Revalorization of traditional practices in the novels of Aminata Sow Fall

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REVALORIZATION OF TRADITIONAL PRACTICES IN THE
NOVELS OF AMINATA SOW FALL

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Aminata Sow Fall, a contemporary Senegalese novelist, portrays life in her nation over the past thirty years in a critical, but hopeful light. She differs from some of her predecessors in that she focuses on post-colonial social issues. She began publishing her writings after Sembène Ousmane, but before Mariama Bâ and her choice of themes and topics is somewhat similar. Her most recent novel was published in 1992 and she continues to write today.

This thesis examines her portrayal of the importance of maintaining tradition in society, in particular as a way to balance what she views as destructive social forces—Occidental mores, especially materialism. The thesis analyses this theme in her five novels: Le Revenant, La Grève des Bâttu, L'Appel des arènes, L'Ex-père de la nation, and Le Jujubier du patriarche. Chapter One considers the thesis topic and also introduces the author, her motivations, and texts. Chapter Two discusses the variety of traditional sources, their peaceful coexistence, and how Aminata Sow Fall portrays them as helpful to her characters. Chapter Three explores the revalorization of these traditional practices as a means to temper materialistic attitudes which she portrays as a source of social and personal division. This chapter also examines her implicit criticism of some traditional practices as divisive. Chapter Four addresses her use of traditional words and style and her search for a similar balance through the written word. In the novels of Aminata Sow Fall, the author searches for a balance between African and Occidental influences through a connection to a collective such as family or community. Furthermore, from the revalorization of this connection comes a Senegalese identity.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS TOPIC, THE AUTHOR AND THE WORKS

Introduction to the thesis topic

The West African nation of Senegal has produced many internationally acclaimed (Francophone) writers including Léopold Sedar Senghor, Birago Diop, Ousmane Sembène, and Mariama Bâ who have addressed a variety of colonial and postcolonial issues. Another Senegalese writer, Aminata Sow Fall, has portrayed Senegalese society over the past twenty years. She has been critical of the overwhelming adoption of Western values at the expense of traditional practices. She does not assert that all Western values are inherently evil. Rather, she sees destructive consequences of this shift in societal mores namely, the loss of personal and national identity and alienation—both within families and within groups in society. First, because traditional rites do not lead to financial gain, they have thus lost importance to those who view every action as an opportunity for an improvement in social status. In addition, when those struggling within the system turn to the traditional support structures such as family, religious leaders or the government, they often discover that these institutions consist of individuals who seek financial advancement rather than seeking to be of service.
The Western influences she describes are occasionally direct governmental influence, international loans, for example. However, more often she cites indirect pressure from foreign societies, such as the influence on those who have been educated abroad. Even if this materialism is a legacy of colonialism, she holds her fellow Senegalese responsible for remedying the social ills.

The "traditional" that can temper Western influence is not a simple, uniform code of behavior. It consists of a personal and widely varied fusion of practices and beliefs drawn from Islam, animism, folklore, and the "cult of ancestors." Furthermore, much of the population maintains some connection to these diverse traditions. However, she does not prescribe a return to a strictly traditional lifestyle or embrace tradition as a cure-all. In fact, she illustrates that certain traditional practices and beliefs can be as divisive as materialism. However, most critical examination has focused on her early novels so the evolution of this aspect has not been treated.

Her source of inspiration for her discussion of these themes stems from her personal experience, as the following description of her life and work explains.
Introduction to the author and the texts

Aminata Sow Fall, who describes herself as "Wolof et de religion musulmane," was born in St. Louis, Senegal where she spent "une enfance sans problèmes" (Pfaff 1985, 135). In 1962, she passed her baccalauréat and received a scholarship to study literature and interpreting in Paris. She worked on some poems and plays during her time in Paris, but did not publish. During her stay in France, she met and married a countryman, Semba Sow, with whom she has had seven children. After seven years in France, she returned to Senegal with her degree (a licence) in Teaching Modern Letters from the Sorbonne. For several years she taught in secondary schools and institutes. She was later named to the Commission Nationale de Réforme de l’Enseignement du Français, where she worked for four years creating new grammar and literature texts. At about this time she produced her first novel, Le Revenant, which was published in 1976.

Since that time, she has been active as a writer and a civil servant. Her second novel, La Grève des Bâttu, published in 1979, won her international acclaim and fame. The novel was nominated for the Prix Goncourt and won the Grand prix littéraire de l’Afrique noire in 1980. It was included on the literature list for the West African School Certificate Examination for several years and has been translated into English, Russian, Chinese, German and Italian.
Her third novel, *L’Appel des arènes* (1982), also met with international success. She was again nominated for the Prix Goncourt and the Institut culturel africain awarded her the Prix international Alioune Diop pour lettres africaines. She published *L’Ex-père de la nation*, her fourth work, in 1987 and in early 1993 her fifth book, *Le Jujubier du patriarche*, appeared. In addition to her writing, she has served as the head of the Centre d’Etudes des Civilisations, which works to promote "cultural revival and cultural modernisation" (Egonu 1991, 66). In 1985, the Association of Senegalese Writers elected her to succeed Birago Diop as president.

However, she differs from some of her male Francophone predecessors such as Diop in that she examines postcolonial social issues. Egonu notes in his article about her, "As a teacher of African literature in Senegalese schools, she realized that many of the old themes were no longer particularly meaningful to the post-independence generation" (Egonu 1991, 68). Her purpose in writing is not to create intricate psychological portraits or detailed studies of daily life. Rather, she seeks to present social dilemmas in an engaging manner while espousing a philosophy of life in a subtle manner.

Thus, she finds her inspiration in the lives of those around her. For example, inspiration for her first novel arrived long before she began *Le Revenant*:

Après sept ans de séjour, je suis revenue au Sénégal, et là il s’est passé quelque chose d’extraordinaire: c’est...
que, à mon avis, la vie avait évolué trop vite. Je ne reconnaissais plus certains aspects de ma propre société, et un exemple surtout frappé: c'était le pouvoir qu'avait pris l'argent dans les relations des gens (Hawkins 1987, 20).

She begins with realistic issues and does not limit herself to what she has personally experienced. "Je m'inspire d'abord de ce que j'observe et de ce que j'entends raconter autour de moi. C'est le point de départ, et le reste, je l'imagine" (Pfaff 1985, 136). A diverse variety of issues attracts her attention: "Tous les aspects de la vie m'intéressent" (Hawkins 1987, 21).

Despite the localized nature of her inspiration, she finds the themes she chooses to be universal. She thinks that her ideas and choices of topics can appeal globally. During an interview with Gadjigo she said, "il y a bien sûr des constantes universelles: l'amour, la mort, le bonheur et chacun a sa manière propre de les apprehender" (Gadjigo 1987, 220).

Her writing expresses her personal insights; she describes her writing as "une sorte de besoin" (Pfaff 1985, 136). After she finished her first novel, she found herself compelled to continue. "Le virus de l'écriture s'était installé en moi" (Gadjigo 1987, 220).

Although she finds it personally necessary to write, her novels do not merely provide her with a pastime: "l'art pour l'art n'est pas un luxe que nous pouvons nous offrir" (Pfaff 1985, 136). Her goal, therefore, is to focus attention on
what she considers pressing and significant issues. She "hopes to force the reader to reflect, even against his will, on the situations and their possible solutions" (Egonu 1991, 68). However, like Ousmane Sembène, she states that she does not teach; she merely focuses attention, "Moi, je n'enseigne pas mais j'attire l'attention des gens sur certains problèmes" (Pfaff 1985, 136). Therefore, she denies needing to provide solutions. "She admits . . . that it would be pretentious for her as a writer to claim to provide answers to the societal problems she raises in her work" (Egonu 1991, 68). Nonetheless, she does know in which direction she would like to see her society go. "Pour moi la société la meilleure serait celle qui mettrait la défense de la dignité humaine au premier chapitre de son action quotidienne et non seulement dans son programme politique" (Gadjigo 1987, 224).

These disclaimers must be viewed somewhat skeptically as she also claims that writing is not really her occupation. "On ne peut pas dire que mon métier d'écrivain soit vraiment mon métier, c'est mon métier à côté" (Pfaff 1985, 135). However, her efforts from this "métier à côté" have produced five novels over the course of twenty years.

In her first novel, Le Revenant (1976), Aminata Sow Fall examined the cost of materialism to the human spirit. She concentrated on describing the problem rather than proposing solutions. This work recounted the story of Bakar Diop, a resident of one of Dakar's shantytowns. His situation
changed, however, when the oldest of his sisters, Adja Yama, married a wealthy and successful businessman, El Hadji Amar Ndiaye. Yama's new social status allowed Bakar to marry Aïssa Guèye whose parents were impressed by gifts from Yama. Bakar soon realized that he could not maintain this high standard of living on his clerk's salary so he embezzled money from his employer. His superiors discovered his crime, and he was imprisoned for five years. During his imprisonment, Yama and the rest of their families dissociated themselves from him and Aïssa returned to her family. Only his friend, Sada, remained loyal; he visited Bakar and quietly helped support Aïssa. After his release, Bakar could not find work or fully rejoin his family. With the help of a woman he met in his former neighborhood, he faked his own death in the sea. With the help of new clothes and a skin-lightening product called xeesaal, he attended his own memorial services unrecognized. Far from being a sad commemoration of her dead brother, Yama used it to further her social image. Later that night, Bakar returned to his family's house to claim the sack of money that was collected at his service which he intended to give to the woman to allow her to return to her village. At the close of the novel, Yama, in shock, ran through the streets of the neighborhood screaming that she had seen a ghost.

La Grève des Bâttu (1979), Aminata Sow Fall's second novel, described the consequences of materialism on an entire social system as well as the individuals in that society. She
also began to explore a balance between materialism and tradition in more detail. In the opening scene, the Assistant Director of Public Health, Keba Dabo, bumped into a blind beggar in the street. Dabo cursed him but the beggar returned the curses, setting the tone of the conflict between government officials and the city's beggars. At work, Dabo's director, Mour Ndaiye, instructed him to find a plan to rid the city of its beggars in order to attract more European tourists. His plan of arrest, harassment and expulsion from the city resulted in the beggars' retreat to the courtyard of a woman named Salla Niang. Although this pleased Ndaiye's superiors, others in the community expressed skepticism. Ndaiye's marabout, Serigne Birama, and others reminded him of his religious duties to the poor. Nonetheless, rumors reported that the President considered him a choice for vice-president. He could not enjoy his good fortune for very long. Some of the President's advisors doubted his capabilities and his first wife, Lolli, expressed displeasure at his new marriage. In an effort to win God's favor, he sought the advice of the holy man, Kifi Bokoul. Bokoul prescribed a dispersement to the beggars in every corner of the city. The beggars, however, refused to return to the streets. The wealthy continued to give alms and the beggars did not have to leave the courtyard. Frustrated and unable to carry out the sacrifice, Ndaiye returned home to hear the announcement of another man as vice-president.
In *L'Appel des arènes* (1982), Aminata Sow Fall portrayed cultural alienation resulting from the rejection of tradition. Rather than a description of the situation as in *Le Revenant* and *La Grève des Bâttu*, she focused on an examination of solutions to the problems that stem from materialism. She presented the struggles of Nalla, a schoolboy in a small Senegalese town. Unmotivated at school and unconnected to his parents, Nalla lacked purpose and direction. His parents, professionals educated in Europe, rejected their cultural identity and its values. Their Western culture alienated them and Nalla from his peers and surroundings and their work preoccupied them and kept them distant from him. They believed that he needed no more than increased academic discipline to motivate him and they hired a respected professor as his tutor. However, Nalla’s tutor could not overcome the malaise either.

