

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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OUTSIDERS / Ceddo (1977)

Sembène Ousmane

OVERVIEW

Auteur 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 quranic 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. Sembène, who liked to refer himself as a *griot*, an African storyteller and historian, produced nine features: *Black Girl* (1966), *Mandabi* (1968), *Emitai* (1971), *Xala* (1975), *Ceddo* (1977), *Camp Thiaroye* (1988), *Guelwar* (1992), *Faat Kiné* (2001), *Molaadé* (2003).

Film

Film The film's title, *ceddo*, as explains Sembène, is a Pulaar word (a language spoken in Senegal but also in other West African countries, such as Mali, Guinea, and Mauritania). In its original denotation, the word means 'outsiders', or as Sembène explains, 'those who refuse to submit to oppression, forced assimilation, and alienation, and who give themselves the mission of preserving tradition.' Among other criticisms, *Ceddo* is a denunciation of the takeover of the political system by Islamic leaders in Africa, and especially in Senegal.

Background *Ceddo* was shot in Senegal, with local actors, some of whom had already appeared in Sembène's previous films. Sembène himself appeared in *Ceddo* as the new forcibly converted Ceddo baptized Ibrahima. *Ceddo*'s criticism of Islamic political leaders has not escaped either the Senegalese post-colonial elite, led by President Sédar Senghor—an elite fascinated with Western culture—or the Muslim elite, which tends to be more royalist than the king in its dream of turning Senegal into an Islamic state. As a result, *Ceddo* was banned in Senegal for eight years. The country's Filmography Control Commission's excuse was that the word *ceddo* must be spelled with a single "d". Sembène refused, insisting that his spelling was more linguistically and culturally correct than the colonial spelling proposed by the government. In fact, the real reason for the ban was the film's critical illustration of Islam. *Ceddo* won the Interfilm Award, Forum of New Cinema, at the 1977 Berlin International Film Festival.

CHARACTERS

<i>King Demba war</i>	A king, who converts to Islam and falls under the influence of the Imam
<i>Diogomay</i>	The leader of the Ceddo
<i>Princess Dior Yacine</i>	The king's daughter, who was kidnapped by the Ceddo.
<i>The Imam</i>	The ambitious Imam, who brings Islam to the kingdom

SYNOPSIS

In a Senegalese village, sometime during the nineteenth century, the king, Demba War, has converted to Islam and, urged on by the Imam from North Africa, wants to force all the kingdom's inhabitants to convert. A community of non-believers, known as Ceddo or 'outsiders', is persecuted by the king. The Ceddo kidnap the king's daughter, Princess Dior Yacine, and threaten to execute her unless the king stops forcing them to convert. The king's nephew, Madior Fall, announces that, as heir to the throne, he will free his cousin

and marry her. However, the king tells him that the rules of the kingdom have changed since his conversion to Islam, and that the matrilineal tradition, which made him heir to the throne, is no longer valid. From now on, says the king to his nephew, it is his son, Biram, who, in accordance with the patrilineal law instituted by Islam, will succeed him. The nephew accuses his uncle of betraying ancestral rules and rejects his uncle and Islam. Prince Biram is killed by his sister's kidnapper while he is trying to free her. The Imam and the king's counselors, realizing that the king has no male heir, murder the king, and the Imam takes the throne. The Imam wages holy war on the Ceddo, exterminating many of them and forcibly converting the survivors. The Imam also kills the Catholic priest, who was struggling to fill his church with converts, and burns the church to the ground. Then, the Imam sends his followers to kill the kidnapper of the princess, whom he intends to marry to consolidate his power. When the princess realizes that her father's death came from the Imam, she snatches the gun from one of the Imam's disciples and kills him, while the newly converted Ceddo help her overpower the Imam's guards.

SCENES

Westerners in the kingdom In a nineteenth-century African society, a European Catholic priest has set up a makeshift mission with the intention of converting the native people to his faith. In that same community, a white trader, too, has set up a trading post in which he conducts commerce with the native people.



