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Concientious Cinema

Senegalese Cineastes as Preservers of Cultural Identity and Promoters of Social Change

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Fall 2005

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I. Abstract:

Senegalese cinema was born with a conscience. From its earliest days, Senegalese films have been marked by tendencies to preserve cultural identity and promote social change. Using background research, film screenings, discussions, and interviews, this study categorizes these trends into a movement of “Conscientious Cinema,” and identifies the development of both of these objectives. This study first traces the trend of cultural identity preservation from the films of the founding generation to their evolution in the projects of young filmmakers today, and similarly explores the development of the trend of social-change promotion from between these generations. In the analysis, I examine why these trends have developed and how they are important today. Finally, this study identifies the future potential of Conscientious Cinema and the ways in which the movement can reach this potential.

II. Introduction:

A. Definitions:

To analyze trends in Senegalese cinema, it is first necessary to define what we mean by ‘Senegalese Cinema.’ Scholars of African film have often faced this challenge when attempting to define African Cinema. In Paulin Soumanou Vieyra’s book “Le Cinéma Africain,” he defines African films as “those that transmit purely and simply the manifestations of African life in visualizing them without modification of exposition or context” (244). However, most African filmmakers disapprove of attempts to create such a definition. In an interview published in “Ecrans d’Afrique,” Senegalese cineaste Moussa Touré stated, “I am African and I try to make films as it is done everywhere in the world. I do not think that time must be wasted on the term “African cinema,” which I do not like very much” (28). For the purposes of this paper, I will define ‘Senegalese Cinema’ according to the most basic model, basing this decision on the simple yet precise definition given to me by first-generation Senegalese director Momar Thiam: « *Un film est Sénégalais parce qu’il est fait par un Sénégalais* » (“A film is Senegalese because it is made by a Senegalese”).

This paper posits that a major driving force in Senegalese filmmaking has been a movement for ‘Conscientious Cinema,’ a term which also necessitates definition. By ‘conscientious,’ I mean that this style of cinema emphasizes didacticism over sensationalism, pedagogy over celebrity, and instructive value over commercial value. Conscientious cineastes strive to engage their audiences and stimulate dialogue. They choose subjects grounded in their native culture but they bring progressive new ideas into the spotlight. Conscientious cineastes create films toward two major goals: the preservation of cultural identity and the promotion of social change.

It is these two trends in Senegalese cinema that I will explore in this paper, tracing their emergence among the first generation of Senegalese cineastes to their current prevalence among the young, rising generation. To clarify, I consider the “older generation” to be those cineastes who have

established themselves enough in the industry that scholars and critics have written about them in academic articles or film reviews. I consider the “rising generation” to be those young cineastes and film students who have yet to gain external recognition.

To provide a context for this study, this introduction will begin with a summary of the general history of African cinema with a special attention to Senegalese filmmakers, followed by a brief discussion of existing scholarly reviews and film criticism. I will then discuss my rationale for conducting this study and the objectives that I hope to accomplish.

B. Background :

1. Cineastes, Agreements, and Institutions

Senegal has been present in the history of cinema almost since its birth. In 1895, the Lumière brothers invented the “cinématographe” in Lyon, France, and only five years would pass before they projected a film on the shores of West Africa. Dakar would screen Louis Lumière’s “L’arroseur Arrosée” in 1900 to awed audiences; however, Senegal would not begin to develop its own indigenous film industry until just before independence in 1960.

In 1955, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra created “Africa Sur Seine,” commonly considered the first Senegalese film. This *court-métrage* (short film) was produced by Vieyra’s Groupe Africaine du Cinéma, which included Mamadou Sarr, Robert Caristan, and Jean Mélo Kane. At this time, no film formation programs existed in Senegal, so most cineastes received their training elsewhere: Vieyra attended IDHEC (Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques), a school of cinema formation in Paris, and the next big director on the scene, Ousmane Sembène, received his formation in Moscow. Sembène entered the world of Senegalese cinema with his 1962 *court-métrage* of “Boroom Sarret,” followed four years later by Senegal’s first *long-métrage* (feature film), “Le Noir de...” in 1966.

Senegalese cinema, having been born during the independence movements of the 1960’s, is truly a child of the revolution. From its earliest days, we begin to see the presence of political and social awareness, appearing not just in Senegalese cinema, but all over Africa. As African cineastes strove for greater independence, the trend towards Conscientious Cinema took hold. This trend is reflected in the actions of cineastes, in the agreements they formed, and in the institutions they developed.

In the early years of African cinema, filmmakers depended heavily on Western organizations such as the French Ministry of Cooperation for monetary support, technological expertise, and the necessary resources to produce and develop films. However, in the midst of the independence movements of the 1960s, African cineastes began to break ties to their former colonial powers. Outspoken filmmakers such as Sembène denounced the exploitive and monopolistic tendencies of the French-owned *Companie Africain Cinématographique Africain* (COMACICO) and the *Société*

d'Exploitation Cinématographique Africain (SECMA), both of which primarily distributed Western films.

At the Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres in Dakar in 1966, African filmmakers came together to propose the creation of an inter-African film office that would promote truly African cinema, complete with African facilities of film production, cinemas and archives. Three years later in Algiers, in July of 1969, the Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes (FEPACI) formed, marking a monumental step for independent film in Africa. The primary founders of FEPACI were leftists committed to the ideals of the Pan-African movement, who “believed their prophetic mission was to unite and use film as a tool for the liberation of the colonized countries as a step toward the total unity of Africa.” (Diawara, 39). The organization encouraged the use of semi-documentary and didactic fictional forms to denounce colonialism and the alienation of African countries that were still culturally or economically dependent on the West.

In March of 1972, FEPACI transformed the Semaines du Cinéma of Burkina Faso into a continent-wide film festival, the Festival Pan-African du Cinéma de Ouagadougou (FESPACO), that engaged African cinema in competition and acknowledged exceptional films with prestigious awards. The primary objective of the festival was to facilitate the diffusion of African films and to promote dialogue and exchange between filmmakers. With each biannual festival, the event grew and developed and the quality of selected films improved. At the ninth FESPACO in 1985, the festival hosted its first colloquium on African literature and film, and also adopted a theme for the first time: “Cinema and the Liberation of People.” For each subsequent festival, FESPACO selected a new theme to engage filmmakers and audiences, including “Cinema and New Technologies,” “The Role of the Actor in Cinema,” and “Cinema and History.” These themes, predominantly socio-political, tie each festival together and promote the discussion of pressing issues. More than simply a film festival, FESPACO harnesses the power of cinema to foster cultural exchange and raise consciousness of social and political issues.

In January of 1975, the Second Congress of FEPACI adopted the Algiers Charter on African Cinema, which addressed the urgency and the importance of the creation of national cinematic industries. The charter states, « *La domination culturelle, d'autant plus dangereuse qu'elle est insidieuse, impose à nos peuples des modèles de comportement et des systèmes de valeur dont la fonction fondamentale et de renforcer l'emprise idéologique et économique des puissances impérialistes* » (“Cultural domination, which is all the more dangerous for being insidious, imposes on our peoples models of behaviour and systems of values whose essential function is to buttress the ideological and economic ascendancy of the imperialist powers.”) They saw the prevalence of Western entertainment as a threat to African culture, but as cineastes, they could take urgent action in the role of liberators. « *Dans cette perspective, le cinéma a un rôle primordial à jouer parce qu'il est un moyen d'éducation, d'information et de prise de conscience, et également un stimulant de créativité* » (“In this perspective, cinema has a primordial role to play because it is a means of education, of

information, of raising conscience, and equally a stimulant of creativity.” By questioning the dominant styles of narrative structures and Western-stereotyped images of Africa, filmmakers could draw on the resources of a fully liberated popular creativity.

It was in this climate of African cinema that the first generation of Senegalese filmmakers created their oeuvres. Today, FEPACI is still an active organization, with its headquarters in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and FESPACO is an ever-growing festival set to take place again in February 2007. Although the focus of this paper is on Senegalese filmmakers, not African film institutions, I have described these declarations and organizations here to serve as examples of the political consciousness present in African cinema during its years of formation.

