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Ousmane Sembene

Ousmane Sembene is justifiably thought of as the true founder of African cinema, and is still considered to be one of its greatest film-makers. This is no mean achievement for someone who began film work at the age of 40 (when he went to Moscow to study with Mark Donskoi) and whose entire career has been the product of constant struggle. In spite of the fact that many African countries became independent in the early 60s, the whole continent continues to be the dumping-ground of second-rate American and European films. African films are not even tolerated, much less distributed, by this circuit. Consequently they are subjected to the same inadequate budgets as 'independent' films here, and in addition most of the technical facilities, equipment and even crews are only available from Europe. Senegal has more film-makers than other African countries, but at the moment very few of them are actually able to produce films because there is no industrial structure and less and less financial support.

Sembene has been a well-known novelist since 1957, when he published 'Le Docker noir', recounting his experiences as a trade union organiser in Marseilles. He began making films, however, because his books were of necessity written in the official language, French, and thus unavailable to

most Senegalese people, 80% of whom speak Wolof. Since *Mandabi*, he has used Wolof to communicate better the principle from which he operates: 'There are fundamentally two types of régime - socialism and capitalism. I'm for socialism, but I'm not going to provoke the eruption of a socialist régime by making films. The people will instigate that, and it's important that the films don't provide the comfortable feeling of making revolution by proxy.' It is this concern to communicate with his people that puts Sembene in the same league as Youssef Chahine and Yılmaz Güney, whose films were shown at the NFT in January. And like theirs his work has utilised popular forms of entertainment to make greater sense of common experience. This is what makes his work, like that of Chahine and Güney, so refreshing. And as Jim Pines writes in *The Other Cinema* catalogue (to be published shortly), Sembene's importance comes from his 'sharp sensibility and creative genius for penetrating and dramatising the core tensions within African history and culture.' -Angela Martin.

Guardian Lecture

Wed 8 Apr 8.30

The NFT is pleased to welcome to London Ousmane Sembene, who will be interviewed on stage for this evening's Guardian Lecture. (All seats bookable at £1.50).



Gomis Diouna is employed by a French family to look after their children in France. Little more than an indentured cleaning servant, she finds herself denied any form of human connection - she can neither speak French nor write in her native tongue. Even her letters must be written and read by the French family. 'Sembene's extraordinary ability to create an easily understood film about such complex themes well justifies the acclaim he has received' (Risa Ellovich, *American Anthropologist*). *Senegal* 1966. Plus *Borom Sarret* and *Taaw*.

Sun 5 Apr
8.45

Black Girl

(La Noire de...)



When Ibrahima Dieng receives word that a nephew is sending him a money order, he finds his entire life thrown into a chaos of false friends, corruption and bureaucracy. 'A wonderful, handsome and real comedy... We had seen a new film master and a new kind of film. It lifted the whole festival - here was the masterpiece that could justify any film festival... None of Sembene's films could have been made by any visitor to Senegal' (Jay Leyda). *Senegal* 1968.

Mon 6 Apr
6.30

The Money Order

(Mandabi)



During the Second World War, the French imposed a heavy rice tax on the Diola people of Senegal. This film is based on the resistance they met, a resistance founded in the Diolas' belief in spiritual beings called upon to advise them. 'Although they are mythological beings, very much like the Greek Gods, they materialise from time to time in human form and hold chanted discussions with the people... I have never seen any of these spirits, but I respect them' (Sembene). *Senegal* 1972.

Mon 6 Apr
8.45

Emitai



At the age of 50, El Hadji Abdou Kadar Beye decides to take a third wife, another villa and a new car, but on his wedding night he finds himself suffering from a curse of *xala*: temporary sexual impotence. In a sense, this is a true story: 'of today's third world bourgeoisies who, having beaten French, English or American colonialism, have formed new classes that only know how to imitate Western bourgeoisies... the reign of these new bourgeoisies will necessarily run its term some day...'. (Sembene). *Senegal* 1974.

Tue 7 Apr
6.15 8.30

Xala



The film is set loosely in the 17th or 18th century. Its title is the name given to the men who resisted the initial influence of Islam, but here Sembene is concerned to make a film of reflection on all outside influences: Islam, catholicism and trafficking focused on guns, alcohol and slaves. *Ceddo* has received wide acclaim in the film world and caused considerable controversy where its concerns dig deepest; it was banned in Senegal, ostensibly for its 'unorthodox' Wolof spelling with two d's. *Senegal* 1977.

Wed 8 Apr
6.00

Ceddo

