THE AFRICAN WRITER AND THE AFRICAN ELITE; AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMAGE OF THE ELITE IN SEMBENE OUSMANE'S NOVELS

BY

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D E D I C A T I O N

To the Memory of My beloved Mother,
Bilkisu Yamusa II, who lost her life in the
Process of bringing me into the World.

And

My Dear Father, Alhaji Muhammadu Chindo
Yamusa II, who more than makes up for My
Lost Mother.

D E C L A R A T I O N

I hereby declare that this dissertation has been written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are specifically acknowledged by means of reference.

H. Y. Yamusa II.

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

This thesis titled: "The African Writer And the African elite: An examination of the image of the elite in Sembene Ousmane's novels", by Halima Yadikko Yamusa II, meets the regulations governing the Award of the Degree of Masters of Arts in Literature of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

Chairman, Supervisory Committee	3/1/91 Date
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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

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A B S T R A C T

This thesis explores the image of the African elite in the novels of the Senegalese writer Sembene Ousmane. In Ousmane's handling of the various phases of the growth of the elite, he traces the history of the Senegalese society from pre-colonial to "Independent and neo-colonial Africa. The thesis also considers how Sembene Ousmane, in his novels, demonstrates the role and the place of the masses and the centrality of "struggle" in the political process. The thesis studies Ousmane's novels from a broad sociological framework for a profound understanding of the complex stages within which the elite and the Africans interact. The image of the African elite that emerges in Ousmane's novels as cheats, greedy people and rapacious, class of exploiters who support their luxurious life style at the expense of the masses.

The four novels studied are; God's Bits of Wood, (1970); White Genesis with Money-Order. (1972); Xala, (1976) and The Last of The Empire (1983). References are also made to some of his films such as 'Ceddo', 'Boron', 'Serret' and 'Saitone'.

Chapter one comprises the introduction, which provides a historical, theoretical and social background to Ousmane's novels. In the Literature review, it is examined why it is necessary to study the image of the elite in Ousmane's novels from all aspects of the elite. In Chapter Two, the embroyonic stage of the elite from pre-colonial to early cclonial period is examined with illustrations from God's Bits of Wood and "The White Genesis". Chapter Three explores the ascendance of the elite, their coming into prominence, the display of their loct and glory and of course the genesis of their fall with illustrations from "The Money-Order" and Xala. Chapter Four examines the gradual decay of the edifice of the elite, the increasing repression and their survival tactics. The revolutionary of Sembene Ousmane is examined with illustrations from The Last of The Empire. Finally, Chapter Five draws a conclusion, provides concise summary of our findings *on* Ousmane's profound insight into the nature of the elite in Senegal and the complex processes they are involved in.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Sembene Ousmane is a prolific writer and a film director. He is a self-educated man and a keen observer of life. His political and socialist ideology were acquired mostly through association with many people in many areas of human endeavour. For instance, he was a fisherman, a plumber, a bricklayer, an apprentice mechanic and a soldier. His genius and experience earned him the leadership of a docker's trade union in Marseilles, France. His activities during his term as a leader are reflected in his novel, God's Bits of Wood. Even Bakayoko, The labour leader in God's Bits of Wood, is modelled on the real life of Ousmane as a labour leader. His first novel, Le Docker Noir, depicts his personal experiences as a docker.

The term elite is defined as a "group in society considered to be superior because of the power, privileges, etc of its members". Sembene Ousmane's concept of the elite seems to concur with D.H. Laswell's definition as:

> ... the holders of high positions in a given society. There are as many elites as there are values. Besides an elite of power (the political elite), there are elites of wealth, respect, knowledge since we need a term for persons who are elite in relation to several values, we speak of "the elite".

The word elite in the general sense refers to a group of people in the society who hold things of value and positions.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

Walter Rodney is of the view that before the 15th century, Africa's predominant principle of social relations was that of family and kinship associated with communalism. He says:

> African societies [then had] the individual at every stage of life... a series of duties and obligations to others in the society as well as rights: namely, things that he or she could expect or demand from other individuals.[2]

Before the advent of colonialism, African societies were communal. Then, wealth in whatever form produced or got by men, belonged to the community at large. Thus under traditional "Communalism",

was easy access and there was also an equitable mechanism of distributing surplus;

Despite the inherently communal nature of most African societies, the situation was different in the more complex ones, the Igbos, the Yorubas and the Hausas in Nigeria and the Serer and Wolof communities in Senegal, the societies are stratified. In African societies, feudalism existed before the coming of the Europeans. For instance, some traditional African communities were stratified and the ruling class possessed preferential, political and military status, economic or religious powers. In some communities, the oppressors were not directly the traditional rulers but people wealthy in cattle, land, farms, wives and children. In other communities, the elites were priests and doctors who are respected for their ability to cure diseases and control the fortunes of men and the natural forces.

Senegal our area of reference, was a stratified society even before the advent of colonialism and its independence in 1960. The two most important groups in Senegal then were the Serer and the Wolof. Being a structured society:

> The social structure of Serer society consisted of Seven Castes, the most important of which was the warrior's

> Caste made up of soldiers, judges and tax collectors. Then were the Caste of artisans: blacksmiths, leather-workers, weavers, wood-carvers, and musicians. The lowest social rank comprised domestic and trade slaves. The social and political structure of the Serer rested on traditional religious practice.[3]

After considering the Serer, we move to their national counterparts, the wolof. In terms of social structure,

> "The Wolof were even more rigidly organised than the Serer castes. The castes of the free-born ranged from the royal lineages at the top to that of the peasants at the bottom. Slaves formed a class of their own".[4]

The traditional Senegalese society was a hierarchical class society in which there were the aristocracy regarded as "the unproductive elements" who were at the top then there was the vocational castes such as blacksmiths, leather workers, weavers, and so on as the middle class and the slaves class at the bottom. The low strata people not only laboured under the social stigma of being considered by the aristocrats as of impure blood (therefore not to be mixed or intermarried with), but they were the most exploited class by the alliance of the French colonial

bourgeoisie and their dependent Senegalese agents. The peasants, craftsmen and slaves formed what is known as "the productive segments" who have been constantly exploited by the French and the African ruling classes.

The image and the conditions of the African elite need to be seen through the historical background of colonial Africa. The historical background of Africa is riddled through and through with all conceivable forms of external domination. The embodiments of external domination such as the French, Portuguese, Germans and British have despered economic exploitation, cultural alienation, and so on in Africa. Class distinction is one legacy of colonialism which has intensified the collapse of the cohesion and the internal unity of the traditional communities.

The fact remains that the latest form of domination of Africa is the European colonialism with all its divisive characteristics. It embraces: political, social, economic and cultural dominations. It is significant therefore to note that the Europeans came into Africa within "The two decades 1919-39 [these] can therefore be looked upon as the years most characteristic of European rule in West Africa."[5]

Unlike the British system of "Indirect Rule" whereby the British imperialists ruled the Africans through their various Amirs and Chiefs, the French imperialists ruled the Africans directly through the system of "Assimilation". The French theory of assimilation was given its classical meaning during the French Revolution. The rights of men were held to be applicable every where, since it was thought that if men were given the opportunity, they would be civilized, rational and free. There is logic in the reasoning that the "assimilation" system is more vicious than the "indirect rule" system. It is hereby clearly explained that:

> The Revolutionary fathers agreed with Helvetius that all humans were essentially equal but that education was needed to correct the inequalities caused by environmental differences. Thus the French, when confronted with people they considered barbarians, believed itstheir mission to convert them into Frenchmen. This implied a fundamental acceptance of their potential human equality but a total dismissal of African culture. Thus assimilation was revolutionary and egalitarian on the one hand but conservative and elitist on the other. The democratic assimilation policy of the Revolution and its lingering influence in later French regimes gave Senegal its political rights and institutions.[6]

At least the British imperialists did not totally dismiss or systematically try to destroy the African culture.

With the advent of Colonialism either through the indirect rule or the assimilation system, most African customs and traditions had to undergo some changes. The European values undermined those of Africa, especially in the area of religions, social and economic life.

However, the Europeans taught a small proportion of the people western customs and culture, the art of reading and writing. Armed with this education, some Africans such as Senghor, Ngugi, Soyinka, Sembene, Armah, Achebe, among others, were able to rediscover their African values, customs and traditions as well as their political and religious set-up.

It is necessary for some of these enlightened Africans such as those mentioned above to play the role of vanguards, agitators and militant liberators of their people from the shackles of colonialism through writing. Therefore, they have to protect against the destruction of some of their people's cultural heritage. Under such obligation and heavy responsibility, the writers lead their people to retain "only those stronger aspects of their cultural

heritage".[7]

There is a need to examine what Sembene Ousmane says about the activities of the African elite against the background of what other African writers have also had to say about these elites. The aim is to highlight in other African writers how they share the same views about the African elite with Sembene Ousmane on the economic exploitation of the masses and how the socio-political and religious aspects of the Africans are being oppressed.

Most African writers and critics have for long tried to find a way of literarily expressing Africa's colonial problems. For instance, some critics have noted that:

> ... a number of authors tried to imbibe, and invoke and impress every vital spirit from outside the metropolis of the administering power. Though each writer or group of associated writers drew inspiration and sustaining substance from differing aboriginal atmosphere and political climates, each according to his situation found himself voicing the protest and conflict to his place and time. That is how the modern African literature of social commitment came into being, and came to dramatise the conflict and protest of the African scene and in African communities in their different twentieth century stages.[8]

The political conflicts and subsequent protests and the fight against the injustices of colonialists and neo-colonialists has pre-occupied many African writers.

Culture-wise for instance, the reaction against assimilation system took the form of a denial of the basic assertion that Africans were a people without a culture or history and that they were fortunate to have been under the guardance of France. In fact the basis of the African attack was a statement made by the French administrator that: "we have civilised these people and built them roads".[9] To disabuse the minds of the French over the statement, the Senegalese intellectuals dug into their past to discover an African past which can testify to what role it played in the development of man. It was Cheikh Anta Diop who gives a comprehensive picture of the achievements of the African past which compare favourably with that of Europe. Thus he asserts that:

> Pharaonic Egypt was a Negro Civilisation. Since the West acknowledges its debt to Egyptian civilisation, it was also indebted to Negro peoples for its present cultural attainments... the Egyptian achievement was essentially a Negro one and all Africans without exception can draw from it the same moral benefits that the

> West does with regard to Graeco-Latin Civilisation.[10]

Though Diop's work is limited to the traditional dignity of the Senegalese, his study shows concern for all Africans. He is also of the belief that lessons must be drawn from what is being read.

As earlier on acknowledged, the advent of the Europeans destroyed the unity of Africa. Achebe, in his novel, Things Fall Apart, for instance, exposes how Europeans ended up in disuniting the Africans. This is summed up as follows:

> ... the whiteman is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion... Now he has won our brothers and our clans no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.[11]

Some of these "things" that held the Africans together were the communal concern and care for individuals existing in the African extended family system. The system has always narrowed the poverty gap amongst the Africans.

In terms of administration, Colonialism destroyed the internal communal cohesion of the Africans and substituted it with capitalistic

individualism. Colonialism also rendered traditional titles, rituals and ceremonies impotent and inferior. It also paved the way for political domination. Thus, I agree with Achebe when he says: "apart from the church, the whiteman had also brought a government. They built a court where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance."[12]

Consequent upon the use of the assimilation policy, the traditional chiefs who used to be the heads of villages, became redundant and this led to the loss of their prestige in the eyes of their subjects. The newly educated elite now filled these roles. One result of the replacement of the traditional elite with the new ones was the creation of educational qualifications replacing the "blue blood myth". Before this development, with very few exceptions of some African communities, people's social positions were fixed; that is once born a royal blood, ever a royal blood or once born poor ever remain poor.

