

ARTISTIC AND IDEOLOGICAL CONVERGENCE: OUSMANE SEMBENE AND HAILE GERIMA

By

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History is replete with examples of intellectual, artistic, and political pairings that have in various degrees influenced and shaped human thought and actions over time. Perhaps the most celebrated of such duos is that of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels whose formulations and reflections on the human being and human society continue to guide and inspire many forms of thought and action in many parts of the world today. Other pairings did occur within the context of what could be referred to loosely as "schools of thought." Such is the case of black literary greats of the Harlem Renaissance like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Zora Neale Hurston whose literary as well as socio-cultural acts marked a historic turning point in black aesthetics. Negritude, taking some inspiration from the Harlem Renaissance Movement, highlights Leopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Leon Damas. The impact--literary and otherwise--that Okot p'Bitek and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have made on literary creativity is well documented. The revolutionary orientation given to cinema and to the entire process and technique of making film in early twentieth century Russia is credited to luminaries such as Sergei Eisenstein and Vladimir Pudovkin. Out of Latin America have emerged progressive film theoreticians and practitioners such as Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino whose concept of "Third Cinema" or revolutionary cinema has made a profound contribution to the effort to redefine and reorientate cinema, especially in Third World countries. The anti-imperialist and anti-neo-colonial struggle in Africa produced the minds of Kwame Nkrumah and Franz Fanon, Julius Nyerere and Amílcar Cabral whose historic contributions to African and black thought and action are only too well known. The traits which mark each of these pairings include (a) some degree of similarity in field action and in ideological orientation, and (b) the fact that the individuals involved are more or less contemporaries and seriously committed to the theory and praxis of transforming society to bring about freedom, social justice, and equality. Ousmane Sembene and Haile Gerima belong to this category of celebrated duos, and in this paper we explore the artistic, political, and ideological thought and action of these two African filmmakers whose work has shaped and continues to shape the contours and essence of the African film.

The differences in their general background notwithstanding, Sembene and Gerima have in separate ways combined to help define the broad outline of what can be referred to as the

quintessential African film. This is a film that dramatizes and exposes the truth of the African historical and/or contemporary experience in order to create a consciousness for liberation from all forms of oppression, injustice, and inequality, and a consciousness for the construction and development of a just and viable African society. The quintessential African film draws upon the artistic resources of the filmmaker's indigenous creative traditions, modifies these, if necessary, and integrates them skillfully and realistically into the medium. Thus, the quintessential African film captures and scrutinizes typical forces in society in a structure, rhythm, pace, and language that are largely, though not exclusively, African, and the mission of this film is revolutionary. Such is the synthesis that emerges from a careful examination of the work and pronouncements of these two premier African filmmakers, one working out of Senegal and the other forced by current circumstances in his native Ethiopia to work temporarily out of Washington, D.C.

Together, Sembene and Gerima account for a pretty large share of the feature films made by Africans for the period from 1960 to 1980. Of the approximately 38 films--documentary as well as fiction--made by 14 Senegalese filmmakers from 1958 to 1977, 8 belong to Sembene,¹ the rest average 2.5 films per director. In the case of Gerima, he is so far (apart from Solomon Bekele who made *The Rotten Existence*) the only known filmmaker from Ethiopia, and to date he is credited with 6 films² and is currently editing a new film tentatively entitled *Calaloo*, for release in 1981. Quantitatively, then, one is dealing here with a comparatively substantial body of work. Both Sembene and Gerima came to film via another medium and for the same reasons, too. How this impinges upon their conception and practice of film will be examined in another part of this paper.

One of the most striking characteristics of the work of Sembene and Gerima is the clarity and effectiveness with which their very similar ideological orientations are imparted on different levels within the context of any given film, and these levels, the most central of which are structural and thematic, work to reinforce and comment on each other in various ways for maximum impact. In this way, the ideology embodied in their work does not in any way emerge as a result of direct moralizing or preaching by the director through mouthpiece characters; rather, the ideology emerges primarily from the structure of the work itself, and it is this structure, a structure of opposites in most of the films of Sembene and Gerima, that enables Sembene and Gerima to organise and control shots and sequences and the component elements of these so that the final product usually becomes a living dramatisation of ideology.

