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Tracy D. Snipe

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THE INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF FREEDOM OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN SENEGAL

Tracy D. Snipe, Wright State University

There is no such thing as freedom. Those in power never grant freedom on their own accord. All governments are politically and ideologically conservative when it comes to art. Conformity has to be broken. - Fírinne Ní Chréachain

Freedom of artistic expression does exist in Senegal, where a long-standing democratic tradition endures. Yet artists have not always been fully free of restrictions—during the colonial era or since independence—since they operate under funding and licensing limitations. It was difficult for artists and intellectuals to express their views without some indirect official criticism when President Senghor had serious ideological disagreements with them. However, Senegalese artists never had to contend with rigorous censorship legislation and decrees like those imposed by Nigeria and Kenya, which led to the imprisonment of writers such as Wole Soyinka and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and the death of the Nigeria writer/activist Ken Saro-Wiwa whose last spoken words were "Lord take my soul, but the struggles continues."¹

In 1948 the United Nations produced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which all territories and countries are supposed to adhere to in spirit. Ken Saro-Wiwa's hanging led to world wide condemnation and human rights protests against Nigeria. Ken Wiwa, the writer's son, proposed an international boycott of Nigerian oil. His father had waged a protracted battle against the Nigerian government on behalf of the Ogoni ethnic (Wiwa is also an Ogoni) group who contended that their environment was being polluted by the booming oil industry located in this region of Nigeria.² Saro-Wiwa's hanging may also be interpreted as a flagrant violation of the United Nation's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. One section of the Preamble to this document reads:

Recognizing that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights, as well as his economic, social and cultural rights....³

All states have practiced censorship and will continue to employ it. The Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka contends "artists, intellectuals, technologists, and other producers of culture will always function despite state hostility or indifference."⁴ Ideally artists should be able to create without the fear of retaliation or retribution; nevertheless, political authorities have imprisoned, banished, exiled, and censored them.⁵ In extreme cases, artists have been put to death, or, like Salman Rushdie, author of the *Satanic Verses*, they live under the continual threat of death because their artistic visions clashed with those of the political or religious figures.

Various forms of censorship exist even under so-called tolerant, liberal democratic regimes. In the United States, which is often portrayed as a model of democracy, schools boards and citizen action committees ban certain books from public schools and local libraries. Famous and lesser-known artists have been ostracized and promising careers destroyed or abridged when the artist's integrity clashed with concerns of the state. American artists such as Hallie Flanagan, the director of the Federal Theatre Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Arts Project, came under attack for suspected communist sympathies during the years between the wars.⁶ During the McCarthy era, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) harassed many Hollywood directors, actors, and screen writers whose careers were sabotaged in light of their suspected communist leanings or their affiliation with communist organizations.⁷ Because he refused to state whether or not he was a communist, the celebrated African-American actor and singer Paul Robeson was denied a passport,⁸ preventing him from traveling abroad. Government action led to the decline of what had been a brilliant career. Paradoxically, since funding controversial exhibitions by Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Seranno during the late 1980s, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has been under congressional attack and

some legislators have proposed eliminating the agency altogether.

Although remarkable artistic productions come out of totalitarian countries, state censorship often produces stagnation in the arts. Censorship undermines artistic creativity and the critical spirit, and it stifles freedom of expression. Yet, dissident writers who remained in countries such as South Africa,⁹ (prior to the end of apartheid) produced fiction and non-fiction of high artistic merit in spite of the excessively restrictive measures employed by the state and in repudiation of state institutional policies.

Artists who view politics through the prism of an alternative social vision have on occasion used their craft to support political agendas, which in the eyes of some observers compromise their integrity. Such criticism is particularly true in regard to artists considered too closely aligned with the state. Although the actress, director, photographer Leni Riefenstahl is generally viewed as one of the most distinguished female filmmakers of the twentieth century, her affiliation with Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party casts an ominous suspicion over her career even today.¹⁰ Along with a few celebrated architects and sculptors, Riefenstahl was one of the most heavily commissioned individuals in Germany's fascist art experiment, *Gleichschaltung*,¹¹ led by Joseph Goebels, minister of propaganda and public education.