The Priest's dream: Convert the whole kingdom to Catholicism In the priest's dream, on the day of his death, in the 20th century, a Catholic requiem mass in his honor is officiated by white and black priests. The mass is attended by a huge crowd of native converts. Among the attendees are the Ceddo, the ceddo leader, Diago, the Ceddo kidnapper, the *griot*, the Imam, and many members of the community. In his dream, the priest sees the most prominent members of the kingdom converted to his faith. Several native nuns attend the ceremony, too. Among them is the king's daughter, Princess Dior Yacine. The king's nephew, Madior Fall, is now a cardinal. He is the presiding priest, who performs the ritual of Holy Communion. The people receive communion from him. Madior Fall's crozier is the staff of the kingdom, which now stands next to the Holy Cross.



Branded with fleur-de-lys In the white dealer's shop, human beings, as well as commodities, such as, cotton, grains, goats, and cattle, are traded in exchange for goods like fabrics, liquors, guns, and sweets. The white trader has just received two new human merchandises. He brands them with the symbol of the *Fleur-de-Lys* ('Lily flower').



Princess Yacine has been abducted Some women come running and wailing past the open-air mosque set up by the new Imam who has converted the king. The women scream that Princess Dior Yacine, the king's daughter, has been abducted. The men interrupt their prayers to go see what is happening. Princess Yacine's abductor tells the princess, through a *griot* storyteller, that he has captured her because he wants the oppression against his people to stop. He tells the princess that his people refuse to become Muslims.



Meeting on the village square The village crier announces that the king wants everyone to gather on the public square. The crier also announces that the Imam asks that every Ceddo (non-believer) bring a load of firewood. Diago, the leader of the Ceddo, leads his people to the square. He plants the emblem of the Ceddo, a wooden lance adorned with pagan carvings, in the ground, in the middle of the square. The king arrives with his retinue. The Imam is there with his most faithful followers. The priest and the trader come and greet the king and take their seats a little away from the crowd. Jaaraf, the *griot*, flatters the king, telling him that his reign is blessed by Allah. Pointing to the Ceddo or unbelievers, the *griot* tells the king that these people, slaves of the kingdom, who refuse to convert to Islam, and who have dared to kidnap Princess Dior, are meant to burn in hell. The *griot* asks the king to be merciless with the

unbelievers. The king asks Jaaraf to ask Diago, the Ceddo leader, why he has his emblem planted in the square. The *griot* passes on the message and Diago comes forward with his load of firewood on his head. The king tells the *griot* that he had excused Diago from carrying wood. Diago puts his load down and tells the king, via the *griot*, that he will speak on behalf of his people, the Ceddo. Diago tells Jaaraf to tell the king that he refuses this special treatment as long as his people are in bondage. He tells the king to remember that the baobab tree springs from a small seed (meaning that the king is nobody without the little people he despises). Diago's words anger the prince, who asks his father for permission to kill Diago. The *griot* intervenes to tell the prince that a noble like him must not sully his hands with the blood of a Ceddo representative. The prince replies that Diago is not a representative in his eyes. Diago tells the prince that if he thinks of himself as a hero, he should prove it by rescuing his kidnapped sister.

Our freedom or your daughter's life The king asks Diago the meaning of the emblem he planted in the middle of the village square. Diago tells the king that it is a request from his people, the Ceddo, that the inequalities, the looting, and the enslavement must stop. He tells the king that the unbelievers' crops must be theirs to dispose of as they wish. Diago tells the king that no one should be forced to become a Muslim. A clamor of protest comes from the Imam and his followers. Diago tells the king to free his people, or his daughter will be killed.

Princess Yacine's suitor Saxewar Saxewar, a king from a neighboring kingdom, arrives on horse. The *griot* starts praising his courage. A young female slave is ordered to bring Saxewar some water. Saxewar knocks the young slave down and tells the *griot* to tell the king that the only water that will quench his thirst will be the one served to him by Princess Dior Yacine. Saxewar tells the king that he will free the princess and marry her.