The dominant structural pattern which characterizes the films of Sembene and Gerima is a structure of opposites, the highest common denominator in their work being the framework of polar opposites within which the bulk of their material--the African historical and contemporary experience--is examined. This framework enables Sembene and Gerima to graphically lay bare the nature and interrelationship of the forces that co-exist in and shape African society; forces which, in the main, are conceptualized as antagonistic and therefore locked in conflict. Thus, in its detailed manifestation, this structure of conflicting opposites takes on the manner of a struggle between the rich and the poor, the exploiter and the exploited, the honest and the dishonest, the progressive and the reactionary, the powerful and the powerless, the landlords and the peasants, the political and economic managers and those politically and economically managed. This organisational principle flows from a conception of reality or society as a highly structured and well-organised unit. Unlike conventional bourgeois aesthetics which regard reality as a chaotic and unorganised mass out of which the artist selects and orders, at will, pieces of experience into a work, the aesthetics of Sembene and Gerima see reality as a neatly structured unit composed of basically two forces engaged in a struggle for dominance, and the artist, by virtue of his commitment to truth, justice, equality, change, and progress, meticulously examines, analyses, and exposes the real nature of these contending forces and the relationship between them. *Ceddo*, *Xala* (which Sembene labels "un film de contradiction"), *Mandabi*, *Emitai*, *La Noire de....*, and *Tauw* are constructed on the basis of this structure of opposites, as are Gerima's *Harvest: 3000 Years*, *Wilmington 10: USA 10,000*, and *Bush Mama*. These films not only expose the oppressive, exploitative, and reactionary nature of one force and the oppression and exploitation suffered by the other potentially progressive force, but they also reveal the ideological implications of regarding reality as chaotic. Reality--the African reality--is a reality of oppression and exploitation of the majority by a powerful and resource-laden foreign and indigenous minority, and the systems and modalities of this oppression and exploitation are highly studied, well-structured, planned, and organised. As such, there is nothing chaotic about this reality. The films of Sembene and Gerima expose and denounce the inhumanity of the structures and the dynamics of these systems of oppression and exploitation, and the inevitable lesson that forces itself upon the viewer is the imperativeness of struggle and change.

Ceddo constitutes the most critical artistic scrutiny to date of the history of Islam in Senegalese society. Using the principle of opposition as a structuring device, Sembene pitches on one side the local earthly agent of Islam, the Imam together with his followers, against, on the other side, the so-called

'pagan' African mass--the ceddo. Within this framework he proceeds to examine and analyse the events and the factors that affect and shape the relationship and the outcome of the relationship between these two forces, which represent different sets of values, interests, and aspirations. Islam emerges as a usurper, oppressive, insidious, and calculatedly ruthless in its determined quest for dominance, not unlike colonialism and imperialism of the kind portrayed in *Emitai*,³ a film which also uses this structure of opposites to examine the French colonial oppression and exploitation of the Diola of Cassamance.

The same principle of polar opposites defines the structure of *Xala*, where the nascent indigenous but impotent commercial bourgeoisie is pitted in a conflict with the poor, cheated, and despised majority. El-Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, on the one hand, and the beggar, on the other, constitute the representatives of these two antagonistic polarities whose values, interests, and aspirations are not the same. This grid provides Sembene the scope within which he analyses and exposes the neo-colonial, dependent, and impotent nature of the Senegalese bourgeoisie, and the calm resolve and dignity of the struggling poor.

Looking at Gerima's *Harvest: 3000 Years*, a film set in feudal Ethiopia, one discovers this same structure of opposites. The contending forces in this film are so sharply defined and detailed by the structure that the temptation to dogmatically argue only one possible approach becomes extremely strong. On one end of the pole is the feudal landlord, lazy, unproductive, exploitative, and well-fed, and on the other pole, the peasants, hardworking, productive, honest, and suffering. From this structure of opposites, focusing on the landlord/peasant relationship, emerges a portrait of a patently feudal, highly exploitative, and clearly unjust society.

