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AVATARS OF THE FEMININE IN LAYE,
SENGHOR AND DIOP

“La vérité dépend de qui la dit aussi bien que de qui l'écoute.”

Birago Diop

From its inception during the colonial period, African literature of French expression has flirted with two compelling myths. The first is the vision of a pre-colonial “original” Africa, the equivalent of a “paradis perdu,” or as former President Léopold Senghor of Sénégal has often called it, “le royaume d'enfance.” This pre-industrial, pre-“modern” world, as yet untainted by the horror of the European slave trade and the evils of colonialism, was a site of purity and goodness. Such a dream of lost innocence and happiness may seem at first to have nothing peculiarly African about it. To a certain extent it is the same impulse which can be traced in Western discourse from Rousseau to the Surrealists and even, one could argue, in Lukacs' early discussion of the epic and the age that produced it: “Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths. . . .”¹ It is perhaps our fate to long for this Eldorado wherein humankind is uncorrupted by “civilization” and undivided by class (although there is surely a lesson in *Candide's* having turned down invitations to stay).

In the African context, this idealization of a supposedly harmonious and happy past is neither gratuitous nor just another manifestation of a “universal” phenomenon. The African intellectuals who expressed this vision did so in the context of a struggle with French cultural and political hegemony. The problem they faced—it has taken us decades to see its dimensions and intricacy—was how to valorize African life and culture. The myth of an essential Africa, innocent and happy, situated either *temporally* (before the arrival of Europeans) or *spatially* (out of reach of colonial urban centers) provided one answer.

Concomitant with this vision and emblematic of it was that of the strong, maternal “traditional” African woman. For a number of writers of this period, the dream of an immemorial, utopic Africa is displaced onto the African woman. This double signification of African womanhood has its finest moments in Camara Laye's autobiographical narrative, *L'Enfant noir*, and in certain *négritude* poems of Senghor. An impoverished worker in a car factory in France

around 1950, Laye wrote—as a way of consoling himself—his memories of home. At the urging of friends, he organized and published these notes in 1953 and offered the following dedication to his mother, who indeed looms large in his narrative:

Femme noire, femme africaine, ô toi ma mère je pense à toi . . .

O Dâman, ô ma mère, toi qui me portas sur le dos, toi qui m'allaitas, toi qui gouvernas mes premiers pas, toi qui la première m'ouvris les yeux aux prodiges de la terre, je pense à toi . . .

Femme des champs, femme des rivières, femme du grand fleuve, ô toi, ma mère, je pense à toi . . .

O toi Dâman, ô ma mère, toi qui essuyais mes larmes, toi qui me réjouissais le coeur, toi qui, patiemment supportais mes caprices, comme j'aimerais encore être près de toi, être enfant près de toi!

(Paris: Plon, 1953, 7–8)

The mother—her magic powers, her bond with her son, the wrenching experience of their separation—is both the subject of the narrative and the symbol of that which the *act of writing* is meant to recover: Africa, the past, childhood, lost innocence. (And indeed one might argue that all acts of writing in colonial Africa during this period were guided by this impulse.)

Senghor's *négritude* poems, unlike Laye's reminiscences, are both self-conscious and highly stylized. Published in 1945 in *Chants d'ombre*, "Femme noire" is one of the best known and most accomplished of his poems:

Femme nue, femme noire

Vêtue de ta couleur qui est vie, de ta forme qui est beauté!

J'ai grandi à ton ombre; la douceur de tes mains bandait mes yeux.

Et voilà qu'au coeur de l'Été et de Midi, je te découvre, Terre promise, du haut d'un col calciné

Et ta beauté me foudroie en plein coeur, comme l'éclair d'un aigle.

Femme nue, femme obscure

Fruit mûr à la chair ferme, sombres extases du vin noir, bouche qui fais lyrique ma bouche

Savane aux horizons purs, savane qui frémis aux caresses ferventes du Vent d'Est

Tamtam sculpté, tamtam tendu qui gronde sous les doigts du vainqueur
Ta voix grave de contralto est le chant spirituel de l' Aimée.

Femme nue, femme obscure
Huile que ne ride nul souffle, huile calme aux flancs de l'athlète, aux flancs des princes du Mali
Gazelle aux attaches célestes, les perles sont étoiles sur la nuit de ta peau
Délices des jeux de l'esprit, les reflets de l'or rouge sur ta peau qui se moire
A l'ombre de ta chevelure, s'éclaire mon angoisse aux soleils prochains de tes yeux.