2. Scholarly discussion

Although supportive literature is not abundant, scholars and film critics alike have often commented on the socially engaged qualities of African film. While leaving the bulk of this discussion to the Findings section of this paper, I will briefly mention what has already been written on this topic in both of my target thematic areas: the preservation of cultural identity and the promotion of social change.

a. Preservation of Cultural Identity

In responding to the theme “Indigenisation in African Cinema,” film academic Samir Farid writes “...the way we dress, the way we talk, the way we live, is our culture. Art is something completely individual to the creative person. Cultural identity is invented by those creative individual people.” However, this relationship is reciprocal: a person’s culture influences his art, and in turn, a person’s art can influence his culture. In his essay on the same theme, Cheikh Oumar Sissoko elaborates that “A filmmaker communicates through a certain well-established language which involves a public and its cultural references” (*Symbolic Narratives / African Cinema*, 192). As preservers of cultural identity, African cineastes reflect their native values and traditions. According to Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, « *C’est un fait, un cinéma national est forcément le reflet de l’ensemble des valeurs de civilisation propres à un pays déterminé. Ses particularités relèvent du dynamisme interne des sociétés qui composent le visage du pays considéré.* » (“It is a fact, a nation’s cinema is a strong reflection of all the values present in the civilization of a determined country. Its particularities reveal the internal dynamism of the societies that compose the face of the country”) (*Le Cinéma Africain*, 299).

In presenting these values, African cineastes often draw heavily on the roots of their oral storytelling traditions, using symbols, idioms, music, aphorisms, and allegorical narratives which contribute to a folkloric quality in their films. Moreover, the use of native languages reinforces this movement to break away from colonial influence and “immerse ourselves in our own sources” (Diawara, 160). Vieyra writes « *...le cinéma africain doit commencer par être africain totalement ; et c’est à partir de cette situation qu’il y aura quelque chose à offrir au monde.* (“... African cinema

must commence by being completely African, and starting from this moment it will have something to offer to the world”) (Le Cinéma Africain, 267). By not canonizing Western standards, African cineastes advance their own cultural identity through film.

b. Promotion of Social Change

As early as 1975, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra wrote that African film had the power to promote positive social and cultural development. He stated that Africa was searching for conscientious and engaged directors who were nourished by the values of African civilizations and who were convinced that cinema can help a people to fully realize themselves (Le Cinema Africain, 342). As film scholar A. Enaharo writes, “The African cineaste is like a harbinger, he tells his audience the problems of society. It is his responsibility to identify these problems. He is the spokesman of the community, for it is believed that no society altogether knows its own heart” (137). In addition, another academic in the field, Mbye C. Cham, has posited cinema as the “crucial site for the battle to decolonize minds, to develop radical consciousness, to reflect and engage critically African cultures and traditions, and to make desirable the meaningful transformation of society for the benefit of the masses” (201). It is in this vein that Ousmane Sembene declares cinema as “an evening school” for the people, playing a crucial educational role in the heart of a community (Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema 187). Films that advance social change confront the contemporary society in which they are set. These works tend to address present social realities by engaging audiences with themes such as urbanization, political instability, religion, gender roles, and the challenges of post-colonial life.

C. Rationale:

My rationale for conducting this study on Conscientious Cinema in Senegal stems from my appreciation for film. I have always been fascinated by the power of cinema to stimulate emotions, to open minds, and to awaken consciences. In a developing country with many national languages and with unalphabetized sectors of the population, cinema can serve as an invaluable tool to communicate to the people, provide educational messages, and promote an exchange of ideas. In order for Senegalese cinema to be able to reach these people, however, there are numerous obstacles that need to be overcome in the domains of production and distribution. The majority of these challenges stem from the greatest problem facing African cinema today: a simple lack of financing and resources. However, in order for governments, organizations, or private investors to become interested in providing support for Senegalese cinema, it is first necessary to understand the potential advantages of a supported film industry: the power of socially-conscious films and the benefits they could bring to the Senegalese people. Therefore, I have embarked on this study to reveal the prevalence of Conscientious Cinema among Senegalese filmmakers and explore the implications of this trend.

D. Objectives:

In conducting this study, I intend to discuss the development of norms in Senegalese cinema starting with the first generation of cineastes. I will argue that the founders set the precedents for the rising movement of Conscientious Cinema, by creating films which stressed two major themes: cultural identity and social change. In the Findings section of this study, I will provide evidence regarding the emergence of these two trends in both the old and new generations of Senegalese cineastes. The first half of this section will trace the development of cultural identity preservation in Senegalese filmmaking from the founding generation to the rising cineastes, with subheadings to examine the importance of positive cultural images, music, language, and intended audience. The second half of this section will trace the development of social change promotion in Senegalese filmmaking between these two generations, with subheadings to discuss a cineaste's role in society, current and past productions, and a transition in approaches. In my analysis section, I will discuss why these trends developed, their current relevance, and their potential value to the Senegalese people.

Finally, I will call attention the challenges that remain in the way before this brand of Conscientious Cinema can really flourish. By creating this study, I intend to demonstrate that the rising generation of Senegalese cineastes, if provided with the proper support, can serve the interests of the Senegalese people. By creating works that emphasize the preservation of cultural identity, cineastes celebrate their nation's history, traditions, and values. And by creating works that emphasize social change, cineastes bring current problems quite literally into the spotlight, promote informed discussions, and propose possible solutions. In this vein, I intend to argue that young Senegalese cineastes, building upon the foundations laid by the first generations, are creating a movement of Conscientious Cinema that works towards the preservation of cultural identity and the promotion of social change. Properly supported, this movement has the potential to be a powerful force in modern Senegalese society.

III. Methodologies

A. Literary research

1. Book and text research

In order to conduct this study, it was necessary to have informed discussions with Senegalese cineastes. In order to have informed discussions with Senegalese cineastes, it was necessary first to be informed. I gained overall knowledge of the history of African cinema as well as the writings of scholars and film critics from a few key resources. These included two works by Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, "Le Cinema Africain" (1975), and "Le Cinema Au Senegal" (1983). In addition, a recent collection of writings by African filmmakers and film scholars, "Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema" (2000) served as an invaluable resource. Finally, online scholarly databases such as JSTOR provided access to such academic journals as "African Media Review," "Filming the African Experience," and "Black Film Review."

2. Magazine articles and printed interviews

Some of the most influential and ground-breaking Senegalese cineastes were simply out of my realm of interview possibilities (i.e., Ousmane Sembène due to his high-profile and his being frequently abroad, and Djibril Diop Mambety due to his recent passing away). Therefore, printed interviews with these first generation filmmakers served as great references in evaluating the evolution of cinematic norms. In addition, printed magazine articles provided overall information on films and directors, and often included brief film criticism or reviews. The magazines I used for this research were “Unir Africa” (1993), “Ecrans D’Afrique” (1992), “Black Cinema” (1993) and “Yegoo” (2005).

B. Viewed films

It would be a serious oversight to attempt this study on the content of Senegalese films without actually viewing any. I knew that taking notes and analyzing a selection of Senegalese films would be essential to my research, but tragically, Senegalese films are extraordinarily difficult to gain access to in Senegal. Thanks to SIT, I was able to view “Guelwaar” (Ousmane Sembène) before actually starting my project, which gave me starting ideas to work with. From there, I sought resources where I could. Unfortunately, I still feel that this area of my research was lacking. Being able to view a greater number and a greater variety of Senegalese films could have provided me with more complete and more in-depth information and I regret that I was unable to do so. However, the simple lack of availability of Senegalese films did provide insight into the direness of the local film distribution industry.