After the 'independence', the management of the European legacies rested on the Africans who were privileged either through association with the Europeans or were their former employees. This group of Africans are mainly cheats or greedy people

enrich themselves at the expense of the masses. To support this arguement, Achebe again has brought out an example of one of them in his novel: A Man of The People Chief Nanga, is a politician who grasps everything for himself. Chief Nanga represents the new ambitious petit bourgeois created by the imperialists. Pieterse and Munro have noted that:

> Chinua Achebe has well delineated a typical representative of the emergent bourgeoisie... Chief Honourable Nanga, M.P. is the corrupt uncultured minister of culture in a corrupt regime of a newly independent African State. In a country where the majority of peasants and workers live in shacks and can only afford pails as lavatories, the minister lives in a pricely seven-bedroom mansion with seven gleaning silent action water closets.[13]

The greed in the African elite is also mirrored in Armoh's Fragments, where Baako, the hero of the novel, witnessed a grotesque episode in the workers struggling to appropriate Television sets which were meant for the public. The novelist tells us that even before then, the Bosses had each taken home more than one set each.

The African elite at the inception of independence, behave more according to the wishes of their colonial masters. Elite are supposed to lead by [illegible]

examples. Ngugi for instance, sees the African elite the same way as Sembene. Criticising Aluko's hero in One Man One Matchet, Ngugi depicts the District Officer as a stereotyped African elite who promotes foreign activities. We learnt that:

> The new African District Officer, Udo Akpan, who speaks of tackling problems in an essentially African way and yet talks and acts like any white expatriate is soon described as "the black white man" by his opponents. He is a graduate of Cambridge Cricket blue. He is a perfect example of the African elite whose self-appointed task is to make colonialism look stock and barrel work.[14]

Soyinka is of the same view with Ousmane on the evils of the African elite. His play The Trial of Brother Jero, depicts how the new European religion, did not only lead people astray but also gave rise to characters like Brother Jeroboam who manipulates religion for his economic purposes. Thus:

> Brother Jero and his fellow propherts represent the religious leaders that crop up in most African States whose main object is to profit themselves at the expense of the masses. Brother Jero retains his followers by keeping them spiritually dissatisfied and thus in continued need of help.[15]

From the above quotation, we notice that religion as one of the arms of colonialism, has aided in the creation of the new class of elite.

Sembene Ousmane is in the fore front of African writers who portray an unflattering image of the elite in their society. The writer gives illustrations of the nature forms and cohesion of these segments of society which the elite through their privilege, acquired through Western education; inheritance, commerce, power or influence to exercise control over society's development. According to Arman, Ousmane is "acutely conscious of the fact that both traditional Senegalese society and the French fashioned colonial society were built upon strong social differentiation or stratification".

As a writer, Sembene Ousmane regards himself as the organic intellectual of the masses. In fact this position is articulated by Ousmane in a British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) Channel 4 interview. He says:

> At times when people do not speak out for themselves, the artist must suppress the concerns of the people. People need a man of power to rule over them. To control the people, a ruler needs an army and the police. Yet a ruler also needs the opposition of artists who act as the voice of conscience when they over-step their limits.[16]

In his writing, the interests of the oppressed social classes are his concern. Sembene here again, regards art and the artist as the channel through which the formation of a genuine democratic and dynamic nation can be built. He asserts that:

> In the past people have belonged to different ethnic and linguistic groups, to different cultures. Until now we have not had a Senegalese or a Malian culture. There was no culture to Guinea or to Ivory Coast linked to language. The Mandigues had their cultures. The Poular and the Wolof have their culture. But now, as a Modern State, we are trying to fuse these cultures into one. We are in search of a new culture, an African culture that will create a national identity which, coupled with external influences will form a national culture.[17]

While the political elite pretended they were fighting for political liberation, they were merely interested in replacing the colonial masters. On the other hand, African writers saw the social injustice, spurred the writers to creative writing which exposed the corrupt and dehumanizing aspects of colonial domination either by the colonial Masters themselves or their fronts. From the point of view of African writers, it is clear that liberation from the shackles of colonialism is:

> ... the common political, social and literary pre-occupation of African writers. It is a Oneness which exists in spite of differences of opinion or interpretation in spite of the fact that some are writing in French culture, while others are writing in English under the influence of English culture. It is a Oneness which shows that it is the political and social revolution which has inspired modern African creative writing.[18]

It would be seen that some artists' works reflect the crisis in African culture adulterated by European values. From the above quotation, one views that the post-independent writers' efforts are to re-awaken the national consciousness of their people towards the need for a political and social revolution.

Ousmane Sembene's articulation of the centrality of the elite, in the underdevelopment of Africa and Senegal in particular provides a comprehensive picture of the complex processes that shaped and are still shaping not only the evolution of the elite but also of the Senegalese society itself. Thus in his works, we grasp the various thought inter-related 'phases' of the growth of the elite corresponding also as it does, with the phases of the transformation of the Senegalese society from pre-colonial, colonial, 'independent' and neo-colonial society.

The elite in Ousmane's novels, thus come from among political leaders, business tycoons, intellectuals, religious leaders, and so on. In "White Genesis", the representative of the elite is a family head and a traditional leader who is pictured as narrow-minded, fanatical and conservative. In God's Bits of Wood, we have a religious leader, Serigne N'Dakaru uses religion to justify colonialism. In the novel Ousmane agitates for equal opportunity for people among African communities... Boubacar, a character in the novel who says: "Iam a smith by birth and by trade, and even if my parents did have to accept a menial place, that doesn't mean that I will be anyone's slave".[19] Also like his fellow African writers, Sembene exposes the evils of colonialism. The advent of western civilization hastened the destruction of African civilization. The destructive effect of colonialism is well illustrated in his novel, God's Bits of Wood, where it keeps N'Deye Touti western civilised girl, outside the struggle of her people for liberation and betterment of their living conditions. Instead, N'Deye only dreams of love in Western romantic fashion and she is utterly ashamed of her people and of herself.

We are told that:

> The people among whom she lived were polygamous, and it had not taken her long to realise that this kind of union had nothing to do with love - at least not with love as she imagined it. And this in turn, had her recognise what she now called the "lack of civilisation of her own people...
>
> When N'Deye come out of a theatre where she had seen vision of mountain chalets deep in snow, of beaches where the great of the world lay in the sun, of cities where the nights flashed with a kind of nausea, a mixture of rage and Shame.[20]

From N'Deye Touti's behaviour, one could see that it was the Western education she acquired that made her look down on her culture. This is as a result of cultural alienation which is widespread in colonial and post colonial Africa. Another story of Ousmane is "The Money-Order", where he ridicules the complicated system of administration which looks down on the uneducated masses and gives room for the creation of the elite as a class.

During the colonial era, the Europeans were directly involved in the systematic exploitation of the Africans; either through the "indirect rule" or through the "assimilation" policy. After "independence", we

notice the same kind of exploitation but in different style by different characters these people are the neo-colonialists - the elite. For instance, the economic disparity is caused by the multi-national European corporations who deliberately built up the class of the elite as affluent and influential men. Sembene Ousmane detests this predatory middle class people and reflects his socialist conviction by bringing out the worst in this affluent class. Beyond castigating the individual, Ousmane satirizes the corruption of Senegalese capitalism and the exploitative relations of the traditional order with the colonial system of exploitation. El-Hadji Abdou Kadar Baye, in Xala, for instance, represents the class of the elite who enrich themselves at the expense of the masses. While the novelist depicts the ruling class as people with no sense of direction yet they rule and exploit the masses in The Last of the Empire.

However, the significance of the elite to Sembene's vision is that despite their divergent nature, they in fact constitute a dominant class bound by the same interest which can only be perpetuated by retaining the status-quo. This can be done by sustaining neo-colonialism and all its vices. Also, this is the reason why they struggle to control all sources of power,

commerce and industry. In other words, Sembene's 'image' of the elite goes beyond their thematic roles as tyrants, cheats and corrupt and rapacious people; to their functions in the total stagnation of their society.

TRENDS IN THE CRITICISM OF SEMBENE OUSMANE.

A considerable amount of critical works have been written on the works of Ousmane Sembene since the publication of his first novel, Le Docker Noir, in 1956. As a writer of French expression, most of his earlier works, appear in French. Criticisms in English commenced after the publication of his third novel, God's Bits of Wood which was translated English in 1962. The translation of some of his works into English helps to bring Ousmane and his works to prominence as an African writer who is radical and revolutionary in his approach to African problems. His concern for the African masses and a preference for social and political economy is seen through his distaste for all forms of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The writer's aim of using Marxist approach is to enable a change in the society from the exploitative tendencies to equality. Because of this socialist

or Marxist approach, Ousmane is often associated with the Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o.

Ousmane Sembene gives us a wide coverage of the elite as a ruling class within the context of their historical evolution and growth, from their embryo to 'traditional' Senegalese society to their changing form in colonial and neo-colonial Senegal. These trends of events are reflected in his novels: God's Bits of Wood, The Money order with White Genesis, Xala, and The Last of The Empire respectively.

This study's concern with the image of the elite in Sembene's novels is based on the limitations of some previous studies on him. Several of Sembene's critics such as Martin Bestman, Dorothy Blair, Firinne. Chreachain, Maryse Conde, Abiola Irele, to mention but a few, studied his concerns with the elite from different perspectives as suggested by the following titles: "Political elite", "The Theme of Corruption", and "Class interest and interrelations in the Post-Independent Novels of Sembene Ousmane", "Sembene and his women", Manipulation of religion in Sembene's works", and so on. Though such

focusses give hints or sometime even deeper vision on his concerns such as found in Firinnne's "self and other Sembene Ousmane's Xala in New West African Literature,[21] for instance, they still do not provide a satisfactory account of his comprehensive encapsulation of the elite as ruling class in a complex historical process. This reason for the limitation lies in the fact that some critics examine only isolated texts, others approach the texts on purely thematic basis while others such as Martin Bestman and Dorothy Blair, ignore Sembene's ideological positions.

Ousmane Sembene does devote some attention to describing how religion is used by the ruling class to intimidate the masses into abandoning the struggle. Thus he describes the antics of the likes of the Serigne N'Dakaru and Koeghbi on behalf of their colonial masters. Yet Bestman ignores this. Bestman's criticism in A Celebration of Black and African Writing, "Sembene Ousmane: Social Commitment and the Search for an African identity"[22] examines the Central issues in Sembene's novels with emphasis on his concern with the masses, his disgust at social parasitism and above all, his revolutionary tendencies, He also points out Ousmane's concern with

the betrayal of public confidence that characterizes the African political leadership as in The Money-order with with white Genesis and "A Matter of Conscience". Bestman's write up although aware of Ousmane's Marxist inclination, does not encapsulate the image of the elite to enable full exposition of their functions.

Another Sembene's critic is Dorothy Blair. Her book African Literature in French,[23] a critical survey of works of prominent African writers of French expression such as Mongo Beti, Camara Laye, Ousmane Sembene and others. Blair attempts a thematic as well as stylistic study of the individual work in their different historical settings. Her work is mainly introductory commentry which do not critically bring out the image of the African elite and Sembene's ideological position. In her treatment of Xala, for instance, Blair exhibits a weakness to appreciate the message implicit in the novel. She regards the novel as "the most pessimistic of Ousmane's works". According to her, the Beggars do not show any sign of ideological commitment or class consciousness. Despite this misinterpretation, Blair's book serves as a good introduction to the themes of Ousmane's novels.

Writing in Presence Africaine, under the title "Literature for the people, The novels by Sembene Ousmane", A.U. Ohaegbu raises the issue of popularity of Ousmane's works. Focussing on "The Money-Order" and Xala, he calls upon the African writers to "come back home" from the common theme of colonialism and face the present African problems by re-awakening the national consciousness of the masses. On what is genuinely African literature, Ohaegbu maintains that:

> For literature to be truely African, it must be a mirror of the people offered to them in order to see themselves and know what they are and thereby measure the gap between what they are and what they would like to be.[24]

Ohaegbu further maintains that Ousmane Sembene's characters represent all the strata of the society and keep close to the present realities of Africa. Xala, for instance, projects disease, hunger and misery. In "The White Genesis", Ohaegbu identifies the lack of education and religious fanaticism which erode the people's sense of hardwork. Summing-up his study with "The Money-Order", Ohaegbu remarks that:

> Frustration and dissatisfaction colour the whole novel. They emanate from the fortuous bureaucracy of public administration inherited from the colonial powers: a bureaucracy which independent African States apply rigidly to African conditions without making any attempt to change some aspects of it to suit African realities.[25]

Ohaegbu's article, highlights one aspect of the image of the African elite. For a clear understanding of the image of the African Elite, we need to have a whole analysis of their activities.

