SEMBENE BEHIND AND BEYOND THE IRON CURTAIN

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In May 1977, during the Cannes Film Festival, Ousmane Sembene spoke with the German cinephile and curator Ulrich Gregor.[1] The director's new film, *Ceddo* (*Outsiders*, 1977), had just been banned in his native Senegal. His previous picture, *Xala* (1974), had been heavily edited for distribution there and in other African countries. Acclaim at film festivals abroad was crucial in countering censorship at home. "At present the European festivals are doing more for African film than the African governments," Sembene told Gregor. Notably, he made no distinction between Western European and Eastern Bloc capitals. "If the film is on in Paris, Berlin, Moscow or London and the press reviews it, that's good."[2]

Two months later, *Ceddo* played in competition at the Moscow International Film Festival, alongside Mrinal Sen's *Mrigayaa* (1976). That year, neither Cannes nor Berlin featured any African or Asian films in competition, a common occurrence prior to arrival of "world cinema" as a festival phenomenon in the 1980s. Conversely, as part of the Soviet Union's cultural diplomacy, the Moscow festival, and especially its sister Tashkent Festival for Asian, African, and Latin American Cinema, showcased an unprecedented variety of political, avant-garde, and popular films from those three geographic regions. Only at Tashkent could a cineaste or critic see these films alongside one another and make connections across the cinemas of all three regions. Moscow always featured several Third World films in competition, screening them for the top film critics and festival programmers from Western Europe and North America who flocked to the Cold War capital for the chance to see them.[3] Soviet festivals thus provided an indispensable platform for Third World filmmakers.

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As an African filmmaker in the Cold War–era Global North cinematic value system, Sembene faced multiple dilemmas. He made films for African audiences, and his main loyalty was to African institutions such as the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers (Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes or FEPACI, which he helped found) and film festivals in Tunisia (Carthage Film Festival of Arab and African Cinema) and Burkina Faso (Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou, or FESPACO), established in 1966 and 1969, respectively. But his goal of advancing film production and spectatorship in Africa required prestige and funding: major film-festival prizes, critical accolades, and financial support from both the socialist East and the capitalist West.[4] After the cameras stopped rolling, Sembene had to submit his films for judgment to an ideologically and stylistically divided Cold War cinematic world, both sides weighted with their own entrenched assumptions about what "good" cinema looked and sounded like.

Sembene's stature as "the father of African cinema" is so canonical today that it is easy to forget that his films were initially met with skepticism by white critics unaccustomed to having their colonialist assumptions challenged. Writing in 1966, and presuming to have insight into the thoughts of the festival's organizers, *Cahiers du Cinéma* critic Jacques Bontemps opined that Cannes's decision to screen Sembene's first feature film, *La Noire de . . .* (*Black Girl*, 1966, which he described as "an extremely weak film by a young Senegalese") "simply because it is made by a young Senegalese is a disastrous, paternalist attitude."[5] In 1970, a review in this publication described *Black Girl*—a film inspired by a news clipping about an African maid driven to suicide by her French employers' cruel treatment—as an "unsophisticated film" because "[t]he Europeans are blatant, two-dimensional caricatures of White Oppressors and quite unbelievable."[6] Sembene had to travel across continents, speaking tirelessly in public and in print, to frame his films, and by extension all African cinemas, against this initial prejudice. His frequent journeys to Moscow and Tashkent, to Cannes and New York, were part of that strategy.

Sembene's resounding success on both sides of the Iron Curtain reflected his talent, but also his skill for self-fashioning across ideological lines. Sembene acknowledged the tensions between the two contexts in his brusque retort to a question about his time in Russia, telling his interviewers, "I don't talk about my Russian experiences in America just as I didn't talk of my American experiences in Russia."[7] Sembene's reception in the West versus the Eastern Bloc in the late 1960s and 1970s was shaped by the vastly different political and cultural lenses through which his work was viewed. While American critics and audiences came to celebrate Sembene as a postcolonial auteur, the Soviet Union championed the collectivist aspects of his work—his political organizing and his understanding of film as a tool to educate the masses. This lesser-known socialist context complicates the established narrative of Sembene's significance as an African auteur, putting his legacy and the global impact of his films in a different light.

An Anti-Imperialist Comrade

Sembene's entrée to the socialist world came in his capacity as a Communist and a writer. He joined the French Communist Party while unionizing dock workers in Marseille, and published his first novel, *Le docker noir* (*Black Docker*), based on those experiences, in 1956. Within the next two years, Sembene visited Prague and Moscow as the party's envoy, and attended the inaugural Congress of the Asian and African Writers Association in Tashkent, where he met W. E. B. DuBois, among others.[8] Founded with Soviet patronage, the association had offices and held meetings throughout Asia and Africa. Sembene's novels, stories, and poems were published regularly in Soviet literary journals, and in 1971 he won the association's Lotus Prize, a prestigious literary award also bestowed on such luminaries as Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish and Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. His works came out in Russian translation quickly, often within months of their publication in France.[9] Because Soviet intellectuals accorded a special respect to the art of literature, Sembene's reputation as an award-winning novelist aided in the favorable reception of his films in the Eastern Bloc, where he was often introduced in film-festival interviews and photo captions as "writer, screenwriter, and director."[10] In several interviews, Sembene averred that he favored literature as an art form and that he turned to cinema only when his novels, written in French, failed to reach the Senegalese masses.[11]

