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Dedication

We would like to dedicate this work to all the members of our family particularly to our parents for their love and help.

We would like also to dedicate it to MrsSenghita Sen.

Abstract

This piece of research intends to discuss the issue of the representation of intellectuals by Senegalese film producer and novelist SembeneOusmane. His films Mandabi(1968) and Xala (1974) constitute the corpus in this study. To prove our assumptions, we rely on Fanon’s theory he develops in The Wretched of the Earth (1961); mainly in the chapters “The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness”and “On Violence”.The films are a denunciation of neocolonial disasters the intellectuals maintain. The neocolonial leaders are responsible for post-independence chaos;such as corruption and exploitation. Another issue raised is the function of the peasantry guided by true intellectuals in the overturn of these disasters.

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I. Introduction

The early 1960s marked the decade of decolonization, when numerous African countries obtained their independence. Africans aspired to create their own films. In the 1950s and 1960s, cinema was used as an anti-colonial struggle. Directors were interested mainly in themes praising the African past and identity for self-affirmation or themes related to the colonial experience. However, in the 1970s, the post-independence era, cinema turned to a protest against corrupt African elite. Directors became concerned more with neocolonialism¹ and its troubles such as corruption, betrayal of independence and exploitation.

Early directors such as Sembene Ousmane considered the art of filmmaking as an important instrument committed to social or political programs. He is an instance of a “Cinéma Engagé”² and “Third Cinema” that aims to “immerse itself in the lives and struggles of the peoples of the Third World”³. He turns to a cinema that represents African realities. He has produced a plethora of films condemning neocolonialism; including *Mandabi* (1968) and *Xala* (1974) which constitute the corpus of the study for this dissertation.

Both *Xala* and *Mandabi* were initially written forms before Sembene turned them into films. *Mandabi* is about the treatment of ordinary people by bureaucracy. *Xala* is a satiric allegory on the African bourgeoisie. Both films are Sembene’s critical assault on the ills of neocolonialism, a burning political issue directly linked to post-independence period.

This piece of research probes into the image of the intellectuals in Senegalese filmmaker Sembene Ousmane in selected films, *Mandabi* (1968) and *Xala* (1974). We intend to look into the way he depicts intellectuals in Neocolonial Senegal and Africa at large.

1. Review of the Literature

Scant pieces of criticism have been conducted on *Mandabi*, but many more are carried on *Xala*. The critics tackled the two films from different angles. For example, in his article “Mandabi” in *Film Quarterly*, John Frazer refers to Sembene as an artist of talent and commitment who portrays critical social issues of his Senegalese society⁴. The reviewer sees Sembene as a politically conscious intellectual who believes his primary task is to be in touch with a large audience of his society. Thus, Sembene's film *Mandabi* is considered as a “vehicle for social and political persuasion”⁵. Through this film, Sembene attains his aim of attacking the black bureaucracy.

Reviewing *Mandabi*, Poussaint Renee, in his article “African Film: The High Price of Division”, sees Sembene Ousmane’s film as a portrayal of the opponent of the evolution of Senegal towards social equality. For Renee, Sembene accuses the elite class of bourgeoisie which exploits the masses. He quotes Sembene, “this bourgeoisie uses its knowledge and position to keep the people under its domination and enlarge its fortune”⁶. The critic then discusses the function of cinema. For Sembene, as Renee writes, the film is a political activity. According to him, Sembene “makes his film of and for the masses.”⁷

In his article “Artistic and Ideological Convergence: Ousmane Sembene and Hail Gerima”, Mbye Baboucar Cham sees *Mandabi* as a denunciation of the Senegalese bureaucracy and exploitation. He refers to the film as quintessential African film as it exposes the existing troubles and creates consciousness⁸. The critic attributes the mission of regeneration and change to the exploited once they are enlightened to the causes of their conditions⁹. As a matter of fact, Mbye Baboucar Cham sees *Mandabi* as carrying the mission of political and moral education¹⁰. He adds that “the film is an artistic tool for socio-political development and anti-imperialist struggle”¹¹.

So far as *Xala* is concerned, Françoise Pfaffin her article “Three Faces of Africa: Women in *Xala*” assesses closely the female characters connecting each with stages in Senegalese history: traditional, transitional, and a new Africa. Sembene for Pfaff uses women to condemn polygamy and female subservience. Along with the position of women, the critic puts forth that Sembene is an aspiring Marxist, who sees in Marxism offering the possibility of alleviation to the troubles of post-independence Africa. Concerning cinema, Pfaff discusses “engaged cinema” quoting Sembene’s words: “for us committed cinema is useful and educational”¹².

Marcia Landy is concerned with Sembene’s committed cinema. In her article “Political Allegory and Engaged Cinema: Sembene’s *Xala*”, Landy refers to Sembene’s “engaged cinema” that “sought to articulate and practice a cinema which sets itself in opposition to dominant political ideas and cinematic forms”¹³. For her, beyond mere entertainment, Sembene makes a skillful use of allegory, satire, and montage to engage the viewers critically into political concerns of neocolonialism. In doing so, Sembene succeeds in making his audience reject the dominant political structure of post independent Senegal.

In their article, “Footprints of Fanon in Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* and Sembene Ousmane’s *Xala*”, Haider Eid and Khaled Ghazel discuss the film *Xala* from a Fanonian stance. They examined consumerism, cultural imperialism, capitalism, and neocolonialism as they are displayed in the film. Along with Fanon’s ideas, the two critics focus on the pitfalls and danger of the national bourgeoisie. For them, impotence in *Xala* is a symbol of the weaknesses of the neo-bourgeoisie in post-independent Senegal¹⁴. The two critics refer to scenes from the film stressing the differences that exist between the exploitative elites and the exploited masses.¹⁵

Kenneth Harrow, in his article “Sembene Ousmane’s *Xala*: The Use of Film and Novel as Revolutionary Weapon”, discusses both the film and the novel. He describes *Xala* as a tool

used by Sembene to attack the corrupt governments, religious hypocrisy, and neocolonialism. The author, then, lists the disparities that exist between the novel and the film. For him, the novel is less effective than the film because of the strong link between the visual images, themes, orality, and music dimensions¹⁶.

A more recent study carried out on both *Mandabi* and *Xala* is David Murphy's book *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction* (2000). In chapter three "filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in *Le Mandat/Mandabi*", Murphy examines the film as a means of resistance. He underscores Sembene's endeavour to find a cinematic form to the African masses through which social concerns can best be shown on screen. Murphy also argues that Sembene frames *Mandabi* around two opposing worlds: the traditional and the capitalist one¹⁵. In the next chapter, "The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie? Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in *Xala*", Murphy discusses *Xala* in relation to male sexuality, power, consumerism, fetishism, and socialism. Unlike Teshome H. Gabriel and Emerka.p, Murphy sees male impotence as symbol of the limitations of the national bourgeoisie.¹⁶ The reviewer then assesses Sembene's engagement in cinema. According to the critic, Sembene proved that African cinema could be politically engaged capturing the corrupt attitudes of his society.¹⁷

2. Issue and Working Hypothesis

The above critics dealt with the two films from different angles especially the political and the social. They were mainly concerned with Ousmane Sembene's "Engaged Cinema" and his biting assault on the corrupt bourgeoisie. Nonetheless, they did not tackle the films emphasizing the characters as intellectuals, and using Fanon's ideas on the concept he develops in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

The main intention of this dissertation is to find out the neocolonial dysfunctions of post-independence as depicted in Sembene's films *Mandabi* and *Xala*. We will proceed through a thematic study. A special focus is put on the intellectuals who cause such ills to the African nation. For this purpose, Fanon's key concepts about intellectuals in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) mainly the article "The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness" seems appropriate for the analysis of the fictional intellectuals present in both films. Reference to other theorists dealing with the notion of the intellectuals will be made when appropriate.

Methodological Outline

The outline of this discussion will follow the IMRAD method. The dissertation starts with an Introduction in which the problematic is identified. It is followed by a brief overview of the literature conducted on both films. The Method and Materials section is devoted to the summary of the theory and the synopses of the two films. The Results part presents the findings we have reached. The Discussion section will be divided into three main chapters. The first chapter will examine the corruption of the characters in particular the intellectuals, the second one will be concerned with exploitation performed by intellectuals, and then the last chapter will study the role of intellectuals in a revolution. Finally, the work will be ended with a conclusion.

Endnotes

¹ For Nkrumah, "The essence of neocolonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside. In Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. (International Publishers: 1965), ix.

² Cinéma Engagé can be defined in the words of Sembene as, "a political instrument of action," in Guy Hennebelle. Ousmane Sembène: For Me, the Cinema Is an Instrument of Political Action, But ..., 1969, 12. <http://missingimage.com/book/export/html/250717>.

³ Teshome H. Gabriel, "Xala: a Cinema of wax and Gold," in *Third Cinema in 3rd World: the Aesthetics of Liberation* (London: Bowler, 1982), xi.

⁴ John Frazer, "Mandadi," in *Film Quarterly*, University of California Press 23, no. 4 (1970): 48, accessed April 28, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1210540>.

⁵Ibid., 49.

⁶PoussaintRenee, "African Film: The High Price of Division," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 1, no. 3 (1971):56, <http://www.escholarship.org>.

⁷Ibid., 58.

⁸Mbye Baboucar Cham, "Artistic and Ideological Convergence: OusmaneSembene and Haile Gerima," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 11, no 2 (1982): 141, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/83j278kd>.

⁹Ibid., 148.

¹⁰Ibid.,150.

¹¹Ibid.,152.

¹² Françoise Pfaff, "Three Faces of Africa: Women in Xala," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 27 (1982): 27-31, <http://www.ejumpcut.org>.

¹³Marcia Landy, "Political Allegory and "Engaged Cinema": Sembene's "Xala,"" *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 3 (1984): 31, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225095>

¹⁴Eid Haidar and KhaledGhazel, "Footprints of Fanon in GilloPontecorvo's" *The Battle of Algiers*" and SembeneOusamne's *Xala*," *English in Africa* 35, no 2 (2008): 151, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40239113>.

¹⁵Ibid., 158.

¹⁶Harrow Kenneth, "SembeneOusmane's *Xala*: The Use of Film and Novel as Revolutionary Weapon," *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 4, no . 2 (1980): 184, <http://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1084&context=sttcl>.

¹⁵ David Murphy, "filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in Le Mandat/Mandabi," in *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction*, (Oxford: James Currey/Trenton, NJ: Africa World press, 2000), 87.

¹⁶ Murphy, "The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in *Xala*," 100.

¹⁷Ibid.,123.

II. Method and Materials

1. Method

For the theoretical basis of the discussion, we are going to rely on Frantz Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) mainly on the chapter "The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness". The book, a significant text in postcolonial studies, thoroughly studies the growth of the African national bourgeoisie. It examines the collapse of the anti-colonial struggles on the African continent and assaults the danger of post-independence colonial politics. Frantz Fanon had predicted the faults occurring in post independent Africa. *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) reveals Fanon's preoccupations and worries about neocolonialism. He foresees the corrupt and exploitative character of some leading intellectual of the African countries who plays a major cause in the failing of independences.

