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Intercepting Archives:
Transmedial Editing across *La noire de...* and *Incendies*

By

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THESIS

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Abstract

This study explores how forms of editing to the source are made palpable across the source texts and the adaptations. I reflect on the lines of adaptation that end with two films that are produced across the space of the French colonial empire: *La noire de...* (1966) directed by Ousmane Sembène and *Incendies* (2010) directed by Denis Villeneuve. I locate these two films in their respective lineage of preceding works including Ousmane Sembène's short story "La noire de...", Wajdi Mouawad's play "Incendies", and Souha Béchara's autobiography *Résistante*. I contend that from the source to the most recent film iterations, forms of transmedial editing to the represented subject are made palpable. Across these two works, the medium through which one is ostensibly given access to the source material reveals the inability to completely refer to and recover that source. Across these texts, the circulation of multiple media forms and the production of opacity reveal how the represented subject evades positivistic representation by making apparent the processes of editing and translation/interpretation underlying what is projected onto pages, stages, and screens.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Adaptation, Interception, and Transmedial Editing	1
Introducing <i>La noire de...</i>	3
Introducing <i>Incendies</i>	7
Comparison and its limits across the Francophone World	9
Surface reading and Adaptation	16
The Adapted Work: “La noire de...”	17
The Adapted Work: <i>Résistante</i>	28
Transmedial Editing in <i>La noire de...</i>	35
Producing Opacity and Scattering the Source across “Incendies” and <i>Incendies</i>	48
Conclusion	62
Works Cited	65

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Introduction

This project reflects on the representation of archives and historical documents in two films that are produced across the times and spaces of the French colonial empire: *La noire de...* (1966) directed by Ousmane Sembène and *Incendies* (2010) directed by Denis Villeneuve. Although these two films are produced within their own unique histories, examination of these two works can illuminate the ways in which multiple media forms are represented in film and can reconfigure the film's relationship with the source material. In this project, I argue that the adapted text and the adaptation both participate in forms of transmedial editing through which multiple forms of media make tangible the techniques of interception in order to reveal how that source is compiled. The distinction between the stable original source and the derivative adaptation is destabilized in their mutual exposition of the ways the depicted subject evades total recovery and also produces their own modes of making palpable their presence. Such a recognition of this revision process destabilizes the fixing of the source text as stable matter in order to reveal how that source is already composed of its own variance. Across these texts, the circulation of multiple media forms and the production of opacity reveal how the source evades positivistic representation by making apparent the processes of editing and translation/interpretation underlying what is projected onto pages, stages, and screens.

Adaptation, Interception, and Transmedial Editing

The means of representation through which the adaptation is produced relies on a certain seizing of the source text to be deployed. This seizure of the source can be understood as a process of interception that reworks the source material and extends its variance. The notion of interception is helpful in articulating adaptation, not simply as an aesthetic remaking of the

source text from one medium to another, but to reveal how the source is deliberately stopped and compiled into a knowable source. Here, interception recognizes how the adapted text may actually be resistant to being further represented and projected by others.

Across these works, this interceptive process is made tangible through techniques of transmedial editing that are rendered apparent to the viewer. The circulation of multiple forms of media within the discussed works reveal the means of representation through which either Diouana Gomis or Souha Béchara, the real world counterparts of the film characters, are referenced. In addition to traditional forms of media like the printed newspaper and photograph, I invoke an expansive form of media that incorporates those forms of communication that are used to deliver information about the source. These forms of media within the discussed works include, but are not limited to, letters, poems, and the on-screen characters. In viewing these materials as media forms, they come to serve as channels to the represented subject but also index forms of mediation that render opaque direct access to that subject. Transmedial editing indexes the ways that these works incorporate and/or stage other media forms into their narratives and in doing so reveals how access to the source is enabled through a series of edits. Although film has been traditionally positioned as the total work of art that synthesizes sound, image, and narrative, the transmedial editing that remains persistent across these texts permits a reflection on the unique ways written texts have also come to incorporate modern media material. Throughout these works, the incorporation of media does not simply permit a representation that claims unfettered ability to simulate reality but reveals how access to the subject is always in the process of mediation.

In viewing adaptation as a form of interception and transmedial editing, I argue that these two films gesture toward the incompleteness and continuation of histories that refuse to be

relegated to pastness even as the projected on-screen image potentially consolidates a recovered narrative. In the following sections, I hope to describe how the following written works and motion pictures make palpable the forms of editing and interception through which these lives enter into an aestheticized work. First, I look at Ousmane Sembène's short story "La noire de..." and Souha Béchara's autobiography *Résistante* to examine how the source is designated and compiled through a series of edits. I then turn to filmed and staged adaptations of these texts: Ousmane Sembène's *La noire de...*, Wajdi Mouawad's "Incendies", and Denis Villeneuve's *Incendies*. These three works gesture to the ways that variance is extended across multiple textual iterations. Even as they point to and rely on source material, it is through their remixing of the source that these works reveal how the represented fail to be subsumed into a totalizing narrative. Through the circulation of multiple media within the written works and films, adaptation does not simply occur from one stable text to another but is also manifested within the film itself as it travels across multiple media and acts as a domicile of signs that attempt to refer to the source. By putting these two films and the adapted works in discussion with each other, I explore how the circulation of multiple media forms within the film form indexes the making of sources while evading complete domiciliation.

Introducing La noire de...

The Senegalese author and director Ousmane Sembène's first film continues to garner attention for its reflection on the colonality of the Francophone world. *La noire de...* (1966) or *Black Girl* (Criterion) begins with the arrival of the French liner MV *Ancerville* into the Port of Marseille. This ship is carrying the film's protagonist, Diouana Gomis (Mbissine Thérèse Diop), who is brought to France as a maid by her two unnamed employers, Monsieur (Robert Marcy) and Madame (Anne-Marie Jelinek), who are on a long vacation in the Mediterranean city of

Antibes. From this point of entry into southern France, we follow flashbacks to her life in Dakar, her confinement in the Antibes apartment, and the act of her suicide in her employers' bathtub.

The film is also situated within a line of literary adaptation. Prior to the production of *La noire de...*, Ousmane Sembène was a prolific writer of novels and short stories. The 1966 film is an adaptation of "La noire de...", a short story from his 1962 collection *Voltaïque*. Beyond Sembène's literary and film depictions of Diouana, these two aesthetic works point to an actual life. Diouana Gomis died from an act of suicide in her employers' Antibes apartment in 1952. Gomis was born in 1927 in Boutoupa, a southern region of Senegal, and was hired in Dakar as a maid for a white French family. In *The Suicide Archive*, Doyle Calhoun directs us to how Sembène creates a story from Gomis' life with two source documents: *le procès verbal* (police transcript) and *les faits divers* (The miscellaneous facts of a newspaper). In thinking with Freud's notion of the screen memory, Calhoun contends that Sembène's on-screen projection of Diouana Gomis as Diouana simultaneously recovers her from these archival documents and covers over that same life. Through Sembène's excavation and redeployment of archival material, the notion of literary adaptation as primarily consisting of a line of aesthetic works is destabilized as the succeeding aesthetic works rely on the information of official police documents, newspaper reporting, and other material that could be recovered from the lived life of Diouana Gomis.

Although suicide is often framed as an act of victimhood, this act can also be understood as an act of resistance when placed within local notions of dignity and expanded histories of resistance to the Atlantic slave trade. First, Calhoun argues for the necessity to recontextualize Diouana's suicide and place it within local and pan-African histories of suicidal resistance. Two terms from Senegalese culture and Wolof philosophy are important for recontextualizing this act: *sutura* (discretion) and *jom* (dignity, manifested in suicide) (Calhoun 140). By placing Diouana's

death within these terms, her act is framed beyond that of a state of victimhood and transformed into an act of radically affirming the self in the face of unlivable constraints placed on her by the two French employers.

Furthermore, when placed within a history of suicidal resistance to the Atlantic slave trade her suicide within the film reveals the continuation and persistence of these imperial formations that have sought to capture bodies and instrumentalize them for labor. What is ultimately important about situating Diouana's suicide within these contexts is that suicide evades the totality of a single interpretive framework. Referring to the histories of suicide on the African continent and the broader Atlantic, Calhoun says that attention to these histories "...help us to recognize suicide as, on the one hand, a complex and deeply ambivalent act, about which we can make no sure claims, and, on the other, a well-established practice of anticolonial and antislavery resistance with local (Senegalese) and transnational (Atlantic) genealogies" (140). Within Calhoun's push for a recontextualization of this representation of suicide, there is a recognition of the multiple discourses that mediate our understanding of the represented suicide and a call to establish comparison within local and pan-African understandings of this act. Although it is impossible to narrate why Diouana chooses to die in this way, suicide within these multiple frames evades any totalizing understanding of the act.

The production process of *La noire de...* also calls us to track the numerous limitations imposed onto the film's production. Attention to these limitations allows us to see how constraints become the working of an agency that resists total modes of power. In "Enacting Postcolonial Translation", Tobias Warner lays out the limitations on funding and the production issues that came with directing a film as a Black director within the Francophone world. These issues include financial support from the French Ministry of Coopération, proper licensing from

the Centre Français de cinématographie to make a feature-length film, and budget constraints that prevented Diop from recording her speaking lines in Paris. Warner contends that the work “actually foregrounds these chromatic and sonic constraints” and makes these production issues palpable in the viewing and listening experience of the film (115). He views Sembène’s reworking of these constraints as a mode of free indirect discourse that breaks down the barrier between the subject of representation and the means of representing that subject (116). This mode of free indirect discourse stages a collapse between the issues that structured the production of the film and the sound and image situated within it. Here, the surface of the film becomes revealing of those limitations imposed on the production process that is sought to be covered up by the final product.

This project aims to see how film adaptations make palpable their interception of the source material and the forms of editing through which a source can be compiled. Calhoun argues for a recontextualization of Gomis’ story via Sembène’s *La noire de...* within a lineage of resistance to slavery in the Atlantic world and local Senegalese notions of dignity. Warner describes how Sembène makes tactile the very structures and constraints in the film product with which he contends in the production process. Across these two arguments, the subject and means of representation are called to be re-described in ways that are not always tangible at first glance. However, these facets become tangible when put into modes of comparison as Calhoun does with the transnational histories of resistance and local notions of dignity and Warner with his comparison of the Wolof and French versions of Sembène’s film. Within this project, the practice of comparison is not simply situated between *La noire de...* and *Incendies* but with the texts that have preceded the film production. A study of the preceding adapted works and its adaptations can allow one to see the persistent forms of editing across these two texts. Across these two

discussed films, variance is not solely found in the succeeding adaptations but is constitutive of the compiled source from which the adaptations are produced.

Introducing Incendies

Those colonial constraints imposed onto Sembène's filmmaking process are evidently not present within Villeneuve's high budget Canadian film. However, this film continues to render apparent the multiple forms of interception required in the projection of such a story. Canadian filmmaker Denis Villeneuve's film *Incendies* (2010) begins with the opening of a letter from Nawal Marwan (Lubna Azabal), the mother of twins, Jeanne (Mélicha Désormeaux-Poulin) and Simon (Maxim Gaudette). This letter, opened in the office of the notary Jean Lebel (Rémy Girard) in Montréal, sends the two children to their mother's home country in search of their father and brother. The letter is accompanied with two sealed letters directed to the father who they believed was dead and the other to a brother they did not know they had. While in the country, the twins uncover the mother's life as a militant and her assassination of an opposing political leader. The horrifying truth about their family is uncovered when the twins realize that their father (Abou Tarek) and their brother (Nihad) are the same person (played Abdelghafour Elaaziz).