Sembene described his film education as self-directed training for film production in conditions of scarcity. In the

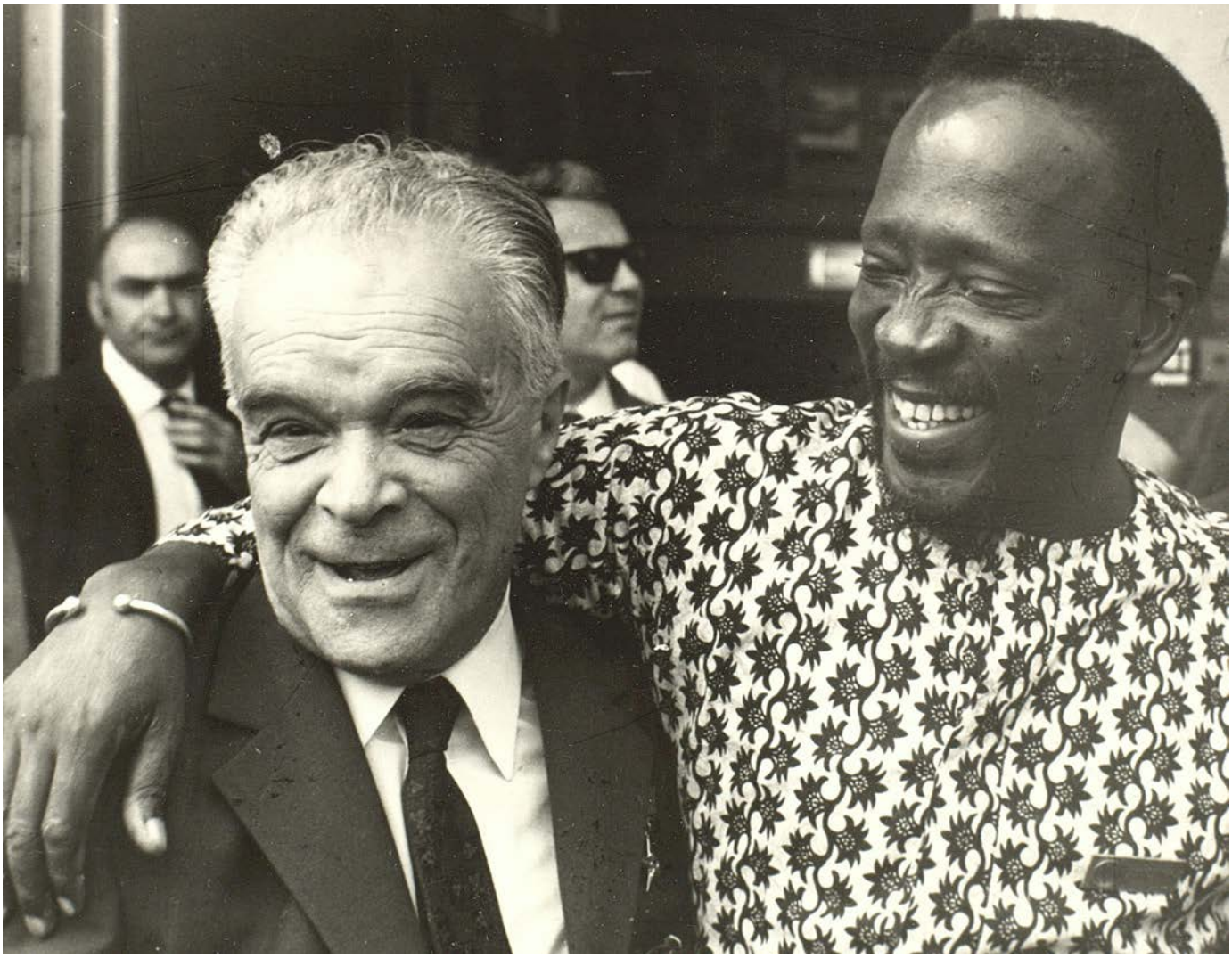
Ousmane Sembene accepting the Lotus Prize in 1971 for his literary work.

early 1960s, Sembene contacted several governments, including those of Czechoslovakia, France, Canada, and the United States, asking for a stipend to study filmmaking. The Soviet Union was the first to respond, and Sembene spent several months apprenticing at Gorky Film Studio with Soviet director Mark Donskoi in 1962, on the set of *Zdravstvuite, deti!* (*Hello, Children!*, 1962), a drama about an international children's camp, shot in Crimea. A veteran director and an exuberant personality, Donskoi won a Stalin Prize for his trilogy based on Maxim Gorky's novels. Sembene focused on Donskoi's ability to reimagine literary works as cinema and to direct untrained child actors.[12] He would use these skills in adapting his own novels for the screen and working with nonprofessional actors in Senegal. At Gorky Studio, he shadowed as many directors on the set as possible, but he took no theory courses.[13] Observers remembered him showing up early and leaving late, eager to learn every aspect of filmmaking, including editing, rehearsing, lighting, and mise-en-scène. This versatility would come in handy in Senegal, where trained film technicians were scarce.[14] Speaking at FESPACO in 1979, Sembene described his ideological kinship with Donskoi but implied that his mentor taught him only the practical filmmaking skills that would help him cinematically foster "the communist ideal" he had held since his unionizing days in Marseille.[15]