Ultimately, his contact with the wrestlers Malaw Lô and André rekindled his interest in life and his heritage. They shared legends and traditions of the near-paradise of Diaminar. Nalla’s grandmother, Mame Fari, also encouraged his connection with his past. She helped Nalla arrange for the ritual rite of passage for males. Nalla’s mother, Diattou, vehemently resisted this procedure as a mutilation of her only child but compromised on a hospital circumcision. As the story continued, Nalla’s involvement with the wrestlers and enthusiasm for life grew. Nalla and his father, Ndiogou,
ultimately connected through their connection to the traditional arena. However, his mother, Diattou remained isolated from her family and community.

In *L’Ex-père de la nation* (1987), Aminata Sow Fall returned to the political scene to describe the personal and social consequences of life in a modern African state. As in *La Grève des Battu*, the central character sought a balance of traditional and Occidental values— with limited success. For the first time, she criticized some traditional practices as detrimental to the good of society as a whole. She presented this novel as the memoirs of Madiama Niang, the imprisoned former ruler of an unnamed African country who rose to power through his union and was initially placed in power by the former colonial government. Although honest, just and hardworking, he struggled with the intractable problems of his country. A massive drought struck his country shortly after his term commenced. In his determination to avoid dependence on foreign loans, he refused money from Western nations. However, famine spread and public opinion began to turn against him. Desperate to save his suffering population, he accepted a burden of loans from outside sources. However, Madiama could not stop the corruption within his government nor control the forces of nature. Gradually, he discovered that his base of support and power was severely limited. One of his daughters, Nafi, joined a union to work against him and the opposition newspaper, *Dolé*, vehemently denounced his
policies. He decided to resign but before he could, several of his ministers quit and massive demonstrations began. During a protest outside the presidential palace, members of a more extreme faction murdered Nafi. He yielded to the advice of more authoritarian advisors and began a crack-down on opponents of his government. Pressure from within and without mounted. Before he was aware of it, power had slipped away from him and the leader of the security forces escorted him to prison.

Aminata Sow Fall’s most recent novel, *Le Jujubier du patriarche* (1993), explored the past and present within one extended family. The author minimized the description of materialism and concentrated instead on presenting tradition including some drawbacks to it. In the beginning chapters of the work, the descendants of the great hero Yellimane contended with the daily issues and crises of modern life. The namesake of Yellimane, Yelli, and his wife, Tacko, were beset by disagreements over their tenuous financial situation and the return of their suddenly divorced daughter, Bouri. The family discord escalated as Tacko blamed the divorce on Narrou, a niece whom she and Yelli had raised as a daughter. As family griote, Narrou held a place of importance in the family but she commanded little respect. One of her ancestors had been Yellimane’s second wife, a slave from another people. This rift in the family had been perpetuated through many generations as his first wife’s descendants, such as Tacko,
condescended to the descendants of his second wife. In the chaos, older family members recounted the exploits and legends of previous generations. This reconnection with the past by family members seemed to improve the well-being of the entire family. Yelli and his family embarked on a spiritual pilgrimage to the site of the jujubier tree that his family had revered as sacred. After many years of inactivity, the tree had bloomed as did the spirituality of the family. The following year all returned to the sacred place to hear the exploits of the ancestral heroes.

All of these novels share a common theme that differentiates Aminata Sow Fall from some earlier African writers; she chooses-- especially in her early novels-- to emphasize the internal struggles of her country rather than global issues. "Après les Indépendances je me suis aperçue que les questions de race n'étaient pas les seules à engendrer des problèmes. On a des problèmes sociaux et il fallait donc en parler (Hammond 1981, 192).

She has chosen, unlike Bâ or some Anglophone writers such as Buchi Emecheta, to portray only males as her central characters but does include themes relevant to women especially. In many ways she is similar to two of her contemporaries, Sembène and Bâ. La Grève des Bâttu and Xala address many of the same ideas: polygamy and a long-suffering first wife, empowerment of the disenfranchised, and an ultimate disgrace of the powerful through the actions of the
formerly powerless. Similar to both novels of Bâ, Aminata Sow Fall illustrates the divisiveness of polygamy in modern middle-class families. However, she is generally more conservative than either of them. The beggars in *La Grève* never enter the house of a government official or confront one directly with complaints and a demand for restitution, as in *Xala*. African traditions and groups who represent them coexist peacefully in her novels whereas tension and rivalry between them forms the basis for Ousmane Sembène’s *Ceddo* and *Guelwaar*. In this respect she is more hopeful about society.

Some scholars have classified her as part of the "Marxist camp of Sembène Ousmane" (Ogundjimi 1990, 324; Gadjigo 1989, 415). When asked if there were Marxist ideas in *La Grève des Bâttu*, she replied, "Je crois que c’est possible . . . des gens peuvent effectivement lire mon livre et y trouver des idées marxistes" (Hammond 1981, 194). However, she does not profess to be a Marxist. "Je vous dirai que je ne suis pas marxist" (Hammond 1981, 194). In fact, she maintains independence from any political ideology. "J’ai besoin d’une totale liberté pour interpréter ce que je vois. Dès le moment où on adhère à un parti politique, cela vous limite et vous oriente" (Pfaff 1985, 137). This liberty also includes no adherence to any of the Occidental feminisms. She notes:

> Il est vrai que les femmes d’Afrique, comme les autres femmes, ont leurs problèmes. Mais je ne pense pas qu’on puisse résoudre ces problèmes de la même manière qu’en Europe, parce que nous n’avons pas les mêmes manières de penser ni les mêmes manières d’agir (Hammond 1981, 193).
Although she prefers a different manner, this does not mean that she accepts all practices and situations in her society. "Je sais très bien que les femmes n’ont pas toujours le beau rôle" (Gadjigo 1987, 221). Neither does she encourage complacency for women; she advocates a new social condition for them. "Je soutiens par ailleurs qu’il est normal que la femme puisse réclamer et obtenir ses droits" (Gadjigo 1987, 221). She names two sources of influence in particular. First, she already witnesses strong women in her society. "Les femmes que je connais ici sont très puissantes" (Pfaff 1985, 137). She views the position of women as significant and involved. "La femme joue un rôle actif et non passif dans nos sociétés" (Gadjigo 1987, 220). She repeatedly emphasizes a second and very powerful solution for improving the situation of women: education.

Je pense que c’est la femme qu’on doit éduquer. On doit opérer en elle une reconversion de la mentalité pour qu’elle sache qu’elle est citoyenne à part entière et qu’elle doit revendiquer autant de droits qu’elle a de devoirs (Hammond 1981, 194).

She also mentioned in an interview with Françoise Pfaff, that her first priority was motherhood. "Pour moi il y a en premier lieu ma vie de famille puis ma vie professionnelle" (Pfaff 1985, 135).

Nonetheless, Aminata Sow Fall is a leading writer in Senegal and the Francophone world as well as one of its pioneer women writers. One writer describes her as the pioneer:
The corpus of francophone African literary writing beginning . . . in 1920 and continuing through the colonial and postcolonial periods, was entirely male. This "silence" (as it is called) was broken in 1976 with the publication of Aminata Sow Fall's *Le Revenant* (Miller 1990, 249-250).

She has an explanation for this delay: "Je pense qu'écrire est une chose osée et que par son éducation la femme n'ose pas toujours aller jusqu'à un certain point" (Pfaff 1985, 136).

However, it is to the past that she looks for answers to the social dilemmas of contemporary Africa. Much of the critical analysis of her works has focused on the presence and integration of these traditional elements, as it is quite extensive.
Aminata Sow Fall's novels contain extensive references to a variety of sources of traditional practices drawn from everyday life in Senegal. Amidst the overwhelming presence of materialism, some of her characters, like many Senegalese, have maintained connections to traditional life. In Senegal, "Everywhere the traditional society meaningfully survives" (Irvine 1972, 136). A diverse collection of activities and beliefs compose this traditional society; it includes influences of Islam, animism, and the cult of ancestors.

Islam, for example, exerts a strong influence in Senegalese culture. According to the US Department of State, 94% of the population of Senegal is Muslim. "Au Sénégal, l'Islam est perçu comme élément inhérent à la nation senegalaise" (Herzberger-Fofana 1987, 97). It is not, however, the fundamentalist ideology of Iran or, recently, Algeria. Other, African, practices have been incorporated. "L'Islam noir s'est adapté aux réalités africaines, incorporant les pratiques animistes et les interférant au dogme religieux" (Herzberger-Fofana 1987, 97).

This continued practice of African religions may be explained by how recently Islam became widely accepted. Although the religion arrived in the area nine centuries ago, "most widespread conversion took place only in the late
nineteenth century" (Mbiti 1969, 238). Another possibility is the nature of Islam itself. "Unless Christianity and Islam fully occupy the whole person as much as, if not more than, traditional religions do, most converts to these faiths will continue to revert to their old beliefs and practices for perhaps six days a week, and certainly in times of emergency and crisis" (Mbiti 1969, 3).

Therefore, local customs have been woven into the system of Islamic beliefs. "Des analystes de la société négro-africaine d’horizons divers relèvent souvent la facilité avec laquelle la religion musulmane s’insère dans les traditions locales" (Lemotieu 1986, 50). Whatever the origin of this peaceful cohabitation, its existence gives rise to an intricate set of societal and personal values and practices. "Une fois acceptés le Coran et les cinq prescriptions fondamentale de l’islam, les croyants se sentaient libres de vivre la nouvelle foi dans l’esprit de la religiosité traditionnelle, avec de nombreuses composantes syncretiques qui se rattachaient à l’«Animisme», entre autres la pratique habituelle de la magie" (Lemotieu 1986, 50). For access to the world of magic, people turn to those who possess "les secrets de la science occulte: les marabouts" (Lemotieu 1986, 52).

In addition to the magic of the marabouts, characters find guidance from the past, specifically through their ancestors, traditional rites, and childhood memories.
Another aspect of traditional realism is the place history occupies in its consciousness. Since traditional practices are hallowed by time and established by ancestral charter, the past is never remote from the present but is frequently a backward extension as well as a reinforcement of the present. . . . There is a deep and abiding interest in history. . . . as an accumulation of human achievement. . . . The perception of time and space embodies the continuing influence of the past on the present" (Obiechina 1975, 133).

Again, Islam peacefully coexists with practices which glorify great ancestors and their exploits. "[L'Islam] se montre tolérant et compose aisément avec le culte des Ancêtres" (Herzberger-Fofana 1987, 97). Celebrating the achievements of an ancestor is one way to invoke the influence of a deceased relative. A more direct way is to use his or her name. "The traditional belief that the proper name and the person who bears it are one. . . . A child born under the tutelary influence of an ancestor often bears the ancestor's name, the inference being that the influence is thus reinforced" (Obiechina 1975, 82).

This combination of influences-- Islamic, animist, ancestral-- affects all levels of society from the personal and mundane to the national and political. "Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, or between the spiritual and the material areas of life" (Mbiti 1969, 2). Aminata Sow Fall portrayed this all-pervasiveness through the actions and habits of her characters. "Both Le Revenant and
La Grève des Bâttu prove that among the Wolof, Lebu, and Serer, religious belief is linked to the action and the daily occurrences of ordinary life" (Pfaff 1988, 349). This can be said of her more recent works as well.

There is a strong Islamic presence in Le Revenant. Early in the novel, Bakar inquired about his father who was at the mosque. "Papa n’est pas encore revenu de la mosquée?" (Revenant, 10). After his imprisonment, Bakar’s mother-in-law sought out religious leaders in an effort to dissolve the marriage of Bakar and Aissa. "Bakar ignorait que Adja Dado Sarr ne ménageait rien pour casser le mariage de sa fille: conseils, imprécactions, maraboutages, elle passée partout" (Revenant, 63). After Bakar faked his suicide, he attended his own memorial service in disguise. Friends and relatives comforted his parents by telling them he was in Paradise. "Mais celui qui périt dans l’eau va droit au Paradis, il ne connaîtra jamais le purgatoire" (Revenant, 117). This statement "connotes Islamic beliefs since there is neither paradise nor purgatory in most traditional African religions" (Pfaff 1988, 350).