Admittedly, there is little that is uniquely or exclusively African in this structure of opposites. In fact, some may even recognize in it elements of Marxist dialectics. This is no surprise at all since both Sembene and Gerima are declared Marxist-Leninists. Whatever Africanness is manifest here is to be found perhaps in the manner in which this structure of opposites is used to determine and define the rhythm and pacing of the film. Each of the films mentioned above posits a primary set of polarities and secondary sets of polarities, both of which are complementary, and it is in the repetition--a central aesthetic device in many African oral narrative performances--of these secondary sets of polarities that the rhythm and pacing of the film are established at the same time that the major ideological and thematic points of the primary set are given added force. The ideological and thematic thrusts of the primary set are replicated in different ways in the secondary

sets. This is what accounts for the ideological and thematic consistency and clarity of any given Sembene or Gerima film. The primary set establishes a structural mold that sets the tone and orientation which the secondary sets echo in their own way.

In *Emitai*, for example, the primary set of polarities is that established between the French imperialists, on the one hand, and the colonized Diolas, on the other. Within this set Sembene details the brutal excesses and exploitative nature of the colonial/imperial system, on one side, and the heroic nature and martyrdom of the political act of defiance that led to the mass massacre of the Diola. A secondary set of polarities is also posited in this film, and this pitches the radical (and, maybe, rash) elements in the council of Diola elders against the more conservative ones on the question of tactics to be adopted to respond to the colonial attack and demands. Another set compares and contrasts the firm and dignified stance of the women with the indecision and capitulative tendencies of the council of elders. Sembene repeatedly cuts back and forth from the seemingly endless council deliberations to the quiet and sometimes musical resistance of the women to the French military officers and their sepoys. This navette defines the sometimes slow and sometimes rapid pacing of the film whose rhythm, on the whole, is relatively slow. It also reinforces the themes of oppression, exploitation, and the redundancy of certain elements of tradition.

Harvest: 3000 Years uses as its primary set of polarities the feudal landlord, on the one hand, and the peasant family, on the other, and this set concerns itself principally with feudalism as a system. We also see that Gerima posits secondary sets of polarities, some of which include that established between (a) Kabebe (the 'madman'), whose land was cunningly expropriated by the feudal landlord, and the latter; (b) Berihun, the young peasant who dreams of life in Addis Ababa, and his parents who shudder at the prospect of separation from their only son; (c) Kabebe and the repressive arm of the feudal system; (d) the two little boys who exhibit germs of male chauvinism and the little girl, Abebetch, who refuses to accept male prescription of the female role in society. Within the confines of these sets Gerima is able to examine and graphically convey the myriad facets of injustice and conflicts engendered by feudalism. Like in *Emitai*, the rhythm and pacing of *Harvest: 3000 Years*, although infinitely slower, flow from the repeated back and forth movement between these sets.

The primary set of polarities, then, is systemic in the sense that its main concerns are less with individuals than with individual representatives of a system or a certain view of human beings and human relationships. The principal objective

of the primary set in the films of Sembene and Gerima is to analyse and expose the real nature and dynamics of oppressive and exploitative systems, which, in their case, is capitalism, neo-colonialism, feudalism, or a combination of these. This analysis and exposition is also tantamount to denunciation and creation of a consciousness for liberation. While the primary set focuses on systems, the secondary sets examine the inner details and implications--human and otherwise--of these oppressive and exploitative systems, concentrating on, say, those factors and dispositions in society which unwittingly facilitate the continued existence of these systems and variants thereof in African society.

The secondary sets of polarities should not, however, be looked upon as sub-plots or sub-stories in the conventional sense. They do not develop any ancillary story within the scope of the major plot of the film. Rather, one should see them as sets of relations that are constructed in the image of the primary set of polarities and that complement and reinforce the principal ideological as well as thematic focus of the film. It is important to make this distinction because the plot in the majority of the films of Sembene and Gerima is characterized to a large degree by linearity of movement from conflict to conclusion. This straight linear plot movement, focusing usually on one central idea, is a characteristic of most African oral narratives. The overriding preoccupation with one central issue--and the urgency and clarity with which this issue needs to be conveyed to the African audience--eliminates any tendency on the part of Sembene and Gerima to dabble in intricate convoluted sub-plots that all too often tend to confuse rather than clarify. The wisdom and appropriateness of this preference for linearity become all the more evident when we take into consideration Sembene's and Gerima's conception of film and the role of film in Africa and the Third World, a topic which we shall discuss shortly.

