

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## **La Petite vendeuse de Soleil/The Little Girl Who Sold The Sun (1999)** Djibril Diop Mambéty (1945-1998)

### OVERVIEW

**Auteur** Djibril Diop Mambéty was born in 1945, in Colobane, Senegal. He died in 1998 in Paris after a long battle with lung cancer. Mambéty's first artistic love was theater. He then transitioned to film though having no formal training in the trade. After a few shorts, Mambéty gained international recognition with *Touki Bouki*, which won him the International Critics Award at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival and the International Federation of Film Critics Prize (FIPRESCI Prize) at the 1973 Moscow International Film Festival. In 1992, Mambéty directed *Hyenas*, an adaptation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *The Visit*. He later directed *Le Franc* (1994) and *La Petite Vendeuse de Soleil/The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* (1999), both part of his unfinished trilogy *Contes des Petites Gens* (Tales of the Little People). Mambéty's films are celebrated for their non-linear narratives, surreal imagery, and sharp social criticism.

**Film** *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* is a 45-minute drama envisioned by Mambéty as the second part of a trilogy titled *Tales of Ordinary People*. The film was released posthumously in 1999 after Mambéty died of lung cancer in 1998. The short film received several awards recognizing its social impact. Among its honors were the Ellen Award at Aspen Shortsfest (2000) and Best Short Film at the Pan African Film Festival (2000).

**Background** *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* was filmed in Dakar, Senegal. Lissa Baléra, the lead actress, was discovered among street children. The film was widely praised in Senegal for its realistic depiction of resilience and hope. The dialogue is spoken in Wolof and French.

### MAIN CHARACTERS

**Sili Laam:** A 10-year-old girl who decides to take on the boy-dominated role of selling newspapers

**Babou:** A newspaper boy who befriends and protects Sili against aggressive newspaper vendors

**The newspaper boys:** A gang of rowdy newspaper boys

### SYNOPSIS

Sili, a 10-year-old disabled girl walking with crutches, leaves her slum for Dakar, hoping to beg and provide for her family. Upon arriving in the city, she observes newspaper boys hawking their papers and boldly chooses to enter the trade, challenging the idea that it is reserved for boys. Her presence provokes hostility from the newspaper vendors, who see her as an intruder and attempt to intimidate her. They push her, shove her to the ground, and try to force her out, but she refuses to retreat. Each time she falls, she rises with unwavering defiance, meeting their aggression with fearless determination. Despite their attempts to discourage her, she successfully sells *Le Soleil*, proving her resilience. As her success grows, so does the boys' resentment, leading them to escalate their efforts by stealing her crutches. In her most vulnerable moment, her loyal friend, Babou, who has protected her since she began selling newspapers, carries her on his back. Together, they walk from a dark hallway into the light outside, a powerful visual of solidarity and hope in the face of adversity.

## SCENES

**An accused woman** At the exit of the port of Dakar, a guard stops an employee. He accuses her of theft and asks to search her basket. The woman refuses. She retorts that the guard has no right to search her and that she is an honest woman. The guard roughs her up and, in the commotion, rips off her dress, exposing her bra. The police intervene and take the woman away. Detained a few moments later in the police station courtyard, the young woman cries out her indignation. She accuses the authorities of humiliating her by calling her a thief. She declares that she is a queen, descended from a noble family and not a line of thieves.



**Going to Dakar** Sili, a ten-year-old girl, walking on crutches, struggles out of a shantytown. She passes through a quarry where a ragged man, sitting on the ground, is breaking stones into gravel. She joins a young cart driver, who asks her how she is doing. She tells him that the pain in her knees prevented her from going out and that now that she feels better, she wants to go to Dakar to look for work to support her family. The cart driver carries her on his back and helps her onto his cart.



**There is nothing a girl cannot do** Sili goes to see her blind grandmother, who begs at the Dakar market. Sili begs, too. She sees a group of noisy boys selling newspapers. She follows them. The boys besiege passersby and motorists, hawking their papers. One of the boys pushes Sili, who lands on the pavement. Leaning on her crutches, the little girl gets to her feet. She promises herself that tomorrow she will look for work as a newspaper seller because there is nothing that a girl cannot do.



