the holy site of Mecca are not excised. And when the men start confiscating their radios, the women, by Sanata's voice, declare that the purpose is to lock up their minds to better rule them. "How can the men think that they can lock up something invisible?" This is the question that one of the women asks. Indeed, how can they lock up something so invisible and so fluid as the mind? What these women are pointing out is men's illusion of power. What these women are saying is that nothing can stop women's flow of awareness, not even taking their radios away from them. What these women are saying is that the process of reevaluation of patriarchal values is taking hold, and men's power rests on shaky grounds.

**RELIGION:** Religion is an unavoidable aspect of African societies. Everything, or almost everything, revolves around religion. People are judged and measured according to religious morality, and every act is weighed in the scales of religion. Sembène tackles this important aspect of African societies in almost all of his films. Sembène's treatment of the topic often reflects his Marxist-Leninist inclination.

*Mandabi* Ibrahim Dieng is unemployed and lives by his wits. But he is convinced that if he has managed to overcome life's vicissitudes, it is because Allah is in his corner, protecting and guiding him. So, he glorifies Allah every day, good and bad. He is poor, but he gives alms to those poorer than himself, convinced that Allah will repay him a hundredfold. Religion is also used to justify certain reprehensible acts. When the local Imam and Ibrahim's neighbors come to him begging for rice and loans, they come to him promising Allah's blessings. And Ibrahim, who is at the end of his rope himself, would have handed over, in the name of Allah, the last of his family's resources and starved his children if his wives had not stepped in. The Senegalese commitment to religion, Sembène seems to suggest, is largely theatrical. Indeed, once satiated and having noisily expurgated the effluvia of his digestion, Ibrahim falls asleep and forgets his Friday prayer. As for the Imam, the religious guide who is supposed to advise and calm any unrest, he is instead the propagator of rumors and Ibrahim's betrayer when the latter sincerely tells him that he is unable to grant his request for a loan. The Senegalese man's spirituality seems to be a mere façade, which, at the end of the film, prompts a disillusioned Ibrahim to promise that he too will be a wolf in the great Senegalese community of wolves and thieves.

*Emitai* The religious question Sembène raises in *Emitai* is that of a people's loyalty to their gods, who seem deaf to their prayers. The Diola people practice a polytheistic animist religion. As the film's title ('God of Thunder') indicates, each natural phenomenon has its own god. To remain in the good graces of the gods, the Diola make offerings to them. In the film, these offerings consist of chicken or goat sacrifices. Although the Diola are very attentive to pleasing their gods, the latter do not show up when their devotees call out for help. The young men of the village are continually kidnapped by the colonial army and sent to fight for France. The men are humiliated in front of their wives and children. The village empties itself of its vigorous arms and withers. Despite all this, the gods remain impassive. Now, it is the rice, the sacred food used to honor the dead during funerals, that is threatened with seizure by the colonizers. In order to meet the needs of its army at war, France imposed a tax on rice, requiring every Diola family to provide a large quantity of its harvest. Refusing to comply, the women, who were the main rice growers, hid the harvest in the mangroves. When the colonial army is deployed on a punitive mission, the men meet in conclave to decide what measures to take. Some of them propose that the gods be consulted and offerings made to them. Djimeko, the tribe's valiant warrior and chief, urges his peers to act immediately, wasting no time in offerings and prayers to gods who have abandoned them. While some clan members insist that they must wait for the gods' answer and accuse Djimeko of blasphemy, Djimeko rallies the clan warriors and launches an attack against the colonial army. The arrows of Djimeko's warriors are useless against the guns of the colonial army, and Djimeko's troops are exterminated and he himself seriously wounded. Before dying of his wounds, Djimeko has a tense exchange with the gods, who accuse him of having doubted them. Djimeko tells them that they are selfish, that they would rather be worshipped than think of protecting their people, that they have put their own lives above those of their people. The gods condemn Djimeko to death for his impertinence. Djimeko accepts his death and retorts that, with his death, they have just signaled their own. For Djimeko, God is what functions, and there is no reason to continue idolizing a god who does not function, that is, who does not satisfy the expectations of those who pray to him.

*Xala* Sembène's critique of religion is acerbic and multifold. Religion can be a breeding ground for abuse and insincerity. El Hadji, by his name, is a holy man. In Senegal, the titles "El Hadji" (for men) and "Adja" (for women) apply to Muslims who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and who, on their return to their communities, are credited with a certain holiness, honesty and wisdom. El Hadji and his first wife, Adja, have accomplished their pilgrimage and enjoy the respect of their community. However, El Hadji falls far short of the behavior expected of him by his title. Firstly, his recourse to fetishism, *marabouts* and pagan rituals makes him not a herald of Islam but a hypocrite, who surfs on animist or Islamic beliefs when it suits him. When El Hadji wants a third wife, he invokes his loyalty to the Muslim religion, which entitles him to four wives. When he believes himself to be afflicted with *xala*, which renders him impotent, El Hadji becomes a fervent believer in animist rituals and relies on them to the point of ridicule and comic. He complies, for instance, with the injunctions of his first *marabout*, who prescribes that he wear mystical bracelets and belts, smear his whole body with a mysterious concoction, and crawl at night towards his wife, holding a talisman clenched between his teeth--rituals that do not fail to frighten the young wife. And yet, a few days earlier, El Hadji had refused to comply with his mother-in-law's advice to sit on a mortar, a pestle clenched between his thighs, to guarantee his virility towards his new wife. El Hadji found the ritual ridiculous and outdated. El Hadji's faith is perfunctory and disingenuous. It vacillates according to his interests of the moment. His title

as a pious and honest Muslim enables him to do good business in his import-export firm. But recourse to ancestral rites, which he dismisses out of hand when things are going well, serves as a last resort when he finds himself in trouble. El Hadji's vacillation is the condition of the colonized, always caught between ebb and flow.

*Ceddo* *Ceddo* places Africa at the crossroads of three religions: Animism, the original religion of Africa; Islam, the religion that arrived with the descent into West Africa of the Moroccan Almoravids in the 11th century; and Christianity, which from the 15th century preceded the colonial armies into West Africa. The two revealed religions, in their resolve to dethrone animism, proceeded in different ways, and Sembène's film dramatizes the different procedures used by Christianity and Islam. The Christian priest in *Ceddo* proceeds by gentle persuasion. He hopes, by the example of patience, humility, service and piety, to bring new converts to him and to God. He takes no aggressive action. In a kind of patience that resembles indolence, he watches the life of the kingdom unfold. In his most beautiful dreams, he imagines, at his requiem mass, all the kingdom's inhabitants, nobles and commoners, men and women, old and young, animists and Muslims, accepting the host from the hands of Madior Fall, the king's nephew, the first black cardinal. The priest awakes from his stupor to realize that his dream is far from being fulfilled. The nave of his makeshift church remains empty. Meanwhile, the Imam, intolerant and absolutist, uses coercion and violence to widen his circle of followers. He decrees the enslavement of the *Ceddo*; he orders the destruction of their idols; he changes the rules of heredity of the kingdom. With the complicity of those close to the king, he has the latter assassinated and sets himself up as king. He wages *Jihad* (holy war) against those who refuse to embrace Islam, and goes on a rampage. He sets fire to the church and kills the priest. He forcibly baptizes his prisoners with Muslim names. He reigns as absolute master until the king's daughter, whom he intends to marry to legitimize his power, kills him.

*Guelwaar* What happens when Christians and Muslims go after each other with clubs? Answer: the political elite reap the benefits of this conflict. For the political elite, who are up to their necks in embezzling international food aid, it is better that the eyes of international observers and journalists are turned away from them. It is better that the rhetoric of endless religious and tribal conflicts dominates the headlines rather than investigations into where foreign donations to Senegal end up. From an internal point of view, a population who is busy waging war against itself and killing its own brothers and sisters over religious considerations has less time to devote to finding the origins of its social woes. Senegal has serious problems, including the troubles of its youth reduced to prostitution, like *Guelwaar's* daughter, Sophie, and her friend, Hélène; or reduced to unemployment, like *Guelwaar's* second son, Aloys, who is disabled and is called useless, even by his mother, Nogoy Marie. Senegalese peasants are often victims of droughts, which significantly reduce their harvests and plunge them into precarity. International food aid, which is supposed to bring relief to the people, is misappropriated by a class of selfish leaders who are indifferent to the plight of the masses. For this uncaring and corrupt class, it is a good thing for the people to occupy themselves with interethnic, intercommunal or interreligious squabbles. It is a diversion that allows the elite to rob the people in total tranquility. This conflict between Muslims and Christians over a dead body is allegorical for the Marxist-Leninist Sembène: it is the drug offered to the proletariat by the rulers, which prevents the proletariat from understanding the real causes of its exploitation.

*Faat Kiné* Kiné's marriage to Jean, Sembène wants us to understand, is that of two religions, Islam and Catholicism, which in Senegal coexist peacefully, observing and respecting but also distrusting each other. The Muslim religion is very strict in its conception of marriage: it has a negative view of inter-religious marriage, unless the non-Muslim partner converts to Islam. This view of marriage has often held back inter-religious marriages. When they see their parents infatuated with each other, Djib, Kiné's son, and his friend Joe, Jean's son, already imagine them breaking with strict religious exclusivity and leading a married life. For their parents, they advocate marriage outside the mosque and the church, a marriage celebrated by the secular power, that of the mayor. Although timid, this overtaking is not new, and did not wait for Sembène's film to take place. Muslims and Christians have been marrying and living in Senegal for decades. However, financial means have had a significant impact. When one or other of the partners is financially well-off, his or her will has imposed itself on that of the clerics, who prefer to pretend they have not seen anything, allowing the couple to continue practicing their respective faiths. Sometimes, too, the richer partner imposes his or her religion on the other. Sembène's film, by putting Kiné and Jean on the

same financial footing, shows that a union that respects each other's religion is possible beyond financial considerations.

**Superstition** Animism, which is based on the belief that the elements of nature have souls and sometimes represent gods, demands a certain respect between people and their environments. When people offend these elements or nature's gods, they may pay the price by being cursed. And when a member of the community suffers injustice, he or she can call upon the gods for justice. In his films, Sembène shows how the lives of Africans, be they Muslim or Christian, are structured around superstitious beliefs.