The weekly Cinéclub at FORUT provided me with the opportunity to watch films with Senegalese film students, but unfortunately during the month of my research, no Senegalese films were screened. My advisor, Cheikh Moustapha Sarr, provided me with two video cassettes which I also viewed with the film students at FORUT: a Senegalese court-métrage entitled “Yexu – Le Mariage” (Fousseynou Diagola) and a feature length Malian film “Finye” (Souleyemane Cissé). At the Centre Culturel Français, I viewed the only two Senegalese films (both documentaries) available: “Dakar-Bamako” (N’diaye Samba Félix) and “Baw Naan – La Rite de Pluie” (Joseph Gaye). The CCF had also scheduled a showing of Sembène’s “Moolaade” this month, but unfortunately canceled the screening at the discretion of the director due to fears of bootlegging (making illegal video-recordings.) Finally, after much persistence, I was able to view two films from the personal collections of directors at Cinéseas: “Baks” (Momar Thiam) and “Hyenes” (Djibril Diop Mambety).

In viewing all of these films, my role as an American had both a positive and a negative affect on my ability to analyze the portrayal of cultural identity. First, being an outsider, I had an “oeil extérieur,” (exterior eye) in the words of my advisor Cheikh Moustapha Sarr. This allowed me to recognize as uniquely African or uniquely Senegalese those cultural elements which were unfamiliar to me as an American. To a Senegalese person, it is precisely these elements which would be unremarkable, as they would be normal or typical to his/her everyday life. However, having been brought up in a Western society and having been immersed in Western cinema, I thereby lacked the full cultural context with which I might be able to interpret the significance of these cultural elements.

Since I was aware of this weakness in my viewing of films, I strove to see as many of these films as possible accompanied by at least one Senegalese informant – which I was able to accomplish through the institutions of FORUT and Cinéseas.

C. Cinéseas

Cinéseas, or Cinéastes Sénégalais Associés, is an association of Senegalese filmmakers whose headquarters is located across from the Théâtre Nationale Daniel Sorano. The filmmakers whose offices are located here are generally members of the older generation who have been around for several years and are well-connected in the industry. Cinéseas itself provides a space where cineastes can hold office hours, work on their projects in a shared setting, and coordinate ideas and resources as needed. Since these cineastes are relatively well-established, they are also relatively busy. Thus, although I frequented this location several times during my research process, I met with difficulty in scheduling interviews and having appointments canceled at the last minute. Finally however, the directors at Cinéseas ended up pulling through as some of my most valuable informants on the first generation of Senegalese directors.

1. Informal discussions during screenings

The personnel at Cinéseas were kind enough to screen two films to aid me in my research. The first film I viewed was “Baks” by Momar Thiam (1973), which I was actually fortunate enough to view with the auteur, Momar Thiam himself. I also watched this film with Ngagne Kasse, a member of Cinéseas who had first seen “Baks” when he was only twenty years old and not yet working in the field of cinema. Now, Kasse has an office at Cinéseas and has been involved in numerous Senegalese productions, including Djibril Diop Mambéty’s “Hyènes,” the second film I viewed at Cinéseas with both Kasse and Thiam. For this production, Kasse served as the casting director, cameraman, and assistant acting director for Mambéty. Being able to view these two films with the people who helped them into creation proved to be one of the most interesting and informative ways to learn about the first generation of Senegalese cineastes, and I only regret that scheduling conflicts prevented both myself and Cinéseas from programming more screenings of this kind.

2. Structured interviews

I also conducted two structured interviews at Cinéseas, with directors Momar Thiam and Amadou Saalum Seck. Momar Thiam’s first film, a court-métrage entitled “Sarzan,” (1963) was one of the very first Senegalese productions. Since then, he has produced numerous long-métrages, and he is currently working on plans for an exposition of the history of Senegalese Cinema to take place later this year. Amadou Saalum Seck is the Vice-Président of Cinéseas, and one of the newer members of this group of established filmmakers. His first film, “Saraaba,” was released in 1987, and although he filmed his second work “Ndobène” in 2000, he has been unable to complete the final cut due to a lack of resources. These two structured interviews provided me with solid primary research for my examination of the older generation of Senegalese cinema, both at its earliest beginnings (with Momar Thiam) and as it evolves (with Saalum Seck).

D. FORUT media center

The FORUT media center of Dakar is a center of formation for aspiring young cineastes. Each year, the center accepts twelve students (six male and six female) for a comprehensive training program in the audiovisual industry. For ten months, they study scriptwriting, filming, sound, and editing, all of which culminates in a final project of short documentary films to be screened at the annual Festival des Films de Quartier (also organized by the media center). The center also promotes the use of media to encourage community development, as the program for the Festival describes the ambition of the media center as « *de faire des stagiaires des médiateurs sociaux capable d'appréhender les problèmes de l'environnement et de les aborder à l'aide de l'outil audiovisuel.* » (“to make the students into social mediators capable of recognizing the problems in their environment and tackling them with the aid of audiovisual tools.”) As a location where I could meet young Senegalese filmmakers embarking on their first projects and eager to discuss their ambitions for the future, FORUT provided me with the perfect balance to the association of established cineastes at Cinéseas.

1. Informal discussions

My interactions at the FORUT center provided me with a wealth of ideas about the rising generation of Senegalese cineastes: what subjects interested them, what they were passionate about, why they chose to study film, and what they plan to do after their formation. Many of these discussions were an extension of friendly social interactions, but I did take brief notes on informal discussions with the following film students: M'béro Sarr, Matar Badiane, Cheikh A.T. Sy, Mamadou Dia, and Mariam Fall.

2. Unstructured Interviews

I also conducted two unstructured interviews at FORUT: the first with Oumar Ndiaye, a documentary filmmaker and also the Secretary General of the Festival des Films de Quartier. For my second interview, I discussed the current academic thinking on African films with Professor Ken Harrow. Harrow is an extremely knowledgeable African film professor at Michigan State University who is spending this year in Dakar teaching at University Cheikh Anta Diop. He also comes frequently to FORUT to work with the film students and lead the debates following Cinéclub screenings.

3. Structured Interviews

At FORUT I conducted a structured interview with Modibo Diawara, the director of the media center's student formation program. He provided a great deal of information on the history of Senegalese cinema, the evolution of film as seen through the advancement of technology, and the current objectives and future plans for the media center.

4. Questionnaires to film students

Without a doubt, one of my most valuable methodologies was the distribution of questionnaires to film students at FORUT. The questionnaires included ten questions about the student's personal goals in filmmaking as well as the student's thoughts on the role of cinema in society. Enough space provided for a brief paragraph to answer each question. Unfortunately, my research project happened to fall during the exact weeks when the students started their "fin de formation" projects, their very first films. As a result, these new cineastes were extraordinarily busy, and many of them left to other regions of the country to begin their filming. Out of the twelve questionnaires distributed, I managed to collect six back. All six were well filled out, with a good deal of attention paid to each question. The responses were so valuable and so interesting that I wish I could have obtained all twelve, and had I developed this questionnaire earlier, I would have liked to distribute similar ones to filmmakers outside of FORUT. As it worked out, however, the six questionnaires I received still provided quality data for my findings regarding young cineastes.

5. Participant observation at FORUT's Cinéclub

Finally, I attended four film screenings this month at FORUT's weekly Cinéclub, a Wednesday night event in which the center shows a film and follows it by a debate. The audience generally consists of around twenty people, the majority of them current or former FORUT film students. The event is free and open to the public, so often there are several attendees who are simply film enthusiasts. Unfortunately, I was not lucky enough to see a Senegalese film at any of this month's screenings, but nonetheless, participating in the debates provided me with an opportunity to note the aspects of films that Senegalese audiences commented on, the questions they raised, and their thoughts and reflections upon viewing the film. This month's program consisted of Alfred Hitchcock's "Psycho" (U.S.), Souleymane Cissé's "Finyè" (Mali), Thomas Osmand's documentary on Ethiopian ethnic groups "Imaginaires Croisés" (France) and Jean-Marie Teno's "Chef!" (Cameroon).