Abiola Irele is the critic that first linked Sembene Ousmane to the literary concept of socialist realism. The African Experience in Literature and Ideology. He writes that:

> In modern terms, Ousmane's work can be best understood as an illustration of the theory of socialist realism that is as a work whose conscious direction is toward the attainment of a social ideal established through the presentation of examplary characters and situations.[26]

For Irele, Ousmane is a writer with a specific social purpose. On the whole, Irele's study opened up new trends in the criticism of Sembene.

Another critic of Sembene Ousmane is Tar Adejir. In his unpublished thesis titled: "Class Interest And Inter-relations in The Post-Independence Novels of Sembene Ousmane", it acknowledges the existence of class distinctions among the people in the Senegalese society and goes on to analyse how they are structured. The thesis is a profound exposition of what the oppressors do to the oppressed even though it limits its focus to one aspect of the existence of the African elite.

There is also, another unpublished Thesis by Ferdinand Asoo entitled "Socialist Realism in the Works of Sembene Ousmane", which tends to do a good work on defining the concepts of socialist realism as a means of instigating the masses to be aware of their rights. For the fact that most masses are not aware of their rights, or how the elite exploit them, it is necessary for Ousmane to first of all project the full image of the elite for the understanding of the masses before he agitates for the inevitable revolution.

Thus there is the need to study Sembene Ousmane's novels from a broad theoretical framework which allows for a deeper understanding of his perception of the

complex processes within which the elite and the masses interract. This study intends to fill in this gap.

Since Ousmane writes from a Marxist perspective, the critical approach which allows for a deeper understanding of his works is the socialist approach. This method helps us to see the role of a writer in the society by reflecting the roles of the elite as a minority class who exploit the masses. For the Socialist, there is no art for art's sake. This is to say, whatever is written, is committed to learning and putting into record. Ousmane declares that: "You will never be a good [writer] so long as you don't defend a cause. You see, the writer must go to the fore-front see things in their reality, not fear his ideas".[27]

Sembene Ousmane's acquisition of socialist ideology is traceable to his activities as a working class member where he was able to identify himself with the masses. For example, a character in L'Harmattan, says, "who sees better the harvest of tomorrow, if not a writer? he alone can search conscience that of the agronomist, of the physician, of the black-smith, of the shoemaker, of our present leaders".[28]

This quotation in essence suggests that the writer serves as a regulator of the activities of the people in the society.

As a committed socialist writer, he belives that African writers should engage themselves in revolutionary action. For this reason, he disagrees with the ideas of the "Negritude" movement which is agitating for just a return to Africaness for instance, the cultural values of the African art. Ousmane feels the 'Negritude' movement like that of Leopold Senghor, Camara Laye, and others, hinders Africans from being conscious of their moral and material conditions. Also devoted to the cause of interpreting their legitimate aspirations, he is suspicious of the bourgeois and the intellectuals whose interests cut them off from the masses and their destiny.

For the purpose of understanding the thematic pre-occupation of Ousmane's works, it is necessary to understand some terms like capitalism and socialism which will be recurrent in the analysis that will follow. These terms will be discussed in relation to the concept of elite as a class of the minority who exploit and oppress the majority lot. To all intents and purposes, Ousmane views the problems of exploitation

from the socialist point of view as against any ideology which allows for individual acquisition of wealth at the expense of the community.

The concept of capitalism is viewed as socio-economic system whereby the lower class are constantly hurled down into the poletariat by action of competition and as modern industrial development. The implication is that capitalism is free-for-all 'competition' for material possession. In the process of the accumulation of wealth, the capitalist has no respect for any value that does not further his profit including the value of human life. The point is that this class of elite who acquire material wealth in whatever manner, subject the ordinary people to untold hardships in factories, commerce and industries.

Capitalism then, is a system of production organised on the ownership of private property and it actually engages in accumulation of wealth. O.A. Lawal says capitalism is:

> ... a tool for development which in turn is possible only through supply of labour by the common people. And for surplus again and accumulation of wealth, the lower class in the capitalist societies are over burdened with work. Despite their real capacity for productivity, they receive little or nothing in return for the labour.[29]

The African writers believe the existence of colonialism are violations of the fundamental rights of equitable distributions of natural resources. Marx and Lenin assert the fact that: "Socialism grants and guarantees to all citizens not only political freedom but also a broad complex of important socio-economic rights affecting the very foundations of people's lives, which could not be fully ensured under capitalism..."[30] The socialist African writers agitate for equality in their various societies can only be achieved through revolutionary actions against the elite as illustrated in most of Sembene Ousmane's novels which will be illustrated in due course.

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13. Pieterse and Munro, Op.cit., p. 58.

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16. An Interview with Sembene Ousmane, in B.B.C., Channel 4, Caption "Africa for Africa."

17. Ibid.

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26. Abiola Irele, The African Experience in Literature and Ideology, London: Heinemann, 1981, p. 159.

27. Marx And Engles, On Literature And Art, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976, p. 23.

28. Sembene Ousmane L'Harmattan London: Heneiman 1970, p. 45.

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CHAPTER TWO

"WHITE GENESIS" AND GOD'S BITS OF WOOD

In depicting the image of the African elite, Sembene Ousmane starts from their embryonic stage, that is from pre-colonial into the early colonial period.

During the pre-colonial era, some African traditional communities in Senegal, the Serer, for instance, were stratified from a traditional head to a slave or the griot. The rulers are regarded as the traditional elite or the old elite who existed before any foreign interventions such as Islam or Western religion and civilization. Ajayi and Webster assert the fact that:

> Old elite [were] people who enjoyed status and whose characteristics inspired others to wish to be like them. In some communities, the elite were the ruling class, traditional rulers, people wealthy in cattle, land, farms, wives and children... In yet other communities, the elite were the elders distinguished for their wide knowledge of traditional love. In still others, they were the priests and doctors respected for their ability to cure diseases and control the fortunes of men and the forces of nature.[1]

Wesley Johnson has this to add: "African traditional society had evolved a comprehensive political and social structure long before the advent of Islam. Islam has [only] influenced and changed some indigenuous

institutions".[2]

The first foreign religious contact of the Africans was the Islamic religion through the Berber Almoravid movements that ruled West Africa from 1056 to 1147 with the aim of military conquest and religious reform and propagation. History too has proved the fact that Islam was the first foreign religion to intervene in the African, ways of life. Albert Gerard says: "It is usually assumed that Islam began to supplement the original animistic religion of the Wolof as early as the eleventh century..."[3] Then the elite were the sheiks, Emirs and Imams.

Among the things that changed or were influenced in the African traditional society were the political and religious activities. With their (Muslims') Mission of conquest, the muslims were able to achieve their aim and manipulate the religion for their selfish ends. Lucy Behrman acknowledges the fact that: "politicians apparently have always manipulated the value symbols and gods of their people to serve the ends of the state and their own personal ambitions."[4] These acts create the religious elite who organise religion of all types to oppress the masses. This same religious elite act as political elite to suppress

their subjects to succumb to the government of the day as we would clearly explain later in the Chapter.

The coming of the Europeans did not affect the survival of Islam because during European colonialism and even after, we still have the Imams, Shaiks and Mallams who perform their functions. The advent of colonialism to Africa also introduced some new values which in turn, created some categories of elite according to their nature and function. This creation of the elite class affected the relationship that existed before then. As earlier on mentioned in the previous Chapter, the relationship that existed between the Africans was a kind of a "communal" one; but with the development of elitism, the distance was widened between the masses and elite. The elite rather established a relationship with the colonialists. It is in the light of this point that Ousmane tries to portray the gap between the Africans on one hand and the association of the African elite with the colonialists on the other hand.

While the old or traditional elite did not have to be selected or trained through schools, the new elite had to acquire some basic education through the schools introduced by the Europeans. These schools or training centres were used to inculcate the Europeans'

values through the obligatory use of French language. This quotation below clearly defines the aims and objectives of the French colonial policy which led to the creating of a class of the elite:

> Colonial obligation and political and economic necessasities impose on our educational endeavour a double task: It is on one part to train indigenous cadres destined to be auxillaries in all domains and to assure ascension of an elite carefully selected on the other part to educate the masses, to draw it near us and transform its kinds of life... politically, it is to make known to the natives our efforts and intentions to fasten them to their place and to French way of life. Economically, it is to prepare future producers and consumers.[5]

Ezra Suleiman adds that:

> the ultimate aim of public education is to create professions useful to the society. The state was going to need qualified man to serve it in sphere that it was to control, and one of the main aims of the new educational system was to provide these trained people.[6]

Through the use of schools, the Europeans were able to train a group of people who later formed a class of the elite. Though the new elite replaced the old ones, this is not to say that the new ones totally wiped out the old ones. They live side by side as we would

see later in the Chapter and the subsequent ones. Serer Mada, in Xala, for instance, is a member of the traditional elite who is respected for his ability to cure people, we still see his role as an elite at the time of the new ones.

"White Genesis" deals essentially with contemporary African society at a time of rapid transition from traditional to modern socio-political life. Sembene Ousmane is able to let us reason with him on the social ills of the African societies by waging:

> a relentless crusade against [some of the] customs or traditions. He diagnoses the evils that weigh down on society, such as the impact of imported religions, the lack of effective dialogue between parents and children, polygamy, the bourgeois tastes of an elite and corruption that has become a way of life.[7]

The short story is symbolic. It is so in the sense that the disgrace brought to the village of Santhiu Niaye by the chief in begetting a child by the daughter of his eldest wife indicates the decline if not the end of the morale in the traditional village. This is relevant to our interpretation of the role of the African elite because after the disgraceful act by the chief, the traditional rules and regulations that used to bind society village together no longer exist. This

then paved way for the younger generation in the novel to move to the city in search of jobs. The decline of the traditional institution leads to a modern way of life. Ousmane in his preface to the story, says: "For out of the defects of an old condemned world will be born the new world that has been so long awaited and for so long part of our dreams".[8] Sembene Ousmane as a socialist, detastes the negative traditional exploitative tendencies.

The novelist, in the novel, shows how the young Africans leave the village for Dakar; driven by the introduction of tax payments by the colonialists. A character, by name Amath, for instance, confesses that he was leaving for the town because of the tax. He says: "I shall leave. I don't want to be here when the toubab-Commandant arrives. I am leaving with my family... I can't keep on paying tax" (p. 52).

For a clear analysis of the image of the African elite in Sembene Ousmane's "White Genesis", the elite will be discussed under various categories as projected by the novelist. In the story, we have the traditional, political, religious, economic and social elites respectively.

As earlier on indicated in the previous chapter, African societies were to some extent communal but that

notwithstanding, the traditional elite and other holders of various valuable positions suppress the masses' political rights. Ousmane in the preface sums up that: "Racial solidarity certainly exists, but it is subjective and it has not prevented the reigning dynasties of modern Africa from committing murders, detaining people without trial and gaoling others for political motives." In this case, Ousmane depicts the traditional political elite as murders.

The elite in Ousmane's novel, thus also come from the religious leadership. The Imam, for example, is a religious leader. Despite their divergent nature, the elite constitute the dominant class, that is they are bound by the same interest which can only be perpetuated by retaining the status-quo by sustaining both colonialism and neo-colonialism and all its vices. For the religious leaders, we understand that: "they would receive no material benefit from it but both knew that whoever held the office would have considerable influence in the community" (p.45).