*Xala* El Hadji suffers from temporary erectile dysfunction. What in Western societies could be interpreted as the result of a psychological affect (stress, overworking, exhaustion) or a pathological affect (blood pressure, nerve damage), finds, in the context of animism, a mysterious, supernatural explanation. El Hadji's affliction immediately invites all sorts of suppositions. One wonders who he angered who wants to take revenge on him. The Chamber of Commerce the president's first suspicions are directed at Oumi, El Hadji's second wife. Rama's suspicions are directed at her own mother, Adja, who swears that she would never think of doing such a thing to her husband. El Hadji himself suspects Oumi at one point and in his thoughts begs her to deliver him, swearing to divorce his third wife if it is his third marriage that has offended her. In the hope of healing from his affliction, El Hadji makes the rounds of the marabouts, who prescribe remedies, each as absurd as the next. Ngone's mother, who asks El Hadi to perform the virility ritual before his first night with the new bride, might have an excuse for the skeptics of animism. She could be accused of falling easily into the obscurantism of superstition due to her lack of formal education and the fact that she is immersed in Senegalese tradition. Yet, what Sembène seems to be telling us, by making the Senegalese elites (El Hadji, the president) and the new Senegalese generation (Rama) as superstitious as the traditional Senegalese (Ngone's mother, Modu, El Hadji's driver, the beggars and the marabouts), is that superstition has reached all strata of the Senegalese society.

*Moolaadé* Superstition is a major aspect of life in this small village. If the 150-year-old mosque in the village and the children's day at the village Koranic school are anything to go by, the inhabitants are theoretically all Muslims. Indeed, the men of the village justify the practice of clitoridectomy on the basis of Islam. And yet, what seems to regulate the lives of the villagers is more superstition than belief in Allah. The *moolaadé* under whose mystical protection Collé places the children is a pagan belief that the excising women dare not defy for fear of being struck by misfortune. Clitoridectomy itself is subject to superstition. A *bilakoro* or unexcised woman, is believed in this community to be an impure woman, whom men must avoid, because she cannot bear them children. This naïve belief has been instilled in the population with such success that Collé, who opposes it, is considered crazy, irrational and even possessed by satanic power. Balla, Ciré's eldest son, tells his mother Hadjatou that Collé is a madwoman. And when Collé confronts the men at the assembly to tell them that clitoridectomy does more harm than good to women, one of the elders calls her possessed and a Satan. In this community, where superstition rather than logic guides people's actions, it's Collé, the rational woman, who is called irrational.

**Corruption:** Senegal is a society of moral and spiritual corruption, Sembène seems to be telling us. Morally, Senegalese society seems to give priority to those who break the law or engage in simulation. *Mandabi* features corrupt individuals who are successful while decent individuals have trouble getting by. With *Xala*, Sembène criticizes the buying of conscience, the influence peddling, and other behaviors that harm good governance in post-colonial Africa. In *Guelwaar*, corruption is endemic amongst the elite, even those who appear reliable.

*Mandabi* Mbarka is a shopkeeper who engages in illegal practices. He's a loan shark who exploits the hardships of the people in his neighborhood to enrich himself and drive them further into poverty. In addition, the "photographer" is a swindler who never puts a roll of film in his camera and charges his customers for services he never renders. Ibrahima's nephew, Mbaye Sarr, takes advantage of his uncle's illiteracy to cheat him out of his money order and to sell his house, and he has no regrets. In government services, nothing is easy to obtain, unless one bribes employees or knows an influential person who can intervene on the applicant's behalf. For example, to collect the check given to him by his nephew Hamath, Ibrahima, who has no identity card, must pay a bribe of 300 francs to a bank teller, via a broker posted at the entrance. And to obtain a birth certificate, Ibrahima has to use his nephew's connections. Alongside this

moral corruption, there is the spiritual corruption symbolized by the neighborhood Imam. Jealous, insensitive and a gossip, the Imam is the antithesis of what his position requires of him. In the Imam's unbridled logic, Allah grants mercy only to those who help him, the Imam.

*Xala* The new rulers, the members of the Chamber of Commerce, did not wait long to be corrupted. The day after the local elites took power and evicted the colonial administrators from the Chamber of Commerce, the latter returned to the Chamber with briefcases loaded with money and immediately fell into the good graces of the local rulers. From this moment on, the former colonial administrators turned into advisors to the new management team, becoming their eyes, their ears, and their brains: Thus, paradoxically, the local rulers relocated their ability to think and devise solutions to their country's problems to those from whom they wanted their independence. The corrupted African elites, by falling prey to bribery, enabled the return to power of the former colonizers. They allowed neo-colonization to have a foothold in Africa. The immorality of the local leaders did not stop at this aberration. Now, freed from the tasks of governing, which they abandoned to the neo-colonizers, they devoted themselves to issuing bad checks, to shady business dealing, to the management of their private companies supported by the embezzlement of public goods and public markets. For example, El Hadji supplied his stores with tons of rice and other goods acquired illegally from the National Food Suppliers. Other members of the Chamber of Commerce peddled their influence, pushing businessmen's bids for procurement in exchange for bribes. El Hadji's downfall came when he dared to issue bad checks to other members of the Chamber of Commerce and to the government. El Hadji was then excluded from the Chamber of Commerce. Before leaving, however, he spoke up to denounce his colleagues for hypocrisy, accusing them of being like him, corrupt sellouts, who wanted to pass for models of virtue.

*Guelwaar* All the people in power seem to be corrupt. The Muslims and the Christians, who are fighting one another on the ground of religious faith, seem to have more in common than they are aware of. They are all the victims of their leaders' immorality. They are being fleeced by the greedy and egoistical elite of Senegal. In the film, political leaders turn the distribution of international food aid into political rallies, where they pass it off as the result of their own perspicacity. Despite this self-congratulation, which passes them off as rulers concerned about the welfare of their populations, the leaders divert most of the aid, which they sell on local markets and in the private stores they have opened for that purpose. Thus, international food aid, which is supposed to be distributed free of charge to the population, is sold to the same population by the elite. In a trickledown effect, senior government officials, village and district chiefs, and middle-level civil servants all benefit at the expense of the little people. Embezzlement of aid has become endemic in Senegal. The Ciss brothers denounce the misappropriation of aid by the village chief and police chief. But Guelwaar denounces embezzlement at the highest level, by regional and national leaders. And it is Guelwaar's denunciation that leads to his assassination. However, Guelwaar's assassination does not stop his fight against corruption and indignity. The youth he trained take up the torch. This is Sembène's hope for a nobler, less corrupt Senegal.

**Patriarchy:** Sembène's films excoriate patriarchy, especially in societies built around the abusive power of the father. His films often burlesque the African omnipotent father as someone who is actually losing control of his kingdom. Ibrahima of *Mandabi*, El Hadji of *Xala* and Gaye of *Faat Kiné* are typical of the powerless fathers who are outwitted by women. In fact, Ibrahima survives his difficult condition only thanks to the wits of his two wives.

*Mandabi* Despite being a deficient husband and father, who keeps his family on the edge of starvation, Ibrahima is a king in his household. He is the epitome of Senegalese life organized around the preponderance of the all-powerful male. In Ibrahima's household, everyone stops whatever they are doing to serve the master. The children may cry from boredom or hunger, but until Ibrahima's needs are met, no attention will be given to them. When Ibrahima enters the compound, his wives welcome him on their knees. When he speaks to them, they kneel to listen. And when he sits down to eat, one of his wives has to make sure that his fish is cleaned of any bones that might cause him discomfort, and that the heat of Dakar is blown away from his face by a fan she manually activates. And only when she has lulled Ibrahima to sleep with a good massage after his collation can his wife withdraw to tend to the needs of her children and herself. For the Imam, all these efforts made by Ibrahima's wives to satisfy their husband are not enough. Maty dared to contradict her husband's order to give the family's last kilograms of rice to Madiagne. Furthermore, Ibrahima will not give the Imam the money he got for pawning Aram's necklace, and which

he intends to give to his sister, Astou. For the Imam, this is proof that Ibrahima is being robbed of his authority by his wives and women in general. So, he advises Ibrahima to get his act together and remember that men must first help men.

*Xala* When Rama opposes her father's third marriage and, therefore, places him in the category of dogs and liars, he punishes her with a slap, stressing to her that his household is governed by his rule, the rule of the law of the father, and he suggests that she leave his house if she does not approve of that law. He also suggests that it is highly improbable that she can escape that law. Indeed, he tells her that the heroes of this country are men like himself, that is, proudly polygamous. Family being the archetypical foundation of patriarchy, it is by consolidating the fortress of his family that El Hadji hopes to promote his power and project himself in the larger Senegalese society. Consolidating his fortress means, for El Hadji, having several wives and a multitude of children. Yet, patriarchy, Sembène seems to suggest, is in decline. Sembène demonstrates this by attacking patriarchy's primary institution (the family) and patriarchy's preferred tool of governance (male erection). Patriarchy's erection falls on the very day he increases his harem. Patriarchy's loss of power had already been foreshadowed by seemingly innocuous events, but which, nonetheless, sounded the alarm bells of an imminent downfall: Rama's revolt, Oumi's insolence, the extortion by Oumi's children. Patriarchy is no longer taken seriously. It is turned on its head until it loses its essential pillars. And when patriarchy tries to regain his footing, he is ridiculed by *marabouts* and illusion sellers; this fills him with more resentment and frustration, which he pours onto the most vulnerable—his daughter Rama, the beggars and the handicapped. It is at the end of the film, when those who have been his stepping-stone in his social ascent (Oumi, Ngone, Ngone's mother, but also the beggars and the handicapped) take their revenge on patriarchy that Sembène signals the end of patriarchy. Is this not an overly optimistic filmic gesture in a Senegal that is still a long way from burying the law of the father?

*Ceddo* As he often does in his films, Sembène places African woman at the center of the story. Feminine or feminist actions in the film are rare. However, they are condensed in the person of Princess Dior Yacine, who is, for most of the film, the Ceddo's hostage. The princess being taken hostage is paradoxical, in that it resembles the exile of a statesperson from a country in crisis, until the conditions are right for his/her return and safety. Indeed, Yacine represents matriarchy in exile, threatened with being crushed by a war of interests waged in her kingdom between three patriarchies: her father, the Catholic Church and Islam. Whoever wins this war of patriarchies, the ultimate goal is the same: to erase matriarchy, the system that has always prevailed in the kingdom. Aware of the place she is now being given in the kingdom by her father, who has already renounced the matrilineal system in favor of the patrilineal one, as well as by the priest and the Imam, who dream of a society based on the law of patriarchy, the princess begins to question her convictions. She undresses herself from the symbols of the kingdom and of Islam by taking off her traditional robe and purifies herself in the river. And when a fugitive Ceddo tells her that her father has been murdered by the Imam, who wants her in marriage, she seizes the rifle of one of his guards and kills him with a bullet to the heart. As she leaves the scene and turns her back to the people, they have their eyes fixed on her. To the people, the princess becomes the symbol of a new-found freedom, the heroine, the new breed of person who will lead the kingdom towards the promised land, back to the ancient matriarchal traditions trampled by exogenous Christian and Islamic ambitions.

