

Ousmane Sembène: The Making of a Militant Artist

By Samba Gadjigo

Samba Gadjigo presents a unique personal portrait and intellectual history of novelist and filmmaker Ousmane Sembène. Though Sembène has persistently deflected attention away from his personality, his life, and his past, Gadjigo has had unprecedented access to the artist and his family. This book is the first comprehensive biography of Sembène and contributes a critical appraisal of his life and art in the context of the political and social influences on his work. Beginning with Sembène's life in Casamance, Senegal, and ending with his militant career as a dockworker in Marseilles, Gadjigo places Sembène into the context of African colonial and postcolonial culture and charts his achievements in film and literature. This landmark book reveals the inner workings of one of Africa's most distinguished and controversial figures.

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Review

This is the first biography of one of the most important African writers and filmmakers, a man who remains, as Gadjigo (Mount Holyoke College) puts it, 'an unknown celebrity.' The author intends to rectify this situation by retracing Sembène's trajectory from 1923 to 1956, the formative years in which Sembène (1923-2007) became a militant artist. By Gadjigo's own account, this is a careful 'reconstruction' of the artist's life: because of the scarcity of written information about Sembène, the author has relied on first-hand oral testimonies. He provides numerous insights into Sembène's personal development by recalling little-known episodes of his life--episodes that reveal Sembene's major concerns as he expressed them in his work. In placing Sembène's experiences in their larger context, Gadjigo also re-creates a time period: for example, the reader gets a glimpse of what life was like for African dockworkers in post-WW II Marseille. This book is lively and the many quotes and personal testimonies make for an enjoyable read. Summing Up: Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty. -- ChoiceS. Vanbaelen, Butler University, Jan. 2011

"This is the first biography of one of the most important African writers and filmmakers... an enjoyable read.... Recommended." ?Choice

"[T]his narrative that reconstitutes the world that shaped one of the greatest African artists is a significant contribution to the fields of African, Film, and Francophone Studies." ?French Review

"Samba Gadjigo's book is both biography and demystification. It exposes the situations and historical moments which created Sembène the artist. Concisely and convincingly written, this investigation of the life of a man who inhabited various intellectual, artistic, and political spaces is an eloquent duty of memory." ?Sada Niang, author of Djibril Diop Mambety

"Very well documented, this biography is of critical importance and unquestionable value to students, teachers, and researchers of African literature and cinema." ?African Affairs Advance Access, September 2, 2011

"Samba Gadjigo has undertaken a very important task, that of writing the first biography of one of the best-known and most influential African writers?and the founder of the continent's cinema?Ousmane Sembène." ?Christopher L. Miller, author of *The French Atlantic Triangle*

"Gadjigo's admiration of Sembène along with the intellectual earnestness with which he has documented the life of one of Africa's most gifted artists yields a fine and welcome first biography of a formidable man." ?*Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 42.2, Summer 2011

About the Author

Samba Gadjigo is Professor of French and African literature at Mount Holyoke College. He is author of *Ecole blanche*, *Afrique noire: L'image de l'école coloniale dans le roman africain francophone* and editor of *Ousmane Sembène: Dialogue with Critics and Writers*. He has directed a documentary on Sembène's film, *Moolaade*.

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