The absence of sub-plots in the work of Sembene and Gerima is not, however, an indication of inability to stylize, nor does it render the work simple. In fact, a close look at their films will reveal a well-pronounced tendency to stylize, and where this occurs its functional role within the immediate as well as the larger context is always clearly defined. Thus, stylization in the work of Sembene and Gerima is never gratuitous. They will stylize only where such a technique confers added potency to their concerns. In the films of Sembene and Gerima stylization most frequently takes the form of flashback, flashforward, dream, hallucination, and the use of sound and silence. Because each or all of these tend to be tightly integrated into the fabric of the film they always bring important dimensions to the ideological and thematic concerns of the film.

Let us examine the following example from *Emitai*. The power of the various Diola deities and the faith of the Diola in these deities are among the factors that Sembene examines in *Emitai* in order to dramatize and, indeed, put into question the role of tradition in the face of an oppressive and militarily potent force. The very deep roots of this faith in Diola deities is conveyed by Sembene through a variant of hallucination--a trance--in what could be called the consultation sequences, where the mortally wounded Diola elder engages the different deities in a dialogue. The marked change in the visuals and the use of an echoing and rather surreal sound synchronized with the sudden appearance and disappearance of each deity creates the impression of a trance as well as an unearthly atmosphere. The point of view here is that of the Diola elder who is laying moribund in the middle of the sacred shrine. The point to be emphasized here is that by stylizing the vision of the elder Sembene plunges us deeply into a fundamental and, indeed, well-adhered to living aspect of Diola mythology. But Sembene does not simply stop there. He immediately contrasts this aspect of tradition with the current reality of oppression, humiliation, and exploitation suffered by the Diola at the hands of the colonialists and also with the practical resistance act of the women. Thus, Sembene not only succeeds in conveying visually, through stylization, a fundamental Diola religious belief, but he also manages to question the practicality and effectiveness of such religious canons in the present context of oppression, humiliation, and exploitation by superior military forces.

Ibrahima Dieng's ordeal in *Mandabi* is an exposition as well as a vehement denunciation of the defects and failures of the Senegalese bureaucratic structures and of the moral responsibility of those who manage or profit marginally from such structures. More than just exposition and denunciation, *Mandabi* is also an invitation to positive political action. Again, in order to emphasize the imperativeness and urgency of such action, Sembene resorts to stylization in the form of a flashback right at the end of the film. This flashback comes a little after the postman admonishes Dieng to think positively and consider the power and possibilities lodged in a unified force of the oppressed in society. The series of images from Dieng's painful ordeal, that Sembene flashes again, superimposed against the background of Dieng flanked by his wives, serve as graphic reminders of the urgency of change as well as the price for continued inaction and apathy. Other examples abound in the work of Sembene, especially in *Ceddo*, which is highly stylized, particularly in its use of dreams, hallucinations, and flashforward. Space does not, however, allow us to consider these here.

In Gerima's *Harvest: 3000 Years* stylization plays an equally important role. Here, dreams and hallucinations constitute two of the most effective techniques employed by Gerima

to underscore the inhumanity and beastly nature of feudal exploitation and the inevitability of change. Just as in *Emitai*, the dream sequences in *Harvest: 3000 Years* display a skillful mastery and functional application of stylization. Not only are they dazzlingly beautiful but they are also very touching and highly provocative. In Abebetch's dream we first see two pairs of cattle, each pair with a yoke around the neck, ploughing a field. Then gradually the cattle disappear and are replaced by Abebetch and her father on one yoke and Berihun and his mother on the other, and behind them the son of the landlord wielding a mighty long whip and driving them like cattle. The landlord is seen dressed in white like his son and sitting on a chair in the distance watching. Then, no longer able to withstand the pain, the peasants together shatter the yoke to pieces and free themselves. This, in the main, is the substance of Abebetch's dream and because of its significance Gerima repeats it three times in the film.