*Faat Kiné* In Senegal, as in many African communities, while the father is the repository of the family's honor, this honor rests on women's respectability. Women must ensure that their actions conform to social morality because otherwise they would sully the respectability of the father, who is the mirror of the family in society. For women, conforming to social morality means having a well-regulated social life, not having sex outside marriage, being legally or religiously married (preferably before the age of thirty), and not being divorced. Kiné has failed to meet these requirements on several occasions: as a teenager, she became pregnant by her married teacher, Gaye. This fault would be excusable if Gaye had saved her by marrying her and recognizing her child, which he refused to do. Disgraced by his daughter's condition, Kiné's father tried to burn her but only succeeded in severely crippling Kiné's mother, who covered her daughter with her body. Kiné's father decided to disown his daughter. Then, as a young gas station attendant, Kiné was impregnated a second time by Djib's father, who also fled after promising her marriage. A single mother for the second time, Kiné raised her children and persevered in her job until she became the manager, secured a comfortable income and bought her own home. Kiné's social success did not, however, spare her the stigma associated with being a single woman. Nor did the upward mobility of her friends, Amy and Mada, spare them the negative judgments of society. Kiné's children and her mother insisted that she marry, and

set out to match Kiné with Jean. As for Amy, she was remarried without her consent to her ex-husband, whom she had divorced to avoid a polygamous union. It is as if social harmony could only be established if a woman's sexuality conformed to her father's laws. For Kiné, her tumultuous life and her language, which Massamba, her friend Jean and even her son find vulgar, are tamed as soon as she falls under Jean's sway.

*Moolaadé* Life in this little Burkina Faso village is organized around the assumed superiority of men. Girls, the elders say, are naturally impure and must be purified before they can enter into union with men. Girls are purified by an operation that removes their clitoris. This conception of women's nature stems from a misinterpretation of the Qur'an, which Collé denounces when a village dignitary accuses her of disobeying Islamic law by granting sanctuary to four girls who have escaped from the excision camp. To make Collé break the mystical invocation that protects the girls the men of the village suggest that her husband, who says he has never laid a hand on a woman, flog her in public. For the men, Collé's opposition to female excision is a challenge to their authority. Collé's brother-in-law, Amath, tells his younger brother that the latter's wife has made him the laughingstock of the community and disgraced his family; and he gives his brother a leather whip to beat his wife in public to assert his male authority and force her to release the girls. This gives away the real reason why men insist on clitoridectomy. The clitoris is that organ which, by its constitution and shape, imitates the penis and therefore threatens patriarchal authority. To guarantee the authority of man over woman, the clitoris must be removed before marriage. Religion has nothing to do with clitoridectomy. The clitoris is the sign of patriarchy's malaise, which must be eliminated so that patriarchy can be sure of ruling as sole master.

**Exchange:** What does Africa gain from its relationship with the West? Sembène's diagnosis of this question is bleak. In *Mandabi*, the filmmaker uses a very clever metaphor to show the inequality of the terms of trade between North and South. In *Camp Thiaroye*, Sembène shows how the CFA, the single currency of 14 French-speaking African countries, functions as a machine of French imperialism.

*Mandabi* Ibrahima's nephew Abdou, who has gone into exile in France and is unsure when he will return to his native country, raises the crucial question of the deteriorating terms of trade between the West and Africa. Abdou is a young man with some education in Senegal, who, disillusioned by the impossibility of finding work in his country, offers himself to France as a street sweeper. Abdou is also taking evening classes with a view to obtaining a business degree. Abdou is a metaphor for the plundering of Africa's intellectual resources, exported to Europe as cheap, unskilled labor. Abdou promises his uncle to remain a good Muslim and a man of integrity, not to lose himself in Western immorality. These are noble sentiments, which, as we see in another of Ibrahima's nephews, Mbaye Sarr, could be compromised by the harsh realities of the Western terrain. Indeed, Sarr returns from Europe with a degree in Business Studies, only to turn out to be a notorious swindler. It is Sarr who promises one of his clients to sell him his uncle's house, taking advantage of Ibrahima's financial difficulties. And it is Sarr again, who, using a power of attorney given to him by his uncle to cash his money order, keeps the money for himself, throwing the unfortunate man into despair. Like the cheaper African cocoa beans that go to Europe and come back to Africa as chocolate bars packed with useless, overpriced calories, Abdou is what Africa sends to Europe, and Sarr is the manufactured product that comes back to Africa. They are metaphors for the deteriorating terms of trade between the South and the North.

*Camp Thiaroye* (monetary imperialism) The event that led to the massacre of the soldiers was their refusal to be swindled by the colonial administration, which, not content with denying them their war indemnities and pay, also wanted to exchange their French money at half the prevailing rate. What then is the colonial French franc? Indeed, when in 1945, French finance minister René Pleven announced the creation of the CFA franc as the new currency in the French African colonies, he had this to say: "In a show of her generosity and selflessness, metropolitan France, wishing not to impose on her far-away daughters the consequences of her own poverty, is setting different exchange rates for their currency." It would seem, from Pleven's words, that France was doing Africa a great favor with the institution of the CFA franc. In fact, the contrary was true: France was in economic difficulty. Joining the Bretton Woods institution in 1945 had devalued the French currency and weakened its economy. The creation of the CFA was France's strategy for pulling herself out of trouble by using Africa as her safety line. With the CFA franc, stronger than the French franc, Africa became a great market for French export goods, while it became difficult for Africa to export its goods to France. Since 1945, the CFA franc has remained a tool for France to establish its



hegemony in French Africa through monetary imperialism. The monetary policy of the 14 countries that use the CFA is formulated by the French Treasury, and each of these 14 countries is obliged to deposit at least 65% of its foreign exchange reserves in an "operational account" with the French treasury, plus 20% to cover any liabilities. Thus, 85% of the foreign exchange reserves of these African countries are controlled by the French Treasury. African banks do not formulate monetary policy. Profits from the investment of African reserves, which should theoretically be returned to the countries of the CFA franc zone countries, are in fact France's property. The officials of the French treasury are bound to secrecy about these African funds. Any African head of state who ventures to understand the system or to call for the repatriation of African reserves or the introduction of an African currency independent of the French treasury in the French-speaking sub-region suffers the fate of the Senegalese soldiers. In the best-case scenario, he is simply deposed, and in the worst-case scenario, accused of crimes against humanity and taken to the International Criminal Court (in the case of Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo) or simply eliminated (in the case of Burkina Faso president Thomas Sankara). The fate of the Senegalese soldiers hangs over the heads of African monetary sovereigntists like a sword of Damocles. Presently, the nations of Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger are meeting to see how to get out of the CFA zone. It will be interesting to see how France reacts to this "defiance."

**Postcolonial/neocolonial mindset** The legacy of colonization in Africa is not a glowing one in Sembène's films. It's a legacy of bureaucratic deficiency, corruption, laxity and the dereliction of duty. In Sembène's films, the characters who embody the West are often unreliable swindlers, intent only on the rapid accumulation of wealth by any means necessary.

*Mandabi* Ibrahima has received a money order from his nephew, Abdou. However, he can only cash the money order if he shows up at the post office with his identity card, which he does not have. And this is where Ibrahima's difficulties begin. Born in an era of predominantly oral traditions, when births were not dated numerically but rather by reference to natural or cultural events, Ibrahima is required to prove his identity with a document specifying his precise date of birth in order to be entitled to his money. He has a voter's card which vaguely states that he was born around 1900. However, this is insufficient for the town hall official, who tells him to think it over and not to return to the counter until he has determined the precise month in which he was born. Ibrahima's peregrinations to obtain an identity card show his maladjustment to the post- or neo-colonial world. Here, the world he has always known, that of the informal, collapses, and another world demands that he justify his existence, prove that he is not irrelevant. This new world is square, unforgiving, uncompromising. It refuses all negotiation, all explanation. Or maybe it has its own rules that Ibrahima cannot understand. Maybe, in spite of all its principles, this new world is just a rotten world where everything can be bought and sold. In truth, this new post-colonial or neo-colonial world has its rules, which Ibrahima ignores. They are no better than the rules of the old world. And when Ibrahima finally understands the general principles of this new world, in which his generous nephews Abdou and Hamath are only exceptions, but to which the employees of the post office and town hall, the young hustler at the bank, the fake photographer, the grocer and his nephew Sarr all belong, he decides that, like them, he too will be a wolf among wolves, a thief among thieves.

*Moolaadé* The small village in *Moolaadé* can easily be understood as a representation of the postcolonial state. What is this postcolonial state? First of all, with the arrival of Mercenary, it is a plastic state, where nothing that is produced can last. Although it sparkles in all sorts of colors, it is only certain to pollute. It would be redundant here to point out the difficulties Africa has in ridding itself of this pollution. Secondly, it is an alienated state. Even in this small, remote village, which produces millet and sorghum, the French baguette, this colonial staple, is what everyone wants, and Mercenary does know it and does not hesitate to raise the price of the French bread he sells, much to Doucouré's exasperation. The postcolonial state is also a state of violence and violations of human rights, particularly women's rights, as they are beaten, mutilated, and silenced. The postcolonial state is also the state of impunity, where people like Mercenary, who dare to defend the weakest, find themselves murdered without any investigation to establish responsibility. The postcolonial state is the state of muzzled people, of their isolation from sources of information, and of their programming by the state propaganda machine. The postcolonial state is the state of endless, pointless palaver that keep the nation in inertia, like these interminable and fruitless meetings presided over by Dougoutigui. But fortunately, the postcolonial state is the state that still has a great deal of room for progress, and whose young human resources, like those four little girls who defied excision to put themselves under the protection of a fearless woman, are ready to launch into the future.

The small village of *Moolaadé* reflects the impediments, tribulations and aspirations of the postcolonial state.

**Alienation** One undeniable consequence of colonization is the alienation of the African, his split between two personalities, and often his flight from his traditional culture. The alienated black wants to pass for a Westerner. In his quest for the garments of the West, the alienated black appears burlesque, clumsy and comical. At least, this is how Sembène portrays him in his films.

*Emitai* With the changes brought to the Diola society by colonization, also come the alienation and estrangement of people from their ancestral values. It is remarkable to see how quickly young Africans are transformed from protectors of their people to executioners of their people by the colonial system. First revolted by colonial abuses and refusing to be regimented, the young Diola are soon coopted by France. Indeed, kidnapped by colonial troops, trained in boot camps to march in step and to follow orders and dressed in khaki uniforms and red hats and equipped with guns, these young Diola find themselves singing with enthusiasm and pride the glory of France and being the most faithful and docile collaborators of the colonial system. Soon, they were used by the colonial system to increase its numbers by kidnapping other Africans. They, thus, became the most formidable tormentors of their fellow Africans. The black sergeant is an impressive example of the neurotic African running away from himself. Outfitted with the same trousers and service cap as his superiors (the ordinary African troops wear khaki shorts and red bonnets), the black sergeant now sees himself as one of the whites, although the treatment he receives from his two white superiors is far from consideration and reciprocity. He is an exploited person who does not understand that he is exploited, and who, for the little attention given to him by the white officers, hates his tribesmen to the point of wanting to distance himself from them as much as possible by subjugating them. His performance is burlesque and pathetic. He never walks when his superiors call him: he runs and he jumps. And when they give him orders, he shouts them with great gestures to his black subordinates. His zeal is superfluous. He snatches the sunshade from one of the gathered women, who is trying to protect herself from the scorching sun. And it is another woman, exasperated by his excess of zeal, who comes to snatch from his hands the parasol that he has so impudently taken. The black sergeant is the prototype of the black colonized whom the colonizer filled with white dreams, and who now despises his origins. The settler's intrusion into the Diolas' lives also alienates them from their ancestral beliefs. When the gods of the Diola do not seem to find immediate answers to the danger that threatens them and seem to remain deaf to the humiliation the Diola suffer from the white colonizers, doubt sets in, and some, like Djimeko, deny their beliefs.