**Sili wants to sell *Le Soleil*** The next day, Sili waits with the boys for the newspaper warehouse to open. As the gates open, the boys rush to the entrance and beat her to it. Sili arrives last in front of the warehouse manager and tells him she wants to be a salesgirl for *Le Soleil*. The man is surprised that a girl would want to do this job. His assistant, a woman, tells him that girls can sell newspapers just as well as boys.



**Sili is hired** The assistant gives Sili a batch of thirteen newspapers and has her sign a receipt. Sili signs the receipt by drawing a sun on it. Sili promises the assistant that she will sell all the newspapers and remit her money tomorrow. A young newspaper seller, Babou, who had been watching Sili from afar, approaches and offers Sili a canvas bag to carry her newspapers. Sili straps on the canvas bag and sets off to sell her newspapers through the muddy, sewage-filled streets of Dakar.



**Babou protects Sili** Sili joins the newspaper vendors along the highway shouting the headlines of their respective newspapers. Sili exclaims, visibly proud, "Grandma, I've finally made it as a *Sun* seller." Sili sells her newspapers in front of a bakery. One of the newspaper boys asks her to leave his territory. Babou defends her and tells the boy that the law allows Sili to sell her newspapers wherever she wants. A man buys all Sili's newspapers, gives her a 10,000-franc bill and tells Sili to keep the change.



**Sili demands an apology** Sili goes to the bakery to break her large bill. A police officer stops her. He wants to know how Sili, whom he knows as a beggar, obtained such a large sum of money. He asks Sili to follow him to the police station. Sili replies, "Let's go!" At the police station, Sili produces proof that she is a newspaper seller. The commissioner orders



her to be released. Sili asks the policeman to apologize and pleads for the woman arrested at the port to be released, too. Sili tells the commissioner that the woman is like herself, a victim of abuse of power. The commissioner has the woman released.

**Sili offers a party** Sili buys a parasol to put over her grandmother's head to protect her from the sun. Sili hands out money to beggars. She orders drinks and buys music from a young disabled man who sells music from his cassette player. Sili, wearing yellow glasses and a yellow dress, eats, drinks and dances with the local children. The children also wear new clothes, probably given to them by Sili.



**13 is my lucky number** Sili goes to the newspaper depot to hand in her earnings. The manager and his assistant congratulate her for the job well done and give her 350 francs as her commission. The assistant offers Sili a batch of 25 newspapers to sell, encouraging her to take on more work. However, Sili confidently replies that she prefers to stick to 13 newspapers, as she believes the number brings her good luck.

**Government vs people papers** Sili goes out to sell her newspapers with her friend, who sells *Le Sud* (*The South*) instead of *Le Soleil* (*The Sun*). Curious, Sili asks him why he chose *Le Sud*, and he explains that it sells better than *Le Soleil*. He further clarifies that *Le Sud* is considered the newspaper of the people, while *Le Soleil* represents the government.



**Babou recovers Sili's crutch** Sili and her friend Babou decide to sell their newspapers at the port. The newspaper boys are already there, trying to sell their own papers. Sili sells all her newspapers, becoming the boys' target. They shove her and throw one of her crutches into the sea. Babou dives into the sea to retrieve it, and Sili, still on the ground, gives him a big, grateful smile. Sili and Babou retreat to a secluded spot in the mangroves, where the boy takes off his soaked T-shirt, wrings it out, and lays it to dry on the branches. Sili tells Babou tales passed on to her by her blind grandmother. She sings him a song.



**Walking into the future** The newspapers seem to be selling very well. Both Sili and the other newspaper vendors are making good earnings. The front page announces that Africa is leaving the CFA (Colonial French Africa currency) zone, capturing the public's attention as they become engrossed in reading the news. While Sili counts her earnings, the boys steal one of her crutches and run away. Babou chases after them but returns empty-handed. Carrying Sili on his back, Babou and Sili walk toward the exit of a grand hall of the Dakar-Gorée boat station, stepping into the daylight.



## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**SILI** Optimistic and fearless, Sili refuses to let obstacles define her, tackling the male-dominated newspaper trade with unwavering determination. Resilient in the face of adversity, she rises each time she is pushed down, proving that strength comes from perseverance. Her compassion shines through her generosity, as she shares her earnings to uplift those around her despite her own struggles. Fiercely independent, she rejects reliance on begging, choosing instead to work and provide for both her and her blind grandmother.

