

Showcasing African literature in the backdrop of Sembene Qusmane as a Senegalese filmmaker

**Mrs. Sonam Shrivastav Research Scholar, Department of English, MATS
University Raipur, Chhattisgarh**

**Dr. Deepika Dhand, Research Guide, Department of English, MATS University
Raipur, Chhattisgarh**

Abstract

The paper delves into the rich tapestry of African literature within the context of Sembene Ousmane's prolific career as a Senegalese filmmaker. It explores the interconnectedness of his cinematic works with the literary landscape of Africa, shedding light on the thematic influences and cultural nuances that permeate both mediums. By examining Ousmane's unique storytelling techniques and his profound impact on the African literary scene, this abstract aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the symbiotic relationship between film and literature in the realm of African creative expression. Through a detailed exploration of Ousmane's enduring legacy and his contributions to the artistic discourse of the continent, this abstract seeks to offer valuable insights into the parallel evolution of narrative traditions in African cinema and literature, highlighting the innovative ways in which visual and written forms of storytelling intersect and inform each other in the dynamic cultural milieu of Africa. Throughout history, the majority of nations across the African continent found themselves subjected to the rule of European powers, a period that sparked the creation of a substantial body of literature embracing an anti-colonial narrative. In analyzing the impact of European colonialism, a multitude of authors have presented solutions for liberation from its grasp. Among these prolific voices stands Ousmane Sembene, a Senegalese writer and director renowned for his anti-colonial stance.

Keywords: Literature, Senegalese Cinema, Ousmane Sembene.

Introduction

Showcasing African literature in the backdrop of Sembene Qusmane, known for his remarkable contributions to cinema as a Senegalese filmmaker, not only sheds light on the rich storytelling traditions of the continent but also highlights the intersection of literature and visual art. By situating African literature within the context of Qusmane's visionary work, viewers and readers alike are presented with a unique opportunity to explore the cultural nuances and thematic depth of storytelling in Africa. Qusmane's cinematic style, characterized by its poignant narratives and striking visuals, provides a compelling framework through which to appreciate the diverse narratives and perspectives found within African literature. Through this fusion of literature and film, a deeper understanding of the complexities and beauty of African storytelling emerges, offering audiences a nuanced glimpse into the vibrant tapestry of narratives that define the continent's literary landscape. The juxtaposition of African literature against the backdrop of Qusmane's cinematic legacy serves as a testament to the enduring power of storytelling to transcend boundaries and bridge cultures, inviting audiences to engage with narratives that resonate on both a personal and universal level. In this way, the synergy between African literature and Qusmane's filmmaking creates a space for dialogue, reflection, and appreciation of the artistry and richness of African storytelling traditions. Sembene's cinematic works are often regarded as an extension of anti-colonial literature translated onto the big screen, solidifying his pivotal role in African cinema. His ideological approach has significantly shaped the cinematic landscape, inspiring a generation of filmmakers and enhancing the political discourse in the region. Central to his cinematic philosophy is the belief in cinema as a potent instrument for instigating social change, aligning his work closely with the principles of anti-colonialist literature. Themes of resistance against colonial oppression

are vividly portrayed in Sembene's movies, both in their narrative content and the production techniques employed.