Another religious image of the elite as portrayed by Ousmane is the fact that the traditionel rulers are expected to be the custodians of customs, traditions and religious ritual; but under the pretext of these functions, some of them eliminate one another for the purpose of mounting the throne. In the "White Genesis", for instance, the Writer depicts a character,

Medoune Diob who is eligible for the throne as somebody instigating the elders of the community to punish the Chief who is the incestuous father by killing him. Medoune Diob claims to be protecting the religious and traditional values. He says:

> If we are to preserve the adda and give example... if we are to vindicate the honour of our community, the couple ought to be punished. The Koran is clear about that. And we are Muslims here. The punishment must be carried out in public in front of every one or the guilty party must be thrown into a well and the opening blocked with stones. p. 42.

In view of the above quotation, Sembene shows how religion can be used for selfish interest, for instance, we get to know that Medeoune Diob's concern is more about the throne than the religious injunctions.

Though the injunctions of the Holy book are hardly abided by, the religious leaders enjoy the powers associated to it. A character in the novel, Masses, asserts the fact that:

> the scriptures are dead letter. For never in this village nor in the whole Senegal, where Mosques nevertheless proliferate, not once have the penalties laid down by the holy scriptures been carried out. Go and see authorities! We respect them and we cherish them, that seems to be all p. 45.

The writer illustrates how the religious elite used their positions to indulge in immoral acts. For example, when Dethye Law attacks the religious institution by saying the leaders marry their daughters' age-mates which is as good as marrying their own daughters, the Imam defends their acts by saying: There have been many of holy men who have had wives the same age as their daughters. The women too, as wives, do not have specific roles in the society. This enables the men to oppress them under the cover of having to be obedient to their husbands so as to go to paradise when they die. Ngone War Thiandum, the eldest wife of Gumbril Guidy Diob, is like all other African women, who:

> had her place in society, a society sustained by Maxims, wise sayings and recommendations of passive docility... The woman found herself a listener. Outside her domestic tasks, she was never given the opportunity to express her point of view to state her opinion pp. 14-15.

The above quotation justifies why Ngone War Thiandum had to poison herself and die quietly in her hut.

As earlier on acknowledged in this Chapter, all sorts of exploitation either political, economic, religious or social, had been in existence even before

the introduction of the foreign system of administration. For instance, the majority of the Africans who are the Masses, had always been at the receiving ends. The Ndiobene ruling class for example, benefitted from the navetanekat Atounmane, a servant who came to stay with them. During her agony, Ngone War Thiandum confesses that a"fine" field was abandoned by everyone because of its thorns but the navetanekat "on his own ... got rid of the thorn bushes .. we profited from his work. All the Ndiobene did" p. 45. Another character, that is the griot, also confirms the fact that the servant was economically exploited by the ruling class.

With the advent of the colonialists, the traditional elite or rather the old elite, were introduced to yet another form of economic exploitation which has given a clearer picture of all the viees associated with the image of the African elite. The first time we learnt of the coming of the toubab-Commandant was to exploit the Africans. A character in the novel, Gornaru, informs us that the authorities do not do anything for them in the village except to "suck" them "like tobacco". These whites exploit the Africans with the aid of their African elite. Through Badieye, another character in the novel, we learn that Medoune Diob, the new Chief of the village will welcome the toubab-Commandant and

after handing him over the tax collected, he would be given ten percent.

Sembene projects the image of the African elite as colaborators with the colonialists. For instance, when the toubab-Commandant came, he was "welcomed under the triumphal arch of palm fronds by Medoune Diob, the Imam and Beye Yanar. Medoune Diob richly dressed... The toubab-Commandant, the interpreter and the elders isolated themselves at the Ndiobene concession for discussions."[7]

While some people desert their nativeland to town because of the introduction of the tax, others become mean. For example, in the novel, the driver of the lorry loading sand, refused to help Khar Madiangua Diob to the town free of charge. The new economic value has forced people to stop being generous.

The writer portrays the image of the African elite as those morally bankrupt, Ngone War Thiandum asked a rhetorical question about her husband's immoral act by saying "how can anyone in Sathiu-Niaye forget that Gumbril Guidj Diob, the father of Khar Madiagua Diob, has committed incest? He the village Chief the noblest descendant of the most illustrious families of the Naiye?" p. 22. The village is morally destroyed by the immoral acts of a Mother who commits suicide, a son

who kills his father and an incestuos daughter.

The image of the African elite is further described by the writer as of those who give priority to birth and wealth rather than the truth. Dethye Low , the griot says the inability to identify the truth does not come from the mind but rather, from the fact that too much considerations are attached to birth and wealth.

Ousmane Sembene projects the image of the African elite in the White Genesis as less than that of the griots who are the story tellers praise singers or poets in the African society. Sembene who is known to always identify himself with the Masses, intones a character, Dethye Law, the griot, to tell Baye Yamar another character that anybody who does not recognise or say the truth is an inferior person. He says: "The refusal to see or hear the truth when one is not able to grasp it for oneself or to make it one's own is a sign that one is less than a griot" p. 54.

Another social factor that enables the writer depict a clear picture of the African elite is the fact that the introduction of the new values by the Europeans has widened the poverty gap between the elite and the Masses. For instance, the creation of towns has caused over-population, this in turn has created more beggars and redundant people. Masser another character confesses

that "There is nothing at Ndakoru [for example] except too many people and beggars" p. 72.

The title of the story itself is the process of the beginning of a new life, "Vehi-Ciosane" means "White Genesis" and this is the name given to the unborn child by its grandmother Ngone War Thiandum before she died. She declares that "With him would begin another life into which would be grafted the unhappy lot of all men renewing and fulfilling it" p.50.
Like Ngugi's Petals of Blood, that ends with victory on the side of the Majority which are the Masses, Sembene's "White Genesis" shows that the future lies in the hands of the Masses too; who are not of noble class. A groit of the Ndiobene, Gnagne Guisse prays to Yallah to "ensure that, although that child is not of noble birth, it may acquire nobility and nobility of conduct. Out of them, the future will be born" p. 69.

Ousmane Sembene's God's Bits of Wood, is a novel that tries to champion a cause or some principles which the author believes ought to prevail. His concern is with the destiny of man, especially as expressed through human labour. He believes that life ought to be a heroic

struggle to defend the inalienable rights of all men to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

The novel emphasizes collective heroism, one nevertheless can distinguish a leader in the person of Bakayoko. For Bakayoko like Oumar Faye in Opay Mon Beau Peample, the urgent Mission is the economic liberation and restoration of the dignity of the working class. The ensuring struggle is therefore political and economic attacks which are directed towards the bosses of the Dakar-Niger railway. Lahbib, one of the strike leaders, tells the director that they do not "represent a nation or a people here, but simply a class. [They] represent another class, whose, interests are not the same as [theirs][9] Sembene, in God's Bits of Wood, does not only provide a precise "political economy" of Senegal but also its history.

Unlike in "White Genesis" where we have individual exploiters as members of the elite class, God's Bits of Wood, attacks capitalism as a system of exploitation. In the novel, Sembene projects a group of whites exploiting the Africans. The measure they took in exploiting the native Africans through the payment of tax in "White Genesis" manifests itself in God's Bits of Wood by introducing their economic policy through the railway whereby the Africans are only labourers who

earn low income which has reduced them to being used like animals. Mamadou Keita or "the old one" asserts this fact by saying: "we have our trade but it does not bring us what it should. We are being robbed. Our wages are so low that there is no longer any difference between ourselves and animals" p.

Few Africans were attracted by these new measures such as the emergence of social forces which represent the new interests; for example, technological or economic interests or trade union leadership in the society. Also, there were in the society, the remnants of the feudal system whose doctrines represented so many different attempts to revive ancient ideas of social hierarchy and to erect obstacles to the spread of democratic nations. For instance, the social enviroment of such doctrines are the problems of political leaderships. These new measures gave rise to the new elite.

For a better understanding of the activities of the African elite in God's Bits of Wood, Sembene has hereby categorized them according to their nature and functions, for instance, we have the religious leaders, the workers' union leadership, and social Elite. Furthermore, these elite could be viewed in two different aspects. We have the guilty and the guiltless elite.

What we mean by the term guilty and guiltless is those Africans that took sides with the Europeans, are the guilty ones while those who struggled for the better conditions of their fellow Africans are termed not guilty.

For the guilty African elite, they collaborated with the Europeans to exploit the Masses. The chiefs for instance, were known for that and any chief that refused to succumb, to their request was severely punished. Chief Mour Dial, for example, refused the rails to cross his lands because he too in his mean way, was protecting his selfish interest. For that, he was taken to Dakar and imprisoned. The Europeans also used force to achieve their exploitative aims. When the strike began for instance, "with a rythmic thudding of boots and a clash of metal a troop of soldiers was marching in from the highway" p.25.

Where the use of force failed, the whites attempted giving gifts such as money or positions so as to create their own class of the elite. Isnard, one of the whites, tries to convince Doudou, one of the strikers by telling him that:

> You know, I'm going to be retiring soon and well, it's you who are going to take my place... How does it feel to

> be the Chief of the whole thing? You know, I can't help feeling proud that the man picked out someone from our group. At least I can tell myself that after fifteen years in the colony I've finally accomplished something p. 146.

The foreign traders such as the Arabs, Lebanese and Syrians also took sides with the Europeans. This has to be so because the whites in return make their lives difficult once they help the strikers. For instance, a Syrian trader, Hadrame, refused to give Ramatouleye rice on credit. He confesses to her that: "I couldn't do anything more for you, or for any of the strikers families. I can't even give you anymore credit or they will cut my own supplies. And I have to live myself" p. 42. Instead, Hadrame advised Ramatouleye to convince her people to call off the strike.

As earlier on mentioned in the Chapter, there are categories of elite according to their nature functions. The new created religious elite were being used to suppress the masses' efforts for struggling for their rights. The Imam, Serigne M'Dakaru, for instance, used his position as a Spiritual leader to suppress the people during a riot that the whites could not suppress themselves. He addressed the crowd by saying:

> God has decided that we should live side by side with the French toubabs, .../ it is not up to us to rebel against the will of God, even when the reasons for that will are a mystery to us. It is always possible to fall into error, but I have done my best to help you with my little knowledge and I tell you now to go back to your homes p. 124.

The religious elite are depicted by Ousmane as European fronts who aid the colonialists in maintaining their status-quo. The writer satirises them as people who are ignorant of their religious knowledge. The Imam himself confesses of having "little knowledge" about the religion he leads.

Ousmane Sembene portrays the beginning of the early African elite by exposing how they betray their fellow Africans. The leaders of the strike made the assertion that the European exploiters have always devised methods as well as magnifying the old one of ensuring exploitation. For instance, through people like Diara, Dauda Beaugosse, we know that the Europeans succeeded to some extent in creating the new elite. Bachirou, the bureaucrate for example, was quoted by Sambe one of the strike leaders saying "I am part of the office staff" p. 29.

The novelist also portrays the image of the African elite as culturally alienated. Ndeye Touti, for instance, is a girl who through Western education she acquired, hates anything African. We are meant to understand that she:

> knew far more about Europe than she did about Africa; she had won the prize in geography several times in the years when she was going to school. But she had never read a book by an African author - She was quite sure that they would teach her nothing p. 58.

Beaugosse, is another character that the Western education had rather done more harm than good to. Thus Sembene rejects those aspects of Western education that serve as tools for social alienation and brain-washing of the young generation. Through Beaugosse, the Writer satirizes the cultural bankrupcy of the African elite. At anytime Beaugosse, for instance, appeared in the public, he was "properly dressed". His salary seemed to be spent on the gratification of a desire to be always "in style and he insisted on being properly dressed, no matter what circumstances or the place" p. 36.

The "guilty" African elite and the colonialists maintained cordial relationship because with them that is people the religious leaders, the chiefs, and few educated ones such as Bachirou, Beaugosse, Diara,

and so on, the Europeans were able to create their own elite.