*Optimistic* Sili's optimism radiates through her unwavering smile, a symbol of her resilience despite the hardships she faces. Her battle cry, "Forward," reflects her optimism, as she refuses to be held back

by obstacles. She has set her mind on selling *Le Soleil* and does not entertain the possibility of failure, forging ahead with confidence and resolve until she becomes the best newspaper salesperson in Dakar.

*Fearless* Sili boldly enters the male-dominated newspaper trade, refusing to be intimidated. She stands her ground against bullies, rising each time she is knocked down. Confidently navigating the streets on crutches, she proves that strength isn't limited to physical ability. Through her courage, she challenges norms and inspires others to be brave.

*Resilient* Sili's refuses to let her physical handicap or bullies hold her back. Each time she is knocked down, she rises and keeps going, determined to succeed in a job traditionally reserved for boys. Through courage and perseverance, she defies expectations and carves her own path.

*Compassionate* Sili's compassion shines through her generosity, as she shares her earnings with her friends, treating them to drinks and music to bring them joy. She also uses her money to buy a parasol for her grandmother, ensuring she is protected from the harsh sun. Through these acts of kindness, Sili uplifts those around her despite her own struggles.

*Independent* Sili's independence is evident in her refusal to rely on begging, choosing instead to earn her own living by selling *Le Soleil*. She takes full responsibility not only for herself but also for her blind grandmother, ensuring she is cared for and protected. Her determination to provide for both of them highlights her maturity and strength, proving that she is capable beyond her years.

**THE NEWSPAPER BOYS** The newspaper boys guard their trade with relentless aggression, viewing Sili as an intruder who threatens their dominance. Their resentment fuels hostility, driving them to intimidate and push her out, unwilling to accept her success. In this fiercely competitive environment, they fight to maintain control.

*Aggressive* The newspaper boys display relentless aggression, determined to maintain their dominance in the trade. They see Sili as an intruder and resort to intimidation, pushing her down and trying to discourage her from selling newspapers. Their hostility reflects the harsh realities of street life.

*Resentful* The newspaper boys' deep-seated resentfulness toward Sili becomes a major hurdle in her attempt to sell *Le Soleil*. Resentful of her presence in what they consider their domain, they initially express their hostility through veiled threats and exclusionary behavior. As their bitterness intensifies, it gives way to physical aggression, forcing Sili to constantly defend herself against their escalating attempts to drive her out.

*Competitive* The newspaper boys are fiercely competitive, risking their safety as they dart between cars to sell papers to motorists. Their survival depends on speed and strategy, making them highly protective of their territory. When Sili enters their trade, they see her as a direct threat to their success, resenting her determination and resilience.

**BABOU** Babou, Sili's friend, shows deep empathy and protectiveness. He stands up to the newspaper boys and ensures that Sili can sell *Le Soleil* without fear.

*Empathetic* In the harsh and indifferent urban landscape, where everyone is a stranger and the law of the strongest prevails, Babou is the first to offer Sili a shoulder—both literally and figuratively. He shields her from bullies, plunges into danger on her behalf, and becomes a trusted companion with whom she shares stories and laughter. Through his empathetic presence, her time in Dakar becomes less bleak than it might otherwise have been.

*Protective* Sili's friend proves his unwavering loyalty by standing up to the newspaper boys who try to push her out of their territory. He refuses to let them intimidate her, ensuring she can sell *Le Soleil* without

fear. When they cruelly throw her crutch into the sea, he immediately dives in to retrieve it, showing his deep commitment to her well-being. His courage and selflessness make him an invaluable ally in Sili's fight for independence.

## THEMES

**Gender / Emancipation** The pursuit of freedom from societal constraints is a journey that often requires defiance, resilience, and self-determination. In the process of emancipation, one has to break barriers, redefine one's roles and assert one's place in society. In *The Little Girl Who Sold The Sun*, Mambéty captures this journey through Sili, who, despite her poverty and disability, refuses to be confined by traditional expectations. Sili challenges gender norms in a patriarchal environment, where a woman's voice is often overlooked. The city, though a harsh and unforgiving place, becomes a space where Sili shapes her own path, proving that social mobility is possible even for the most marginalized. Her struggle becomes a metaphor for broader societal change, where the oppressed rise, reclaim their place, and undo outdated structures. Mambéty's message on liberation derives from Franz Fanon in the sense that emancipation is not given but fought for, often in defiance of the forces that seek to maintain oppression.