Interesting possibilities arise when a head of state is an artist. In the modern era, Senghor and Czech president and playwright Vaclav Havel are two leaders who clearly fit this rare category. Christian Coulin writes:

Senghor's international status and his prestige as a writer were important factors in his moderation and liberalism. It was very difficult for the man who has long been thought of as a future Nobel Prize winner in literature to behave as a tyrant and as a violator of civil liberties. He has always been very sensitive to the image that Senegal projected abroad, and he did not want to appear as the oppressor of the country's intelligentsia—remarkably large and lively for such a small nation. Whatever love-hate-relationships he may have had with fellow artists like Sembène Ousmane,

the film maker, or Cheikh Anta Diop, the historian—people who did not hesitate to voice their criticisms—Senghor endeavored to turn Senegal into a "black Greece." Such an ideal was incompatible with a hard-line regime suspicious of artistic creation and criticism.¹²

In Senegal, from the administration of President Senghor to the Diouf government, increased democratic demands have led to a more tolerant, liberal environment, which has had a profound impact on the freedom of artistic expression. This can be documented by interpreting the major political changes that occurred in Senegal from 1960 to 1996 in the context of films, songs, journals, and newspapers that were banned or, in effect, censored for political reasons. Moreover, the program of government subsidies for artists, the legacy of French colonialism and Islamic traditions will be examined in this analysis of the freedom of artistic expression.

In Senegal, freedom of expression is a fundamental right guaranteed to all citizens.

The Senegalese State, which in the preamble to its Constitution proclaims the freedom of speech, of religion and of philosophy, and its unreserved adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, cannot encroach on the freedom of creative work. Since it is a democratic State enjoying broad popular support, its arts and its culture can but stem from the people, and its policy in this area can but be the genuine expression of the national will.

These considerations have led the Senegalese Government to make the exercise of freedom in creative work not only something unassailably guaranteed but also the basic prerequisite for the success of its cultural policy...¹³

While these goals are laudable, they were not always honored when it came to artists, intellectuals, or outspoken political figures. The

Constitution also clarifies the responsibility of the legislature and judiciary.

Constitutionally, the government is responsible to the president and is controlled by the Assemblée Nationale (Parliament), which can cause its resignation by a censure motion. The assembly may be dissolved by decree of the president of the republic on the recommendation of the assembly president following adoption of a censure motion. Ultimate judicial authority is vested in the Supreme Court.¹⁴

Though the Constitution, written in 1960, initially provided for multiple parties, Senegal became a *de facto* single-party state after an unsuccessful *coup d'état* in 1962, which was led by Mamadou Dia, Senghor's friend and the prime minister of Senegal¹⁵; this rebellion was crushed by armed forces loyal to Senghor, and Dia was later imprisoned. Following the failed bid to overthrow him, Senghor reduced the authority of the office of prime minister and placed greater restrictions on the activities of trade unions and political parties of the opposition. That opposition political parties were forced to remain underground from 1965 onward was ironic. A multiparty system had operated during the colonial period and from the time of the four communes diverse political parties existed in Senegal.

Student radicalism represented one of the major forms of political activism in 1961, however teachers were not immune from punitive government actions. Abdourahmane Cissé maintained that as a result of Pathé Diagne's association with the Algiers Festival in 1969, Senghor later had him fired from the Université de Dakar.¹⁶ Cheikh Anta Diop's clandestine political activities were not tolerated nor was he invited to teach at the Université de Dakar, though he held an appointment at prestigious Institute Fondamentale Afrique Noire (IFAN), because of his differences with the president.

Mamadou Seyni M'Bengue contends that artistic creativity was reflected in the training programs of the National Arts Institute, where artists were able to create without any governmental interference¹⁷; he asserts that there was no harsh criticism directed at the government by artists *per se* during the 1960s. Freedom of artistic expression was not a

high priority, because the government was more preoccupied with the task of nation-building, managing the economy, and destabilizing the opposition during the first few years of independence. In the wake of the political reforms during the 1970s, partisan and ideological differences between the government and the Senegalese intelligentsia became more pronounced.

In response to internal pressures for political liberalization and external pressures to be recognized as member of the International Socialist Party, Senegal revised its Constitution in 1974; by 1976 a series of significant political changes had occurred. The new Constitution altered the *de facto* one-party state and, consequently, divided the left.¹⁸ President Senghor legalized three political parties: the Union Progressiste Sénégalaise (UPS), the ruling party; the Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS), which was led by Abdoulaye Wade; and the Parti Africain de l'Indépendance (PAI), led by Majhemout Diop. Senghor established these parties to reflect ideological trends. The PDS was supposed to be liberal and democratic, while the PAI was designated Marxist-Leninist or Communist. Other political parties such as Cheikh Anta Diop's Rassemblement National Démocratique (RND) were forced to remain underground, which stirred resentment and created a wave of protest. In 1979, the Constitution was revised once again to allow for a fourth legal political party, the Mouvement Républicain Sénégalais (MRS), a conservative party led by Boubacar Gueye.¹⁹ Once again the opposition protested Senghor's attempts at "liberalization." It maintained that Senghor did not have the authority to declare which party was legal or to designate which party should represent liberal democrats, social democrats, communists, or conservatives.²⁰