In the chapter "The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness", Fanon deals with the African elites and leaders who took power after the colonized countries had gained their independence. As the only educated people, they held key positions in government, securing for themselves the best status to accumulate wealth. They are self-interested elites who want to become wealthier by exploiting the weak peasants or working class. These elites have not the sufficient competence to rule the newly independent nation. Thus, the newly independent nations are obliged to keep the economic channels that are set up by the colonial regime.

The majority of the African educated intellectuals in the new independent states do not bring about any change. They are corrupted leaders who rule the country in their own interests above the interests of the nation. The intellectual leaders often betray the masses and break the promises of independence after a long way for liberation. The elites mobilize people under one goal, but while their aim is fulfilled in the sense that they have their independence and they hold positions of power, they work to serve their own interests excluding the masses from the fruits of independence. For Fanon, "the current behavior of the intellectuals, who on

eve of independence had rallied around the party, is proof that such a rally at the time served no other purpose than to have their share of the independence cake”¹⁸.

Fanon draws the real image of some African leaders. They are false intellectuals who are the traitors of Africa. They seem as they are doing their best for the wellbeing of their country, but in fact, they ran only behind their personal interests. They put their continent between the hands of the former colonizer only for getting wealth without caring about the future of their nations.

Fanon also draws attention to intellectuals who remain uncorrupt and lead the masses in their struggle against neocolonialism just as they have been before independence. They embody the hopes and aspirations of the oppressed and stir on them political consciousness for the struggle that would bring change.

In this context, Fanon explains that the peasantry led by the intellectual becomes the class that is capable of rising in rebellion against its oppressor. In the chapter “On Violence”, Fanon considers the peasantry as the only class which “has nothing to lose and everything to gain.”¹⁹ Contrary to the urban proletariat, the peasants are the most disadvantaged class that is excluded from the benefits of the economic structure of the State. As Fanon writes, “The peasantry is systematically left out of most of the nationalist parties' propaganda.”²⁰ For a peasant, the only solution to overthrow colonialism and imperialism is through struggle. Fanon also selects the peasants as central for any revolutionary movement. For him, “it is obvious that in colonial countries only the peasantry is revolutionary.”²¹ Fanon concludes that they must be an important part of the African revolutionary elite since they were the only true and spontaneously revolutionary force.

2. Materials

In this section, we are going to summarize the selected films of SembeneOusmane: *Mandabi* and *Xala*. We will also provide the biography of the film maker. *Mandabi* and *Xala* have been singled out for particular attention because of their insightful portrayal of the political situation in Africa. Both films carry the troubles of an age of transition known as the neocolonial era and meet in their criticism about the neocolonial intellectual.

A. Summary of *Mandabi*(1968)

It is the story of IbrahimaDieng, who is married to two wives; Mety and Aram. His nephew, working in Paris, sends him a money order with instructions as to how it will be divided. To cash the money order, Dieng goes to the post office where his nephew's letter is read. He then sets off for the counter where he is asked to come back once he obtains an identity card. He leaves for the police station to obtain a card where he is once again asked to bring a birth certificate, photographs, and a 50 francs tax stamp.

Leaving to the municipality to obtain a birth certificate, he is again sent away as he does not know his exact date of birth. Dieng then goes to visit his westernised nephew. Both leave back to the municipality, where Dieng's nephew puts him in touch with someone who can help him obtain his birth certificate. After that,Dieng goes to the bank and has been offered help to cash the check and the man demands 30% of commission. Afterward, he looks for several photographers' shop. He is led into one. Though obviously no photographs have been taken, he is asked to pay in advance and to come back later for the prints.

Mbaye, a businessman who hopes to acquire Dieng's property to sell it to a client, proposes aid. When Dieng visits Mbaye's house, the latter lies and tells him he has cashed the money but is then robbed. The film ends with the mailman consoling Dieng that ordinary people can change the situation.

B. Summary of *Xala* (1974)

The story concerns El Hadji Abdoukader Beye, a businessman married to two wives; Adja Awa Assatou, Oumi N'doye and prepares his wedding party with N'Gone who is in his daughter's age. The film opens at the Chamber of Commerce which is initially occupied by Europeans but now is at the hands of the Africans. However, the white men return with briefcases full of money given to the new occupants of the Chamber.

In his wedding night, El Hadji becomes impotent. In a hope to be cured, El Hadji visits numerous marabouts and spends a great amount of money. First, the president of the Chamber of Commerce takes him to his private "marabout", but with no results. After that, his car driver, Modu takes him to a marabout in an isolated village, where the healer brings him a cure. Meanwhile, El Hadji went bankrupt. He goes to the bank for a loan but has been refused. Then, he is expelled from the Chamber of Commerce as he fails to pay for rice delivered to him by the National Grain Board. The marabout comes to see him for payment. As El Hadji is not capable of doing so, he restores the curse.

One of the beggars who El Hadji has stolen his land, tells Mudo that he can bring a cure. The beggars move toward El Hadji's house. They tell him that the cure entails El Hadji standing naked and being spat upon by all the beggars. Having no choice to regain his manhood, El Hadji accepts. The film ends up with a freezing frame of the beggars spitting on El Hadji.

2. The Biography of Sembene Ousmane

Sembene Ousmane, the author of two documentary and nine fiction films, was born in January 1st, 1923 in Ziguinchor-Casamance, southern Senegal. In the fifties, he was a mere docker, but in the sixties, he achieved a certain literary and ideological maturity as he gets in touch with Senghor, Birag Diop, Césaire, Ousmane Socé Diop, Frantz Fanon, and Richard Wright. In an interview he gives to Pierre Haffner, Sembene reveals, ". . . I was new and I had

to learn everything from each of them”.²² In France, he worked as a docker and a trade-unionist. During his free time, he attends tutorials on Marxism and Communism that enhanced his intellectual maturity.²³

Unlike many African intellectuals who have been educated in western universities like his compatriot, the Senegalese president Senghor, Sembene is a self-taught individual having thus escaped the influence of western education. He is, however, influenced according to Murphy by the Italian neo-realists and the works of Bertolt Brecht.²⁴ Sembene also shows an inclination to the communist doctrine that probably he inculcated through a training course in the cinema at the Gorki Film Institute in 1961 in the former USSR.

Sembene turned to cinema so as to target more effectively the illiterate audience and stir on them consciousness. Sembene’s words in Siradiou Diallo, "Jeune Afrique fait parler Sembene Ousmane" are apt:

This medium [cinema] would allow me to reach the masses. As far as I am concerned, cinema is the best evening school. It not only allows me to do what cannot be done through literature but also allows me to go further, to let people speak in their own language: that is, Wolof.²⁵

Sembene’s concern for the masses marks his engagement that is clearly stated in a letter he addresses to Senghor following a governmental decree to ban the diffusion of his film *Ceddo*. He says,

Mon refus de ce décret n’est pas un problème politique personnel, ni une opposition politique. Je n’ambitionne aucun poste politique, ni aujourd’hui ni demain, ni une prise en charge bénévole. Mon ambition est de pouvoir exprimer, traduire à tout moment, les préoccupations et pulsations de mon peuple.²⁶

Sembene makes clear that this opposition does not stem from an ambition to any given political position. His aim is rather to express the concerns of his people. His works are in direct quarrel with the Senegalese government “firmly devoted to capitalism and to the creation and maintenance of an elitest bourgeoisie or *classe dirigeante*.”²⁷

Endnotes

¹⁸Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 116.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23

²⁰ *Ibid.*,

²¹ *Ibid.*,

²² Pierre Haffner, “Sembène Ousmane in Kinshasa” (1977), 90. <http://missingimage.com/book/export/html/250717>.

²³ Samba Gadjigo, “Ousmane Sembene : the Life of a Revolutionary Artist” <http://newsreel.org/articles/ousmanesembene.htm>

²⁴ David Murphy, “filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in Le Mandat/ Mandabi,” in *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction*, (Oxford: James Currey/ Trenton, NJ :Africa World press, 2000), 81.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁶ Cheikh Anta Diop and Sembene Ousmane, “Lettre au président Léopold Sédar Senghor : On ne décolonisera pas l’Afrique avec les langues étrangères, » *lemouride*, 2016. <http://www.mourides.info>.

²⁷ Poussaint Renee, “African Film: The High Price of Division,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 1, no. 3 (1971):58, <http://www.escholarship.org>.

III. Results

Our dissertation intends to analyse Sembene's two films *Mandabi* and *Xala* into the way Sembene Ousmane depicts the image of intellectuals in postcolonial Senegal. To approach our work and to develop our discussion, we have chosen Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and in particular the chapter "The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness" as a theoretical framework to demonstrate Sembene's attack on the neocolonial intellectual.

In the first section of our discussion, we have analyzed corrupted intellectuals. For example, in *Mandabi*, the filmmaker depicts corruption among the bureaucratic system and the different workers in the public offices, such as the letter reader, the worker at the municipality and the man outside the bank. Also, corruption is depicted among the highly educated elite as Mbaye. In *Xala*, corruption is underscored within El Hadji and the members of the Chamber of Commerce in the form of political betrayal. We notice that Fanon's theory on the opportunistic intellectual in the post-independence era corresponds to these characters Sembene denounces in his films.

In the second section, we have dealt with exploitation. First, we notice that Sembene in both films condemns exploitation that creates a class-based society. In *Mandabi*, the life of the rural masses is miserable. This is illustrated through Dieng's family and his neighbors. Their world contrasts heavily with that of the urban rich typified by Mbaye. In *Xala*, the masses; such as the blind beggar and the peasant suffer from exploitation. Their precarious life is established against that of the rich typified by El Hadji and the members of the Chamber of Commerce. What we notice is that in both films the exploiter enriches himself at the expense of the exploited who remain poor. The journalist in *Xala* becomes an epitome of intellectuals committing themselves to the struggle against exploitation.

The last section examines Sembene's call for action. His message is directed to the intellectuals joining and enlightening the masses in their struggle to get their rights. This is shown in *Mandabi* through the mailman who says to Dieng that change lies in people like him. In *Xala*, the spitting scene of the beggars becomes epitome of a revolution. Sembene has exposed the process of social formation in Africa, which he sees in a revolution conducted by the oppressed and the true intellectuals. This corresponds to Fanon's ideas on a genuine revolution that can become a reality only through the oppressed.

Finally, having examined *Mandabi* and *Xala*, we come to the conclusion that Sembene represents two kinds of intellectuals. The first group consists of opportunists, who are the primary cause of post-independence decadence. They make of post-colonial era a continuation of the colonial one. The other group comprises true intellectuals to whom Sembene ascribes the responsibility of leading the masses toward change that would bring a true independence.