*Xala* El Hadji is a schizophrenic, a man who hears several bells ringing in his head every day and doesn't really know which one to answer. When the colonized man in his traditional clothes comes to power, everything changes. Imbued with his new authority, El Hadji buys himself a Mercedes with the taxpayer's dime. He drinks only imported Evian water. He has his Mercedes washed only with mineral water. He refuses to lower himself to the practice of the pagan rituals recommended to him by his mother-in-law. He clears the sidewalks of beggars, whom he considers human waste and insults to the sight of tourists. And he insists that his daughter, Rama, a student at Dakar's Cheikh Anta Diop University, who loves to speak Wolof (Senegal's national language), only speak to him in French. El Hadji wants to appear civilized and sophisticated and for him, it implies going beyond merely mimicking the former colonizer. At the same time, El Hadji, who dreams of substituting himself for the former colonizer whose world he is envious of, appeals to traditional, ancestral customs when he decides to take a third wife. When Rama objects to his taking a third wife, he slaps his daughter and tells her that the great men who resisted imperialism and held Senegal together were polygamous. When he loses his sexual virility, El Hadji submits to the most degrading rituals prescribed by his *marabouts*. And ultimately, he agrees, in order to regain his "manhood," to undress himself and be spat on by the brotherhood of beggars. Whereas the colonizer ruled with collectedness, precision, and efficacy to guarantee his reign, the colonized, the native elite, seeking to emulate his former colonizer, autodestructs by blatant scatteredness, imprecision, excess, and extravagance. El Hadji is the image of the neurotic, inexact, and extravagant African leader, who ends up making a mockery of independence.

*Guelwaar* Witnessing a lively discussion between Gora and Barthelemy, the Muslim village chief, Mbaye Aly, asks Gora why the Senegalese elite like to speak French in front of the peasants rather than the local languages. Gora replies that Barthelemy is a black white man who neither understands nor speaks any of

the local languages. Similarly, when the deputy mayor and Barthelemy are in the middle of a discussion at the Muslim village cemetery, the Christian gets angry and asks them to speak in the local language. Wolof is Senegal's national language, understood and spoken by nearly all Senegalese, although the country has over thirty other languages. However, to distinguish themselves from the common people, Senegal's post-colonial elite prefer to speak French, the language inherited from colonization. This mimetism is a point of contention for Sembène, who campaigned for the promotion of local languages. Barthelemy, Guelwaar's eldest son, who lives in France, proudly displays his French passport and looks down on the Senegalese, is the Senegalese alienated from his people and culture. Sembène portrays him as a clown, the subject of mockery by the people. The priest scolds him for his insensitivity; Gora puts up with him in spite of himself; and the Muslim village chief calls him a failed copy of the white man. At the end of the film, however, this man who goes to great lengths to find his father's body, finally becomes one with his people and proudly declares himself Senegalese. Barthelemy, then, is the alienated man who restores himself, who rediscovers his roots. All he has to do now is learn his national language to complete his journey of initiation. If Barthelemy has reformed, this is not the case as regards the corrupt ruling class, alienated from the realities of Senegal, which they have never sought to understand, because they are too busy embezzling public funds and food aid and mimicking the white man. The deputy mayor reflects this class. To change it, Sembène sees only radical actions, such as those undertaken by Guelwaar and the young people Guelwaar trained.

**Tradition** Sembène's films are windows into African cultures. They reveal Africa's spiritual traditions, its social and political organizations, its subsistence economies. They also reveal African criteria of beauty, as well as the eloquence of the *griots* and the magnificence of the oral tradition. These films also show the roles and spaces occupied by men and women in pre-colonial societies. From this point of view, Sembène is truly the *griot*, that is, the storyteller and historian that he wants to be.

*Emitai* The Diola of Senegal are a population of about 400,000 people. They are wet-rice farmers, whose daily lives are governed by animist gods. They live in democratic societies, where the chief of the tribe is selected by vote. In Diola society, the chief's voice is just one among many others, and his authority is not absolute but can be challenged anytime. In an interview, Sembène reveals that some chiefs have been elected in the morning only to be voted out in the evening by the people. The democratic governance of the Diola does not limit itself to the political or social sphere. It carries over to the religious sphere, too. In Diola religion, the gods, like the chiefs, are not inaccessible entities from whose words unquestionable precepts descend to the people. The gods are directly accessible by the people, and their authority is contestable. In *Emitai*, Djimeko contests the gods' authority by refusing to wait for their counsel before going to war against the colonial army. Djimeko resents what he sees as the gods' narcissistic behavior. He confronts them and accuses them of dereliction of duty and egotism. In retaliation, the gods condemn Djimeko to death. Why condemn to death someone who is obviously on the verge of death due to the extent of his injuries? Quite simply, the gods' condemnation closes the door of Diola leadership to Djimeko. This condemnation deprives him of the possibility of becoming a god and advisor to the people in the afterlife, as is the case among the Diola, where the worthy dead become gods in their turn. Thus, Djimeko's spirit will not be reincarnated as that of a god, at least not for the time being. For, as some ethnologists have noted, the redemption of a wandering soul is always possible in the Diola religion. All this tradition is still carried on by a conclave of the gods, a democratic approach.

*Xala* Sembène gives us his main character as a case study for examining aspects of the cultures that are at play in Senegal. El Hadji, this Senegalese man, is a composite of several cultures, which he performs in an awkward way. In any case, he allows us to begin a discussion about these cultures. First and foremost, he is a Senegalese man who grew up in a traditional environment that shaped him socially, religiously and politically. Socially, El Hadji's tradition has always emphasized man as the structuring element for both family and society. Religiously, El Hadji's culture is animist, a belief that sees souls and gods in the things of nature, and that often tends to grant these natural gods masculine attributes. With the Moroccan Almoravids' invasion of sub-Saharan Africa in the 12th century, El Hadji's animism was diluted by Islam, which, while changing certain aspects of the social architecture, such as matriarchy, continued to grant men superiority over women. This aspect of Islam, which already exists in traditional animist society, facilitates its retention in Senegalese society. As a result, the Senegalese willingly straddle animism and Islam, as is the case with El Hadji, who swings between the mosque and the *marabout*. Politically and

economically, it was Europe which, although it failed to cover the whole of Senegal with Christianity (less than 5% of Senegalese society is Christian), molded Senegal through colonization and its capitalist regime based on the accumulation of personal wealth as the measure of success. Colonization saw fit, in order to succeed, not to disturb the traditional gendered organization of Senegal too much, but to make it one of its cornerstones. As a result, El Hadji, a blend of traditional Senegalese, Muslim and French cultures, became a poor performer of each. He assimilated them in a disjointed synthesis. One thing, however, remained constant in him, as it existed in each of the cultures he inherited: his perception of women as accessory.

*Ceddo* (matriarchy vs patriarchy) Until the early fifteen century, before the Moroccan Almoravids' violent campaign of conversion of Sub-Saharan Africans to Islam, the various peoples of Africa were exclusively of animist faith. That is, they believed that the elements of nature had souls and each natural element or occurrence was represented by a god. These pre-Christian and pre-Islamic societies were mostly matriarchal. In fact, thirteen-century Moroccan scholar and traveler Ibn Battuta noted upon visiting the empires of Sub-Saharan Africa that for these unbelievers, "men did not get their genealogy from their fathers, but rather from their maternal uncles; sons did not inherit from their fathers, but from their mother's brothers." And *Ceddo* dramatizes what happens in the kingdom when Islamic rules start to apply: A family feud erupts between the king's nephew, Madior Fall and his cousin, Prince Biram. As customary in the matriarchal system, Fall expects to sit on the throne after his uncle, and likes to refer to himself as the future king. Fall is surprised that the prince contests his right to succeed the king. The prince's claim as his father's successor is supported both by his father and the Imam, who explain to Fall that the regime has shifted from a matriarchal regime to a patriarchal one, thus, making Biram the legitimate successor to the king. They justify this change with the kingdom's official conversion to Islam, though the *Ceddo*—attached to their ancestral animist religion—still oppose Islam. Feeling cheated by his uncle and the Imam, Madior Fall drinks wine in front of the kingdom's council and renounces Islam, thus severing his ties with the regime of patriarchy. The return of the kingdom to matriarchy is reinforced when Princess Dior Yacine kills the Imam at the end of the film. Today in Africa, ancient regimes of matriarchy coexist with the new regimes of patriarchy introduced by Christianity and Islam.

In *Ceddo*, Sembène also notes how the history of traditional African societies is recorded and passed on to future generations. Sembène includes a *griot* on each side, on the side of the oppressors and the oppressed. These *griots* are witnesses to the events in progress. Jaaraf is the *griot* of the royal court. He serves the king, whose attentions he enjoys as a member of the nobility. He is richly dressed, eloquent in speech, and his tongue never fails to flatter the royal family. He sees and reports facts as they appear, but he also indulges in preface and sycophancy. Despite this, the core of his testimony is unalterable, and history will retain his idiosyncrasies only insofar as they are ultimately mere accessories, which do not significantly alter the historical account. On the side of the oppressed, the *Ceddo*, unbelievers, or outsiders, the *griot* is Farba. He observes but says little. He presents the facts briefly and objectively, without adding anything of his own. He does not flatter, embellish or take sides. Farba is the *griot* at the periphery of power, the *griot* of the little people, the workers, while Jaaraf is the *griot* at the center of power. In reality, Jaaraf and Farba are two sides of the same historian. When he allows himself to be corrupted, the *griot* has the appearance of Jaaraf. His tongue is sweet, he envies courtly pleasures, and he will not hesitate to switch his loyalty. Jaaraf's greed and betrayal cause his downfall and humiliation by the Imam he helped to murder the king, but who never trusted him. However, when, like Farba, the *griot* does not divert from his role as the honest repository of history, he is always amongst the victors. His neutrality guarantees him a long tenure.