The program of liberalization was not automatically accompanied by a more independent press or tolerant artistic environment in the mid-1970s. In fact, a conflict involving *La Lettre Fermé*, an independent newspaper, suggested that the state was not living up to its creed. The newspaper was banned when Abdourahmane Cissé wrote an article critical of the Senghorian government's cultural policy. The state claimed the article was inaccurate, but Cissé took the case to court, where, after a bitter struggle, he won a favorable decision.²¹

Ousmane Sembene: Portrait of a Senegalese Artist

The career of Ousmane Sembene provides an excellent example of the ramifications of political liberalization on artistic freedom in Senegal. Although he began as a writer, Sembene became one of the most celebrated filmmakers in Africa. Trained at the Gorky Film Institute in Moscow, Sembene turned to filmmaking as a medium to reach a mass African audience.²² Known as an advocate of "a cinema of struggle," his films have depicted the people's struggle against colonization (*Emitai*, 1972), the rise and downfall of the black bourgeoisie (*Xala*, 1974), and the tragic plight of a black woman in exile (*La Noire de*, 1966).²³ One of Sembene's recent films, (*Camp de Thioraye*, 1988) was based on "the French massacre outside Dakar in 1944 of African soldiers just back from serving in the French army, and demanding their demobilization entitlements."²⁴ His long-standing goal is to make a film that surveys the life of Samory Touré, a Senegalese patriot, who resisted French dominance near the end of the nineteenth century.²⁵ Although Sembene criticized French colonialism, Senghor's version of Négritude, African socialism, and La Francophonie (which he perceived as a version of the French policy of assimilation), he received aid from the Senegalese and French governments for some of his films²⁶—a fact that would seem to confirm Mamadou Seyni M'Bengue's contention that:

There is no discrimination, prejudice or hostility for or against any particular artist. They all receive an equal measure of official support for the preparation and presentation of exhibitions of their work, in the assessment of which considerations in regard to the political or religious allegiance of the artist just do not apply.²⁷

By funding an outspoken artist and critic of the government such as Ousmane Sembene, the state could advance the argument that it was liberal and tolerant.

During Senghor's presidency, Sembene was not permitted to show the critically and popularly acclaimed film *Ceddo* (1978). The film dealt with conflicts between Islam and traditional religion, but Senghor chose not to object to that publicly. He opposed the spelling of the title

of the film, decreeing that some words had to be spelled according to prescribed standards, which specified how the six national languages were to be written. The word *ceddo*, which means African "samurai" or "warrior," was to be spelled with only one "d." Sembene had always been an outspoken critic of neo-colonialism, but with the exception of *Ceddo*, none of his films were completely banned, although segments of *The Money Order* (1969) were cut. In an interview with Chr  ach  in, he claimed that President Senghor banned his films for ten years.²⁸

More than two decades after directing *The Money Order*, Sembene continues to speak out and deplore the Diouf's government reliance on American assistance. In an interview, he offers critical observations on this dependent relationship:

America is a liberal capitalist country, an imperialist country which simply wants to call all the shots. But if America is calling the shots in Senegal at present, it's because those who govern Senegal allow this to happen. So we find ourselves with a society on its knees, waiting for America to provide. Never, ever, ever, in the space of ten years, have I felt so humiliated by my society as now. They give us "gifts": a few thousand dollars worth of rice—mere chicken-feed. A society can't live on handouts. A society that has its own culture can confront all sorts of calamities and adversities with its head held high. I always say, if I were a woman, I'd never marry an African. Women should marry real men, not mentally deficient ones.²⁹

While revered in Senegal and credited as the "people's artist," Sembene, the private individual, does not view himself as a seer.³⁰ During an informal conversation I asked him: "What is cultural policy and does Senegal have one?". Sembene suggested that I pose this question directly to President Diouf since filmmakers do not create cultural policy.³¹ Further, in an interview with Issa Sall and George Mendy, Sembene was unwavering:

Do you think the cultural policy of the government can offer an alternative? It is not the business of creators. It is a matter of cultural policy. An artist cannot possibly change the face of society.³²

Though Sembene takes a noncommittal stance on cultural policy *per se*, he is widely known for his films and novels as well as for his political views. Outside of Senegal he has earned respect and admiration from critics who recognize his gift for exploring complex political and historical themes in film. Stanley Crouch writes:

Few artists who would like their work to have political resonance can make important distinctions between the layered worlds where politics really work and the shorthand of slogans, placards and unsentimental characterizations. Senegalese screen writer and director Ousmane Sembene is a significant exception....