However, alongside Islam, the characters participate in African practices. Large social activities, "les festivités familiales et socio-religieuses" center around religious events of significance both in Islam and traditional religions such as weddings and funerals (Jaccard 1986, 178). At a function at which Yama attracted quite a bit of attention, a
traditional griot also attended. "Alors le griot chanteur qui avait eu le temps de demander son nom, entonna: Yama, Yama Joob, yaa ma neex" (Revenant, 28). As Bakar left for his first day at work, his mother, Ngoné, offered him a Muslim blessing: "Bakar, que le bon Dieu te vienne en aide" (Revenant, 21). This alone was evidently not enough as she also gave him a sort of magic oil, "Elle lui remit ensuite un petit flacon, lui dit de s’en oindre le visage quand il serait près de partir et de garder le reste pour les jours suivants" (Revenant, 21). After Bakar's arrest, his parents turned toward the magic of the marabouts. "Tante Ngoné et le père Oussèye s'étaient alors tournés vers les science occultes et il n'y eut pas de marabout célèbre qu'ils n'eurent consulté, pas de village réputé où ils ne se furent rendus, pas de philtre qu'ils n'eurent donné à Bakar pour qu’il en bût et se frictionnât le corps" (Revenant, 51-52). During Bakar's disappearance, his mother worked both angles tirelessly. She consulted the marabouts and performed their sacrifices.

Elle n'était pas restée inactive. Elle avait consulté marabouts et guérisseurs, interrogé les cauris et les cornes de bélier. On lui avait recommandé de faire divers sacrifices-- moutons blancs, poulets, kolas, etc.-- et on l'avait assurée que rien n'arriverait à son fils" (Revenant, 111).

In addition, she practiced an Islamic form of prayer. "Elle passait tout son temps à prier, chapelet en main, dans sa chambre, au pied de son lit" (Revenant, 111).

The participation in one form of practice does not preclude participation in another. In fact, they compliment
each other. However, the cult of ancestors is only alluded to briefly and infrequently in this novel. "Les uns, se retranchant derrière la naissance, le passé glorieux et le rôle historique des ancêtres," (Revenant, 34-35) "Et Bakar se souvenait de quelques scènes de sa jeunesse qui avaient laissé une marque indélébile dans sa mémoire" (Revenant, 74).

Again in La Grève des Bâttu characters looked to God for protection from a variety of evils and there is a definite Islamic tone. One woman prayed, "Que le Tout-Puissant chasse mes maux ainsi que ceux de ma famille, qu'il me protège de Satan, des sorciers anthropophages et de tous les mauvais sorts que l'on pourrait me jeter" (Grève, 52).

However, much of the discussion of religious beliefs centers around what also became a secular, political issue: the presence of the beggars. "Dans La Grève des Bâttu... la notion de la communauté islamique est très fortement soulignée. Puisque le don charitable fait partie des prescriptions de la foi" (Case 1988, 25). Many of the characters underlined the religious importance of giving to the beggars. Serigne Birama cautioned Mour against the beggars removal as a violation of the spirit of Islam. "Attention, Mour, Dieu l'a dit: il ne faut pas éconduire les pauvres" (Grève, 26).

Alms-giving, however, is not a wholly Islamic practice. "In Senegal, beggars are the recipients of alms, and charity in the form of almsgiving is regarded as a duty within both
the traditional and Muslim set of values" (Pfaff 1988, 351). Kéba Dabo's campaign against the beggars mystified his secretary, Sagar, because, as she noted, "ils sont là depuis nos arrière-arrière-grands-parents" (Grève, 22). Further, she reminded him of the religious obligation, "la religion recommande bien que l'on assiste les pauvres; comment vivraient-ils autrement?" (Grève, 23). This obligation, however, is not only for the good of the beggars but the givers; Sagar continued, "Ah! Dis-moi encore ceci: à qui les gens donneraient-ils la charité, car il faut bien qu'on la donne, cette charité qui est un précepte de la religion?" (Grève, 23). The beggars themselves knew the importance of their role in society. "Ceux qui sont plus nantis doivent donner une partie de leurs richesses aux plus pauvres. C'est comme ça que l'a dit la religion; en mendiant nous ne faisons que réclamer ce qui nous est dû!" (Grève, 82).

An excellent example of those who skillfully combine African and Muslim beliefs and practices are the marabouts who reflect the attitudes of the society as a whole. In La Grève des Bâttu, Aminata Sow Fall demonstrates their importance and pervasive influence. "The marabouts and their witchcraft are more detailed in La Grève des Bâttu than they are in Le Revenant, where the diviners are alluded to in a plural and impersonal manner" (Pfaff 1988, 354). Although the marabouts are Islamic holy men, they advocate magic solutions. The marabout Kifi Bokoul figured prominently in the story. "His
trance-like praying and penchant for sacrificial offerings are a manifestation of the world of animist beliefs, not the world of Islam" (Hemminger 1986, 274). This is hardly surprising for someone whose birth was heralded by an animistic spirit.

Après [un] sacrifice, un énorme serpent était descendu de l’arbre et s’était adressé au couple en ces termes: «Un enfant sortira des entrailles de cette femme, un enfant dont l’œil pourra voir ce que vous, vous ne pourrez pas percevoir. Car l’être que cette femme enfantera viendra de vous, il sera parmi vous, mais il ne sera pas de vous.» Ces paroles obscures prononcées, le serpent avait intimé à la femme l’ordre de danser; celle-ci avait dansé, dansé, dansé, et était entrée en transe, puis s’était endormie (Grève, 75).

Despite their magic practices, the marabouts owe their influential position to Islam. "Maraboutism gained eminence as the result of Islamic evangelisation and proselytization among the Wolof" (Ogundjimi 1990, 325). Furthermore, they maintain elements of Islam.

Divination combines both traditional methods and the use of Islamic almanacs. People greatly fear witchcraft. Their belief in the existence and working of spirits and the living-dead is strong, incorporating from Islam ‘the devil (seitane) . . .’ (Mbiti 1969, 239).

The marabouts wield great power in middle class society. "The socio-psychology of the Senegalese bourgeoisie like Mour Ndiaye is shaped by this ‘magic consciousness’" (Ogundjimi 1990, 326). Matters such as marriage and job success are routinely referred to the marabouts. Mour visited Serigne Birama about a promotion to Vice-President. The marabout advised a plan of action: "Tu l’auras, s’il plaît à Dieu. Fais seulement le sacrifice d’un beau bêlier tout blanc. Tu l’égorgeras de ta propre main, tu feras sept tas de viande que
tu donneras à des mendians" (Grève, 28). Early in their marriage, Mour’s first wife, Lolli, consulted marabouts to further her husband’s career. When she heard of Mour’s decision to take a second wife, she reminded him of this:

Qui courait derrière les marabouts? Dis-moi à ton tour, où passait l’argent que me donnaient mon père et mes frères qui avaient pitié de moi? --Dans la poche des marabouts pour t’ouvrir les portes de la prosperité" (Grève, 44).

She returned to the marabouts in an attempt to regain Mour’s affection and attention after his marriage to his second wife, Sine. "Encore un espoir logé dans le coeur de Lolli: celui de récupérer son mari pour elle toute seule: ce sera la nouvelle raison de ses tête-à-tête avec les marabouts" (Grève, 48).

Salla’s recounted her former employer’s rites for finding a new job:

Mon patron, le dernier qui j’ai travaillé, ... passait son temps à pester contre les marabouts. ... Pourtant cet homme, un vrai toubab ... ne sortait jamais de la maison, le matin, sans s’être enduit du contenu de sept canaris remplis de mixtures de poudres et de racines fermentées" (Grève, 34).

Their influence extends beyond the lives of individuals into the political arena. "No party could hope to obtain power if the ‘marabouts’ were unanimously hostile to it, and it seems certain that any party once in power would be forced to come to terms with them" (O’Brien in Ogundjimi 1988, 326). Although they play a significant role in her second novel, they are absent from her three more recent novels where she concentrates on other aspects of religion.
In *l’Appel des Arènes* Aminata Sow Fall focuses mainly on traditional African practices with Islamic beliefs taking a minor role. For example, when her child is stillborn, one mother accused Diattou who was acting as mid-wife of being a soul-eater. "Sale «dèmm!» C’était bien vrai. Tu as mangé mon enfant comme tu as dévoré l’enfant de Kani Sadio" (*Appel*, 89). There are several references to griots. "Malamine le griot du village raconta neuf cents ans d’histoire des Lô que lui avait appris son père qui la tenait des ses peres" (*Appel*, 94). The griot visited the family’s house until Diattou insulted him.

She also included several references to magic. Malaw recounted how his father emerged from the woods one night with the characteristics of a lion. "On vit mon père bouger, puis se secouer, et enfin se dresser, totalement métamorphosé. Ses yeux avaient la couleur de l’ocre" (*Appel*, 95). In addition, Nalla’s privileges as assistant to Malaw went beyond cheering in the wrestling arena. He became a link to and an active participant in the natural world. "Tu seras mon garçon-fétiche, c’est-à-dire que tu seras le témoin de mes contacts avec les forces invisibles de l’air et de l’eau. Ensemble, nous communierons avec la terre. Ensemble, nous implorerons le ciel" (*Appel*, 112).

There are other references to the connection to the land. Malaw related the practice of burning piles of grass to enrich the soil; the fact that his ancestors believed in this
practice was sufficient for him to believe as well. "C’est que les débris calcinés nourrissent le sol, avait répondu Malaw. Nos grands-mères l’ont cru; nous aussi, nous le croyons" (Appel, 49). This association between the land and his grandmother is explicitly underscored later. "La grand’mère, c’est encore la terre... Le lien avec la terre..." (Appel, 86).

Characters looked to the past for strength, direction, and inspiration. Malaw recounted the example set by his grandfather, "Certains acceptèrent la domination mais mon arrière-grand-père refusa l’humiliation" (Appel, 70). Nalla also understood the sacredness of the past to himself and his grandmother. "Nalla aimait entendre Mame Fari replonger dans son passé qui était pour elle un bain de jouvence et le plus sacré des pèlerinages" (Appel, 57). A long association between the families of André and Malaw enhanced their friendship. "Une longue amitié datant de nos ancêtres respectifs, s’est consolidée de génération. Malaw est pour moi plus qu’un frère" (Appel, 45).

References to Islam, however, are present as well. Although he advocated traditional ways, André also found strength in a non-animist God. He recounted how he won a match: "Le Tout-Puissant me donna la force de déjouer tous ses pièges" (Appel, 39). Malaw’s ancestors also looked to a Muslim deity to guide their lives. "«Al akbar», «Al akbar!» Après la prière, très solennellement, mon aïeul s’adressa à
ses compagnons” (Appel, 71-72). Even Mame Fari, who was a strong advocate of preserving traditional practices, professed a belief in a more Islamic God: “Le temps nous impose l’oubli, mon petit...Il nous l’impose. C’est de la loi de la nature, bouluée par le Créateur” (Appel, 56).

While *L’Appel des arènes* focuses on the overt theme of African religion and tradition, in *L’Ex-père de la nation* the presence of tradition is more subdued. In fact, at first glance, *L’Ex-père* is a political, secular story. However, a closer look reveals a strong pattern of Islamic and African practices. In the political sphere, Islam played the more significant role; in the personal, characters turned toward their ancestors for guidance.

After years of devastating drought, people turned toward God for assistance. Madiama recounted that, “les hommes abrutis par l’enfer de l’hivernage sans pluie lèveront la tête vers le ciel. «O mon Dieu, qu’il Te plaise de faire descendre la pluie sur notre peuple...»” (*Ex-père*, 7-8).