This film is drawing from two sources: *Résistante*, an autobiography by Souha Béchara, and "Incendies", a play by Wajdi Mouawad. Although the country is not directly named in either the film or the play, the events relayed in both aesthetic works refer to the life of a Lebanese militant. Souha Béchara was born on 15 June 1967 in Deir Mimas, a town in the south of Lebanon. Her childhood and early adult life were spent in frequent movement between Beirut and the country's southern region. Leaving college in 1986, she joined resistance activities against the ongoing Israeli occupation in Lebanon. Béchara was assigned by the Lebanese

Communist Party to assassinate Antoine Lahad, the leader of the South Lebanon Army (ALS). In preparation for this act, she gains employment under Lahad's wife, Minerva, as an aerobics instructor. She, then, enters public discourse through her assassination attempt of Lahad on 7 November 1988, and is subsequently detained in the Khiam torture camp for ten years. Following her release from the camp on 3 September 1998, she moved to Switzerland and published her autobiography in 2000.

Recent scholarship on *Incendies* has outlined how the film enables transnational and intermodal connections. In "Scorched Palimpsests and Transnational Experiments", Noah McLaughlin contends that Villeneuve's *Incendies* produces a palimpsest of meaning that traverses between Canada and the country that remains unnamed in the play and film, Lebanon. He argues that the palimpsest of the film has three layers: the film's relationship with the source material of Wajdi Mouawad's play by the same name, its reference to other cinematic works, and its deployment of alternative rock music. Important to this project is McLaughlin's focus on the source material from which this film adapts. He positions the play written by Wajdi Mouawad as the theatrical source text for the film as it has shared characters, settings, and narrative arcs. Across the film and the play, McLaughlin argues that these two works share in a matrix of imitation for the story of Oedipus. If instead, one places Souha Béchara's autobiography *Résistante* as the source material for this line of adaptation one can begin to see how this line of aesthetic production is a result of an interception that inserts the Oedipal story into the reception of this narrative. While the insertion of the Oedipal story into the aesthetic productions of the play and film will not be the focus of this project, such an insertion underscores the ways through which one's life narrative becomes adapted into a dramatized and universalized psychoanalytic

story. Understood in this way, adaptation can be reframed as a product of interception and insertion into the held source material.

Comparison and its limits across the Francophone World

This project attempts to illuminate constellations across multiple sites of the Francophone world: Senegal, Lebanon, Canada, and metropolitan France. This act of comparison across the Francophone world, however, risks solidifying the metropole as the central node for discussing aesthetic works that have proliferated within and despite France's violent imperial history and space. The centering of the European metropole often takes place as a given with studies of aesthetic and literary works in the colonial language and within colonial settings.

This problem is not solely relegated to literary studies but integrated into the writing of available historical narratives. Describing how Europe exists as the silent referent for historical knowledge, Dipesh Chakrabarty points to two everyday symptoms of the subalternity of Third-world histories and historiography. First, the Third World historian feels the necessity to refer to works of European history while the European historian does not feel the need to reciprocate (Chakrabarty 2). Here, the historian's enterprise is constrained within, and her response is implicitly yielded in relation to, a set of European canonical historical texts. This centering of Europe structures the historiography of those histories written within and across the periphery. Chakrabarty's second point describes how the European continent within historical discourses becomes the "theoretical condition under which historical knowledge is produced in the third world" (Chakrabarty 2). In this organization of the field of historical knowledge, Europe and its settler colonies are held as the standard to be fleshed out in empirical research on the histories of the global south. Through this division of the historical world, the Global South is held as supporting data to affirm the theoretical paradigms produced by western(ized) academies. Such

centering of Europe and other Western spaces ignores the many emergent links of solidarity and knowledge production across peoples of the designated peripheries of empire.

In situating these two films within the Francophone world, this project risks reproducing a discourse that implicitly maintains the French metropole or the geographic hexagon as the central connecting point of comparison between the multiple histories represented within the chosen works that exist outside of Europe's policed boundaries. With this problem that undergirds this work, I would like to invoke Gayatri Spivak's notion of catachresis to continue struggling with the provisional naming of the Francophone space in which I articulate this project. In "More on Power/Knowledge", Spivak reads Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida together to ask how one can use a critical philosophy ethically and politically outside of a purely theoretical framework. Spivak describing the instability of what is named "Power" says,

Like all names it is a misfit. To use this name to describe a generality inaccessible to intended description is necessarily to work with the risk that the word 'is wrested from its proper meaning,' that it is being applied 'to a thing which it does not *properly* denote' (OED). We cannot find a proper place – it must be effaced as it is disclosed (146)

Spivak insists on the use of naming particular sources of power as "Power" if only to provisionally make intelligible that source of power to be rendered open to deconstruction.

Through this convention, the name is transformed into a referent to index that subject that one cannot imagine as literal referent. This notion of catachresis allows us to see how the deployment of a conventional name can become revealing of its own incapacity to accommodate that which it previously has sought to subsume. It is with this provisional containment of these works within the *francophonie* that I hope to illuminate how the center of the Francophone world is also no longer in the hands of the silent referent of the French metropole. By placing the genealogies

containing the two films, *La noire de...* and *Incendies* in comparison with each other, I hope to have decentered this policed geographic and cultural space in the hope of exploring emergent linkages of edited historical narratives that resist simple comparison to hexagonal France.

It is important to note that this cartography of the French empire with the hexagon as the center is not solely a discursive problem limited to research produced in the academy. In her book on birth-control policies and forced sterilization in the French overseas department of Réunion, *Les ventres des femmes (The Wombs of Women)*, Françoise Vergès argues that the inequalities between the metropole and the overseas territories and departments are steeped in a republican form of coloniality that maintains a distinction between the full citizens of metropolitan France and the yet-to-be modernized populations of its imperial space. This form of subjection to the colonial power continues to endure long after the end of formal colonial governance. Vergès, describing the erasures of histories and the legitimization of colonial biopolitics, says “The reconfigurations undertaken by the state to preserve its own interests along with those of capital have produced a *mutilated history* and a *mutilated cartography*” (5). These two terms, *mutilated history* and *mutilated cartography*, index how these overseas spaces are taken out of their immediate geographic and historical environment to then be placed in direct relationship with the economic, discursive, and political power of metropolitan France. This kind of colonial alignment persists past moments of formal independence and designations of legal incorporation into the French republic as it continues to position the French metropole as the prime beneficiary of the wealth extracted from these lands and the manager of human lives and populations in these colonial spaces.

In relation to the controlled circulation and distribution of film within France’s insertion into the economies of the African continent and the Antilles, French control over the production

and distribution of this material across its empire has explicitly prevented comparative connections of colonial experience across its imperial space and newly independent nations after the Second World War. Ousmane Sembène in an interview at the University of Wisconsin is asked if his films are distributed throughout Africa and other French overseas spaces. To this question he describes the censorship he faces in his attempts to screen *Emitai* (1971) across the Francophone world:

“We tried to show *Emitai* [sic] in Guadeloupe, but the ambassador from France interceded. The film had one night of exhibition in Upper Volta but never again. When I was invited by the government and students of the Ivory Coast to show it, *Emitai* was first screened the night before by a censor board of eight Africans and two Frenchmen. The eight were in agreement but the two Frenchmen went to the French ambassador who went to see the head of the government. I was told that it wasn’t an ‘opportune time’ to show this film. They were all very polite, so I didn’t say anything. I took my film and left” (Sembène 45)

Two sets of questions arise from this interview response: What is the space of comparison and how is it policed? What is its time and how is it precluded? Sembène’s references to the intercession of the French ambassador in the film’s distribution into the overseas department of Guadeloupe and the instances of French censorship in Upper Volta (present day Burkina Faso) and the Ivory Coast¹ reveal attempts to police the circulation of film material critical of France’s colonial administration in regions within its imperial reach. This cartography of French imperial space that is partially maintained through the censorship of aesthetic production and distribution

¹ Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) and the Ivory Coast gained formal independence from France in 1960

controls the possibilities of connections of coloniality made possible in the reception of films critical of past and ongoing processes of colonialization. Perhaps distribution of the screening of a massacre of Diola men and women would open the possibility of a comparative memory that enables a collective opposition to Hexagonal France across set boundaries of the designated periphery.

Furthermore, the French government's act of intercession can also be read as an act of interception. Sembène's description of these webs of censorship draws attention to how the French state asserts itself as the representative speaker for the populations living within its imperial space through its policing of what aesthetic material is permissible for screening. This insertion into the distribution of aesthetic material reveals an attempt to naturalize a transnational *francophonie* that is united in their attachment to and alignment with the language, culture, politics, and economy of the French Republic. The affirmative vote of the eight Africans on the censor board is nullified by the minority of two Frenchmen who oppose the screening of the film. This capacity to cancel out the majority affirmative vote with the minority vote discloses an explicit attempt to not only censor threatening film material, but also an assertion of the distinction between the full citizens of the metropole and the semi-citizens of the imperial space. Despite the claims to equality under the French Republic, the status of the citizen remains an unevenly distributed terrain that accumulates with the bodies of the metropole and dissipates at the periphery.

Sembène is also told that the screening of *Emitai* is not arriving in these spaces at an opportune time. Within this description of the conditions that prevent the distribution of Sembène's film, time is assumed by the French officials to be at their service and control. This attempt to control which films may enter French colonial space assumes control over the

narration of history by excluding those documentations and representations of historical experience that reveal the violent and repetitive structure of the French empire. This description of attempts to control the narration of historical experience discloses the explicit ways that the French state simultaneously excludes and produces a curated image of these histories that are deemed to be marginal to the metropole. The silent referent of Europe in historiography now becomes fleshed out as explicit censorship of those critical representations produced within its imperial reach.

Although Lebanon does not have the same colonial relationship that Senegal has with metropolitan France, a relationship of colonality still persists in the history between Lebanon and France. Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War 1, the Sykes-Picot Agreement between the United Kingdom and France divided the region between these two European nations. The British gained control of modern-day Iraq and the southern regions of Syria. Meanwhile, the French controlled the rest of Ottoman Syria which partially consists of the modern-day nation-state of Lebanon. Souha Béchara was born more than twenty years after the end of the French Mandate which existed from 1923 to 1946. However, the very structure of the Khiam Prison Camp, in which she was detained, was originally built and used as a barracks complex by the French military in the 1930s. The construction and maintenance of this camp provide a way for thinking the persistent continuations of French imperialism in Lebanon long after the end of the Mandate through its containment of space and bodies. In “Necropolitics” Achille Mbembe describes the general condition of the camp as a space in which the exercise of sovereignty manifests in “*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and population*” (Mbembe 14). This formulation of the camp is not limited to a particular space or time within history but is constitutive of modern

forms of political power. Although the Khiam prison camp operated as a detainment center for political prisoners rather than as a death camp, the containment of space and intense management of bodies permits association between the space described by Mbembe and that of Béchara. Even as the structure of the French barracks became operational as a prison camp long after the end of the French mandate, the reiteration of the structure allows one to see how space is continuously rearranged and confined past the end of formal colonialism.

Furthermore, during this twenty-year period, the sectarian system between the multiple Muslim and Christian communities of Lebanon was cemented into the political infrastructure through the formal allocation of government positions based on confessional identity. During this period, the Maronite Christians were the favored group of the French government with the office of the president allocated to members of this community. With the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the following Nakba which displaced more than 700,000 Palestinians from their homes, Lebanon became a host country for Palestinian refugees who were predominantly Muslim. This changed the demographics of Lebanon and shifted the power balance in favor of the Muslim communities in the early 1970s (Tuktal). Although the structure set up by the French government cannot be said to have fully and solely determined the emergence of the sectarian conflict and civil war in Lebanon, the political power attached to particular sectarian identities and demographics enabled the conditions of violent political rivalries and conflicts between communities.

Despite their shared connections to and incorporation into the French empire, the histories depicted within these two works are revealing of their own particularities. These two sets of texts index the multiple ways through which a projected historical narrative is a product of various forms of editing that attempt to recover that event. Catachresis within this project

articulates the temporary naming of space and the construction of a provisional history that reveals its own conventions of historical representation. Within these films, the deployed image of that historical narrative is not a total capture and recovery of the said event but points to the instability of that history.