33

The Activist-Scholar v. the Poet-Politician

Unlike Sembene, historian Cheikh Anta Diop played an active role in Senegalese politics. He created an opposition party, the Bloc des Masses Sénégalaises, which eventually led to trouble with the government. Diop was imprisoned in 1962, and his party was dissolved the following year. In 1965, he formed the Front National du Sénégal, which was immediately banned, as were other parties of the opposition. When the ban was lifted in 1973 in preparation for Senghor's mandated parties, Diop created an interest group, the Rassemblement National Démocratique (RND) and established a new journal *Taxaw*.³⁴ According to Chris Gray:

The RND was an unlikely alignment of dissident intellectual and Mouride interests united by their opposition to Senghor and the ruling party. It remained an interest group throughout the 1970's, Senghor not

allowing it to take on the status of a political party, and Diop was continually harassed as he occasionally had difficulties in obtaining exit visas to attend international conferences and was in fact prosecuted for creating an illegal organization.³⁵

During the 1970s, when Senghor's concept of Négritude and his pro-French sentiments came under increasing criticism, the reputation of Diop, an advocate of Pan-Africanism and staunch supporter of national languages, continued to grow.

Sheldon Gellar writes: "as a cultural nationalist, he [Diop] has called for the adoption of Wolof as Senegal's national language and insisted that African languages are by no means inferior to European languages."³⁶ Actually, Senghor was engaged in a protracted dispute over the politics of language with the Senegalese intelligentsia. *Kaddu*, a Wolof journal that first appeared in 1970, encountered problems similar to those of *Ceddo*. Among the leading writers for this publication were Ousmane Sembene, Pathé Diagne, Amadou Diack, Samba Dione and Wayne Faye.³⁷ *Kaddu* featured articles on politics, economics, society, and culture and included poems as well as games in Wolof. *Kaddu* had a small readership and operated on a limited budget. Individuals who did not have access to the publication, which advocated the use of the national languages, learned of its contents by word of mouth.³⁸

Senghor also decreed that *Kaddu* was to be spelled with just one "d." When writers affiliated with the paper refused to cooperate with the name change, he ruled that the journal could no longer be published. This decree, along with its financial difficulties, caused *Kaddu* eventually to cease publication.³⁹ In my assessment, the spelling dispute was merely a convenient excuse for President Senghor to ban a troublesome publication as he had done with the controversial film, *Ceddo*.

Siggi, an opposition newspaper edited by Cheikh Anta Diop, was also banned. According to Sheldon Gellar, the spelling disputes that involved *Ceddo*, *Kaddu*, and *Siggi* masked a deep-seated political conflict over the fact that Senghor established the Centre de Linguistique Appliquée de Dakar (Applied Linguistics Center of Dakar - CLAD), an organization headed by French scholars, to develop a grammar for the national languages.⁴⁰ Gellar notes further:

Of course, the linguistic dispute was more than just an academic issue; it also reflected sharp political differences between the pro-French Senghor and Senegalese nationalists who saw the French inspired official orthography as still another manifestation of neocolonialism.⁴¹

Diop and Senghor maintained a certain degree of reserved admiration for one another's intellectual contributions despite their political differences and distinctly different approaches to culture, which were, ironically, complementary.⁴² In an interview with Carlos Moore, Diop remarked:

My cultural approach was scientific, rather than poetic. Once on a scientific terrain I had only objective phenomena to analyze. I realized that out of the three components of the cultural identity of a people, only two could be apprehended scientifically, i.e. the linguistic and historical factors. I therefore laboured towards restoring the historical and linguistic personality of black peoples. I also worked towards the restoration of our common historical past by attaching primordial significance to the oldest and most accomplished civilization elaborated by black African peoples: ancient Egypt! Once I had realized the collective personality, the cultural identify [sic] of a people, centered on three components—linguistic, historical and psychic—I concentrated my scientific efforts along the two lines which could be grasped objectively by scientific research. That has been my approach to the cultural rehabilitation of the black man and of black societies.⁴³

Senghor attributed Diop's criticism, echoed by Tchicaya U'Tamsi and Wole Soyinka, to the impatience of a new group of writers and intellectuals who wished to be more radical and dynamic than the esteemed Négritude poets. "It was normal that this generation had the ambition to contribute something new and to deepen Négritude."⁴⁴ In an homage to Diop in *Ethiopiquest* magazine, Senghor professed that by

contrasting his intellectual framework with Diop's, the point of reference for Négritude was enlarged. Senghor, who allowed Diop freedom to express his thoughts on cultural nationalism, seemed to thrive on this challenge, which created a dynamic cultural atmosphere in Senegal.