IV. Findings

A. Conscientious Cinema as a Tool for the Preservation of Cultural Identity

1. First generation: Return to the Sources

In speaking of cultural identity, it is necessary to note that those elements which one considers "cultural" are the elements that tend to be unique to a certain group of people. When asked whether Senegalese cinema formed a distinct cadre in the realm of African cinema, the response I received was almost always the most obvious: « *Un film est Sénégalais parce qu'il est fait par un Sénégalais* » ("A film is Senegalese because it is made by a Senegalese") (Thiam).

This response was frustrating at first, until I discussed it with Cheikh Moustapha Sarr. Sarr is not himself a director, but he has worked for several years in the logistical domain of Senegalese cinema and is a great aficionado of Senegalese films. He explained that the very elements of a film which a filmmaker would take for granted might be those very elements of cultural identity that I was looking for in my research. The criteria for beauty is not the same throughout the world, nor are tastes

in music, dance, or style. What makes Senegalese people distinct are details such as the way they talk, the way they move, and the way they dress. In addition, the style of narration in many of these early films may also be considered uniquely African. Sarr compared a filmmaker to a modern-day griot, who uses his camera as a mode of expression. All of these elements could certainly be perceived in Senegalese films, and film critics may propose that they form the base of an « *esthétique négro-africain* » (“black African aesthetic”) (Sarr). However, these are not details that a Senegalese cineaste would deliberately inject into his film. Simply by virtue of being a Senegalese production, these elements tend to appear. Therefore, in examining the use of film to preserve cultural identity, I will focus not on these elements which a cineaste would take for granted, but I will instead focus on the deliberate decisions made by filmmakers which confirm their interest in keeping their cultural traditions alive.

a. Positive cultural images

When discussing the evolution of Senegalese film, Modibo Diawara emphasized the influence of colonialisation, which as a powerful conquering force threatened Senegalese culture. The media of the colonizers was a way of controlling the people, and French schools were a means of assimilation. Thus, the preservation of cultural traditions and customs became a very important issue in the years following independence. Here, Modibo references the famed NYU African film professor of the same last name, Manthia Diawara, who classified this early 1950-1970 era in Senegalese cinema as a ‘Retour des Sources.’ This ‘Return to Sources’ movement countered the Western colonial presence and stressed identity and Senegalese cultural background.

Joseph Gaye’s 1984 short documentary “Baw Naan (Rite de Pluie)” serves as an example of this ‘Return to the Sources’ movement. It demonstrates the utility of cinema (a modern means of expression,) to celebrate dances and rituals, (a traditional means of expression.) This film includes no narration; instead, Gaye allows the camera to bear simple witness to events and lets the images do all the talking. The film starts with a brief paragraph of text on the screen, explaining that the Baw-naan was an incantory ceremony practiced by the Lebu people during the harvest, in which they attempted to « *faire rire Dieu pour obtenir la pluie* » (“make God laugh in order to obtain rain”) (“Baw Naan”). After the brief text, no additional narration or explanation appeared in the film. The screen showed simple montages of the ceremony: villagers dancing, singing, chanting, and playing traditional instruments. Gaye’s “Baw Naan” has an ethnographic quality to it, it is a film that ‘returns to the sources’ and portrays traditions and rituals without overriding messages or morals.

Fousseynou Diagola’s 1992 court-métrage “Yexu (Le Mariage)” is another film that exemplifies the movement for locally produced images that reunite Senegalese cinema with its public. On the cover of his film, Diagola is quoted: « *Cette Afrique misérabiliste, rongée par la famine, la guerre et la sous-développement n'est pas celle que je connais* » (“This miserabilist Africa, gnawed by famine, war, and underdevelopment, is not the one that I know”) (“Yexu”). Instead, this film tells the simple and positive story of a man impatient to marry his fiancée. The film is slow-paced, with a

series of artistic and pleasing images taken from the setting in a rural African village. At the end, the short film concludes in a marriage, with long takes of traditional dancing, rhythms, and rituals: a celebratory sequence reminiscent of Gaye's "Baw Naan".

In simply regarding both the documentary "Baw-Naan" and the fiction film "Yexu," it is impossible to determine what era either film is set in. These films include no visible traces of Western culture, therefore they could just as well take place 20 or 200 years ago. In these works, Gaye and Diagola celebrate cultural traditions and stresses the presence of African identity uncorrupted by Western influence.

b. Music and cultural identity

In both "Baw Naan" and "Yexu," music is more than an accompanying soundtrack; instead, traditional chants and rhythms compose crucial elements of these films. Cheikh Moustapha Sarr explained that in films, music serves as an additional mode of expression: a way of bringing focus or adding tension at critical moments. The choice of music depends on the auteur, as Momar Thiam states, « *Tu peux choisir la musique qui te plait. Ou bien, tu prends un musicien de présenter le film* » ("You can choose the music that pleases you. Or moreover, you can have a musician present the film.") Ousmane Sembène followed this idea in "Guelwaar," using the renowned Senegalese artist Baba Mall to compose the soundtrack for his film. The use of local music in Senegalese films gives « *une tranche de vie, une rhythm de vie,* » ("a slice of life, a rhythm of life,") explains documentary filmmaker Oumar Ndiaye. The use of local or traditional music creates the appropriate atmosphere in which films can "return to the sources" and immerse themselves in cultural identity.

c. Language and cultural identity

One of the most easily perceptible manifestations of cultural identity in a film is its spoken language. The way we communicate, our styles of speech, our colloquialisms, all these elements compose a crucial element of our culture. Cheikh Moustapha Sarr commented that languages communicate certain unique cultural codes that are simply untranslatable. « *Il y a certain réparties, certain réponses que vous avez dans votre langue que vous ne trouvez pas, par exemple, en français. Ou bien, si vous traduisez ça, il y a moins d'impact, il y a moins de sel vivant, il y a moins d'épice* » ("There are certain sayings, certain responses that you have in your language that you cannot translate, for example, into French. Or then, if you do translate it, there is less impact, less of the salt of life, less spice") (Sarr).

This choice of language is a characteristic that differentiates cinema from the literary arts. Both movies and novels are generally considered to be Western art forms at their origins, however, almost all African novels are written in colonial languages. One of the great strengths of cinema is that it is made with image and sound, therefore facilitates the use of native tongues. In an article published in "Unir Cinéma" in 1993, Babacar Dia Buuba wrote, « *Un tour d'horizon de la filmographie Sénégalais permet de constater que sur plus de 150 films, près de la moitié des titres sont en langues nationales ou bilingue. Ce qui est révélateur, comparé à la production romanesque ou à la*

presse essentiellement en français » (“A tour of the horizon of Senegalese filmography confirms that of more than 150 films, close to half of the titles are in national languages or are bilingual. This is revelatory, compared to the essentially French productions of novels and the press”) (29). For example, films with Wolof titles include “Baw-naan” (Joseph Gaye), “Simb” (Momar Thiam), and “Saraaba” (Amadou Saalum Seck); there also exist films in Pulaar: “Rewo Dande Mayo” (Seex Ngaydo Ba); in Sereer: “Massane” (Safi Faye); in Soninke: “Tiyabu biru” (Moussa Yoro Bathily); in Mandingue: “Mako Dakan” (Sega Coulibaly); and in Joola: “Emitai” (Ousmane Sembène). In commenting on the use of these native languages by Senegalese cineastes, Buuba writes « *Leur pays a une histoire, qui ressent le choc des cultures, ce qui explique l’utilisation à la fois des langues nationales et des langues étrangères* » (“Their country has a history, which has felt the shock of cultures, and this explains the use of both national languages and foreign ones”) (29).

d. Audience and cultural identity

When asked about his intended audience in creating a film, director Momar Thiam responds, « *Moi, j’occupe d’abord de mon pays. Si ça plaît le Sénégal, je suis content* » (“Me, I concern myself first with my country. If it pleases Senegal, I’m content”). When asked about his thoughts on the role of the cineaste in society, Amadou Saalum Seck replied that it is a role of vigilance, to anticipate problems and to awaken consciences. Cinema should be a conscience, he said, especially for Africans. It is through cinema that they can confront the problems of independence, of colonization; it is through cinema that they can work for the formation of a black identity. Here, the idea of promoting social change and preserving cultural identity go hand-in-hand. It is as a result of Senghor’s influence, Seck states, that the locomotive of African cinema is to sustain the culture. He stated that especially in this era of globalization, the society that is at risk is the society that lacks the means to preserve its own culture. Seck commented on the urgency of having competent people who can speak to their own populations in today’s society. Television screens are already filled with Western action heroes and Asian martial arts stars, he lamented. Therefore, faced with this influx of imported images, it is all the more important for Africa to be provided with its own heroes to look up to and to identify with. Accomplishing this, Seck claim, will « *donne à un Africain sa fierté* » (“give an African his pride”).