Surface reading and Adaptation

Attempts to establish lines of textual adaptation often fix the original as a stable text from which derivative adaptations are produced. Thinking about lines of adaptation as a plane of texts that are continuous with each other in their shared compilation and construction of the source allows one to attend to the ways the represented subject across these texts evades total capture even as she is made to pass through these multiple textual iterations. Instead of establishing the preceding works as the stable original source that renders a transparent view of the represented subject, surface reading allows one to contend with the opacity that is readily present. From the 1970s and 1980s, psychoanalysis and Marxism emerged as metalanguages that enabled conversation between humanistic and social science disciplines. Despite their different objects of research, both theoretical approaches perform a “symptomatic reading” that attempts to disclose the hidden or repressed content below the manifest surface. In this mode of reading, the critic uses their particular theory to bypass the surface categories in order to discover the text’s underlying ideology. This attempt to discover the underlying content potentially overlooks facets of the text that may be apparent when the text is placed within its own discursive system and is realized to produce its own theories for reading and approaching that work.

In “Surface Reading: An Introduction”, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus provide a definition of the proposed object of study for this reading practice: “We take surface to mean what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding; what in the

geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers no depth. A surface is what insists on being looked at rather than what we must train ourselves to see through” (Best and Marcus 9). This practice calls one to focus on what is readily evident and knowable from the text. This mode of reading potentially reproduces readily given and dominant understandings of the approached text. However, it also urges the critic to pay attention to what is often overlooked within symptomatic readings. What is particularly interesting about Best and Marcus’ definition is their call to focus on that which has length and breadth. Their attention to what is diffused and dispersed potentially enables new constructions of genealogy for literary and film adaptations. Both films discussed, *La noire de...* and *Incendies*, are on one end of a line of adaptation. While genealogy constructed in this way may suggest a textual depth to these films as they are situated within these continuous lines, such a model risks solidifying the film as the most complete textual iteration of the source materials on which they draw and the final completion of that history. I aim to decenter the film as the final textual iteration by seeing how these films, along with the adapted works, point to the ways the preceding texts are composed of their own forms of variance. Instead of viewing the film as a mode that uniquely attempts to capture the totality of the represented subject, these following works point to the ways that multiple textual forms, film included, attempt to make accessible the represented subject but also index the instability of that same channel.

The Adapted Work: “La noire de...”

Ousmane Sembène’s short story “La noire de...” and the following poem about the short story’s protagonist “Nostalgie” were originally published by Présence Africaine in French in his 1962 short story collection *Voltaïque (Tribal Scars)*. The short story was published four years prior to the release of Sembène’s first feature film *La noire de...* (1966). Both short story and

film can be read as attempts to recover the life of Diouana Gomis, a Senegalese woman who dies from an act of suicide in the apartment bathroom of her employers. By beginning with the short story, I attempt to show how the act of recounting the story and naming the person engender an unstable narrative of the event by revealing the multiple frames through which one is given a glimpse of that event and life. I argue that the French employer's voice within the short story reveals how Diouana Gomis' story enters a series of mediations and revisions. By making these layers of mediation and revision palpable in the short story, Sembène's process of adaptation from the *procès verbal* (official police report) and *faits divers* (miscellaneous facts of the newspaper) to the short story and film becomes self-aware of its own limitations in narrating Gomis' story. Such a recognition of this revision process points to the inability to completely return to the source and destabilizes attempts to trace standard lines of adaptation that are established between the source and the subsequent aesthetic productions.

As much as this cannot do justice to Gomis' lived life that is full of its own complexities that will evade this meagre recounting, it seems important to establish a conventional timeline so that the reconstruction of this life points to what is irrecoverable within these few lines. Diouana Gomis was born in 1927 in Boutoupa in the Zinguichor region of Senegal. She was then hired in Dakar as a maid for a white French colonist family. She joined her employers, the Petit family, on their journey to the French city of Antibes where she continued to work as a maid until her suicide on 22 June 1958. Her death appears on the following day in the *faits divers* of *Le Nice-Matin* (Calhoun 120). Prior to her appearance in the *faits divers* of the morning newspaper, Diouana Gomis' death was recorded onto the *procès-verbal* through the testimony of her employer, Jeanine Petit, and her neighbors (Calhoun 134). With these meagre sketches available in archives, Ousmane Sembène produces two works that attempt to recover this life from the few

lines that have been written about her. At the very least, it seems Ousmane Sembène had a copy of the *faits divers* in which Diouana Gomis' death is written into public discourse. From this document he writes the short story "La noire de..." in 1962 and releases the film, *La noire de...* in 1966. Although lines of literary adaptation are typically viewed as lines of aesthetic production, this situation asks for a formulation of adaptation that explores how non-aesthetic documents and texts are introduced into literary and aesthetic works. By including these materials within the lines of adaptation of the short story and film, adaptation can also be figured as a form of interception that reassembles and redeploys what can be found in the historical archive.

The voice of Diouana's French employer, only referred to as Madame in the short story, reveals the forms of mediation through which one comes to know of Diouana Gomis. Even as the employer's speech establishes a privileged account of the event when her speech is inscribed onto the official document produced by the French state or appears in the *faits divers* of the morning newspaper, her voice within this short story also undermines attempts to maintain the stability of the narrative that could be found within the state's documents or mass print. The written text opens into the wake of the event with investigators entering the apartment to question the witnesses. Asked to recount her perspective of the order of events preceding the discovery of Diouana in the bathtub Madame says,

Après ma sieste, j'eus envie de prendre un bain. La porte était fermée de l'intérieur (elle se moucha). Et je me suis dit, c'est la bonne qui prend son bain. Je dis la < bonne >, rectifia-t-elle, mais jamais on ne l'appelait que par son nom - Diouana

(After my nap, I wanted to take a bath. The door was locked from inside – she blew her nose. And I told myself; the maid is taking her bath. I say the 'maid, she corrected

herself, but we never called her anything except by her name – Diouana; Sembène, *Voltaïque* 151; my trans.)

Through this set of descriptions that situate the reader within the scene that transpires in the apartment, we are not directly brought to the scene of her suicide through an impersonal narrator, but through the words of the situated employer that are narrated to the French detectives after the event. Through Madame's account of her own experience, the text reveals the spatial and temporal separation between her failed witnessing of the suicide and the narration that follows from it. Within this recounting, Madame's speech points to those actual barriers that prevent her from accessing Diouana's act and her body. This inability to directly view Diouana's suicide and to look upon Diouana's body is physically hindered and postponed by the locked door. Although this door will eventually be breached, Madame is prevented from immediately entering the space in which Diouana dies. Through Madame's own voice, the text sets up the scene of Diouana's death as a time and space to which one is unable to return. By setting up these temporal and spatial barriers within the recounted story, the primal scene through which Diouana's life and death enters discourse is occluded from Madame and the reader. Although adaptation returns to the source text to generate from it, this adaptation also reveals how the bodily source from which this story is generated evades a totalizing view.

In the opening pages of this story, the text reveals the conditions through which Diouana's story is told. Through the description of Madame and her sister's position in the living room as they speak to the detectives, the narration of the discovery of Diouana's body is revealed to be told through the particularized speech of the employer and across multiple lapses in time. By describing the employer's distance from the scene of the event the short story puts into display the inability to fully recover the event. These distances between the event of Diouana's

suicide, Madame's discovery, and her recounting of that discovery to the detectives are all collapsed into this single passage. At first read, this narration presents itself as a fluid and complete testimony of the event. It can even be received as the privileged account through which one gains sure access to the event as the official document through which this narration first appears is in Jeanine Petit's (Diouana Gomis' employer) testimony of the events in the *procès verbal* (written police report) (Calhoun 134). However, by making these layers of temporal gaps palpable the text makes explicit how that scene relayed by Madame is marked by a separation from the time of the event and the time of its recovery. Even as Madame's voice is the conduit through which one receives an account of Diouana's death, that narration is accompanied with its own inability to fully and directly return to the scene that it narrates.

The employer's narration of this experience within the text manifests temporally further away from the actual scene of the suicide as she speaks to the detectives. The employer relays her testimony to the detectives after having opened the door with the help of her neighbor who discovers Diouana's body in the bathtub. Within Madame's own recounting, the original event is screened over by Madame's narration that is revealed to begin in the suicide's aftermath. By bringing the reader to this distinct position in time, the direct scene of the act is inferred but not directly witnessed by the employer. In his essay "Screen Memories", Sigmund Freud explores the channels through which one accesses particular childhood memories. He suggests that

What is recorded as a mnemonic image is not the relevant experience itself – in this respect the resistance gets its way; what is recorded is another psychical element closely associated with the objectionable one – and in this respect the first principle shows its strength, the principle which endeavors to fix important impressions by establishing reproducible mnemonic images. The result of the conflict is therefore that, instead of the

mnemic image which would have been justified by the original event, another is produced which has been to some degree associatively displaced from the former one (Freud 307).

Calhoun encourages us to see Sembène's film as a screen memory for the real life and death of Gomis as it keeps her memory alive and engages it with the present (Calhoun 120). I would like to extend Calhoun's argument by seeing how this screening process is made palpable within the short story attempt to recover Diouana Gomis' life. The inability to return to that event is made palpable through this deferral from witnessing even as one infers that event. As Madame's story within her recounting only begins once Diouana has died, the narration of the story circulates in the surrounding events before and after her death. In addition to Madame's inability to return to that original event, this impossible return becomes the screen through which one gains access to the event. Madame's testimony that is written down within the short story becomes the voice through which Diouana Gomis' story escapes the confines of that apartment building. This produced testimony describes the event but is unable to fully return to it in its immediacy. Here, the story of the event that one receives displaces the former original scene from which that story commences. However, by putting the reader within these sets of mediation, the short story begins to reflect on the ways it enters into a series of interceptions about Diouana. This separation between the time of the event and its future narration through the employer puts into relief how Diouana's body within the short story is screened over by the words said about her. In tracking the forms of forgetting that become constitutive of the memory in Sembène's short story and film, Calhoun draws on Sigmund Freud's screen memory and argues that "...acts of recovery can also *cover over*" the represented subject (Calhoun 115). Within this passage in the short story, the

text becomes cognizant of its own production of the story that occurs later in time and apart from the direct experience of Diouana Gomis and voiced through Diouana's employer.

Although the text establishes a relationship to that past event, the text also points to the inability to completely represent that event in its immediacy. By making palpable how this life is narrativized within the discourse of Madame's voice, the text plays with a vernacular definition of history. Michel Rolph-Trouillot describes this vernacular definition of history as "both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts, both 'what happened' and 'that which is said to have happened' (5). Trouillot's distinction between the facts of the matter and the narrative that is produced from the facts reveals how the writing of history is not simply the relaying of factual events, but a careful curation of links by the person writing the story. In between these two vernacular definitions of history, the short story comes to question the writing and means of representation through which Diouana enters public discourse. Instead of giving voice to Diouana Gomis or directly describing the scene of Diouana Gomis' death, Sembène critically fabulates the scene surrounding her death by relaying these statements said about her through the voice of the employer. Here, Sembène participates in what Saidiya Hartman calls a critical reading of the archive. Hartman outlining her notion of critical fabulation that fashions a narrative based on archival research describes her practice "that mimes the figurative dimensions of history" and tells an impossible story that amplifies the impossibility of its telling (26). Through Sembène's ventriloquizing of the employer character in the short story, he replays the means through which one currently has access to the event and how that event is always mediated apart from the subject of that event. Such a replaying of these means of representation does not unilaterally extend the effects of previous attempts to represent Diouana Gomis' story in

the *procès verbal* or the *faits divers*. Instead, this reiteration brings attention to the multimedia mediations through which Gomis' story has been disseminated.