*Camp Thiaroye* *Camp Thiaroye* hints at some elements of African tradition, such as meat consumption, walking long distances, and beauty. Indeed, African literature is replete with indications that the continent is a land of plenty, with a tradition of hunting and husbandry, including cattle and poultry raising. Africans are, therefore, big consumers of animal protein. Yet, this is not what Captain Labrousse, who claims to know the Africans, thinks. When the soldiers complain of the bad quality of the meal they are served, and Captain Raymond asks why the soldiers have no meat in their food, Captain Labrousse pulls Captain Raymond aside and tells him that Africans do not eat meat in their villages, and that they only eat plain rice and millet. Sembène's cinematic gesture to prove Labrousse wrong is to send the soldiers on a mission of finding meat for themselves in neighboring villages. The soldiers return loaded with all sorts of meat, proof

that the villages are great reserves of animal protein and that the Africans have an enduring dietary tradition of meat consumption.

**Nature** Africa is a continent of open spaces, and the Africans are natural hikers. Sembène contrasts the enclosed space of Camp Thiaroye, which keeps the soldiers in a kind of prison comparable to concentration camps, to the wide ranges of baobab groves. When the soldiers take a trip to the villages to console themselves for the loss of their American uniforms, it is by foot that they travel long distances, and in a mood of joy, relaxation, laughter and relief. When Bintou, her mother, or her father come to visit Diatta in Thiaroye, it is also by foot that they travel. And Captain Raymond, who finds the distance lengthy, offers to take Bintou home in his car. Africans, Sembène seems to be saying, are great hikers, who find their fullness in the open spaces of nature, and the closed, compartmentalized space kills them, as did their confinement in the Thiaroye camp.

*Guelwaar* Sembène's camera lingers on the comings and goings of friends who have come to express their condolences to Guelwaar's grieving family, but above all on the offerings made to the family in anticipation of the funeral feast. Indeed, African funerals are often ruinous for bereaved families. In addition to the pain of burying a loved one, these families have to deal with the multitude of friends who arrive to support them, but many of whom actually come because there is an opportunity to feast. Several sacks of grain, dozens of poultry, sheep and goats are prepared for the funeral feast. The burden is heavy for the grieving families, who are often obliged to postpone the date of the funeral until they can gather the necessary funds. This is a vicious circle of indebtedness. As the body sits in the morgue waiting for the funeral funds to be raised, it continues to accumulate costs. So, to help grieving families, friends contribute to the expenses by donating money and food. In the film, the eldest Christian, Gor Mag, insists that part of the money from the Christian community's *tontine* (common fund) be made available to Guelwaar's family. In addition, members of Guelwaar's extended family provide food. It is only through this solidarity that Guelwaar's funeral will successfully take place and his family's honor will be guaranteed.

*Faat Kiné* There is a Senegalese tradition of shameless begging in the name of religion, which the social authorities are finding hard to curb because of the weight of religion and the power of the clerics. This degrading behavior, which is rationalized by religion, is a gaping wound that undermines the Senegalese's will to appear dignified and independent. In Senegal, beggars are to be found on every street corner, in front of every shop and mosque, aggressively accosting passers-by to the point of snatching their money out of their hands. In the film, Kiné's boss complains that the beggars no longer "ask, but attack". In *Faat Kiné*, we also see *talibé* (beggar children from qu'ranic schools) queuing up to accept coins from Kiné, as the Koran requires believers to give alms to the poor. This precept has become a business plan for some people, who have made begging their livelihood. Madras masters use the children entrusted to them for instruction in the Koran for begging. These little beggars (or *talibés*) bring their masters alms in money and kind, which these masters shamelessly resell. In 2013, Senegalese President Macky Sall announced that "strong measures to put an end to child exploitation" would be taken. These measures have yet to be introduced into law.

**Tradition vs modernity** Sembène's films dramatize the conflict between tradition and modernism. Tradition is often portrayed as a heavy weight that keeps society in a state of inertia. As a result, the main characters are confronted with stifling traditional practices from which they seek to break free. However, Sembène refuses to be an advocate of 'cleaning the slate' of tradition. He even praises certain aspects of tradition. In this respect, *Moolaadé* and *Faat Kiné* are Sembène's most representative films.

The struggle between tradition and modernity is played out between the men in Kiné's life, within Kiné herself and between Kiné and her children. Indeed, Kiné symbolizes the modern Senegalese woman. As manager of a gas station, she is financially independent and immune from the urges of patriarchy, which has traditionally used its financial dominance to subjugate women. There was a time when, as a young woman, Kiné was subjugated by the laws of patriarchy. However, by dint of hard work and perseverance, she has emancipated herself and even dictates her laws to patriarchy (Massamba, for example, becomes her sex toy), which, resting on its laurels, has lost its preponderance, become obsolete and irrelevant. For the children of Kiné, however, the modernism that Kiné represents still has a long way to go and attitudes to perfect. Kiné's children speak to their mother with an audacity that would never have been possible in

the traditional society in which she grew up. Aby's words, telling her mother that her profession as a service station manager is not a noble aspiration for her, or that she is no longer a virgin, are shocking and hurtful to Kiné's traditional ego. Djib's words, telling Kiné that her daughter knows more about life than she does, offend the mother's traditional sensibilities. And of these bold, almost irreverent children, the grandmother says they have been brought up by television, not by parents. If Kiné's modernism is transitional, her children's is revolutionary. And just as she shocks traditional patriarchy, which finds her vulgar and pretentious, Kiné is also shocked by the modernism of her children, whom she finds bold, mean and insensitive.

*Moolaadé* (collectivism vs individualism) When Ciré summons his wife, Collé, in the presence of his brother, Amath, and tells her that he would never have married her if she were a *bilakoro*, Collé reminds her husband that such conversations would be better held in private. Collé's words hurt Amath, who, as he gets up to leave Ciré and his wife's room, complains to his brother that his wife has just driven him out of his home. Ciré apologizes to his brother and asks him to stay. Then, turning to Collé, Ciré admonishes his wife for disrespecting his elder brother. Similarly, when his father, Dougoutigui, tells Doucouré that he refuses to let him marry Amsatou because she is a *bilakoro*, and proposes his niece Fily instead of Amsatou, Doucouré respectfully replies to his father that his marriage is a private matter, and that only he can choose his wife. Like Amath, Dougoutigui loses his temper and hits his son with his umbrella. Doucouré then tells his father that the era of tyrants is over. What we see in these two scenes is the confrontation between the collectivism of traditional Africa and individualism. Amath considers that all matters concerning his brother's family concern him and that he should meddle. He goes so far as to instruct Ciré on how to punish his wife, even putting a whip in Ciré's hand and ordering him to beat her in public. Similarly, when Doucouré returns from Paris, the whole community rallies to welcome him, and his family compound is packed with well-wishers and *griots*. By opposing his father's injunction to marry Fily instead of Amsatou, Doucouré breaks his ties with the collectivism of which his father is the guarantor as village chief. For Collé, it is her husband who, leaving the assembly of dignitaries and taking his son Balla with him, indirectly declares that from now on all family matters are private and will never again be discussed in the public square.

**Selfishness/greed:** The postcolonial society is a society of greed. The colonized, now independent, dreams of only one thing: to accumulate as much wealth, if not more, than his former ruler. Indeed, as Sembène shows so well in his films, the colonized's greed is a fact of calcomania. It is the reproduction of a behavior observed in the colonizer, for whom the colonized has an inestimable admiration. This is why, as is the case in *Mandabi*, *Xala* and *Guelwaar*, this greed is most often observed among Africans who are more at the center than at the periphery of power, the bourgeois elite, who are closer to the colonizer than to the peasantry. This is not to say that the peasantry is immune to the gangrene of gluttony. It too suffers from it, albeit to a lesser degree. In the rural zone, even the gods can be greedy.

*Emitai* The Diola society is spiritually governed by animist gods. The head god is *Emitai* (the god of thunder). Emitai delegates some of his duties to secondary gods, who are in charge of solving daily problems. In recognition for their service, or even in demand of these services, the Diola people make offerings to these secondary gods, in the form of animal sacrifices performed at shrines erected for these secondary gods. In the film, faced with the danger of dispossession and annihilation, the Diola make offerings to their secondary gods and invoke them. The gods remain silent and leave the people puzzled, who think that they have not done enough offerings, and therefore, give more to the gods. The people upgrade their offerings from chickens to goats. Still, the gods remain silent, until the village chief rebels and distances himself from the gods' authority. Here, Sembène offers a veiled denunciation of the politics of selfishness, which is rampant not only on the side of the colonizers but also on the side of the colonized.

This selfishness is most apparent in France's colonial management, which simply siphons off the geological, agricultural and human riches of its colonies without giving anything significant in return. Diola young men are forcibly conscripted to defend France from Nazi occupation. Diola farmers are ransomed to feed the French army and general populations in times of crisis, and the Diola's protests are crushed in violence and bloodshed. However, Sembène's criticism is also directed at the Diola society, where those who govern it, the gods, are only concerned with their own well-being and pay no attention to the well-being of the people. The film is set in World War II, before the African independences. However, it was shot in 1971, eleven years after Senegal's independence. And in this post-independence Africa, Sembène sees the selfishness

of African rulers, who are worshipped through the cult of personality, receive bribes and the meagre fruits of the people's hard labor, but do nothing to satisfy the latter's expectations. Here, Sembène shows that Africa's depressive condition is the result of both exogenous and endogenous causes, selfishness being one of these causes.

*Xala* The white administrators who offer briefcases of money to the black leaders the day after their ouster from the Chamber of Commerce are not philanthropists. They intend to recapture this money a hundredfold. Agents of France, their intention is to preserve the economic interests of France, a country that, for a century and a half (from 1800 to 1960), was greedily attached to French-speaking Africa as its cash cow, sucking from it as many agricultural, geological, and human resources as the continent was capable of producing. The extraordinary gluttony of France inspired those to whom France represented itself in superlative terms, and who only dreamed of emulating France. When the independence of Africa came, and this emulation passed from the register of a mere dream to that of reality, crooked Africans emerged, like El Hadji and his colleagues from the Chamber of Commerce. For them, it was a matter of accumulating, by any means necessary, personal wealth. Thus, El Hadji and his peers set about lying, cheating, stealing, twisting the arm of legality to enrich themselves. And the more they enriched themselves illegally, the more they were intoxicated, and the more they wanted. With material gluttony came sexual gluttony, for an eminently wealthy man apparently cannot help but control others. And the number of women he has is the measure of the mastery of the rudder by the Senegalese man. El Hadji offered himself one, then two, then three wives, as one offers oneself some properties. And between the women, he offered himself a multitude of children, too, as one buys oneself assets. To his second wife, Oumi, as well as to Oumi's children, El Hadji passed on the "scent of the father," the father's illness, his greed. They, too, became greedy for money. Adja, the first wife, and her children escaped this affliction. There must be survivors in every epidemic. Adja and her children are the parable of the survivors of this evil, the greed for material things and sexual yearning, which is eating away at the Senegalese society.