2. Rising generation: Revolution in Technologies and Evolution in Themes

When asked about the differences between the old generation of cineastes and the rising generation, director of FORUT Modibo Diawara responded that major distinctions stemmed from differences in training and technology. The older generation trained in the grand schools of cinema in France (Vieyra), Moscow (Sembène), or in Germany (Saalum Seck). In other words, they left Senegal to learn their craft. Today, there exists a new generation of Senegalese cineastes who who learned on the set of the first generation, who are training at the Centre Daniel Brottier in Saint-Louis, and who are undergoing their formation at the FORUT Media Centre of Dakar.

In addition, starting in the 1990's, the emergence of the video offered a revolution in cinema, what Diawara labeled "a democratization" of filmmaking. This allowed for a greater accessibility to tools, greater participation by young filmmakers, and amelioration in the quality and quantity of productions. The emerging tool of the video allowed the rising generation to break away from the "bourgeois" era of Senegalese filmmaking, the time of "one man, one film" when a filmmaker took charge of every aspect in his work : scriptwriting, directing, producing, distribution. However, this system of "cinéma d'auteur" was inefficient and unsustainable, remarks Modibo Diawara. What separates the current generation from their predecessors, he explains, is the progressive and positive design of an environment that can sustain the development of the cinema industry. This environment includes access to professional film formation programs, a greater number of film institutions and film festivals, and the utilisation of digital film technology. This is a real revolution, he explains, because it allows for the entire chain of film production to be completed within the native country. It is no longer necessary to go to Europe for film editing, sound editing, or post-production; everything can be done in Dakar.

Along with this revolution in technology came a revolution in themes. As Diawara explained, Senegalese cinema has passed by the first phase, « *le cinéma qui réfléchissait une sorte du vision monolithique* » ("the cinema that reflects a sort of monolithic vision"), and has passed into a new phase marked by a diverse canvas of themes, a cinema increasingly free and independent. "The dualism of Sembène is no more," he continued. The constant tension of colonized vs. colonizer, rich vs. poor, Christian vs. Muslim: that is the monolithic universe of Sembène. (Diawara).

Today, Diawara explains, we are in the era of a new cinema that is profoundly marked by a diversity of approaches, a cinema that "sings of diverse cultural identities." « *C'est ça la grande révolution :* » He declares, « *plusieurs cinémas. On parle de cinéma africain au pluriel* » ("that is the grand revolution : many cinemas. We speak of african cinema in the plural"). To break away from the 'militant' cinema of Sembène's generation, Diawara states, Senegalese cinema today must reunite with its public. Filmmakers accomplish this through their choice of themes and their promotion of indigenous images. « *Le cinéma d'aujourd'hui aussi doit promouvoir une meilleure circulation de images auprès de la communautés africaines, parce qu'il y a une domination écrasante des images importées de l'extérieur dans les programmes télévisuel africain ...il n'y a pas une positive promotion des images produit locale* » ("Cinema today must also promote a better circulation of images about African communities, because there is an overwhelming domination of images imported from the exterior in African television programs ... there is not a positive promotion of locally produced images") (Diawara).

a. Positive cultural images

In looking at the proposed documentary films by students at FORUT, it is interesting to note that only three out of the twelve subjects directly relate to the preservation of cultural identity, while the rest fall generally into the category of promotion of social change. With her project "Copier

Coller” Sophie Kane proposed to examine the contemporary fashions of young Senegalese women and how it has evolved from traditional African dress. N’déye Codou Sène also proposed a project that would look at the evolution of a specific cultural element, in this case dance, with her project “Visage d’Afrique.” In her film, Sène planned to show dance as a tool of communication, to show how contemporary dance has been influenced by the different rules and choreography of different ethnic dances. When asked in the questionnaire why she chose this topic, N’déye responded « *Je l’ai choisi pour mettre en valeur les diversités culturelles* » (“I chose it to show the value of cultural diversities”) (Sène). Finally, M’bérou Sarr’s project, “Le Nguel,” which is among the five selected for this year’s Festival des Films de Quartier, serves as a prime example of a film that stresses the urgency of cultural identity preservation. Sarr’s film will focus on a Sereer song and dance ceremony called the ‘Nguel,’ or ‘l’arbre à pararbre.’ In answering the questionnaire about her motives for creating this film, Sarr wrote : « *Dans ce projet j’essaye de réaliser les cultures nationales qui sont pour la plupart menacées de disparition ou sont négligées* » (“In this project I am trying to film the national cultures which are often menaced to the brink of disappearance or neglected.”) In discussions with Sarr, she described that in some villages the ‘Nguel’ has been transformed into more of a Western-style spectacle, with guitars and amplifiers instead of traditional instruments. She feels strongly that these influences corrupt the cultural ceremony of the ‘Nguel,’ and stated that she would rather see it disappear altogether than become Westernized (Sarr). In showing her film, she strives both to celebrate this ceremony in its traditional form, and argue for the importance of preserving the ‘Nguel’ against the threat of Western cultural encroachment.

Although Matar Badiane's film project strives to illustrate the hardships of the Reubeussois in order to bring about social change, Badiane does not engage in the pessimism and strict didacticism of his predecessors. He emphasizes the instructive values of cinema, but believes it can be harmonized with a celebration of identity. « *Le cinéma est pour moi un moyen de communication, d’éducation, il aide la population à devenir plus conscient de son réalité* » (“The cinema is for me a means of communication, of education, it helps a population to become more conscious of its reality.”) Likewise, Mohamedh Samb writes: « *Le cinéma est un moyen d’expression culturelle, un moyen de partager sa vision du monde avec d’autres, de donner la parole aux oubliés* » (“The cinema is a means of cultural expression, a means of sharing your vision of the world with others, of giving a voice to the forgotten.”)

b. Music and cultural identity

Music and rhythms are a vibrant aspect of Senegalese society, and their inclusion in Senegalese films adds another dimension to the portrayal of cultural identity. When asked about their intended use of music in their films, the students responded almost overwhelmingly in favor of traditional styles. Mbérou Sarr intends to use « *une musique folklore sérère* » (“Sereer folk music”) because her project will focus on Sereer chants and dances. Matar Badiane writes that he will use « *une musique populaire des habitants de Reubeuss pour entrer dans le réalité du film ; la musique est*

acoustique et traditionnel, accompagné et composé de djembe » (“a popular music of the people of Reubeuss to enter into the reality of the film; the music is acoustic and traditional, accompanied and composed by djembe.”) Notably, Ndéye Codou Sène expressed an interest in going beyond both traditional and modern music styles, in breaking new ground with musical experimentation. Sène writes of her music, “*ni traditionnel, ni moderne. Ces des outils sonore que j’ai créés, je l’ai choisis pour avoir quelque chose de nouveaux dans la musique, tout le monde fait la même chose* » (“neither traditional, nor modern. These are the sonorous tools that I have created, and I chose them for having something new in the music; everyone does the same thing”) (Sène). These responses demonstrate both a sustained interest in the incorporation of traditional music and a developing interest in the reinvention of it.

