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Sada Niang (Ed.): Littérature et Cinéma en Afrique Francophone: Ousmane Sembène et Assia Djebar

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**Sada Niang (Ed.): Littérature et Cinéma en Afrique Francophone:
Ousmane Sembène et Assia Djébar**

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The series of articles gathered in this book draw a parallel between the work of Algerian writer and filmmaker Assia Djébar and Senegalese writer and filmmaker Ousmane Sembène. Djébar and Sembène are of a different generation, gender and nationality, but their works reflect a common central interest in themes that have been essential in the development of the literary and filmic production in French speaking Africa. In comparing and contrasting the work of the two authors, *Littérature et Cinéma* constitutes an investigation of issues that are central to the culture and identity of post-colonial societies. Some of the articles focus on the confrontation with the colonial past, and the desire to write another history, or to write history differently – a desire that is shared by both filmmakers, but approached in a revealingly contrasted way. The book also addresses the issue of the representation of women in their role as disruptive forces that question the dominant powers and established order. In addition, a number of the articles look at Djébar and Sembène's work as reflections of the elaboration of polysemic societies, and highlight the significance of the different use of languages – French, as opposed to Wolof or Arabic, in film and in writing.

Mamadou Diouf looks at two Senegalese films, *Ceddo* (Sembène, 1976) and *Hyènes* (Mambéty, 1992), showing how – through their common concern with social elements of rupture represented by women and marginalized people – the two directors adapt a different approach to the representation of history. In Frederick Ivor Case's article, Djébar's and Sembène's use of several languages and media is discussed. Case demonstrates how, while this versatility allows both authors to create new territories, it also reflects a coherent ideological discourse. Suzanne Crosta, however, contrasts the ways in which Sembène and Djébar treat the problematic of the gaze and of the voice when concerned with those who are traditionally deprived of both: Sembène's approach is an engaged one, marked by a clear ideological project, while in Djébar's work, the social discourse does not offer such a direct resolution. In both these author's works though, one finds the desire to experiment with images and sounds so as to question power structures and to expand the frontiers of the imaginary. Alioune Tine underlines some of the aesthetic strategies elaborated by both authors in order to change or to deconstruct the linguistic norms of and to offer a resistance to the language of the colonial power that has fostered linguistic and cultural alienation in their countries. Sada Niang

tackles similar issues, and compares but also contrasts Sembène's and Djébar's attitudes: Sembène recontextualises the dominant language to show how it is used to marginalise the native culture; Djébar, on the other hand, invents new modes of expressions in French and in Arabic, in order to reflect a feminine space, and the spoken language holds, in her films, no superiority on the image or on the other elements of the soundtrack. Samba Gadjigbo underlines the links between Sembène's life and experiences and the development of his career as a writer and filmmaker whose work focuses on the issues of freedom and cultural identity in his country. Bernard Moitt also reflects on the relation between facts and fiction in Sembène's work, but through an analysis of *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), a film based on the brutal repression of rebelled Senegalese soldiers, by the French army in 1944. Moitt shows how, with the records of historical facts and documentary sources as a background, Sembène elaborated a far-reaching fictional treatment of the event. Joseph Paré's article looks at the written and the filmic texts of a same story, *Le Mandat* (1966) – *Mandabi* (1968), highlighting the differences and complementarities between two facets of an approach based on the same coherent discourse.

Through a comparative reading of a short-story, *Taaw* (1987), and a short-film, *Tauw* (1970), Thérèse Michel-Mansour explores questions of representation of the working-class and of women in Sembène's work, and the elaboration of a specifically feminine aesthetic. Similarly, Réda Bensmaïa and Danielle Shepherd's articles are concerned with the representation of women. Bensmaïa underlines how the creation of an aesthetic of the fragmented allows Djébar to evoke through her film-making, and against a troubled, unstable historical background, the voices of the Algerian women, while Shepherd follows the process of representing women's conquest of dignity in *Loin de Médine* (Paris: Albin-Michel, 1991). Mar Frothy studies Djébar's parallel exploration of feminine identity (with issues such as the veil, gender exploitation and the absence of a voice) and of national identity (the European 'temptation' and the fight for Algeria's independence).

Radiba Hadj Moussa stresses how Djébar's film-making is an attempt to propose an alternative to the conventional (Hollywood-like, patriarchal) depiction of Algerian history: Djébar builds this alternative point-of-view by giving an expression to the feminine memory, reflected in particular through the creative use of the voice-off. Bernard Aresu pursue the same reflection, and summarises, while linking the fundamental motives of the veil, the screen, and the voice, the historical and autobiographical aspects of Djébar's work.

This collection of essays, which is concluded by a testimony by Assia Djébar and Ousmane Sembène, is a rich exploration of the opposition and complementarity between different languages and different modes of expression, and shows how it is this very struggle to create an alternative space of/for expression which ultimately allows the authors to question conventional representations and to give a voice to those who have remained at the margins of societies and of history.

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