

Discussions with Sembene Ousmane

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THIS interview with Sembene Ousmane was held in Dakar, Senegal before his death in June 2007 and relates to the role of the beggars in Sembene's popular novel *Xala*.

OB: Sir, who can be called a beggar?

SE: It is the one who begs.

OB: That sounds to me like a sweeping statement.

SE: Yes. As a researcher, you should know it is the one who begs.

OB: Then anyone who stretches an arm to receive a favour is called a beggar?

SE: Yes, several times, if one does it every day, at the corner of the street (in the offices) ... yes, one is a beggar.

OB: If I understand you well, it is hereby implied that standing at a corner and stretching an arm to receive alms constitutes begging. Isn't this...?

SE: Yes, of course. That, we can classify as begging. There is this other category too: There are now the corrupt people inside the offices in the administration (and) also corrupt police officers who stand at the corners of the roads.

OB: So the clerks, officers, the orderlies, the guards in our ministries who are always broke before the end of the month, all these people can be called "beggars?"

SE: One cannot say flat out they are beggars, but when they use their offices for corruption, there are nevertheless beggars, if you want. Like the one who sits at the corner of the streets or in front of the mosque... to that we can agree. Now there are countries in Africa such as Nigeria or Senegal where one sees the petty civil

servant who does not manage to tie both ends (before the end of the month) becoming corrupt... people like that we can accept as belonging to a rotten system of beggars.

OB: And the unemployed of various categories who trudge our roads?

SE: They will end up being beggars. Look at your cities in Nigeria: Kano, Maiduguri....

OB: (And cities in) Burkina-Faso, Mali too.

SE: Yes, look at the number of people who become insane... the young people starting from 30 to 40 years of age. That is due to unemployment, lack of work, eh...? It is so serious that they are ready to beg. We know of these fathers or mothers in the streets of Dakar on Friday... It is no more a secret you see... there are women who have twins, who have two children, who beg.

OB: But for the women who have twins, there seems to be one reason. For example, at the Aiyetoro, a Yoruba community in Nigeria, there are these women who beg, and they do that because it is a rite, i.e. begging became for them...

SE: Wait. I do not know how that is done in Nigeria. Here in traditional community of Wolof, this begging by the mothers of twins was done only one day per week and for one hour at that. Moreover, the twins should be no more than 7 years old.

OB: That is to say that begging was done like a rite too.

SE: It is like a rite. That is, done one day per week and from one certain hour defined in the places given. Now if you look at, well, instead of going to the mosque people band themselves around traffic lights... Yes, they flock around red lights. I do not know if you already read *The Last of the Empire*?

OB: No, not yet.

SE: There is where you will see the description

OB: If I grasp very well what you are saying, people exploit the ritual ceremony of begging in Senegal.

SE: Yes.

OB: Can one call somebody who renders a simple service "a beggar" because the service is not orthodox?

SE: No, because it is not a stupid trade.

OB: Can one call the Third World countries which lick the bottom of the International Monetary Fund (I. M. F) and the World Bank (to have loans) beggars? How do you characterize these countries?

SE: You see, for development, it is not begging. One can say that for development, a country needs investments. Are you in agreement?

OB: Yes, yes.

SE: Therefore these countries move to go to seek capital to develop such or such sectors of their economy.

OB: According to what you have just said, it seems to me that there is a condition of begging implicit in the actions of these countries.

SE: No, that is not the picture we are given. It is us who suppose that when African Heads of States move to seek investment, we say they went to beg.

OB: So in the true sense of the word, they are not beggars. Even if it means that these negotiations with the I. M. F and World Bank end only in misery.

SE: Yes, let it be known that when our Heads of State leave abroad to seek capital and they return with money, we, Senegalese and Nigerians, say in bad faith that our Heads of State went to beg because the word “to beg” is anchored in our head. Do you understand?

OB: Yes, yes.

SE: It is a popular word because the beggar who is, from the social point of view, down the bottom begs and the Head of State “begs” also, but the two actions differ.

OB: That’s it?

SE: The two points differ; that is what I want to say to you.

OB: Please what are the causes of begging?