Certainly it is not the whole elite that are guilty of exploitation like the whites. Bakoyoko puts their struggle in historical perspective when he tells his capitalist bosses that the Africans' struggle is economic and not political that workers have an inmate distrust for indigenous politicians. He says:

> Our deputies, Do you know what we think of them? To us their mandate is simply a licence to profiteer. We know them that, and that is what we think of them for. There are some of them who, before their election, did not even own a second pair of pants. Now they have apartments, villas automobiles ... They have become your allies p. 182.

The above statement throws light on why there should be two camps of the elite class. With close reference to God's Bits of Wood, Ousmane acknowledges the fact that age should not stop one from "listening to the words of infants". Mamodou Fa Kaita, for instance, is an old man that identifies himself with the struggling Africans. Despite his religious beliefs, he is ready to listen and adopt the new system of social change which connotes the existence of equal rights in the society. Fa Kaita says "old people

must learn" because the World is changing. He thus, warns that the traditional mistake of confusing respect with knowledge should no longer be made. In this way, Sembene is able to create a picture of the generation difference between for instance, Bakayoko, while Fa Kaita inspite of his religious beliefs is ready to listen and adopt the new social system, people like Bakayoko are ready to learn and the old exploitative system. Doudou, for example, is an awkward speaker whose phrases clash against each other; but Bakayoko gives him books and urges him to "take the time and study them carefully" because according to Bakayoko, "we cannot afford to risk defeat now just because of our ignorance".

In God's Bits of Wood, We learnt that Ad'jibid'ji is adored by everyone this earned her the name "Soungoutou", meaning the union's "little daughter". Through a discussion with her grandmother, we heard that she believes that one day, there will be equal rights among the people.

Sembene Ousmane believes that with collective actions, the masses will eventually overthrow the capitalist system of exploitation. Here the writer projects the fact that the machine invention has brought the labourers, the house wives, the old

ones and the school children together. This has made them realize that they are bound together in a new system of capitalism. The community is bound together "because their fellowship with the machine was deep and strong; stronger than the barriers which separated them from their employers, stronger even than the obstacle which until now had been insurmountable - the color of their skin" p. 77. The introduction of the new economic value and its framework is summed up by Fa Kaita "the old one" of Bamako as a thing that has disorganised their old system but in a way centralized their activities. He said:

> A long time ago, before any of you were born, everything that happened happened within a framework, an order that was our own, and the existence of that order was of great importance in our lives. Today, no such framework exists. There are no castes among people, no difference in the equality of grain or of the bread that is made from the grain, there are no weavers... It is the machine which has ground everything together this way and brought everything to a single level p. 94.

It is this common destiny that creates a consciousness in the workers to act together and fight for betterment of the community entirely.

With reference to <u>God's Bits of Wood</u>, there is possibility of overhtrow of neo-colonialist elite.

The nature of this success is through collective action. Women too can be revolutionary. The leader of the journey from Thies to Dakar, is a woman, Penda. In her address to the strikers, Penda says: "Yesterday we all laughed together, men and women, and today we weep together but for us women this strike still means a possibility of a better life tomorrow. We owe it to ourselves to hold up our heads and not to give in now". p.35.

Sembene Ousmane like his fellow African writers such as Ngugi, Soyinka, and Achebe, projects the eventual equality of human rights. Adjibid'ji says "petit pere says that man and woman will be equal someday" p. 97.

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CHAPTER THREE

"THE MONEY - ORDER" AND XALA

> It is perhaps worth pointing out that all these men who had given themselves the pompous title of "businessmen" were nothing more than middlemen, a new kind of salesmen. The old trading firms of the colonial period, adapting themselves to the new situation created by African Independence
>
> Sembene Ousmane, Xala.

In the previous chapter, we observed that Sembene Ousmane pre-occupied himself with how the colonial masters; the French, for instance, deliberately planned how they could create a class of the African elite and still present a semblance of good intention towards their colonial subjects. This chapter examines the post-independent period characterized by exploitation by this time around, the indegenous bourgeoisie who stepped into the shoes of the departed colonialists. It projects the bureaucratic bourgeoisie in its relation to the underprivileged ones. In "The Money-Order," for example, the central issue rests on the incompatible, irrelevant and rigid administrative arrangement in the modern Senegalese society.

The European activities in Africa introduced new values such as tax payment, schools, and so on, as indicated in the last chapter. These new ways of acquiring status have created the class of the elite who are attracted to these new ideas and who have imbibed them. In the rise of the new elite, the presence of the Europeans, their trade and other aspects of their impact were important. But the most important factor has been education, especially Secondary or Teachers' College education. Armed with the little education they acquired, the Africans are able to carry on the exploitation of their fellow Africans after the 'independence' as would be illustrated in this chapter. The newly created elite have not only been able to hold on their positions which enable them exploit the masses but have actually succeeded over the past 'century and half' in the society in transmitting practical knowledge which serves as models for the next generation of the elite.

Generally, for the elite to survive, self-image and legitimacy are crucial. Self-image here means according to Ezra Suleiman, and I agree with him that:

> The self-image of the elite suggests that... the elites do not share [and] are in fact fundamentally hostile to, the aspirations which those demands embody... The elite sees itself as being best equipped to formulate the directions in which the society should move because it alone can perceive the society's real interests.[1]

In view of the above quotation, we are able to gather the fact that the elite as a class, sees the Masses as people ignorant of the happenings of their society for that, they only tend to defend their personal interests.

The elite are of various sectors; for them to acquire legitimacy in the society, the members share some common interests as a class and these interests serve as unifying factors of the different sectors. Again, Ezra Suleiman quotes Shils saying: describing elites degree of the structural resemblance by saying:

> This sense of affinity rests ultimately on the high degree of proximity to the center which shared by all these different sectors of the ruling class. They have, it is true, a common vested interest in their position. It is not, however, simply the product of a perception of a coalescent interest, it contains a substantial component of mutual regard arising from a common relationship to the central value system.[2]

Shils' statement sums up the fact that "central value system", serves as a link among the members of the elite class by making them share what they define as the main goals of the society.

The main fact, however, remains that regardless of the "affinity" that members of the elite share and regardless of how much they believe that they are capable of ruling, they cannot endure for long if the society does not accept them and their views. This assertion will be cleared when we come to see how El-Hadji Abdou Kader Beye of Xala ends up his life.

"The Money-Order" is a story of a man's struggles for survival when pitted against the alien and hostile society of the new African city. The central theme of the novel deals with social injustice for instance, we have the poor unemployed people against the bureaucrats and the local traders. The novel features how the elite betray the public confidence the highly decadent and corrupt society that jeopardises the lives of the ordinary people and a social stratification that natures exploitation and oppression of the less privileged. The portrayal of this inhuman and insensitive thwarting of the masses'

efforts is intended by Ousmane to give a clear image of the African elite on money.

Ibrahima Diang, the hero, is depicted as unemployed, in debt, but still retaining his respect among his people; receives a money-order from his newphew in Paris, with instructions on how he is to divide the money-order when cashed. Mety his elder wife, tells him that: "Abdou has sent you 25,000 francs. There 2,000 for you and 3,000 for his mother. The ramaining 20,000 francs he wants you to keep for him" p.13. His troubles begin with attempts to cash the order; for example, he gets into the trap of the adopted bureaucracy from the Europeans. Dieng is also the victim of the evil planning of the local shopkeepers, his neighbours, "relatives" and "friends" who all rallied around him at the news of the money-order. In the end, he becomes more indebted than ever. For he is cheated out of the money by a "boy" who is equally a "relative". Mbaye, impresses the ignorant, and credulous Dieng by his standard of living which has all the trappings of westernised bourgeois characteristics. We are told that: "Mbaye's Villa stood in the middle of the Shanty town and its tumble down shacks. In the sitting-room, crammed with armchairs, chairs and vases of artificial flowers..."[3]

" "The Money-Order", is not just a satifical comment but also a psychological study of a man who is caught between two worlds; that is the world of tradition and the new modern world he eventually found himself in. The story in "The Money-Order", is similar to Ahmadou Kourouma's The Suns of The Independence[4], where Fama the hero is socially humiliated before he finally ends up in a state of desperation at the impossibility of his twenty-year-old "Monogamous" Marriage to Salimata to bear children. This leads him into marrying a second wife, Mariam which in turn, causes Salimata's jealousy. Finally, Fama is forced to join a movement to unseat the governing and the "only legal party". Arrested for detention, he ends up being abandoned by his two wives. In the long-run, Fama too could not, like Dieng, cope with the new regime.

In a nutshell, the story depicts an ironic and pathetic life of the Masses who are still ignorant of the complications and bureaucracy of the city life.

The class of the new elite who are obviously the educated Afficans, have adopted the European system of bureaucracy which does not suit us as such, the method complicates issues rather than solving

them. Dieng for instance, realises that far from alleviating his problems, the money-order which is part of the European system, has complicated them the more. In order to cash it, Dieng needs an identity card, he needs a birth certificate and for the certificate his name must be on the civil list. While going from one office to another, he is duped by a businessman who promised to help him cash the Money-Order. Here, Ousmane illustrates how dubious the elite can be.

Though Sembene Ousmane identifies himself with the Masses, he does not take sides entirely with the likes of the Dieng. We can agree with the fact that in most cases, the circumstances surrounding Dieng have forced him to behave the way he does, but Diang indulges in all those things which combine to pull down the African and deprive him of mental and economic liberation. He is an illeterate, vain, polygamous, over-generous and conservative. It is not enough to say he is the victim of social circumstances. For even though he is poor, he still loves flamboyant dresses. We are told that he had a weakness for dresses. This urge to impose on the other person the taste for dresses always puts him an inch above his "interlocuter".

Dieng's experiences in the story have several implications. On the surface, we are made aware of the fact that nothing has been done to simplify the labyrinth of administrative procedures inherited from the French colonialists thereby making life impossible for the "common" man. The point is driven home as we observe the ordeal of an illeterate Dieng being pushed here and there by uncivil civil servants in a bid to cash a money-order.

"The Money-Order", is mainly concerned with social change. It is however, not as revolutionary as God's Bits of Wood, partly because the oppressed class is not as politically minded as those in the earlier work. The change which Ousmane is agitating for is both ideological and cultural. The writer in trying to bring out the image of the elite, depicts Dieng as somebody weighed down and frustrated by the intricate administrative system which makes it impossible for him to cash a money-order, for that, Dieng resolves to change. He declares that: "Me, too I am going to put on the skin of the hyena .. Because it is only cheating and lies that are true Honesty is a Crime nowadays" (p. 136). It is important to note why Dieng has to take such a decision. He too, had been cheated and exploited by Mbarka and Mbaye out of his money-order.

The image of the African elite is hereby projected as corrupt. When Dieng asks a bricklayer how he can cash his money-order he is told that everything depends on whether Dieng has contacts or not. It is not only contacts that matter with the African elite but that "Everyone has his price. The main thing is to get what you want... everytime you want something, you have to pay" (p. 101). Sembene Ousmane attacks the system as harsh because in the novel, the characters are depicted to have been constantly harrased by civil servants. Interestingly, Ousmane's attack is conveyed through characters who came to life as individuals. In the words of his characters, it is made known that the whole country is full of "intrigue, nepotism, unemployment, immorality... (p.120). The novelist exposes the civil servants as being indifferent in their attitude to work. They are also associated with another bad habit, that of always stealing cash from tho state treasury.

In "The Money-Order", Ousmane depicts the image of the political elite as leaders who are indifferent to the endemic poverty and the suffering of the masses. He further illustrates their corruption,

incompetence and their complicity with the foreign powers. Also in the story, Sembene Ousmane satirises the complicated administrative system which does not regard the illiterate and the masses generally as equal to them. Dieng, for instance, had to go through difficult procedures to cash his money-order. By so doing, he inevitably becomes a victim of the complicated system. Instead of helping, the administrative mechanism inherited from the colonial system rather creates misfortunes to the Africans.

Dieng's experiences demonstrate the gradual exaltation of money to the status of semi-god since the "independence" of African nations. A character says: "it's crazy how people fight over money since independence" another chipped in by asserting the fact that: "it is true. Money seems to have taken the place of morality in our country" (p. 126). The above mentioned quotation sums up why Dieng is afraid to talk about his money-order in the street.