Thanks to these cultural and ideological affinities, Sembene's films found an immediate welcome in the socialist world. Sembene's film career in the USSR was aided by his friend and producer Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, a Dahomeyan-Senegalese filmmaker in his own right and a regular attendee of Soviet film festivals. As a film scholar and an employee of Senegal's Ministry of

Information, Vieyra promoted Sembene's work, organizing retrospectives of Senegalese cinema in Moscow in 1964 and 1967 that featured his first short film, *Borom Sarret* (1963), and *Black Girl*, respectively. Vieyra served on the Moscow Film Festival competition jury in 1971, when Sembene's *Emitaï* (1971) won a Silver Prize. Indeed, Vieyra's support helped ensure that every film Sembene made in the 1970s played in competition at Moscow and at Tashkent, which were held in alternate years. Sembene and Vieyra attended both festivals consistently throughout the decade, representing their country in this quasi-official capacity despite communist Sembene's antagonistic relationship with Francophile Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor.[16]

By the time Americans discovered Sembene, he was already considered an old comrade by the Soviets. When *Black Girl* won the Grand Prix at the Carthage Film Festival in 1966—after having won the Prix Jean Vigo that March and participated in the Semaine de la Critique at that year's Cannes Film Festival—the Soviet screenwriter Igor Chekin interpreted the prize as a diplomatic victory for the USSR. "Ousmane Sembene studied with our director M. O. Donskoi," he reported to his superiors. "It is very good that we are planning to invite him to serve on the [documentary and short-film] jury of the next Moscow festival."[17] Sembene accepted the invitation. At the same time, Sembene's festival success raised his profile in the West. After Cannes, French film critic Louis Marcorelles introduced Sembene to American art-house pioneers Dan and Toby Talbot, who acquired *Black Girl* and *Borom Sarret* for their fledging distribution company, New Yorker Films.[18] The distribution deal made Sembene the only African director with films on the US art-house circuit, a representative for an entire continent.[19]



Sembene reunited with his mentor Mark Donskoi at the 1971 Moscow Film Festival. Courtesy of the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art.

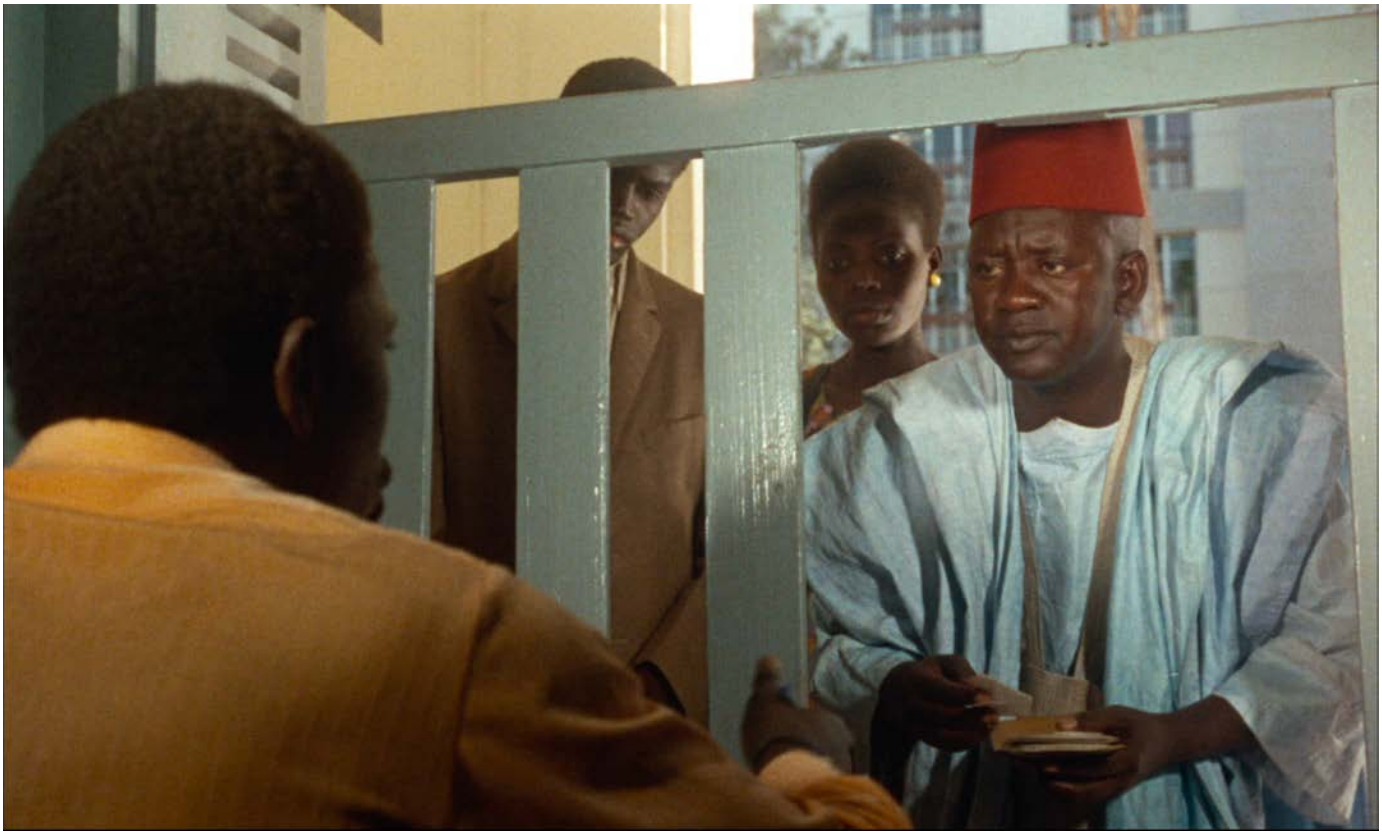
By contrast, at the 1967 Moscow festival, Sembene was the cream of an entire crop of African cineastes. *Black Girl* played out of competition at the festival and opened the Senegalese Film Week, which also included films by Vieyra and other directors. In the words of Sembene's Russian translator—who was required to submit reports on Sembene's activities to the festival—Sembene "united at the festival all African filmmakers," working to establish what would become the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers.[20]