SE: It is difficult to say what the precise causes of begging are. One can say that it is poverty because people are deprived. Ok? It is what one can say. That is one apparent cause: one is poor and deprived. In addition, there is no desire to honour the religious injunctions on the act.

OB: Good! Where does begging originate? I mean.... At the beginning of humanity, there were no beggars. Even in feudal times,

begging assumed a different character from what it is today. And how is independence responsible for begging?

SE: I did not say that. I did not say that.

OB: And the dryness and famine?

SE: Good. Those are factors.... It is not independence; economic and ecological factors cause that. Let us take for example England a hundred years ago at the beginning of industrialization.... Or France. In England we have the book of Camus (Albert) *The Outsider* and we have in France, the book of Hugo (Victor) *The Poor Wretches*. You see, it is not independence at all. There are economic factors and one can go around on a world tour to see.

OB: If I understand you well, the famine destroyed all and the ground does not yield any more....

SE: Yes, you can say that is an ecological factor, and it is not only that; the famine perhaps accentuated, worsened it. The destitution of people, of the peasants, is so much that they leave, that they give up the ground for the city. However they do not have there an exact trade anymore and they depend on community or religious solidarity to beg.

OB: What Marxist interpretation can you give to the phenomenon of begging?

SE: That a capitalist system protects the rich minority and, by this objective, it goes without saying that beggars emerge because the great majority does not have much to consume; it can never benefit from the system where there is no right and equitable distribution of the means production.

OB: So why did you write *Xala*, your famous work?

SE: It was a fight known in Senegalese community as *hélée*. *Xala* does not speak about the origin of the beggars.... With the middle-class becoming increasingly small, begging –the beggars– grew increasingly numerous. But *Xala* is a kind of metaphor.

OB: Do you think that *Xala* is a better work compared to the *Ambiguous Adventure* from this thematic point of view?

SE: That I should not say.... That is for literary criticism to say.

OB: Can you indicate, either in precise or general way, the manpower of the workers in Senegal in 1960 or the eighties?

SE: That don't I know... the manpower of the workers?

OB: Yes.

SE: Workers?

OB: Yes.

SE: The manpower of the workers, the civil servant and the peasants?

OB: Yes, either in 1960 or at beginning of the 80s.

SE: That I do not know. There must have been statistics.... I know that there were censuses which checked manpower, the exact number of the workers, the workers of factories, the civil servants but I did not really have the exact figures.

OB: In general, there was an imbalance in the manpower of the workers (workmen included)?

SE: I do not know what you want to say or what your objective is. If you asked me how the reports/ratios are done, that is another thing. There are workmen who work without having even factories; there are civil servants. There are workmen; there are tradesmen. You understand what I want to say?

OB: Yes, yes.

SE: And that poses problems. Compared to the peasants, we are placed better. The peasants currently work only three or four months in the year. That is the practice. Good....

OB: Why such a short work period?

SE: You see, we have just spoken about the famine at the beginning of our discussion. It is that.

OB: Do you believe that the beggars play a useful part in the society?

SE: What (do you mean by) "to play"?

OB: Yes, you believe that the beggars play...

SE: Yes, I understand, but play how?

OB: Do you believe that a beggar plays a useful part?

SE: Yes, of course, but play how? Does a beggar play an exemplary part? I can ask you this question and it is important to answer me. Is it a role... a role in the society to forget to bring something to the society? If one is a consumer only, what role can one play?

OB: Like the prayer, the blessing which the beggars do offer to people who need them, can one regard them as service or production?

SE: No, one cannot regard them as production. Moreover, it is necessary to distinguish the standards, the ethics of life, between the two classes. Between the two, one gives and the other receives. Yes. It is important to see the two are not within the same framework.

OB: What are your own judgments?

SE: I do not have judgments. I do not have judgments. I know that a society can become beggars but that of the capitalist system can only populate more beggars.

OB: The religions, i.e., Islam and Christianity, approve that disabled persons who are not able to provide for their own needs can beg, but your beggar who is crippled does not accept his state to be that of a beggar, why?

SE: But listen, it is necessary to leave a fixed and personal premise nevertheless. No father, no, mother would like his/her children to become beggars. It is necessary to start from there. It is precisely that which creates problem in the heart of a mother. Every father or mother wishes that his/her son or daughter becomes someone in life. Do you understand me?