Certainly Diop's confrontations with Senghor had a great deal to do with this decision as the university was seen by the former Senegalese president as the basis for the "Ecole de Dakar" and an expression of his version of Negritude. Diop's activities in the Senegalese political opposition no doubt made it difficult to integrate him into the university community⁴⁵; the Université de Dakar was seen by the president as the basis for the "Ecole de Dakar" and Senghor's version of Négritude. Diop and Senghor were involved in a political rivalry in which the president held the upper hand. Senghor's resignation at the end of 1980 cleared the way for Diop's full-scale entry into national political life and resulted in the suspension of a case brought against him by the government for establishing the RND without official permission.⁴⁶

Democratic Reform under Diouf

The year 1981 was significant in Senegalese politics. Less than three months after he took office, Senghor's heir apparent, President Diouf legalized all political parties, thus establishing legitimacy and further splintering the opposition. While the number of political parties in Senegal rose from four to sixteen, this development hardly favored presidential candidates like Abdoulaye Wade of the Parti Démocratique Sénégalais; it diluted possible support for the major opposition parties and led to Diouf's future political successes.

Babacar Niang and some of the founding members of the RND criticized Cheikh Anta Diop because he did not contest Diouf in the subsequent presidential election. Eventually this split the RND. Diop's decision not to run against President Diouf may have reflected his gratitude for being offered an appointment in the history department at the Université de Dakar.⁴⁷

Despite political liberalization, which the Senegalese government accelerated during the 1980s, a "full-fledged" democracy did not exist in Senegal according to Abdoulaye Bathily, the leader of the Ligue Démocratique des Travailleurs de Parti du Travail (LD/MPT).⁴⁸ Bathily asserted that only the activities of the ruling political bloc, the Parti

Socialiste (PS), were reported daily in the official media.

If you look at how the national media reports... on the political activities of the different political parties in the country, you will see that up until now the culture of the one party is still very much alive.⁴⁹

A form of censorship exists any time the media is controlled by an apparatus of the state.⁵⁰ The official media, radio, television, and the only daily newspaper, *Le Soleil*, engaged in self-censorship. State journalists complained that they did not receive as much respect as their peers who worked for independent newspapers.⁵¹

Bathily also expressed grave concern over the coverage of the 1983 and 1988 elections, which he believed were rigged.⁵² In his assessment, controversies surrounding the latter election precipitated the political and social crises of 1988, which led to almost three years of sustained protests and eventually forced President Diouf to compromise with leaders of the opposition. Opposition parties have had to operate under other impediments. For example, it was difficult for leaders of opposition parties to organize meetings because, according to Bathily, the *gendarmérie* (the police) disrupted rallies under any pretext, especially in the countryside. Such practices led to his assessment that there are "formal institutions for democracy but the principles are not put into practice most of the time."⁵³

While some observers have maintained that the political environment was more liberal under Senghor, the institutional changes initiated by President Diouf led to the development of a vigorous independent press and greater opportunities for freedom of artistic expression.⁵⁴ Under Senghor, *Le Politicien* was one of a small number of independent newspapers, but during Diouf's presidency, independent publications proliferated—*Walfadjri*, *Le Cafard Libéré*, and *Sud Hebdo* among them. In fact, some independent newspapers voiced their perception that President Diouf was not responding to the needs of artists.⁵⁵

The independent newspapers had particular importance for students. During the *année blanche*, the white year (1988), student strikes and protests were possible because the independent papers reported stories that contradicted the government's version of the national elections held that year. (The term *année blanche* stems from the fact that schools were

virtually inoperable for the year.) Abdoulaye Wade of the Democratic Party and several other oppositional leaders were jailed. Rioting virtually immobilized the Senegalese government for several months. Independent movements and political parties were able to use these publications to reinforce their claims of electoral fraud. The independent newspapers printed their own accounts of negotiations between the government and opposition parties.

As a result of the process of liberalization, President Diouf lifted the ban on the Sembene film *Ceddo* and allowed it to be shown in 1984.⁵⁶ Sembene's *The Money Order* and *Xala* now appear in their entirety.⁵⁷ Such decisions may have stemmed from the Diouf government's lack of interest in the language disputes and political issues that initially surrounded *Ceddo*. They could also be interpreted as another attempt to undermine Senghor's cultural legacy. More than likely these increased opportunities for free expression were the result of democratic reform.