*Illustrative moment:* When Sili decides to sell newspapers like the boys of Dakar, she confronts those who doubt her abilities with unwavering resolve: "Girls can do everything boys can do." Sili proves her point by succeeding at selling papers better than the boys, prompting them to start bullying her, pushing her, shoving her on the floor, stealing her crutches and throwing them in the sea. Yet, Sili does not give in, she keeps forging ahead, smiling as a defiance, even raising her fist against them, signaling that she is ready to face their menaces and fight back despite being girl, disabled and outnumbered in a society that marginalizes the women and disabled people.



**Injustice/Power abuse** Power abuse occurs when authority is used unfairly to oppress, control, or punish individuals, often targeting those who are most vulnerable. When institutions fail to act with fairness, discrimination and wrongful accusations become routine, leaving many unable to defend themselves. Whether through law enforcement, government policies, or entrenched social hierarchies, these abuses deepen inequality and silence those who lack influence. In many cases, people subjected to such treatment have little recourse, as their voices are ignored and their rights dismissed. In *The Little Girl Who Sold The Sun*, Mambéty brings this injustice into focus through Sili's experience. Accused of theft simply for possessing a large bill, she faces the same unfair treatment that keeps another woman imprisoned. Yet instead of accepting this abuse, Sili challenges it, standing her ground and demanding accountability, turning her fight into a call for justice and equality.

*Illustrative moment:* At the port of Dakar, a woman is falsely accused of theft by a security guard. She is beaten by the guard, who rips her clothes and exposes her bare chest. The police then come, arrest her, and incarcerates her assuming that she is automatically in the wrong for being accused by a man. Deprived of justice, the woman descends into madness. When Sili faces a similar abuse of power, she decides to fight back both for herself and that woman: Indeed, a customer who knows her grandmother buys all Sili's newspapers and gives her a 10,000-franc bill, telling her to keep the change. As Sili goes to a bakery to break her large bill, a policeman, who knows her as a beggar, assumes that she has stolen the money and orders her to follow him at the police station. Determined to prove her innocence, Sili demands to see the police commissioner, presenting clear evidence that she is a newspaper vendor and that the money is the fruit of her hard work. When she is finally released, she refuses to leave without holding the abusive officer accountable, insisting that he apologize for his wrongful accusation. Seizing the moment, she also argues for the release of the woman falsely imprisoned, pointing out that she, too, is a victim of generalized police abuse against women, a widespread injustice.

**Resilience** Few embody the ability to endure hardship and rise despite adversity more fully than Sili. In *The Little Girl Who Sold The Sun*, her determination is tested at every turn. Poverty, disability, and rejection threaten to hold her back, yet she refuses to surrender. Whether confined indoors by pain or facing hostility from newspaper vendors in the city, Sili always finds a way to push forward. Her ability to lean on her crutches, literally and figuratively, after each fall is a testament to her unwavering spirit. More than an individual act of perseverance, her struggle mirrors the reality of street children and marginalized communities fighting for dignity and inclusion. Through her defiant journey, *Mambéty* illustrates that resilience is about asserting one's existence in a world that seeks to diminish it, proving that hope and determination are powerful forces against social injustice.

*Illustrative moments:* Sili confides in the young cart driver, who worries about her prolonged absence, explaining that the pain in her knees had kept her from going out, and that is why he has not seen her lately. But as soon as the pain subsides, even briefly, Sili heads into the city, determined to earn money and support her family. In an emblematic scene, the camera lingers on the start of Sili's journey toward the city, capturing her amid the clatter of her crutches as she painstakingly crosses a vast boulevard under construction, while massive trucks thunder past at high speed. A ragged stone breaker watches her with concern until she finally reaches the other side. The scene poignantly conveys Sili's vulnerability in the face of the monstrous forces of urbanization, foreshadowing the challenges that await her in the city, while also highlighting her quiet determination to press forward and overcome adversity.