Femme nue, femme noire
Je chante ta beauté qui passe, forme que je fixe dans l'Eternel
Avant que le Destin jaloux ne te réduise en cendres pour nourrir les racines de la vie.

Poèmes, (Paris: Seuil, 1964 and 1973, 14–15)

This poem is a prism of the themes and images of Senghorian *négritude*: “ta couleur qui est vie,” “ta beauté qui passe,” “chant,” “tamtam.” If Laye’s mother is simultaneously specific and symbolic, Senghor’s “femme noire” is pure abstraction. Dignity, beauty, purity, nurturance—those are the attributes of the African woman/continent. This vision with its justification and exaltation of African civilization(s) can be read as a poetic and cultural “reply” to French colonial policy which assumed the deficiency of African cultures.² At the very least, this vision represents the struggle of the *assimilé* to reconcile his heritage from oppressed “mother” Africa with that of an imposing “father” France. The Congolese writer Henri Lopès’ expression seems to sum up best the irony of this vision of Africa and womanhood: “femme opprimée, femme sublimée.”³ Thus Africa and the African woman have sometimes been portrayed by male writers as silent objects of colonial or male domination or as paragons of virtue and beauty or as both at once.

The idealist and essentialist view of African womanhood and of “traditional” life as a great goodness has had its appeal not only for writers but also for many readers and critics of African literature. Yet those who espouse this view have difficulty themselves in accommodating it to all the evidence. In “Images of Black Women in Modern African Poetry: An Overview,” Andrea B. Rushing accurately identifies traits of much African poetry but backs off from a more critical assessment in the face of contradictions which she

herself signals.⁴ Thus Rushing finds that, contrary to the negative images of women in Western (Euro-American) or even Afro-Caribbean literature, images of women in African poetry are positive. The pervasive positive view of women, she argues, is based on their role as *mother*: "The Yoruba proverb says, 'Mother is gold,' and portraits of black women in African poetry seem to radiate from that hub. . . . A theme throughout African literature depicts the woman as guardian of traditions, the strong Earth-Mother who stands for security and stability" (19). Rushing elaborates on this symbolism: "What is being hymned is woman's closeness to the earth (the repository of the spirits of the ancestors), her biological connections to the rhythms of birth, growth, and death, and her proximity to traditional African culture in a world increasingly besieged by Western mores" (21). Rushing concedes briefly that "cultures which enshrine motherhood are . . . no place for childless women to be . . ." (20), but this does not lead her to question the ideal of motherhood; the panegyric goes unchallenged. She is never critical of the cult of motherhood, even as she notes that we will have to wait "until African *women* write the poetry which speak their days and dreams for our hearing" (24) because this poetry is written by men (in a world, as she perceptively indicates, "increasingly besieged by Western mores").

As we have seen, the "Earth-Mother" is a figure of great importance in the discourse of first-generation male writers, but she is generally so mythologized that we find in her little reference to women's lives as they are lived. Moreover, the cult of the Mother, which would seem to elevate womanhood, cuts away at it, paradoxically, in promoting exaggerated and exclusive dedication to motherhood or, conversely, guilt and shame for the woman who has no child.⁵ Rushing's heady embrace of the ideal of motherhood leads her to ignore the cruel irony in her assessment of Nturu's "Rhythm of the Pestle." The woman is tormented, she tells us, "not because she is oppressed by the strictures of traditional culture, but because of her failure to marry and have the twins she dreamed of . . ." (20). Rushing's appraisal is short-sighted, because the woman's sense of failure comes from her having failed *by the standards of traditional culture*. "Her" dreams are the expression of those cultural standards.

Readings of African poems and novels are thus sometimes guided by and respond to the search for a millennial past, and they often fail to take into account the historical context in which those texts were produced. Also, inasmuch as they assume or search for a single image of the past and of woman, they do not consider the

missing pieces of the puzzle provided by other texts. Let us examine, then—alongside these lofty images of African womanhood in Laye's novel and Senghor's poetry—other images proposed in another and less "noble" genre, the West African comic tale, on which Birago Diop bases *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* and *Les Nouveaux Contes d'Amadou Koumba*. These tales are instructive, for herein woman is metaphor neither for Africa nor the past; femaleness is constructed to other ends. It becomes obvious, then, that the significance of femaleness varies from genre to genre, from context to context, from speaker and listener to writer and reader.