Fall claims his rights Madior Fall, the king's nephew, stands up to protest Saxewar's claim over the princess. He tells Saxewar that Yacine was betrothed to him, and he has never renounced his right to marry her. Fall turns to the king and asks him to give him permission to go free Yacine from the Ceddo kidnapper. Fall declares that as he is the king's successor, Yacine is his wife.



Matriarchy no longer applies Fall's words baffle the king's son, Biram, who stands up to protest. Prince Biram tells Fall that he approves of his marriage with his sister, Yacine. However, he advises Fall to forget his dream of succeeding the king, for he, the prince, will succeed his father. The prince tells his cousin that they are now Muslims, and matriarchy no longer applies. Fall walks to the Imam and asks him if it is true that according to his holy book a nephew can no longer inherit from his uncle. The Imam tells Fall that his cousin is right, and that every Muslim must conform to the law of the Prophet that designates the son as the father's heir.



Fall questions patriarchy Fall tells the Imam and the audience that he will not be ruled by this Islamic law. He reminds the audience that if the king is sitting on this throne, it is because he himself inherited it from his uncle and not from his father, and that the king's reign was possible only by the unbelievers that he is oppressing today in the name of Islam. The Imam tells the king's nephew that matriarchy is an old pagan practice. He warns him that whoever tries to bring it back is defying Allah. Fall asks the *griot* to ask his uncle, the king, to tell him if he is or is not his heir. The king replies that they are now Muslims, and therefore, they are now governed by the laws of Islam. The Imam and his followers praise Allah for the king's answer. Fall accuses his uncle of betrayal. The nephew chastises his uncle for being the first to violate their ancestral laws. The slave girl that Saxewar knocked down is still lying on the floor. The nephew calls on one of the king's servants and asks him to go exchange the girl for some wine. The white trader leaves the gathering and leads the servant and the girl to his shop for the transaction.



Saxewar denounces Islam

Saxewar confronts the Imam and tells him that he is a liar for denying the nephew the right to succession. He warns the Imam that his religious crusade must stop here and not be extended to his kingdom. The Imam replies that one day, his crusade will kill all non-believers, and they will be left out in the sun with no proper burial. Saxewar walks to the priest and points to him. He tells the Imam to ask the priest how the Christian campaign of conversion has ended in his kingdom. He tells the Imam that countless bones from priests' corpses are whitening under the sun in his kingdom, and their skulls are part of his trophies. He swears to the Imam that no one can convert him.



Fall renounces Islam

The servant returns from the trader's shop carrying a demijohn of wine. The king's nephew, Fall orders him to pour him some in a calabash (a hollowed-out gourd). The king's nephew drinks up the wine, calls the griot and tells him to tell the king that from this day, he no longer considers him as his relative. Then, Fall places the calabash in front of the Imam and tells him that he is no longer a Muslim. The Imam and his followers pinch their noses in disgust.



Biram will free his sister

One of the Imam's followers pull out his saber and breaks the bottle of wine. The prince threatens his cousin that he would have made him carry firewood like the Ceddo if he were not of noble birth, that he would have traded him for gun powder. The king stands up and decrees that his son, Biram, will go free his sister from the Ceddo kidnapper in a duel. Praised by his father's *griot*, Prince Biram goes to do battle against the Ceddo kidnapper. Biram thanks his father for choosing him as his successor and promises to make him proud. The Imam blesses the prince and tells him that he is under the protection of Allah whose *jihad* ('holy war') he is undertaking against the unbelievers.



Biram is killed

Fall watches his cousin and his retinue go confront the Ceddo kidnapper. Biram finds the Ceddo, shoots twice and misses. He tries to reload his gun. The Ceddo kidnapper shoots two arrows and hits Biram in the heart. Biram falls and dies in front of his sister, Princess Dior Yacine. Biram's body is carried back to his father's palace by the Imam's followers chanting the name of Allah.