IV. Discussion

In this part of our work, we intend to discuss the issue in the light of Fanon's theory in the *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) mainly in the chapter "The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness". In the first chapter, we will demonstrate how Sembene presents a critical examination of the Senegalese society; especially its intellectuals as they are shown in *Mandabi* and *Xala*. In the second chapter, we will investigate the exploitation of the educated elite creating thus class disparities between the masses that are oppressed and the elite that exploits creating a class-based society which accounts for the weakness of the neocolonial regime. In the last chapter, we will look at Sembene's call for the oppressed and the true intellectuals to conduct a revolution that will overturn the neocolonial defects.

Chapter One: Corruption and the intellectual

Throughout *Mandabi* and *Xala*, Sembene exposes the neo-colonial disorders; such as corruption which is represented through various characters. Sembene's assault tackles particularly the intellectuals who engage in bribery instead of bringing change.

a. Corruption in *Mandabi*

In *Mandabi*, corruption is first underscored within Dieng's neighbours i.e. the rural people who oscillate between hypocrisy and greed. So, "the countryside", according to Murphy, "is not excluded from the effects of greed."¹ Mbarka, the neighboring storekeeper is a case in point. While he refuses to give rice for a little poor boy, he accepts to do so for Dieng because of the money order he has to cash. This reveals the true nature of Mbarka whose aim is to gain money from Dieng.

As Dieng walks out of Mbarka's store, a man rushes to him and says, "Mbarka has rice and sells it under the counter". He adds, "He doesn't want to sell [to] me on credit"². This not only reveals the way Mbarka cheats on Dieng, but also the naivety of Dieng which will

make him easy for exploitation throughout the whole film. He remains unaware of Mbarka's mischievous nature. Mbarka also proposes to Dieng to sell his house and pay back his debts. So, the shopkeeper uses the precarious financial situation of Dieng, who has no other alternative than his generosity, to acquire money. It is a world of neocolonial capitalism completely governed by money.

Corruption is also exemplified through the supposed pious people including the imam and the begging women. Though in better conditions than the other villagers, the imam turns out to be a vulture around Dieng as long as he has a money order to cash. However, once Dieng's wives cry and propagate rumors about the stolen money order, the imam is the first to disperse. Having no more interests beyond money, he asks everybody to return home for prayer. He also turns his back to Dieng at Mbarka's store, when he asks him to repay what Mbarka owes him. Mety's words "the mule driver is always beside and supports the hay-seller"³ is the sum of the imam's principles. He places himself besides the advantageous to take their money. Dressed like a devout Muslim, instead of a pious nature and moral rectitude, the imam is not different from the other parasitic neighbors. Sembene depicts a society, where individuals, driven by materialistic reasons and behavior, draw upon other persons only for sustenance.

As far as the begging woman is concerned, she uses begging as a trick to gain money. She asks Dieng's help. All what he receives for helping her is abuse. On his way back from the bank, she begs Dieng another time inventing a new story and imploring his generosity. However, Dieng recognizes her and wonders "where is this country going if begging is a profession"⁴. Sembene depicts a world, where everything is based on deceit and cheat. The woman disguises herself to deceive people and gain money. Corruption thus reaches its peak making the country sink deeper into bribery.

The critic Murphy however, interprets the scene differently. The woman who is begging is not the same woman. What has changed is Dieng's attitude. When he first met her, he gives her money in hope that "all the misfortunes follow his coin"⁵. Dieng then comes across upon her for the second time after he returns from the bank where a man proposes his aid and then asks for 300 francs; a quarter of the cheque given by his cousin Amath. Thus, he suspects now everyone and the woman is no exception⁶.

Sembene attributes corruption to all the members of society. His point seems to be David Murphy's words: "the communal bond has been broken by ... the scramble for money whether amongst the poor who have none or the bourgeoisie who want more"⁷. Money becomes the economic power that dominates everything in a capitalist society. However, his assault seems to be directed in particular against the educated elite. Sembene creates characters as the administrative officers and Mbaye to accuse emphatically the corrupt behavior of some intellectuals.

Some of the intellectuals Sembene depicts in *Mandabi* engage in massive bribery, opportunism, and parasitism with complete disregard for public wellbeing. Within these intellectuals, corruption is underscored through the misconduct of bureaucratic public officers, those particularly working in the post office, the municipality and the bank. Through these characters, Sembene "levels his most potent attacks to date against the black bureaucracy that has created a stratified society as insidious as anything imposed by the French."⁸

Dieng is first the victim of administrators in the post office. There, he goes to the letter reader. In a medium close shot, we notice the latter with a pipe in his mouth, and sits on a desk covered by the Che Guevara's picture who also holds a pipe. As a Marxist revolutionary, Che Guevara fought next to Fidel Castro against the authoritarian government of Cuban

president Batista. He is the symbol of revolution and an ideal iconoclast. He also opposed all forms of imperialism and neocolonialism.⁹ Far from embodying Che Guevara's inspiration for revolution, the letter reader is a parasitic intellectual, who makes benefits on the behalf of the illiterate. When he reads Dieng's letter, he asks for 50 cents as a payment. For Murphy, the letter reader has Che Guevara's picture on his desk, but his social values do not unfold as he seeks compensation for his work¹⁰, a work which consists of reading letters to the illiterates. Through this scene, Sembene reveals the true nature of some intellectuals, who accumulate wealth effortlessly and gain money easily.



Figure1. The letter reader sits on a desk covered with Che Guevara's picture and books. Dieng listens to him as he reads the letter he receives from his nephew in Paris.

The letter reader keeps his attention on Dieng. When the latter leaves without paying, he shouts after him. As a response Dieng says, "I am a good believer not a thief". The letter reader answers "a thief working for you, you should pay me"¹¹. While Dieng and the audience perceive him like a thief, the letter reader considers himself as working and it is his right to be paid for reading letters to illiterate people. As Dieng leaves the post office, he asks his companion if his back gets dirty. So, the letter reader, as an exploiter, stands for dirtiness. As an intellectual, instead of embodying purity and enlighten the illiterates, he uses his education to acquire money. The letter reader is not akin to the function Gramsci contributes to the intellectuals. For him, the role of the educated class is "to lead the popular masses and

develop their progressive elements.”¹². So, the letter reader fails to carry the function Gramsci attributes to the educated. Through the opportunist letter reader, Sembene epitomizes the new educated elite whomakeshuge fortunes in post- independence.

Corruption is also inherent in a government based on nepotism. In the post office, all his attempts to cash money are refuted. The public office workers are unable to live up to the demands of their office and provide assistance to Dieng to obtain a birth certificate. This shows s the dysfunction of an administrative system deeply shaken by bureaucratic codes. Equally important, Diengis unfamiliar with the practices of contemporary urban institutions. In addition to his ignorance, he has no money or any privileged position that will make his pursuit to cash the money order easier. Dieng’sflashbacks at the final scenes of the film highlight the cruel nature of bureaucratic abuse. “He is” to quote Murphy’s words, “a man at sea in the modern, capitalist and bureaucratic world.”¹³

According to John Frazer, “It is in the corrupt and ineffectual bureaucracy of black neocolonialism that the film finds the source of Dieng's misadventures.”¹⁴However, in a way, Sembene condemns Dieng’s illiteracy equally as part and parcel of his problems. Instead of dealing with the money order for himself, he relies on people more educated who eventually cheat him including the letter reader, and the man outside the bank. “It is Dieng exclusion from the written world and its codes of power that leads to his downfall”¹⁵, the critic Murphy notes.

Thus, to obtain a birth certificate, Dieng resorts to people more advantageous than he is.This hints at the use of despotic methods which account for corrupt public structures and the nepotistic side of the postcolonial administration. It is fortune that provides a status of superiority. This is demonstratedwhen Diengrelies on his wealthy and influential cousin; Amath who manages to supply him with a birth certificate while he has failed to do so after several attempts.Sembene gives a picture of a society, where the holders of capital are the first

served. It is a hierarchy built upon nepotism; privileging the wealthy over the poor where access is granted only to the money-wise elite.

Sembene uses the events that revolve around Dieng to demonstrate that the urban employees of public corporations contribute more to perpetuating bureaucracy and corruption than committing themselves to the help of the deprived. Sembene echoes Fanon who warns against such greedy intellectuals whose only purpose is to gain money whatever are the means used. For Fanon, “the current behavior of the intellectuals, who on the eve of independence had rallied around the party, is proof that such a rally at the time served no other purpose than to have their share of the independence cake”.¹⁶

In addition to the denunciation of the administrative bureaucrats, Sembene draws attention to Mbaye. He attributes corruption not only to administrative officers, but also ascribes it to highly educated elite whose conduct is corrupt. This is evident in the character of Mbaye, who represents the corrupt neocolonial intellectual.

Mbaye has unrestrained economic self-interests in sponging the poor. He perfectly represents the type of unscrupulous capitalist intellectual. Dieng’s money order gives him the opportunity to make profits without eventually “sweating”. He attempts and succeeds to trick Dieng. In a higher status, Mbaye turns Dieng illiteracy to his own advantage. He appropriates his mandate after Dieng signs a proxy in his favor. Illiteracy coupled with parasitic intellectuals provide an environment conducive to bribery.

While Dieng is waiting near the doorway of Mbaye’s house, the camera centers on a board where it is written: “Mbaye Sarr: business agent, certified at the school of advanced studies”¹⁷. He is an epitome of “the business elite and university graduates, who make up the most educated category of the new nation [and who] are identifiable by their small numbers,

their concentration in the capital”¹⁸. Mbaye is a businessman who represents the most educated elite of his nation. However, he displays no interests other than capital.

Sembene focuses on Mbaye as an intellectual who is corrupt. The political expectation of his society lies in the hands of people like him. This is Sembene’s central concern in the film. In one of his interviews, he reveals his intention in the film,

In “Le Mandat”, I denounce in a Brechtian manner the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie upon the people. This bourgeoisie, which might be called transitional is a special kind of bourgeoisie not so much composed of property holders (but it is coming, it is coming), as it is of intellectuals and administrative workers. This bourgeoisie uses its knowledge and position to keep the people under its domination and enlarge its fortune.¹⁹

Instead of using his position as a cream of society to lead the masses against corruption and the inequities it engenders, he himself becomes corrupt. He is individualistic and does not immerse himself in Dieng’s troubles like true intellectuals. Mbaye cheats Dieng, who naively trusts him. He mercilessly tells him that the money order is stolen while he himself expropriates it. Dieng’s condition arouses pity, but Mbaye seems to be heartless. Uncaring, he draws Dieng outside with 10 Kilos of rice as repayment, ultimately causing him to be more in debts than the money order is worth. He has a complete disregard for his duties as an intellectual. Sembene portrays a society, where the educated accumulate wealth at the expense of the weak.