However, as the political and economic policies began to impose difficult consequences on the populace, many of them turned to the mosques for comfort and guidance. “Je croyais que le peuple qui avait presque tout perdu de ses libertés s’était rappelé que la religion était le meilleur rempart où l’on pouvait transcender tous les maux” (*Ex-père*, 156). As in *La Grève des Bâttu*, tension arose between the government and religious leaders. In the mosques, imams and others denounced
the government's policies. "Sous les minarets et les rosaces, on criait sa colère contre la misère du peuple, l'appauvrissement du pays" (Ex-père, 157). One speech turned a political execution into martyrdom. After the death of Madiama’s daughter, the government executed one of the men convicted of inciting the crowd. An imam in a city mosque decried the execution and said of the man, "Il avait chanté le fatiha comme on le fait dans les mosquées" (Ex-père, 162).

However, unlike in La Grève, Islamic leaders in L'Ex-père de la nation posed a unified, faceless, political force and the government was well aware of their power and influence. The chief of security, therefore, hesitated to move against them. "Yoro avait fait preuve de moins de rigueur dans la surveillance des mosquées et des églises. Je ne sais pas si c'était par respect pour les choses sacrées ou parce qu'il n'osait pas se risquer à un saut périlleux qui pouvait entamer son autorité s'il n'avait pas réussi" (Ex-père, 156).

At times the government itself took on a holy stature. After the arrest of Maas, one of Madiama’s advisors, he wrote to Madiama and explained his treason in religious terms. "Seytani avait totalement brouillé mon jugement, mais Dieu est plus fort que Seytani" (Ex-père, 36). Madiama would triumph over his adversaries, however, because "C'est Dieu qui nous a donné Madiama" (Ex-père, 33). Andru encouraged Madiama to accept divine comparisons. "Ici l'homme qui gouverne doit le faire à l'image du soleil" (Ex-père, 165). (However, he
cautioned Madiama against religious involvement, "[L]'Etat n'est pas une affaire de morale" (Ex-père, 74).) Madiama is even referred to as the savior of the nation. Madiama, however, looked elsewhere for guidance.

For Madiama, the sources of his inspiration were not distant; they were his mother, father, and grandfather. His honor was their honor. "Les nouveaux chants composés en mon honneur glorifiaient ma mère et mon père et mes grands-parents et mes aîeux" (Ex-père, 19). However, these members of his family did not directly interact with him during his presidency. As in L'Appel the appropriate story was recalled and the narrative was interrupted to return to a pertinent scene in the past.

Furthermore, Madiama's work was a mandate from his father who sent him to school "[Pour] y acquérir assez de savoir pour laver la terre d'un peu de ses souillures. Tu y mettras aussi ton coeur. Sans le coeur le savoir n'est rien" (Ex-père, 95). During a discussion of the vagaries of political leadership, his brother encouraged him to look to their father, "Souviens-toi en toute occasion de l'héritage de Père: une voie de paix dans l'effort et la propreté" (Ex-père, 79).

In the isolation of political life, Madiama turned to memories of his grandfather, Mangoné. As a wood-carver, he lived outside the village in a small, isolated, wooded area believed to be haunted. The villagers watched him suspiciously. "Un homme ordinaire dans le «refuge des djinns»!
. . . Finalement, on décréta: «Cette créature-là n’est pas seulement un homme.» Et on établit une distance respectable entre soi et «cet homme curieux qui n’avait rien trouvé mieux que d’aller cohabiter avec les djinns» (Ex-père, 83).

This is not the only reference to magic in the novel. As child, Madiama’s second wife, Yandé was afflicted with a "third eye" which indicated that she had sorceror’s powers. Through the efforts of her father, these "powers" were removed.

Son père, bilodji [guérisseur qui soigne les malades victimes des sorciers anthropophages] de son état, y avait vu un mauvais tour que lui avaient joué les sorciers, ses ennemis. Puisqu’ils traquait sans cesse, ils avaient décidé de se venger de lui en mettant le troisième œil dans sa progéniture. Sileye avait utilisé toute sa science pour ramener sa fille aux dimensions strictement humaines" (Ex-père, 120).

Throughout her life, however, Yandé continued to look for sorcery in others. When Madiama announced his plan to resign, Yandé accused her co-wife, Coura, of using magic. "Elle a dû t’breuver encore de philtres!" (L’Ex-père, 90).

Although Coura actually showed little interest in magic, both of Madiama’s wives had bound themselves to their ancestors. Aminata Sow Fall contrasted how this connection to the past can either give a woman freedom or trap her. When Madiama criticized Coura for not gladly accepting a co-wife, she reminded him that it was within her rights to have been consulted. "[M]oi, Coura Cissé, nanti par la grâce du Créateur des toutes les facultés d’une personne saine d’esprit et de corps, je peux vouloir dire oui ou non sans offenser ma
patrie ni mes ancêtres" (Ex-père, 56). She then recalled the
day they were married and quoted his mother to invoke his
responsibility to her. "[V]ous deux pour toujours, jusqu'à
la mort." . . . Elle est ta femme. Et moi je serai dorénavant
la femme que le destin et la volonté de mes ancêtres t'ont
collée pour la vie" (Ex-père, 58). Coura then took advantage
of the constant presence of their ancestors to "become" his
mother.

Je jure au nom de Dieu, que pour toi, je ne serai plus
une femme parce que, par ma propre volonté, je me fais
dès aujourd'hui la réincarnation de ta mère, ma tante
Coumba Dado Sadio (Ex-Père, 58).

This allowed Coura to extricate herself from a situation
she found intolerable without sacrificing her dignity or the
expectations of society. Madiama's second wife, Yandé,
however, was not so skillful. She found herself trapped by
her ancestral responsibility and the legacy of her
predecessors. During her first marriage, she left her home
village with her husband. "Elle avait suivi Boly à la
capitale après les derniers conseils de ses parents:
honnêteté, patience, respect de la vérité, courage . . . .
Pour mériter d'ètre née sur la même terre que les femmes de
Nder [Elles étaient sacrifiées par le feu pour ne pas se
rendre à l'ennemi.]" (Ex-père, 121). Yandé needed the
patience and courage of the women of Nder during Boly's
frequent violent episodes. However, her adherence to their
standard left her no honorable escape from her situation.
In *Le Jujubier du patriarche*, ancestral heritage is again of the utmost importance. Again it can be a blessing or a curse. For Narrou and Tacko it defined their roles and their conflict. Narrou lived with Yelli and Tacko as a matter of precedent.

However, Tacko also cited Narrou’s ancestry as justification for treating her poorly. "Elle restera toujours l’esclave qu’elle a été pour mes ancêtres qui l’ont achetée". (*Jujubier*, 46). Ironically, Narrou as griote faithfully maintained the history that kept her in a devalued position. "Elle ressentait ces falsifications comme un sacrilège" (*Jujubier*, 29). Moreover, she had no recourse for personal inspiration. "L’usage ne prévoyait pas de retenir la généalogie des esclaves" (*Jujubier*, 30). In searching for a solution to the conflict in his household, Yelli turned to memories of his father. Even though his father had died, Yelli "heard" his father’s answer, "Narrou est ta fille. . . Nous sommes une famille. . . Nos sangs sont mêlés quelque part. Depuis longtemps" (*Jujubier*, 53).

Characters looked to their ancestors for personal inspiration. Penda advised Yelli, "Sais-tu ce que disent les
sages? . . . Que l'on hérite sept traits de caractère de son homonyme. Alors, voyons ce que tu`as pris chez Yellimané" (Jujubier, 25). Naani was proud to learn that she had heroic ancestors. "Elle apprendra du griot que ‘Biti, l’amazone à l’allure de guêpe et au coeur de lion’ était sa lointaine ancêtre" (Jujubier, 29). In another case of transferring characteristics, Warèle on her deathbed bestowed parts of her spirit on her granddaughter, Biti. "Ce qu’il y a de vrai, de pur, d’éternel en moi, je cacherai en toi" (Jujubier, 101).

In addition to the distinct emphasis on the cult of ancestors in this novel, characters also referred to Islam. Their great hero was subject to God. "Yellimané! dis! Dieu Seul est Grand. Dis! Yellimané, dis!" (Jujubier, 113). In one scene, a speaker on television announced, "Si vous voulez savoir quel argent est licite, voici ce que dit le Livre: celui qui vous a été offert. C’est à vous de voir maintenant. Dieu Seul sait tout" (Jujubier, 67). Later, Yelli asked if he could visit the Jujubier and Narrou responded, "Tonton, tu le pourras, Inch Allah. Nous irons tous à Babyselli" (Jujubier, 91). The blooming of the jujubier was attributed to the grace of God.

L’herbe a poussé. Elle est déjà drue et verte. Quel miracle quand on sait que le sol est resté stérile depuis des décennies! Les jeunes générations n’ont jamais vu ça. Tant d’eau . . . Dieu merci . . . . Le jujubier va-t-il reverdir!" (Jujubier 85)

The final chapter of the novel is an epic poem of family history and exploits which relates mostly to the ancestral
hero such as "O Yellimané, enfant prodige/ Tu as avalé le soleil en naissant" (Jujubier, 130). However, she also included a number of references to Islam, for example, "Maître absolu des Terres et Cieux/ Tu m'as créé humain parmi les hommes" (Jujubier, 136). Later she recalled "Tu entrepris mille jihad/ Contre Satan chatouiller des bas instincts" (Jujubier, 137). She even mentioned the "Pomme d'Adam figé" (Jujubier, 142).

The novels of Aminata Sow Fall clearly illustrate the existence of a vast array of associations with the past. Through the course of her novels, the characters adhere less to Islamic practices and more to ancestral ones. Whether this is a reflection of society's values, her values, or simply her interests as a writer are unclear. Unlike the difficult integration of Western and African values, the integration of Islam and African practices is effortless and seamless. Perhaps Islam in Africa accepts and values traditional practices whereas Occidental materialism does not. Nonetheless, as the next chapter demonstrates, those who seek an antidote to the alienation of modern society need only look around them to find connections to their past and inspiration for their future.
CHAPTER III
THE SEARCH FOR BALANCE WITHIN CONTEMPORARY
SENEGALESE SOCIETY

Although the Republic of Senegal gained its independence in April 1960, it has not remained isolated from France and other Western nations. "The colonizing power, particularly in the case of France, continues to exert a political, economic, social and even cultural influence over the former colonies" (Stringer 1988, 36). For example, according to the United States Department of State, Senegal received $566 million in foreign economic aid in 1988. Furthermore, Senegal "now seeks closer economic ties with a country it sought so long to expel from its shores" (Hemminger 1986, 275). As a result of this association with the Occidental nations, "Senegal (like so many other Third World countries) must daily face the clash of custom and traditional practice with the modes and values of the industrialized West" (Hemminger 1986, 274). The influences of the West in the novels of Aminata Sow Fall take two forms. First, there is the influence of Occidental culture within the nation itself and it is with this that Aminata Sow Fall mainly concerns herself. Second, there is the direct influence of Western countries on African nations by way of trade, economic aid, and political influence. She includes a few references to direct influence, although she makes little overt commentary on this issue.
None of her novels provides an in-depth examination of international political issues; she presents them instead as asides. Clearly, though, her novels protest the adverse effects of foreign aid and its accompanying political interference on African society as a whole. This is not strictly an indictment of foreigners but also officials within African governments whose view of what society could be ignores present reality. There is a distinct lack of balance at work; modernization at all costs has a high price for society and the individuals in it. However, she does not advocate a return to traditional societal structure; she obviously accepts Western-style government, as that is not what she criticizes in La Grève des Bâtte and L’Ex-père de la nation. Rather, her presentation of direct foreign influence consists of a description of the problem without a solution--stated or implied.

In La Grève des Bâtte, for example, the two government officials in charge of the removal of the beggars, Mour and Keba, "represent postindependent African leaders who . . . are willing to exploit and sacrifice their citizenry in order to satisfy "national economy" and foreign interests" (Ajala 1990, 139). They desire to remove the beggars in order to increase the flow of foreign currency that comes with tourism. "Les gens qui habitent loin. . . les toubabs, surtout, commencent à s’intéresser à la beauté de nos pays, ce sont des touristes" (La Grève, 26). They see the beggars as an impediment to this
goal. "Cette année le nombre de touristes a nettement baissé par rapport à l’année dernière, et il est presque certain que ces gens-là y sont pour quelque chose" (Grève, 7). However, what is good for tourism is not good for the country as a whole, for the city can no longer function. Tourism thus becomes a symbol for foreign influence on the mentality and the political decisions of African leaders (Stringer 1988, 38).