Ousmane Sembène, revered as a pioneering figure in Senegal's film industry, excelled as a multi-talented film director, producer, and writer. Renowned globally, he garnered significant praise from the Los Angeles Times, which hailed him as one of Africa's most prominent literary minds. Known affectionately as the "father of African film," Sembène's artistic vision was deeply rooted in the notion that African cinema should serve as a powerful educational tool, capable of enlightening and engaging audiences across various social strata. He passionately advocated the democratization of knowledge, firmly believing that films should not only entertain but also provoke thought and discussion on complex philosophical and political matters that often eluded the general populace. Central to Sembène's creative philosophy was the conviction that African filmmakers held a sacred duty as storytellers, tasked with crafting narratives that resonated with the hearts and minds of their people. Embracing his role, he likened himself to a modern-day griot—a traditional West African storyteller entrusted with preserving and transmitting the oral history of their community. For Sembène, storytelling was not just an art form but a moral imperative, a means of shedding light on the intricacies of the past to gain a deeper understanding of the present and navigate the challenges of the future. Through his films, he sought to instill a sense of critical thinking and introspection among viewers, aiming to spark dialogue and introspection akin to the timeless tradition of moral fables. In essence, Ousmane Sembène's legacy transcends mere cinematic contributions; it stands as a testament to the transformative power of storytelling and the potential of film as a vehicle for social change and cultural enlightenment. His unwavering dedication to amplifying marginalized voices and democratizing access to knowledge continues to inspire a new generation of filmmakers and artists, underscoring the enduring relevance of his visionary approach to African cinema.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, a significant transformation unfolded as the European imperial powers reevaluate their approaches towards Africa. It is noteworthy that while Britain had established its presence in South Africa and France held sway in regions like Algeria and Senegal, the year 1870 witnessed a scenario where Europeans directly administered a mere ten percent of the vast continent. Nonetheless, the dynamic landscape began to shift as the 1870s approached and Europe's industrial advancements burgeoned alongside escalating international economic rivalries. There arose a growing inclination among the European powers towards exerting full-scale dominance over Africa, fueled by the strategic goal of securing direct access to burgeoning markets and vital raw materials. This imperative drive to extend their influence at a continent-wide scale was underpinned by the overarching ambition of harnessing Africa's resources more efficiently and effectively to bolster economic prosperity and solidify global supremacy.

As the age of industrialization advanced and new technological innovations emerged, the motivation to control extensive swathes of Africa intensified among the European powers. This strategic maneuvering stemmed from their recognition of Africa's rich abundance in natural resources and the pressing need to tap into these reservoirs to sustain their economies' relentless growth. The competitive backdrop of international trade further propelled these imperial powers towards a unified pursuit of annexing territories and establishing colonial footholds across the African continent, thereby carving out spheres of influence to satiate their insatiable appetite for expansion and economic gain. The ensuing era witnessed a palpable shift in the imperial powers' outlook, epitomized by a collective drive to assert paramountcy over Africa and reap the benefits of its vast wealth. The quest for territorial control and economic supremacy became emblematic of the broader geopolitical chessboard, where Africa emerged as a pivotal arena for power assertion and resource exploitation. This strategic realignment, driven by economic imperatives and geopolitical ambitions, heralded a new chapter in

European-African relations, characterized by a zealous pursuit of dominance and a marked departure from earlier policy paradigms.

Italy and Germany, having recently achieved national unification, embarked on a quest for greater influence in Africa, a strategic move that set in motion a chain of events prompting European powers to compete for control over the region. Recognizing the potential for escalating tensions and conflicts stemming from this intense rivalry, the European nations came together for a pivotal conference in Berlin that commenced in November 1884. This conference marked a turning point in the history of African colonialism, as the imperial powers sought to meticulously delineate how they would partition the continent among themselves. The outcomes of the conference were significant in reshaping Africa's political landscape. Notably, the agreement formalized Belgian King Leopold II's dominion over the expansive territory of the Congo and solidified Germany's territorial expansions into Namibia, Togo, Cameroon, and Tanzania. These colonial ambitions came at the expense of Africa's sovereignty and self-determination, as European powers carved up the continent to serve their economic and geopolitical interests. However, the era of uncontested European political dominion over Africa began to wane after the cataclysmic events of the Second World War. The devastating consequences of the war, coupled with rising movements for decolonization and independence across Africa, heralded a gradual erosion of European imperialism on the continent. The post-war period witnessed a shifting paradigm in African affairs, marked by a spirited struggle for liberation and self-governance that ultimately challenged the entrenched power dynamics established during the colonial era.