Mbaye personifies the political disintegration of the educated elite. There is no single intellectual who is prepared to forgo a little privilege in the interests of the people. Instead of using his education to help his community to develop, the intellectual uses it to fence off society. So, political development is hindered by intellectuals, who do not commit themselves for the African communities. It is the intellectuals like Mbaye, who maintain a corrupt political system and show no concern to the problems of the disadvantaged and the marginalized groups. Throughout the whole film, Mbaye is merciless and soulless who shows

apathy towards Dieng's problems. He even does not hesitate to make of him his favorable prey for acquiring more capital. This gives a clue that corruption is the sustaining force of Mbaye's way to elitism.

b. Corruption in *Xala*

In *Xala*, corruption is typified through El Hadji and the members of the chamber of commerce. El Hadji displays the same opportunist mentality as Mbaye in *Mandabi*. According to Murphy, both Mbaye and El Hadji use their education for corrupt ends.²⁰ Through El Hadji, Sembene examines the world of degrading capitalist intellectuals whose common interest is getting richer. Sembene denounces the opportunism and the vile ways in which El Hadji and his kind have reached their prestigious positions and acquired their wealth. They flourish and prosper at the expense of the masses. El Hadji expropriates the land of his cousin and steals rice destined to the destitute. He and his likes who stand for the educated class are just self-seeking opportunists.

Corruption extends to all El Hadji's business associates; the members of the Chamber of Commerce. The film opens with an atmosphere of joy celebrating independence. In a straight-on angle, the masses are shown dancing expecting a better life from the injustices of the colonial period certainly because they are involved in the struggle against the French. The most educated take power after independence. This is shown right at the opening scenes of the film, when the blacks clothed traditionally chase away the French. It is a corruption in the form of political betrayal. The speech of the president of the Chamber of Commerce we hear on the soundtrack once the French supposedly leave displays nationalism, dignity, and democracy. It is reminiscent of the hopes and aspirations of the people. It incarnates the ideals of an egalitarian society easily betrayed once independence is obtained:

Before our people we must show ourselves capable like other peoples of the world. We are businessmen. We must take over all the businesses even the banks. We can't turn back. Our struggle for true independence is finished. This

is an historic day. It is a victory for our people. Sons of the people are leading the people on the people's behalf.²¹

The above vice-over is full of hope and expectation. However, what is more shocking is that the speech is replete with contradictions, when it comes to reality: there is in fact not much difference between the white rule and the new black one. "As soon as the independence euphoria is over, the leaders' revolutionary fire dies down"²², AaronMushengyezi notes. The ethics and promises the speech embodies are soon violated and abrogated by the elite class at the expense of the people. Their rights have been betrayed. They have been forgotten in favor of individuals. Fanon emphasizes the point by writing:

Before independence, the leader, as a rule, personified the aspirations of the people- independence, political freedom, and national dignity. But in the aftermath of independence, far from actually embodying the needs of the people the leader will unmask his inner purpose.²³

According to Aaron Mushengyezi, their motivation is to "replace" the white face in the chair with a black one, the latter continuing from where the former has stopped.²⁴At the beginning of *Xala*, the police manipulated by the whitechases the civilians. This hints that the new government is comprised of the educated elite the colonizer use to take the advantage of the state apparatus so as to enforce its position. The scene also displays the way the masses are socially rejected from the fruits of independence. They are trapped in an economic system which excludes them from the share of the country's wealth.

The political evolution of a country can be validated through its elites. In *Xala*, the elites have been corrupted by status and its many privileges. Once in power, the members of the chamber of Commerce among whom is El Hadji disregard all the values; such as freedom, justice, and equity. Sembene attacks such educated elites that are at the service of the former colonizer. This is revealed early in the film when they received from the colonialists briefcases full of money on which the camera zooms in. Aaron Mushengyezi notes down, "As they open the briefcases, a smile spreads over their faces. We are left guessing as to what the

money betokens, but we sense that it smacks of bribery and that Sembene uses it to signal the genesis of corruption.”²⁵



Figure 2. The white man Dupond Durant handles the black leaders briefcases full of money they cheerfully accept.

The fact of accepting the briefcases, the members of the Chamber of Commerce enter the world of corruption. Instead of being the voice of the nation and defend its interests as they once were during the nationalist period, they serve their personal concerns. Correspondingly, Fanon says, “The organic party, designed to enable the circulation of an ideology based on the actual needs of the masses, has been transformed into a syndication of individual interests.”²⁶

The few educated elites become mechanical puppets and subjugated to colonial power preventing social progress. After independence, the privileged class that engages in material property is satirized through El Hadji’s sexual impotence or “xala” in Wolof. This impotence becomes a symbol of the cultural, political and economic weakness of the ruling elite. In the words of Sembene:

These people, who often hold vital positions within society, are struck down with a cultural, political and economic impotence... This privileged class plays a negative role. It prevents social progress toward its own desire for material wealth.²⁷

The French Dupond Durant stands as an overseer in position of power. El Hadji and his colleagues are represented as the management class for the French. The masses once

needed to gain control of the Chamber of Commerce are now pushed away and the former colonizer fills their place²⁸. So, the scene hints at the exclusion of the masses from the fruits of independence. Dupond's presence signifies the mutual benefit between the Senegalese elites and the West. Just after independence is declared, they become westernized bourgeois intellectuals. In a full shot, they are shown in three-piece dark suits just as their French counterpart. They are more concerned with replacing the French in the leading positions of power than with building a nation aspired to during the revolution.



Figure 3. The black army pulls away the masses who had been there to celebrate independence excluding them from the fruit of independence.

While the whites are shown climbing the steps of the Chamber of Commerce, we hear on the soundtrack the president's words, "we have chosen socialism, the only true socialism, African socialism, socialism with a human face."²⁹ According to Murphy, this is a parody of Senghor's notion of socialism.³⁰ It is a picture of Senghor's policies after independence who advocates an African Socialism which becomes an empty cliché as soon as he comes to power. The president adds "Our independence is now complete."³¹ This is ironical as the members of the Chamber of Commerce accept the briefcases filled with money.³²

El Hadji's last speech at the Chamber of Commerce is frank and direct. It reveals the true nature of these members and no one is exceptional. He says "We're all crabs in the same basket. We've all given bad checks, been in the same rice trafficking. As for the drought,

we've all diverted goods destined for the needy.”³³ This is further enhanced when El Hadji leaves and the thief Thielli who robs the peasant replaces him. Sembene points to a system of robbery and corruption that is maintained within the Chamber of Commerce. These members of the Chamber of Commerce consist indeed of thieves, who engage in opportunistic ways to acquire wealth. Instead of changing for better, African leaders maintain corrupt governance.

Equally important is that such corrupted men reward the thief by making him a member in the Chamber of Commerce. He causes by his act not the sufferings of one peasant but the depravation of the whole village. Ironically, the thief that replaces El Hadji at the Chamber of Commerce does not have any foreknowledge of what authority and management entail. This is analogous to El Hadji's words "... these people who listen to me in which doctors who know nothing about business dare shout from the rooftops about an injustice which we all practice.”³⁴ It is evident that these members cannot create any structural change and development.

Political corruption is also revealed through El Hadji's ties with Europe and his import business. Proudly, he announces to his client that he imports food directly from Europe; seeking to create connections with multinational businesses for their own benefits. He joins hand in hand with foreigners instead of enhancing the economy of his country. El Hadji despises national products. In fact, he and the members of the Chamber do not practically establish economic and political plans that would transform the country after independence. They are never shown discussing strategies which would help the peasants improve their miserable life. They have never met to discuss the troubles of the country; such as drought, famine and insecurity. These chaos, however, affect only the poor and the deprived. El Hadji and his likes are secure from such defects.

The members of the Chamber of Commerce have failed to improve the socio-economic conditions of the masses. Seeking their own ambition, their aim is acquisitiveness

not the welfare of the people. Their portrayal throughout the films resembles that drawn by Fanon: “The national bourgeoisie in the underdeveloped countries is not geared to production, invention, creation, or work. All its energy is channeled into intermediary activities.”³⁵

This confirms Kwame Nkrumah’s explanations. He says that “the essence of neocolonialism is that “the state which is subject to it is in theory independent and has all the outward trappings of national sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.”³⁶ The *xala* stands for the impotence of the Senegalese elite in the period which has followed independence. "What are we?" El Hadji asks the businessmen of the Chamber of Commerce, “Mere agents, less than petty traders. We merely redistribute. Re-distribute the remains the big men design to leave us.”³⁷ The sphere of influence takes new forms. It is a subtle interference through economy where the ex-colonizer still practices an indirect rule making the colonized completely dependent. Sembene, thus, denounces the subtle presence of French in form of aids such as the rice destined to the destitute.

Through the two films, Sembene’s assault is primarily directed towards the intellectuals, who perpetuate corruptive methods. He designates them as the enemies of a healthy society.

Endnotes

¹David Murphy, “filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in *Le Mandat/Mandabi*,” in *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction*, (Oxford: James Currey/ Trenton, NJ :Africa World press, 2000),74.

²Sembene, Ousmane. *Mandabi* (1968)

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶ Murphy, “filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in *Le Mandat/Mandabi*”, *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction*, (Oxford: James Currey/ Trenton, NJ : Africa World press, 2000),92.

⁷ Ibid., 96.

⁸ John Frazer, "Mandabi," in *Film Quarterly*, University of California Press 23, no. 4 (1970): 50, accessed April 28, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1210540>.

⁹ www.britannica.com/biography/Che-Guevara.

¹⁰ Murphy, "filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in Le Mandat/ Mandabi," 90.

¹¹ Sembene, Ousmane. *Mandabi* (1968)

¹² Antonio Gramsci, "Problems of History and Culture: The Intellectuals" in *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* 1971, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International publishers, 1971), 90.

<https://archive.org/details/AntonioGramsciSelectionsFromThePrisonNotebooks>.

¹³ Murphy, "filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in Le Mandat/ Mandabi," 93.

¹⁴ Frazer, "Mandabi," 48.

¹⁵ Murphy, "filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in Le Mandat/ Mandabi," 91.

¹⁶ Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 116.

¹⁷ Sembene, Ousmane. *Mandabi* (1968)

¹⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 98.

¹⁹ Guy Hennebelle, Ousmane Sembène: For Me, the Cinema Is an Instrument of Political Action, But ..., 1977, 13. <http://missingimage.com/book/export/html/250717>

²⁰ David Murphy, "The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in Xala," in *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction*, (Oxford: James Currey/ Trenton, NJ : Africa World press, 2000), 118.

²¹ Sembene Ousmane, *Xala* (1974)

²² Aaron Mushengyezi, "Reimagining Gender and African Tradition? Ousmane Sembène's Xala Revisited," *Africa Today* 51, no. 1 (2004): 53, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/www.sndll.arn.dz/stable/4187628>.

²³ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 112.

²⁴ Mushengyezi, "Reimagining Gender and African Tradition? Ousmane Sembène's Xala Revisited," 53.

²⁵ Ibid., 54.

²⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 115.

²⁷ Murphy, "filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in Le Mandat/ Mandabi," 99.

²⁸ Murphy, "The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in Xala," 112.

²⁹ Sembene, Ousmane. *Xala* (1974)

³⁰ Murphy, "The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in Xala," 112.

³¹ Sembene, Ousmane. *Xala* (1974)

³²Murphy, “The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in Xala,” 112.