The beggars can also be seen to represent Africa as a whole. "Aids, grants and loans are modern euphemisms for begging" (Ogundjimi 1990, 328). Although she does not offer any clear solution to the modern economic situation, the beggars in the novel succeed through making the wealthy come to them by banding together and manipulating the middle-class desire for advancement.

Aminata Sow Fall includes a parable about economic oppression in L’Appel des arènes. Nalla’s hero, the wrestler André, leaves the city to return to his home village of le Saalum. One dark night after the harvest, he and his fellow workers transport part of the harvested goods across the river to the cooperative. Pirates approach in a motorized boat and demand the cargo at gun point. The harvesters refuse to surrender and in the ensuing fight André is killed. Africa, like André, struggles to allow its people to profit from their work and the benefits of independence. However, many Western nations and companies, as well as individuals within Africa itself, are eager to make a fortune in developing nations.
In *L’Ex-père de la nation*, Aminata Sow Fall more openly tackles the issue of a head of state confronted with foreign colonial and postcolonial involvement. The central character, Madiama was chosen by the colonial powers as the interim president in the fourteen months before national elections. However, as he stated, "En réalité je ne gouvernais pas." (*Ex-père*, 10). The colonial government continued to control the army, finances and other sectors of the government. However, without a figure-head such as Madiama, their withdrawal from the country would have been rushed and dangerous. Nonetheless, the colonial authorities explained that it was for the good of the people and the new nation that they were leaving gradually; "nous serons à vos cotés en cas de difficultés" (*Ex-père*, 11). Although this may have been true initially, even after their official withdrawal from the country Madiama commented, "Elle avait encore des intérêts bien solides à protéger dans le pays" (*Ex-père*, 21). Foreign governments continued to have an influence in the struggling nation through the sale of goods and food. "Les projets avaient été présentés comme la solution miracle de nos problèmes" (*Ex-père*, 66). As this alone was insufficient, foreign interests lent his government large sums. However, this only increased his nation's dependence on them. "Depuis trois, quatre ans nous ne fonctionnons péniblement que grâce à l’argent qu’ils veulent bien nous prêter. A leurs conditions... Nous en sommes maintenant à plus de six cent
millions de dollars" (Ex-père, 79). Foreign governments then used these funds as political leverage. "Des pressions, toujours des pressions et des menaces de nous couper l'aide si nous n'exécutons pas certaines de leurs volontés ou si, sur le plan international, nous ne nous alignions pas sur leur politique" (Ex-père, 164). Thus, international aid is both a blessing and a curse. She seems to have had no more success with this problem than most economists. Her expertise lies not in global politics, but instead with the human condition. Although she explores these issues involving international policy, she devotes much more time in her novels to a reflection on the influences of Occidental culture on the culture of Senegal.

This seeming preoccupation with the cultural aspect of foreign influence results, perhaps, in part because it is more personal, but also because she experiences "the simultaneous and continuous exposure of Africans to traditional and Western forms of culture" (Irvine 1972, 136). In this respect she, like her characters, inhabits an inescapable, contradictory reality: "Africans, even if they wished to, could not accept one society and then pay little or no attention to the alternative; they simply must experience both societies" (Irvine 1972, 136). In most instances, especially in her first two works, what Aminata Sow Fall describes as Western values is rampant materialism. She vividly portrays the dehumanization and alienation that accompany the urbanization
which has developed in the pursuit of it. "Emigration to the
city, for example, which in its modern form is a Western
phenomenon, has led to a rootlessness which can be seen
everywhere in Black Africa and which is often, but not
necessarily, a cause of anguish and loss of identity"
(Stringer 1988, 37). This urban rootlessness and
dehumanization contrasts with the traditional identity from
membership in a group. "To be human is to belong to the whole
community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs,
ceremonies, rituals, and festivals of that community" (Mbiti
1969, 2). In her novels, Aminata Sow Fall concerns herself
primarily with a description of the overwhelming pervasiveness
of these foreign influences and the various manifestations of
materialism. She does not openly propose any blanket
solution, although the implied solution is often a return to
the traditional ways. Nonetheless, she includes some implied
criticism of certain traditional practices as well. In short,
she explores the possibilities and pitfalls of finding a
balance between the two. Characters meet with varying degrees
of success (where success is defined as achieving a desired
end). Through the successes (and failures) of her characters,
Aminata Sow Fall, always the teacher, gives lessons in life
and personal responsibility.

Her first novel, *Le Revenant*, clearly depicts the grave
consequences of the new philosophy of monetary gain. There
are no characters who maintain a strictly African lifestyle,
although she provides a few glimpses of traditional practices and minor characters who have successfully struck a balance between the two value systems. The focus of this novel, however, is on problems created by materialism. After Yama married a wealthy businessman, she embraced a Western value system and expected Bakar to follow suit. Bakar’s courtship of Aissa, for example, differed somewhat from the traditional as Mbiti described in *African Religions and Philosophies*:

The parents arrange marriages among the Wolof. When a young man meets a girl whom he intends to marry, he tells his father about the matter. His parents send an intermediary to the girl’s parents, to enquire if the suggestion for such a marriage is favorable in their sight. If it is, the boy’s parents send kola nuts to the girl’s father, together with a formal request for marriage. The girl’s father then consults his wife and daughter, and if these agree, he also gives his consent. . . . . The two young people now begin a formal courtship (Mbiti 1969, 133-134).

However, Bakar followed a modified version of this procedure. During one of his frequent visits to Aïssa after he met her on the beach, Aïssa’s father summoned Bakar who asked to marry her. Adja Dado Sarr and El Hadji Wellé Guèye (Aïssa’s parents) knew the reputation of Bakar’s sister, Yama, as wealthy and influential and agreed. Bakar then sought out not his parents, but Yama, who gave him money (not kola nuts) to take to Aïssa’s family.

Ultimately, however, Bakar was unsuccessful in his quest for a place in the materialistic society. In addition to prison time for embezzlement, Bakar could not reenter society upon his release, as no employer overlooked his “fameux
certificat de casier judiciaire" (Revenant, 73). Eventually, he spent less time in his parents' house and began to wander in the streets of his former neighborhood. This return to his past marked the beginning of Bakar's search for balance. It is not a physical return, however, but a spiritual one that initiates the process of change. For even though Bakar returned to this place, he became so drunk one evening that a stranger, "un des ces hommes pleins de bonne volonté qui sont toujours prêts à aider le prochain" dragged him back to the house. With a usual Sow Fallian ironic twist, it was because of this very Western behavior that his family finally gave up on him. Bakar explained, "Sais-tu que depuis ce fameux soir, je n'existe plus pour mon père?" (Revenant, 109). Still, however, Bakar was unable to embrace a more traditional lifestyle. Instead, he endeavors to beat the system, at an extreme personal cost. Faced with expulsion from his family, he began a more literal process of alienation. His loss of cultural identity is expressed through a physical loss of identity as he disappeared into the old neighborhood and physically altered his appearance through the skin-lightening xeesal. After staging his own death, the ultimate form of alienation, he returned after the funeral to obtain the money collected at the service. He had become literally dehumanized to Yama who believed she had seen a ghost.

Bakar's friend, Sada practiced several African customs and embodied a contradiction to materialistic ways. He
socialized and gave money, not for show and personal glorification, but from kindness and a sense of community. On the weekend, he provided generous hospitality for a large number of friends. (He also continued the practice of relying on his wife, Maïmouna, to do all the work.) During Bakar's imprisonment, he provided for Aïssa, but told her it was from her husband. "Depuis que tu es ici, chaque mois, Sada vient me remettre cinq mille francs de ta part" (Revenant, 57). He visited Bakar in prison and even met him there to help him return home. Sada maintained a personal and internal connection to the past. Aminata Sow Fall portrays him as an example of someone who can prosper in a capitalistic society without becoming obsessed with material gain—prospering instead through the continued practice of traditional values such as generosity.

Although many of the other characters, especially the women in this story, have embraced the Western-value system, Yama had a particularly warped sense of right and wrong. Bakar described her as "une sale arriviste" (Revenant, 84). She did not understand that the act of Bakar's theft itself, and not the sum of money taken, was the main concern of the law. "Rembourser ce qu'on doit et aller quand même en prison! C'est de la folie!" (Revenant, 47). This is a prime example of her self-serving philosophy; her interest in the matter was in saving herself from the bad publicity, and not the welfare of her brother. When she realized the inevitability of
Bakar’s imprisonment, she withdrew. “Dès le moment où elle avait compris que la prison était inévitable pour Bakar, elle s’était désintéressée de l’affaire” (Revenant, 51).

Yama does not suffer in the same way Bakar did. However, she too paid a price. In her quest for security, she has become a commodity herself. Aminata Sow Fall points a finger at mothers who seek their own financial stability through their daughters’ marriages. Bakar’s mother, Ngoné Niang, looked toward a wealthy husband for Yama as the key to the family’s happiness. “Si elle épouse un homme riche, nous pouvons enfin être heureux” (Revenant, 24). Wellé Guèye, on hearing of Bakar’s crime, leveled some blame at his wife for encouraging Aïssa’s materialism. He cried, “Vous, les femmes, vous êtes des démons, des démons trop sensibles à l’argent” (Revenant, 56). Despite the first catastrophe, Aïssa caved in to family pressure and her desire for affluency; she left Bakar and married another man who could provide her with more financial stability. “Il avait offert à Mame Aïssa comme cadeau de noces une Taunus coupée” (Revenant, 69). The lesson of Yama and Aïssa is a warning to women that marrying for money does not guarantee happiness. In fact, the quest for material gain is neverending as each social event must outdo all others preceding it.

Toward the end of the novel, Aminata Sow Fall introduces a female character who contrasts sharply with Yama, Hélène. (This device of two contrasting women is a pattern in her
novels.) Hélène Ndiaye, had, in part, integrated the two worlds. She lived and worked in the city and had no objections to nightclubs. In fact, one evening she and Bakar "dansèrent jusqu'à l'aube dans une boîte" (Revenant, 94). However, she did not move to the city in search of a wealthy husband. "Au village, on m'a déjà promise à quelqu'un" (Revenant, 99). When Bakar asked her if she loved this man she replied, "Je ne me suis jamais demandé. C'est notre tradition" (Revenant, 100). Hélène provides a model of dignity and contentment to counter Yama. Like Sada, she is an example of the possibility of balancing the two different systems.

Striking this balance, however, is far from easy. The main character of La Grève des Bâttu attempted to integrate Western and African values rather than live an entirely Western lifestyle. Unfortunately, as with Bakar, Mour also failed to achieve success in the new system, despite his efforts to balance the diverse customs. Again, Aminata Sow Fall presents characters with a variety of degrees of Westernization, including characters who adhered to a significant portion of the Western value system—some quite successfully. Through their actions and struggles, she proposes a variety of lessons.

Mour Ndiaye, although he believed himself to be quite Western, integrated African practices into his lifestyle. For example, he spoke of moving his country into the future. "Les
temps ont changé; maintenant nous sommes responsable du destin du notre pays. Nous devons combattre tout ce qui nuit à son essor touristique et économique" (Grève, 26). However, he also found a Wolof saying to justify his actions: "Ligééy dé mooydëgg. Tout l'homme a le devoir de travailler" (Grève, 27). He wore a ring with "des signes cabalistiques" and made frequent visits to the marabouts (Grève, 7). His second wife, Sine, was not only young but very Westernized; he was impressed with "surtout l'aisance avec laquelle elle s'exprimait dans la langue officielle . . . . Elle était très élégante et très moderne" (Grève, 45). So why does he not succeed? There is the obvious and often cited irony that in his quest for the vice-presidency he removed the beggars whom he needed ultimately. In other words, he rejected tradition and therefore suffered. However, this explanation is too simplistic. If he had not removed the beggars, he would not have been considered for the post. Furthermore, if he had practiced a more Western tradition, lobbying for the job, he might have had more success.