Birago Diop was subject to the same assimilationist pressures and same contradictions as Senghor: both were members of that cohort of African students educated in Paris in the 1930s and thus among those who made the "retour aux sources," and Diop wrote in the 1940s and 1950s, the same period during which Senghor was writing his most important poems and essays. Yet Birago Diop's work is quite different from that of his friend. The inspiration for many of Senghor's poems, their breath, rhythm and tropes, comes from poetry of the oral tradition, Senghor tells us, but Diop's tales descend directly from that tradition. Jean-Paul Sartre's comment on Birago Diop's poetry is relevant also to the latter's tales. In "Orphée Noir," his introduction to Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, Sartre states:

Le centre calme de ce maelstrom de rythmes, de chants, de cris, c'est la poésie de Birago Diop . . . elle seule est en *repos* parce qu'elle sort directement des récits de griots et de la tradition orale. Presque toutes les autres tentatives ont quelque chose de crispé, de tendu et de désespéré parce qu'elles visent à rejoindre la poésie folklorique plus qu'elles n'en émanent.

(Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948 2^e éd. 1968, xxiv).

Senghor, like most of the poets in the *Anthologie*, rejoins the tradition. His poetry is a re-visioning of "Africa" in new historical circumstances; in Diop's tales, on the other hand, the humor, the lessons, the stories of African oral traditions are *re-constituted* in a new medium.

Mohamadou Kane says of the oral genre, on which *Les Contes* is based:

Le conte est, avant tout, au service de la société, dont à l'instar des autres genres, il doit contribuer à assurer la survie. . . . Il permet aux héritiers d'une même tradition culturelle et reli-

gieuse de se retrouver le soir après le travail, et ensemble, de s'instruire et de se réjouir. . . . [L]es thèmes issus de la tradition ont ceci de commun qu'ils concourent à l'exaltation de comportements ou d'idées propres à convaincre ces hommes que leur vie ne peut avoir de sens que conduite dans la perspective du renforcement de leur groupe social plutôt que de leur individualité propre.⁶

To instruct, to delight, to solidify communal bonds—those are the aims of the genre. These tales are characterized by a standard narrative structure, by moralizing—veiled or explicit—and by an assumption of shared values, all of which seem to bespeak (for readers) an age gone by, a homogeneous community, a simple and good life—the utopic Africa evoked in Laye and Senghor. Yet despite their humor, the apparently straightforward and simple lesson, traditional tales are frequently boldly and brutally honest about the workings and misworkings of the societies which they represent.

Indeed, because the traditional tales on which *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* is based contain images created by the community for the community, we see inscribed therein men's and women's roles, as they are felt consciously or unconsciously by those involved, with their measure of privilege and powerlessness, fear and contradiction. Thus while Birago Diop's recuperation of traditional materials in *Les Contes* is, like Senghor's retrieval of an African past, a valorization, indeed a monumentalizing of African civilizations, the internal structure and metaphor of the tales are far less affected by "(ceux) qui l'écoute(nt)," the new audience (French readership and African elites) than is Senghor's reworking of images and aspects of African life.⁷ The tales are subject to different mythologies which preserve the social structure of their milieu; they give a less flattering picture of the feminine, to be sure, but also a more complex one of gendering.

We shall refer to two tales, chosen because they treat explicitly the relationship between woman and man. The first, "N'Gor Niébé," is, like the others, delightfully comic. It is also an unmitigated attack on women and contains enormous contradictions. N'Gor Sène has always refused to eat beans. No one can imagine why, since (the narrator tells us in a rather lengthy preface to his tale) N'Gor has never even heard, in fact, the sad story of Mawdo the Peulh who *did* eat beans:

Quelle que fût la manière dont on les préparât, quelle que fût la sauce dont on les accommodât, sauce à l'arachide pimentée ou

à l'oseille acide, quelle que fût la viande qui les accompagnât: côtelettes de chèvre ou cou de mouton, tranches de boeuf ou d'antilope, N'Gor n'avait jamais touché aux niébés, jamais un grain de haricot n'avait franchi sa bouche.

Chacun savait que N'Gor était celui-qui-ne-mange-pas-de-haricots. Mais, explique qui pourra, personne ne l'appelait plus par son nom. Pour tout le monde il était devenu N'Gor-Niébé. . . .