President Diouf was involved in several controversies over the arts, one of them concerning the song, "Le Président" by Ouza, a Senegalese musician. While this popular song did not refer directly to President Diouf by name, it was generally critical of the institution of the presidency. For a brief period "Le Président" was played on the national radio, but after a time it was no longer heard on the government-owned, national radio. One Senegalese musician considered the song's removal from the airwaves as a direct form of censorship.⁵⁸

Senegal observes the United Nation's conventions on human rights, and Diouf has reaffirmed his commitment to human rights despite a 1990 Amnesty International report that "alleged that prisoners linked to the resurgent Casamance separatist movement were subjected to torture."⁵⁹ In spite of this ongoing conflict in Casamance, Senegal has continued to expand democratic opportunities throughout the late 1980s and into the 1990s.

Although the record is not unblemished, the scope of civil liberties has increased. Freedom of speech, press, and association are not only respected by the state, but now deeply rooted in Senegalese political culture as basic values.⁶⁰

The Myth of the Independent Artist

Is the independent artist an illusion in Senegal? Where artists depend on subsidies from the state, merely being deprived of subsidies could be interpreted as a form of censorship. Artists have more control of the final form of their creations in states where they are able to accumulate wealth and status, although they still can encounter numerous institutional constraints. Sembene emphasizes the dilemma of the independent filmmaker.

People would like for us to take a position for them vis-a-vis the state. This is the position we find ourselves in, between the people, ourselves, and the state, which also wants us to make propaganda for it. The filmmaker's choices are very limited. Either do what the governments want you to do and become a civil servant, or try to do what the people want you to do and then you are censored, and if you want to be independent, you are attacked from both sides.⁶¹

Does the state coopt artists when they become prominent, extending certain privileges to them in return for political support? According to Landing Savané, a former presidential candidate for AND JËFF/Mouvement Révolutionnaire pour la Démocratie Nouvelle (AND JËFF/MRDN), the government provided less state patronage during the 1980s but still tried to capitalize on artists.⁶² Musicians like Youssou N'Dour and Baba Maal received no government support at the beginning of their respective careers, yet Savané asserted, the government tried to coopt popular artists at strategic times such as during electoral campaigns.⁶³ He also maintained that some artists used government contacts to have increased access to state facilities.

Artists have profited from the system, but in most instances the rewards are meager. Of the large number of painters, dancers, filmmakers, and writers, few are wealthy; Ousmane Sembene and perhaps two painters are the exceptions.⁶⁴ Most are forced to hold two jobs and often work as civil servants, which puts them in an uncomfortable relationship with the government. Placed in this situation, they tend to mute serious criticism of the state, which has implications for the creative process. An "artist/civil

servant" differs from an artist who creates without constraints, which could result in the loss of a job or an official reprisal.⁶⁵

According to Landing Savané, those artists who chose independence receive no state assistance in any form.⁶⁶ In a country where people are generally not rich and artists have no direct access to international markets, or receive little in the way of commissions, those who do not receive official support find it difficult to survive.⁶⁷ Savané observes that only groups or individuals who go abroad, such as the immensely popular band Touré Kunda, become truly independent of the government; anyone who depends on government support had to compromise.⁶⁸ Some musicians struggle to maintain their independence through songs on a variety of subjects ranging from national unity to anti-Apartheid, yet they choose to remain in Senegal in spite of financial drawbacks, forsaking the prospect of profits in a life abroad.

On the domestic front, in 1976 four painters (Mamadou Dabo Fall, Moussa Tine, El Hadj Babacar Sy, and Ali Samb) and two tutors from the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts (ENBA), created the Arts Village.⁶⁹ Located on the Corniche (cornice or cliff road), the Arts Village flourished during the first few years of its brief existence. Painters, actors, and musicians lived and worked there; on occasion they collaborated on joint projects.

The Galerie "Tenq" (Wolof for joint, connecting piece) was inaugurated as well as a workshop for music, a small theatre and a social meeting place for artists. Many events took place (exhibitions, discussion groups, lectures and concerts) bringing residents and the public into contact with each other. The annual "Tenq" took place four times (1980-1983). The community of artists always gathered together, the residents of the near districts participated but the so-called "audience" were reserved. However, the main events were inaugurated by the respective ministers for cultural affairs.⁷⁰

The Arts Village was the site for theatre workshops such as the experimental "Laboratoire AGIT-Art" and "Nouveau Toucan." Films commissioned by Senegalese television were made there, and the Senegalese-Gambian Jazz Band, NGuelaw, performed prior to the

Confederation of Senegambia,⁷¹ a fleeting undertaking, experiencing a brief life span from February 1982 to September 1989.)