As in *Emitai*, we witness here too an expert manipulation of visuals and sound to not only create the impression of a dream but also to underscore the animality of oppression and the limits to which oppression will be endured by the oppressed. The visuals in the dream contrast starkly with those in the other sections of the film. The dream-like atmosphere is created effectively by the washed-out, almost blurred and hazy look of the images brought about by double exposure, and the use of the freeze frames synchronized with the moment the whizzing sound of the whip tears on the flesh, makes the experience all the more real and painful. The transition from yoked cattle to yoked human beings is significant on several accounts. First, it conveys the inhuman and exploitative view that the feudal lord has of peasants. It defines feudal perception of peasants. Second, that this yoke--a symbol of oppression--is shattered to pieces in Abebetch's dream by the unified and determined will and strength of herself, her father, mother, and brother is highly central to the primary objective of the film. Hence the three repetitions of the dream. It constitutes a living dramatization of the power and possibilities inherent in combined human action and will. Human beings, Gerima seems to be saying, have the capacity to liberate themselves, as opposed to cattle which are at the total mercy of their owners. Whereas Sembene conveys the power and possibilities of the oppressed verbally through the postman's remarks to Dieng in *Mandabi*, Gerima dramatizes them in the peasant act of shattering to bits the very incarnation of their oppression. Through this dream, that is extremely stylized, Gerima reinforces the life of pain, oppression, and exploitation suffered by the peasants at the same time that he puts forth perspectives of liberation, and this becomes all the more significant and encouraging coming from Abebetch, a young girl.

The confidence in a liberated future that Abebetch's dream conveys contrasts vividly with the fears of the landlord of the impending and inevitable doom of feudalism. Like Abebetch's dream, those of the landlord are highly stylized and they graphically underscore the inevitability of change. He constantly hallucinates about yoked cattle (read human beings) furiously charging toward him, and this explains why he always jerks up frightened from his dozes and hallucinations muttering loud incoherences. Other times he sees himself face to face with a succession of workers madly, intimidatingly, and purposefully staring at him, and ready to pounce on him. Here too, the sound, which closely approximates that of mad charging cattle, is as menacing as the stern faces of the workers. These dream images prefigure Kabebe's attack and killing of the landlord at the end of the film. Stylization, then, functions in the work of Sembene and Gerima to analyse and question individual human and social practices and to reveal vistas of possibilities to remedy or change individual human and social malpractices.

Another important area of convergence in the art and ideology of Sembene and Gerima is in their practice and conception of the role of editing in their work. Our discussion of structure touched on this in a general way since the structure of any film is, to a large extent, defined by the editing. The same principle of opposition found to be at the center of the structuring of the films of Sembene and Gerima is also present in the editing of shots in most of their films. Shots are juxtaposed in contrapuntal fashion mainly for analysis and denunciation. Two examples will suffice here.

Sembene imparts most effectively the profoundly vicious crudity and bloodsucking nature of social tricksters in urban Senegal not by words but by cleverly juxtaposing two contrasting shots which, to quote a cliché, are worth more than a million words. The film is *Mandabi* and the sequence is the one where Ibrahima Dieng goes to claim his photographs but gets into a fist fight with the photographer's assistant who gives him a bloody nose. Ambrose, the "photographer," whose camera was never loaded in the first place when Dieng had the picture taken, accuses Dieng of ruining his equipment and wants to jump on him too, but is restrained. Ambrose settles down on a table in his "studio" with a friend to celebrate by toasting red wine and telling his friend that "only scoundrels live well in this country." Dieng in the meantime is seen hobbling off to his house. From the two-shot of the "photographer" and his friend lifting the glasses of red wine toward their mouth Sembene cuts immediately to an extreme close-up of some red liquid on the sand in between two legs, and as the camera slowly tilts up we gradually begin to realize that this red liquid on the sand is actually blood dripping from the nose of Ibrahima Dieng. By placing these two shots side by side, not only is the association

of the red wine with blood forced upon us but we also see that the saying "living on the blood of the people" is given new meaning. By focusing on Ambrose, Sembene also denounces and warns people against professional charlatans.