³³Sembene, Ousmane. *Xala* (1974)

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 98.

³⁶ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. (International Publishers: Unites States, 1965), ix.

³⁷Harriet D.Lyons, “The Use of Rituals in Sembene’s *Xala*,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 18, no. 2 (1984), 322, accessed April 07, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/484332>.

Chapter II: Exploitation and the intellectual

Another Sembene's concern in *Mandabi* and *Xala* is exploitation. He records the exploitation of the Africans even after independence. To denounce the danger of exploitation, Sembene posits a series of polarities within which he details the greediness of the exploiter on the one hand and the deficiency of the exploited on the other hand. In this context, Nkrumah's definition of neocolonialism is apt. For him, neocolonialism is a "power without responsibility for those who practise it, and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress."³⁸ This creates a class-based society which is visible in both films.

a. Class differences in *Mandabi*

Class divisions in *Mandabi* are visible via life standard. For example, Food stands certainly for the economic situation. The manner the poor starve and the way the rich feed bring out two contradictory and opposed styles of life. First, the poor suffer acute hunger and endure deplorable living conditions. This is depicted through Dieng's family and first shown when Mety and Aram receive a notice to cash the money order. The mailman handles just a notice of the money order, and the two women set out to the store as Aram says, "Today we'll eat well"³⁹. Later on, Mety tells Dieng that without using the notice of the money order to borrow food "The children wouldn't have had lunch today."⁴⁰ Aram's and Mety's words give an idea about the lack of food in the family.

In their daily life, credit is nearly the only means by which they can access goods as food or even water. They can afford to eat well only when they have a money order to cash. The family has also been, starving for so long. This is further reinforced, when Dieng returns to his house and eats hungrily. He says: "I've been so time since I've eaten so well!"⁴¹ Dieng's terms reflect the poverty and the plight of his family and the deprived in general who are economically poor.

Dieng's poverty culminates in the words of Mbaye, who tells his client that Dieng is "broken: two wives, seven children, an insatiable need to keep up appearances."⁴² Dieng's poverty is also displayed when he says "I don't have a dime on me."⁴³ A dime is a physical coin smaller than a penny. As an idiom, people tend to say "I don't have a penny" to refer to the fact they do not have money. Dieng does not own even what is less worthy than a penny, a dime. This implies the indigent poverty of his large family. He is jobless, and it has been four years he has not a job. He has no regular income. This entails the conditions of post-independence Senegal, where unemployment and thus poverty dominates the lives of the poor.

Sembene denounces such troubles brought by neocolonialism. He seems to condemn equally the fact that Dieng remains jobless and careless towards his family. After he has been satiated, he does not ask about the source of the money whereby he has been fed. Without the money order, "the children wouldn't have had lunch"⁴⁴ his wife replies. To denounce more Dieng's irresponsibility, Sembene creates the character of Abdou, his nephew who works as a street sweeper. Unlike Dieng, Abdou is cautious. The letter he writes to his uncle Dieng remains an evidence. He says: "I came to Paris ... to work, to make some money, to learn a trade, In Dakar, there is no work. I couldn't spend my life without work, waiting for handouts or some used clothing. Now I have enough money to start a family"⁴⁵.

Abdou epitomizes qualities of a decent and not a parasitic man. He is hard working and self-reliant. His reliable qualities are underscored as the camera cuts to a close-up where Abdou sits on the train seemingly tired and suffering from a pain on his shoulder. He makes sure he has enough money before he can found a family. Besides work, Abdou with effort goes to night schools. He is a man who tries to improve his life conditions both economically and intellectually. Abdou refuses aid when it means to be a parasite on the back of others. He is neither passive nor opportunistic waiting for someone on whose behalf he can make

money. He himself provides substance to his mother and uncle by sending them a money order.

Rather than the daily humiliating spectacle of poverty, Abdou has chosen to act. Unlike him, Dieng remains unemployed and does not even make any effort to change his deplorable conditions. He is just waiting for some money on the part of his nephew to feed himself and his family. So, even Sembene condemns poverty as a neocolonial trouble and a direct consequence of exploitation, he also directs his assault to people who do not act to change their situation.

Poverty is also depicted through Dieng's neighbors who represent the sufferings of the rural masses living in shanty dwellings. A scene that illustrates this point is the mid-shot where the Imam addresses Dieng and asks him for money: "Life is difficult for people like us"⁴⁶. However, it is evident that the imam is in better conditions than Dieng, and his goal is to benefit from him. Unlike the imam, Madiague, the other neighbor, asks not for money but for rice to feed his hungry children. This marks him as a different person from the parasitic imam. His objective is to feed his hungry children not to make money.

When Mbaye asks Dieng's wife Mety about the party in the village, she replies, "You know how it is in this country. When they hear money, everyone shows up."⁴⁷ This may imply, on the one hand, a society built upon parasitism, where money is the only common interests, and, on the other hand, it may involve poverty and deficiency the poor endure. According to Murphy, the suburban poor lead such a precarious existence that their sense of community has been reduced to a concern with meeting the needs of one's family.⁴⁸ The rural public turn like vultures around money. The money order Dieng receives from his nephew Abdou shakes the whole village. This hints not only to poverty but also to the way the

illiterate, incapable to prosper, becomes parasites, the very social parasitism Sembene criticizes.

The poverty of the rural masses stands in opposition to that of the urban rich. This is typified by the life style of Mbaye. While the poor suffer from hunger, Mbaye lives in opulence. When Dieng waits in front of his house, the viewer notices a street with modern houses which contrast the rural shanty dwellings. Mbaye himself possesses a luxurious house with European furniture that display luxury. He owns a car and is always clothed in fashionable suits. Sembene portrays the scandalous wealth of Mbaye, which is different from the under human conditions of the poor, who cannot even feed themselves. While he eats variably, Dieng says he drinks only herbal tea.⁴⁹ He exploits Dieng by stealing the money order he so much needs. When Mbaye addresses Dieng about the money order, he says, “a pickpocket stole it”⁵⁰. So, through these words, the viewer understands that Mbaye is in fact a pickpocket. This is also a hint to Mbaye’s way to elitism, which is made possible through exploitation. As he exploits Dieng, Mbaye becomes the source of his troubles and his ascending poverty. After he steals the money order, nothing is left to Dieng except debt. Sembene denounces the danger of a society, where the rich who are the exploiter acquire wealth and possess western- like houses and automobiles the poor who are exploited as Dieng end up possessing nothing.

Access to education is also determined according to a person’s position in class structure. This is exemplified through Dieng’s children and Amath’s child, Dieng’s wealthy cousin. When Dieng goes to his cousin asking for help to obtain a birth certificate, we see the little child holding a book and reading as his father does. He also speaks French, which hints that he is an educated child. However, Dieng’s children, who are poor, are never seen at school or reading, but always in the household. The divisions between the rich and the masses exist not only on the materialistic levels, but on the linguistic one. Those who speak French

stand for the wealthy, while those who speak in Wolof, the native tongue, represent the poor. This further hints that education is determined according to one's class not competence. For Poussaint Renee:

The language division is indicative of another barrier increasingly evident in African societies- that of class. Those who speak the language of the colonisers and received their education in the colonisers school generally form a definite minority elite in African countries, the very elite Sembene so vigorously condemns.⁵¹

So, education is granted to the elite. There exists a sharp division at the level of learning between the two groups which also creates a division at the linguistic scale. French becomes just a colonial artifact adopted for the aim of defrauding those who have never received their education. While speaking on the phone, Mbaye arranges to sell Dieng's house without the latter suspects anything. He speaks in French which is alien to Dieng and which he cannot understand. Mbaye thus exploits the barrier of communication caused by language. The ability to function in the former colonizer's language permits to cheat, abuse, and lie in the best circumstances rather than use that language to the benefit of the illiterate. This marks the political disintegration of the African community.

In the film, being educated and speaking French eases access to economic well-being. The life of Amath, Dieng's cousin, is evidence. He dwells in a well-built city that is obviously different from the shanty dwellings of Dieng and the other non-literate villagers. Besides, Amath is well dressed and possesses a car, while Dieng and the other villagers cannot even afford to eat well. Equally important is the fact that while Dieng is refused to obtain a birth certificate, Amath manages to bring him one. Hence, money eases access to public structures and grants power. Therefore, education becomes not only a way out from poverty but also a bridge to prosperity and status.

b. Class differences in *Xala*

The disparities that function as Sembene's denunciation of the exploitative system are maintained in *Xala* as far as class inequalities are concerned. The lifestyle of the beggars and the urban poor is established in contrast to that of the rich in particular that of El Hadji. This is analogous to the observation of Fanon who says, "enormous wealth rubs shoulders with abject poverty."⁵²

Poverty and hunger are conveyed through the beggars who are marginalized. Their situation depicts the reality of exploitation at the hands of their fellow citizens. In the urban city of Dakar, the poor fade away "miserably in intolerable poverty and slowly become aware of the unspeakable treason of their leaders."⁵³ Sembene uses the peasant who is robbed to accuse their suffering, which is the direct outcome of exploitation.

For Africans, land is a fundamental wealth, because it concerns the source of life and feeds the whole community. With drought, the land becomes sterile affecting thus the lives of the peasants because their survival connects with climatic conditions that announce famine and deprivation. However, the hardworking, productive and honest peasants are suffering not only from drought, but also from manipulation at the hands of opportunistic intellectuals, who make their lives sink deeper into misery. Their rising plight, their growing misery and their psychological devastation serve as Sembene's denunciation of a system of abuse that culminates in the story the journalist wants to narrate. It is the story of a poor peasantry community as told by the peasant who has been robbed:

As you know, we've had a drought for many years. The crops have been poor. The villagers sold what little millet they could harvest. I had all their savings here in my bag to buy what they needed in the city. That's the money that was stolen. It's more than I can bear.⁵⁴

The words the peasant says to the journalist in a medium close shot are evidence of the mistreatment they suffer from. They not only go through the shortage of water, but also from irresponsible leaders whose policy seems carelessness: they suffer from severe droughts, poor

harvests, and hunger. Instead of finding solutions to the troubles the peasants actually suffer from, El Hadji and the president ask for a patrol car to get rid of beggars among whom the peasant is part. The scene underscores the abuse of power of the educated elite here represented by El Hadji and the president. Fanon claims that the police and the army are tools in the hands of the leaders with which people are oppressed and silenced: “[ministers] get rich, their wives become floozies, members of the legislature line their pockets, and everybody, down to police officers and customs officials, joins hands in this huge caravan of corruption.”⁵⁵

Similarly, in a long shot where El Hadji is shown delivering his last speech to the members of the Chamber of Commerce, the idea of restricted military forces is conveyed. El Hadji says: “The army, even the security agents are on your payroll.”⁵⁶ They actually harden the life of the poor peasants and workers. They, according to Murphy, “want these people to be excluded from their society, to be hidden from view.”⁵⁷ As a result, the beggars are completely ignored by the authorities. The bettering of their lives and their welfare are definitely not the preoccupations and concerns of El Hadji and his likes. With independence, such leaders see their new status as an effective tool to enrich themselves.