*Guelwaar* When Police Chief Gora starts his search in the Muslim village to locate Guelwaar's body, Mbaye Aly, the village chief, is the first person who tries to help him by playing the role of the intermediary between the Muslim villagers and the Christians. So conciliatory and understanding at the beginning, Mbaye Aly changes his stance when the Ciss brothers start threatening to expose him for misappropriation of public aid if he continues to defend the idea that it is Guelwaar's body, and not that of their brother, Meyssa Ciss, that is buried in the Muslim cemetery. To protect himself and preserve his position, Mbaye Aly turns completely against Gora and accuses him of plotting against the Muslims. This spectacular U-turn by Mbaye Aly can only be explained by his selfish instinct to avoid humiliation and preserve his privileges. Similarly, the Ciss brothers' refusal to admit their mistake is an egotistical move to save face amongst the Muslims. Like the Ciss brothers and the village chief, the deputy mayor's sole aim is to be re-elected to the position that allows him to enrich himself by embezzling public assets. In fact, when the mayor is called in by the village chief and arrives at a place where Christians and Muslims are about to throw themselves against each other, he gives a populist speech that plays on the Muslims' religious and traditionalist sensibilities. The mayor knows the weight of the Muslim electorate and wants to surf on it, taking up the cause of Muslims against Christians. However, when the prefect reminds the mayor, in private, that delaying the handover of Guelwaar's body to the Christians could alert the newspapers and jeopardize his re-election, the mayor orders that the tomb be opened. The opening of the grave having proved that the buried body is indeed that of Guelwaar, the mayor scolds the Ciss brothers for having almost created an interreligious war, and congratulates himself on having made it possible to avoid the worst. Sembène criticizes selfishness as one of the main driving principles of people, especially people in power.

*Faat Kiné* (Selfishness vs selflessness) Polygamy, the tradition practiced by men in Africa under the cloak of Islam, is a selfish practice. Indeed, Islam recommends not only that the polygamist should have the means to look after his wives properly, but also, and above all, that he should love them and treat them fairly, which makes polygamy virtually impossible, unless one is a saint. However, as can be seen in *Faat Kiné* through the lives of characters like Alpha (an acquaintance of Kiné) and Gaye, the polygamists cannot live by the rules of Islam. They marry one woman, then a second when they find a younger one, then a third when the second wife no longer attracts them. What dictates their polygamous practice is less a spiritual reason than the satisfaction of their libido. Moreover, once married to several wives, they leave them to fend for themselves and look after their children, when they are not begging to feed their families.

Very often, it is the youngest of the wives who is lucky enough to benefit from the husband's attention, while the older ones see him only very sporadically. These marriages have nothing to do with the Koranic prescription of polygamy. They are the realization of man's selfishness.

Gaye's return to Kiné, one might be tempted to think, is to finally play his role as a father in the life of his daughter, Aby. But this is not the case. Gaye is a retired man, struggling to support himself and his large family. As it is customary in Africa for children to take care of their parents, Gaye already sees in Aby's passing of her baccalaureate, the blueprint for a daughter who in a few years' time will be employed and have some financial means. So, for Gaye, it is necessary to start getting closer to Aby, with a view to her helping him support himself in his old age. It is this same motivation that leads BOP to his son, Djib, whom he has not seen for seventeen years. And for each of these two men, the jackpot would be to marry Kiné. While Gaye thinks so, but does not say it, BOP says it outright: he is ready to marry Kiné. However, Kiné, who is not fooled and understands that their sudden paternal impulses towards her children are mere artifices, kicks them out of her house under the booing of Djib's friends.

If the men in the film rarely give selflessly, if they only give to themselves, the women, on the other hand, seem to give without expecting anything in return, purely altruistically. To protect her daughter, Mammy, Kiné's mother, gave her back to the flames of a selfish, honor-seeking father, and emerged scarred and disabled forever. Kiné sacrificed herself for her children, confronting her father's chauvinism and society's gossip, to set them on the road to success. She also took care of her mother, to thank her for what she did for her. And it is not only to those closest to her that Kiné gives without expecting anything. She also gives alms to beggars, helps the handicapped, and supports bereaved or needy families through her membership fees to a charity.

*Moolaadé* In *Moolaadé*, the advocates of female circumcision/excision justify the practice on religious grounds. The men repeatedly mention excision as a practice dictated by Islam. Collé refutes this, telling them that this is not what the Grand Imam says on the radio. If clitoridectomy is not an edict of the Qur'an, why are the men so determined to enforce it in their village? In fact, the men's determination to remove the women's clitorises stems quite simply from sexual egoism. Men want a monopoly on pleasure. Having convinced themselves that the clitoris is a penis in miniature, men have concluded that this organ is the erogenous center for women, just as the penis is for men. In a society where men are convinced of their superiority due to the protuberant nature of their anatomy, and of women's inferiority due to the cavernous nature of their anatomy, the clitoris, because of its resemblance to the penis, is an organ that challenges male superiority. In the male imagination, the clitoris delivers women to the unbridled pursuit of sexual pleasure. Yet pleasure should only be the province of men. Women's sexuality must be reduced to its strict reproductive function within the institution of marriage. For this to happen, the women's clitoris must be removed, taking away their pleasure drive. The aim of female genital mutilation is to reinforce man's uneducated feeling that he is the only recipient of pleasure, having removed that pleasure from the woman. This pointless, selfish mutilation reflects men's ignorance of the female body, and men's belief that the clitoris is women's only erogenous zone. Sembène is, thus, justified to say that "... mentally it is not African women who need liberation so much as African men."

**Feminism:** The emancipation of women is of paramount importance in Sembène's films. For this Marxist-Leninist, women are the poor children of the proletariat, who must free themselves from the yoke of the patriarchal bourgeoisie. Sembène therefore emphasizes women's struggle for emancipation. However, the feminism that Sembène seems to advocate is a feminism steeped in the African tradition of women's stoicism and respect for tradition, rather than a European-style feminism that devalues men and the tradition from which they draw their benefits.

*Xala* Rama, El Hadji's daughter, is meant to embody the voice of Western-style feminism. A medical student, independent in her movements, as evidenced by the moped with which she travels around the city of Dakar, she does not keep her tongue in her pocket. In fact, she is the image of the woman who takes possession of her space and her voice. She asks her mother, El Hadji's first wife, to divorce her father rather than accept that he imposes another rival on her in a third marriage. Rama's feminism, Sembène seems to suggest, is not yet ripe for Africa. The moorings of this feminism to patriarchy are too solid for it to be able to proclaim its emancipation. Indeed, when El Hadji overhears the conversation between his daughter and his first wife about his marriage, when he hears Rama calling him a dog, El Hadji slaps her



and tells her to go do her revolution somewhere other than in his home. Rama still lives under her father's roof, is financially dependent on him, and does not have the means to implement her policy of female emancipation. In contrast to Rama's Western feminism, which is struggling to take off, Rama's mother offers a feminism that could be described as 'womanism'. The mother asks the daughter to show patience and stoicism in the face of adversity. This type of feminism, where the quality of the woman is measured by her strength of resistance and adaptation, as well as her loyalty to the ideal of marriage, has already been celebrated by Senegalese authors such as Aminata Sow Fall and Mariama Bâ, who judged that Western feminism was not adapted to African realities. This is what Sembène also seems to suggest by noting Rama's dependence on the father.

*Moolaadé* The struggle of Collé and the women of the village is not just a campaign to stop the mutilation of young girls. This struggle is multifaceted. It is a super-struggle for the total emancipation of women. Through this action, the women free themselves, among other things, from domestic violence, social stigmatization, silencing, sexual confinement, and more. Collé's resistance to her husband's whippings overcame domestic violence. When long minutes of intense lashings fail to subdue Collé to the men's will, they withdraw from the assembly, disappointed, beaten, exclaiming, "what a failure! it is a real blow!". The men's disappointment comes from their realization that violence cannot break the will of women. Ciré is comforted in his position that being empathetic to his wives, treating them as partners deserving of his respect, is not a sign of weakness but something to be proud of. As Ciré removes from the phallogocentric assembly his eldest son, Balla, who has been spending too much time with Amath, his violent and misogynist uncle, Ciré passes onto Balla his ethics of compassion that he almost allowed Amath to corrupt. With this experience, Balla is less likely to reproduce the order of discourse that has just been defeated by Collé and the women and more likely to be a man of compromise—although misogyny is known to have a thick skin. This battle also puts an end to stigmatization. The derogatory term of *bilakoro* is put on its head when Amsatou tells Doucouré, "*Bilakoro* I am, *bilakoro* I will remain." Doucouré's smile, accepting his fiancée as she is, is a sign that the term is no longer a stigmatizing one, but one that simply marks a difference that is no longer qualitative but nominal. Similarly, Sanata, the woman stigmatized as promiscuous for her sexual freedom, breaks free from the stigma of negativity when she speaks out, denounces men, exposes their attempt to muzzle women and control their thoughts by seizing their radios, sings the praises of Collé, and throws the excisers' knives into the flames. Sanata's role as spokesperson for the struggle puts an end to the intellectual and sexual exclusion imposed on women. The women's struggle in *Moolaadé* is, in all these respects, a struggle for the total emancipation of women. It is a feminist endeavor.

**Change:** Senegalese society, Sembène seems to suggest, is in a state of flux. With this evolution comes a change in the roles and spaces previously assigned to men and women. Senegalese women, once submissive and exploited, are asserting themselves and increasingly occupying roles that were the private spheres of men. *Xala*, *Moolaadé* and *Guelwaar* are particularly representative of that trend.

*Xala* With *Xala*, Sembène signals the change in Senegalese society. He does this through the women who surround El Hadji. His first wife, Adja, is the symbol of a traditional Senegalese society destabilized by the brutal arrival of modernism. Adja is the traditional pious, enduring woman who advises her daughter Rama that patience is the mother of virtues and the antidote to adversity. This adversity comes to Adja in the form of her rival Oumi, El Hadji's second wife. The arrival of Oumi, who is younger than Adja, is the signal for her that her time is over. El Hadji moves out of the family home and settles more permanently in the house he bought for Oumi, only paying sporadic visits to Adja. Unlike Adja's reserved tone, Oumi's behavior is outrageous. She is noisy and talkative, insults her husband, snatches his wallet and helps herself to money. Furthermore, when El Hadji visits Oumi, the eldest of the three children he has with her stops him at the door of his mother's bedroom and extorts El Hadji, as if he had to pay a passage fee to see Oumi. El Hadji's second wife, in her exaggeratedly high wig, enormous sunglasses, and Western clothing, symbolizes a modernism focused on money; the opposite of traditional Adja. As for Rama, the daughter of El Hadji and Adja, who insists that her mother resolve her father's humiliation through divorce, her role is that of the feminist who challenges the authority of the patriarchy, whom she calls a dog. Rama, however, does not have the means to carry out her revolution and remains under the influence of El Hadji, on whom she depends financially. No matter, Rama dared to set the tone; she dared to say to her father's face what she thinks of him, that "men are all dogs. Nothing will ever be the same again, Sembène seems to tell us. Besides, El Hadji's dream of a third wife will never materialize. Ngone leaves him. The reign of

the patriarchy is in decline with a wild modernism (represented by Oumi) which has decided, by stripping patriarchy, to humiliate him too: the night of El Hadji's third wedding, Oumi ends up in the arms of the president of the Chamber of Commerce. And when El Hadji loses everything to his creditors, Oumi leaves him with her children and everything she can take from her house, insisting that they be careful not to damage her television. Society is in the midst of change, Sembène shows us, but when things get tough, tradition can still be a source of comfort. It is, in fact, with Adja, the unconditionally loyal wife, that El Hadji will find comfort when he has lost everything. This, however, is not Sembène's total emotional investment in tradition, for to support El Hadji in his moment of crisis, Adja is standing by him, and so is Rama, too, his feminist daughter.