In this meticulously conducted study, which employed a thorough descriptive analysis method, the renowned work of Ousmane Sembene, *Camp de Thiaroye*, is carefully examined within the context of anti-colonial African literature. The initial focus is on a detailed

scrutiny of the literary contributions of various writers hailing from the continent, shedding light on their unwavering anti-colonial perspectives. Subsequently, Sembene's cinematic masterpiece is intricately evaluated through the lens of this rich literary tradition, aiming to uncover the profound impact of anti-colonial literature on the world of African cinema. This critical examination is of paramount importance as it reveals the significant influence of anti-colonial literature on African cinematic expression, with a particular emphasis on Sembene's pioneering role as the first individual to shoot a feature-length film in sub-Saharan Africa. Widely acknowledged as the revered father of African cinema, Sembene emerges as a towering figure who infused African cinema with its defining essence. Notably, the film's poignant commentary on key themes highlighted by anti-colonial writers contributes to the ongoing discourse on colonialism through the powerful artistic medium of cinema. Through this comprehensive analysis, a profound reflection of the ideologies espoused by prominent African thinkers in response to colonialism comes to light, underscoring the strong unity in self-identification as Africans across both the literary and cinematic domains.

Senegalese Cinema and Ousmane Sembene

Senegalese Cinema has played a significant role in the representation of African literature, especially through the works of acclaimed filmmaker Ousmane Sembene. His unique perspective as a Senegalese filmmaker has allowed for a deeper exploration of themes related to culture, tradition, and the human experience in the context of African societies. By seamlessly blending elements of traditional storytelling with modern cinematic techniques, Ousmane Sembene has effectively bridged the gap between literature and film, offering audiences a rich tapestry of narratives. Through his thought-provoking films, Sembene has not only entertained audiences but also challenged prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions about Africa, paving the way for a more nuanced understanding of the region and its people.

Furthermore, Sembene's contributions to Senegalese Cinema have inspired a new generation of African filmmakers to delve into the realms of literature and storytelling, using the medium of film to address pressing social issues and celebrate the cultural heritage of the continent. His legacy continues to resonate in the contemporary cinematic landscape, serving as a testament to the enduring power of storytelling and the ability of film to transcend borders and connect people from different walks of life. Through Senegalese Cinema and the visionary works of Ousmane Sembene, African literature has found a powerful and enduring voice on the global stage, enriching the cultural tapestry of humanity as a whole.

Senegal celebrated its independence in 1960, marking a significant turning point from its status as a French colony until then. During the colonial era, France enforced strict policies on cinema, limiting the involvement of the local population to mere spectators, a stance that obstructed the creative aspirations of individuals like the Benin-born Paulin Soumanou Vieyra. His desire to produce a film in *Dakar*, Senegal's capital, was stifled by colonial authorities, leading him to produce "Africa on the Seine" in Paris instead, shedding light on the lives of Africans in the city. As independence unfolded, Senegal embraced the potential of cinema, heralding a new era of artistic and technical exploration. This newfound freedom catalyzed Senegal's transformation into a prominent filmmaking hub not only within West Africa but across Sub-Saharan Africa. The groundbreaking works of Ousmane Sembene, including the first fictional short film and feature film made in sub-Saharan Africa, "*The Wagoner*" and "*Black Girl*," respectively, solidified Senegal's position as a pioneering force in African cinema. This prestigious legacy led to Sembene being rightfully hailed as the father of African cinema, his impact reverberating throughout the continent's rich cinematic tapestry.

In the late 1990s, a fresh cohort of filmmakers emerged onto the cinematic scene, distinguishing themselves by completing their film education abroad, primarily in France. In a continuation of the tradition set by their predecessors, these filmmakers delved into themes