(Paris: Présence Africaine, 1961, 44)

Beside themselves with frustration at their friend's obstinacy, N'Gor's friends pledge to trick him. They promise to N'Gor's girlfriend, N'Dèné, all she desires if she succeeds in making him eat beans: "nous te donnerons tout ce que tu voudras: boubous, pagnes, argent et colliers" (45). N'Dèné agrees and brings to bear all her feminine charms and culinary powers. But N'Gor outwits her. He assembles, one by one, the network of N'Dèné's friends:

—N'Dèné ma soeur, dit-il alors, je ne mangerai jamais de haricots. S'il m'était arrivé de manger ces niébés préparés par toi ce soir, demain toutes ces femmes l'auraient su, et, d'amies intimes en amies intimes, de femmes à maris, de maris à parents, de parents à voisins, de voisins à compagnons, tout le village et tout le pays l'auraient su.

Et dans la nuit, N'Gor Sène s'en retourna dans sa case, pensant que c'est le premier toupet de Kotj Barma [a Senegalese sage] qui avait raison: "Donne ton amour à la femme, mais non ta confiance." (47)

N'Gor's friends and N'Dèné are thus united in their common goal, but the story establishes quite different motivation for the various conspirators. N'Gor's friends' desire to humble him, to tarnish his perhaps too brilliant pride can be attributed to male rivalry. N'Dèné, for her part, has other motives. She is, first of all, "une belle fille aux seins durs, à la croupe ferme et rebondie, au corps souple comme une liane" (45). The significance of this description is apparent when we consider that N'Gor is introduced only in these terms: "un sérère de pure race, noir charbon, un sérère de Diakhaw" (43). N'Dèné is thus pure female: she is delimited by her sexuality. Furthermore she is utterly "feminine" as well: she hankers for acquisitions which presumably will enhance her already considerable female charms. It is for the sake of vanity that she participates in the plot against N'Gor, and, of course, she is put to shame.

But it is all too simple to see N'Dèné as the culprit in this story. It is in fact N'Gor's male friends who wish to trick him, and yet he never once reproaches or blames them for their mischief. Does this mean we are to believe that they are better friends than she simply because they are not the immediate agents of the betrayal? Or is it not that, given their equality, male friends may try to outdo each other? That is, once equality ceases to be an issue, bantering or one-up-manship is allowed. It is surprising and therefore significant that the male instigators go unscathed and that the story turns its full fury instead on N'Dèné. We are left to conclude that N'Dèné deserves the scorn of N'Gor, the fictional society, and the listener or reader because she betrays for the ignoble reason of feminine vanity and weakness. Men, who betray deliberately because men may do so and because it is manly to do so are not to be reproached.

N'Dèné is hardly the "femme noire" of Senghor. Yet the tale proposes a view of women which is just as essentialist. The positive values are merely now on the other end of the scale. Thus the narrator suggests that N'Dèné could not but do what she did. Her behavior is not entirely or even partially her fault, because women are "that way." With as much or as little consciousness as a plant, women have a tropism for clothes (coquetry and vanity), deception, and chatter: "Promettre à une femme jeune et jolie, à une coquette, pagnes et bijoux! Que ne ferait-elle pour les mériter! Jusqu'ou n'irait-elle pas?" (45). This aside of the narrator echoes his previous description of N'Dèné as "une belle fille": each passage posits an inescapable "feminine destiny." N'Dèné is stripped of the possibility of choosing her actions *because* she is a woman and, even more, a young and pretty woman. As for the charge that women talk more than men, the tale does not even bother to substantiate this claim. Obviously it is a shared assumption.

Femaleness is perceived and projected as *apriori essence*. And because N'Dèné's "flaws" are seen as inherent to femaleness, they are typical of women as a whole. For contrast's sake, we may refer to "L'Os," a tale in which the flawed character is male.⁸ Mor Lam's selfishness is not attributed to *all* men but to Mor Lam alone: the tale is a lesson, then, about the consequences of selfishness in any human being—man, woman, or child. Yet "N'Gor Niébé" purports to reveal the nature of femaleness. And because tradition situates male weakness in a helpless submission to feminine charm, the tale warns men—superficially, at least—to maintain constant vigilance or else be the unwitting victim of these childlike but nonetheless perfidious creatures.

Yet N'Dèné is but a pawn in the game which N'Gor plays with his friends. He wishes to maintain his aloofness, to resist their at-

tempts to control him. So the tale reveals as much about views of maleness as about those of femaleness: fear of loss of control, the myth of women as the agents of that loss. The tale thus participates in and perpetuates the ideology of women's power and of male helplessness, which reinforce the need for male vigilance and power.

