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Emigrants and Immigrants of Burkina Faso, Senegal, and France — Ousmane Sembène’s *La Noire de*… and S. Pierre Yameogo’s *Moi et mon blanc*

**ABSTRACT:**
This analysis of the representation of migrancy in two West African films reveals how the parallel geographical movement of the protagonists – the original migration to France and the ultimate return to Africa – leads to opposed discourses in the two films. While division and incommunicability reign in the classic *La Noire de*… by the recently deceased pioneer of African film Ousmane Sembène, S. Pierre Yameogo’s twenty-first-century film *Moi et mon blanc* reveals correspondeces, and even suggests new utopian connections, between Europe and Africa.

**TWO WEST AFRICAN FILMS,** the 1966 classic *La Noire de*… [Black Girl]¹ and the more recent *Moi et mon blanc* [Me and My White Pal]² from 2003, made almost forty years apart, both narrate journeys from West Africa to France, and back again. Together they provide an ample lens with which to examine changing attitudes regarding relations between cultures and continents, and also between generations in the postcolonial era as depicted in film history.

¹ Ousmane Sembène, dir. *La Noire de*… (France/Senegal, 1966).

La Noire de..., released in 1966 and directed by Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène (b. 1923), is one of the first films to be directed by a sub-Saharan African filmmaker. Although the title suggests an outsider’s perspective, the voice-over narration of the film is, in fact, the interior monologue of the African protagonist.

Sembène’s feature film tells the story of Diouana, a young woman who leaves Senegal in order to join her French employers in Antibes on the Côte d’Azur in France. Once she arrives, she quickly realizes that the couple can no longer afford a big staff and that she is no longer the nanny to the couple’s children, but, rather, the full-time cook and cleaning lady. Her employers think she should be grateful. Flashbacks reveal how Diouana was picked by her employers at the market in Dakar, and how in her dreams about France, which are mocked by her boyfriend, she imagined the beautiful clothes she would buy and how her family would envy her. However, Diouana quickly wakes up to a harsher life, and her daily chores and her employer’s treatment grind her down until, in quiet despair, she finally commits suicide. After Diouana’s death, her employer takes a wooden mask that Diouana once presented to them as a gift, and returns it to her family. In Diouana’s street in Dakar, her employer returns the mask to a boy who formerly played with it. In a symbolically charged last scene the boy puts on the mask and angrily chases the Frenchman through the streets. With the Frenchman fleeing, the boy stays behind, weeping.

Moi et mon blanc, released in 2003, is the sixth feature film of the Burkina-bé director and producer S. Pierre Yameogo (b. 1955). The film, a dramatic comedy, gained prominence at film festivals in Europe, the USA, and Africa, and won the audience prize at FESPACO, Africa’s largest film festival. Also narrated from the perspective of the African protagonist, Moi et mon blanc tells the story of Mamadi, a doctoral student from Burkina Faso (although his country of origin remains unclear until he returns home) who studies political science at the Sorbonne with the help of a stipend from his home government. Although we are not told why, the governments of several West African countries discontinue the stipends. As a result, Mamadi can no longer pay his rent in time and is thrown out of the boarding house where he lives, but with the help of an older cousin, he finds himself a job at a parking garage. One day Mamadi finds a bag full of money and cocaine left behind by a pair of drug dealers, who were chased out of the garage during a false alarm. After they return and threaten Mamadi, our protagonist turns to his French colleague, Franck, and the ensuing hunt leaves the two no choice but to flee France and escape to Ouagadougou, where they want to start a new life with the loot. In a final twist, they are mugged just after they buy a spot for a nightclub they have planned to open; now penniless, they open a street cinema instead.