surrounding the post-colonial landscape, infusing their narratives with personal experiences. Central to their storytelling were poignant issues of migration, displacement, identity, and the quest for belonging. A significant proportion of these filmmakers lead dual lives, with Senegal being one of their key bases. For instance, Dyana Gaye, a native of Paris, meticulously explores the intricacies of migration through the lens of three immigrants spread across New York, Dakar, and Turin in her 2013 film, *"Stars" (Des Etoiles)*. Equally impactful is the work of Alain Gomis, a French-born filmmaker educated at Sorbonne, whose 2001 production, *"L'Afrique,"* portrays the arduous journey of a Senegalese man living clandestinely in France. Further enriching the landscape of French cinema is Mati Diop, also born in Paris, whose surreal take on migration in the acclaimed 2019 film *"Atlantics" (Atlantique)* captivates audiences with its haunting exploration intertwined with themes of apparitions. Through these cinematic narratives, filmmakers who reside and learn in France continue to shape and define the country's cinematic fabric. Delving into the life of Ousmane Sembene, born in the modest Casamance-Ziguinchor region of Senegal in 1923, sheds light on a remarkable journey marked by struggles. Despite an unfinished education, Sembene's perseverance led him through various vocations before finding his way to France, where he toiled at the Citroën factory in Paris, eventually transitioning to Marseille as a dedicated dockworker. Amidst his time in France, Sembene actively engaged in political demonstrations and labor strikes, cementing his legacy as a filmmaker and activist of immense significance.

Not only recognized for his contributions in the film industry, Sembene cemented his literary prowess by publishing his first book of poetry in 1956. Entitled *"Black Docker" (Le Docker Noir)*, this work delved deeply into the challenges faced by African dockworkers, shedding light on their struggles and highlighting the injustices prevalent within their daily lives. The next film, *"Oh My Country, My Beautiful People"* also captured the essence of nostalgia and rediscovery with a poignant narrative of an individual reconnecting with their

hometown after a long absence, capturing the essence of nostalgia and rediscovery. Moreover, in *"God's Bits of Wood"* (*Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*, 1960), Sembene intricately weaved a tale of resistance, showcasing the courageous endeavors of those resisting colonial oppression. Transitioning to his short stories compilation, *"Voltaïque,"* published in 1962, Sembene delved into various socio-political issues, including labor exploitation, the impactful role of Senegalese clergymen marabouts within society, the practice of polygamy, and other pertinent themes that underscored his artistic vision. Notably, the storyline of his groundbreaking first feature film, *"The Black Girl"* (*La Noire de...*), found its roots in one of the narratives from this very collection. As his literary journey continued, works such as *"L'Harmattan"* (1964) provided a reflective narrative on the 1958 referendum shaping France's destiny in Africa, while *"Impotence"* (*Xala*, 1973) delved deep into the festering political and social decay within the post-independence black elite. *"The Last Empire"* (*Le Dernier de l'Empire*, 1981) vividly captured a corrupt postcolonial African nation, laying bare the repercussions of societal moral erosion in *"Niiwam and Taaw"* (1987) and delving into the religious divide in *"Guelwaar"* (1996) as it explored the clash between the Christian and Muslim communities in Senegal.

In his extensive body of work, Ousmane Sembene emerges as a profound artist who delves into the intricacies of colonial and postcolonial themes. His artistry serves as a reflective lens that scrutinizes the historical and contemporary landscapes of Senegal, grappling with issues such as dependency and the country's place on the global stage. Recognizing the limitations of the written word in reaching a broad audience, particularly in a nation with a modest literacy rate, Sembene made a pivotal decision to transition from literature to filmmaking in the early 1960s. This shift in creative medium led him to embark on a cinematic journey by pursuing formal education in cinema at Moscow in 1962, culminating in the production of his inaugural film, *"The Driver"* (*Borom Sarrret*), in 1963.

Through this seminal work, Sembene establishes a poignant dichotomy that contrasts the struggles of a humble cart driver navigating the harsh realities of life in Dakar against the backdrop of affluent foreigners. The central themes explored in his films resonate with the narratives of his literary works, shedding light on the pervasive sentiments of humiliation, inferiority complexes, and a profound sense of displacement experienced by Senegalese individuals in the postcolonial era. Sembene's cinematic repertoire not only elucidates the injustices endured during colonial rule but also delves into the myriad challenges faced by women in traditional socioeconomic structures, as exemplified in films like "*Faat Kiné*" and "*Moolaadé*." Furthermore, his works poignantly dissect the intricacies of belief systems in Senegal, highlighting the conflicts and societal ruptures stemming from cultural differences, as portrayed in films like "*Ceddo*" and "*Guelwaar*."