**Optimism** Optimism fuels perseverance, turning obstacles into opportunities rather than barriers. It is not merely hope but a conviction that progress is possible even in adversity. Those who hold onto optimism can endure hardship with resilience, approaching setbacks as challenges to overcome rather than reasons to surrender. In environments shaped by struggle and exclusion, optimism becomes a tool for survival, empowering individuals to envision and work toward a better future. This spirit defines *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun*, where Sili's unwavering determination enables her to push forward despite cruelty and rejection. Her belief in possibility inspires those around her, proving that hope is a force capable of reshaping reality.

*Illustrative moments:* You see, Grandma, I sell the newspaper Soleil!" This is Sili's triumphant cry when she finally breaks into a trade that refuses to make room for women—let alone those with disabilities. Her exclamation marks a symbolic victory: the triumph of Sili's optimism over the pessimism imposed by her social condition as a poor girl from a Dakar suburb. She confronts the monstrosity of urban sprawl, the hostility of the boy newspaper vendors, the skepticism of the newspaper depot manager, and the abuses of the police. Against all odds, Sili overcomes every obstacle and ultimately embodies the power of hope in a future bathed in the yellow hues of the sun, surrounded by the children of her neighborhood.



**Empathy/solidarity** Solidarity and empathy are essential survival tools in societies marked by hardship and inequality. In difficult environments, where individuals face economic struggles, social exclusion, or general injustice, the ability to connect, support, and uplift one another becomes a means of survival. Empathy fosters understanding, allowing people to recognize shared challenges and offer help where needed, while solidarity transforms individual struggles into collective strength. Whether through small acts of kindness, mutual protection, or communal resilience, these forces allow the most vulnerable to navigate adversity with dignity. In urban spaces where competition and exploitation threaten to eat away human kindness, solidarity ensures that no one is left entirely alone. This is especially compelling in *The Little Girl Who Sold The Sun*, where despite the brutality of street life, moments of compassion, such as, between Sili, her peers, and even strangers, provide her with the strength to persevere.

*Illustrative moments:* The kindness Sili experiences in her rural neighborhood follows her into Dakar, even as the city tests her resilience. It begins with the young cart driver, who carries her on his back, ensuring she reaches her destination despite her physical limitations. This act of compassion sets the tone for the solidarity she finds amid the hardship of urban life. In the city, Babou, another newspaper vendor, drawn to her spirit, watches over her, defending her against rival sellers and even diving into the water to retrieve her crutch when she is attacked. When Sili earns a small amount of money, she immediately thinks of her grandmother, who begs under the scorching sun, and she buys her a parasol. Sili also brings joy to the girls in her community by buying new dresses for them and organizing a small celebration with drink and dance, proving that generosity can flourish even in difficult circumstances. Mambéty's lesson is that through human connection and mutual support, individuals find strength, turning adversity into moments of triumph.

**Friendship and love** Friendship and love are two essential forces that shape human relationships, offering support and comfort in the face of life's challenges. Friendship is built on trust, sharing, and mutual assistance, helping individuals feel less alone and stronger in difficult times. Love, whether fraternal, friendly, or romantic, transcends barriers and nurtures hope, providing light even in the darkest moments. These emotions become even more valuable in a world filled with adversity, where kindness and solidarity serve as shelters against hardship. In *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun*, Djibril Diop Mambéty illustrates these values through the relationship between Babou and Sili, who, despite their harsh surroundings, find strength and hope in their friendship. Babou, by protecting and supporting Sili, embodies the idea that humanity can endure even in a merciless world.

*Illustrative moment:* In *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun*, the relationship between Babou and Sili represents deep friendship and precious solidarity in a Senegalese society defined by rivalry and the struggle for survival. From the moment she enters the newspaper vendors' circle, Sili faces the brutality of boys who refuse to accept her. Unlike them, Babou watches over her, protects her, and defends her against their hostility. Together, they share stories, forging a genuine bond that transcends the hardships of daily life. When Sili is deprived of her crutch, Babou does not hesitate to dive into the sea to retrieve it, an act that demonstrates his loyalty and devotion to her. In the final moments of the film, he carries her on his back, symbolizing their unity and their shared journey toward an uncertain but intertwined destiny.