c. Language and cultural identity

Just as in the older generation, language is a powerful indicator of cultural identity in film. From discussions with the students at FORUT, I heard over and over again the importance of using native languages when creating their films. However, each of them also intended to subtitle their film in French (and some even expressed interest in including English subtitles as well.) Mohamedh Samb writes, « *Le Wolof sera utilisé comme langue de support parce qu’elle (cette communauté) est composée essentiellement d’illettrés.* » (“Wolof will be used as a supporting language because it (this community) is composed essentially of illiterates.”) In making this choice to use Wolof because the majority of his subject community is illiterate, Samb expresses a desire to meet his fellow countrymen on their own ground. However, the fact that all of these students plan to use French subtitles as well also demonstrates that they have wider intentions for their project as well. As Matar Badiane states, « *J’ai choisi le français [pour les sous-titres] pour parler aux intellectuels du pays des facettes négatives de notre quotidien* » (“I chose french [for the subtitles] to speak to the intellectuals of the country about the negative facets of our daily life.”)

d. Audience and cultural identity

In responding to the questionnaires, Mariam Fall, Mohamedh Samb, and Mamadou Dia all state that they have no target audience for their film, that they address their work « *à la société toute entière sans exception d’âge ou sexe* » (“to the entire society without regard to age or sex.”) Some of the other students, however, target their work at their peers. Mbérou Sarr comments on the loss of identity among today’s youth and writes, « *La plupart des jeunes ignorent ou négligent nos cultures en faveur des cultures occidentales. Je veux qu’elle prenne conscience des risques qui menacent nos cultures* » (“The majority of youth ignore or neglect our culture in favor of Western culture. I want them to be conscious of the risks that menace our cultures.”) Likewise, Matar Badiane’s primary audience is also youth, as is Ndéye Codou Sène’s « *parce c’est eux l’avenir de demain* » (“because they form the future of tomorrow.”)

B. Conscientious Cinema as a Tool for the Promotion of Social Change

1. First generation: Breaking ground

a. A cineaste's role in society

In discussing the role of a cineaste in society, Cheikh Moustapha Sarr contends that films have a greater power to influence populations than other forms of art. A cineaste is a « *réveilleur de conscience* » (“awakener of conscience”) who plays foremost a role of diffusion, « *qui montre aux autres la force et aussi la faiblesse de la culture* » (“who shows to others the strength and the weakness of the culture.”) It is in this vein that a cineaste has responsibilities or obligations to his people, maintains Sarr. He is « *presque un pédagogue* » (“almost a pedagogue”) who has the tools to change society by demonstrating certain problems, certain realities, and the negative aspects of certain practices.

In discussing the educational quality of films, director Momar Thiam states, « *Tout film a un message. C'est sûr. Des films de la vie sociale, ça te rend courant, et ça marche mieux.* » (“All films have a message, this is sure. Films about the social life, they keep you informed, and this works better.”) Moreover, when asked about the role of cineastes in Senegalese society, Thiam responded by asking, « *Est-ce que ça éduque? Ou bien, est-ce que ça donne des messages? La role des cinéastes, c'est ça. Il faut informer* » (“Does it educate? Or moreover, does it transmit messages? This is the role of the filmmaker. You must inform.”)

b. Productions of the first-generation

In viewing Thiam's 1973 production, “Baks,” I noted these trends in his work. The film tells the story of a young boy, ignored and neglected by his father, who begins skipping school. Eventually, this boy wanders to the Corniche, where a group of drug addicts decide to adopt him into their group. Thiam's film portrays the delinquency of juveniles stealing from “toubabs” (white people) in order to purchase more marijuana, and it shows the hypocrisy of professional businessmen who sneak down to the beach to smoke during their lunch breaks. Throughout, Thiam interseperes his film with overt didactic images: in a classroom scene, the blackboard reads « *Méfions-nous du yamba, c'est l'ennemi de l'homme* » (“Beware of marijuana, it is the enemy of man.”) When the police apprehend the leader of the group of drug addicts, an officer lectures him on “l'esclave de la drogue,” (the slavery of drugs), which is responsible for the children in the streets and the failures of the country (“Baks”). Taken on the whole, the film has a very didactic tone, indeed, it would fit in well as a resource in a drug-prevention curriculum.

The most well-known of the didactic Senegalese directors is without a doubt Ousmane Sembène. This cineaste has been controversial throughout his career, in his choice of often-taboo subject matter and the pessimistic way in which some claim he portrays his African subjects. However, his films have received a great deal of praise for their critical and engaged look at society.

In the publication “Unir Cinéma,” Père Jean Vast examines the role of women in the films of Ousmane Sembène, and how this director uses the tool of cinema to highlight their position and challenges in society. For example, Vast writes, in “Xala,” (1974) Sembène uses a powerful female character to communicate his message. « *Elle dit les choses crûment, dénonce les traditions abusives et tout ce qui est rétrograde et réactionnaire. A travers elle, Sembène dit sa foi dans l'engagement des femmes* » (“She says things crudely, denouncing the abusive traditions and all that is retrograde and reactionary. Through her, Sembène declares his beliefs about the engagement of women”) (10).

In viewing Sembène’s more recent film “Guelwaar,” (1993) I also remarked on the use of a character to convey messages. In this case, the present action of the film is interspersed with flashbacks of speeches by the title character, in which he denounces Africa’s reliance on foreign food aid. This reliance, he argues, creates a cycle of dependency and a generation of beggars. At the end of the film, we see the powerful image of the youth pouring food aid onto the ground. This act of wasting nouriture is considered a sacrilege; but as the film communicates to us, the real defilement of culture would be to continue receiving aid from foreigners.

In looking at these two examples of first generation Senegalese filmmakers, it is understandable that film scholar Manthia Diawara would label this as a movement of “Afro-pessimism,” of social problem films. As Diawara writes, these films possess little desire to meet the African people on their own ground, and often end up treating African people as objects. Instead, these films function similarly to a form of television reportage: they bring into the spotlight those issues which need public exposure, but they portray these issues in a way which little to advance the language of African cinema (83). These established filmmakers set the trend for films with instructive value, but it would be the next generation which would explore new thematic approaches for the portrayal of these values.

c. A transition in approaches

Such new styles can be seen in “Hyènes” by Djibril Diop Mambéty, a revolutionary filmmaker who bridged the gap between the old and new generations. “Hyènes” is actually Mambéty’s adaption of a Swiss novel by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, set in a Senegalese village. The tone is epic and folkloric, and the film is a pleasure to watch : with elaborate costumes, vibrant colors, traditional rhythms, flavorful dialogue and colorful characters, Mambéty brings us back to the spectacle of cinema. However, the film is not without a message. “Hyènes” tells the story of an old woman, once scorned and sent away from her native village, but now returning with wealth and riches beyond anyone’s imagination. She declares that she will donate her money to the village, but on one condition: that they kill her former lover, the man originally responsible for her being sent away. The film attacks hypocrisy and the corrupting power of wealth, but in a stylistic way. As film reviewer Anne de Gasperi writes, “This ruthless condemnation of corruption passes through the fresh colors of a direction that has a hint of choreography and literature, borrowing its style from ancient tragedy

enriched with African joyfulness and rhythms” (“Ecrans D’Afrique,” 18). Mambéty’s film confirms that Senegalese cinema is evolving as cineastes invent new ways to speak to their people.

Amadou Saalum Seck could be considered a filmmaker in transition, a cineaste who worked with the moralizing first generation of moralizing filmmakers but shows an increasingly progressive approach to didactic cinema. His first long-métrage, “Saraaba” (1987) is a film about sociopolitical movements which highlights African problems of development. In his second film “Ndobène” (not yet released), Seck chooses to address a more gritty and taboo topic: the phenomenon of pedophilia. As Seck explained, many Senegalese claim that pedophilia is only an affliction of the “toubabs,” the white people. However, he maintains, pedophilia exists in Africa but it is simply not spoken of. This silence, he argues, is dangerous and prevents the abuse from being properly dealt with. He attributes this silence to the “morale sénégalaise,” an unwritten cultural norm that favors sorting out problems “en famille.” The message of this film, according to Seck, is that pedophilia is a taboo that should no longer be hidden (Seck).