Through its recognition of the text's inability to make a complete return to that said event, the same passage indexes the forms of editing through which we read of the conditions surrounding Diouana's death. However, such an interception of Gomis' story does not simply confine her to the speech said about her. By making this revision and editing process apparent, the text reflects on the selective means through which Diouana Gomis becomes available to discourse. Madame refers to Diouana, first as "the maid (*la bonne*)" and then corrects herself to call Diouana by her first name. While we do not know what the French employers call Diouana outside of the instances of dialogue in the short story, this description of Madame's speech reveals an editing or revision that is underway in the process of her speech². This passage is the first mention of Diouana. However, Diouana does not first emerge onto the text's surface through her proper name. Instead, she emerges through her employer's naming convention that first recognizes her as a domestic worker and finally by her proper name. This marked revision in Madame's identification becomes revealing of an editing process that indexes the forms of subjugation through which one comes to know of Diouana. This potentially reveals how her body is, first and foremost, seen as a laboring body that does not require hailing by a proper name as her labor is exchangeable for the labor-power of other Senegalese women. As the title of this story may suggest, *la noire de...* (the black girl of...) can be repeatedly substituted for any person on the labor market to perform housework. This slip through which Diouana is first named, becomes revealing of these markets that instrumentalize bodies and makes them known primarily in the terms of their labor.

² Later in "La noire de...", the employers' children call Diouana racist slurs

What remains interesting about Madame's testimony is that the narrator interrupts the employer's speech and, in doing so, emphasizes these shifts that begin by referring to Gomis by her occupation and then by her first name. Through the narrator's interjection into Madame's speech, Madame's reference to Diouana as the maid, is positioned as an error when the narrator interjects to say that the employer corrected herself and following this correction begins to refer to Diouana by her name. By interjecting in between Madame's naming of the maid and her quick shift to the proper name, the narrator breaks up the flow of her speech and points to that fleeting revision to the discourse produced about Diouana. This direct insertion of the narrator's voice into Madame's speech opens a space of critique within the partial words of the employer.

These in-between recognitions of revision allow us to reconfigure the designation of a stable and assignable source from which the short story draws. In terms of recoverable self-written traces, Diouana Gomis has left none. In other words, Diouana Gomis is unable to narrate herself within a standard notion of autobiography. In *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals*, Karen Emmerich revises understandings of the original text and its derivative translations in a way that can be fruitful for the constellations between sources and adaptations discussed here. Emmerich responds to views of translation that hold the source texts of literary translation as if "each were a known quantity, a singular entity whose lexical content is stable or fixed: 'the original,' [or] 'the source text'..." (Emmerich 1). To this view of translation that holds the source as stable, she argues that "...the 'source,' the presumed object of translation, is not a stable ideal, not an inert gas but a volatile compound that experiences continual textual reconfigurations" (Emmerich 2). Through Emmerich's conception of the original text, the source is not held as a unified document from which translations are unilateral derivations of that original. Instead, this understanding suggests that the derivative translations grapple with the

source's variance and extends that variance into another language. By extending Emmerich's intervention in translation studies to adaptation studies, the source material of the adaptations can also be composed of multiple textual configurations that are compiled into the designated source. This is not to say that the ontology of Diouana Gomis is simply composed of writings written about her as this view seems to reduce Gomis' capacity for agency and potentially further projects her as an emptied figure through which anything could be said. Instead, it is to suggest that the life that is made accessible to us through these works has already been compiled through preceding textual reconfigurations. Here, the narrator's interjections into the employer's speech makes palpable the mediations through which this life enters discourse and the variant voices that compose our knowledge of this life.

If we are to pose the short story as a translation to the historical life of Diouana Gomis, this translation could then be conceived as a form of transmedial editing through which Diouana's story passes through multiple medial iterations. Here, Sembène comes to negotiate with what is available in French archives and creates a different story from that original telling. In Emmerich's words, "Translation may be conceived as a form of translingual editing, by which a translator both negotiates existing versions and creates a new one of her own, in a language other than that (or those) in which the work was first (or previously) articulated" (Emmerich 2). Through Emmerich's understanding of translation as a form of translingual editing that occurs on the same plane as an original that is already composed of its own variance, the short story as the aesthetic source material for the film does not exist apart from the mass print of the *faits divers* or the official police documents. Importantly, Sembène articulates this story in prose that is quite different from these preceding archival documents. The short story participates in the fabulation of the represented life and reveals how previous discourses that claim unfettered ability to

describe the subject are composed of their own forms of instability as they reveal how that subject has been transformed by discourse. Instead of simply describing Diouana's conditions, the short story outlines the conditions of legibility through which Diouana's conditions have appeared on paper. Sembène's negotiation with the existing versions of Diouana Gomis' conditions does not cleanly separate itself from those preceding modes of discourse but replicates them in order to point to the ways the conditions of the subject evade their grasp.

Through this interjection into the employer's speech, adaptation as a form of interception becomes palpable through the voice of the narrator. In "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography", Gayatri Spivak discusses the problems of documenting the collective consciousness of peasant views of class struggle. Pointing toward the inability to recuperate the subaltern's thoughts she says, "that it is only the texts of counterinsurgency or elite documentation that give us the news of the consciousness of the subaltern" (Spivak 212). Although Diouana Gomis does not neatly fit into the definition of Spivak's category of the subaltern, Gomis' life and body enter a series of interceptions through and within these textual iterations. Both the employer and the narrator who comments on her speech participate in the interception of Diouana Gomis' story. This entanglement between the voices gestures toward how Gomis' story is not solely intercepted by the French employers or by the newspaper, but through Sembène himself. However, this mode of interception does not assume a unilateral interception of Gomis' story that fully recovers that event. By entangling the narrator's voice with the character's act of description, Sembène intercepts the previous texts written about and for Gomis and reveals how these texts become the means through which one receives a readily available account of the story. In the following section, this interception of how one's story is deployed is directly revealed through the first-person narration of an autobiography. Here, the

autobiographical account comes to contend with the ways through which the narrator also refuses full recovery of her narrative. Instead of recovery of that original scene and life, the short story reveals the palimpsest of edits through which one is provided discursive knowledge of Diouana Gomis.

The Adapted Work: *Résistante*

Souha Béchara's autobiography, *Résistante*, was originally published in French in 2000 by JC Lattès. From the French edition, Arabic and English editions were released in 2003. The text is written from Béchara's perspective starting from her earliest childhood memories in Beirut and Deir Mimas up to her liberation from the infamous Khiam prison camp operated by the Southern Lebanese Army (SLA). She was a member of the Lebanese Communist Party and born from an Eastern Orthodox family in Deir Mimas in the southern region of Lebanon. Frequently moving between Beirut and the south during her childhood and early adult years, displacement and movement structure the narration of this text. In this section, I attempt to describe how Béchara's entrance into public discourse refuses attempts to stabilize her life into a static image. This refusal is performed through her editing of the multiple forms of media that are used in her projection into public discourse. Even as she outlines the means of obscuration, I argue that this purposeful crafting of her public identity gestures toward a provisional identity that evades totalizing modes of capture.

I cannot completely rehearse the preceding conditions or the actual events of the Lebanese Civil War that took place from 1975 to 1990. Not only are the reasons for the numerous massacres and battles under contestation, but also the conditions that led to the beginning of the entire war itself as historians debate on the salience of sectarian conflicts, class divisions, and the geopolitical factors of the region. It is with these multiple contestations to any

stable narrative of the war that “Any attempt to write a history of the war – or to forge a national history – must start by acknowledging the multiplicity of historical narratives” (Sune). A brief sketch seems to be useful, however incomplete, to establish a provisional amount of clarity for establishing the autobiography within its historical context. In “The Historiography and the Memory of the Lebanese Civil War”, Haugsbolle Sune provides a brief overview of the series of events concerning the Lebanese Civil War. From 1975 to 1990, a series of related conflicts between shifting alliances of Lebanese groups and external actors emerged from the destabilized Lebanese state. He divides the conflicts into five main periods: “the two-years war from April 1975 to November 1976; the long interlude of failed peace attempts, Israeli and Syrian intervention and a host of internal conflicts between November 1976 and June 1982; the Israeli invasion and its immediate aftermath from June 1982 to February 1984; the internal wars of the late 1980s; and finally the intra-Christian wars of 1988-90, which led to the end of the war” (Sune). Near the end of the formal war, Souha Béchara attempted to assassinate Antoine Lahad on 7 November 1988. Lahad was the leader of the South Lebanese Army from 1984 until 2000, when the militia group was disbanded. Against Hezbollah and the increase of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Lahad collaborated with Israel to maintain his stronghold over Lebanon’s southern regions. The South Lebanese Army operated the Khiam detention center that was originally built as army barracks for the French military in the 1930s. At the outbreak of the South Lebanon conflict in 1985, it was transformed into a prison and torture center. Following her assassination attempt of Lahad, Béchara was detained in this infamous camp for ten years from 1988 to 1998.

Instead of discussing the aesthetic works that Béchara produces in the camp, I want to return to the moments prior to her entrance into the history of the Lebanese Civil War as she

prepares to assassinate Lahad. I believe that thinking with these moments directly prior to the assassination attempt will allow us to reflect on how this entrance into public discourse becomes reflective of a self-editing process. Within the autobiography, Béchara illuminates how she takes control of the image projected of her by the Lebanese Communist Party, the party through which she carries out this task. This argument does not intend to make claims about a complete sense of self-definition but intends to show how she continues to negotiate with the restrictive frames through which she enters public discourse. In the chapter titled “L’opération”, in addition to describing her assassination attempt of Lahad, Béchara also outlines the days and nights prior to that event. On one of the nights before her attempt, she meets with Rabih, a member of the resistance who helps coordinate her plan. Describing the letter written to justify her actions, she writes

À la demande de Rabih auprès de qui j’ai passé l’une de mes dernières soirées libres pour recevoir conseils et encouragements, j’ai rédigé une lettre expliquant mon geste. J’évoque la guerre civile, l’invasion israélienne, la mort de nos héros et l’admiration que m’inspire à ce moment l’Intifada qui vient d’éclater dans les territoires palestiniens occupés et qui constitue pour moi le plus bel exemple de résistance et un idéal de révolution

(At Rabih’s request with whom I spent one of my last free nights, receiving his advice and encouragement, I wrote a letter explaining my actions. I evoked the civil war, the Israeli invasion, the death of our heroes and the admiration that inspired me at the moment, the Intifada that had just erupted in the occupied Palestinian territories and that, for me, constituted the most beautiful example of resistance and of revolution; Béchara 101; my trans.)

The letter described here by Béchara explains the reasons behind her assassination attempt. By outlining her reasons from the civil war, Israeli invasion, the Lebanese martyrs, and the Palestinian uprising, she contextualizes her planned actions within and in response to these broader historical moments. In the preface of the English translation, Hale describes the false consciousness that is usually attributed to women participating in activist or militant organizations: “One interpretation is that in many of these above activities [revolutions, collective actions, strikes, etc.] women have been carrying out operations designed by men and led by men. It is argued that women have seldom been part of the planning or leadership and are oftentimes indoctrinated by male cadre” (Hale viii). This point of view that designates false consciousness for women within these militant organizations prescribes a lack of agency for women to act according to their own will. Within this passage, Béchara establishes her consciousness within the historical conditions that surround her. By specifically linking her actions to these conditions, she places her assassination attempt on Lahad as a result her own conscious decision made apart from the influence of male cadre.

Béchara’s own volition becomes clearer when we consider her physical destruction of the photographs that could be used as propaganda and her rejection of the operation name by the Lebanese Communist Party. The burning of her photographs points to a refusal to become solidified as a static image as she enters public discourse. Béchara, describing her actions during the night prior to the operation says “À l’occasion de ma dernière nuit chez nous, je brûle discrètement les photos de moi les plus chères et dont je redoute l’usage que pourrait en faire le Parti pour sa propagande en faveur des « martyrs » de la résistance” (During my last night at home, I discreetly burned my most cherished photos and those of which I feared that the Party would use as propaganda in favor of the ‘martyrs’ of the resistance; Béchara 101; my trans.).