Aminata Sow Fall portrayed him as failing to achieve his goals while practicing African customs. The difference between Mour and Sada or Hélène (i.e. failure and success) is that Mour participated in these practices not for a cultural or spiritual enrichment but to achieve a personal gain. He had, in fact, become totally dissociated from the community spirit of tradition. Serigne Birama noted, "La Ville est en
train de vous déhumaniser, d’endurcir vos coeurs au point que vous n’ayez plus pitié des faibles" (Grève, 26).

Aminata Sow Fall’s concern with intent also explains, perhaps, why she does not indicate that Keba Dabo, who is entirely Western, and who in fact orchestrated the removal of the beggars, suffered a similar fate. Although he came from a poor family, he claimed that his mother never begged, she merely accepted charity from others. Keba objected to the begging, not giving, of alms. For him, the removal of the beggars advanced the country, not him personally. Keba never appeared to covet Mour’s job and it is unclear whether he would have obtained it if Mour had been promoted. This is not to say that Keba is portrayed favorably or presented as a role model. Merely, he appears in a less pathetic light.

Motive comes into play again in the case of Sine. She was very Westernized; she spoke excellent French and smoked cigarettes. However, she chose to become a second wife to a wealthy older man in order to establish her financial security. She, like Yama and Aïssa, discovered that financial security is not equivalent to happiness.

Sine’s foil, Lolli, like Hélène, clung to a traditional marriage role. The lesson of Lolli, though, is in some ways the opposite. Mour and Lolli had married early, and she had dedicated herself to advancing his career through hard work and sacrifice. For example, early in their marriage, she economized by owning and wearing only one pagne despite the
ridicule of her neighbors. In this respect, she is a contradiction to the materialistic Sine. Although she contemplated leaving when Mour married Sine, a stern lecture from her mother on her responsibility to her family and tradition convinced her to stay. In the end, however, it was an aspect of the very traditions to which she adhered that robbed her of what she desired. Appearing as the wife of the vice-president, which she believed would be recognition for her hard work, was an honor that would have gone to Sine. This situation is Aminata Sow Fall's earliest critique of an aspect of traditional life. Whereas Hélène found contentment in the promise of a traditional marriage, Lolli found suffering in the reality of it. This theme will appear again in *L’Ex-père de la nation*.

The theme of seeking a balance between Western and African ideas dominates *L’Appel des arènes*. Nalla, the schoolboy who is the central character of the novel, initially sought a total return to the traditional, but eventually achieved a balance. Again, the theme of Westernization leading to alienation and a subsequent return to tradition as its antidote occurs. However, this novel is more optimistic than either the preceding two works or novel that follows it.

Nalla, unlike Bakar or Mour, could not embrace Western customs with enthusiasm. Perhaps this difficulty persisted because he had not chosen this set of values; it had been imposed on him. Nalla experienced alienation from his
family; his dissatisfaction manifested itself in a disinterest in school and a general lethargy. Nalla's energy returned after he was befriended by the two wrestlers, Malaw and André, who told him stories about the mythical city of Diaminar and about the region of Saalum where André was born. Nalla often daydreamed of life in Saalum, which he envisioned as a sort of promised land. "Il «voyait» alors des hommes torse nu, suant sous le soleil ardent, et défichant une terre que de longs mois d'abstinence avaient desséchée" (Appel, 49). It was not necessary, however, to be physically present in this promised land to receive salvation; the practice of the rituals of Saalum sufficed. Therefore, Nalla participated in the male rite of passage (albeit in the hospital). He also assisted Malaw in the wrestling arena. "Tu seras mon garçon-fétiche . . . Encore, nous implorerons le ciel. Tu porteras mon sac et tu m'aspergeras de liquide bénis dans le secret des nuits" (Appel, 112). Nalla became a member of two communities, the natural world and the community of men. This did not mean that he no longer attended school or lived with his family. Rather, Nalla had succeeded where Bakar and Mour had failed; he integrated the need for academic education with the need for a cultural education. What was Nalla's secret? In part it may be the natural flexibility of children. More importantly, though, Nalla participated in the traditional not from a sense of obligation (as Lolli did) or from a desire for
personal advancement (as in the case of Mour), but in order to achieve personal enrichment.

To illustrate that this is not only possible for children, Aminata Sow Fall parallels Nalla’s discovery with the evolution of his father, Ndiogou. He was alienated from his son and from his heritage. While he did not condemn African practices, as his wife, Diattou, did, he did not value or participate in them. For example, he paid the griot, Mapaté, when he visited, but he did not defend him when Diattou insulted him, and he did not attempt to regain Mapaté’s favor after this incident. However, at the end of the novel, he too, rediscovered the value of connection to his roots. He went to the arenas to find Nalla and was captivated by the crowd and the event. His concern about appearances dissolved when he saw other well-educated and respected men in the stadium. As the novel closed, he and Nalla agreed to attend events in the arena together and to work on Nalla’s studies together. In short, in reconnecting with his heritage he was able to participate in his son’s life.

André and Malaw, however, had never severed that connection. Furthermore, they were quite fortunate, as they seemed to have found success without having had to adopt any Western customs whatsoever. They are by far the least Westernized characters in Aminata Sow Fall’s novels. Despite physically living away from the village, they were bastions of African customs. They attempted to maintain and continue the
values of the village in a world where "«Cosaan» [la tradition] se meurt" (Appel, 79). This luxury, however, carried a definite responsibility. In a not so subtly symbolic scene, the day that André met Nalla he offered him "conkom" which was described as "un liquide laiteux" which his brother who still lived in the village sent to him (Appel, 31). After one taste, Nalla rapidly emptied the bottle. Malaw and André, as guardians of tradition, had an obligation to ensure that it continued to be valued and practiced.

At the other end of the spectrum is the character who is the most Westernized in Aminata Sow Fall’s novels: Diattou. Whereas Yama had participated in traditional social functions and dress, Diattou opposed the maintenance of any traditional practices. After several years pursuing advanced education in Europe, she returned to Africa, where she maintained a very Western lifestyle including wearing European-style clothing and refusing to participate in communal life and ceremony. As a result of her choice of values, she found herself alienated and mocked by her neighbors. Despite this, she adamantly refused anything African. When she discovered that Nalla’s tutor was exposing her son to the chants of the arena, she became enraged, "Vous osez enregistrer des sauvageries que faites écouter à mon fils!" and expelled him from her house (Appel, 85). The family griot, Mapaté, visited her family’s house until she insulted him and his profession by accusing him of seeking only monetary gain: "Les arbres généalogiques
Diattou, who had had Western medical training, scoffed at Nalla’s attempts to undergo the traditional rite of circumcision, saying, “La circoncision n’est qu’un simple acte médical. Pourquoi en faire une cérémonie?” (Appel, 79). So, as Nalla related, his circumcision took place in a hospital "sans «selbé» [les jeunes déjà circoncis] et sans «lingué» [bâton des circoncis], j’étais tout seul entre papa et maman qui me faisaient les pansements alors que Mame Fari avait dit: «Jamais, au grand jamais les femmes ne devront toucher à cela» (Appel, 79). There are additional nuances which set Diattou apart from Bakar, Yama, and Keba Dabo. First, not only did she suffer from her extreme Westernization, but she caused her son to suffer. Secondly, Aminata Sow Fall explores the origins of Diattou’s alienation. She includes a scene of Diattou in France where being African made her feel alienated. This is intended in part as an explanation for her behavior, but also as another lesson. Finding balance involves being extremely flexible; it requires adaptability to changing situations and cultural settings.

Amid these two extremes, Aminata Sow Fall presents two characters who call for balance: Mame Fari and Monsieur Niang. Although their backgrounds and social positions were quite different, they both saw integration of the two influences as the key to success and happiness in Nalla’s life. Nalla’s grandmother Mame Fari, the foil for Diattou, maintained her
African heritage and encouraged Nalla to participate in the male rite of passage. Nalla thought fondly of his time in the country with her and of the stories of magic and adventure she recounted to him. However, she did not expect him to reject all things Western; in fact, she perceived a unity in all cultures. "Le monde est vaste mais les idées peuvent sans doute converger" (Appel, 75). Furthermore, Mame Fari did not discourage Nalla's travels to other places; she expected it. "Comme tes parents, tu iras dans d'autre contrées que moi je ne verrai jamais" (Appel, 76). She is Aminata Sow Fall's example of a grandparent who does not hope for a full return to a previous time. She also assumed the role of instructor when Nalla's parents failed.

Nalla's tutor, Monsieur Niang, also encouraged balance. Although he participated in the Westernized system of education, he did not practice all of its habits or accept all of the trappings of a Westerner. During a tirade against him, Diattou scolded him, "Un professeur qui ne porte jamais de cravate!" (Appel, 85). Monsieur Niang recognized the importance of a connection to one's roots. He said, "L'homme perd ses racines et l'homme sans racines est pareil à un arbre sans racines: il se dessèche et meurt. (Un homme qui a perdu son identité est un homme mort...) (Appel, 67). In order to help Nalla regain a sense of identity, he offered Nalla access to his extensive collection of recordings of stories and songs of the arena. He did not mean for Nalla to abandon his
studies, but rather to integrate both into his life. "Tu l'écouteras trois fois pour ton plaisir personnel. Ensuite, tu relèveras dans ton cahier tous les verbes qui s'y trouvent et tu me les analyseras" (Appel, 84). Like Malaw and André, Niang had a responsibility to Nalla-- not just to educate him in Western literature but African tradition. In addition to underscoring again the importance of maintaining a connection to an African heritage, through this character Aminata Sow Fall also encourages educators to balance it by including African culture in the very French school system.

Moving from the wrestling arena, Aminata Sow Fall returns to the murky issue of balance in the political arena in L'Ex-père de la nation. Again, although Madiama struggled to maintain a connection to the past, it was insufficient to solve his country's numerous problems. Solutions to these problems were even less clear-cut than in La Grève des Bâttu, when they appeared at all. Unlike Mour, Madiama did not dream of wealth and glory; he was an honest idealist who sought the welfare and prosperity of his nation. Due to the political subject matter, most of the discussions of foreign influences are on the national level. Nonetheless, she portrays brief, but telling, scenes of personal weakness and personality. Although Aminata Sow Fall strongly encouraged a return to a traditional sense of family and community in her earlier books, in this novel she portrays adherence to tradition in a much less flattering light.
As in *La Grève des Bâttu*, Aminata Sow Fall contrasts the leader’s two wives in *L’Ex-père de la nation*. Courra is very much like Lolli: she married young, supported her husband, respected tradition. She was also supplanted by a younger, more materialistic second wife whom her husband married without consulting her, much less obtaining her consent. Yandé, however, has more in common with Diattou than with Sine. Yandé’s adherence to tradition earlier in her life, namely during her first marriage, brought her shame and also violence. Although the women’s behavior and attitudes are different, the stories of both women encourage a reevaluation of some traditional practices.

Much of *L’Ex-père* is composed of political events and Madiama’s recollection of events before his presidency. This is not to say that she ignores characters swept away by materialism, just that she spends little time on these descriptions. However, she includes a description of a corrupt doctor who is more sinister than any previous example. Doctor Pinade preyed on his patients’ illness, fear, and adherence to tradition in order to further his personal fame and fortune. He gave prescriptions of aspirin under complicated medical names to his patients and then,

> A la fin du traitement, après avoir reçu son chèque ou l’enveloppe avec les mille remerciements de l’ex-malade, après les adieux, il se tapait la tête comme si l’idée venait de l’assaillir. «Ah! M..., au lieu de mettre à la poubelle les restes des médicaments dont vous n’avez plus besoin, vous pouvez les offrir au dispensaire...»  