With FEPACI as an official partner, Tashkent and Moscow became part of a festival circuit for the latest African films, along with Carthage and FESPACO.[21] Black South African documentarian and antiapartheid fighter Nana Mahomo saw *Xala* for the first time at the 1975 Moscow Film Festival and praised it as a film that "really has an impact."[22] The Central Asian city of Tashkent provided an atmosphere more festive and more informal than Moscow's. In a 1986 Soviet interview, Sembene joked that he preferred to visit Tashkent in September to taste Uzbek melons and grapes, then adding that the festival provided a crucial opportunity for tricontinental filmmakers to meet each other and see one another's films.[23] He met and reconnected with many Indian filmmakers there, including Mrinal Sen and documentary filmmaker S. Sukhdev; Sembene spoke of the importance of Tashkent when he served as the jury president at the International Film Festival of India in Delhi in 1979.[24] Vieyra reported seeing films from Somalia and Ghana, as well as Mauritanian director Med Hondo's *Soleil Ô* (*Oh, Sun*, 1970), at Tashkent.[25] American film scholar Jay Leyda met Sembene and saw *Mandabi* (1968) for the first time at Tashkent; his review was later excerpted in the promotional materials for the film's US release.[26] The variety of films and directors from across the developing world shaped the debates about cinema at Soviet festivals, in which Sembene was a major participant.

In discussions at Moscow in 1967, Sembene balanced his loyalty to the Soviet Union with emerging alliances among anti-imperialist filmmakers from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In deference to the Sino-Soviet split, he refused an interview with Chinese radio. But during jury deliberations in Moscow, Sembene fought for giving the top prize to *Hanoi, martes 13* (*Hanoi, Tuesday the 13th*, 1967), by Cuban director Santiago Álvarez. That year, Cuban president Fidel Castro publicly chided the Soviet Union for abandoning the North Vietnamese in their war against the United States. No doubt in part due to these diplomatic tensions, Álvarez received only the second-place Silver Prize. Sembene nevertheless pronounced the Cuban film, in which Álvarez lambastes American imperialism via spoken verses from Cuban poet José Martí and his own footage of the bombing of Hanoi on December 13, 1966, "the best, useful for the entire world, and interesting for many countries, and also a superior work of art," according to his translator's report.[27] With these words, Sembene defended the idea of revolutionary film aesthetics that would become central to the concept of Third Cinema, articulated by Argentinian filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in 1969.[28] In the early 1970s, the Third Cinema movement spread from Latin America, including Cuba, to international festivals in Asia and Africa, giving rise to what Mariano Mestman called "cinematic Thirdworldism."[29] The movement united a network of transnational organizations, including the Third World Cinema Committee and FEPACI.[30] Although some participants in the movement avoided the state-sponsored Soviet festivals, many continued to participate in both spheres, including Sembene, Vieyra, Indian director Mrinal Sen, Chilean cineaste Miguel Littin, and others.

The combined Third Worldist and Soviet contexts shaped how Sembene presented his own cinema in the Soviet Union. At Tashkent roundtables, festival participants, including Sembene, discussed scarce production funds and the Western monopoly on distribution across Asia, Africa, and Latin America—issues that also animated FEPACI and Third World Cinema Committee meetings in the early 1970s.[31] Speakers rejected polished Hollywood cinema in favor of flexible, low-budget filmmaking—a practice Cuban director Julio García Espinosa termed "imperfect cinema" in 1969.[32] In line with these concerns, in an extended postscreening interview, Sembene described *Mandabi*—the first film made in an African language, Wolof—as a "collective work." He recounted how local officials and the poor residents of the Médina neighborhood in Dakar worked together for two months to make the film. Except for the professional cameraman hired from France, the technical crew and the cast were all amateurs, including the lead actor, Mamadou Guèye. A worker himself, Guèye played Ibrahim Dieng, a poor Médina inhabitant who cannot cash a money order sent by his nephew from France because Senegalese functionaries demand an identity card he never had. To save on makeup and props, Dakar government workers and Médina residents, including Guèye, played themselves in their own clothes, in their own offices and homes.[33]