The camera captures the atmosphere of exploitation as the policemen chain the beggars, the handicaps, and the peasant not the thief. Instead of protecting them, the authorities oppress them. They fail to recognize the suffering of the people and above all, El Hadji fails to recognize the beggars as the solution to his impotence. Also, it is because of such authorities that the urban area becomes a threat to the deprived. It is a soulless and a corrupt area, where they are most exposed to the tyranny of the powerful. In the city, the underprivileged have a precarious experience that displays their rejection and despise. Ironically, the thief buys a costume from the stolen money of the peasants they economized from their little and hard harvest. Sembene’s message when the thief; Thielli replaces El Hadji is that the members of

the Chamber of Commerce are and will remain exploiters of the peasants for their own prestige. According to Aaron Mushengyezi, the thief is the symbol of elites like El Hadji, who has stolen the money he was given by the National Food Board to import 100 tons of rice for the destitute.⁵⁸

The plight of the poor is thus severed because of the failure of El Hadji's and his likes to establish links with them. More concerned with their self-interests than the plight of their own people, they engage in misuse. When El Hadji gives his last speech to the members of the Chamber, he says: "Democracy, equality, justice are words we are too low, too greedy to know."⁵⁹ The elites are completely disconnected from the masses, the most deprived population. Through El Hadji's words, Sembene seems to suggest that the exploitation of the elites lies in their apathy towards the deprived. This is akin to Fanon, who observes:

The unpreparedness of the elite, the lack of practical ties between them and the masses, their apathy and, yes, their cowardice at the crucial moment in the struggle, are the cause of tragic trials and tribulations.⁶⁰

Instead of finding solutions to the beggars and reintegrate them into the community, the elites seemingly worry about tourism that will welcome foreign capital in the country. To create stability between the rich and the poor, the solution for Sembene does not lie in tourism but rather in finding solutions to drought and modernizing agriculture thus enhancing local production. For a society of equity and justice, Sembene asks the elites to make the poor part and parcel of the community, and reintegrate into the masses' concerns as they have been before independence.

The peasants survive under the burden of severe life conditions. Nothing to live for except hope. This becomes visible in a medium long shot of the poor sitting together when the peasant who has been robbed tells about his community: "They will survive hoping for my return. That's help to live."⁶¹ Besides, as the beggars sit eating, the peasant says that in town people are happy and can eat. He takes bread and says, unlike the countryside, in the

community from which he comes there is nothing. This establishes the peasants as the most dispossessed class contrary to the town dwellers despite both are actually poor.

The only living core for peasants is the land. However, El Hadji expropriates his cousin's land and puts him in prison. He explains: "what I become is your fault, you appropriated our inheritance, you falsified our name and our property was seized."⁶² He denounces the vile way his land has been confiscated and conveys thus El Hadji's exploitative conduct. El Hadji cheats on the poor man of the Beye family of his share of inheritance probably to finance his early business and enjoy a world of economic affluence. Not only he seized all what his cousin owns but also throws him in prison as the victim says, "I was sent to prison."⁶³ He is crushed and beaten by the system of exploitation.

The suffering of the different communities in society culminates in the words of El Hadji's cousin addressing him. He says, "Didn't you know those prisoners are happier than peasants, than fishermen and workers. Prisoners have food, lodging and medicine and don't pay taxes."⁶⁴ This evokes the atmosphere of hard conditions of the different communities in the society. Sembene hints at a society deeply rooted in oppression where innocents are imprisoned while the manipulators enjoy a life of political and financial status. By including the story of El Hadji's expropriation of his cousin's land, Sembene points to intellectuals who engage in abuse.

The poor life of the exploited is established against the extravagance of the exploiter. The rich live in flagrant affluence and extravagant luxury. Details of this abound in El Hadji's wedding festivities that document his affluence and the rich in general. Material comfort is first visible through the structure of El Hadji's villa and the different furniture the house comprises as the camera pans from left to right. Likewise, the excesses in food and the gifts

for the bride are excessively enormous: a television, gold, a useless car, all account for a huge material property.

El Hadji's wealth and social status are established at the expense of the deprived majority. His financial status depends on the expropriation and exploitation of the underprivileged. A case at point is when El Hadji uses the money gained from selling rice normally intended for the poor to finance his extravagant wedding. In the words of one of his business colleague with the 100 tons of rice destined to the poor that El Hadji sells and "with the money he took a third wife".⁶⁵ The extravagant marriage El Hadji throws depends on his exploitation. According to Aaron Mushengyezi, "El Hadji's wedding thus becomes the epitome of celebrating an insatiable greed for accumulation and self-aggrandizement."⁶⁶

While the poor are seriously in need of the rice to survive, El Hadji steals it to make an extravagant marriage. He does not care about his decision to rob that food is actually causing severe hardship to the citizens. Not only he completely forgets to take care to improve the living conditions of the beggars less fortunate than he actually is, but also exploits them and lets them in complete deprivation so as to throw an extravagant wedding party. His greed thus has made the poor more deprived. He and the likes of him become capitalist obsessed with wealth.

While the poor strive from hunger, the elite can afford cars, fashion and engage in consumerism. They are characterized by accumulation of material property. The national wealth is evidently "invested for the sake of prestige in cars, villas, and all those ostentatious goods."⁶⁷ Sembene uses panning shot of the marriage to give a clear idea. The gifts to the bride, her dress, the food and champagne all hint at the invasion of a consumerist culture of El Hadji and the likes of him. Furthermore, each of El Hadji's three wives has a villa with Western furniture, he himself owns a chauffeur driven Mercedes. His lifestyle indicates his belonging to a consumerist society. He imports Evian water from France, cleansing his

Mercedes Benz, and refilling its radiators. Murphy notes, "In the 1970s, it is only the rich who can allow themselves to use bottled French mineral water to fill their car radiators."⁶⁸ So, drought has a deplorable impact only on the common people mainly the peasants while the rich remain safe from any danger.

El Hadji is obsessed with material property or what Sembene calls "technical fetishism"⁶⁹ and which Murphy refers to as "commodity fetishism"⁷⁰. Through El Hadji, Sembene depicts an elite that emerged after independence that has nothing to contribute to society because it is individualistic. They engage massively in consumerism enjoying the greatest social status, wealth, and power in society. They retain colonial values; such as consumption which hints to prosperity. Also, these elite imitate only the negative aspects of development making this class a superficial one. They engage in consumerism but not in production. They still import food from Europe as shown through El Hadji when he says to his client that he imports from Europe.

Sembene paints an African reality of social and economic injustices that are the natural outcome of exploitation. By highlighting the disparities that exist between the rich and the poor at the level of life standards, social privilege and political status, Sembene conveys the existence of a class society and condemns its rising. He also voices the ills that are the result of an exploitative system.

Change towards a classless society is what Sembene wishes to see in Senegal and by extension in Africa. For him, among the educated elite, many act as the mindful of the masses and denounce exploitation. Gramsci distinguishes two kinds of intellectuals: "traditional" intellectuals who maintain the hegemony of the dominant class.⁷¹ Among these "traditional" intellectuals, some detach themselves to become "organic" intellectuals in the service of a deprived class using their intellect to the service of the masses.⁷² This recalls the portrayal of the journalist of the Kaddu newspaper, "the only Wolof language journal."⁷³ "Kaddu" was a

political newspaper in the early 1970s in which Sembene involves himself in translating articles.⁷⁴

The journalist is an exemplary committed intellectual, who puts his knowledge at the service of the masses. He stands against the forces of exploitation. When he first meets the peasant who has been robbed, he proposes to write about his story; a story that speaks for their deprived situation of daily sufferings and extreme poverty. He says: "Tell me how it happened? I will publish it."⁷⁵ So, the journalist tries to write about the situation of the oppressed majority denouncing thus injustice and oppression.

Nonetheless, the journalist commits himself to the peasants so as to voice their plight. He has in a way conformed to the definition Sartre gives of commitment. He explains: "L'écrivain engagé sait que la parole est action: il sait que dévoiler, c'est changer et qu'on ne peut dévoiler qu'en projetant de changer."⁷⁶ The engaged writer unveils the defects of his society to bring about change. This is what the journalist does as he proposes to write about the story of the peasant. The police locks up the peasant and at the same time the journalist. This symbolizes the way the newspaperman becomes a member of the peasants. The latter immerses himself deeply in the peasants' troubles. He becomes closer to the masses as he himself experiences their problems.

The scene may also hint at censorship. After independence, Senghor's government carefully regulated press freedom. This began to change in the mid-1970s when Senghor allowed his political opponents to publish their own newspapers. Independent newspapers began to emerge in the 1980s.⁷⁷ Censorship is also visible through the governmental decrees on Sembene's films mainly *Ceddo*⁷⁸. Sembene's films are very critical of Senghor's policies, and are thus either banned or censored.

Also important is the fact that the newspaper "Kaddu", is written in Wolof, the native tongue of majority of the Senegalese society, which unlike French the illiterate i.e. the

peasants understand. The journalist belongs to the breed of intellectuals created by Sembene to represent true intellectuals. For Gramsci, “organic intellectual” must be “a permanent persuader”⁷⁹ building up the hegemony of the masses. Echoing Gramsci, Fanon believes in the existence of “organic intellectuals”. He writes: “Many intellectuals, for instance, condemn this regime based on domination by a select few”⁸⁰. This is what the journalist of the Kaddu newspaper in *Xala* actually does.

Sembene presents the intellectuals who have achieved in life as traitors. The African elites who have become rich stand for the exploiter. This is further observable in the journalist. Though he is educated, he seems to have neither a car nor wears western-like fashion as the other educated members. It is evident that he is not rich. He does not engage in bribery and exploitation. On the contrary, he takes the concern of the peasant as his own. Sembene contrasts the life of the journalist to that of the other educated elite in the film; mainly El Hadji to demonstrate that the few wealthy establish their wealth from exploitation, while the lives of the true intellectuals whose ways are pure resemble that of the deprived majority.

The necessity of another revolution that will overturn corruption and exploitation is hinted to at the closing scenes of both films. Indeed, Sembene transcends mere disillusionment and displays optimism by hinting to revolution that will overturn the present hegemony. This is the topic of the following chapter.

Endnotes

³⁸Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. (International Publishers: United States, 1965), xi.

³⁹Sembene, Ousmane. *Mandabi* (1968)

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸David Murphy, "filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in Le Mandat/ Mandabi," in *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction*, (Oxford: James Currey/ Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000),93.

⁴⁹Sembene, Ousmane. *Mandabi* (1968)

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹PoussaintRenee, "African Film: The High Price of Division," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 1, no. 3 (1971):62, <http://www.escholarship.org>.

⁵²Frantz Fanon.*The Wretched of the Earth*(New York: Grove Presse: 1961), 117

⁵³Ibid.,112.

⁵⁴Sembene, Ousmane.*Xala* (1974).

⁵⁵Fanon, *The wretched of the Earth*, 117.