OB: Yes.

SE: But here is the problem. In countries where there have been transitions and revolutionary upheavals, in Europe, there are also beggars. Transiting from feudalism to industrialization in Europe, there were peasants; there were beggars in London, in Paris in Warsaw or elsewhere. Each time this cycle begins again; but those with no economic power, those who are not adapted yet to modernity, accept the religion and feel left for account. In addition, they are based either on the religions or on the ethics of solidarity which, more and more, finance begging; but it is not an immutable law which regulates life, all is in perpetual motion.

OB: But according to the Islamic precepts begging is something which must exist because it serves a function.

SE: That is false.

OB: Doesn't that serve any function? If the beggars did not exist, to whom does one have to give?

SE: No, that is false. Islam is never known like that. Islam never legalized begging. Islam has a design for a tax called "sada."

OB: The sadaq.

SE: This other form of begging is not in Islam. It is an exploitation that emanated from Islam but not in Islam. Alms, you can give on Friday to the mosque what you want. At the end of the year, you must leave something. You must to give to the Imam. It is the Imam who knows the needy ones and gives them with decency and dignity.

OB: I am in agreement with what you have just said on the gift of the zakat but it is said that in Saudi Arabia, there are no beggars because everyone obeys the Koranic regulation on the zakat very well. One obeys the regulation to the letter and one gives until one finds no beggar in the street.

SE: Yes, yes.

OB: In this light are you in agreement that the presence of beggars on our streets in Africa (and Asia) must lie with the fact that the rich Moslems in our continent do not give enough as had been prescribed in Islam?

SE: No, it is not at all the question either. It is the refusal. Islam does not accept that. Good, let us go further. Haven't we said that many African heads of state today on a journey in Europe asking for money have engaged in another form of begging?

OB: Yes, Nigeria for example.

SE: But it is not Nigeria alone. Not because Nigeria is your country. At some point the people or the heads of states must assume responsibility to solve their own problems themselves. This is what I want to you to comprehend. Poverty exists but I do not know any who dares to say poverty is absolute in Africa.

OB: That is quite true. But it is not that I myself rationalize begging; the Islamic religion for example regards a form of begging as sanctioned. Yes, I believe... i.e., that the practice to go to search alms in....

SE: It is not a question of to go to search... It is not worthwhile to go to search, one must wait....

OB: Until one is given.

SE: That is it.

OB: And if they do not give, how...?

SE: No, if they do not give it is another thing. It is when one leaves his house to go to ask, it is when one goes against the method to

receive alms... the Islamic religion made the distribution of the things well. Begging initially even should be, if one is a good Moslem, avoided because at length, that becomes humiliation. And then it is not right...

OB: To do what?

SE: It is not right to refuse to give. One must give to the mosque through the Imam who divides the gifts. One cannot, on the other hand, forget it in discretion.

OB: So the zakat is always obligatory.

SE: Yes.

OB: One must pay it.

SE: Yes, but another must not go to seek it.

OB: But if it is not paid, how will the beggars live?

SE: It is not a problem. You go to the Imam who knows his parishioners. You donate. They are circulated. Otherwise one must find a useful work. But begging in our streets rises from the spirit or the idea that it is a moral obligation with a preceding good purpose. It is not true. You do not do it to feed people but to be enriched in the other form of existence, in the other better world.

OB: Considering its importance in the life of those who give, don't you believe that it also has a poignant influence on their psychology?

SE: Yes, yes it is an obligation and all the religions have it that either (Catholic) Christian or Moslem, in the cathedrals of Europe, there are beggars.

OB: Very well.

SE: In China too. But it is necessary to pose the question why there are people deprived, people who do not have anything, but do not commit suicide. Why? Why, I ask you the question.

OB: Why what?

SE: Why do they not commit suicide, why? I ask you the question.

OB: Please I do not understand the question well.

SE: Why do the poor, wretched and deprived not commit suicide?

OB: They do not commit suicide because they believe that they can arrive in life with some effort, i.e. they are not resigned to the problem, the situation; they always seek a chance, an opening, out of the problem.

SE: You see. You see now that begging is transitory.

