



Sembene Meets Winnie Madikizela in After-Africa

Africa's world-renowned film director, Sembene Ousmane of Senegal, must have welcomed Winnie Madikizela-Mandela with open arms and a deep puff of his tobacco pipe when she arrived with an exuberant scream into After-Africa. She loved him as the filmmaker who celebrated the sensuous swagger of the Wolof woman as his camera consumed her from the back in the film "The Money Order".

He had contempt for "been-to-Paris" educated women, who

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pecked the earth in imitating walks of European women: seeing it as a mark of being "civilized". She herself had made wearing a headtie a mark of African womanhood following Ancient Egypt's Black African Pharaohs who used headties as tools for tapping blessings and powers from the Gods in the heavens. On 6th April 2018, Black

women in South Africa adorned black dresses and colourful headties in proud celebration of "Mama Winnie".

In "The Money Order", a young educated nephew robs his illiterate uncle of money sent by a son who lives in France. He uses his knowledge of the postal system to claim the money and then defraud his uncle. It is indicative of Senegal's new rulers violating sacred values of filial obligation in Wolof society by robbing their uneducated countrymen with the barbarism of an alien individualism

and hedonism. Dr Brigalia Bam, a former schoolmate of Winnie remembers her as very soft spoken and luxuriously generous by sharing her little pocket money with any girl who was in need. Sisterhood was a cardinal value for her.

At a rally in Georgia near Bloemfontein, Julius Malema, Member of the Parliament of South Africa and leader of Economic Freedom Fighters party, told the crowd that the violent apartheid regime hated Winnie intensely and subjected her to relentless brutalities and humiliation because she was ever intervening to help victims of racism, poverty, illness and police violence. In the slums (or “shanties”) and rural communities they called her “Mama of the Nation” because she was always there to help them.

A leader of the 1976 school boycott by pupils opposed to the policy of being taught in “Afrikaans” - the language of the Boers, recalls that in the terror of police bullets killing and wounding the children, the only voice they heard was that of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela shouting at the White policemen to stop killing her children. No male voice was heard. As the Financial Times newspaper is quoted to have said, Winnie was hit with all the raw brutalities unleashed by the racist regime while Mandela sat more comfortably in prison on Robben Island.

Sembene Ousmane also produced “Xhala” – a film which ended with beggars and invalids off the streets of Dakar spitting all-over the naked body of a top Senegalese official

whose greed had blocked the economic growth of the country and intensified their impoverishment. “Xhala” is the Wolof word for an impotent man who cannot sexually consummate marriage with a new bride. As a film-maker who learnt his craft in communist Poland, Sembene was disgusted by rulers and businessmen of newly independent African countries who did not exhibit the bold creativity and inventiveness that produced the industrial revolution in Europe. Instead they call themselves “captains of industry” when, in fact, they were mere local sales agents for Euro-American and Asian industrialists and bankers. They were also impotent.

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela rebuked those leaders of the African National Congress (henceforth, ANC) – including her husband Nelson Mandela – who abandoned the bold policy of getting land back from white farmers “without compensation” and took economic income to the millions of landless Africans festering in shanties. The ‘xhala-ridden’ ANC leaders opted for the policy of “Black Economic Empowerment” – a code for ANC elites getting shares of white-owned local and foreign companies. They became millionaires and billionaires without spending entrepreneurial sweat of the white god-fathers; and ignoring the poor.

As a mark of their abandoning the route to ensuring employment for the millions of poor and newly educated youths, the black business elite moved residence away from the masses of the people to live in white residential

areas. As those who adored her kept telling reporters of South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Winnie never moved out of living in Soweto because she loved to be close to poor people so that she would represent their raw and authentic interests.

In his film “Emittai”, Sembene mocked the role of “patriarchy” in Wolof society by depicting the cowardice of men even at the risk of bringing mass starvation to their families. During Europe’s First War (1914-18), French colonial authorities decided to expropriate cereal harvests from Senegal for feeding troops on the war front. In anticipation of this genocidal policy, women secretly hid cereal harvests in swamps. However, under intimidation by French officials the men squealed on the women – much to the heartless glee of French officials. Malema accused ANC leaders of preferring Jacob Zuma as Vice-President to Thabo Mbeki at the 1997 party conference for fear of Winnie becoming the next president of the country.

President F.W. De Klerk wrote in his autobiography about his shock at limited demands made by Mandela’s team towards the transfer of power to the black majority. His team must have feared facing Winnie as ANC’s negotiator. Thabo Mbeki’s (former President of South Africa, 1999-2008) little contact with the township and rural people, could have made him resent her fearless hatred of white power, and her popularity.

May Sembene and Winnie make and inspire ‘Films Africana’.