The over-dependence of Dieng on providence illustrates the role of religion as a stumbling block in the move towards progress. For instance, Dieng's belief in the Almighty Allah feebles his creative energies and leaves him a perpetual victim of Mbarka, Mbaye and Ambrose's boy. The role of Gurgui Massa in the story agglutinates how religious piety can be used as an exploitative weapon. This

is so because the Islamic religion, for example, emphasizes helping fellow Muslims; for all they need to do is to "swear on the Koran and by Yallah [for the] promise to pay..." (p.133). As observes by Ousmane, the image of the religious elite in the novel is generally that of deceit which adheres to exploitation and oppression. By this projection of religion as an opium to colonialism, Ousmane seems to be implying that unless its forces are eradicated, its leaders will continue to use it as a means of exploiting the Masses.

Apart from the religious exploitation, social paratism also runs in the novel. A memorable instance is that in which Gorgui Messa turns to a griot in order to earn a living. Other cases involve the prostitute who turns to a beggar, and Dieng's numerous friends who run to him to get their share of the "money-order". These parasites make Mety, Dieng's elder wife, declare with an acid tone "parasites". As soon as they hear someone has money, there they are like vultures" (p. 92). The image of a vulture describes how well the social elite can parasite.

Since independence, there has been a noticeable change in the social order, a change from a situation in which age is no more respected. This is reflected

in the novel there an elderly man like Dieng can be maltreated by young people who have economic and administrative power. Not only in terms of maltreatment by those at the top but "life isn't what it was during...the youth of those who are the parents of today" (p.122).

Sembene Ousmane shows the social life of the African elite as full of suspicion and distrust. Dieng for example, is a generous man but due to the modern situation of the society, he says it is improper to talk about money on the street. The dominant communalism of the past has been replaced by an aggressive individualism. A character in the novel sums up the situation of the past and the present by saying: "I am afraid times are hard. Life isn't what it used to be. You can't count on your neighbours anymore. Nowadays everyone looks after himself" (p. 108). Dieng confesses to his sister that he is afraid times are hard and that life isn't what it used to be.

The role of unity and collectiveness in achieving the aims of a revolutionary struggle is clearly emphasized in "The Money-Order". What Ousmane does as in God's Bits of Wood, is to preach the desirability of collective strength as opposed

to individual or lone questioning. A meticulous categorization of the characters in the novel will reveal that only Mbaiye, Dieng's cousin could be referred to as a member of the class of the African elite. By critical assessment, Mbarka and the Junior Civil Servants are not members of the elite. They are tools in the hands of bureaucratic and commercial bourgeois, whose members might include the ministers, military and the police, chiefs and the multi-national directors.

Obviously, from the above illustrations of the attitudes of the African elite, "independence" has rather given a ticket to them to oppress and exploit the majority who are the Masses. Ousmane ends the story with a tone of optimism; through a "Common" man, Bah the postman, says: "Things will change" (p. 136).

In all Ousmane's works, it is only in "The Money-Order" that the idea of women emancipation is not considered seriously. This could be viewed as partly because Dieng's tribulations are very central and partly because the issue involved, concerns the down-trodden regardless of sex.

The novel, Xala, is a story about the rise and fall of El-Hadji Abdou Kadar Beye who comes under worse treatment than Dieng. The anti-hero is

representative of the class of the new elite which spring up with the attainment of political "independence". From the opening scene, we are impressed upon that Beye is a member of a selfish, exploiting class which has arrived by dubious means and which engages in obvious way of living to the detriment of the nation's economy. The narrator depicts the group as those who:

> had come together from different sectors of the community to form the "Business Group" in order to combat the invasion of foreign interests. Their anxiety to constitute a social clan of their own, had increased their combativity, tingeing it with Xenophobia. Over the years they had managed with some help from politicians to obtain a foothold in the wholesale, trade and to a lesser extent in the import and export field. They had become more ambitious and had tried to acquire a state in the administration of the banks... but their exclusion from the banks had first stimulated, then sharpened a nationalist feeling from which expectation of improved social status were not entirely absent.[6]

The hero has a past that is less attractive. He was a poor Grade II Teacher who was able through some means to acquire a piece of land in Dakar. In fact El-Hadji, is a dismissed primary school teacher who found his way into the business circle where he setsup himself "as a middleman in property

transactions" (p. 3). In his day to day activities, he professes faith in Islam and went to Mecca with his first wife, Adja Awa Astou. The rise of El-Hadji to prosperity has afforded him the joy of marrying a second wife, Oumi N'Deye. He was in the process of marrying or rather, had just married the third wife when disaster struck in his family and hence his misfortune.

El-Hadji's wealth was obtained through his sale of a piece of land which belonged to another clan, this led to a court case. El-Hadji through "the complicity of people in high places", (p.110) got the land and threw the key protester into prison.

After getting money, Beye goes on a spending spree with the backing of the "Businessmen's Group". He ignores beggars and runs after beautifu ladies and flashy cars. He lives a life that is equated with the European middle class. For instance, we learnt that "El-Hadji only drank mineral water" (p. 16). El-Hadji goes on to marry the third wife, N'Gone to his amazement, he discovers he has the "Xala" this means temporary impotence. The novel itself provides its solution with some conditionalities. The Beggar tells El-Hadji:

> If you want to be cured, you are going to strip yourself naked, completely naked, El-Hadji. Naked before us all and each of us will spit three times on you. You have the key to your cure. Make up your Mind. I can tell you now, it was I who caused your "Xala" p. 112.

In view of the above quotation, Ousmane believes that change from the present social and economic conditions is not only possible but clearly foreseeable if the masses are organized and indoctrinated with the right consciousness necessary to effect such a change. However, this consciousness is through revolutionary act. As earlier on mentioned in the previous chapter, Ousmane believes that the role of the artist is preparation of revolution without necessarily realizing it in his lifetime. From all indications, the writer is of the view of the French revolutionary writers such as Voltaire and Rousseau who died several years before the revolution took place. Ousmane, is therefore, with the symbolic use of "Xala", optimistic that inevitably, revolution will manifest in the novel by such characters like Rama and her fellow university students.

The state of the impotence triggers off an unhealthy chain of relations in his life. He ends

up in financial crisis which comes as rapid as his rise because his wealth has no sound foundations. In the process, El-Hadji, the wounded rapacious male, becomes extremely angered; at first:

> He fell ill. He perspired. He the stallion who usually flung himself on women was like pulp. Regret and anger filled him. His body was taken over by bitterness. He had carried his victim to the nest like a victorious bird of prey and now consumation seemed impossible, forbidden (p. 42).

His attention is based on trying to cure his "Xala" so that he neglects his duties at the Business Centre. He spends so much money that he runs into debts. Finally, his business collapses, his business associates desert him and part of his family neglects him. However, as earlier on mentioned, he gets cured of the "Xala", but by that time, he had been stripped of all his wealth, affluence and influence in the society.

The Xala story is a parable of Ousmane's socialist ideology. It is a clear image of the heartless capitalist society where the rich acquire wealth at the expense of the generality of the people, because they must measure up to the confidence of the imperialists that have placed them in their positions. "Xala", the local expression for importance shows

how unproductive the elite's ideology is in Africa. This is so because it appears unjust to ask for more wealth after acquiring a certain level. Here Ousmane's pre-occupation is with the greed and avarice of the elite as cheats who deprive the masses of the ownership of their property. Sembene Ousmane's style of depicting deprivation, poverty and disease poignantly exposes the image of the African elite.

Marxist generally believe that capitalism is capable of destroying itself as the productive forces multiply. Ousmane, being one of them, believes that the bourgeois in the society are not only capable of destroying themselves, but the entire race. In the novel, we hear the leper tells El-Hadji that "I am a leper! I am a leper to myself alone. To no one else. But you, you are a disease that is infectious to everyone. The virus of a collective leprosy" (p. 111). It is the excessive materialism embarked upon by Abdou Kadar Beye that caused him the "Xala" which prevents sexual contact. This lack of sexual contact obviously leads to the absence of procreation. If this is not halted, the writer seems to imply the whole human race will get up one day to discover that procreation has ceased. The portrayal of this image of the African elite is to inculcate

into the masses the need to change the system to a socialist order that generates the continued existence of humanity through its processes of mutual inter-dependence.

Also, the "Xala" is symbolic in the sense that the impotence of El-Hadji symbolizes the impotence of the African elite. Ousmane uses him to explain the fact that the African elite do not know that their sources of wealth are from the masses and at anytime the masses become conscious and rebel, the elite would be helpless. This is clear when El-Hadji, for example, comes to know that his source of "Xala" is the beggar whom he had exploited and denied the right to even beg around his office.

The African writer takes El-Hadji Abdou Kader Beye as a type of a class of the African elite who takes to foreign culture, the culture of materialism without preparing for its effects. Right from the beginning, El-Hadji, is painted as a man who would fail because first of all, he was a trade union activist during the colonial era, but he was dis-missed. Secondly, he became a "middleman" in the grocery trade, he then became an associate of foreigners like the Lebanese and Syrians; he got his money through rice selling. During "Independence", he had acquired

good business connections and money so he became a "well-known man and had a certain standing in the business community; overseas investors paid him to act as a front"[3].

"Due to his lack of cultural base, after acquiring the "wealth, he became arrogant and a spend-thrift." As a result, he became target for flattery and deceit from women to women and from one business colleague to another. In the end, he is rendered impotent in all his activities.

After creating El-Hadji as a business tycoon with all the money and prestige attached to the wealth, Sembene carefully reduces him from grace to grass; from affluence to abject poverty. First, he falls a victim to his deceptive sense of greatness, then he succumbs to the flattery of women like Yay Bineta. Like Mariam Ba's Abdoulaye of So Long A Letter, and Aminata Sow-Fall's Mour Ndiaye of The Beggars' Strike, El-Hadji Abdou Kader Beye rushes into a senseless and unplanned marriage to N'Gone. Immediately after the marriage, we are told that "To his surprise he found himself already regretting this third marriage ... Did he really love N'Gone?... Or was it simply old age urging him towards young flush? Or was it because he was Wealthy?" (p. 70). But eventually, El-Hadji was sure that he had never

had any real feeling for N'Gone. From thore onwards, his fate almost assured as a bankrupt businessman and he is going to return to poverty on a path worst than the one he took to wealth and affluence.

On acquiring the "Xala", the novelist makes it mandatory for El-Hadji to "see a Marabout" (p.28); and depression sets in. This state of mind deprived him of all human feeling towards almost everybody including the beggars. Accusing fingers are pointed and mostly at innocent people like Adja Awa Astou. For instance, Oumi N'Deye, his second wife told him that "She persuaded you to marry this third wife purely out of jealousy" (p. 15). There is a bitter rancour between women in El-Hadji's family and his colleagues. Meanwhile, his "bitterness had become an inferiority complex in the company of his peers" (p. 43) and so his communicative ability to do business and without noticing it, his affairs begin "to go into pieces" (p.52).

The initial downturn continues to drag him down but this time it is his moral strength that is sapped as he feels "the ancestral atavism of fetishism was being re-awakened" (p.55). This psychological engagement begins to destroy his economic base as new stocks are not furthcoming. El-Hadji gets closer

and closer to tragedy as the bank rejects him. The President of the Business Group" invites him for a "chat" and then finally his colleagues "voted unanimously for his exculsion" from their group. Sembene projects him to be seen as somebody left standing on his own.

El-Hadji spends his time going from one medicine man to another. Due to El-Hadji's "Xala", Sembene uses the opportunity to portray the "doctors" respected for their ability to cure diseases and control the fortunes of man and forces of nature as members of the elite class who use their talents to exploit the people. Thus, the Marabouts have become the rural bourgeoisie. Tar Adejir believes that and I agree with him that:

> The Marabouts have, by and large, become the rural bourgeoisie through exploiting local labour to work on the large pieces of land they have acquired. They moreover, hold the peasants in check through positions held in religious orders. They have as allies the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, which is the ruling class.[7]

Through El-Hadji, the writer illustrates the fact that the African elite normally live above their incomes so as to retain their image in the eyes of

the public. The Assistant Bank Manager expreses this El-Hadji by telling him thus: "You are living beyond your income: three villas, cars on hire purchase " (p. 88).