OB: Yes, it is; it is transitory at the individual level.

SE: You see.

OB: What is the goal of the fight which your beggars in your book carried out?

SE: It is for you to read and say about them what you want. Eh?...It is not for me. It is for the readers.

OB: You believe that a disabled person, a beggar, can carry out a revolution of itself?

SE: Why? Is that still a question I must answer for you?

OB: According to Marxist dialectic, the fight against the middle-class must be carried out through weapons. You believe that a beggar, actually, can awake one beautiful day and make war with the authorities, the middle-class?

SE: Listen, it is a metaphor, you see?

OB: What is the end, the goal of this metaphor?

SE: A beggar, the beggars, can make a revolution. The beggars can make a moral revolution. They initiate a process that can lead to a revolution....They all are of the citizenry. I ask you a question: in a democratic country where everyone has right to vote, do the beggars have the right to vote? Yes or no?

OB: Yes, they have it perfectly. That it is quite true.

SE: And then... why do you believe that they cannot make a revolution like the other members of the society? In any case they are more numerous, more in these countries, ready for a revolution.

OB: What do you think of the new tendency where the beggars oblige the men to give them alms?

SE: I do not get it....

OB: What do you think of the new tendency where in the big cities like Dakar, Lagos, Kano... the beggars oblige the authorities to give them alms?

SE: From beginning they know their force, numerical and moral, and the others have a bad conscience of it.

OB: Where in *Xala* is work symbolic of the system?

SE: It is for you to see. ... It is not for me. It is for you to analyze. It is not for me...

SE: If one draws up a chart from reading *Xala*, one will realise two broad themes: the problem of neocolonialism and that of begging. Is it necessary to see these topics like different or complementary?

SE: Can one separate from the same water-bottle warm water and cool water? That is the problem in *Xala*.

OB: The outcome of *Xala* illustrates “the dictatorship of the proletariat”, but there is no proletariat in the novel, owing to the fact that the beggars do not work. What do you want to show there, a simple idealization?

SE: It is symbolism.

OB: What is the goal of this symbolism?

SE: That is for you to analyze. Me, I simply write and leave you make of them what you want to.

OB: How do you place yourself compared to the other Senegalese writers like Aminata Sow Fall in *The Beggars’ Strike*, Nafissatou Diallo in *De Tilène au Plateau* and Ly Sangare in *Sourd-Muet*?

SE: There, it is you who place me. I do not place myself...

OB: But there is something which binds you, you four in these works.

SE: But *Xala* came before all these other works, see?

OB: From talks with Senegalese friends, I have learned that *De Tilène au Plateau* also strives to depict the place where the poor live, the lowly people.

SE: No, no, when Dakar was not also a big city, there was Lanes, see?

OB: Yes.

SE: Here you see... it is like Gueye Wayne, *The Valley of Salted Pond*, etc.

OB: Yes.

SE: It is simply a process of basic conflict, fine. But as any metropolis develops the shopping malls, they attract all of the poor. In Lagos, there are “poor districts” and also “rich districts”

OB: It is so.

SE: But it is the expansion of the city that does that.

OB: Yes but from the title of the novel, *De Tilène au Plateau*, one already sees a conflict.

SE: Yes.

OB: And this conflict exists from beginning to end of the text.

SE: Yes.

OB: As in *Xala*, there is a conflict between the poor districts and the rich districts in *De Tilène au Plateau* i.e., an opposition of poor suburbs to the rich city. Don't you see a kind of parallelism in this process of conflict?

SE: It is for you. It is for you who studied the three books to make the analysis.

OB: Moussa in his above mentioned novel shows the process of emancipation of a beggar, a beggar who in spite of his infirmity, asks for the word... he wants to be understood by the people.

SE: Yes.

OB: Don't you see the same plot in *Xala*?

SE: That also is for you to analyze; it is you who do the research.

OB: How do you characterize the fight which opposes your beggars against the authorities in the novel?

SE: It is in the book. It is the subject of the book. When they came to the house... to invade the house...

OB: It is clear in *God's Bits of Woods* and *Xala* the outcome is always an attack on the residence of the oppressors. Why this leaning?