Even though she is a member of the Lebanese Communist Party, Béchara puts a halt to the Party's attempt to produce a propagandic image of her. The capacity of the photograph to provide a verifiable index of a person is put into question through her discreet burning of these documents that could be widely disseminated on the Party's propaganda posters. This willful destruction of her own image reveals a form of self-editing that is at work even as she is to be projected as a heroic martyr of the Party. Emmerich's theorizations on the instability of the original source material of the subsequent translations could be fruitful in seeing how Béchara's control over her own image disturbs the ability to locate a stable source that is able to produce a readily accessible understanding of the represented subject. Here, her image is not simply resistant to those histories of occupation in Lebanon and the surrounding region, but resistant to those attempts to take control of her image. This form of self-editing at the original source reveals a willful refusal to be instrumentalized for political ends through a solidified image.

Even as she excludes her most cherished images from entering mass print forms, she also provides a few negative images to Rabih. After describing her act of burning the photographs, she says "Je donne pourtant quelques clichés à mon supérieur" (I, however, gave a couple of negative photographs to my superior; Béchara 101; my trans.). Through this exchange of burning and producing, Béchara asserts control over the economy of images that will circulate soon after her assassination attempt. Even as the Party ultimately claims responsibility for this attack and Béchara becomes an iconic figure for the resistance group, her careful curation of the presented image allows her to assert agency over the ways she is represented. Although Béchara's mention of these *clichés* or negative photos may seem like a fleeting detail, it provides us with a way of thinking about her ambivalent entrance into history through her controlled production and dissemination of images. The negative image has already been developed, but the light and

darkness of the plastic film appear inverted without the help of a film scanner. This means that the lightest areas of the photographed subject appear darkest and the darkest parts appear lightest. Furthermore, the color negative reverses the depicted colors into their respective complementary colors. Although these negatives could easily be scanned by the receiver and render a positive image, the negative quality of the photograph and its need to be inverted illuminates how the presentation and dissemination of Béchara's image requires a completion of a series of steps to arrive at that final positive image. Even as her photographed identity enters the official record of the war through the Party's propaganda, this initial postponement through the destruction of her most cherished photographs and the sharing of the negative photographs reveal an attempt to take control of one's identity even as it becomes deployed by forces outside of oneself. By honing into these negative photographs, one can see how the production and writing of history is not readily given but requires the rendering of what is not readily visible to become visible. Such rendering is not automatic but entails an intentional curation of the image that is outside of the represented subject.

However, such an external force does not necessarily naturalize that projected image. I do not intend to speculate on the reasons Béchara chooses to provide negative exposures to Rabih, but the *clichés* provide clues for reading the forms of editing that are required prior to the finalized image. The positive image, the final and rendered picture that displays the same tones, colors and subject matter of the original scene in the world, is denied in Béchara's burning of the photographs and her provision of the negative film. Even as her photographed identity enters the historical narrative of the war and into the Party's propaganda, this initial postponement reveals an attempt to take control of one's identity even as it is inserted into mass forms of media. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility", Walter Benjamin describes

how the emergence of technologically reproduced art diminishes the ritualistic value of the object and shifts the work of art to a political tool for mass consumption. Importantly, he argues that “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (Benjamin 220). Even as Béchara’s provides the negative film and that negative film is scanned to render a positive image, her outlining of this economy of her destruction and production of the image enables a distinction to be seen in the autobiography between the image she chooses to keep hidden and the image that is projected of her in public discourse. By describing this distinction between the destroyed photographs and the provided ones, the provided negative photographs become revealing of their inability to fully represent the photographed subject.

Last in Béchara’s transmedial editing of her projected image is her refusal of the *nom de guerre* attributed to this operation. Although she does not directly describe the reasons for the refusal of this act of naming, her quick response puts a halt to the naming of the assassination attempt. After having described her provision of the negative images, Béchara says “Cet aspect-là des choses m’exaspère et, lorsque Rabih me révèle quel nom de guerre le Parti a choisi pour cette opération : ‘la Fleur du Sud’, je coupe court sans ménagement” (This aspect of things exhausted me and when Rabih revealed to me the name of war the Party chose for this operation: ‘the Flower of the South’, I quickly cut him off without any tenderness; 101-102; my trans.). Not only does this seem to dispel accusations of false consciousness, but this act also refuses a quick consolidation of the event into a solidified narrative. The speed at which Béchara prevents the naming of the operation acts as a blockage to the Party’s attempt to craft a complete narrative of the event. Béchara’s outlining of her actions prior to her assassination attempts reveals a series of attempts to slow down the production of the historical narrative. By tracing the completion of

these steps, the historical narrative and event to which one arrives is revealed to be the result of multidirectional attempts to consolidate and to defer the deployment of that narrative. In the following section, this slowing down or arrest of movement generates possibilities for thinking about how the film, in its representation of a particular subject, outlines multiple media through which one receives an account of that subject and event.

Transmedial Editing in *La noire de...*

I want to begin with a quote from Ousmane Sembène's first novel, *Le docker noir* or *Black Docker*, published in 1956. This novel tells the story of Diaw Falla, a Senegalese dock worker, who is accused of the murder of a white French woman who plagiarizes his novel. In the midst of his trial, his companion Catherine Siadem is described collecting the numerous newspaper articles written about Diaw. Here, the narrator describes Catherine's attempt to schematize the multiple newspaper articles written about her companion:

Elle avait découpé les articles concernant l'affaire ; les données se contredisaient ; les journaux, rivalisant de détails sensationnels, avaient perdu tout scrupule ; parce que Diaw était noir, ils ne respectaient plus rien

(She had cut out all the articles regarding the case and the facts were contradictory. The newspapers, rivaling in their sensational details, cast aside all their scruples. Because

Diaw was black, nothing was off limits; my trans.; Sembène, *Le docker noir*, 26)

This description of Catherine's découpage/collaging of the various newspaper stories written about her companion can help us think about the adjacency of the multiple kinds of writings and representations that are produced in the wake of Diouana Gomis' death. By outlining these competing representations of Diaw through Catherine's collaging, Sembène describes how the Black body becomes the locus of a phantasmatic investment onto which contradictory and

competing claims are written. This quote from Sembène's first novel indexes a transmedial operation insofar as the collaged documents of mass print are incorporated into the novel form to reveal the collective investment in villainizing the represented Black subject. The *découpage* puts these preceding writings side by side, not simply to replicate their violences, but to redescribe them in their dissonance amongst each other and with their represented subject.

In this chapter, I argue that Sembène through *La noire de...* (1966) resists the completion of the projected story by pointing to the forms of editing across multiple media forms through which Diouana Gomis is invoked in the film. This gathering of information about Gomis does not simply establish an alternative account that reinscribes a solidified narrative of her life, but points to the dissonance between the multiple writings about her. By adjoining these multiple representations within a representation, the transmedial operations between speech and writing and mass print and moving image critically redescribe the means through which Gomis appears in discourse. Furthermore, the film enables her appearance into discourse to move beyond such limited conditions of appearance. Through description and disclosure, the projected Diouana also disarticulates those attempts to contain the story. In examining how the documents written about Diouana are presented on-screen, the film acts as a domicile of multiple signs that points to the series of edits made to the signified source. Such a practice of redescription reinscribes a narrative but also point to how this narrative leaks from its contained site.

La noire de... (1966) stages a series of mediators that seek to enable access to the on-screen Diouana. In foregrounding these mediators in our line of access to her, Sembène also tracks the multiple transformations that are necessitated in the establishment of a narrative about Gomis. The mother's letter that is sent to Diouana's two employers is written by the *écrivain public* (public scribe) played by Ousmane Sembène. In this staged scene of writing, the mother's

speech is transcribed onto the paper by this public scribe. This transcription indexes two transformations: a translation from a Senegalese language into French and from oral speech to written document. By viewing these two transformations in this communicative effort with Diouana as a process of editing, the means through which one accesses the source is constituted by its own instability.

The translation from a Senegalese language into French indexes how the French language acts as conduit through which the viewer or reader ostensibly gains access to Diouana. Although we do not know the exact language she speaks, Gomis and her mother both would have spoken Wolof and likely other languages such as Pulaar, Sereer, Manjak and Arabic (Calhoun 155). The letter that is staged in the film indexes a translation process from any one of these languages into French. Here, the written French language becomes the vehicle through which one comes into contact with the on-screen Diouana. The mother's letter is written in French, the language of the two employers, so that it can be read aloud to the daughter who is illiterate. The intended audience is not solely the person to whom the letter is addressed, but for the two employers who can read this language. Here, access to the source is deferred as the intended receiver of the mother's letter is refracted between the on-screen employers and Diouana. Reading aloud a section of the mother's letter, Monsieur says "Je sais que tu ne sais pas écrire. Mais je suis sûre que ta patronne le fera pour toi car c'est une grande dame et une mère" (I know that you do not know how to write. But I am sure that your boss (feminine) will do it for you because she is a good lady and a mother; my trans.; *La noire de...* 38:35 – 38:40). The mother's speech to Gomis recognizes that her daughter is unable to read the French words on the paper and asks Madame to read and respond to this letter for Diouana. However, this letter is read aloud and responded to by the male employer. The communication that would have manifested between these women is

intercepted by two men. This first happens between Diouana's mother and the public scribe and then between Diouana and Monsieur. These two men who communicate in French are inserted into this line of communication between Diouana and her mother. By placing these interceptors within this attempt to contact Diouana, the film directly reveals how this communication is structurally forced to be articulated through the French language and through two men. By revealing these conditions through which the letter is written and read, the French language is shown as the privileged means from which a historical narrative can be crafted and projected. The primacy of French as the language of communication becomes even clearer when Diouana and the other Senegalese characters speak French amongst themselves. As Calhoun notes, less than one percent of women in Senegal were able to speak French at the time of the film (135). Although it seems quite reasonable to write to Diouana in French so that it could be read aloud by the literate employer, the presence of French in the communication among the Senegalese characters in the flashbacks to Diouana's life in Dakar suggests a compulsoriness to communicating in this language. Instead of naturalizing French as the privileged means through which one comes into contact with Diouana, the references to these processes of mediation and mediating figures reveal how one's established access to the source is forced to pass through the words of this language.

The second transformation that manifests through the letter is from the spoken to written form. Through this transcription of speech, contact is sought to be assured to the on-screen Diouana. However, this contact is deflected as she refuses to outwardly voice a response that could be transcribed through Monsieur's hand. Through Diouana's refusal to outwardly speak a response, the written letter fails to elicit and produce speech that is legible to her employer. Souleymane Bachir Diagne reflecting on Amadou Hampâté Bâ's proverb: "An elder who dies is

a library in flames”³ says that “The only way to save this library is to tear it out of its container, living today but betrothed to death, in order to give its hand to the perennity of writing”⁴ (Diagne 22). Through this refusal to speak aloud to her employers, Diouana evades attempts to consign her consciousness to the perennity of writing. This staged refusal to speak keeps an assignable consciousness within a container. Framed in this way, Diouana’s silence begins to operate as a rumor precisely as her speech is staged as inaccessible to her employers and is not registered onto the written form. Stephen Best describes the *rumor in the archive* as “an appearance made possible only in its disappearance; an aspiration registered at the moment of its suppression; a power that reaffirms itself by liquidating its sources” (Best 123). Rumor, here, helps describe how Diouana’s silence is rendered noticeable through the film’s projection of the proliferation of writings about her. Rumor in this instance becomes deployed, not as transmissible and circulating sound, but as a marked absence of speech that is felt in opposition to what has been already solidified in writing. Through this scene in which the employer attempts to write Diouana’s consciousness, silence does not simply operate as the empty space that passively permits a written representation that appears as her voice but registers how that source refuses to disclose itself to a recording apparatus.