Initially, Senghor was content to let the artists remain at the complex, but he did not make good on his promise to allow artists to remain in this space permanently despite a written communiqué in 1980. The Diouf administration's response to the Arts Village was also ambivalent. In 1983, the Arts Village closed, and the artists were forcibly disbanded to make way for the Ministries of Technical Administration, Water Supply and Tourism.⁷² Despite many forms of visible protests, including the initiation of civil proceedings against the Senegalese government, artists were forced to move from this complex.

Extending the idea of independence to another level, exasperated painters like Issa Samb [Jo Oukam] spoke of forming a political party devoted to the advocacy of artists whose needs the government ignored.⁷³ According to Samb, the closure of the Musée Dynamique, the Arts Village, and the Senegalese Cultural Archives illustrated the declining influence of Senegalese artists, especially painters. Samb explains:

It is a fact that the painters are not present at the place where things are decided upon. They no longer support the novelists', the poets', and the scientists' intellectual struggle. Formerly the state's pampered children, they remain in the wake of a political idea and are torn between the image public opinion has of them and the call of artistic genius.⁷⁴

Several political parties were founded by scholars and have strong support within certain circles, however a political alliance of artists remains a remote possibility.

Censors on the Arts

Senegal does have a board of censors that decides which films or television shows may be shown, but today neither the Senegalese government, which regards itself as a democracy, nor any other state pretending to democratic principles, would willingly admit to taking measures that restrict freedom of expression.⁷⁵ Public viewing of

pornography in any form is illegal, although no law prevents viewing erotic material in private.⁷⁶ With such a policy, the censorship board hopes to avoid offending the country's large Muslim population.

Nevertheless, some observers have expressed dismay over television programs selected without care. Carrie Dailey notes:

I'm sometimes appalled that there is not some form of cultural policy censorship in terms of what we show to the population. We have films or programs on t.v., which, in my opinion, do little to promote a positive image in an African society. And in that sense, if we have censorship, the censorship is not what I think it should be.⁷⁷

The popularity of shows like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* is disturbing to artists such as Sembene, who views these shows as an example of American cultural imperialism:

Dallas is a gift from the Americans and the government needs it to keep people quiet. Tomorrow, if I get the green light, I'm ready to postpone *Samory* for six months to do a TV series on what's happening in the country at the moment....⁷⁸

Yet some Senegalese Muslim painters like Mamadou Dabo Fall create artwork without theocratic proscription to their dreams, experiences, and realities.⁷⁹ The Islamic artistic heritage is profound. The *sous-verre* or reverse image glass paintings attest to the impact of the Arab-Islamic culture on Senegal. The grandeur of Islamic architecture is noticeable in many Senegalese cities, as with the Grand Mosque de Dakar (partially financed by France) and in structures in Touba, the holy city of the Mourides. Islamic influences also exist in Senegalese music, both traditional and contemporary. Songs glorify God, Islam, saints, and leaders of Muslim brotherhoods.⁸⁰

While Islam forbids the depiction of the human figure in art, many followers of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the founder of Mouridism, have his picture on a chain worn around their necks. Bamba's fame is in part based on his fierce resistance to French colonialism. There exist many paintings

of Bamba, and his life story has been the subject of several plays. Islam does limit some forms of artistic production. For example, wood carving was forbidden in some areas of the country; sculpture and three dimensional figures also defied the dictates of orthodox Islam. With these strictures in mind, Abdoulaye Bathily asserted, Islam had a negative impact on traditional African heritage.⁸¹

Contemporary Senegalese writers such as Cheikh Amadou Kane (*Ambiguous Adventure*) and Aminata Sow Fall (*The Beggar's Strike*) have taken a strong pro-Islamic position in their creative works. Mbaye Cham asserted:

Products of African, Arab-Islamic and Euro-Christian education, Cheikh Hamidou Kane (1962) and Aminata Sow Fall (1979) have had to come to terms with the conflicting values of all these systems which have played a role in shaping their life-worlds. Their efforts to synthesize or resolve these conflicts have invariably resulted in a wholesale embrace of the African and the Islamic, integrated into one indivisible whole in the case of Kane especially, and a rejection of the Euro-Christian, portrayed as a powerful intruder, the harbinger of destabilization and death in all senses of the word.⁸²

According to Cham, artists like the Senegalese filmmaker Mahama Traoré are criticizing Muslim clerics, not Islam.