Haile Gerima demonstrates in *Harvest: 3000 Years* a similar, dexterous and, indeed, revolutionary use of editing to analyse and denounce. Following the death by drowning of Abebetch, custom dictates a period of mourning for her mother and this is symbolized by having her hair shaved completely. Gerima lingers on this process of shaving for sometime and then cuts to a shot of Berihun and his father sitting at a distance from the women. The very next shot after this cut is an extreme close-up of a shining clean-shaven head (or what appears to be one) and our initial assumption is that what we are seeing is the clean-shaven head of Abebetch's mother. However, as the camera slowly zooms out it becomes gradually evident that, contrary to our initial assumption, what appears to be the clean-shaven head of the peasant woman is actually the bald head of the landlord. The juxtapositioning of these two shots in this manner is doubly significant. First, Gerima denounces what he characterizes as "...a repressive custom...in Ethiopia"⁴ when women are required to shave their hair as a sign of mourning. Second, Gerima uses the symbolism of baldness--a natural irreversible phenomenon, no possibility of regeneration--and shaving--possibility of rebirth and regeneration--to underscore the inevitable doom of exploitative feudalism. He explains it this way:

... But with the following shot of the bald head of the landlord on which no hair will ever grow again, I wanted to show, symbolically, the historic condemnation of a class. If the head of the landlord is synonymous with desert and death of an exploitative generation, that of the peasant woman expresses a positive idea for the hair shaved today will grow again tomorrow.⁵

Thus, through the skillful juxtapositioning of contrasting images, Gerima is able to effectively underscore the inevitable demise of the landlord class at the same time that he offers a proleptic vision of future possibilities for the exploited classes of peasants and workers. For, in the final analysis, it is these classes that constitute, in the view of Gerima and Sembene, the principal forces in any process of social and political regeneration and change.

For Sembene and Gerima such a process of regeneration and change can only be put in motion by the concerted effort of the exploited classes, enlightened and educated as to the real nature and source of their conditions. Film, then, becomes one of the

primary and most appropriate instruments for bringing about enlightenment and education. It is out of a desire and perceived necessity to speak to the poor and exploited masses in society in a language and style that they comprehend that Sembene and Gerima choose to make film. Through film they are able to come much closer to re-establishing and reasserting the primacy of a direct and dynamic relationship between artist and audience, a characteristic of the oral narrative tradition and a vital prerequisite for effective and meaningful political education.

Both Sembene and Gerima came to film through another medium. Sembene started out as a novelist and Gerima was initially interested in writing and performing dramatic plays. However, these printed media are only in partial harmony with the artists' overall conception of the nature and role of art in their respective societies in which the artistic competence, preferences, and sensibilities of the majority of the people are displayed in basically non-print spheres of art. Hence the inaccessibility of relevant written works to the classes that matter the most. It is this disjunction between the significant art object and the significant audience--this absence of a vital direct communicative link between the committed artist and the classes on whose shoulders history has placed a mission of a regenerative and revolutionary nature; this severe limitation or near inability of the printed work to establish a dynamic organic relationship between the artist and the audience--that motivated Sembene and Gerima to move into film and thereby bring their artistic practice in closer harmony with their overall conception of art and the mission of art in society. Film offers greater possibilities for dynamic and effective political and moral education in the interest of a better life for all people.

Film also provides for Sembene and Gerima an opportunity to combat and correct what they regard as artistic and ideological perversions in and of film in Africa, in particular, and the Third World, in general. Historically, the films (documentary as well as feature) that dominated and still dominate the vast majority of screens in Africa and Third World theaters tend to be of the most alienating type: colonial propaganda films that extol, justify, and glorify the virtues and magnanimity of the so-called European "civilising mission"; American 'B' movies of gangsters, cops 'n robbers, cowboys 'n Indian westerns, war extravaganzas, escapist James Bond 007 spectacles; spaghetti westerns; Indian romance fantasies; and, lately, Bruce Lee karate and other Kung-Fu packages from Hong Kong and the so-called blaxploitation films. In short, the net result of foreign language (in all sense of the word language) films is chiefly cultural mystification and instilling of cultural apathy and self-hate in the mass of movie-going Africans, the majority of whom do not speak or understand English, Hindi, or

Italian. Progressive and relevant films from these countries are effectively excluded from the popular exhibition circuit. The implications, political as well as cultural, of using African theaters as dumping stations for outdated, inferior, and politically impotent films are obvious. These films provide and perpetuate escapism and apathy as they constitute an ideological beam that blinds the mass of movie-going Africans from coming to grips with and confronting the real sources and nature of their political, social, and economic conditions. These films uphold and reward false models and they propagate values that are not in the interests and welfare of the average African. Hence the relentless effort of those who profit from such films to propagate the idea of film as nothing but pure harmless entertainment, thereby masking the truly negative and alienating dimensions of these foreign language films--most of whose cultural reference points are not only non-African but also unabashedly anti-African in general.