In the same interview, Sembene labeled his filmmaking "partisan cinema"—a term that likely elicited memories of antifascist resistance in his Soviet peers and linked his own struggles with the Senegalese authorities to the tribulations



Tashkent audiences related to Sembene's critique of Senegalese bureaucracy in *Mandabi* (1968).

of his protagonist.[34] Uzbek director Ali Khamraev reported at the time that *Mandabi* resonated with Tashkent audiences, and more recently recalled, "I was overwhelmed by the film about a Black man who could not cash his money order, because at its heart the film reflected Soviet realities; we experienced analogous humiliation as human beings."[35] In fact, Sembene and filmmakers from Soviet republics had to battle analogous neocolonial bureaucracies during and after production. Sembene fought what he once called a Senegalese "politburo" of censors and the French agencies that funded his early films, while Khamraev faced dual political oversight at the Uzbekfilm studio and in Moscow.[36]

An African Auteur

Whereas Sembene's presence at Soviet festivals allowed him to build tricontinental solidarities, he entered the American cinematic orbit alone, via art cinema. Sembene's French prizes led US observers to look for his influences in the avant-garde of Senegal's former metropole. Writing from the Venice festival in 1968, where *Mandabi* won the Special Jury Prize, *Variety*'s Gene Moskowitz declared the director to be "obviously imbued with French culture."[37] When Sembene arrived in the United States for the first time, to attend the 1969 New York Film Festival, he was asked, at his very first press conference, "Do you like Godard?" Sembene evaded the question and talked instead about his reluctance to come to America because he opposed the Vietnam War and about the racial inequities he witnessed firsthand when visiting Harlem.[38] His words resonated with the antiwar and Black Power protesters at the time; four Black Panthers came to his screening.[39] But overall the New York event lacked the political, internationalist tenor of Soviet gatherings. *Mandabi*, the only African film at the festival, played alongside exemplars of the Czech and Japanese New Waves. Critics compared Sembene's filmmaking, spare in part due to production constraints, to the minimalism of art cinema masters Robert Bresson and Yasujirō Ozu.[40]

In keeping with this interpretation, when asked about casting nonprofessional actors, Sembene framed his practice as a creative choice rather than a revolutionary necessity: "Professional actors are simply not convincing as laborers, as ordinary human beings," he explained. "Of course, if the story seems right, I might consider using a professional actor one day."[41] The slight shift in emphasis made Sembene appear more in control, suggesting a direct correspondence between the director's vision and the final cut. The

Grove Press Film Division bought *Mandabi* after it played at the festival, and distributed it with a "discussion guide." The guide provided background material on African and Senegalese history but omitted Sembene's organizing work with FEPACI and elsewhere.[42] More importantly, it invited viewers to analyze Sembene's "individuality" as a director, in sync with Sembene's claim of creative control, in this way helping shape his reception in the United States. His future films would be distributed by New Yorker Films, which specialized in European art cinema, further cementing Sembene's perception among cinephiles.[43] His status as an auteur would ensure invitations to universities and allow him to travel across the United States raising funds for future films.[44]

Black American spectatorship challenged Sembene's apolitical art-house reception in the United States. At the New York Film Festival, members of the Black Panther party took him to task for focusing on the African poor instead of the achievements of decolonized states.[45] As he had done in Moscow and Tashkent, Sembene developed mentoring relationships with young Black American filmmakers. In November 1970, Third Cinema theorist Teshome Gabriel invited him, along with eight other West African filmmakers, to the first African Film Festival at UCLA. *Mandabi* opened the festival; *Black Girl* played as well. Heated debates about cinema and anti-imperialism followed all screenings. This gathering served as one of the founding moments of the L.A. Rebellion film movement.[46] And in 1978, Sembene traveled to New York with Vieyra and several others for a Museum of Modern Art retrospective, "Senegal: Fifteen Years of an African Cinema," which included all of his films up to that time.[47] When the retrospective came to the Pacific Film Archive, the radical "guerrilla cinematheque" at the University of California, Berkeley, Sembene appeared as a revolutionary leader of a cinematic Pan-African movement. Black Power legend Angela Davis was invited to serve as his interpreter, and fielded questions from militant students and African expats alike.[48]

In discussions at these events and elsewhere, Sembene argued that while struggles for Black Americans are different from liberation struggles in Africa, he saw Black American and African filmmakers as parts of the same movement because "we consider the Afro-American community to be a colony within American society."[49] At Soviet festivals, he lambasted American action films, especially Westerns, distributed by French companies throughout Africa, and joined the chorus of Tashkent invitees decrying sex and violence in cinema, especially that of Hollywood.[50] But he softened his disdain for blockbusters when speaking in the United States about black cinema. "There is a public now prepared to receive Afro-American films in Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya," he told an interviewer in 1972, then added, "I'm sure a film like *Super Fly* would have the largest box-office of any film in Africa."[51] Blaxploitation films like Gordon Parks Jr.'s *Super Fly* (1972) fell under the exact categories of action, sex, and violence that Sembene rejected in discussions with Third World and Soviet filmmakers. At the UCLA festival, his own screenings straddled political and entertainment cinema: reports praised *Mandabi* as a "sharp" comedy.[52] Sembene's answers thus proposed a continuity between his own work and black American filmmaking across the spheres of art and popular cinema.