In spite of his professed belief in Islam, Traoré uses this film to launch a severe attack on the Senegalese serigne-marabout as the prime guardian of the first phase of Islamic education. However, like the other artists...his targets are the selfish detractors of Islam rather than Islam itself."⁸³

Other Senegalese artists like Sembene perceive Islam as another form of colonial oppression. Sembene, who in his youth converted to Islam, does not stop by citing the shortcoming of the muslim clerics. He repudiates "Islam itself as the obstacle to the true integration of individual and society

in Senegal."⁸⁴ Although the reason was never stated officially, many observers speculate that President Senghor banned *Ceddo* because he did not want to offend the Muslim community who provided his political support. Fírinne Ní Chréacháin maintains:

Although the official reason for the ban on *Ceddo* cited Sembene's failure to respect the newly-decreed Wolof standard spelling in the title, few were in doubt that, as with Rushdie, the real reason was more closely related to the régime's deference to the powerful leaders of the Muslim brotherhoods in Senegal. This was particularly true under Senghor who, as Christian president of a predominately Muslim country, relied heavily on the latter's support.⁸⁵

Artists may not have been censored, repressed or jailed under French administration, but European power denigrated the history and value of African and Senegalese arts, languages, and civilization.⁸⁶ (Freedom of expression suffers.) Abdoulaye Bathily described how a student was given a small piece of wood carved in the form of a donkey, which was referred to as *le symbole*; this symbol was a form of ridicule and punishment for students who forgot or chose not to speak French at school.⁸⁷ *Le symbole* implied that its possessor was a donkey who had to be beaten for speaking an indigenous language. In contrast, those pupils who excelled in French were given laurels and honors.

Diagne insists that only artists who used their native languages to express themselves in theater, film, television, or literature enjoy freedom of expression in the complete sense of the word.⁸⁸ However, in my assessment, artists have chosen to write in French because of market factors and the limited size of the reading population for a given national language. French versions of films enable artists to reach a mass audience in Senegal as well as abroad. The choice, though, belongs to the artist, and some—like Sembene—have chosen to produce their work in French as well as Wolof to reach a specifically Senegalese public. According to some observers, Sembene has Africanized or Wolofized French.⁸⁹ Sembene and the Nigerian musician Fela are two prominent African artists who have chosen to create in their national languages.⁹⁰ Sembene, a Marxist, is critical of neocolonialism and bourgeois values; Fela opposed

military rule in Nigeria.⁹¹ Both artists are known as much for their political views as for their artistry.

Several decades after independence, without the support of French organizations like the Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique (ACCT), which helps fund African filmmakers, Senegalese artists would be in a difficult financial position. Bérénice Reynaud contends:

The achievements of film makers from Francophone Africa can be partially explained by the support of the French Ministry of Cooperation after the colonies gained independence. French assistance, however, does not come without strings attached: support may require use of a French film laboratory, or equipment. The cultural, financial and emotional interdependence between France and its former colonies creates a complex situation....⁹²

As a Francophile, President Senghor may have created his share of unpopular policies, but he had earned the respect of admirers and adversaries alike. His perspective on the arts was utilitarian; Senghor the artist could not be separated from Senghor the politically astute president.

Senghor wanted his country to be a model of liberty and democracy for Africa, and he counted on his prestige to attract Western aid and investors, who could not but be impressed by the example of Senegal in an Africa characterized by the widespread degradation of living standards and political mores.⁹³

Nevertheless, President Diouf, who had earned a reputation as a technician, created a more liberal atmosphere for the arts in Senegal. Although full-scale censorship never existed, the Senegalese government did try to control newspapers, students, and artists indirectly through subsidies to artists, removal of certain songs from the radio, and pressure on newspapers to impose some form of self-censorship. On the one hand, one could contend that had President Senghor not been so concerned with his world wide image as a poet-politician and President Diouf so concerned with his growing international reputation as a statesman, censorship may

Tracy D. Snipe

well have been strict and more widespread in Senegal. Conversely, one could also argue that neither president was solely motivated by personal gain but genuinely desired to create an atmosphere that would foster a creative climate for the benefit of Senegalese artists, intellectuals, and citizens.

Endnotes

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77. Dailey, interview. Dailey extended this criticism to television audiences in the United States and in France. In terms of using television as a mode of communication, Dailey asserted that a young, developing nation cannot afford to make the same mistakes that more developed countries make.

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83. Ibid., 456

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85. Chr  ach  in, "If I Were a Woman," 242.

86. Path   Diagne, interview by author, tape recording, 11 July 1990, Dakar.

Freedom of Artistic Expression

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