

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

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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.

The film is divided into a number of sections by collage-style animated sequences marking Sembène's various life stages and film periods—"Galle Ceddo," the house of the rebel, where Sembène lived; "Young Fisherman," on his upbringing and the social context for his art; "A Mirror for Africa," on the years of independence and his social realist films; and "The Rebel," on his films critiquing colonial and imperial history. From the very first animation, which introduces Gadjigo's journey to Sembène's house after the filmmaker's death, the influence of Sembène on the documentarian's own development and career is part of the subject matter. The final section, "Finding Sembène," directly concerns Gadjigo's experiences as a scholar in the U.S. teaching Sembène's work and the beginning of his personal relationship with the filmmaker. In telling his story, Gadjigo shares his bitter-sweet encounters with Sembène, who ultimately became Gadjigo's "tonton" (the Wolof word for "uncle"), while Gadjigo became a keeper of Sembène's legacy. The narrative is intertwined with exclusive archival images of historic and backstage moments, as well as film scenes and a few selected testimonials, including those of the Malian writer, filmmaker, and scholar Manthia Diawara; the Senegalese author Boubacar Boris Diop; Sembène's son, Alain Sembène; and his housekeeper, Nafi Ndoye.

The unity of this biographical film portrayal is achieved through a carefully selected soundtrack and a visual leitmotif. Gadjigo had selected some of the music for Sembène's films—including a song by the Senegalese musician Baaba Maal for *Guelwaar* (1992) and the soundtrack for Sembène's last film, *Mooladé* (2004)—and here he chose Youssou Ndour's track "Tourista," a tribute to Sembène, to play over the final credits. The leitmotif, which appears in various parts of the documentary, consists of the final scene of Sembène's *Black Girl* (1966) in which a masked boy follows a young Frenchman who has traveled to Senegal to report the suicide of the expatriate Diouana to her family. This image is arguably one of the most powerful, or at least unforgettable, sequences in Sembène's filmography.

The decision on the part of Gadjigo to structure the biographical narrative of Sembène according to his own personal story was perhaps a function of the inherently daunting nature of the project; Gadjigo describes the intimidating feeling that marked his first encounter with Sembène and perhaps never entirely left him. Portraying important cultural figures is always a challenge—recent attempts, like *Finding Fela!* (2014), about legendary musician Fela Kuti, or *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo* (2014), about the Ghanaian writer, have had trouble reducing these complex figures to short film narratives. Gadjigo and Silverman's autobiographical approach, therefore, which presents Gadjigo himself as a reflection of Sembène the storyteller, may have been a practical as well as an artistic solution.

Indeed, Gadjigo's first-person account coheres with the importance that Sembène gave to orality, even if it is unclear whether Sembène or cinema itself can be considered part of the griot tradition. The film claims that Sembène saw a potential in filmmaking partly because of the high rate of nonliteracy in postcolonial Senegal, although the film fails to critically and

explicitly engage with the ways in which this potential was achieved. The focus on Gadjigo's autobiography also means that some important themes within Sembène's films, such as the empowerment of women, are somewhat neglected. Similarly, a discussion of the impact of his films in the wider Senegalese community is missing. What is shown instead is their impact on the American community, the international cinephile audiences of Cannes and the Venice film festival, and the political powers of France and Senegal that banned *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988) and *Ceddo* (1977), respectively.

Nevertheless, the film succeeds in presenting the story of one African's discovery of the filmmaker who would make, according to Gadjigo "the first film by an African in Africa for Africans." As Manthia Diawara says in the documentary, "Against one hundred years of stereotypes, Sembène's work constituted an incredible revolution, where he invented a new cinema language to represent black people." By celebrating and reviewing the filmography of this renowned director, the documentary initiates a call for a rewriting of the history of cinema in which filmmakers from Africa are not only present but also central. In the 1960s there was a flowering of European aesthetic forms contesting the hegemonic Hollywood style, such as Italian neorealism, the French Nouvelle Vague, and British Free Cinema. Yet other films that contested the hegemonic productions of the Hollywood studio system were only noticed later and studied under the rubric of "world cinemas." Looking at African cinemas in that period allows us not only to see other forms of resistance to the Hollywood studio system, but also to see a broader contestation of the representation of African people, for the first time presented through African eyes. The global history of cinema can be truly rewritten only if it includes African filmmakers, and if audiences are exposed to their films and to documentaries such as this one. Even more importantly, perhaps, if Sembène's films were made primarily for African people, only distribution and exhibition of this documentary beyond the Euro-American circuit will guarantee a worldwide restoration of Sembène's legacy, inclusive of the Senegalese and broader African context.

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Marc Francis and Nick Francis, directors. *When China Met Africa*. 2010. 75 minutes. English and Chinese with English subtitles. U.K. Speakit Films. £10.99.

The warming of relations between China and many African governments since the early 2000s has provoked considerable academic interest, as has the accompanying rise in Chinese investments and commercial activity across the African continent. This documentary, directed by Marc and Nick Francis, focuses upon Chinese relations with Zambia and provides portraits