⁵⁶Sembene, Ousmane.*Xala*(1974).

⁵⁷David Murphy, "The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in Xala," in *Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction* ,(Oxford : James Currey/ Trenton, NJ : Africa World Press, 2000:118.

⁵⁸Aaron Mushengyezi,"Reimaging Gender and African Tradition?OusmaneSembene'sXala Revisited," *Africa Today* 51, no. 1 (2004):54,
<http://www.jstor.org.www.snd11.arn.dz/stable/4187628>

⁵⁹Sembene, Ousmane.*Xala*(1974)

⁶⁰Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 97.

⁶¹Sembene, Ousmane.*Xala* (1974)

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Mushengyezi,"Reimaging Gender and African Tradition?OusmaneSembene'sXala Revisited," *Africa Today* 51, no. 1 (2004):53,
<http://www.jstor.org.www.snd11.arn.dz/stable/4187628>.

⁶⁷Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 103.

⁶⁸David Murphy, "The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in Xala,"118.

⁶⁹Sembene, Ousmane.*Xala*(1974)

⁷⁰David Murphy, “The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in Xala,” 122.

⁷¹ Antonio Gramsci, “Problems of History and Culture: The Intellectuals” in *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* 1971, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, (New York: International publishers, 1971), 3.

<https://archive.org/details/AntonioGramsciSelectionsFromThePrisonNotebooks>.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Sembene, Ousmane. *Xala* (1974)

⁷⁴David Murphy, “The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in Xala,” 119.

⁷⁵Sembene, Ousmane. *Xala* (1974)

⁷⁶Jean Paul Sartre, *Qu'est Ce Que la Littérature* (New York : New Viewpoints, 1974), 28.

⁷⁷ Gellar Sheldon, In “Democracy in Senegal: Tocquevillian Analytics in Africa,”(August 22, 2003): 8.

⁷⁸ Cheikh AntaDiop et Sembene Ousmane: «On ne décolonisera pas l’Afrique avec les langues étrangères »<http://www.mourides.info>.

⁷⁹Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, 10.

⁸⁰Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 121.

Chapter 3: The role of the intellectual in a Revolution

Beyond classifying the ills of the political and social systems in neocolonial Senegal, Sembene also points to revolution which will bring change. According to him, at the end of the both films, the director sets an ideal tool to reverse corruption and exploitation. For him, a revolution becomes the only weapon with which to fight for a decent life, and the only way of ending corruptive and oppressive social institutions.

a. In *Mandabi*

In *Mandabi*, Sembene conveys the hope for transforming society. His political didactic message operates through the mailman's remarks which convey the possibilities of change and the power of the oppressed to carry a revolution. He incites Dieng and his wives i.e. the oppressed masses to stand against social, political, and economic oppression. This exhortation indicates that genuine liberation can only be real through the downtrodden.

Sembene emphasizes the role of the oppressed and the intellectuals, who should be united along with the urban masses to build a new society based on egalitarian share of the national wealth. While Dieng desperately lies off in the ground, the mailman declares with certitude, "tomorrow we'll change all that." He adds, "you, your wives, your children, me. We will all help to bring about change."⁸¹ He typifies the true intellectual not only in his professional activities, but also in the way he perceives himself and the exploited as agents for change.

So, Sembene like Fanon, attributes resistance to the oppressed along with conscious intellectuals, as he says through the mouth of the mailman. He defends the rights of the masses, raises their political consciousness and leads them in their struggle. He persuades them that any positive change must be brought by them. Sembene, thus, hints at the African liberation that will be brought about an alliance between the masses and the intellectuals. He has conformed in a way to the definition Fanon gives to the true intellectual, "The combined

efforts of the masses, regimented by a party, and of keenly conscious intellectuals armed with revolutionary principles, should bar the way to this useless and harmful bourgeoisie.”⁸²

Sembene, like Fanon, sees a second revolution against neocolonial defects possible through the blending force of the “organic” intellectuals acting as the political awareness of the people. Through the mailman, Sembene inspires hope toward change for the actual degrading neocolonial situation. The joined forces of the committed intellectuals and the people can lead to a solid revolutionary movement aiming to establish an egalitarian society.

As Dieng and his wives are illiterate, they need true intellectuals, like the postman, to stimulate in them political awareness and to arouse interest particularly in the midst of Dieng’s despair. Sembene sees in the mailman the hope for the future. The intellectual’s duty is to awaken the oppressed and guide them in their revolutionary struggle. He acts as a mentor who typifies the true intellectual, whom Fanon sees able to lead the nation in the right direction: “These men must be used intelligently in the struggle to steer the nation in a healthy direction. Barring the way to national bourgeoisie is the sure way of avoiding the pitfalls of independence.”⁸³

Commenting on this, Sembene reveals in an interview in *Revue Jeune Cinema*: ‘Ily a en Afrique des forces populaires en action qui finiront par l'emporter un jour. C'est le sens de la dernière scène du film.’⁸⁴ Sembene seems confident about the masses that are able of revolutionary action, which would bring genuine revolution for the African communities. He sees revolt as a vital condition whereby equity, justice and fairness are made the policies of public conduct and the basis for social, political and economic relations.

Murphy comes to a different explanation. For him, the final scene is ambiguous. After his reminiscences, what will be Dieng’s decision? Will he choose to be a thief like the people who deceive him? Or will he side with the poor like the woman with two children who show

up asking for help? ⁸⁵His hope for a radical change seems to disappear and appears to be incapable of being a threat to the present oppressive order.

Unlike the corrupt Mbaye, the mailman uses his education joining the masses in their fight to create a better society. The mailman, thus, becomes the reverse of the corrupt Mbaye. While Mbaye pitilessly steals the money order, the mailman faithfully hands it over and loyally explains the exact sum of money. He can easily cheat Dieng's two wives who do not expect to receive any money. However, he emphatically maintains that the money order is for their husband, Dieng. He could be part of the corrupt intellectuals provided by his job status. However, he rejects such an easy way of gaining money.



Figure 4. The mailman hands the notice of the money order to Dieng's illiterate wives without cheating them.

Significant also is the fact that the postman remains away from Ibrahima Dieng unlike all those who know about the money order. He shows up again only to do his job i.e. bring a letter to Dieng. According to Murphy, "the mailman is probably the only public servant in the film who can truly be said to carry out his job in the service of the public." He adds that he "offers a positive vision of the modern state structure."⁸⁶ Besides, when rumors spread about Dieng's stolen money, the mailman brings a second notice proving that the money order is

still at the post office. Thus, he diverts himself from corruption, and sets himself apart from a parasitic society and refuses to be part of a corruptive system.

Sembene's concern in *Mandabi* is raising social consciousness. True freedom is obtained only through revolution, and destruction of the structures of inequity. It is the only way for society to transform and clear away the oppressive tools of neocolonial society. He seems to suggest the ideology through which contemporary African societies will achieve a genuine liberation. According to John Frazer, "*Mandabi* is intended as a vehicle for social and political persuasion."⁸⁷ Murphy concludes his analysis of *Mandabi* by saying that the revolt hinted in *Mandabi* becomes a cinematic reality in *Xala*.⁸⁸

b. Revolution in *Xala*

Revolution is first displayed within Rama. The remedy for Sembene is a kind of intellectual like Rama. The latter is a female intellectual who embodies for Sembene what El Hadji has failed to provide in the leadership of Africa. She is a type of a revolutionary student, and more importantly a revolutionary woman. She does not depend on any man. A case at point is when her father asks if she needs money, she replies: "The only thing is to see Mother happy."⁸⁹ She is sensitive to the psychological condition of her mother thus of women who are strongly affected by polygamy.

For Murphy, however, beyond Rama's own mother, Sembene hints at a Mother which is the unified Africa thus to Pan Africanism. When she visits El Hadji in his office, Rama is placed before a map of Africa. Her dress reproduces the colors of the Senegalese flag.⁹⁰ Teshome has the same interpretation. The color of the map reflects the exact colors of Rama's traditional costume; boubou and it is not divided into boundaries and States. It denotes Pan-Africanism.⁹¹ Equally important is the fact that the divided map is shown behind El Hadji and the president of the Chamber of Commerce. The geopolitical division of the African map

conveys the fragmentation of Africa as divided by French, British, or Portuguese. This stresses the fact that the members of the Chamber maintain the colonial era.

According to Pfaff, Rama is Sembene's ideology and hope for the future."⁹² She embraces nationalist positions as she is determined to use Wolof, her native tongue, and refuses to speak in French. She addresses her father in Wolof though his opposition. When the latter enters into Awa's house and greets the family, Rama answers in Wolof making her father angry.



Figure5. El Hadji shouts after Rama as she is determined to use the Wolof language rather the French as he does.

This leads to a discussion of Senghor's promotion of "La Francophonie" seen as a way of progressive assimilation. In post-independence Africa, the issue of language is a burning dilemma. Some African governments adopted directly the language of the colonizer as an official language. Senegal is an example. After independence, Senghor, as a Senegalese poet and its first president, imposed French as a first language. Hemaintains,

Aujourd'hui, je pense naturellement en Français et je comprends le français, faut-il en avoir honte ? mieux qu'aucune autre langue. C'est dire que le français n'est plus pour moi un véhicule étranger, mais la forme d'expression naturelle de ma pensée.⁹³

Senghor sees the French language not alien, but it is better than any other languages. He thus rejects his native tongue Wolof. This goes in contradiction with Sembene's attitude to

language that insists on the promotion of African languages which would revolutionize the African continent.

Rama also refuses to consume foreign beverages; such as the Evian water, her father's favorite drink. However, she uses some western practices as driving a scooter. She also wears a mixture of western dresses and Senegalese "boubou". She adopts western values she sees useful. At the same time, she keeps some African traditions and rejects others she sees hampering the development of a healthy society such as polygamy. She is not blindly mimicking the West in the external facet of life, but adopts western revolutionary ideas which would direct her country into a better society.

Equally important, Rama becomes a feminist activist refusing male prescription of polygamy. She develops a political awareness whereby her fight against neocolonialism goes along with the liberation of women and thus herself. She daringly stands up to her father's third marriage and openly criticizes every polygamous man as a liar. Her father's answer is ironic. He makes clear that he is one of the fighters during the revolution. He says: "It is the people like me; your father who kicked out the colonizers and freed the country."⁹⁴ This becomes ironical, because what Sembene portrays as the film progresses is the maintenance of the colonial structures which operate through the greedy elites like him.

Rama is a mature woman who becomes the hope for all women who would fight all forms of oppression. She is a rebellious student and an instance of revolutionary womanhood. Through Rama, Sembene shows his commitment to the defense not only of the deprived masses but also to the oppressed women. She seems to be Sembene's model of intellectuals needed for the true development of Africa. Sembene stresses the importance of education in the edification of a revolutionized society. For Aaron Mushengyezi, "Sembene acknowledges in *Xala* that the liberation of women can be attained only through education."⁹⁵

This is what Sembene tries to stress. Rama's consciousness lies in her education. Her awareness and political education start at the university. She grows stronger through her intense reading and carrying books with her. Her room is full of books with a poster of Cabral, an African revolutionary and Charlie Chaplin. She gains a political consciousness from books. Through Rama, Sembene insists on the primordial role of education in the formation of a political maturity and consciousness that leads to reform. The only way out is education. The ambiguity with Rama lies in the fact that she does not help the poor by raising their political consciousness.