Again through El-Hadji, Sembene defines what the business elite are, as agents of the foreigners. He says:

> We are a bunch of Clodhoppers. Who owns the banks? The insurance companies? The factories? The business? The wholesale trade? The cinèmas? The bookshops? The hostels? All these and more besides are out of our control. We are nothing better than crabs in a basket. . What are we? Clodhoppers! Agents! Petty traders! In our totality we call ourselves "businessmen"! Businessmen without funds (pp. 92-93).[8]

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE LAST OF THE EMPIRE

In his early novels such as God's Bits of Wood and The Money-Order with White Genesis, Sembene Ousmane illustrates how elitism started. God's Bits of Wood, for instance, though an imaginary recreation of a real historical movement based on the railway strike of the former French West African colonies, directs the reader's attention to the image of the African elite. The new African elite as a class were able to evolve during colonialism. The traditional rulers, religious leaders and the likes, were the early elite, prior to the process of formation of the new elite during the colonial era. Serigne N'Dakoru of God's Bits of Wood, is one good example of the religious elite, who started by suppressing his fellow Africans for the advantage of the whites so as to receive favour in return. In the story of "The White Genesis", Chief Djibril is an example of the traditional rulers who formed the class of the Africa elite; they were exploiters, oppressors rather than leaders. By the time Ousmane wrote "The Money-Order" which deals with the post-independent era, a period characterised by exploitation of the Africans by their fellow

brothers, the indigenous bourgeoisie has evolved fully. "The Money-Order" is on the bureaucratic bourgeoisie in its relation to the less privileged class. Xala, its sequel, exposes the neo-colonial manipulations. The attack however, this time, is not just against the local bourgeoisie but the entire system of capitalism.

The Last of The Empire, Ousmane's latest novel, projects a comprehensive study of neo-colonial Africa. It projects the image in African of cynically corrupt and inept indigenous elite that is subservient to the whims of European powers. The novel demonstrates the political attitude adopted by the African elite in order to delay the inevitable revolution. Through a president, Leone Mignane and his cabinet we see various tactics of the elite for the retaining of their positions. For instance, the military force is used to sustain power. Ousmane shows the president as example of a neo-colonial stooge and through him the indepth study of the activities of neo-colonialism in African states.

The point, in essence, is that Sembene Ousmane's previous novels only paved ways for the more comprehensive exposure of the image of the African elite in The Last of the Empire. It is important to place this novel against the background of the growing image

of the African elite that we have seen in the earlier novels. The shift from analysis of economic crisis in society to the criticism of the political system, rooted in Western ideologies, which sustain exploitation of the people, while the elite swim in material abundance is exposition of another aspect of the image of the African elite. The novel also describes how the people can engage in revolutionary actions, the writer demonstrating that through the use of violence, they are capable of changing the system to suit them.

One of the intricacies of neo-colonialism explored in the novel is the capacity of the African ruling class with its highly deceptive and oppressive ideologies to oppress the masses under such terms. The positive role of one of the core characters. Doyen Sall who is the retiring minister of Justice in the novel and the views of his famous son, Badou, are positive steps in the cause of the socialist revolution. Badou tells his father that communism may take a long time to achieve the desired communist state but its success is inevitable. Badou's view of the inevitability of communism re-eachoes Marx's postulation that:

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> Capitalism is a natural State in the development of Mankind, it is progressive by Comparison with feudalism but is an historically transient stage which will give way to more highly organised social relation. In creating collosal productive forces, bourgeois society has there by paved way for its own down fall: it has given birth to its own grave digger - the proletariat.[1]

The portrayal of Leon Mignane, the president, as a neo-colonial stooge, an example of how the African elite operates within the neo-colonist state all over Africa. The military which liquidates "the last of the empire" in an attempt by neo-colonialists to change a corrupt regimes is itself another form of exploitative agency. Its intervention is only an attempt by the African ruling class to reform capitalism and delay the inevitable revolution. It does not actually change the system.

Prominent among African writers who had voiced out their feelings about the image of the African elite before Ousmane are Tierno Monenembo, who wrote The Bush Toads, in which he exposes the elite as "the educated who have dared to challenge the Soulless system under which they live",[2] and Alioum Fantoure whose novel The Tropical Cycles,[3] Dorothy Blair describes as the exposition of "the people's suffering under the tyrannical rule of a man drunk

with power ... joined by some of the military leaders..."[4]

What Sembene Ousmane does in his The Last of The Empire, is to bring out a clearer and a more comprehensive image of the African elite. He also introduces the prospect of achieving freedom for the masses from the shackles of neo-colonialism. The novel illustrates the gradual decay of the edifice of the elite; their increasing repression of the masses; their survival tactics and their imminent fall. Ousmane draws the image of the African elite by representing their divergent nature, as political leaders, economic exploiters, intellectuals, religious leaders, and so on. However, the significance of the elite to the writer's vision is that despite the difference in their interests, together they constitute and function as the dominant class - a group that is bound by neo-colonialist interest and all its voices. For a better analysis of the image of the African elite, it is worth the effort to examine them according to their role in exploiting and oppressing the masses.

In Africa, political and economic activities are inseparable. Thus a person who is in control of power, also controls the economy. Ousmane reflects in his novels this tendency whereby the African elite

strives to combine political and economic power, always to the detriment of the exploited majority. The political and personal conflict between the prime minister and the minister of finance provides details of corruption and diversion of public funds to personal use by the class of the elite. We also know this through some leaflets in the novel. The leaflets read thus:

> Crushed by taxes, crushed by housing levies on wretched salaries, while living in crowded unhealthy slums, crushed by the special development tax, when monthly wages were no longer enough to provide for the individual's basic needs, and he had five, seven, nine eleven up to twenty-five months to feed well, crushed by the insolence of technocrats and executive riding past in luxury cars with their wives, while their children, maids or stewards were driven to school or market in official cars; crushed by want... by lack of schools, hospitals, dispensaries, maternity clinics, while luxurious villes were being built for ruling class, crushed by unemployment; crushed by the need to educate their children; the people were ready to head such leaflet.[5]

From the title of the leaflet "How to rob the nation legally", we know that the political elite use their power to enrich themselves. Another case of mis-management of state funds and diversion of public funds to personal use is that which involves the plan

to buy an earoplane for the "venerable one" as a birthday present. Even his colleagues argued at a debate that:

> A period of drought is not the time to indulge in such an expensive toy. Not only is the price high, there is interest to pay as well. Who will endorse this loan? The State, on behalf of our impoverished people? Such a gift at a time like this, a misappropriation of public funds. (p.31).

The sharp contrast in the existing socio-economic conditions of the two group, the affluent elite and the deprived masses is enough to stimulate the spirit of rebellion in the masses. As Nkrumah notices, the basis of revolution: "is created when the organic structure and conditions within a given society have aroused mass discontent and mass desire for positive action to change that society".[6]

Through Doyen Sall the outgoing Minister of Justice, Sembene Ousmane presents the ruling class as "a set of individuals engaged in legalised plunder of national economy". As a result of their action in "legalised plunder", there is general poverty and deprivation leading for instance, to begging. Thus we see "an old man and a crowd of children begging" in the novel. Doyen Sall goes on to argue subsequently that:

> At every sunset their voices rise in accusation. Today anger vented in words, but tomorrow, a justified rebellion ,.. that those in power will seek to crush Decrees, orders and laws are fashioned into a muzzle, to protect a tiny minority; this muzzle dangles over the people's heads, they flout them. The space allowed the free exercise of democratic freedoms grow smaller everyday. Freedom is not something which can be handed out to any individual group. It - freedom - is the way in which individuals, or the people as a whole, can remedy abuses. Depriving a group or an individual of freedom, sooner or later leads to a revolt (p. 40).[7]

In the society depicted in the novel, there are two main classes, the rulers and the ruled. It is the ruling class that possesses the political and the economic power while the subject class is forced to register its support with the use of oppression. The result, inevitably, is conflict and violence. This is the unhappy situation that leads to the political awareness of the masses This ruling class is made up of academics, service bureaucrats, soldiers, judges and the police officers. They are mainly interested in retaining the capitalist system inherited from colonialists. Doyen explains the essential character of this group:

> They came to power with empty hands but privileged through their education. They soon constituted a gentry that rapidly grew rich on public funds, making populist speeches to conceal their embezzlements . Having at their disposal the entire machinary of administration, finance and justice, this stratum behaved like those who formerly occupied the country, whose licensed agents they had become (p. 131).

The above statement describes the behaviour of the African elite whose main activity is looting the public funds. We are not surprised then that the youth took to fighting the elite in the streets.

Under the umbrella of Democracy, the leaders took to exploiting the masses. Dioulde, for instance, cannot by any stretch of imagination be regarded as a representative of the people in the national parliament. This point is clear because during his tenure for example, he lived above the people and supported laws that seek to exploit them. It is against the background of his selfishness we can explain his action in supporting the motion that seeks to send soldiers to Zaire to defend a neo-colonialist cause.

The elite use the term "Authenegraficanatus", which means in search of authenticity to complicate

issues for the people. This is because they cannot define the term properly or make out the exact sense in which they use it. Ousmane denounces this kind of mystification of politics and political administration. In an interview, he declears that:

> Negritude seems to me to have nothing solid about it. There was a time when Negritude meant something positive it was our breat - plate against culture that wanted at all costs to dominate us. But that is past History. For my part, I do not believe Negritude has a future... Negritude neither feeds the hungry nor builds roads ... I am not in favour of shutting ourselves in a black world, in Negritude.[8]

The novelist projects the elite as those using the political term for selfish purposes; that is to retain their political positions. An instance is the practice in the novel, whereby an arrangement is instituted in the name of democratic system, making Governors directly responsible to the president. This gives people like Mam Lat Soukabe, the Minister of Finance an opportunity to "arrest peasants or have them kept by force in humiliating postures" (p.131)[9]

Another survival tacticof the elite is seen in the way the Head of State, carefully selects his his cabinet members among his friends from France and

young ones who cannot oppose him because of the personal relationship they have with him or they are too young to understand the political system. We are told that:

> After having liquidated his companions during the year 1963-1970, Leon Mignana had surrounded himself with docile young technocrats, knowing them to be avid pleasure - seekers, eager for rank and honours, he kept them plentifully supplied with all the little things that deaden a man's will to react, to refuse to disagree with the Father in charge (p. 98).

It is as part of the strategy to retain their political power by all means that the elite withholds vital information from the journalists. When a press conference is held in the novel, for instance, the journalists are left "disappointed, feeling cheated" because they would not be told the truth. For example, the president could not attend a conference; the only excuse made was that the president is suffering from temporary indisposition.

Ousmane sees the economic and political exploitation of the masses as compounded by the manipulation of religion. The elite use religion to assure the underprivileged ones that their lowly fate is the result of

predestination. Cynically, the writer tells us that the acts of begging for alms is most obvious on Fridays when the "faithful" pray publicly in the mosque. This is cynical because Ousmane shows a sharp contrast between the poor and the rich. For instance, he depicts the cadres, bureaucrats, Civil Servants, and so on, cast off their western clothes and "dooned" traditional wears such clothes like robes, kaftans and dyellabahs on Fridays. On the other hand, he depicts groups of blind and crippled, both old and young, men and women who take up positions at the gates begging on the same religious days. He remarks: "On this holy day they clustered about traffic-lights... to grasp hold of the privileged ones who drove cars" (p. 58). The religious leaders are shown to be in league with their political elite counterparts in the exploitation of the masses. Thus they make appearances at every important state function and the president counts on their moral and spiritual support.