Sembene and Gerima have declared war on this deplorable state of art in Africa. Their films are offered as alternatives which combat and attempt to alter the popular one-dimensional view of film as merely pure harmless entertainment and nothing else. They marshal their artistic skills and sensibilities to give them a relevant significant political orientation, one that helps demystify and equip for positive change. Thus their films talk directly to the oppressed majority about issues and forces that are directly relevant to their everyday lives and in a language that they can understand. For in the final analysis, film for Sembene and Gerima is an instrument of analysis, education, and development. This artistic and ideological like-mindedness between Ousmane Sembene and Haile Gerima becomes all the more significant when viewed against the background of their respective life experiences--one the son of a fisherman from Cassamance, an elementary school drop-out, a jack-of-all-trades, a World War II veteran, a dockworker, a trade union activist, a self-taught novelist who later received training in filmmaking in the Soviet Union; the other, the son of a well-known highly respected literate priest from Gonder, a dramatist who later received an MFA degree in film in the United States of America.

Filmmaking by Africans is a relatively new artistic undertaking, barely two decades old. In spite of this short history and a host of very difficult financial and technical problems it has achieved a level of artistic and ideological maturity, sophistication, and clarity high enough to enable us to better see it as an integral part of a progressive Third Worldwide movement directed at providing new definitions and meaningful orientations for such a potent instrument of human communication as film. A large share of this credit goes to Sembene and Gerima.

Many elements of Cinema Novo, Third Cinema, and Revolutionary Cinema are clearly articulated in the films of not only Sembene and Gerima but also of other equally important and progressive African filmmakers, such as the Mauritanian Med Hondo and Sembene's compatriot Mahama Johnson Traoré. Perhaps the most significant element that unites the progressive African filmmaker and his Third World counterpart is the primordality of their common concept of film as an artistic instrument for socio-political development and anti-imperialist struggle. This cardinal principle is clearly articulated in the pronouncements and films of Glauber Rocha, the spokesman for Cinema Novo, of Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, advocates for Third Cinema, and of other proponents of the Revolutionary Cinema, such as Jorge Sanjines and some Cuban cinéastes. The 1975 Algiers Charter of African Cinema, a short but equally important 'manifesto,' states explicitly that ". . . le cinéaste africain doit être solidaire des cinéastes progressistes du monde entier qui mènent la même lutte anti-impérialiste."⁶ This declaration, issued at the Second Congress of the Pan-African Federation of Cinema (FEPACI) in Algiers in January 1975, merely formalized and sanctioned what has for long been the fundamental pillar in the work of Sembene, in particular, and Gerima. It is this socio-political and anti-imperialist orientation of the artistic minds of Sembene and Gerima that explains the skillful and highly effective and harmonious convergence of aesthetics and ethics, of art and politics in their works.

¹ Borom Sarrett (1963), *Niaye* (1964), *La Noire de . . .* (1965), *Mandabi* (1964), *Tauw* (1969), *Emitai* (1972), *Xala* (1974), and *Ceddo* (1977).

² *Hour Glass* (1971), *Child of Resistance* (1972), *Bush Mama* (1974-5), *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976), *Wilmington 10: USA 10,000* (1978), and *Calaloo* (forthcoming).

³ Little wonder that *Ceddo* is yet to receive official clearance for exhibition in Senegal, a country with better than 65 percent of its population professing allegiance to Islam.

⁴ Interview in G. Hennebelle et C. Ruelle, eds. "Les Cinéastes d'Afrique Noire," *L'Afrique Littéraire et Artistique*, No. 49 (1978), p. 71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁶ The full text of the declaration can be found in Hennebelle et Ruelle, *op. cit.*, p. 165.