If "N'Gor Niébé" takes as its subject ideologies of maleness and femaleness, "Un Jugement" is a practical tale about the etiquette of community life. Demba arrives at his field one morning to discover that his crop has been ravaged by Monkey and his friends. He returns home in a fury and visits his anger on his wife:

Il trouva que l'eau que Koumba lui offrait à genoux en le saluant n'était pas assez fraîche. Il trouva que le couscous était trop chaud et pas assez salé et que la viande était trop dure, il trouva que cela était ceci et que ceci était cela, tant il est bien vrai que l'hyène qui veut manger son petit trouve qu'il sent la chèvre . . .

Las de crier, Demba se mit à rouer Koumba de coups, et, fatigué de la battre, il lui dit:

—Retourne chez ta mère, je te répudie. (22)

As the days go by, Demba begins to realize how valuable a wife is in a home:

Il est défendu à l'homme fait de toucher à un balai, et pourtant, comment faire quand la poussière, les cendres, les coques d'arachides et les épiluchures de patates envahissent chaque jour un peu plus le sol de la case?

L'on ne travaille vraiment bien que le torse nu. Mais lorsque la journée finie, on endosse son boubou, l'on voudrait bien que ce boubou ne soit pas aussi sale que le foie d'un chien; et pourtant, est-il digne d'un homme qui mérite le nom d'homme de prendre calebasse, savon et linge sale et d'aller à la rivière ou au puits faire la lessive?

Demba commençait à se poser toutes ces questions, et beaucoup d'autres encore. Sa sagesse, peut-être un peu en retard, lui répétait: "L'on ne connaît l'utilité des fesses que quand vient l'heure de s'asseoir." (23-24)

Demba then goes to fetch his wife and claims he never sent her away, but Koumba, enjoying her new-found freedom and insisting that Demba repudiated her, refuses to return with him. After traveling near and far to find the wise man capable of settling the dis-

pute, the two arrive at Maka-Kouli where the sage Madiakate Kala puts them up. The next day, when everyone has begun to relax after the meal and prayer, he asks all of a sudden:

—Où est l'homme qui a répudié sa femme?

—Me voici, répondit Demba au dernier rang des fidèles.

—Homme, ta langue a enfin devancé ton esprit et ta bouche a consenti à dire la vérité.

“Dites à sa femme de retourner tranquillement chez sa mère, son mari a reconnu devant nous tous qu'il l'avait répudiée.” (29–30)

One is tempted to say Koumba “wins,” because Demba clearly regrets his initial actions: his bed is now too big for him alone, his midday meal is no longer brought to him in his field, his clothes and hut are dirty. As the narrator puts it, “on ne connaît l'utilité des fesses que quand vient l'heure de s'asseoir”. Yet it is something of an illusion to see this story as an example of woman triumphant merely because Koumba plays an important role and cannot be foregone. For the same can be said of any object important for one's household and daily routine—one's hut, one's cot, the well, and so on. No one (except Demba perhaps) has ever doubted the utility of a wife. Can we believe, then, that it is but one step (large, at best) from the recognition of utility to that of equality?

Kotj Barma, with whose quip “N'Gor Niébé” ends, obviously did not think so. Nor does the culture which produced this story. “Un Jugement” does not preach woman's equality so much as it does the dangers of ignorance and immaturity. The tale does not object in principle either to the hierarchy in which man is seen as “above” woman or to the distribution of roles and labor. Rather, it accepts that discrepancy as normal and argues instead that even the lowest rank or the smallest role has its place and importance and therefore deserves respect. We may recall the fable of the lion who, for all his nobility and power, is saved only through the efforts of the mouse who gnaws through the net. Demba learns this lesson too late. In any event, if Koumba cannot—as a woman—claim the same stature as her husband, she is nonetheless—as a woman—integral to order, life, community, and it is from that role that her “strength” in this story derives.

So the tale seems to capitalize on Demba's stupidity to compensate for the imbalance in the husband-wife relationship and to assuage a certain uneasiness about the wife's lack of status. The status quo stays intact because any husband who does not appreciate his wife is unpardonably foolish and will bring about his own demise.