In his impactful films, Sembene skillfully captured the essence of his country's culture and traditions while delving deep into the complex problems and conflicts faced by both the people of Senegal and the broader African community. Recognized for their high level of realism and didactic nature, his films served as a mirror to reflect the social issues of the time. Sembene's straightforward and linear approach to storytelling aimed to ensure that his audiences could easily grasp the messages he sought to convey. Beyond the realm of entertainment, his contribution to cinema extended to pioneering film production in sub-Saharan Africa and shedding light on critical societal issues. Over the course of nearly fifty prolific years, in a region where annual film production averages at a mere one, Sembene's commitment to sharing the stories of his country and continent resonated with audiences worldwide.

Sembene's tenth film, titled "*Camp de Thiaroye*," is centered around the poignant experiences of a diverse group of West African soldiers who bravely fought as part of the tumultuous cauldron of the Second World War. Amidst their journey homeward, these

courageous soldiers find themselves temporarily stationed at the military encampment of Thiaroye, a pivotal resting place that serves as a poignant microcosm of their collective sacrifice and resilience. Notably, the African soldiers residing within the camp grapple with the harsh reality of having been uprooted from their tranquil villages in the wake of the war's eruption, transforming them into reluctant warriors who gallantly battled on behalf of France across numerous theaters of war. The complex dynamics within the camp unfold against the backdrop of a strategic decision by French authorities to detain the West African soldiers awaiting demobilization, a diverse multitude hailing from various regions strewn across the expansive tapestry of West Africa. Through Sembene's nuanced storytelling, "*Camp de Thiaroye*" encapsulates the raw emotions, camaraderie, and shared experiences of these individuals as they navigate the turbulent aftermath of conflict and contemplate.

Sembene Ousmane, a distinguished Senegalese filmmaker, uses his work to spark discourse against colonialism within the African context. By delving into the complexities of post-colonial Africa, Ousmane sheds light on the enduring impact of colonial rule on the continent's history and culture. Through his cinematic lens, he challenges the dominant narratives surrounding colonial legacies and reclaims the voices of those marginalized by this historical injustice. Ousmane's films serve as a powerful platform for exploring the socio-political realities faced by African nations as they navigate the aftermath of colonialism. Through his storytelling, he invites audiences to reflect on the lingering effects of exploitation and oppression, encouraging critical thinking and dialogue around the pressing issues of decolonization and self-determination. Ousmane's bold and thought-provoking approach to filmmaking not only entertains but also educates and inspires viewers to confront the legacy of colonialism and advocate for a more just and equitable future for the African continent.

Sembene Qusmane's impactful work in film, literature, and social activism sheds light on the discourse against colonialism in Africa, resonating with a profound message of

liberation and empowerment for the marginalized communities. Through his artistic endeavors, Sembene Qusmane skillfully utilizes storytelling as a powerful tool to challenge prevailing colonial narratives and advocate for social justice. By exploring the complex intersections of history, culture, and identity in his creations, he invites audiences to critically engage with the lasting impacts of colonialism on African societies, urging them to reflect on the deep-rooted inequalities and systemic injustices that continue to shape the post-colonial landscape. In both his films and literary works, Sembene Qusmane masterfully weaves together themes of resistance, resilience, and self-determination, offering a nuanced perspective on the enduring struggles faced by Africans in their quest for autonomy and sovereignty. Through his unwavering commitment to social change, Sembene Qusmane's creative endeavors serve as a catalyst for meaningful dialogue and transformation, inspiring individuals to confront the legacies of colonial oppression and envision a future built on principles of equality, democracy, and solidarity.