However, even when dealing with these social problems, Seck turns away from the early trend of harshly critical “African pessimism.” He states, « *J’aime mon pays, je suis fier de mon pays* » (“I love my country, I am proud of my country,”) but that there exists a way of presenting these problems aesthetically instead of shamefully. In breaking style with Sembène’s didacticism, Seck stresses the importance of making films that promote dialogue instead of films that overtly teach lessons. He posits film as a means to transmit opinions from a cineaste to his people, « *c’est un lieu de dialogue, de débat, et un partage des opinions* ». (“it is a place of dialogue, of debate, and a sharing of opinions”) (Seck).

2. Rising generation: Building upon the foundations

a. A Cineaste’s role in society

The way in which filmmakers view the role of the cineaste in society is one of the strongest indicators of this trend of conscientious cinema. Like the older filmmakers, the rising generation recognizes the instructive value of films. However, their approaches have shifted slightly from strict didacticism: from the “militant cinema of Sembène” (Modibo Diawara), from being “almost a pedagogue” (C.M.Sarr), and from Momar Thiam’s, statement that “you must inform.” Instead, the younger generation align themselves more with the progressive ideas of Amadou Saalum Seck, who emphasizes the power of film to awaken consciences and promote dialogue. In addition, they use a more diverse canvas of thematic approaches in order to portray these messages.

This evolution is apparent in the attitudes toward film expressed by students at the FORUT media center. Like Mambéty, many members of the rising generation favor films that show realities without moralizing about them. As Mamadou Dia writes, « *Le film permet de voir la société sans le juger* » (“Film permits the viewing of a society without judging it”) (Dia). Likewise, Matar Badiane stresses the importance of the simple portrayal of reality. He writes, « *C’est à travers le cinéma qu’on*

peut connaître les réalités de la société. Le cinéaste est responsable envers son peuple parce qu'il est censé les conscientiser » (“It is through cinema that one can know the realities of society. The cineaste is responsible to his people because it is his obligation to awaken their consciences.”)

Mohamedh Samb writes that the cineaste has a great influential power, *« il lui appartient de soutenir à l'éveil des populations au développement de son pays mais à la stabilité du pays »* (“it belongs to him to sustain the awakening of populations about the development of his country but with the stability of the country”) (Samb).

b. Productions of the rising generation

It is notable that out of twelve proposed projects among the FORUT students, nine of them focused on the promotion of social change. In his proposal, Ibrahima Yague's “Fr@cture” intended to explore the negative aspects of the use of internet by youth, denouncing those who use the web to abuse chatrooms and download pornography. Mame Fatou N'diaye's “Femmes et Sage-Femmes,” proposed to look at the problems and poor working conditions for nurses and midwives in hospitals. Mohamedh Samb's project “Buuju, Lu tax?” would have spoken of the life of the “Buuju-Man,” a label for the people who go into the “Mbeubeuss,” the vast fields of garbage dumps on the outskirts of Dakar. When asked in the questionnaire why he chose this topic, Samb writes, *« J'ai choisi ce sujet pour montrer comment cette communauté est pauvre et abandonnée par les politiques et la société et comment elle mise sa santé juste pour survivre »* (“I chose this subject to show how this community is poor and abandoned by the government and society, and how they stake their health just to survive.”) Mamadou Dia's project proposed to explore the condition of AIDS in Senegal: to show the difference between official numbers on the prevalence of AIDS and the real situation of the disease, as well as to show how HIV-positive individuals are excluded from society. In his questionnaire, he writes, *« J'ai choisi ce sujet parce que le SIDA rampe sans cesse et évolue d'une manière exponentielle alors que le pays tout entier se satisfait sans véritable prévention organisée »* (“I chose this subject because the rate of AIDS is climbing ceaselessly and is developing in an exponential manner while the entire country is satisfied to be without any real organized prevention.”)

Aside from Mbérou Sarr's film (referenced earlier), the four remaining films chosen for this year's Festival des Films du Quartier include those proposed by Codou Dieng, Cheikh Ahmet Tidiane Sy, Mariam Fall, and Matar Badiane. In “La Voile du Secret,” Codou Dieng will examine incest and the sexual abuse of children. Cheikh A.T. Sy, himself a child of Mauritanian refugees, will be filming “Silence, On Arrive!” to show the current living situation of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal. To film his project, he will be spending five days living with these refugees in their encampment north of Saint-Louis. During informal discussions, Sy explained me that he prefers documentaries over all other forms of cinema because they are the best way to portray reality. Mariam Fall's “La Lumière du Coeur” will look at the socioprofessional insertion of visually handicapped people into society, because *« les non-voyants sont la plupart des marginalisés et laissés pour compte alors qu'ils doivent*

occuper une place dans la société et prendre part aux prises des décisions » “The visually-impaired are often marginalized and left to fend for themselves, but they must occupy a place in society and take part in making decisions”) (Fall). In “Reubeuss, le Ghetto de La Capitale,” Matar Badiane will film one of the poorest quartiers of Dakar, Reubeuss. His film, « *ça parle de la délinquance juvénile et des conditions de vie des Reubeussois* » (“it speaks of juvenile delinquency and the living conditions of the people of Reubeuss”) (Badiane). However, although his film looks at such a dismal part of society, Badiane’s intentions are not entirely pessimistic. He plans to show the good will of those Reubeuss people who work for the development of their quartier without any support from the government or authorities, and how some have been able to lift themselves out of their situation.

These subjects, diverse as they are, demonstrate the high social consciousness of today’s young filmmakers. Notably, almost all of these projects focus on marginalized populations: “Buuju-men”, the HIV-positive, sexually-abused children, Mauritanian refugees, the visually-handicapped and the Reubeussois. Although they all chose to target different sectors of society, the students all noted similar motivations for choosing these topics. Mbérou Sarr writes « *Mon but c’est de reveiller les consciences de la population sur les maux de notre société* » (“My goal is to reawaken the consciences of the population on the troubles in our society.”) Likewise, Matar Badiane writes, « *Je veux accomplir mon objectif qui est de sensibiliser les autorités aux maux qui gangrène la société* » (“I want to accomplish my objective which is to inform the authorities of the sicknesses which rot our society.”) The students have goals beyond simply creating these films, indeed, these students are poised to change the society in which they live.

V. Analysis

A. Historical Context: Why did this trend develop?

The spirit of conscientious cinema has been present from the earliest court-métrages like Sembène’s “Boroom Sarret” to projects being filmed today at the FORUT media center. But why did Senegalese cinema develop with this born-in thematic? The factors are surely varied and complex, but it seems evident that the political climate in the 1960’s, the decade when cinema emerged in Senegal, played a key role. During this era, Senegal was struggling with two major forces: the influences of colonization and also of modernization. I posit that these two forces shaped the two major trends in conscientious cinema: that the impact of colonization drove filmmakers to strive for the preservation of cultural identity, and that the progressive ideas of a modernizing world inspired filmmakers to promote social change.

When the French held power on Senegalese soil, they posed a threat to native cultures. Education became a means of assimilation, as the French tried to make of the Senegalese people, “des français à peau noir” (C.M. Sarr). The French imposed their language and their culture, encouraging the Senegalese to put aside their traditional values. Therefore, the first generation of Senegalese

cineastes reacted against this form of cultural domination and expressed this reaction through film. In this era, the goal of cineastes was the defense and illustration of their own native colonial values.

During this era, Senegal was faced with the growing influence of the Western world. And although in certain ways this influence threatened native cultures, in other ways this influence encouraged new ways of thinking. Improvements in technology, transportation, and communication opened up Senegal to the rest of the world. By opening up and gaining a greater knowledge of other societies, Senegalese people began turning inward and examining certain elements of their own culture. The first generation of Senegalese cineastes were influenced by this trend, they were “men of their time” according to C.M. Sarr. In evaluating their society, filmmakers remarked on social problems and used their films to highlight these issues. While still grounding themselves in their Senegalese cultural identity, these cineastes adopted the progressive modern ideas that promoted positive social change. However, they often took a very critical attitude toward their subject matter, earning them the later characterizations of “Afro-pessimism,” “militantism,” and overt didacticism.