The comic and rather unpretentious form of narrative which is the tale is thus surprisingly complex and reveals some of the dynamics of maleness and femaleness in West African cultures, which are absent in Senghor's poems and other such sentimental journeys into "traditional" Africa. But it is a long road from complex to visionary. Surely, traditional tales are not prone to flattery as is poetry, since they are meant to deflate rather than exalt their subjects. Thus women in these tales are captured in metaphor and metonymy: butts and beans. It may be that we are less attentive to the lack of force which is women's lot since all characters are made fun of in the traditional tale, for—some would argue—there is a kind of equality in foibles, in the comic. But the inequality of male and female characters as actors within a society is magnified—not reduced—by narrative strategies, for women are seen as a type and as a group whereas men are seen as individuals. And one and the same behavior on the part of men can be regarded as worthy but on the part of women as weak. Equality is thus not recognized as fundamental, and justice remains precarious, at best.

The tales are shaped by the experience of gender and culture as they are lived and perceived by those who speak and those who hear these tales. In *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba*, however, Birago Diop is the one who *selected* these stories. He is therefore the lens of this particular portrait of West African culture. We have every right to assume that a group of tales selected by another individual—a woman writer, for example—or intended for another audience would be different.⁹ Moreover, Diop has not merely selected the tales; he has also interpreted them. His insider's knowledge informs his narrator's tone, descriptions, and the motivations which the narrator assigns to characters. We, then, are readers of Birago Diop's "reading." But another author might read differently, making different emphases. If one chose to tell "N'Gor Niébé," could one not subvert its meaning and make it more self-aware, more conscious of its sexism by concluding with the proverb from "Un Jugement"? Might we not say that N'Gor *wants* to blame N'Dèné and indeed "l'hyène qui veut manger son petit trouve qu'il sent la chèvre"?

Thus, to ask whether images of women in African literature have been positive or negative or whether women and their image fared better in pre-colonial or colonial times is to obscure more important issues. Such questions lead us to ignore the common, prominent thread which we trace from the comic tale to the Senghorian poem. As an object of scorn or praise, "woman" is singular, essential. Thus whether she be mother, goddess or brat and *because she can*

be any of these, "woman" reveals itself as a cultural and literary category whose representation may change in accordance with social and ideological currents, but whose unchanging aspect, in these many avatars, is always generic, always female.

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Notes

1. *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971) 29.

2. Guy Ossito Midiohouan argues that Senghor's emphasis on African culture distracted attention from the need for political struggle and therefore suited French policy. See *L'Idéologie dans la littérature négro-africaine d'expression française*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986 pp. 105-133.

3. Lopès gives this title to his preface of Arlette Chemain-Degrange's *L'Emancipation féminine et roman africain*, Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1980 p. 7.

4. *Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature*, ed. Roseann P. Bell, Bettye J. Parker, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1979, pp. 18-24.

5. See, for example, *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta and *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa. For further discussion, see Kathleen M. McCaffrey, "Images of Women in West African Literature and Film: A Struggle Against Dual Colonization," *The International Journal of Women's Studies*, 3 January-February 1980, pp. 81-83 and Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, *Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*. London: Zed Press, 1983. Cutrufelli argues that, "[t]he glorification of maternity is more than a 'traditional' peculiarity of African societies: in the first place it represented the social response to the depopulation caused by the slave trade and, later, by the colonial wars . . ." (2).

6. *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba: du conte traditionnel au conte moderne*, Langues et Littératures, 16 (Dakar: l'Université de Dakar, 1968) 31-32.

7. This is not to say that the presence of the new audience is not manifest. We may sense their presence in Diop's inclusion of certain tales and omission of others. Or we may see Diop's tales as the external and monumental rendering of an internal self-image—this had been done already, of course, by ethnographers, and done less well. There is a sense, then, in which Diop "took back" certain West African stories and told them from an insider's point of view in an aesthetically conscious fashion. One might argue, on the other hand, that to monumentalize past aesthetic creations was to betray a sense of closure and impasse.

8. "L'Os" appears in *Les Nouveaux Contes*. It is the story of Mor Lam who refuses to share his treasured knuckle-bone stew with an initiation-brother. Mor Lam feigns sickness and then death in hopes that his "more than brother" will go home. The latter never leaves, of course, and despite the entreaties of Awa, his wife, Mor prefers being buried, losing the bone, his wife and his life.

9. During the discussion following my presentation of an early version of this paper (African Studies Association Meeting, New Orleans, November 1985), a Senegalese noted that his mother would have told this story to him but would not to his sister.