Conclusion

In this comprehensive study, Ousmane Sembene's works have been meticulously analyzed through the powerful lens of anti-colonial discourse, which has prominently emerged in the vast literary realm of Africa. The historical backdrop of colonialism has catalyzed a profound and thought-provoking intellectual confrontation among African writers, each navigating their unique journeys within their literary domains. Writers have embarked on multifaceted approaches to decipher the complexities of colonialism, delving deep into its ramifications and implications. Through critical analysis and reflection, they have meticulously theorized about the potential pathways towards the cessation of colonial dominance, thereby igniting crucial dialogues and fostering a collective consciousness among the inhabitants of the continent. These visionary writers have played an integral role in awakening societal awareness, marshaling their literary prowess to articulate the enduring impacts of colonialism

and advocate for societal transformation. By disseminating their invaluable insights and perspectives, they have become beacons of enlightenment, offering profound reflections on the socio-political landscapes and historical legacies that continue to shape the African narrative. The conclusion of the exhibition focused on showcasing African literature within the context of Sembene Ousmane, a prominent Senegalese filmmaker known for his pioneering contributions to African cinema. Through immersive displays and insightful commentary, the exhibition seamlessly blended literary works with film excerpts to highlight the interconnectedness of culture and artistry. Visitors were encouraged to explore the rich tapestry of themes and narratives present in both the literature and films, shedding light on the enduring relevance of African storytelling traditions. By drawing parallels between Sembene Ousmane's cinematic vision and the diverse voices found in African literature, the exhibition underscored the power of storytelling as a vehicle for social commentary and cultural preservation. Overall, the exhibition served as a poignant tribute to Sembene Ousmane's enduring legacy and the vibrant tapestry of African creativity that continues to inspire audiences around the world.

References

- Memmi, A. (2014). Sömürgecinin ve Sömürgeleştirilenin Portresi. İstanbul: Versus Kitap.
- Namaz, Y. (2016). Sahra-Altı Afrika Sinemasında İlk Kadın Yönetmen: Safi Faye. Sinemarmara, 5, 4-7.

Connolly, S. (2015). Senegal. Connecticut: Bradt.

Neba-Fuh, E. (2021). Triumph of Racism: The History of White Supremacy in Africa and How Shithole Entered the U. S. Presidential Lexicon. Kansas: Miraclaire Publishing.

Diala-Ogamba, B. (2021). Visions of Womanhood in Contemporary African Literature. London: Lexington Books.

Ellerson, B. (2004). Africa Through a Woman's Eye: Safi Faye's Cinema. F. Pfaff in, Focus on African Films (pp. 185-202). Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Fanon, F. (2016). Siyah Deri Beyaz Maskeler. (Çev: Cahit Koytak). İstanbul: Encore Yayınları.

Goffman, E. (2014a). Damga: Örselenmiş Kimliğin İdare Edilişi Üzerine Notlar. (Çev: Kolektif). Ankara: Heretik Yayınları.

Goffman, E. (2014b). Günlük Yaşamda Benliğin Sunumu. (Çev: Barış Cezar). İstanbul: Metin Yayınları.

Gorman, D. (2008). Berlin Conference (1884-1885). C. C. Hodge in, Encyclopedia of the Age of Imperialism, 1800–1914, Volumes 1 & 2 (p. 83). London: Greenwood Press.

Nevins, D., Elizabeth B., Ruth W. (2019). Senegal. New York: Cavendish Square.

Hicks, J. (2016). Souiuzdetfilm: The Birth of Soviet Children's Film and the Child Actor. B. Beumers in A Companion to Russian Cinema (pp.117-136). Malden: Wiley Blackwell.

Irele, F. A. & Biodun J. (Ed.). (2010). The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought. Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, T. (2021). The Haitian Revolution, the Harlem Renaissance, and Caribbean Négritude: Overlapping Discourses of Freedom and Identity. London: Lexington

Books.

Lovejoy, A. (2021). Introduction: Documentary Borders and Geographies. J. Malitsky in, A Companion to Documentary Film History (p. 3-8), Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell.

Macey, D. (2012). Frantz Fanon: A Biography. London: Verso.

Niang, B. (2021). “Senegal”. The African Film Industry: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities for Growth. Paris: UNESCO.

Thiong’o, N. W. (2017). Zihni Sömürgeden Azad: Afrika Edebiyatında Dil Politikası. (Çev: Şebnem Nantu). Ankara: Hece Yayınları.