Generally in the novel, Sembene Ousmane projects the intellectuals, who are also members of the elite, as people who rob, cheat and exploit the masses so as to be comfortable. Dioulde, for example, lives well

above his level and does not care about the people he represents. In this regard Western education serves as a tool for exploitation and suppression of the majority rather than serving as instrument for helping the less literate and under-privileged ones. According to Ousmane, education has failed because it does not serve its purpose. He believes that the aims of neo-colonialist education are two fold, to turn the Africans into "French-men" and to make them lose their culture. With time, Ousmane feels with the use of the education that the Africans acquired from the Europeans, the colonialists destroyed crushed the African culture and distorted the growth of the African society, "imposing an armade of obtuse advisers whose role within our new administration is not to help us but to curb every daring return, every enterprising spirit" (p. 39).

Ousmane does not recommend a military solution to the problems of the suffering of the people. He is essentially a humanist who would not wish to spill human blood unnecessarily. For that, the coup d'eta in the novel, does not seem to offer a solution to the problems of the people. In this respect, Ousmane like other African writers, such as Ngugi, Armah and Achebe, projects the vicious cycles of coups in Africa that will never solve African political problems.

Doyen Sall, voices out the author's position when he says: "it is a mistake to try and keep soldiers out of public life, as if they and their families didn't share life's daily problems" (p. 232). This quotation suggests that even though the military officers claim to defend their nation, they too are part of the elite because they take advantage of their obligation to keep peace to rule their nation the way that suits them. Again through Attorney Ndaw, a fairly enlightened citezen, Ousmane expresses the fact that achievements could only come through the people not the army. He says: "... we can't achieve anything with the army" (p. 232).

The writer depicts coups as tactics used by the military officers who are equally members of the elite to delay the commencement of socialist revolution. Ousmane feels coups must be seen as part of the strategy devised by the elite to fortify capitalism not a means of protecting the people's interests. For the soldiers initially pretend to check corruption and inefficiency, only to turn whatever little gains they had achieved to safeguarding the status-quo. Their antics show that they are not really interested in fundamental changes in the society in such a way that society can be restructured to the benefit of

the majority. Colonel Mane who takes over power in the novel, is aware of the fact that coups are normally welcomed with mixed feelings. This is because the initiative for the taking over of power is not by the people and normally the results are not in their interests. It is only the officers that benefit. The same Colonel confesses that: "Today and tomorrow... may be. In a few weeks or months our rule will have been legalised by public opinion and international morality. People are shocked when an army takes control of public affairs ... But for how long? (p.212). The writer's use of coup is to show how the neo-colonialists make all efforts to hinder the revolution. The military is nothing but another arm of the black elite, an institution that encourages the existence of oppression of the masses.

Nevertheless, it is gratifying to note that Ousmane does not turn a blind eye to isolated cases of members of the black elite who try to use their education to fight for the cause of justice among the people. Such educated men of integrity include Doyen Sall and his Son Badou, whose roles are similar to those of Bakayoko in God's Bits of Wood, who is at the forefront of the struggle for bettering the social conditions of his people and Ad'jid'bidji, the Child

who is projected as a future activist; Dethy Low of "White Genesis", who always tells the truth for the enlightenement of his people and Nama of Xala, who uses her education to enlighten her people to understand the evils of colonialism. All these people attempt to expose the hazards of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

The author ridicules the African elite for their use of out-dated feudal caste system to hinder other people from ruling in order to achieve their desired social order. For example, Daoude cannot succeed Leon Mignane because he is: "a man of Caste". Also, Mam Lot's ministry is depicted to be "an extention of his clan" for which high civil service positions are reserved.

Djia Ummrel, the wife of Doyen Sall, is also used to satirise Leon Mignane, the head of state. She says that Leon is conservative:

> Leon is consistent. He's never changed. The precedent of Zaire is part of a long-term strategy. Your government - has been the accomplice of every piece of back-handed business done on the continent. From the Algerians' liberation struggle to the Polisari's you've always been on the losing side (pp. 86-87).

The role of Leone Mignane in the novel suggests that he is a servant of Western capital and a typical example of Western Stooges in Africa. He is projected as a white with a black skin. It is not surprising that at the end of the novel he returns to Europe where he truly belongs. He is frequently referred to as "the black with the biggest haul of European distinctions" (p. 95).

The president is further satirised as a person who wants to be white, as we see when he mimics the whites in his speech and uses: "Latin, Germanic, English and French quotations" (p. 214). His intellectual knowledge is shown to be negative because he cannot even associate himself with his fellow Africans rather his education inspires in him a feeling of inferiority complex.

While Ousmane depicts the active participation of the elite in exploiting the masses, he also shows other people to be inactive, neither actively participating in the exploitation nor resisting exploitation. For instance, they either support Daouda or Mam Lot while serving the interest of Leone Mignane and the Western exploiters. These people are: Naffisatou, Correau, Wade, Haidra, Mapeshe, Talla and Badara. They all belong to the class of the elite who are opposed

to the aspiration of the masses.

When the masses could no longer stand the oppression, they take to violence. This is due to the fact that the sort of change required by the people was not forthcoming so there was the need to eradicate the existing social structures. The masses projected in the novel engage in acts of violence. Ousmane depicts this clearly when:

> disappointed in those who were ruling the country, they had no way of expressing themselves other than violence... (p. 155).

One of the scenes of violence in the novel is when the young ones emerged in the streets due to the release of the leaflets. We are told that: "In the streets, teenagers checked cars, stopping all vehicles marked S.O. (Service O ficial") (p. 161).

The writer continues to portray of the revolutionary act by the burning of in the streets "heaps of tyres on which petrol or paraffin had been poured. Thick clouds of smoke rose, giving off stiffing heat and a nauseating smell. The intense heat emanating from the heaps detonated the police's ammunition and tear-gas canisters" (p. 155). The youth are portrayed as the revolutionary class in the society because they are the worst victims of exploitation who look forward

to the benefits of the desired changes.

The African elite are satirised in the novel to be greedy people who have become worn-out and diseased. Leon Mignane, the president for instance, is portrayed:

> Years of solidarity undivided of presidential power had taken their toll. Exhusted by overwork [he] was growing weaker. His health and strength were warning. He experienced long, very long spell of dizziness and fainting. His personal physician, fall the doyen of the Medical corps, diagnosed a state of deficiency and a long-standing case of pernicious anemia (p. 57).

Politically, the incompetency of the elite in power is ridiculed, It has brought about their fall. Daouda, the Prime Minister, employed Djibril Sarr as the Minister of Justice not for his qualification. Daouda confesses this assertion when informing him (Sarr) about the past. Here Daouda says: "Ever since completing your secondary school studies, you've been a model party worker. In view of your merits, the party and government are offering you the justice portfolio" (pp. 117-188).

Through Ummrel, Ousmane again satirises the ruling elite as those who are not consistent in

their rules and regulations. Ummrel says:

> a sign of weakness on the part of the elite, and of government. We live like pebbles in a creek, tossed from one bank to the other. When the African side suits our needs of the moment, we cling to it. But as soon as it hinders us, we fling ourselves in the stream to cross to the modernity imported from Europe. We are forever fleeting our African realities (p. 134).

The above quotation sums up how Africa lost its feeling of oneness; which is being replaced by the superiority complex of the elite over the masses.

The novelist goes on to even satirise the physical appearance of the African elite. For instance, we see some signs of decay symbolising the collapse of the system:

> Correa had woken [on one] Monday with a dreadful headache pouches under his eyes were swollen. His face had taken on baked-earth colour of the Niaye sand-dunes. Like a sudden epidemic, his hair was falling out by the Combfull, white thick tuffs were sprouting in his ears. His eletric razor scraped his flabby cheeks ... He used all kinds of lotion to soften his skin but in vain ... His complexion was blotched with blackish broken veins, spreading over his cheeks and the bridge of his nose (pp. 156-157).

The above quotation symbolises the general decay of the African elite. The African elite is portrayed to be morally bankrupt. For we are informed about

Correa's affairs with his Secretary in the office. A similar case is that of Mam Lot and Naffisatou during a meeting where "from time to time he fondled the woman's thighs, winking at her".

Ousmane's position in the novel indicates the fact that eventually, socialism will over-throw capitalism. For at least in the novel, The Last of The Empire, the youth who are the leaders of tomgrrow, are not killed. This shows there is hope in the future.

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9. Sembene Ousmane, op.cit., p. 131.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Sembene Ousmane's novels have shown and illustrated his vision of what the writer should be and do for his society. A central consideration in this thesis is Ousmane's perception of the image of the elite in the light of the writer's obligation to his people. The writer is opposed to political, social and religious oppression or exploitation.

In Africa, according to Ousmane, the elite are the embodiments of the vices of economic exploitation, religious, political and social oppression; and then almost always, the masses are their victims. The central aim of the writer's works is to over turn the system of capitalism which has slain behind the duplicity and rapaciousness of the elite. Ousmane pitches camp with armed rebellion as the only means by which the masses can triumph over their oppressors. Thus he presents the victory of the strikes in God's Bits of Wood: the victory of the beggars in Xala, and the ending of the activities of the imperial rule of Leone Mignane, "the venerable one", in The Last of the Empire, show the way toward effective democratization of the

instruments of power. Ousmane highlights the classical conflict between the proletariat and the owners of capital based on capitalist productive relationships.

The Money-Order with White Genesis And Xala, basically denounce the social and religious ills of Senegal. Also, the two novels are not in support of the political activities in Senegal. Dieng, for example, finds to his surprise, his voter's card cannot get him anywhere.

In Xala, we see the elite represented by El-Hadji Abdou Kader Beye whose source of finance is through dependence on the foreign business whereby there is repression on the part of the government. Sembene Ousmane here points out how the solution lies with the people. Just as El-Hadji finds the cure of his "Xala" from the beggar, so will the nations economy eventually find its cure from the people. Ousmane's last novel, The Last of The Empire, exposes the fact that apart from an industrial conflict due to exploitation of human labour, and insensitive political administration, the system of administration can also motivate the masses to change the system from capitalism to socialism.

Throughout this work, a deep sense of optimism can be seen to have been at the centre of the works of Sembene Ousmane. Though the revolution has not yet been achieved, the writer has not lost hope. God's Bits of Wood, Xala and The Last of The Empire, for instance, are some of his novels that favour of the masses. This suggests how optimistic Ousmane is. His turning to film production indicates his determination to reach a wider and less literated audience. He sums it up in an interview by saying: "to prepare the revolution... there are always other people who realise the revolution". His film, "The Money-Order", for example, is based on the attempt to reach the less literate. In the film, Ousmane draws a causic portrait of Senegalese society, mercilessly dissecting the corruption of the government administration through the misfortune of the hero, Ibrahim Dieng, who attempts unsuccessfully to cash a money-order sent by a newphew in France due to the corruption embedded in the system. Similarly, "Emitai", translated as "The Thunder Gods", is another film of Ousmane. The film traces the collective resistance

of the Dioula people to the exactions of the French colonial administration in the early 1940s. Sembene Ousmane's last film, dating back to 1977 is called "Geddo" meaning "The Resisters". The title alone is self-explanatory; because the term was originally applied to those who refused to convert to Islam or Christianity. Thus, the film glorifies the mentality of resistance to foreign penetration and its cultural alienation.

If Sembene Ousmane's films trouble a number of African leaders, he nevertheless refuses to make schematic stereotyped films. He believes his philosophy of film production will eventually sharpen the political consciousness of Cinema goers and ineviably enable them to act on their conditions. He remarks that he considers his films "as introductions to the comprehension of situation which demand to be changed."

The above brief exposition of the image of the African elite either in his novels or films gives examples of the Senegales groups of elite whose prime interest is to exploit and oppress the less privileged

ones. The relationship between the rulers and the ruled is depicted by Ousmane, who deplores the ugly situation ir which the ruled get nothing in return for the burden of being the sole producers of the nation's wealth - wealth which the elite appropriate. As a Marxist, Ousmane believes that change for a better social condition of the people can only be brought about by the people themselves. This hope in the eventual overcome of an egalitarian society and in the capability of the masses to bring to an end represents his greatest achievement in the novels.

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