Saxewar is killed too

The *griot* plants the royal emblem at Saxewar's doorstep, signaling to him that Biram is dead, and that the duty to rescue Princess Dior Yacine is now his. Saxewar mounts his horse and goes to war against the Ceddo kidnapper. Saxewar tracks the Ceddo kidnapper. The Ceddo kidnapper tricks him, and he shoots at the Ceddo kidnapper's empty hat mounted on a pole. Saxewar thinks that he killed the Ceddo kidnapper and tells Dior Yacine that her tormentor is dead. The princess tells Saxewar that she wants to step over her kidnapper's body before leaving her place of confinement. Saxewar's body is carried to his village. The Muslims refuse to recommend his soul to Allah because he is a pagan. They order his body out of the village, and he is denied burial.



The Ceddo's solution

The Imam's coercive conversion method is gaining traction with the king's blessing. The Imam organizes a meeting with the king and his entourage to find a solution to the insubordination of the Ceddo community, who killed Prince Biram and Saxewar. During the meeting, a messenger arrives with news that the Ceddo elders wish to speak. The king grants audience to the Ceddo elders. The Ceddo elders tell the king that the kingdom is divided because of his intent to force the Imam's religion on people and to persecute those who refuse to convert. They tell the king that those who do not believe in the Muslim faith must be left to practice their faith. They remind the king that his investiture was approved by them, and they demand that no decision be made in the future without consulting them. The Imam takes the floor. He tells the council that the Ceddo elders do not deserve to speak. He reminds the audience that the Ceddo killed the prince and Saxewar. The Imam tells the audience that the Ceddo should never be spoken to, must never be given the



floor, and must have their wells plugged up. He insists that the only things that suit the Ceddo are persecution and death. The Imam asks one of his followers to throw the Ceddo elders out of the meeting. The king tells the Imam that he has overstepped his authority. He reminds the Imam that his role is to oversee the prayers and not to make decisions that belong to the king. One of the council members intervenes to tell the king that the Imam is not challenging his power but warning the people about the evil the unbelievers constitute. Another man adds that the Ceddo, who killed the prince and are holding the princess hostage, are plotting against the king.

The Ceddo's dilemma The Ceddo elders gather to assess the situation. They note that it is clear that the king has allowed the Imam to strip them of every right to speak at the council. They agree that their humiliation at the council gives them three options: secede from the kingdom and consolidate their camp, exile themselves, or convert. The Ceddo elders note that the Imam has armed his followers with guns. For them, the Imam's intention is clear: conquer them by force. Diago, the Ceddo's leader, suggests that they go to war against the Imam. One person remarks that they have no slaves to trade for guns and powder. Diago replies that the white trader would give them guns and powder in exchange for their people, young or old, male or female. One Ceddo finds it immoral to sacrifice one's child in order to live. Another one declares that he had rather convert than give away his family or cattle, and he leaves the meeting. Another Ceddo announces that he will never part with his ancestral gods or be a slave, and that he prefers exile. He leaves the meeting. The Ceddo council decides the terms of the exchange with the white trader: an adolescent for a gun and gunpowder; an adult for two guns and gunpowder. The council votes and agrees on the proposal.



The real danger is the Imam Madior Fall, who entered the king's compound during the meeting, follows the discussion with visible interest. He interrupts the council members and tells the king that the real danger is the Imam. He says that the Imam, who has made him believe that his Allah is more important than their ancestral gods, already wields more power than he does. Fall tells the king that his power is corrupt because he has rejected its foundation. The *muezzin* calls the faithful to the prayer. As the Imam withdraws from the meeting, the king asks him why he does not refer to him as king, like everybody else. The Imam tells the king that there is only one king, and that is Allah, the Creator of everything. The king is visibly unhappy. The Imam orders the believers to follow him. The king's notables follow the Imam. In the absence of the king, his notables talk about the future of the kingdom. They note that, with the prince dead, the king's sole successor is Princess Dior Yacine. They find it unacceptable for a woman to sit on the throne. They also find it unacceptable for the Ceddo to come to power, as they would seek revenge for the wrongs they suffered and will take away their property and turn them into slaves. One of the notables proposes that the Imam marry the king's daughter and rule the kingdom; this way, the power of the Muslims will be absolute. The other notables approve. The king's notables feel that the king is getting old. They do not want to be surprised by a power vacuum. They say it is in their interest to find a successor who will allow them to keep their privileges. They think the Imam is the right person.