Furthermore, the presentation of the written account of Diouana’s conditions via the letter written by Monsieur foregrounds how the reception of this account is conditioned by an act of domiciliation that gathers multiple signs. When Monsieur begins writing the letter in the place of Diouana, his body blocks the document on which the reply is written. In this shot, Monsieur is foregrounded with his body partially facing away from the camera. Madame is seated to his left

³ “Un viellard qui meurt, c’est une bibliothèque qui brûle”

⁴ “La seule manière de sauver cette bibliothèque de la destruction est alors de l’arracher à son contenant vivant mais aujourd’hui promis à la mort la confier à la pérennité de l’écriture”

and is partially blocked by Monsieur's body. Diouana is directly seated in front of him and whose face is completely visible to the viewer (see fig. 1). The composition of this shot that arranges these three bodies potentially gestures toward how the story one receives of Diouana is produced through the writing of another as his body prevents a full view of the document. Jacques Derrida's attention to the archive can help us think about the way Sembène positions these bodies within the camera's view. Derrida derives this term from the Greek *arkheion* which was initially the house of the superior magistrate or *archons*. Regarding these rulers, Derrida says

On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house...that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives (2)

Through this scene, Monsieur appears as the archon who obscures our view of the document but also acts as the particular body that permits us to hear the content of what is in the process of being written. As we hear of Diouana's conditions through his voice, these statements are not simply descriptions that provide us with an impartial account of her life but are statements that one receives through the body that is endowed with the power to interpret the source. The written representation of Diouana via the letter is not directly presented to the viewer as one only receives a view of it through oblique angles. Instead, we hear the contents of what is written onto that document. It is through this hearing that the written enters its own instability as it flows out of writing and into speech. By attending to the bodily speech of the employer, we come to know that the written account is not impartial and written by the on-screen Diouana in an attempt to

establish her own consciousness. Instead, it is written by the individual who is invested in producing an image of Diouana that is thought to assert and maintain his position. Within the film, what is described about Diouana is redescribed by revealing how the account one receives is mediated by these multiple forms of interception.



Figure 1

Even as the audience hears Diouana's monologue, her on-screen speech is not hearable to her employers and is unable to be transcribed onto the letter. Instead of deploying the voice over as a recovery of Diouana's thoughts, the voice over simply narrates the conditions under which she was living in the film. After ripping her mother's letter into small pieces, Diouana leaves the table and begins to speak

C'est pas vrai. C'est pas ma lettre non plus. Elle vient pas de ma mère. Pas plus que je n'ai demandé à monsieur d'écrire une lettre. Et madame n'est pas une grande dame. C'est parce que je ne sais pas écrire. Si je savais écrire je saurais quoi dire de la bonté de Madame. Ici je suis une prisonnière

(That is not true. That is not my letter either. It does not come from my mother. No more than I asked monsieur to write a letter. And madame is not a great lady. It is because I do not know how to write. If I knew how to write, then I would know what to say of Madame's kindness. Here, I am a prisoner; my trans.; *La noire de...*; 40:00 – 40:20)

Even though this extra-diegetic speech is usually thought to give direct access to the character's thoughts, the descriptions that come from the character's voice seem to only scratch the surface of what has already been shown through the film. It is important to note that the voice of this character is not voiced by the on-screen actress, Mbissine Thérèse Diop, but by Haitian singer Toto Bissainthe. Reflecting on how this vocal substitution produces multiple dislocations, Warner says "On a thematic level, the palimpsestic voice of 'Diouana' in *La noire de...* is premised on the interchangeability of the character within the film itself...The overlaying of voices also nods to the way in which Diouana's voice is often subject to being captured and ventriloquized" (Warner, "Enacting Postcolonial Translation" 116). Through this palimpsest of voices, the film participates in what has already been said about Diouana Gomis but makes palpable the sedimentation of statements about her. This representation of Diouana Gomis via Diouana whose actress and whose voice are dispersed across two bodies produces a catachresis of Gomis that discordantly indexes that represented life.

Even as the statements within the voiceover are assumed to emanate from the character as the camera follows Diouana with a high angle shot, the content of what is said does not unilaterally allow access to the character's interiority. In this voiceover, Bissainthe's voice describes the means through which Diouana's ability to write back is hindered by her illiteracy and the employer's written reply on her behalf. As the camera follows her face from a high angle shot, Diouana says "Si je savais écrire je saurais quoi dire de la bonté de Madame" (If I knew how to write I would know what to say about Madame's kindness). This statement does not provide an account of events beyond what is written on the letter penned by Monsieur but instead registers the possibility of speech in the conditional as it simply describes the kind of statement that can be made about Madame's treatment of Diouana. This same statement provides us with a

way of thinking about the transmediality manifesting on the film's surface. Within Diouana's statement, writing acts as the possibility of speech that would enable criticism of her employer. However, this writing is not possible within the current conditions of legibility and literacy. The content of this speech points to the limits of what is available to transcription and to serve as evidence from the source. Here, the recognition of the impossibility of writing and the conditionality of speaking registers and makes palpable the source's inaccessibility. Instead of gaining access to the character's interiority, the staged speech of the voice over captures its own suppression as it registers the limits of what can be described.

Despite the attempt to contain Diouana's story in the written words of Monsieur, the story eventually leaks from those attempts to contain it. The sequence that I would like to focus on begins with Diouana reclined in the bathtub after having already died from suicide with water still trickling from the faucet. Following her suicide in the bathtub, the film briefly cuts to the gifted mask and Diouana's packed suitcase to then bring the viewer to a pan shot of a beach on the French Riviera. Within this portion of the sequence, the montage wavers between arrest and movement. The French lounging on the beach remain relatively still as the camera pans the multitude of bodies. Here, there is a moment of arrest as they mime Diouana's reclined position in the bathtub. Following the shot of the beach, the film brings the viewer to two women lounging and then to two children playing. Following these two scenes of particulars, the newspaper that is presented to us opens onto the camera's view as if the page of the newspaper is being turned. Once the onlooker of the beach opens the newspaper, the film cuts to a full screen presentation of the paper and the camera zooms into the news column in which Diouana appears. In this sequence, the presentation of the people on the beach mirrors the presentation of the newspaper's content as it moves from the general to the particular. While the content of what is

presented on the beach is relatively still, the camera pans across the space and cuts across multiple individuals (fig. 2). Meanwhile, the newspaper is presented in motion as it opens onto the screen and as the camera subsequently zooms into the document (fig. 3 and 4). Here, the words of the document remain stable as the work of montage and the camera's lenses create movement. Despite the written content of the newspaper attributing the cause of her suicide to a case of *mal du pays* or homesickness, Sembène's remixing of this archival material within this edited sequence reveals the lines through which this story exceeds those attempts to limit its movement. Although it is quite apparent that Diouana's story does not enter complete oblivion as it escapes the walls of the apartment and into the newspaper, this sequence provides us with a way of re-reading the newspaper against its naturalization of Diouana's death and as a resurfacing of the story alongside and in excess of its previous iterations.



Figure 2



Figure 4



Figure 3



Figure 5

When read in conjunction with the preceding scene of Diouana reclined in the blood-filled bathtub, the presentation of the sun-bathing beachgoers suggests a differential in the lives of the working racialized maid and the leisurely white beachgoers. This reading is productive of registering how the leisure that is experienced on the beach depends on the work of the maid who performs the reproductive role of housework. Through the juxtaposition of the shot of the bathroom and of the beach that visually repeats reclining bodies, the film places these scenes side-by-side to suggest how Diouana's work and death are the condition of possibility for white leisure and relaxation. Françoise Vergès underscores how "...capitalism inevitably creates invisible work and disposable lives...It is on these precarious lives, these endangered lives, these worn-out bodies, that the comfortable life of the middle class and the world of the powerful ultimately rests" (*A Decolonial Feminism* 2). Here, Vergès describes how the reproductive role of racialized workers in the sanitation industry sustains the comfortability of those who pass through their cleaned spaces. Although Vergès is not specifically describing domestic waged labor, both forms of work seem to be invisibilized because of an expectation of repeatable and daily cleanliness. However, this work is rendered noticeable when the effect of the work is no longer accomplished. Even though Diouana dies and puts an end to her expendable labor power, her death does not lead to an end of the beachgoer's leisurely day. Instead, this leisurely scene persists on those shores because her labor power is exchangeable for the labor power of thousands of other potential maids on which this scene of relaxation depends.

Despite the exchangeability of labor power among domestic workers, her death continues to evade these logics as her story circulates outside of the walls of the bathroom. This scene records the compulsion of capital and the French Republic to enable and produce social death. However, it also indexes the possibility of contending and negotiating with these constraints.

When the scenes of the bathtub, the beach, and the newspaper are read together within the film, Diouana's story is not simply cast out of public memory and rendered into further anonymity. Even as the film reckons with the inability to fully recover Gomis' life, it also stages the possibility of a return to or haunting of the shores of this coastal French city. Through this sequence, Diouana's story fails to be kept within the bathtub or the words of the newspaper as it comes to circulate in the intramural immured by the suicide scene repeated through the film's dramatization and the *faits divers* received by the reading public. Christina Sharpe's use of residence time to discuss how the slave past remains within our present seems especially helpful in describing how Diouana escapes these compulsions that work to assign her death to a stable document (Sharpe 41). Residence time is the duration or persistence of a mass or substance in a medium or place (Merriam). Of salience here is the duration under which Diouana remains consigned to social death through the multiple writings about her and the eventual return on the beach. The medium through which Diouana appears starts at the moving image of the film and ends at the mass print document of the newspaper. Here, the film works as a domicile of signs that taxonomizes the multiple media through which Diouana's story is projected and enters public discourse. The intramural scene of the beach becomes a moment that points to the possibility of a return onto the shores of the French beach town. In between these two representations of Diouana either through dramatized film or the prose of the *faits divers*, the littoral space in which Diouana is visually absent marks a critical opening that points to the inability to render her visible.

The notion of fungibility as the ability of a commodity to be interchanged with other identical units without loss of the commodity's utility can help describe how the on-screen

Diouana is put through multiple media iterations within this film. Thinking with Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman, Tiffany Lethabo King maintains that

Black fungibility can denote and connote pure flux, process, and potential. To be rendered Black and fungible under conquest is to be rendered porous, undulating, sensuous, and in a space and state-at-the-edge and outside of normative configurations...[that] stabilize and fix the human category...It operates both materially on the body and produces Blackness (as idea and symbol) as a discursive space of open possibility (23)

King's understanding of Black fungibility that describes the subjectivation of Blackness as what is at the edge or outside of the normative human is displayed in this sequence as Diouana is circulated from the motion picture to the *faits divers*. Within either of these projections of Diouana, the representative claim of these representations purports a recovery of that story which is unable to be told by its original bearer. However, as her body is figured as transformable material from motion picture to the newspaper article, the littoral scene in which Diouana is not visible shows how that leisurely scene depends on the obscuration and exchangeability of her labor and labor power.

Despite these attempts to render Diouana visible within constrained frames and consign her story to the pages of the miscellaneous section of the newspaper, her death registers tangible effects for the employers within the film as they decide to cut their vacation short and return to Dakar. As they pack up their own and Diouana's belongings, Madame enters the bathroom and glances into the now cleaned up and drained bathtub (fig. 5). Although Diouana's body has been removed, the trickling of the water that was present at the scene of her death is repeated in this moment. The depicted emptiness of the bathtub presents us with an absence but with an absence

that is made palpable in reference to the scene for which the film is known. I do not attempt to claim that such a detail from the shot marks Diouana's completed return but that the trickling of the water visually recalls the event of Diouana's death through its marked difference with the previously filled vessel. Residence time, here, does not solely mark the duration under which Diouana is held in a particular medium. Instead, the term labors to outline the multiple ways her story passes through multiple media forms. Here, the emptying of the source does not simply register as permission to write over Diouana in multiple and adjacent narrations of the event but points to the chains of representations through which such a source is emptied or empties herself and through her emptying a residual trace is made visible.