(*Ex-père*, 174).
Rather than become upset, his unsuspecting patients praised him highly, "«Merveilleux docteur Pinade! Il vous maintient sur terre en vous préparant une place au Paradis!» (Ex-père, 174). In keeping with the dark, realistic tone in this novel, Pinade is apparently never punished. In fact, as this was early in Madiama's career, Madiama is sent to a very rural clinic to silence his protests of Pinade's behavior. In another ironic scene that implies a reevaluation of one traditional practice, when Madiama arrived there he was informed that "Les villageois préfèrent encore leur médecine traditionnelle" (Ex-père, 180).

Madiama displayed no calculated duplicity, as Pinade did. As president, he neither accepted bribes nor sold offices. The one incident of corruption related in the story involved his sister who approached him about finding work for her unemployed husband and sons. Her request and his response reveal much about Madiama's position. He sister spoke to him at a gathering,

L'assistance matérielle que tu me portes me fera vivre tout le temps que durera ton règne, et je t'en suis reconnaissante. Mais je voudrais aussi que mon mari pétrisse un peu de pain que nous mangeons. Tu sais qu'il chôme et que mes trois fils en âge de travailler ne font que vivoter. . . . Trouve-leur un travail décent" (Ex-père, 81).

After he agreed, he stopped and reflected on his behavior,

J'avais moi-même signé des affectation à des postes importants sur simple intervention ou par sympathie, sans me demander si c'était dans l'intérêt du pays. . . . J'eus brusquement peur. Peur de découvrir ma propre vulnérabilité devant les sollicitations d'un système très
While nepotism is often viewed as corrupt in Western governments, Madiama was living according to his traditional responsibility of supporting an extended family. This situation also highlights another aspect of Madiama’s character, his desire to accommodate everyone. He was undoubtedly chosen by the colonial government for not only his honesty, but also because he was not a strong personal force. Over time, the opposition parties and even his own ambitious ministers eroded his control of the government and the nation. Aminata Sow Fall seems to be saying that honesty and a connection to the past are necessary but alone they are not sufficient to make a strong and effective leader.

For her most recent novel, Le Jujubier du patriarche, she again examines the life of private citizens who attempt to balance and make sense out of the world in which they lived. As Naarou said, "Tu vis dans la fin du vingtième siècle avec ses dures réalités" (Jujubier, 12). There is essentially no description of materialism in this book, instead there are glimpses of modern life, such as watching television. As in L’Appel des arènes, this story involved a promised land. Unlike Saalum, characters make pilgrimages to Babyselli. However, the internal transformation, rather than physical relocation, is again necessary for growth and contentment. Although the past is still cited as a source of strength, Aminata Sow Fall continues to become more openly critical of
some tradition, while she includes more description of it in her novels. Where materialism caused family division in her first three novels, traditions caused the divisions in *Le Jujubier*. Much of the conflict, therefore, focuses on the maintenance of traditions that, rather than uniting the family, divide them. Yelli differs from Bakar, Mour and Nalla who fought personal battles with materialism, because his struggles and frustrations stem from the conflict of others around him: between his daughter Bouri and her husband, Goudi, and between his wife, Tacko, and "daughter" Naarou.

The marital conflict between Goudi and Bouri highlighted a tradition that may be due for a reevaluation. The couple had remained childless despite Bouri's attempts at a variety of treatments. As this was not successful, she made a logical assumption: maybe the problem was not her body but her husband's. He, however, chose to maintain the traditional view that it could not possibly be his fault. Thus, when she proposed that he see a doctor, his reaction was less than favorable. "Son amour-propre bafoué, sa dignité d'homme blessée, quelle horreur!" (*Jujubier*, 37). He divorced her on the spot. Ironically, it was by breaking the rules (carrying on an "affair" with him after the divorce) that Bouri obtained what she desired: her husband and a child.

True to form, Aminata Sow Fall again contrasts two women in conflict with each other. However, both women in this story maintained an active connection to their heritage while
living in a modern society. The issue that divided them involved a distant quarrel between the two wives of a distant ancestor. (Again, Aminata Sow Fall cites a drawback to polygamy.) Tacko blamed all misfortune on Naarou to whom she referred as "l’esclave qu’elle a été pour mes ancêtres qui l’ont achetée" (Jujubier, 46). Naarou used her position as griote to unsettle Tacko. The solution to this divisive tradition was a recognition of the unity they shared as descendants and therefore members of one family. All those who visited Babyselli had something in common, despite their diverse origins and appearances. Yelli remarked on the diversity during the pilgrimage to the jujubier, "Fantastique, cette foule impressionnante d’hommes, de femmes et de jeunes de toutes conditions" (Jujubier, 93). However, he also appreciated diversity in the city, symbolized by its buildings, which presented "un tableau architectural incroyable dans sa diversité: du soudano-sahélien, du baroque, du byzantin, et aussi du moderne" (Jujubier, 50).

Through the character of Penda, Aminata Sow Fall generalizes this idea of doing away with past divisions to form a more unified Africa--based on similarities rather than divisive differences. Penda traveled to several African regions during her struggle for prosperity. However, she was treated as a foreigner and expelled. Disgusted by this attitude she remarked, "Ce qui me navre, c’est l’hypocrisie de nos chefs qui passent leur temps à parler de fraternité,
d'amitié, d'unité, tout en agissant comme les blancs qui ne veulent plus nous voir chez eux" (Jujubier, 20). This is not only a novel of personal transformation, but a call for pan-Africanism.

Recognition of this connection to the past does not heal all divisions or erase all suffering. Tacko and Naarou do not experience a grand reconciliation; there is not a scene in which they promise eternal cooperation and affection. The randomness of life continued as well. Bouri was killed by a drunk driver shortly after the birth of her child. Unity and connectedness do not provide simple or magic solutions for happiness. However, the gathering at the jujubier after Bouri's death provided an opportunity for grieving and remembering.

Over time, the novels of Aminata Sow Fall evolve from a strong denouncement of materialism to a critical analysis of some traditional values. She does not encourage a return to a traditional society with a rejection of all things Western. As one of her characters remarked, "Quand le monde bouge, il faut bouger avec" (Jujubier, 59). Rather, she sees tradition as an enriching and stabilizing force in society and the lives of individuals. This does not imply that she embraces all tradition as beneficial. For example, she would not mind discontinuing the practice of excision in particular. "Ainsi on pourra progressivement mettre fin à la pratique de l'excision pour la santé et la dignité de la femme" (Gadjigo
Tradition is not a stagnant relic of the past. "La tradition elle-même a beaucoup évolué. Et cependant elle reste toujours une tradition" (Gadjigo 1987, 221).

As a writer, she too seeks balance in her work. Through her characters she exposes the impediments to contentment and the numerous problems of late-twentieth-century Africa. Nonetheless, her portrait of society becomes more hopeful as the novels progress. Yelli is more successful than Bakar; Madiama is more effective than Mour; Tacko is more at peace than Diattou. By the end of Jujubier, the tone of the novels is more optimistic and balanced.

Furthermore, there is also an evolution in her style, as the next chapter discusses. She integrates more African stylistic elements into her novels as her search for balance continues, just as her characters integrate more African practices.
CHAPTER IV

STYLISTIC AND LINGUISTIC REVALORIZATION OF
SENEGALESE TRADITION

While Aminata Sow Fall's stories focus on the possibilities of balancing Western values with a renewed appreciation of African traditions, as an author she faces similar challenges within the texts themselves. First, her audience consists of Senegalese, other Africans, and Occidental readers. This influences her choices of form and vocabulary. Second, in order to incorporate the past, her narrative must integrate the past (traditional) and the present (Occidental). She explores the possibilities of a balance between Western and African style, vocabulary and chronology.

She is familiar with both African and Western styles of narrative and, writing for an audience of exclusively Senegalese or of exclusively foreign readers would undoubtedly present few significant difficulties. However, her novels target a mixed and diverse readership. She writes first for other Africans. "Le roman africain devrait être ... le roman par lequel les Africains se découvrent par eux-mêmes" (Hawkins 1987, 20). Nonetheless, she writes for Westerners as well. "J'écris pour tout le monde" (Hammond 1981, 192). Therefore, she constructs her work from "classic western structure and treatment combined with a plot based on
fundamentally non-western cultural traditions, intended to suit both African and western audiences" (E. Miller, 145). Even though her earlier unpublished writing projects had taken the forms of poetry and drama, she chose to address these new issues through the novel. "Je pense que le roman est encore le meilleur moyen d'expression pour rendre compte de ces problèmes [sociaux]. Et c'est pourquoi j'ai choisi le roman" (Hammond 1981, 192).

True to her admonitions to maintain an African heritage, her style is faithful to the past. For example, "Authorial interventions are frequent. In short, [L'Appel des arènes] has some resemblance to the traditional African tale where the griot (story teller) often repeated key sentences and commented on the material just presented. Moreover, the use of much dialogue gives the novel a dominant orality." (Hammond 1983, 908). This is true of her other novels as well. Furthermore, she continues the traditional practice of transmitting an appropriate moral. "It is to be noted that Sow Fall herself, as the author/narrator, espouses the role of the story-tellers who, beyond describing situations, formulate a definite opinion about the events which are taking place in the novel" (Pfaff 1988, 343). Another manifestation of her connection to the past is her use of indigenous words and expressions.

This use of "non-French" vocabulary in her novels written in French deserves closer attention. She regularly includes
words, phrases and entire sentences in languages other than French. In some cases, these words have been incorporated into French, although not for all speakers as many Francophone works include them in a glossary of "African vocabulary". (For convenience, the term "non-French" is used to describe these words even though this is not entirely accurate.) She borrows primarily from Wolof but also includes a number of phrases from other languages, in particular Arabic. For example, characters often exchange greetings of: "--Saalamu Alleykoum! --Maalikum Salaam" (Le Revenant, 32). Some of these words describe objects and customs native to Africa for which no other word exists in French, such as baobab (Jujubier, 97).

When writing for an audience that includes foreigners, Aminata Sow Fall and other African writers "attempt to recapture traditional speech by translating fairly literally into the vernacular" (Obiechina, 155). Accordingly, borrowed words frequently occur in dialogue or the author's presentation of her characters' thoughts where they flow naturally into the scenes.

However, the author's incorporation and explanation of what are, for many readers, foreign words presents another problem. "The Senegalese reader, who is familiar with the clanic hierarchies of his society, who understands allusions to traditional customs . . . has no need for explanatory ethnographical footnotes" (Gérard and Laurent 1980, 136).
Readers from outside Senegal, however, often do need an explanation. In most cases she follows the expressions with a phrase in French that the non-Wolof-speaking reader assumes provides an explanation. The redundance resulting from the repetition of a non-French phrase followed by a similar one in French creates an interruption in the flow of dialogue. Furthermore, in some instances the translation results in a possibly confusing change of meaning. For example, the expression "l’esclave de Dieu. . . [Grève, 87] s’agit d’une traduction du syntagme arabe al abd ullah . . . Cette expression arabe pourrait se résumer tout simplement par ‘celui qui se soumet à Dieu’ c’est-à-dire le Musulman” (Case, 1988, 28). Other exclamations can be deciphered from context. For example, a character cries: Wóóý! Mon pauvre père! when she fears that her father has died (Grève, 40). Thus, the expression wóóý probably expresses grief or dismay.

