

film that presents thought-provoking questions without being preachy or patronizing. Especially now that the wave of homophobia is sweeping across the continent of Africa—from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Uganda, and Gambia to Kenya—it is a particularly timely documentary.

Unoma Azuah
Illinois Institute of Art
Chicago, Illinois

unomaazuah@gmail.com

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Joseph Gaï Ramaka, director. *Plan Jaxaay!* 2007. 25 minutes. Wolof with English and French subtitles. Senegal. Observatoire Audiovisuel sur les Libertés. Available on Vimeo.com. No price reported.

Joseph Gaï Ramaka was born and raised in Saint Louis, Senegal. After completing his university studies in visual anthropology and cinema in Paris, he established production companies in both Paris and Dakar. Ramaka is best known for his feature film *Karmen Geï* (2001), an innovative adaptation of Prosper Mérimée's nineteenth-century novella *Carmen* and George Bizet's opera which was screened at film festivals throughout the world. *Karmen Geï*, the first African adaptation of the myth, is a modern story that takes place in the urban capital of Dakar, a setting that underscores the eponymous heroine's quest for freedom. Ramaka's lesser-known documentary, *Plan Jaxaay!*, also features Dakar, but with a focus on the disastrous social problem of chronic flooding faced by the city's densely populated suburbs.

Plan Jaxaay! opens with the date February 26, 2007, displayed on center screen, one day after the Senegalese presidential election that secured Abdoulaye Wade a second term in office. The film is composed of a series of interviews with male and female residents of Médina Gounass who share their personal stories about how they have been negatively affected by the floods in the region and lack of response by the Senegalese government. The filmmaker himself is never heard, and the film therefore prioritizes the voices and experiences of the residents themselves, several of whom thank Ramaka for allowing them to speak about their challenges and frustrations.

The film begins with a scene of a man standing in front of a pool of water. He states that the flooding problems began in 2000, and that "since then, we have been living in distress, dirt, and water." Many residents were forced to evacuate their homes and find lodging elsewhere, while those who stayed have suffered from health problems such as malaria, cholera, and other gastrointestinal illnesses. The title of the film, *Plan Jaxaay!*—which can be translated roughly as "the bird that flies the highest"—derives from President Abdoulaye Wade's urban development plan of the same name intended to deal with the flooding disaster. The principal goals of this project were to relocate individuals from flood-prone neighborhoods and

channel rainwater into catchment basins within the flooded areas. The newly created neighborhoods were supposed to include two- or three-bedroom houses subsidized by the government, although many of the interviewees complain that they were forced to move to smaller yet more expensive homes.

One interviewee, Kalidu Ndiaye, criticizes the government for trying to remove families from neighborhoods they have known for decades. He explains that he has resided in Médina Gounass since 1966 in a house with five bedrooms that already lacks space for his large family. He argues that he should not be forced to move to a house with less space and then be asked to pay more, adding that the price originally quoted by the government is significantly lower than what the actual contract indicated. Another interviewee, a young boy, complains that the government is pushing relocation to areas that lack amenities such as electricity, police officers, fire stations, district offices, and hospitals. Despite the daily struggles faced in Médina Gounass, he says that he and others prefer to remain: "We know that we don't live comfortably here, but if they let us stay, we shall develop our neighborhood. We know what life looks like here." Another resident, Kuma Siré, contends that while residents were initially told that only those living in flood-prone areas would be required to move, the government program was actually much more comprehensive. She says that despite the relative security of her own home, the government came in, marked her house with an arrow, and indicated that it would be torn down. The government also shut off her water pump, so now she and her family must retrieve their water from basins: "We carry so much water that our hair is falling out and our chests hurt." In addition to these health problems, she is plagued by economic difficulties as a result of the government's response to the flooding. Her monthly electricity bills have skyrocketed to 75,000 CFA despite the fact that she owns just one freezer and uses only a limited amount of electricity. She asserts that she is in effect paying for those who left the neighborhood so that the government can recuperate its expenditures.

The twenty-five-minute documentary is particularly effective at illustrating the negative health and economic consequences of flooding for female residents. It was shot on location, so the viewer sees glimpses of what citizens face on a daily basis, including trash littering the streets and water basins. In addition, the viewer can hear the sounds of the neighborhood such as the wind, ripples from the standing water, and voices of children playing. Through their touching personal stories Ramaka is successful at authentically depicting the challenges faced by residents who have been marginalized by Wade and his administration. One possible weakness of the film, however, is that Ramaka does not provide introductory remarks about the issue at hand or historical background of Wade's Plan Jaxaay. This may prove problematic for viewers unfamiliar with Senegal or the urban flooding crisis in Dakar. *Plan Jaxaay!*, therefore, is particularly valuable for viewers who already have some knowledge about or interest in urban issues facing contemporary Senegal. It brings voices of the marginalized to the fore by

highlighting their personal experiences and raises awareness about an important health, economic, and social crisis that has been neglected by the government.

Molly Krueger Enz
 South Dakota State University
 Brookings, South Dakota
 molly.enz@sdsstate.edu

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Samba Gadjigo and Jason Silverman, directors. *Sembène!* 2015. 90 minutes. Wolof, Peul, French, and English. The Film Sales Company. £200.00.

Sembène! is a documentary film about the Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène, director of one of the first narrative films made in sub-Saharan Africa, *Borom Sarret* (1963), and the first feature-length sub-Saharan African film, *Black Girl* (1966). Usually referred to as the “Father of African Cinema” and as a modern griot, Sembène was born in 1923 in the southern region of Casamance and died in Dakar in 2007. His social realist narrative films not only portray Senegalese realities but also aim to question, challenge, and respond to those realities from an African perspective and with a desire to speak to African audiences. *Sembène!* is a film about the filmmaker’s life and oeuvre, and it has been screened internationally at numerous film festivals (for example, the BFI London Film Festival, the U.K.-based African film festivals network, the New York Film Festival, and the Sundance Film Festival). It is a celebration of cinema and particularly of African cinema, with the goal of ensuring that Sembène’s heritage is not only remembered but also celebrated all over the world. Released just two years after Mati Diop explored the legacy of the avant-garde Senegalese film *Touki Bouki* (1973) by her uncle Djibril Diop Mambety, *Sembène!* has the distinction of being the first biographical documentary of an African filmmaker. It also functions as virtually a rewriting of the history of cinema.

Samba Gadjigo, the author of two studies of Sembène—*Ousmane Sembène: Une Conscience Africaine* (Editions Homnispheres, 2007) and *Ousmane Sembène: The Making of a Militant Artist* (Indiana, 2010)—is the narrator in the film, which opens with archival images of rural Senegal, where Gadjigo grew up with no television or radio, just his grandmother’s stories. Gadjigo tells us that he dreamed of becoming French at the age of fourteen, like the characters he read about in his high school books. When he was seventeen he discovered the stories of Sembène, with characters who were “just like” his friends, parents, and grandparents. This artistic encounter marked a transition for him: “Suddenly I did not want to be French. I wanted to be African.” The documentary then shows a still image of Ousmane Sembène, characteristically smoking his pipe, and dissolves into a montage of sequences from his films. Then we hear Sembène’s voice for the first time, claiming the need for African self-representation.