

Why come back?

Sense of place and Senegalese student migration



1. How are different feelings of in-place or out-of-place expressed in Senegalese literature through the main characters' returns to Senegal or decisions to stay in Europe?
2. Do the data concerning the true experiences of Senegalese migrants confirm the experiences of these literary characters?

Defining Place

- Three main elements: "locale, the settings in which social relations are constituted; location, the geographical area encompassing the settings for social interaction ...; and sense of place, the local structure of feeling" (Agnew)
- Meaning of place primarily derived from experience

Sense of Place

- Place-ballet: Places "performed on a daily basis through people living their everyday life." People "participate in these daily performances" to "get to know a place and feel part of it. Those who do not know the routine will appear clumsy and 'out-of-place'" (Seamon)
- "One's connection to a group is foremost a matter of individual identity."

Mythical Space

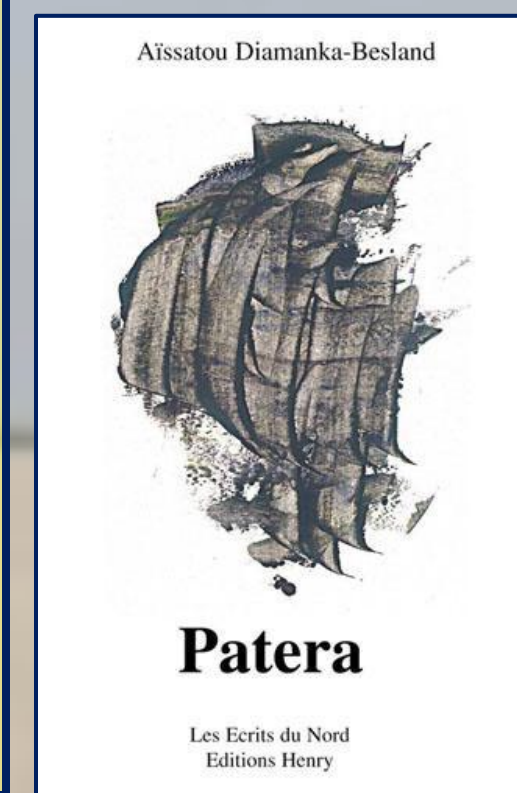
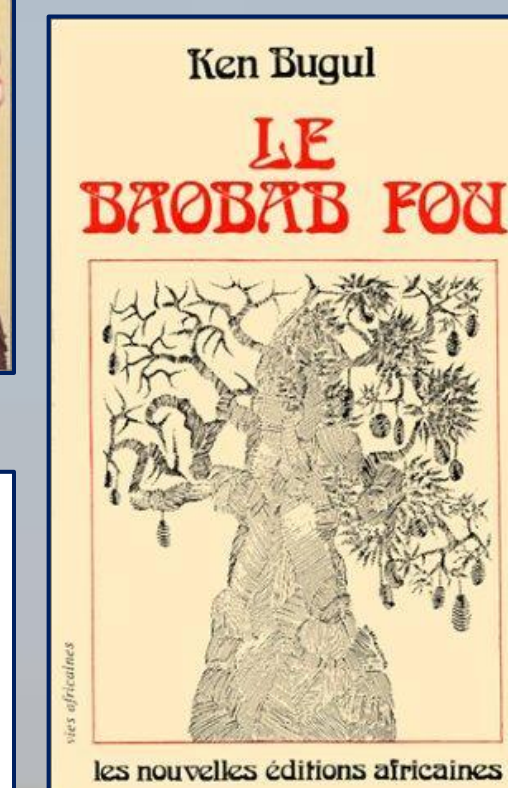
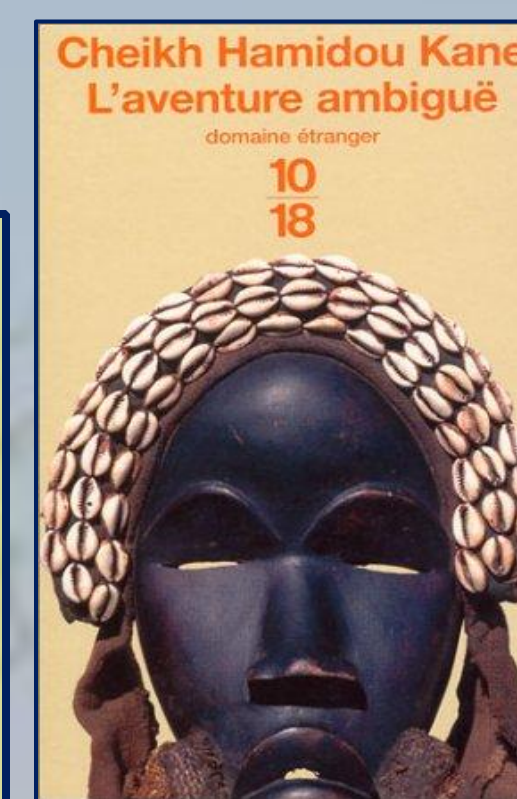
- Construed space which "depends on the power of the mind to extrapolate far beyond the sense data."
- "Fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding empirically known," or the "spatial component of a world view, a conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activities"