**Disability** In *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun*, Djibril Diop Mambéty highlights the marginalization of people with disabilities in a society that provides neither protection nor proper accommodation. Sili, the film's protagonist, relies on a crutch to move, yet the city of Dakar is not designed to support her mobility. Chaotic streets, inaccessible sidewalks, and the absence of infrastructure make navigation difficult, forcing those with disabilities to struggle for basic dignity in their daily lives. The film raises a fundamental question: how can a society progress if it abandons its most vulnerable members? Through Sili's journey, Mambéty urges us to consider the importance of inclusion and the need to respect everyone's fundamental rights.

*Illustrative moment:* The film illustrates this social exclusion through the hardships Sili and Moussa, a disabled young man in a wheelchair, must endure. Moussa sells music through his cassette player and is constantly bullied by the young newspaper vendors. They take his hat from him, hit him on the head, and pull his wheelchair. Sili tries to intervene, but she, too, becomes the target of the boys. Sili struggles to navigate the unforgiving landscape of Dakar, forced to wade through dirty water, climb stairs, and walk on uneven sidewalks, all the while relying on the strength of her frail arms and the support of her crutches. On top of these physical challenges, she faces relentless hostility. Sili is constantly shoved, scorned, and rejected, not only because of her disability. The other vendors see her as an intruder and cruelly steal one of her crutches, which they throw in the sea, thus depriving her of her only means of mobility. This poignant scene highlights the complete lack of consideration for society's



most vulnerable and the harsh reality of a world where disability is not perceived as a condition deserving assistance but as an aberration that has no rightful place in the social fabric.

**Rural vs urban spaces** African literature and cinema often contrast rural and urban spaces, depicting the former as a place of tradition, community, and moral grounding, while the latter represents modernity, opportunity, and ruthless competition. The rural world, though marked by poverty, follows a measured rhythm shaped by ancestral wisdom, whereas the city thrives on individual ambition, often at the expense of collective support. As urbanization accelerates, this shift pulls people away from their cultural roots, replacing solidarity with relentless struggle. In *The Little Girl Who Sold The Sun*, Sili's journey illustrates this tension, as she moves from a familiar, communal rural space to the unforgiving urban environment of Dakar. Her experience reflects the broader societal challenge of adapting to progress while grappling with the erosion of traditions, showing how individuals must navigate new opportunities without losing their cultural identity.

*Illustrative moment:* The film opens with Sili emerging from her shantytown, stepping onto a landscape caught in the throes of urbanization. Bulldozers carve out new roads, reshaping the terrain under their relentless weight, while a man in tattered clothes, seated on the ground, hammers stones into gravel to be used as raw material for the city's future. This contrast sets the stage: the transition from rural poverty to the promise of urban prosperity, a journey that will be both arduous and solitary. Sili confronts the difficult reality of the heartless urban space when the newspaper boys bully her or when she is forced to earn a living risking her life on highways with speeding cars or face the injustice and abuses of people in authority, such as the police. While the rural space is one of collective sharing, the newspaper vendors, who order Sili to leave their territories, remind her that the urban space is carved in privatized spaces of individual control.



**Change** Throughout history, gender roles have shaped access to economic, social, and physical spaces, often reinforcing divisions that limit opportunities based on societal expectations. However, shifts in cultural attitudes, economic necessities, and acts of individual defiance have steadily challenged these constraints, paving the way for new possibilities. Women and girls, in particular, have confronted traditional boundaries, asserting their right to participate in domains once dominated by men. Whether in labor markets, public spaces, or informal economies, these moments of resistance redefine notions of capability and entitlement. The transformation is not merely about inclusion but about dismantling assumptions that link gender to ability, proving that presence and participation are matters of determination rather than biology. This shift is illustrated through Sili's unwavering persistence, as she refuses to be excluded from the streets where boys control the newspaper trade. Through resilience and conviction, she forces a reckoning with outdated norms, demonstrating that access and success should never be determined by gender alone.

*Illustrative moment:* Sili boldly asserts her right to occupy spaces traditionally reserved for men, declaring, "Anything a boy can do, a girl can do, too." Her words are reinforced by the newspaper distributor's female assistant, who challenges her boss when he doubts Sili's ability to sell newspapers simply because she is a girl. The assistant insists that girls can be just as skilled at selling papers as boys, emphasizing that gender should never dictate one's opportunities. And she is right: Sili quickly proves herself to be a formidable newspaper vendor. She sells out her papers, remits the receipts the next day, and get more papers, outperforming the boys so thoroughly that they turn resentful. Frustrated by her success, they become hostile, pushing her to the ground. Yet Sili refuses to be defeated. She lifts her head and flashes them a defiant smile, silently declaring that the old ways are over; she is here to stay, and they will have to reckon with her presence.