Across Cold War camps, Sembene explained his kinship with other cinematic traditions in terms of his militant rather than aesthetic goals. He shaped his answers so as not to alienate his audiences, but he was always consistent on that one point. Western critics have sought in Sembene's cinema a critique of French directors such as Jean-Luc Godard, but when asked about his view of Godard in New York in 1969, Sembene simply evaded the question.[53] When the militant Moroccan journal *Souffles*, during the first Pan-African Festival of Algiers, asked Sembene whether his aesthetics aligned with that of Brazilian Cinema Novo filmmakers such as Glauber Rocha, Sembene framed his reply in terms of political organization: "[W]e are fighting the same fight. It is in this sense that cinemas are similar."[54] Asked about his artistic inspiration after the *Ceddo* screening at the 1977 Moscow festival, Sembene averred, "The director most important to me is Sergei Eisenstein." He spoke about teaching Eisenstein's essays on montage to his students in Senegal, in order to develop an African "rhythm montage" that would allow actors to "speak less."[55]

Here again, Sembene redirected a question about influence to one of his central political aims—reaching African audiences across languages. He spoke four African languages; he made films in two of them, Wolof and Diola, but frequently lamented that only a fraction of African spectators would understand either tongue.[56] He saw Soviet montage as one of the ways to solve that problem. Sembene elaborated on his point about Eisenstein at a symposium on the influence of Soviet revolutionary filmmakers on world cinema. The symposium took place during the 1977 Moscow festival and also included talks by Vieyra, Mrinal Sen, and American scholars Jay Leyda and Annette Michelson, among others. Sembene argued that Eisenstein's theory helps demonstrate how visual montage and gestures

At the Moscow festival in 1977, Sembene argued for using movement and gestures to convey meaning across languages, as in this scene from *Ceddo* (1977).

can better "convey an idea" in African countries where "the diversity of spoken languages limits sound cinema [and] multinational dialogue." He proposed *Ceddo*, made in Diola, as a film made "in that spirit"—that is, inspired by Eisenstein—where "out of two hours only around a half hour are dialogues. The rest are visuals, sounds, and movement."[57] While his talk made it clear that Sembene thought of Eisenstein when he made *Ceddo*, his film was not made to claim a place in the artistic tradition that Eisenstein represented. Rather, Sembene praised Soviet montage as a tool to reach his multilingual African spectators.

An archival history of Sembene's activities and reception in the Soviet Union and America makes manifest that his life's work exceeds his reputation as an African auteur. First, it encourages an understanding of his early films as products of the collaborative, "partisan" filmmaking he described at Tashkent. He developed his contingent, collaborative cinematic style in conversation with his African laboring audiences and actors. He slowed down the tempo of *Emitaï* so that Senegalese spectators who did not speak Diola had time to read the French subtitles.[58] And he opted to shoot outdoors in sunlight and chose medium and full shots so that his unprofessional actors would have "time and space to move around."[59] Second, Sembene's self-fashioning invites an appreciation of his films, usually examined as art or political cinema, within a genealogy of popular-genre cinema, from Blaxploitation to Nollywood. Sembene used humor in *Mandabi* and *Xala* and was proud that they drew large audiences in Senegal, beating out American Westerns. He also used his influence to promote the role of cinema as a "night school" for the masses, "at the same time *spectacular* and didactic."[60]

Sembene benefited from his films being understood as art cinema in American academic and cinephile circles. But his allegiance belonged to the many Third World filmmakers who gathered in Tashkent, Ouagadougou, or Delhi, not just to the few of them celebrated as Third Cinema masters in the United States. Whereas Sembene was programmed with art-cinema staples like Godard in the United States, at the Tashkent festival, blockbuster Hindi and Egyptian melodramas played alongside Sembene's political films. He found allies with equal ease among South African, Black American, Brazilian, Cuban, Indian, and Uzbek filmmakers. Thanks to Sembene's self-fashioning, his films acquired new lives as they traveled across continents and ideological camps, and his global legacy comprises all of these incarnations.