B. Present Relevance: What has this trend accomplished and why is it important?

Unfortunately, the Senegalese film distribution industry has never received adequate support to be able to make Senegalese films available to a large portion of the population. Indeed, as I discovered in conducting my research, it is easier to find a Senegalese movie in the U.S. than it is to locate one in Senegal. This fact, as professor Ken Harrow rightfully states, is “heartbreaking.” Therefore, it is impossible to prove that Senegalese films have had a major impact on Senegalese society. However, we can propose that the films of the first generation of Senegalese cineastes have affected the people they have reached: in other words, the older generation of filmmakers have set the precedents that the younger generation now follows. The earliest Senegalese cineastes established themselves in a pedagogical role as educators, imparters of messages, and awakeners of consciences. Today, the rising generation of filmmakers is following this tendency. Like their predecessors, the film projects of young Senegalese cineastes are marked by a tendency towards the preservation of cultural identity and the promotion of social change.

So, what can people take from these tendencies, and how are they important today? Taken together, these themes emphasize an enlightened outlook on society: the ability to recognize the positive aspects of a culture in order to preserve them, and the ability to recognize positive new ideas in order to apply them. Films in this conscientious cinema movement encourage people to maintain those values, traditions, and customs that make up the heart of a society. At the same time, these films encourage people to take into account the modern and progressive ideas that can improve society and integrate them into their daily life.

To illustrate this duality, this balance between tradition and modernity, Cheikh Moustapha Sarr used the powerful image of the baobab tree, the symbol of Senegal. Sarr states, « *Comme le baobab, il faut avoir des racines profondément ancrées dans le sol – mais il faut avoir un feuillage*

ouvert à tout les souffles, les vents qui viennent d'ailleurs qui apportent des valeurs positives. Donc, c'est-à-dire, on reste dans à la base, dans le terre de notre culture, mais sans rester fermé » (“Like the baobab, we must have roots profoundly ingrained in the soil – but we must have foliage open to all the breezes, all the winds from afar which bring positive values. In other words, we stay in the base, in the earth of our culture, but without staying closed” (C.M. Sarr).

C. Future Potential: What can this trend achieve in the future, and how can it get there?

Film academic Ngugi Wa Thiong'o writes that we are now “at the end of a century which has seen one of the youngest arts, the moving image, come to occupy the central place in the mediation between human consciousness and the entire ecological, economic, social and political landscape.” (Symbolic narratives/African Cinema p. 239). The influential power of cinema is unquestionable, and if this power could be released in Senegal, it could prove to be a great benefit to society. When asked about his hopes for the future, director Oumar Ndiaye replied that he envisions the future of Senegalese cinema with « *beaucoup d'optimisme* » (“much optimism.”) He has high hopes for the new generation of filmmakers who started after the tides of independence, who turn away from the spirit of “Afro-pessimism” and towards an “Afrique de sourire.” Because, he states, « *les cinéastes sont des vendeurs des rêves* » (“filmmakers are the vendors of dreams.”)

The students at FORUT already possess the desire and drive to become socially conscious filmmakers. When asked about future plans, Mbéro Sarr responded, « *Je veux réaliser des films engagés. Des films qui montrent les problèmes sociaux, politiques et culturels de nos sociétés* » (“I want to create engaged films. Films that show the social, political, and cultural problems of our society.”) Mohamedh Samb notes his aspiration to create documentary films about social phenomenons and fiction films about daily life. Indeed, almost all of the students express interest in becoming cineastes after they finish their studies, many of them in the field of documentary filmmaking. Both Matar Badiane and Cheikh A.T. Sy remarked that they preferred to make documentary films because « *c'est plus de la réalité* » (“it's closer to reality,”) (Badiane) and because « *la meilleure manière de montrer la réalité, c'est pas la fiction* » (“the best way to show reality, it is not fiction”) (Sy).

However, the greatest obstacle facing Senegalese cinema today, in the domains of both production and distribution, is an overwhelming lack of resources. Today, cineastes and patrons of the arts are working to to obtain greater support and greater self-sufficiency in order to improve these structures. When asked about the future of cinema in Senegal, Amadou Saalum Seck stated, « *Si on ne forme pas la nouvelle generation, il n'y aura pas une relève* » (“if we do not train the new generation, there will be no one to take our place.”) He acknowledges the accomplishments of institutions like the FORUT media center, but it is not enough, he says. He has plans in the works to

construct a grand school of cinema in Dakar that would serve as a cinematic center of formation for all of West Africa, but he lacks a sufficient budget to complete this project. Seck's ambitions reveal a prevailing trend in the current thinking on the training of the new generation: It is only with indigenous formation that Africa can create an indigenous and self-sustaining film industry.

However, the development of an indigenous industry will take time. But what can be done today? How can we promote conscientious cinema while the Senegalese film industry is in the process of developing? In the meanwhile, there do exist other avenues available to promote the creation and diffusion of Senegalese films. Modibo Diawara speaks of the advantages of digital technology, whose tools that are less expensive, more accessible, and which assure a regular production of films. He states emphatically, « *le cinéma sera numérique ou il ne sera pas* » (“cinema will be digital, or it simply will not be.”)

However, production is only half of the problem: there are still immense obstacles in the domain of distribution. If a film is concerned with awakening the consciences of society, it is crucial for this film to actually reach those members of society. Although virtually no salles de cinéma remain in all of Senegal, computers and DVD players are relatively accessible in Dakar and other urban centers. This again promotes the production of digital films, some of which could even be distributed through the internet. However, in rural areas and villages, such access is generally not possible.

In order to bring films to these regions, Cheikh Moustapha Sarr proposed the reinstatement of the Cinébus. In the 1990s, he informed me, there existed two Cinébuses financed by UNICEF that traveled to rural areas to screen films. A small crew traveled in a bus that transported a screen, a projector, a generator, and films. The Cinébus would circle a village, play music out of speakers, and call the people together in the evening to watch a free screening of a film. The films were shown in native languages and were primarily documentaries or educational films. They were very well received, Sarr explained, because the majority of the villagers had never seen a film before. The members of the Cinébus team would host a debate after the screenings, thus bringing to life the “place of dialogue, of debate, and a sharing of opinions” that Amadou Saalum Seck had envisioned.

These ideas of digital production and mobile diffusion are resourceful avenues to start bringing Senegalese films to the Senegalese people today. However, in order for more substantial, self-sustainable infrastructures of production and distribution to be created, more support will be needed from the government, from organizations, and from private investors. This support can not be gained unless people are made aware of the potential power that film carries to promote positive social values and improve society.

VI. Conclusion

This study has sought to examine the development of a movement of conscientious cinema among Senegalese filmmakers from the founding generations to the rising generation of today. By

exploring two major trends in this movement – filmmaking towards the preservation of cultural identity and filmmaking towards the promotion of social change – I have drawn conclusions about the evolution of this movement. Today, young filmmakers are following the precedent set by the first generation to combat the encroaching threats of Western influence by making films concerned with cultural identity. However, thanks to a revolution in cinematic technologies and the subsequent “democratization” of filmmaking, while today’s cineastes are exploring a greater diversity of themes and are experimenting with innovative forms of expression, while still drawing inspiration from local sources. In addition, new filmmakers are following the early tendencies to make socially-conscious films with the goal of effecting change. However, in pursuing these goals, young filmmakers break style with the filmmakers formed at the dawn of independence. This rising generation distances themselves from the didacticism, militantism, and Afro-pessimism of Sembène’s peers, and instead experiments with less overt, less judgmental, and less critical approaches to incite social change. These two trends, when taken together, form the “baobab” of the conscientious cinema movement. In paraphrasing Cheikh Moustapha Sarr, today’s cineastes must keep their roots deep in the soil of their native land, but must keep their branches open to all the new and positive winds from afar. From the beginning, Senegalese cineastes have sought to both celebrate their native society as well as improve it. In conveying these themes, the moving image is a powerful tool. If the rising generation of Senegalese cineastes can gain access to the resources needed to produce and distribute their films to their native populations, they will be the next bearers of their culture identity and the next instruments of positive social change.

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