*Faat Kiné* Kine and her friends, Amy and Mada, are part of this new breed of women. They no longer wait to be taken care of by men. These are women entrepreneurs or businesswomen, who are financially responsible for their families, and who now leave the house or the country as they please. Despite pressure from society and family, this new breed of women feels under no obligation to marry, and lives comfortably as single women. Kiné even allows herself the sexual services of a man, Massamba, when she feels like it. If women have taken the place of men, it is because men have failed. They have become a race of physically, morally and financially handicapped men, dependent on women. It is Kiné who feeds the city's disabled beggars. It is Kiné who supports the families of gigolos like Massamba by paying them for their sexual services. It is Professor Gaye or Bop, who once impregnated and abandoned her, who now dream of marrying her to guarantee themselves a nice retirement. It is one of Kiné's male colleagues who comes to her in the hope of being lent a million francs to save his business. Through these failed men, Sembène criticizes those who have made a mockery of Senegalese independence. It is, he seems to be saying, that the hope of saving Senegal rests, if not exclusively, at least for a great part, on the Senegalese woman.

*Moolaadé* "They will no longer cut anyone" is the battle cry of the village women. "They", of course, refers to the men, even if it is the women excisers that do the work on their behalf. They will no longer cut anyone, unless, as Collé warns, they agree to allow chaos, fire and blood to prevail in the village. This is the call for change. Women will no longer accept being trampled, called impure, and mutilated for the sake of the pride of an insecure masculinity. This change, this freedom, was won by women through the lashes, wounds and the blood of Collé. And if men want to take this freedom away from women, they will have to agree to reclaim it in blood and fire. This is what Collé is telling the men, and through Collé's voice, this is what all the women in the village are saying. The village is no longer the same. The change is such that young Amsatou tells Doucouré that she is and will remain a *bilakoro*, an unexcised girl. Take it or leave it. It is not hard to imagine that Doucouré has already made his choice: it will be Amsatou and not little Fily, as proposed to him by his father, disgusted by Amsatou's impurity. Doucouré himself had already initiated the change since the day he told his father that his marriage was a private matter in which he should not interfere. He had already taken up the cause of women when he told his uncle that confiscating women's radios was a lost cause, because radio and TV were now an inescapable part of human society and no hegemonic will could eliminate them, and that his own TV would stay on as long as he wanted it to. The little village in Burkina Faso was on the bandwagon of change. Patriarchy could either reform, adapt, and make room for itself, or remain frozen in its century-old dogmas and vanish.

**Intergenerational conflict** Change in African society necessarily generates conflict between the older and younger generations. Young people oppose traditional practices that they consider outdated and burdensome, and they express their opposition to these practices by challenging the authority of the father, who is usually the guarantor. This conflict can be as simple as verbal disagreements, but it can also be violent, as is the case in *Xala* and *Moolaadé*.

*Xala* The conflict between El Hadji and his daughter, Rama, as well as the misunderstanding between Rama and her mother, Adja, is a generational one. El Hadji and Adja come from this generation of traditional Senegalese whose institutional balance is based on the separation of the sexes and the conviction of the weakness and inferiority of the female sex in relation to the male sex. Ngone's mother, a woman of the same generation as Adja, expresses this well when, on the night of her daughter's nuptials, she reminds her that her husband is her master, that she must always be available to him, and above all, that she must never raise her voice when speaking with him. Adja has always practiced this precept, waiting patiently for her husband, El Hadji, to come and see her according to his schedule; she is careful not to ask him about

his intimate life, and she never ventures to upset him. This is why Adja doesn't understand the audacity of her daughter, Rama, who irritates El Hadji with her outspoken positions and daring, shameless conversations. Indeed, Rama, a feminist student, makes a harsh judgment of her father's polygamous practices: she finds them degrading for women and asks her mother to get out of them by filing for divorce from her father. Rama calls all polygamous men, her father included, dogs and liars; and she says it to El Hadji's face. El Hadji slaps his daughter and reminds her that she is still living in his house. Here, the clash of generations is not subtle. It is a war without mercy, a battle without gloves, which the past—through El Hadji's generation—wages on the future—represented by Rama's generation. This war is explicit and violent. It is by means of insults and physical blows that the old and new generations jostle for positioning. However, the tide seems to be turning against the old generation, either because that generation is working against itself (El Hadji belittling tradition and seeking to pass for a modern French man) or because time is running out on that generation (El Hadji being too weak and frail for his new bride, Ngone, who ends up leaving him). El Hadji's sexual impotence is the symbol of the emasculation of the past, a past that has drawn its glory only from the prominence and good health of the father's genitals taken as the organizing structure of society.

*Moolaadé* The conflict between Collé and the village elders, as well as the conflict between Doucouré and his father, Dougoutigui, is intergenerational. Collé is an excised woman. However, she has experienced and continues to experience the harmful consequences of the practice. Her difficult deliveries and painful sexual relations are the results of her genital mutilation. So Collé, reassured by the Grand Imam's radiophonic declarations on the uselessness of clitoridectomy, convinces her husband, Ciré, to spare their daughter Amsatou from the ordeal. As a result, Amsatou remains uncircumcised, creating an uproar among the village elders when they learn of Amsatou's *bilakoro* (unexcised) status. Dougoutigui decides that his son, Doucouré, will no longer marry Amsatou. However, Doucouré, who has been educated in Europe and lives there, is amused by the villagers' superstition. He jokingly tells the little girls who have come under Collé's protection that they will not have husbands. Yet, he rewards the bravery of these rebellious children by handing out sweets. And to his father, who forbids him to see Amsatou, Doucouré twice reminds him that his choice of wife is not a community affair but a private decision. Doucouré marks his break with the past, represented by his father, when he tells his father, who intends to stamp his authority on him by hitting him with his umbrella, that his time, the time of tyrants, is over. With Collé, the little fugitives, Amsatou, and Doucouré, a new generation opposes the old generation represented by Dougoutigui, Amath, the excising group of women, and the council of elders.

**Responsibility:** One of Sembène's favorite themes is the question of responsibility. He once said that "[w]e must have the courage to say that in the colonial period we were sometimes colonized with the help of our own leaders. We must not be ashamed of our faults and our errors." The question of Africa's responsibility in its conditions, either historical or contemporary, is one that Sembène addresses in several of his films, such as *Ceddo*, *Xala*, and *Guelwaar*. And in *Faat Kiné*, the filmmaker addresses the question of family responsibility, but also that of national responsibility.

*Ceddo* In *Ceddo*, one important aspect of that question concerns the role that Africans played in the sustenance of the slave trade. The film opens with a scene in which black slaves are led by their black masters into the shop of a white trader, where they are exchanged for things as puerile as cloth, a gun or a bottle of liqueur. It is immediately clear that the African becomes a mere commodity for the African, just like his agricultural and geological materials, a bargaining chip that enables him to obtain the goods that make his life comfortable. When the *Ceddo*, confronted with the superior weaponry of the Muslims who persecuted them, got together to see how they could counter their enemies, some proposed that they exchange members of their families for rifles (a child for a rifle and gunpowder, and an adult for two rifles and gunpowder). This proposal, though horrifying, is put to the vote and adopted, allowing the free sale of certain family members as a solution to existential questions. Africa, as Sembène shows, was not innocent in the slave trade.

*Xala* In *Xala*, individuals of questionable morality pose as virtuous persons and occupy positions of high responsibility and leadership. The members of the Chamber of Commerce, who came to power under the acclamations of the populations, are in fact people thirsty for power and money, who ruminated on their desire to be in the place of the colonizers until it became possible for them to do so. To gain support from the masses, the local members of the Chamber of Commerce operated by connivance: they dressed like

the local population, in traditional garb. Like the locals, they showed outrage against colonization. When they took over the Chamber of Commerce, the local leaders removed from it all the statues, portraits, and cultural vestiges that connoted "France," and they left them on the steps of the Chamber of Commerce for the colonial administration to come and collect under the jeers of the population. All this, however, was mere gesticulation, mere pretense to appear as sympathetic to the masses' anger and to gain support from them. The next day, the local leaders, bribed by the colonial administrators, reintroduced the latter into the Chamber of Commerce and took governance advice from them. This is Sembène's explicit criticism of African leaders, who, following the independence of their countries, exhibit a false outrage often resulting in changes in appearance (change of the name of the country, change of the color of the national flag), which under the surface, keep all the infrastructures of colonial domination. Sembène also invites the people to be self-critical, because if this manipulation is possible, it is because the people are gullible and too often allow themselves to be seduced by high-sounding titles and pageantry. Sembène shows that the phenomenon by which immoral people are promoted to posts of leadership will continue as long as the masses do not take their responsibility as citizens seriously and allow themselves to be seduced by the superficial, the shiny, and the flashy. Thus, the pickpocket, who robbed a peasant in Dakar had an impressive three-piece made for him from the money of his crime, and, dressed like a winner, manages to seduce the members of the Chamber of Commerce, who choose him as El Hadji's replacement. Sembène leaves it to his audience to imagine the disgrace that such a man is capable of causing to the Chamber of Commerce, especially when that body is a metaphor for the State.

*Faat Kiné* The Senegalese, and Africans in general, have failed in their family and national responsibilities. The failure of family responsibility is that of patriarch, who has managed the family inheritance as an absolute and selfish master, unable to take into account the challenges of the future. This is what Djib blames Gaye, Bop and Massamba for. Responsible men are rare, and Jean and Thiam, the franchisor of the gas station, are only survivors of this evanescent race. The failing patriarchy has already been replaced by women like Kiné, Mada and Amy, whose hard work and insights hold the rudder of the family and the nation, until - and this is the unfortunate aspect of what Sembène seems to be suggesting - a new breed of men emerges to wrest it from them. Indeed, as if to suggest that the weight of responsibility is too heavy for the emancipated Senegalese woman, it naturally falls to Djib, Kiné's male child, foreseen by his high school friends as the future president of Senegal, to define Senegal's future. While Senegal's stability seems compromised by the disgraceful behavior of truculent, sexually promiscuous women fascinated by the West and its failed conception of femininity, male wisdom will triumph and peace will ultimately prevail. It is thus from Djib's mouth, and not from Kiné's or Aby's, that the filmmaker's dream of a new Senegalese order unfurls, precisely because Djib represents less the birth of a new social force than the restoration of an old and dignified Afrocentric might symbolized by the leaders whose portraits are hanging all over Kiné's house.