Notes

1. Gregor and his wife, Erika, founded the Berlinale Forum for Young Cinema in 1971.

2. Ulrich Gregor, "Interview with Ousmane Sembene," *Framework*, nos. 7/8 (1978): 37.
3. Elena Razlogova, "World Cinema at Soviet Festivals: Cultural Diplomacy and Personal Ties," *Studies in European Cinema* 17, no. 2 (2020): 140–54. The Tashkent festival was founded in Uzbekistan, then a Soviet republic, in 1968; it officially included Latin American films beginning in 1976.
4. While the French government funded some of Sembene's films, the Soviet state funded his film education. He also received modest fees for the publication of his books and articles in the USSR.
5. Jacques Bontemps, "Semaine de la critique à Cannes: *La Noire de . . .* de Sembene Ousmane," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, June 1966, 48.
6. John Frazer, review of *Mandabi*, directed by Ousmane Sembene, *Film Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (Summer 1970): 48.
7. Gerald Peary and Patrick McGilligan, "Ousmane Sembene: An Interview," *Film Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 40.
8. Gabrielle Chomentowski, "De Marseille à Moscou: Retour sur le contexte politique des années de formation d'Ousmane Sembène (1946–1962)," *Présence francophone*, no. 100 (2024): 21–33.
9. Rossen Djagalov, *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema between the Second and the Third Worlds* (Toronto: McGill-Queens University Press, 2020), 65–110. In France, Sembene's novels came out from Présence Africaine, a publishing house that shunned the USSR in favor of ties to the US-controlled Congress for Cultural Freedom; see Monica Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).
10. See, for example, V. Molchanov, "Kinoiskusstvo dvukh kontinentov," *Iskusstvo kino*, September 1968. This article previewing the 1968 Tashkent festival introduced Sembene as a film director "known to the Soviet reader as the author of novels *The Son of Senegal* and *God's Bits of Wood*" (22).
11. See, for example, Semion Chertok, "Semben Usman," *Iskusstvo kino*, July 1969, 31; and Siradiou Diallo, "African Cinema Is Not a Cinema of Folklore," in *Ousmane Sembène: Interviews*, ed. Annett Busch and Max Annas (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 54.
12. Ousmane Sembene, "Khoroshii, khoroshii chelovek," in *Mark Donskoi: Sbornik*, ed. Liudmila Pazhitnova (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1973), 257–58.
13. Michael Dembrow and Klaus Troller, "Interview with Ousmane Sembène," in Busch and Annas, *Ousmane Sembène: Interviews*, 67.
14. Semion Chertok, *Tashkentskii festival* (Tashkent: Gafur Guliam, 1975), 60.
15. Ousmane Sembene, "Statement at Ouagadougou (1979)," *Black Camera* 12, no. 1 (2020): 148. For a detailed account tracing Donskoi's aesthetic influence on Sembene, see Gesine Drews-Sylla, "Ousmane Sembène et le cinema sovietique," *Présence francophone*, no. 100 (2023): 34–38.
16. Elena Razlogova, "Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, the Soviet Union, and Cold War Circuits for African Cinema, 1958–1978," *Black Camera* 13, no. 2 (2022): 451–73. For more on Sembene's challenges with state censorship, see Akin Adesọkan's essay in this Special Focus section of *Film Quarterly*.
17. Igor Chekin to Aleksei Romanov, July 20, 1966, f. 2944, op. 13, ed. khr. 876, Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow (hereafter RGALI).
18. Toby Talbot, *The New Yorker Theater and Other Scenes from a Life at the Movies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 70.
19. Gene Siskel, "'Black Girl' and 'Borom Sarret,'" *Chicago Tribune*, October 9, 1969.
20. A. Sutarmina, "Otchet o rabote s chlenom zhuri korotkometrazhnogo filma g-nom Sembenom Usmanom" (July 1967), f. 2936, op. 4, ed. khr. 1593, l. 27, RGALI. The Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers resulted from many discussions in Africa and elsewhere before it was founded at the First Pan-African Festival, held in Algiers in July 1969, with Sembene and Vieyra as founding members. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra mentions discussions at Dakar, Carthage, and Tashkent, in his "Le cinéma au 1er festival culturel panafricain d'Alger," *Présence Africaine*, no. 72 (1969): 192.
21. Djagalov, *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism*, 137–72; Masha Salazkina, *World Socialist Cinema: Affinities, Alliances, Solidarities* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023), 101–3.
22. David H. Anthony III, "Clandestine Filming in South Africa: An Interview with Nana Mahomo," *Cineaste* 7, no. 3 (1976): 49.
23. O. Savlev, "Interview s senegaliskim kinorezhisserom Sembenom Usmanom dlia zhurnala *Iskusstvo kino*" (1986), f. 2912, op. 7, ed. khr. 19, ll. 1–6, RGALI.
24. *Symposium on Cinema in Developing Countries* (New Delhi: Publications Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 1979), 14.
25. Chertok, *Tashkentskii festival*, 120.
26. Grove Press Education Department, *A Discussion Guide for the Film Mandabi* (New York: Grove Press, 1970), 18.
27. Sutarmina, "Otchet o rabote," ll. 28–29.
28. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, "Toward a Third Cinema," *Tricontinental* 14 (October 1969): 107–32.
29. Mariano Mestman, "From Algiers to Buenos Aires: The Third World Cinema Committee (1973–74)," *New Cinemas* 1, no. 1 (2002): 40–53.

30. Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 35–50.
31. For key issues discussed at Tashkent, see Salazkina, *World Socialist Cinema*, 114–42.
32. Julio García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," trans. Julianne Burton, *Jump Cut*, no. 20 (May 1979): 24–26.
33. Chertok, "Semben Usman," 31.
34. Chertok, 31.
35. Ali Khamraev, "Mysli vokrug festivalia" (unpublished article submitted to the journal *Iskusstvo kino*, 1972), f. 2912, op. 4, ed. khr. 662, l. 10, RGALI; Khamraev to author, Facebook chat message, May 6, 2024.
36. Gregor, "Interview with Ousmane Sembene," 37. On Central Asian directors' battles with the Soviet state, see Salaskina, *Socialist World Cinema*.
37. Gene Moskowitz, "Mandabi," *Variety*, September 11, 1968, 106.
38. Guy Flatley, "Senegal Is Senegal, Not Harlem," *New York Times*, November 2, 1969, D17.
39. *A Discussion Guide for the Film Mandabi*, 16.
40. Roger Greenspun, "Film Festival: 'Mandabi'," *New York Times*, September 30, 1969, 41.
41. Flatley, "Senegal Is Senegal, Not Harlem," D17.
42. *A Discussion Guide for the Film Mandabi*, 18.
43. Jonathan Buchsbaum, "Militant Third World Film Distribution in the United States, 1970–1980," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 24, no. 2 (October 2015): 59.
44. Harold Weaver, "'Film-Makers Have a Great Responsibility to Our People': An Interview with Ousmane Sembene," *Cinéaste* 6, no. 1 (1973): 26–31.
45. Flatley, "Senegal Is Senegal, Not Harlem."
46. Renee Poussaint, "African Film: The High Price of Division," *Ufahamu* 1, no. 3 (1971): 55–56; Ntongela Masilela, "The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers," in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993), 111.
47. The retrospective included the features *Black Girl*, *Mandabi*, *Emitaï*, *Xala*, and *Ceddo*, as well as the shorts *Borom Sarret*, *Niaye* (1964), and *Tauw* (1970). See schedules in the *Pacific Film Archive Newsletter* for February and March 1978, available at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA.
48. Lee Amazonas, "Guerrilla Cinematheque Comes of Age: The Pacific Film Archive," *Chronicle of the University of California*, no. 6 (Spring 2004): 147–59. For Angela Davis, see, for example, Q&A session at the Pacific Film Archive, February 3, 1977, https://archive.org/details/bampfa-audio_03519 110. PFA Director Tom Luddy invited Davis to serve as an interpreter; Luddy, interview with author, March 1, 2019.
49. Weaver, "'Film-Makers Have a Great Responsibility to Our People,'" 31; on different struggles, see Flatley, "Senegal Is Senegal, Not Harlem."
50. Nauchno-issledovatelskii institut teorii i istorii kino, *Kino v borbe za mir, sotsyalnyi progress i svobodu narodov: Tvorcheskaya diskussia na V Mezhdunarodnom kinofestivale v Tashkente, 1978 g.* (Moscow: NIIK Goskino SSSR, 1978), 39.
51. Weaver, "'Film-Makers Have a Great Responsibility to Our People,'" 31.
52. "African Film Festival," *African Arts* 4, no. 3 (Spring 1971): 76.
53. For a persuasive analysis of intertextual connections between Sembene's *Xala* and Godard's *Weekend* (1967), see James S. Williams, *Xala* (London: Bloomsbury/BFI, 2024), 33–34.
54. "Entretien avec Sembene Ousmane," *Soufflles*, nos. 16–17 (1969): 51.
55. Rolf Richter, "Interview with Ousmane Sembène," in Busch and Annas, *Ousmane Sembène: Interviews*, 103–4. Sembene told his biographer, Samba Gadjigo, that Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) influenced his editing process; for this point, and for an argument for Eisenstein's influence on Sembene, see Lindiwe Dovey, "Listening between the Images: African Filmmakers' Take on the Soviet Union, Soviet Filmmakers' Take on Africa," in *The Oxford Handbook of Communist Visual Cultures*, ed. Aga Skrodzka, Xiaoning Lu, and Katarzyna Marciniak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 373.
56. Samba Gadjigo, Ralph H. Faulkingham, Thomas Cassirer, and Reinhard Sander, eds., *Ousmane Sembène: Dialogues with Critics and Writers* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 40. For an important role of multilingualism in Sembene's films, see John Mowitt, *Re-Takes: Postcoloniality and Foreign Film Languages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 97–132.
57. Ousmane Sembene, "Influence de la Revolution d'Octobre et reflexion sure le cinéma d'Afrique noire" (talk presented at the "October and World Cinema" Symposium, Moscow, July 1977), p. 6, box 81, folder 9, Annette Michelson Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. I thank Anne Eakin Moss for sharing this document with me. This talk was published in Russian as Ousmane Sembene, "Oktiabrskaia revolutsia i iskusstvo chernoi Afriki," in *Kinoiskusstvo novogo mira*, ed. T. Vetrova, Liudmila Melvil, and Irina Bykova (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1981), 3; and in Spanish as Ousmane Sembene, "La influencia del cine mudo soviético en los cineastas africanos," *Cine cubano*, no. 93 (1979): 14–16.
58. Weaver, "'Film-Makers Have a Great Responsibility to Our People,'" 29.
59. Dembrow and Troller, "Interview with Ousmane Sembène," 69.
60. Weaver, "'Film-Makers Have a Great Responsibility to Our People,'" 27. Emphasis mine.