The king is murdered The Imam declares a holy war. Some Ceddo come to the Imam to convert to Islam. The Imam's followers shave them, give them some new clothes, and start teaching them how to pray. The Imam hears of the Ceddo's plan to attack. He gathers his followers and tells them to go on the offensive first. He tells them that Allah is protecting them and asks them to be intolerant with those who refuse to submit to Islam. The Muslim troops attack the Catholic mission, kill the white priest, and burn his church. They attack the Ceddo. They cause desolation on their path. The Imam's troops convert the Ceddo by force. The Imam and the king's counselors, plot to kill the king.



The Imam becomes king The Imam is now the most powerful man in the kingdom. He sits on the late king's throne, and the king's *griot* and counselors, who have plotted against the king and helped the Imam come to power, sit next to him. However, during a town meeting, the Imam asks them to go sit among the commoners, and he calls his own men to sit with him. The Imam declares paganism and idolatry crimes against Allah and punishable by death. He forbids drinking and debauchery, as well as any artistic reproduction of human form, whether on canvas, metal, or wood. The Imam's followers refer to him as the new king and tell the people that if they obey him, they will have a place in paradise. One by one, the Ceddo are brought before the Imam, who gives them new, Muslim names.



The princess kills the Imam The Imam's disciples kill the Ceddo holding Dior Yacine hostage. As the Ceddo kidnapper collapses to the ground, the princess has a vision of him coming to court her. She wishes that he had fallen for her when she tried to seduce him during her incarceration. The Imam's men take the princess to the Imam. The princess snatches the gun of one of the Imam's disciples. The other guards of the Imam want to intervene, but the Ceddo grab their guns and put the barrels in their own mouths, thus, preventing, with their mystic powers, the guns from going off. The princess walks to the Imam and shoots him. The Imam falls, dead. The princess walks away.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

DEMBA WAR 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.

Weak Demba War is an impotent king. His authority no longer holds sway. He has become a repeater of the Imam's orders, and he realizes that the Imam no longer has any respect for him. At one point in the film, he asks the Imam why he refuses to call him king. The Imam replies that only Allah deserves that title. The king's advisors realize his weakness, conclude that he is getting old, and are already thinking of finding a replacement for him in the person of the Imam.

Malleable The king is gullible and malleable. He has abandoned his responsibilities and his ability to think to the Imam. The Imam now decides everything in the kingdom. He realizes this when the Imam expels the Ceddo representatives from the kingdom council. He tries to complain, but his *griot* immediately defends the Imam's action as praiseworthy. And the king sheepishly retracts.

DIOR YACINE 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.

Dignified Dior Yacine is not intimidated by her kidnapper. When the Ceddo kidnaps her and confines her to a secret place in the heart of the savannah, she asks him, as a princess worthy of her family and religious origins, if he really knows who he is dealing with. She reminds him that she is the daughter of Demba Dior and a faithful Muslim, and she promises that she will step over his corpse within hours. The fact that she is a prisoner does not prevent her from fighting back.

Determined The princess is determined to free herself from her kidnapper and waits for help from the palace. When, after a few days, she realizes, with the death of her brother and Saxewar, that the rescue operation has failed, she takes matters into her own hands. She tries to seduce her kidnapper to take his weapon, but to no avail. Determined not to be the wife of the man who had her father murdered, she takes revenge on the Imam by killing him.

Brave The people realize the bravery of the princess when she saves the kingdom from the Imam's grip. Dior Yacine's gesture comes at a crucial moment in the kingdom's history, when an Islamist dictatorship threatens to erase the people's cultural identity. In the film's final scene, when Yacine is leaving after killing the Imam, all eyes turn to her in the hope that she will be the kingdom's new leader. She embodies the resilient woman found throughout the histories of African kingdoms, who kept them standing against external aggression.

THE IMAM 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.

Ambitious Contrary to his professed faith in Allah and respect for his precepts, the Imam cherishes the dream of sitting on King Demba War's throne and ruling an Islamic kingdom. He does this by weakening the king's power and secretly arming his followers for the holy war he was preparing. He has the king assassinated, then, he sits on the king's throne and institutes a short-lived Islamic dictatorship in the kingdom.