Beyond Rama, Sembene attributes revolution to the beggars. The final freeze-frame in *Xala* synchronized with the sound of the spitting scene becomes a symbol of a coming revolution that would put an end to neocolonialism. This becomes evident when the police enters El Hadji's house and says, "We've told there is rebellion here".⁹⁶ The spitting scene conveys the real pain of the peasants that are exploited at the hands of El Hadji and his likes. As Murphy notes: "When the beggars spit on El Hadji's naked body...they are spitting out the anger of all those who are socially excluded from Senegalese society"⁹⁷. It expresses the wrath of the oppressed against their corrupt leaders and reinforces the life of pain, oppression, and exploitation suffered by the peasants mainly the blind beggar whose land has been expropriated, and the peasant whose money has been stolen. It is the hard and bitter background that becomes the origin of their awareness that in turn lead them to revolt.

The beggars are illiterate and powerless. However, unlike Dieng in *Mandabi* who is guided by the mailman, the beggars in *Xala* are capable of influencing El Hadji without any guidance. They become conscious. For David UruIyam, "the peasants will then be able to interpret their own thought into positive action when the oppressor is off his guard".⁹⁸ *Mandabi* ends with Dieng reasoning while *Xala* ends with the beggars revolting and the solution for Fanon lies in revolutionary action not reasoning.⁹⁹ Sembene's peasantry is

thus capable of action. Though the beggars remain static throughout the whole film, they manage to evolve and to move to action as the film closes. They transform themselves from passive watchers to active revolters.

Fanon sees the peasantry as the only revolutionary class by excellence, because “it has nothing to lose and everything to gain.”¹⁰⁰ Commenting on the role Fanon gives to the peasantry, G. K. Grohs says,

Fanon believes that at this point the Marxist theory does not work. The proletariat in the colonial countries is not the suppressed mass of poor industrial workers, but a small privileged group of wage-earners, who have, in contrast to the poor peasants, far more to lose than their chains.¹⁰¹

For Sembene, the power of the beggars lies in their incorrupt nature. He makes them different from the greedy marabouts. According to Marcia, “The beggars' curse is not an expression of fetishism; nor is it a form of the “technical fetishism””. She notes: “The power of the beggars derives from their experiences and from their collective strength, from their claims to justice based on the misappropriation of their goods”¹⁰² Their aim in curing El Hadji from his “Xala” is not money as it is for the marabouts. They remain morally incorruptible, and thus they are the only class capable of achieving genuine revolution. This is the political message of the spitting scene of the films. Ordinary people have the power to transform society and seize what rightly belongs to them. The aim is to create a society in which irregularities in power, wealth, and opportunities are abolished in order to achieve justice and equality aspired and desired during the nationalist movements.

It is the beggar who strikes El Hadji with the “xala” that makes him impotent not only sexually but at the same time economically as he went bankrupt in his search to cure himself. Spending excessive amounts of money for the marabouts in hope of finding a cure, he brings about his economic as well his social downfall. “Xala initiated by the blind beggar is the generator of sexual, psychological, and economic impotence. So, indirectly, he is capable

ofdispossessing El Hadji and of taking action. He also succeeds to remove the “xala”. The “xala” itself is impotence suffered as a result of greed and abuse of male sexual privilege.¹⁰³

At the end of the film, we learn that the xala is the result of his exploitation. He sold a large land belonging to the Beye family and jailed one of the owners, the blind beggar. So, El Hadji’s sexual impotence is the result of his corrupt methods. Impotence El Hadji is a victim symbolizes by extension that of Senegal and then that of Africa. "Xala" is imposed as punishment for his disability both intellectual and financial to meet the needs, aspirations and interests of the masses. To cure his xala, he spends considerable sums of money to pay the marabouts. This causes financial and thus social collapse. His impotence which is the result of his expropriation of his cousin’s land causes his financial downfall. According to Marcia Landy, “Sembene is not interested in removing El Hadji's sexual "xala" but in exorcising El Hadji's political opportunism.”¹⁰⁴

Heal and purification are found within the beggars. It is the beggar who is disowned by El Hadji who proposes to cure him further hinting at the force Fanon contributes to the exploited and the peasants as the revolutionary class by excellence. This reveals that El Hadji’s search for a cure within the marabout is futile. He opts for fetishism and maraboutism that are too simplistic solutions. They provide El Hadji with no escaping from his impotence. The solution for El Hadji is to get rid of his selfishness and to fulfill his role of the educated elite in Africa. This is the purpose of the purifying scene of the beggars who spit at El Hadji’s naked body.

El Hadji is cured once he accepts to be spat upon by the beggars he once exploited and cheated. His Xala “brings him down to consult the same wretched of the earth he calls "human rubbish." But, therein lies the "liberating" power of the curse”¹⁰⁵. El Hadji must be purified by the spitting of the beggars that would bring a purification of his corrupt character and reintegrate into purity. For Teshome, “just as there is a cure for El Hadji'sxala, therefore, so

too is there a cure for Africa”¹⁰⁶. It is a revolution against a corrupt establishment. From this emerges Sembene’s ideology about the power of the oppressed to act as agents for change.

Through *Mandabi* and *Xala*, Sembene projects the revolution as an element of a positive societal growth, and points hopefully toward revolutionary movement that will transform the Senegalese society and Africa at large. He recalls their people’s struggle for independence in relation to post-independence troubles. Though the peasants in *Xala* are more conscious and determined to revolt than Dieng in *Mandabi* is, Sembene like Fanon see them as the revolutionary class par excellence.

Endnotes

⁸¹ Sembene, Ousmane. *Mandabi* (1968)

⁸² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 119.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 121

⁸⁴ Med tabeche, “Le Mandat de Sembene Ousmane,” 2013. djourdjura.over-blog.net

⁸⁵ David Murphy, “filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in Le Mandat/ Mandabi,” in *Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction*, Oxford: James Currey/ Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000: 96.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ John Frazer, “Mandabi,” *Film Quarterly*, *University of California Press* 23, no. 4 (1970): 49, accessed April 28, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1210540>.

⁸⁸ Murphy, “filming Africa: The Location of an Urban African Discourse in Le Mandat/ Mandabi,” 97.

⁸⁹ Murphy, “The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in *Xala*,” 119.

⁹⁰ Marcia Landy, “Political Allegory and “Engaged Cinema”: Sembene’s “*Xala*,”” *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 3 (1984): 34, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225095>.

⁹¹ Teshome H. Gabriel, “« Xala »: A Cinema of Wax and Gold,” *Présence Africaine*, Nouvelle Série, no. 116 (1980): 211, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24350027>.

⁹² Françoise Pffaf, “Three Faces of Africa: Women in *Xala*,” *Jump Cut: A Review Of Contemporary Media*, no. 27 (1982): 27-31, <http://www.ejumpcut.org>.

⁹³ Irene Assiba d’ ALMEIDA, “The Language of African Fiction: Reflections on Ngugi’s Advocacy for an Afro- African Literature,” *Présence Africaine*, Nouvelle Série, no. 120 (1981): 85, accessed August 20, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org.stable/24350127>.

⁹⁴ Sembene, Ousmane. *Xala* (1974).

- ⁹⁵Aaron Mushengyezi, "Reimagining Gender and African Tradition? Ousmane Sembene's *Xala* Revisited," *Africa Today* 51, no. 1 (2004):49. <http://www.jstor.org/www.snd11.arn.dz/stable/4187628>.
- ⁹⁶Sembene, Ousmane. *Xala* (1974).
- ⁹⁷David Murphy, "The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in *Xala*," 123.
- ⁹⁸David UruIyam, "The Silent Revolutionaries: Ousmane Sembene's *Emitai*, *Xala*, and *Ceddo*," *African Studies Review* 29, no. 4 (1986):85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/524007>.
- ⁹⁹David Murphy, "The Indiscreet Charm of the African Bourgeoisie?: Consumerism, Fetishism and Socialism in *Xala*," 119.
- ¹⁰⁰Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 23.
- ¹⁰¹G. K. Grohs, "Frantz Fanon and the African Revolution," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 6, no. 4 (1968): 550, <http://www.jstor.org/www.snd11.arn.dz/stable/159334>.
- ¹⁰²Marcia Landy, and Sembene. "Political Allegory and "Engaged Cinema": Sembene's "Xala,"" *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 3 (1984): 44, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225095>.
- ¹⁰³Harriet D. Lyons, "The Uses of Ritual in Sembene's *Xala*," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 18, no. 2 (1984): 223.
- ¹⁰⁴Marcia Landy, and Sembene, "Political Allegory and "Engaged Cinema": Sembene's "Xala,"" *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 3 (1984): 40, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225095>.
- ¹⁰⁵Aaron Mushengyezi, "Reimagining Gender and African Tradition? Ousmane Sembène's *Xala* Revisited," *Africa Today* 51, no. 1 (2004):57. <http://www.jstor.org/www.snd11.arn.dz/stable/4187628>.
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V. Conclusion

Through *Mandabi* and *Xala*, Sembene tries to cover the social, political, and ideological contradictions of his time. Sembene uses diverse characters; true intellectuals, false intellectuals, peasants, the French, all made to revive the conditions of post-independence era. He is very critical about the troubles of neocolonialism such as corruption and exploitation some intellectuals maintain. He also puts focus on the role of true intellectuals and peasants to conduct another revolution in post-colonial Africa for possible better societies.

Through our study of his both films, we have reached the conclusion that the primary cause of the post-independence chaos is the intellectual whose conduct is corrupt and who engages in exploitation. As a result, the same problems faced during the colonial era are maintained into the neocolonial period. The new rulers, comprised mainly of intellectuals, simply adopted the ideology of the former dominator and serve their own interests. Once the educated elite hold positions of power and fulfill their aims, they work to serve the interests of the French colonialists who are still present, rule behind the scenes and maintain the status quo in a supposed independent country.

As we had tried to demonstrate in our study, the acceding to independence does not mean a break with the colonial structures. This implies that independence does not put an end to the relationship of the colonizer and colonized. It is what Onyejekwe names "recolonization."¹ Indeed, colonialism is still at work. Through *Mandabi* and *Xala*, Sembene hints to the continued French-African connection which is known as "Françafrique". Questions concerning the post-independence relationship between France and Africa still abound after decades of independence from the former French colonizer. It is a field of research that needs further studies.

Endnotes

¹Onyejekwe, Okey. 1984. "Decolonization and Recolonization in Africa: The Trend for the 80s," *Journal of African Studies*, 1984.qtd in *The Silent Revolutionaries: Ousmane Sembene's Emitai, Xala, and Ceddo*, 80.