Analysis of novels and student interviews

Ambiguous Adventure, Cheikh Hamidou Kane (1961)

- Places are ideological representations
- Sense of place based on religious beliefs
- Senegal portrayed positively
 - Emphasis not on particular environment, but on symbols of intimacy with God
 - Sunset is a common descriptor of place
 - Intense color show vivid spiritual life
 - Time of sunset linked to prayer in Islam
- France portrayed negatively
 - Represents materialism and secularism
 - Street is common descriptor of place

- Described as "bare" despite presence of people ("objects of flesh") and vehicles
 - People dehumanized and replaced by meaningless and vague objects because they lost touch with God
 - Shades of gray dominate descriptions (spiritual death)
- Return: Samba Diallo: "I am not a distinct county of the Diallobé facing a distinct Occident ... I have become the two."
 - Refuses to go to mosque and pray
 - Cultural hybrid so can't reconnect with God after time in France
 - Out of place in his homeland



Interviews of current Senegalese students

- Migration viewed positively if it's not permanent
 - 70% of Senegalese students want to immigrate to Europe, 90% want to return to Senegal
 - Better working conditions and chance to earn money
 - Family or social pressure to emigrate
- Why come back?
 - Serve country of origin and participate in development using skills and money earned abroad
 - Data suggest that decisions to return are also personal
 - "I prefer to remain close to my family"
 - "I feel better at home regardless of circumstances"
- Place is important
 - "Senegal is country of students' family and culture which will always be a part of their identity," "where they feel most comfortable"

Conclusion

- Preoccupation with France in Senegalese fiction continues because of its role in the Senegalese cultural imagination
 - Likely linked to colonial presence
- Ability to identify with a place is important when deciding to stay or leave
 - Meanings associated with place expressed uniquely based on identity and experience
- Strong sense of place could indicate stronger place attachment and greater concern for one's environment
 - Colonial influence could lead to idea of place as contaminated
 - Manipulated material elements of country, so ideal elements seen as separate or protected and are emphasized by students
 - Complex view of responsibility for environmental problems (didn't cause them, but must resolve them)
- Tensions in narratives of place are applicable to environmental discourse
 - Tension between tradition and modernity
 - Nature frequently romanticized, viewed as pure
 - Place described nostalgically
 - Experience easily rejected in favor of preferred conception of a place (or nature)
 - Emphasis on imagined over real aspects due to cognitive and cultural filters

The Abandoned Baobab, Ken Bugul (1984)

- Nostalgic construction of place
 - "Everyone was happy there, everyone shared everything."
- Senegal presented positively in terms of tradition and warmth
 - Baobab tree linked to history and traditions
 - Source of life via production of food and medicines
 - Sun linked to warmth and protection
 - In village, "there was only sun," the "sky down there [was] much more protective, more reassuring."
- Europe presented negatively in terms of cold and isolation

- Europe initially presented as Promised Land
- After experience, Belgium described as a "cold and lonely world where everyone walks too quickly."
 - "The sick were alone, the handicapped were alone, the children were alone, the elderly were alone."
- Return home: out of place in Europe
 - "All the other baobab trees hid behind their trunks ... The sun was guarding the dead one as it stood fully lit ... [It was] the first morning of dawn without dusk"
 - Baobab dead but light and sun signal positive meaning of village and Ken's sense of place

Patera, Aïssatou Diamanka-Besland (2009)

- Mythical construction of place
- Senegal presented negatively:
 - Place of little hope and few jobs for young people due to weak economy
 - Deeply tied to tradition for Soukeyna
- Europe presented positively:
 - Europe as Promised Land of unending prosperity
 - "Leaving for Europe was a sign of social ascension,"

- and "being there is necessarily to be rich"
- Experience in place doesn't confirm mythical view of Europe
 - "It is important that the Senegalese know [about the hardship] so they don't continue to dream of an idea that only exists in their head."
 - Europe in terms of cold and isolation
 - "The daily solitude, the cold, the coldness of people"
 - Soukeyna "misses the African heat" and "life is too difficult without family" but she stays in Europe
 - Europe still positive in Senegalese cultural imagination

A uniform sense of place?

- Return theme typical in literary and real accounts
- Theme of mythical space in real and literary narratives
 - Place defined from outside more than from authentic experience
- Real students confirm Besland's novel where Europe is seen as a prosperous place

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