## CHARACTERS

### Open

1. RAMA (*Xala*): Rama, the daughter of El Hadji and Adja, is an empathetic girl. For the filmmaker, she is the voice of a changing society. She takes up the cause of the oppressed and fights for a modern Senegal, free from the weight of patriarchal traditions that keep women enslaved. However, her fight for change faces century-old obstacles that will not make her task easy.
2. SERGEANT DIATTA (*Camp Thiaroye*) Diatta is an intelligent and loyal soldier. He has an education that impresses or makes the French officers jealous. The soldiers under his command admire and respect him. Diatta remained loyal to his soldiers, whose demands he supported despite attempts by French officers to co-opt him.
3. CAPTAIN RAYMOND (*Camp Thiaroye*) Captain Raymond is an empathetic and sincere man. His perception of the soldiers, with whom he fought in France, differs from that of his French colleagues serving in Africa. He endorses the soldiers' fight for respect and equality. However, his support for the soldiers remains superficial, and he fails to save them from massacre.

4. KINÉ (*Faat Kiné*) Kiné is a resilient, liberated and audacious woman. At 40 at the time the film is made, she is exactly the age of independent Senegal. She is therefore supposed to represent the new breed of women the filmmaker envisions for a new Senegal. She is a fearless woman, who overturns prejudices about her gender and occupies roles and spaces hitherto reserved for men.
5. GORA (*Guelwaar*) Police chief Gora is an impartial and determined character. Committed to seeing through the investigation he has begun to find Guelwaar's body, he is not swayed by either the Muslim or Christian accusations of bias. However, allegations of corruption raised by the Ciss brothers hang over Gora. Gora doesn't deny them one bit, which might suggest that they are true.
6. COLLE GALLO ARDO SY (*Moolaadé*) Collé, Ciré's second wife, is submissive and respectful of her husband. However, she has convictions that her respect for Ciré cannot erase. She firmly believes that excision is an abuse against women that has no religious basis. Using her charisma and courage, she rallies the village women to stop the practice of clitoridectomy.
7. IBRAHIMA DOUCOURE (*Moolaadé*) A generous character who respects his culture and his parents, Doucouré rebels when his father wants to control the private aspects of his life. For Doucouré, the choice of his wife is a decision for him alone to make. Doucouré draws his father's ire and rejection when he refuses to allow his father to interfere in his love life. To show his disapproval of his father's law, Doucouré chooses to marry an unexcised girl, the very one his father forbids him to marry.

#### **Closed**

1. THE WHITE SOLDIERS (*Emitai*): The white officers are a reflection of France. Through them, Sembène presents a nuanced image of France and the French. They can be racist and paternalistic, but they can also show empathy, albeit measured, towards Africans. While one of them wants to get rid of the Diola by slaughtering them, the other praises their courage, like a slave master would proudly praise his slaves after a great harvest, with condescension.
2. EL HADJI (*Xala*): El Hadji is authoritarian, pretentious, chauvinistic, dishonest and comical. He is the epitome of the failed leader of post-independence Africa. His antics would be laughable if they didn't have destructive consequences for his compatriots. His sexual impotence connotes the impotence of post-colonial regimes and the inability of African elites to provide lasting solutions to the dilemmas facing their countries.
3. ADJA (*Xala*): Adja is the traditional woman, loyal and stoic. She never raises her voice with her husband, El Hadji. She never upsets him. When El Hadji gets angry, even for unfounded reasons, she apologizes. She remains with her husband through the difficult trials that he puts her through and that he himself undergoes.
4. THE IMAM (*Ceddo*) The Imam is a dishonest and violent character who arrived in the kingdom with a single ambition: to be a king. Using the Koran, the king's credulity and the advisors' disloyalty, he succeeds. His reign, however, is short-lived.
5. CAPTAIN LABROUSSE (*Camp Thiaroye*) Captain Labrousse is an obtuse racist. He finds it hard that blacks, whom he calls "overgrown children", wear elegant uniforms, eat the same food as whites, listen to the same music as whites, and dare to ask for the same treatment as whites. He goes to great lengths to show that the differences between the races are qualitative differences. Labrousse pushes his disdain for blacks to the point of supporting and rejoicing in their massacre by his colonial army.
6. THE CISS BROTHERS (*Guelwaar*) The Ciss brothers are unreasonable and violent characters. They would rather live in the illusion of what they believe to be true than seek to verify the veracity of their beliefs. The fact that their brother's body remains unclaimed in the morgue is less important to them than believing that a body lying in a Muslim cemetery, which may not be their brother's, is

indeed their brother's body. They become enraged and physically threaten anyone who might challenge their convictions: the village chief, the police officer and the Christians.

7. GAYE and BOP (Aby's and Djib's fathers) (*Faat Kiné*) Gaye and BOP are negligent and decadent characters. They are not only failed and absent fathers. They also represent the morally crippled postcolonial African elite, who have kept the continent in a degenerating state. Having abdicated their familial and social responsibilities, they are pushed aside by the Senegalese women, who step in to do the work they failed to accomplish.
8. CIRÉ BATHILY (*Moolaadé*) Ciré is a malleable character. His older brother, Amath, draws him into domestic violence by telling him that he needs to maintain his manhood by beating his wife in public. However, this violence, which is contrary to Ciré's nature, leads him to rebel against the patriarchal order of society, and to take up the cause of his wife, Collé, and the women of the village.
9. DOUGOUTIGUI AND AMATH BATHILY (*Moolaadé*) Dougoutigui, the village chief, and Amath, Ciré's older brother, are the prototypes of the old guard. They are violent and obtuse. For them, tradition must be maintained by instilling fear and whipping women. They try to keep the women isolated, preventing any outside information from reaching them over the airwaves. Doucouré, the chief's son, tells them that these efforts are useless, and that the village will change whether they like it or not.

#### Agreeable

1. IBRAHIMA DIENG (*Mandabi*): Ibrahima Dieng is a generous man, but authoritarian and hypocritical. He controls his wives with a master's hand. However, he does not hesitate to share what he has, or thinks he has, with his friends and neighbors. He gives those around him the impression of being a good Muslim. His faith, however, is a facade of conformity that hides a fragile spirituality.
2. ARAM AND MATY (*Mandabi*): Ibrahima's two wives are prototypes of the traditional Senegalese woman. They are unconditionally submissive to their husbands, and owe him devotion and respect. They know that their reputation depends on Ibrahima's, and they bend over backwards to spare him dishonor.
3. MONSIEUR (*Black Girl*): Monsieur is a nonchalant and presumptuous man, but an empathetic man, nonetheless. He does not seem to pay much attention to what is going on in his household. Therefore, he is not really aware of the torment his wife is putting Diouana through. He wants to help her, but his help comes out awkwardly when he decides to write a reply to Diouana's mother's letter and put his own words in the letter. If he were not so trusting of his wife, he would have pressed his idea that Diouana needed a break from work, and maybe he would have saved the girl from death.
4. DIOR YACINE (*Ceddo*) The princess is dignified, determined and brave. She is portrayed as a new breed who will lead the people to a new destiny. She is the one who, while taking into account new social and religious interactions, will nevertheless rebuild the kingdom on a cultural foundation and ancestral identity.
5. GUELWAAR (*Guelwaar*) Guelwaar is an eccentric, proud, and bold character. His acceptance of his daughter's profession as a prostitute defies the morals of the religious community of which he is a leader, just as his adulterous life is not in agreement with religious morality. However, the dignity, and courage with which Guelwaar fights the anticorruption war seem to dwarf his flaws.
6. BARTHELEMY (*Guelwaar*) Barthelemy, Guelwaar's oldest son, is both alienated and supportive. At the start of the film, nothing in Senegal seems to move him. Everything disgusts him. However, as Barthelemy invests himself in the search for his father's body, he becomes one of the pillars on

which his family and his Christian community rest. He comes to appreciate and reconcile with his country, and his compatriots, in turn, learn to value him.

7. DJIB (*Faat Kiné*) is a character rooted in his African culture, with his eyes set on the future. The African culture Djib celebrates is that of proponents of African sovereignty, such as Mandela, Sankara, Cabral, and Lumumba. Djib's Africa is not that of the reactionaries who made a chaos of African independence. So, he boldly condemns reactionaries such as his father and his sister's father, whom he sees as the corrupt heirs of Africa.

### Disagreeable

1. MBARKA (*Mandabi*): A local shopkeeper, Mbarka is a businessman with dubious methods. He is dishonest and hypocritical. He has set up a system of usury whereby almost everyone in the neighborhood owes him money. This enables him to become the master of all, who, in order to pay himself, uses pressure and blackmail to strip his debtors of their most precious possessions at the lowest possible cost.
2. MADAME (*Black Girl*): Madame is a lazy and violent woman. She is completely helpless without Diouana, who does all the chores in the house. Yet, she thinks that Diouana is idle. She is abusive to her husband, her children, and to Diouana. The constant humiliation Diouana suffers under Madame drives the young woman to kill herself.
3. THE BLACK SERGEANT (*Emitai*): The black sergeant is an alienated and seduced character. He longs to be accepted into the world of his white superiors. To achieve this, he crushes and oppresses his people. But the white world sees him only as an accessory, a disposable agent in the accomplishment of its imperialist mission. Rejected by the white world and isolated from the black world, he belongs to neither.
4. OUMI (*Xala*): Oumi is the filmmaker's portrait of unbridled modernism. She is materialistic, disloyal, noisy, and envious. She has an attraction to money which she seems to have passed on to her children. The filmmaker makes her almost a comical character in her physical appearance and her taste for the superfluous. Her large sunglasses, her oversized wig, and her love for her television set are laughable.
5. DEMBA WAR (the king) (*Ceddo*) Demba is an impressionable, gullible and weak king. His lack of judgement causes him to lose his ancestral roots, endanger the lives of his people, and even his own life, opening the door to violent eruptions.

### Emotional

DIOUANA (*Black Girl*) Diouana is a naïve, lonely, and abused young woman. She trusted Madame, believing that she will only be babysitting in France and will have a lot of free time. She refused to believe her boyfriend's warning that she was being dragged into a snare. He was right. Her confinement and humiliation in France drove her to suicide.

### Rational

DJIMEKO (*Emitai*): Djimeko, the Diola chief, is a rebellious, brave, and proud man. Rebellious against colonial injustice, he is also rebellious against the inaction and neglect of the ancestral gods. He launches his warriors against the superior colonial army. And when wounded, both physically and in his pride, and on the verge of dying, he fulminates against the Diola gods, whom he accuses of having allowed the humiliation of the Diola through their inattention, and he announces the imminent end of their egotistical reign over his people.