Although the forms of editing are different across the short story and the film adaptation both are done in reference to the compiled source, Diouana Gomis, from which the story is produced. Across both versions, Sembène points to the ways through which access to the source is a result of the multiple mediations of those who have written about or spoken for Gomis. Such a recognition of interception is not limited to the employers, the press, or the French Republic but extended to the author who deploys this story as a means of critiquing these same individuals or systems. By making palpable these modes of interception, these two works refuse those attempts to create a stable source from which a positivistic story is narrated. These textual and film versions of the story index a transmedial relationship to the source that outlines the multiple media through which such a source is compiled and projected.

Producing Opacity and Scattering the Source across “Incendies” and *Incendies*

During her incarceration at the Khiam detention center, Souha Béchara composed multiple poems about her confinement and the yet to be realized liberation of Lebanon. Interestingly, these poems are not recoverable through the narration of the autobiography.

Instead, the reader only receives summaries of the poems' contents. While witnessing the torture of another inmate from a crevice in the cell, Béchara composes a poem. Instead of providing the poem to the reader, she paraphrases what she writes

Je compose alors un poème en souvenir de ma cousine Loula, morte en opération et surnommée « La Perle de la Plaine de la Bekaa ». Je décris comment la peur nous jette, prostrés, dans le coin de notre cellule, recroquevillés sur nous-mêmes, et comment le martyre de Loula est la promesse de notre libération

(In turn, I composed a poem in memory of my cousin Loula who died in an operation and was nicknamed 'The Pearl of the Bekaa Plain'. I describe how fear throws and prostrates us into the cell's corner curled up in ourselves, and how Loula's martyrdom is the promise of our liberation; my trans.; 160)

From this outlining of the conditions under which the poem is composed, Béchara invokes a chain of images that traverse across multiple times and spaces. The first is her witnessing of the detainee being tortured for information regarding resistance activities. From this scene, she invokes the memory of her cousin which serves as the inspiration for her poem. She then briefly summarizes the content of the cited poem. Interestingly, the lines of this poem are not readily given and recounted to the reader as Béchara stops at the level of description that simply registers what the poems are about. Here, the text works on two levels of description. Evident within the summary of the poem, Béchara describes the conditions of fear and confinement she and the other prisoners endure at the camp. This level of description provides access to an image of this zone of exception under which Béchara and the other prisoners live. Instead of quoting and inserting the lines of poetry into the autobiography, Béchara stops at the level of summarizing what the poems are about. This description of a description presents the reader with

an opacity that refuses direct access to the content of these poetic works. I argue that across the play and the film production, this production of opacity reveals the ways through which the source evades positivistic representation by making palpable the processes of editing and translation/interpretation of what is projected onto pages, stages, and screens.

Wajdi Mouawad's "Incendies" (2003) is the second play of a series titled "Le sang des promesses" and is the theatrical basis for Denis Villeneuve's *Incendies* (2009). Prior to writing and publishing the screenplay, Mouawad visited the Khiam detention center where he learned of Souha Béchara and her story. He eventually met Béchara while at a dinner in documentary filmmaker Randa Chahal Sabbag's apartment in Paris. At this meeting, he recounted his idea for the play to which Béchara turns to Sabbag and solely remarks on the story's beauty (Farcet 150). Although the play loosely follows the contents of Béchara's autobiography, Mouawad's play notably introduces the horrifying relation that the torturer has with the main protagonist of the play and film. Here, the adaptation extends what is available in Béchara's text to include this kind of oedipal complex through which her first born son and her torturer in prison are revealed to be the same person. This interception of Béchara's story toward theatrical and dramatized ends deserves far more attention than what I can offer here as such an insertion potentially screens over the readily knowable and already horrifying acts of violence that have been described in Béchara's autobiography. However, this Oedipal insertion functions as a structural screen memory that obscures Béchara's autobiographical narrative specific to the violent occupation and civil war of Lebanon. This screening over of the autobiographical narrative becomes evident when the specific place names present within the autobiography are either completely obscured or given fictional names. From *Résistante* to "Incendies" and *Incendies*, the adaptations

transform a political and anti-colonial narrative into a psychoanalytic and universalist tragedy that potentially obscures the history of the Lebanese civil war and the life of Souha Béchara.

With these dramatized productions that have succeeded Béchara's autobiographical narrative, I first want to focus on a scene that is present across these two succeeding works. Both the play and the film begin with the opening of Nawal's will in the aftermath of her death.

Hermile Lebel, the notary is tasked with administering and reading aloud these letters to Nawal's twin children, Jeanne and Simon Marwan. From the play, Lebel reads aloud the letter

Pierre et épitaphe. / Au notaire Hermile Lebel. / Notaire et ami, / Aucune pierre ne sera posée sur ma tombe / Et mon nom gravé nulle part. / Pas d'épitaphe pour ceux qui ne tiennent pas leurs promesses. / Et une promesse ne fut pas tenue. / Pas d'épitaphe pour ceux qui gardent le silence. / Et le silence fut gardé. / Pas de pierre / Pas de nom sur la pierre / Pas d'épitaphe pour un nom absent sur une pierre absente. / Pas de nom

(Stone and epitaph. To the notary Hermile Lebel. Notary and friend, no stone will be placed on my tomb. And my name will not be engraved anywhere. No epitaph for those who do not keep their promises. And a promise that was not kept. No epitaph for those who keep the silence. And the silence that was kept. / No stone. No name on the stone.

No epitaph for an absent name on an absent stone. No name; my trans.; Mouawad 17-18)

This letter addressed to the notary outlines the conditions of Nawal's marked appearance onto the landscape of the cemetery. The engraving of the gravestone is predicated on the deliverance of Nawal's letters to the father of the two children and her first born son, who we come to know at the end of the play and film as Abou Tarek/Nihad. Within this scene, the notary acts as the appointed executor of the letters testamentary who ensures that her wishes are fulfilled. Here, his position becomes like Derrida's *archon* with whom documents are filed and read. However, his

position is not simply granted the right to interpret the letters but to ensure the completion of the demands within it. The written document read by the notary signals toward the deceased person as its content demands her own disappearance from public visibility. Through these demands, Nawal's letter retroactively edits the conditions through which a name and knowable history can be assigned to her buried body. Even as the film's designated source is brought forth and cited, she also produces her own opacity as she refuses an unconditional entry into public memory and a written disclosure of her life. Instead, this history is sought through the twins' own discovery of their mother's story outside of what can be read from the document.

This scene from the playscript that also appears in the film version gestures toward the inability to fully express one's experience through the written document as the letter calls the children to recover their mother's story by journeying to and through her homeland. There are multiple differences in plot and character between the play and the film that I will not rehearse here. Despite these differences, both works point to the opacity of the source from which the story begins. Denis Villeneuve's film *Incendies* continues to work with this opacity as it produces chains of photographs or shots that cut across multiple times. Heeding attention to how these photographs or shots are presented on screen allows one to see how the process of reproduction obscures the source as it also makes palpable this act of obscuration.

Freud's notion of the *screen memory* seems important for elucidating how these chains of photographs or shots in the film reveal the continuity between the relevant experience and the recoverable memory. Freud's formulation of the screen memory can help us view the film as a domicile of signs through which the objectionable content and the attempt at recovery are filed. Here, the film itself does not only act as a screen memory that displaces those experiences that Béchara lays out in her autobiography but also stages its own screens within the screen as the

children's own recovery of their mother's story is placed adjacent to those visualizations of the mother's experience. As the film's montage places the screen memory and the latent content side by side through either a match cut or a chain of photographs, the film wavers between the mother's past and the children's attempts to recover that past. By placing these experiences adjacent to each other, the film puts onto display the chains of representations that mediate one's access to the source. Through this taxonomy of images, the film makes the depth of this line of access to the latent experience continuous with what is readily apparent within the film.

The match cuts within this film permit a reflection on how the work of montage creates a screen memory within the film. In relation to *La noire de...* (1966), Calhoun draws our attention to the ways Sembène's film screens over, as it simultaneously attempts to recover, the life of Diouana Gomis. This relationship between the film and the represented life indexes how the aesthetic work covers over and obscures the actual life that it aims to represent. With this line of thinking, I would like to draw attention to how this screening process is put on display within the diegesis of Villeneuve's film through the match cuts between Nawal and Jeanne. By reading the match cuts with Sigmund Freud's formulation of the screen memory we can begin to see how the objectionable content is unable to be suppressed and is instead placed adjacent to and shown with the act of recovery. Such attention to this continuity allows us to see the film as a document that traces how that relevant experience is recovered and constructed from the present.

The match cuts within this film allow for a visual merge of the experienced event and the act of recovering that event. Following Nawal's birth to her first son, Nihad/Abou Tarek and her offering of the newborn to an orphanage, she leaves her home to live with her uncle's family in the fictional city of Daresh. As Nawal begins on the trail toward the city, the film performs a graphic match as it cuts to Jeanne entering the city wearing the same dark blue button up shirt

and black pants as her mother. Across these two scenes, there is also a match on action as Jeanne's on foot entrance into the city is continuous with Nawal's on foot departure from the village in the preceding scene. Additionally, the two scenes are tied together with a red title card displaying the city's name that fades in as Nawal's departs her home and that fades out as Jeanne enters the city (see fig. 5 and 6). Through this visual doubling, the shots suggest a symbolic repetition or continuity in time as they lay out the relevant experience via Nawal and the attempt at its recovery via Jeanne. The mother's experience as objectionable content is eventually recovered by the two children when they come to discover their mother's assassination attempt on the leader of the Christian faction and her following incarceration in the Kfar Ryat prison camp. In this first match cut, the film allows us to read for a history that is not relegated to a singular event but is revealing of a structure that sets up the contours that allow for a merge of these two times and spaces.



Figure 5



Figure 6

This visual imprint that sustains itself across the two scenes complicate a standard symptomatic reading that relies on the distinction between obscured depth and the displacing outward symptom. Here, Jeanne and Simon's attempt to recover their mother's story does not simply displace the mother's experience as it screens over the original event but is instead visually merged with the latent through the workings of the match cut. Through the visual repetition within the shot, the film produces its own set of displacing screens. While there is

considerable distance between what is relayed to us in the autobiography and what is shown in the film, the film reckons with its own interception of the autobiography as it puts onto display the act of reaching into the past to construct and project a narrative that can be read or viewed. This particular editing technique puts onto display how the film cites and screens over what is relayed in the autobiography by positioning the twins' recovery of their mother's story as screens that displace the experience of Nawal's previously obscured life. Furthermore, the film refuses a standard symptomatic reading that posits the objectionable content as indefinitely substituted by the screen memory as the said screen also permits a visual return to the mother's experience when the film performs a match cut between these two characters. These shifts between the latent experience and what is recovered allow the film to become a domicile of signs that taxonomizes the multiple ways that Nawal's story is recuperated through the twins' recovery of their mother's life or the film's return to that direct experience. This taxonomizing of the latent and the screen allow the objectionable content and its recovery to be placed adjacent to one another and thus creates a surface that becomes continuous with depth.

This continuity between the latent experience and its recovery is not limited to the workings of the film's match cuts but persists in its taxonomizing of the photographic representations of the mother that circulate across the two times of the film. The film as motion picture is an audiovisual work that consists of related images that are shown in rapid succession to create the optical illusion of continuous movement. This illusion potentially produces a solidified narrative image through which the represented are projected onto the screen and taken as a readily accessible source. Such a projection potentially obscures the processes of production and reproduction necessary for the screening of the film.