Her manner of explanation and the particular themes of her borrowings vary from ritual to philosophical according to the message of the novel. However, the majority of Sow Fall’s borrowings can be divided into five categories. Maxims, mottos, and expressions that imply an opinion or an emotional reaction comprise the first category. For example, Adduna neexul meaning "Life holds surprises" and wallay (expressing an affirmation of something that has been said or is about to be stated) fall into the first category (Revenant, 32, 65). The second category classifies nouns that describe people.
These one-word names usually carry a negative connotation and are always in some way descriptive. This category includes, for example, *ndaanaan* and *diriuanké*, which both denote a woman who is rich and worldly-- but not necessarily respected (*Revenant*, 28). The third category encompasses items of a daily, household nature such as food and clothing. The word *laax* (a type of food) belongs in this third category (*Grève*, 52; *Jujubier*, 43). The fourth group consists of words that describe religious or traditional rituals and items used in these activities, such as the word *tama* which describes a small drum (*L’Appel des arènes*, 26). Words that do not any of these previous four comprise the fifth category; *kersa* (respect) and *xeessal* (a skin-lightening chemical) are examples (*Le Jujubier du patriarche*, 56; *Revenant*, 42). The distribution among these categories varies between novels based on subjects and themes.

*Le Revenant* provides an excellent example of her use of descriptive names. Sow Fall employs a variety of descriptive names to indicate the moral judgement passed by the speaker on the person described. In a society where one family's motto is *Ban gatia nangoo dee*, "Death before dishonor," disparaging names wield considerable power (*Revenant*, 31). Sada's wife, for example, tolerates the incessant work of hostess during the constant unannounced visits of her husband's friends. The alternative is to have her husband branded *siiskat*, someone who violates the rules of hospitality (*Revenant*, 17). The
family of the wife of the central character convinces her to leave him while he is in prison. They tell her that her husband is a badoolo, a man of low social or moral standing (Revenant, 66). The characters use other words to indicate their social superiority to other groups, such as surga, which indicates a subordinate, and neeno, which refers to someone of a lower caste (Revenant, 79, 83). While vying for social position, one must beware of a déem or a sorcerer that cannibalizes the human spirit inflicting sterility, lethargy or bad luck (Revenant, 36). Interjections and expressions are more common in La Grève des Bâttu. For example, when speaking about his future plans one man adds Inch’Allah to every proposition (Grève, 10). Other short interjections convey emotion; Céy waay! expresses surprise, usually pleasant (Grève, 17). Sow Fall again adds maxims and words of wisdom. Characters counsel, Ca dègg dègg lèf li mot naa seetaat, "One must look at the problems right under one’s nose" and Agu jigéén baaxul, "Those who mistreat women will be punished" (Grève, 33, 42). The author also inserts more mundane phrases such as Jóg jot na kat, "It is time to get up." and gaawe ma "Hurry up!" (Grève, 33, 40). Although these type of expressions dot the dialogue, she rarely uses other non-French vocabulary. She includes a few food items, tree names and descriptions of people. She presents one noteworthy descriptive name: waa bitim rééw, meaning the people of Europe and the United States.
In *L’Appel des arènes*, the many discussions of traditional rites and telling of stories require the use of Wolof words and phrases:

L’occurrence des termes wolofs dans le texte est stratégique. En guise d’exemple, les "bâkks" qui ponctuent le texte romanesque, font écho à la quête culturelle de Nalla et conservent une part remarquable du rythme référentiel du wolof (Crosta 1986, 62).

However, Aminata Sow Fall chooses to use fewer and less complicated expressions in this novel than in her two previous books. Most of the borrowings describe items that are native to Africa and some are words which French has incorporated, a *darkassous* tree, for example (*Appel*, 73). Not surprisingly, a number of the names and words relate to the *kasag* (the ritual circumcision) and the contests in the arena (*Appel*, 76). The characters speak of the *tama*, a small drum, and the *lingué*, the instrument of circumcision (*Appel*, 26, 78). They also invoke *cosaan* (tradition) and recite *Bâkk*, poems that recount the glorious achievements of the fighters in the arenas (*Appel*, 79, 25). The circumcised are referred to as *Njulli Njaay* and also as *selbés* (*Appel*, 76, 78).

As in *La Grève*, in *L’Ex-père* even in a modern political system, characters remind each other of time-proven maxims. One character reminds, *Saay saay woxul dêgg wante yakh na xo*: Lying sows doubt (*Ex-père*, 146). Another urges the president, *Yalla yalla beysa toll*: Plant the garden first and pray to God afterwards (*Ex-père*, 157). Even as governments change, some things never change. One injured man trying to negotiate the
bureaucracy of bribes at the hospital remarks: *Baadoolo sonne*, "Life is hard for those who are not rich." (*Ex-père*, 27).


Over half of the names for people refer to women. The characters use the familiar *Yaay* for a mother and *Maam* for a grandmother (*Jujubier*, 31, 43). They also discuss two special "types" of wives. A *femme djinn* renders her co-wives sterile by her jealousy (*Jujubier*, 39). A *tara* is slave woman that a man marries after he already has four wives (*Jujubier*, 55). Again, a worldly, rich woman is a *diriyanke* but a younger woman with connections is a *disquette* (*Jujubier*, 78, 58). As ritual plays a part in the plot of this novel, she includes words such as *Taaxuaan* (to sing and dance in the ritual) (*Jujubier*, 129).

This mix of languages brings benefits and complications. The presence of non-French phrases in her work creates a
precision and an atmosphere that cumbersome explanations in French would not; Wolof expressions allow a certain nuance of meaning. There is a good example of this in Le Revenant. Aminata Sow Fall explains:

Dans Le Revenant par exemple, "Diongoma lu mu bèg yalla nay Jam" (ce que femme veut, Dieu le veut). "Diongoma" se traduit par "femme", mais pour un lecteur sénégalais, il y a plus. Tout un ensemble de sous-entendus: sa beauté, son charme, ses gestes, pour ne pas dire plus (Gadjigo 1987, 224).

The use of Wolof and Arabic terms also invokes a cultural setting and group of ideas which the author calls "un clin d'œil entre Sénégalais" (Gadjigo 1987, 224). For many Senegalese readers, Wolof expressions evoke connotations that enrich the novels. "Chez Aminata Sow Fall, les textes comprenant des citations wolofs créent leur propre cadre de référence" (Niang 1992, 119). Beyond national identifications, her use of Arabic expressions taps into a different set of ideas. "In addition to including Wolof expressions, Sow Fall's narrative, written in French, is punctuated by Arabic greetings and expressions which evoke the Arab discourse" (Pfaff 1988, 346).

This necessity of including non-French expressions raises the issue of her choice not to write in Wolof: "la présence des termes wolofs... nous amène à considérer l'inadéquation de la langue française à exprimer en sa totalité l'expérience politique, sociale et culturelle du contexte sénégalais (Crosta 1986, 62). If she is truly writing to be read in Senegal (a country where "90% des gens parlent ou comprennent
le wolof"), writing entirely in Wolof would seem more practical (Pfaff 1985, 138). However, "the question often asked by Westerners-- Why do Africans write in French?-- assumes that a free and easy choice of among different literacies is available" (C. Miller, 248). Although she would like to write in Wolof, she faces an economic reality:

Even in Senegal, the most broadly developed of the former French colonies, much of the population is illiterate and thus the African audience is at this time restricted to the educated elite. Publishing houses and thus writers accommodate this limited market by addressing a dual audience: the African elite, but primarily the francophone world beyond (E. Miller 1987, 143).

Thus, she writes in French in order to be heard. She remarks, "Il faut user des moyens dont on dispose pour refuser le silence" (Gadjigo 1987, 224). Given this rich source of cultural communication more difficult to access through French, Aminata Sow Fall looks forward to writing in Wolof. She says, "Le jour où toutes les conditions seront réunis pour écrire en Wolof, le dilemme ne se posera plus, ce sera la fin du malaise" (Gadjigo 1987, 224).

Some stylistic elements of her work remain constant over time-- the novel format and the inclusion of non-French vocabulary, for example. However, an interesting evolution takes place in the narratives. As she moves from a criticism of materialism to a connection with the past, her novels spend less time in a forward, linear expression of time and more time relating past events. Le Revenant and La Grève des Bâttu include minor references to the past such as Bakar's
recollection of the day he met Sada and Lolli’s recitation of events early in her marriage. L’Appel des arènes, however, marks a transition. Although the narrative itself never shifts to the past, Malaw recounted several stories of the history of Diaminar. He acted as griot not only for Nalla but for the reader as well. Although L’Ex-père de la nation differs significantly in subject matter, Madiama performs a similar role of griot. First, the book takes the form of mémoires, automatically creating a recollection of the past. Furthermore, in long passages in the novel he recalled scenes from his youth. These interludes were always connected to the "present" through Madiama but they function in the same way as the stories of Malaw, as a return to the past for inspiration. In Le Jujubier du patriarche, much of the story takes place in the past without necessarily a character who relates it. For example, the second chapter of the novel relates Penda’s travels and trials abroad. The narrative progresses in two directions: the characters who live in the "present" move forward in time while the recalled exploits of the heros come from farther in the past. The final two chapters of the book consist mainly of griot chanted poems of the past; sandwiched between them is an update on the characters who were the focus of the early chapters of the novel.

The narratives of Aminata Sow Fall follow her own advice for returning to the past. As the plots of her novels rely more on connecting with the past so does the chronology. As
her characters rediscover a rich traditional heritage from many sources, so she integrates French, Wolof, and Arabic. Furthermore, as her characters seek a balance of Western and African traditions as they seek success, she integrates Western and African elements to create a literature which achieves her goals in writing about modern Senegalese culture.
Aminata Sow Fall has examined and described Senegalese culture over the past twenty years. Although she may not claim to teach, she certainly delivers a message to her readers about the important role of tradition. In her novels, she describes many characters who meaningfully maintain traditional values and practices--such as the consultation with marabouts. As an antidote to the effects of materialism, she invites and encourages the revalorization of numerous elements of their rich heritage, in particular those that include relationships within a community. She acknowledges the need for balance in this process by negatively portraying traditional values that limit and divide groups and individuals.

In her novels, we see that the adoption of Western values in Occidental Africa has led to materialism in which responsibility to others has been devalued in favor of personal advancement. Some traditions that she portrays, such as alms-giving, require the continuation of responsibility. However, both Western and Senegalese social values can lead to social division. Senegalese society has traditional divisions which often focus on the responsibilities of the less powerful to the powerful. In neither case is the obligation of those with more power (money, social standing) to others required or emphasized. Many characters in her novels seek a balance of
West African and Occidental practices, and it is evident that personal integrity and responsibility are of the utmost importance in achieving it; self-serving actions by her characters are rarely rewarded.

The Senegalese traditions portrayed in her novels have a variety of sources: Islam, animism, the cult of the ancestors. An individual's combination of elements of each of them forms a personal philosophy of life and heritage. In her novels, the practice of African traditions provides an example of how diverse customs can exist simultaneously and enrich the lives of those who practice them. These values and practices engage the spirit of individuals and contribute to the community as a whole. Through her novels, we understand that it is this sense of community, especially through family, that has traditionally provided an identity and can be revitalized. For those who have lost all connection to this tradition, they can find it easily accessible even in a Westernized, urban society, if they have the motivation to seek it out in others. A connection to the past arrives through a connection to others. Furthermore, connection to others occurs through a connection to the traditional past.

As Aminata Sow Fall explores the social aspects of balancing Western and Senegalese elements in her plots, she has similarly explored the balancing of Occidental and Senegalese aesthetics in her narratives--through language, poetry and chronology shift. She strives to portray a
Senegalese atmosphere through her inclusion of expressions in Wolof and Arabic, in her novels written in French. Like her characters, she maintains a connection to her traditional literary past by including chants, poems, and proverbs. Thus, her novels move toward a more African aesthetic within the framework of a Western novel.

Aminata Sow Fall describes the evolution of society but also encourages certain ideas, thus transforming the current social and political realities into a more positive framework for the future. She prefers a society that strives to be Senegalese not Occidental. She recommends movement away from money as a source of identity and to a revalorized heritage as a source of identity. She also encourages the dissolution of social divisions that are no longer beneficial in favor of an integrated, balanced society in contemporary Senegal.
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Background Sources