**Quest** The rural world, once a place of tradition and stability, has lost its appeal, while the city offers the promise of modernity. Both young and old migrate to urban spaces, searching for a better life, yet the transition is far from seamless. Sili enters Dakar, a city that offers no mercy. Unlike the young cart driver from her village who carried her with care, the urban world views her disability not with empathy, but as a weakness to exploit. She faces hostility, violence, and rejection. In *The Little Girl Who Sold The Sun*, urban life reflects a growing disconnect from traditional values. The traditional mentors who once passed down history and values are replaced by money-hungry capitalists. As modernity reshapes society, cultural wisdom fades, replaced by violence and individualism. Mambéty's critique raises a crucial question: Can progress coexist with tradition without erasing the essence of Senegalese society?

*Illustrative moment:* From the very beginning of the film, key moments foreshadow the dangers of Sili's journey to the city in search of happiness. The young girl, navigating the world with crutches, must cross a wide and perilous highway under the watchful, visibly concerned gaze of a stone breaker, who follows her movements until she safely reaches the other side. The bulldozers working to extend the road signal the advance of urbanization into her slum, setting the stage for the transition she is about to undertake. Moving against the tide of these monstrous machines, Sili heads toward Dakar, leaving behind the protective embrace of rural life, where the watchful eyes of adults offer security, and stepping into a chaotic urban landscape. It does not take long for Sili to grasp the harsh reality of the city. In Dakar, children roam the streets unsupervised, forced to take charge of their own survival far too soon, navigating a world governed by the law of the strongest. Here, Sili is insulted, shoved, and humiliated. Yet, in her quest for happiness, these trials become unavoidable obstacles, tests of resilience and determination that she must overcome.

**Information** (state vs grassroots) In Senegal, as in many post-colonial societies, government-controlled media often serves as a tool for propaganda rather than truthful reporting. Over time, citizens have grown distrustful of state narratives, refusing to consume news that they believe is manipulated. Instead, they turn to alternative information networks, seeking independent sources that reflect their realities and struggles. The preference for *Sud* over *Le Soleil* in the film symbolizes this rejection of official discourse in favor of grassroots journalism. By highlighting this divide, *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* not only tells Sili's and the people's story but also critiques the broader political landscape. The film suggests that true empowerment comes from reclaiming information, just as Sili reclaims her right to work in a male-dominated trade. Her friend's choice to sell *Sud* reflects a collective resistance, showing how ordinary people challenge state narratives by creating and supporting independent voices. From Ousmane Sembène's *Xala* to Med Hondo's *Black Light* and Abderrhamane Sissako's *Timbuktu*, African cinema has long been a powerful tool for challenging state narratives and exposing media manipulation. Films that critique state-controlled media often highlight propaganda, censorship, and the struggle for truth.

*Illustrative moment:* As Sili ventures out to sell her newspapers, she is accompanied by her friend, who sells *Sud* instead of *Le Soleil*. Curious about his choice, she asks why he prefers *Sud*, and he explains that it sells better because it is the newspaper of the people, whereas *Le Soleil* represents the government. This exchange subtly reveals a deeper societal issue, the people's loss of confidence in the state and its institutions, which have repeatedly deceived them. The dialogue between Sili and her friend subtly critiques public distrust in the media through Sili's deliberate choice to sell *Le Soleil* instead of *Le Sud*. She defends her decision by claiming it serves to bridge the gap between the people and the government, promoting a cordial understanding between the rulers and the ruled.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the film challenge traditional gender roles in Senegalese society?
2. What does Sili's journey reveal about the intersection of gender, disability, and economic survival?
3. What is the significance of the urban-rural contrast, and how does Dakar symbolize both opportunity and exploitation for marginalized individuals?
4. How does the absence of parental figures and traditional mentors reflect a critique of modernity and its impact on youth and communal values?
5. How does the absence of formal education in the film reflect the struggles of impoverished children?
6. How does Sili's approach to earning money and sharing wealth contrast with the competitive and exploitative urban economy?