Dishonest The Imam tells the king that none but Allah deserves to be called king. However, this is just a subterfuge to weaken the king and position himself in his place. When he has the king assassinated and sits on the throne, the Imam forgets his former morality and becomes adulated and idolized. He finds no problem in being given the title he refused the king.

Violent The Imam's methods of conversion have nothing of the gentle persuasion used by the Catholic priest. The Imam uses force. For him, people are either Muslims, slaves or subhuman and don't deserve to live. When he declares war against non-Muslims and launches his followers into what he calls "the holy war," he leaves a trail of carnage, devastated fields and homes.

THEMES

Tradition (matriarchy vs patriarchy) Until the early fifteen century, before a 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.

Religious conversion *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

Responsibility Ousmane Sembène 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. 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.

Crisis and opportunity The widespread arms proliferation in Africa, which many Africans see as a crisis, is for Europe a godsend, a great opportunity. In the documentary *Darwin's Nightmare* (2004), Dima Rogonov, a Ukrainian pilot illegally transporting weapons to Africa, is overcome by a sudden feeling of remorse. He regrets the fact that, just a few days before Christmas, while he is preparing to send his Ukrainian children some toys, the gift that he is bringing to African children are weapons for deadly wars. Indeed, African wars are a booming business for Europe. In *Ceddo*, the white merchant's sale of weapons to Africans inflames inter-communal wars and brings him slaves. To obtain weapons and powder to defend themselves against their enemies, the men of the kingdom exchange men and women for guns. Thus, the Muslims, armed to the teeth, prepare for a *Jihad* that will extend their power. The Ceddo, seeing themselves threatened, also decide to sell members of their families to the white merchant to arm themselves against the Muslim hegemony. In the escalation of armaments, the white merchant does good business, as the prisoners of war are sold to him as slaves. Meanwhile, Africa dwindles by killing off its human resources and halting its chances of development. Here, Sembène's criticism is blunt. It is aimed at both the legal and illegal export of arms to Africa, which, while keeping Africa in a state of decline, enhances development in the West.

Slavery *Ceddo* alludes to one of the most shameful events in human history, the slave trade. Indeed, most European countries took part in the African slave trade. Between 1650 and 1900, more than 28 million Africans were taken against their will and sold as slaves in Europe and the Americas. Slave ships would leave Europe loaded with textile, rum, firearms, and custom jewelry to be traded for tribal war prisoners held by warring African chiefs or innocent Africans captured by commissioned professional slave hunters and rounded up for months in slave outposts on the Atlantic coast. In *Ceddo*, the white merchant, with whom the villagers trade men and women for goods, brands his slaves with the *fleur-de-lys* symbol. This symbol is all the more significant as it reveals the transnational nature of the slave trade. Indeed, while the *fleur-de-lys* was a symbol of the French coat of arms from the Middle Ages to the Revolution of 1792, it was not just a French symbol. It was also found on the coat of arms of the English crown, and in Spain as a symbol for members of the court who had family ties with French royalty, including the King of Spain. In *Ceddo*, the *fleur-de-lys* marking of slaves symbolizes their dispersal around the world as a result of the multinational scale of the slave trade. This internationalization of the slave trade and the multitude of

interests at stake made its abolition difficult. Even after the last slave-economy nations abolished slavery—the British government abolished the import of slaves from Africa in 1833—some lawbreakers were still trading in slaves.

QUESTIONS

1. Is it true, as Sembène suggests, that in colonial times Islam converted by repression and Christianity by persuasion? Justify your answer with historical references if possible.
2. The *Ceddo* refuse to have an ideology imposed on them. Today, what dissent groups would the *Ceddo* symbolize?
3. Sembène often said that in Africa, only men have the right to speak. Do you think that *Ceddo* gives women a voice? Explain your answer.
4. In Sembène's films, no one seems totally innocent or totally guilty. How is this dramatised in *Ceddo*?
5. Imagine and describe a short sequel to this story.