In *Incendies*, the film directly reveals how these images are placed into a sequential chain to construct a narrative that can be projected outside of the immediate experience of that depicted event. The photograph of Nawal that Jeanne brings to identify her mother in the film's fictional city of Daresh allows one to reflect on how the printed photograph indexes the processes through which the depicted subject is obscured from the viewer. When Jeanne brings the photograph to her mother's university in search of clues about her father and brother, she presents the photo to an administrator who notices that the photo was taken at the Kfar Ryat prison camp in the country's southern regions⁵. From this scene in the university office, the film cuts to the mother's past and shows multiple positive film slides being guided by a hand across a light box that illuminates images of protests with some slides featuring Nawal within the crowds (fig. 7 and fig. 8). In these shots, the photos are not presented through an extra-diegetic slide show but appear as close ups within the diegesis of the film as these photos are moved across the light box with the hands of one of the workers at the newspaper press. By displaying these positive film slides, the film gestures to the chain of production through which a printed photograph is produced. By rendering apparent this chain of production that precedes the printed photograph, the film reveals the means of editing and production that had to have been in process to arrive at the printed product. However, this deferral to the preceding product does not necessarily establish an original past to which one can return as the film defers to this set of photographic representation of the subject or the event rather than a shot that brings the viewer to that immediate event of the protests as dramatized footage. Here, the relationship to the past and pastness is mediated by the photographic medium across two times. Through this chain of

⁵ The fictional city of Daresh and the Kfar Ryat prison camp seem to respectively refer to Beirut, Lebanon and the Khiam Detention Center in southern Lebanon operated by the South Lebanon Army

photographs, the film lays out a collage of the chain of representations through which one gains a glimpse of the past but a past to which one is unable to view in its own immediacy. The presentation of photographic media through which the past is invoked within the film also becomes the means through which the mediation and construction of the past is made palpable.



Figure 7



Figure 8

By tracking the circulation of these photographs, one can begin to see how the motion picture within this film deconstructs itself even as the sequencing of shots produce a visual continuity. The content within the photograph slides that are guided across the screen provide a narrative of the protest and its subsequent suppression by armed police and military tanks. Although the sliding of the photos from right to left suggest an order of events, the curation of this narrative through the display of photographs taken at different moments during the protests put into display how these events are arranged prior to their placement in a fluid visual sequence that projects a legible narrative of that event to be known as history. Here, the construction of this fragmented narrative through the footage of the slides does not rely on the production of an illusion of continuous motion through which the viewer is brought to the original experience that is staged through recorded video footage of such events. Although the frame rate of the film remains consistent with the rest of the film, the content of the shot allows for a momentary arrest to the production of a fluid and gapless narrative of that said event. Through this amalgamation of photographed scenes shown side by side and displayed through still images, the film indexes the distinctiveness of each image in relation to other images. This relation does not entail

continuity or uninhibited positivistic representation but becomes revealing of those gaps between those events that emerge through the image.

These photographs displayed within the motion picture place reproducible images within an additional shot of reproducible images. Walter Benjamin's discussion of the technologically reproduced work of art allows us to see how the copy of the original allows the original to circulate in places that it itself cannot attain. Underscoring the photograph's ability for circulation beyond the fixed contexts of the original in its here and now, Benjamin says that "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object produced" (221). Nawal's photograph in Jeanne's hands not only provides a path for her to identify her mother but becomes the preceding contours that enable the circulation of other photographs to be shown on screen. The printed photograph is a copy of an original slide which is a reproduction of the moment that is captured through the camera. Through this chain of images that the printed photograph recalls, the printed copy cites and brings into presence the depicted subject. However, the succeeding scene of the slide film suggests a deferral to the original as the subject to be recovered, Nawal, remains within the circulation of photographic representation. Even as the film records and files all of these photographic representations, its deferral of a dramatized scene of such an event produces a distinct surface of representations that point to the original event as it simultaneously indexes its inability to make a return to its immediacy.

Through this collaging of the multiple photographic representations of Nawal, the film presents us with a palimpsest of screens through which the story of Souha Béchara is accessed.

The film does not simply act as a *screen* of and for this autobiography but brings into view the palimpsest of mediations by staging a chain of representations through which such a source is accessed via the photographs presented within the frame of the shot. This continuous chain of photographs allows the time of the recovery of the mother's narrative through Jeanne and the direct experience of the mother to be graphically imposed onto each other and reveals the chain of representations that recall the two times of the film. The interpretation scene through which Souha (Béchara) emerges and potentially haunts the film allows for a reflection on how the source is cited and deflected within the film. This matrix of citation and deflection in relation to practices of interpretation and translation enable the film to act as a domicile of signs that indexes the multiple transformations that condition the projection of a narrative.

The procedure of interpretation within the film allows for a reflection on how the source and source text are rendered present with the help of an appointed narrator through whom the source is transposed into another medium. The conversation between Jeanne and the women of Nawal's village is facilitated by the linguistic work of a young woman named Samia who speaks Arabic and French. Through this scene, the mother's story is partially obscured by a linguistic difference that is negotiated by an interpreter. In an attempt to gain more information about her mother, Jeanne asks an elderly woman named Souha if she knows of Nawal Marwan. Through



Figure 9

this scene, access to the mother is not solely in the hands of the elderly woman who refuses to

provide additional information about Nawal but is also revealed to be linguistically mediated by the appointed interpreter. Within this scene, the film stages a series of interceptions with which one is called to contend to access the mother's story.

Interestingly, the elderly woman who is able to provide some verification of Nawal Marwan's personal history shares the same first name as Souha Béchara. As Jeanne attempts to uncover her mother's story through this conversation, Souha's story as relayed in the autobiography is indexed through this elderly informant from whom Jeanne seeks knowledge about Nawal (fig. 9). Here, the source is dispersed between the mother who is depicted on the photograph that Jeanne circulates around the room and with the elderly woman who shares the same name as the author of the autobiographical narrative. The match cuts and the chain of photographs within the film have already provided us with a way of thinking about how the source has been deflected through the sequencing of imaged shots. Here, interpretation and translation allow us to see how what is spoken and written about the source is relayed through the interception of a mediator even as it may be received as a completed narrative.

Within this scene in the sitting room, the interception is performed by a character who stands in for the source of inspiration for this film. Souleymane Bachir Diagne's usage of *transvasement* to describe translingual processes as a pouring from one vessel to another seems significant for understanding the processes of substitution within this scene (52). This process of interpretation is not solely revealed on the level of the conversation between Jeanne and the women in the sitting room, but through Souha's body itself. Through this scene, the original is put into an unstable position as the film's obscured source to be recovered, Nawal Marwan, is placed alongside a stand in for the original, Souha Béchara, via Souha. Although to recognize such a substitution in viewing would require knowledge of the historical conditions from which

the play and film are produced, such a recognition of the author of the autobiography through a character who can provide information on Nawal relies on a doubling that prevents further speech about Nawal as the character's presence also cites the film's source text. Here, the woman named Souha refuses to provide any further information about Nawal's mother. The entire conversation is facilitated with the help of Samia who translates between French and Arabic, but who remains out of frame as Jeanne and Souha speak to each other. This enclosed sitting room in which an encounter is made with this substitution of Souha invites Derrida's reflection on spectral existences: "A phantom can thus be sensitive to idiom. Welcoming to this one, allergic to that one. One does not address it in just any language. It is a law of economy, once again, a law of the *oikos*, of the transaction of signs and values, but also of some familial domesticity: haunting implies places, a habitation, and always a haunted house" (86). Not only is this stand-in for Béchara approached in spoken Arabic, but she is also found within an enclosed space built for conversation. Here, the citation of Béchara via the elderly Souha permits a haunting that indexes the source for this film. Instead of acting as an informant who can readily provide a positivist description of Nawal's story to Jeanne, the on-screen Souha acts as a contained vase that refuses to further speak about Nawal. It is in this refusal that the on-screen Souha prevents her speech from being deployed as useful information toward the act of recovery.

Through the film's staging of this substitution, translation and interpretation come to directly bear on the processes of adaptation. Adaptation is commonly thought as a form of translation that reimagines the source material from one medium to another. Mouawad's play and Villeneuve's film evidently draw on Souha Béchara's autobiography to create these two dramatized works that potentially screen over and obscure the life that is relayed within the autobiography. However, the need for interpretation and the substitution of Béchara via Souha in

this scene make tangible the source text and the multiple ways it is mediated. Through this staged interpretation scene, we can also begin to see adaptation as a description of a description.

Returning to Béchara's paraphrased poems can help bring out this doubled description more clearly as such a summary produces an opacity that blocks unilateral access to the poetic work.

Instead of viewing these descriptions of descriptions as statements that block access to the original description, these descriptive practices that succeed the original also produce their own screens that index the ways that the source evades full recovery.

Conclusion

I have attempted to outline how across the genealogies of adaptation of the two films, *La noire de...* (1966) and *Incendies* (2010), forms of editing are made palpable in relation to media forms that are incorporated into the discussed text. I began the discussion of these works by first situating *La noire de...* in line with Sembène's short story published in *Voltaire*. The projection of these forms of editing across these two versions of Diouana Gomis' story reveal how the indexed source passes through multiple forms of media and editing that work to construct a knowable source. However, such a projection of the source is not unilaterally defining nor confining as Sembène's two works also bring to the fore the processes through which one receives the discursive narration of such a story. Alongside Sembène's works, I discussed Denis Villeneuve's film *Incendies* in relation to Souha Béchara's autobiography *Résistante* and Wajdi Mouawad's play "Incendies". This set of texts heeds attention to the circulation of photographs that simultaneously cite and deflect from the depicted subject. Furthermore, these particular texts permit a reflection on how the surface of the film complicates a symptomatic reading as they visibilize the latent content to place it adjacent to the act of recovery. Across these two works, the

medium through which one is ostensibly given access to the source material comes to reveal the inability to fully refer to and recover that source.

Although these sets of texts do not explicitly suggest comparison between Senegal and Lebanon, evident within these texts are the citations of the forms of mediations through which one is thought to gain access to the source. Here, the production of constellations between these two spaces does not rely on a concrete historical connection but an outlining of these forms of aesthetic production that work alongside what is readily apparent in the archive. Across *La noire de...*, *Incendies*, and their respective preceding iterations, the act of recovering the past does not necessarily rely on a full and positivistic return to that depicted subject-event even as they become readily apparent and visible in the film versions. Instead, the recovery of the past within these two sets of texts relies on a description of a description. It is through this redescription that one comes to see how the source is designated and composed of multiple edits. By making these edits palpable, the source reveals the ways that prevailing discourses fail to totally subsume her. Although Diouana Gomis and Souha Béchara make their appearance through the words and images of others this redescription does not unilaterally entail a continuation of the modes of erasure present in what is readily available as plain evidence. Frantz Fanon in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, outlines a practice of description that does not simply rest with its sedimentation as an unchangeable fact:

En principe, d'ailleurs, l'intention de décrire semble bien impliquer un souci critique et par-là une exigence de dépassement vers quelque solution. La littérature officielle ou anecdotique a créé trop d'histoires de nègres pour qu'on les taise. Mais à les réunir, on n'avance pas dans la véritable tâche qui est d'en montrer le mécanisme. L'essentiel pour nous n'est pas d'accumuler des faits, des comportements, mais de dégager leur sens

(In principle, however, the intention to describe seems to imply a critical stance, and consequently, the need to go down toward a solution. The official and anecdotal literature have created too many stories about *nègres* for them to be silenced. But gathering them together does not advance the real task of showing the mechanism. The essential for us is not to accumulate facts and behavior, but to unleash their meaning; my trans.; 136)

Fanon, here, outlines the practice of description as a necessary condition for critique. It is not my intent to claim equivalence between these two texts but to show their shared methods of critical description. While much of the work here has been taxonomic in its delineation of the multiple media through which these two are indexed, I hope that such descriptions also reveal the ways through which these descriptions fail. Ultimately at stake in this mode of critical description outlined throughout these texts are those lives that continue to resist modes of political, economic, and aesthetic capture. Despite their ambivalent entrances into these forms of aesthetic production, Diouana Gomis and Souha Béchara continue to lay claim on these screens through which their stories are accessed. These stories in their multiple iterations remind us of those forms of resistance that refuse the erasure of colonization and occupation.

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