SE: It is for you to compare. Since the beginning up to now, people fight and, since they fight, it is necessary that they arrive at victory.

OB: The victory of these beggars in the novel, can you regard it as a real victory itself because, after all, the beggars can never set up a government or...

SE: Yes, yes.

OB: A system of organization.

SE: What did the beggars do to El Hadji in *Xala*? They stripped him, ridiculed him and asked him whether he wanted to become a man....

OB: Yes, they humiliated him, derided him.

SE: It is necessary that he is punished.

OB: Yes.

SE: The beggars will not go away; only they will confront the corrupt people. They will go with the intellectuals of the country;

they will go to victory with the workmen. That is completely a metaphor, the Marxist metaphor if one can say.

OB: In other words, they mobilize the others who are not corrupt, who go to make war....

SE: Yes.

OB: Against those who are corrupt?

SE: It is precisely that.

OB: Throughout the novel you speak of beggars only in the singular. What is the significance to use only one beggar? Each time you make allusions to the beggar, "the beggar", "the beggar..." until the end of the novel why the reference to only one?

SE: Because, if I had said "the beggars" that would not be well recorded in your head but, in the singular, when I say "the beggar", "the beggar", "the beggar", that remains in your head. Did you notice that they are very numerous? There is always a head.

OB: Oh... to carry out a revolution?

SE: There you are.

OB: When you speak about begging in *Xala*, is it begging in itself that you denounce or is it only one symbol of laziness to be denounced in our society of today?

SE: It is not the same thing. It is the sins of El Hadji, Abdou Kader Bèye. It has its wages. He became impotent. He could not lay with his wife. It is the symbol of the impotence of the black middle-class. And men as El Hadji are nothing but the rest of them.

OB: By extension, don't you believe that this symbol, this impotence known under the name of *xala*, also affects the beggars themselves insofar as they prove to be impotent, ineffective in the revolutionary fight?

SE: Undoubtedly not.

OB: Don't you see that they prove to be impotent from the awkward way by which they had carry out the fight? Don't you believe that they are impotent because they did not carry out the rather proletarian fight in a revolutionary way as it is necessary?

SE: No, they are not proletarians.

OB: Yes, but...

SE: They are not workmen.

OB: It is so but...

SE: Did you see *The Revolt of the Peasants*?

OB: Yes.

SE: You already saw *The Revolt of the Peasants*?

OB: Yes.

SE: They do not act like workmen either.

OB: Do you believe in destiny?

SE: Very well.

OB: Do you believe that all that a man is in this life - low or high - is predestined?

SE: Fate.

OB: Yes, fate.

SE: Fate, oh no.

OB: According to you, where is the connection between man and destiny?

SE: It is man who makes his destiny. There is no connection.

OB: Please what anecdotic interpretation can you give to *Xala*? Because me, I read *Xala* like an anecdote, and also, like facts.

SE: Me, I write and I do not put myself to questions. I do not have the disease of proof. I put questions to my society. What is the simplest form to touch the widest of public possible? That is the problem.

OB: In other words, an interpretation centred on the reader.

SE: Yes, but in essence it is a matter of comprehension; there is in the same book several visions. Do you understand me?

OB: Yes...

SE: You, you have pointed out two of them but there are othersI have seen readers who point out three or even four. Perhaps because me, I am not conscious of all that I put in a book.

OB: Throughout the novel, the only weapon of the beggar is "his song". And that bites, in a painful way, the authorities represented by El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye. What does this song mean?

SE: It is difficult to distinguish the colour of water from the pond but falling drop by drop on the stone it can perforate a piece of iron.... It is so. If not, why the beggar, the beggar, the beggar? Must he sing differently from the *raison d'être* his destiny had forced upon him?

OB: The beggar in the novel prides himself to control the fate of El Hadji and it is fate which makes one weak and the other strong. Don't you believe that the way of being avenged in secrecy with the help of sorcery is anti-revolutionist?

SE: What?

OB: Do you not believe that to be avenged by manipulating fate is anti-revolutionist?

SE: No, that is not the most important passage in the book. You know in our society, people are passive and do not like to work.... Do you agree or not?

OB: They are passive.

SE: Yes, and it is this passivity which causes the problem.

OB: Don't you believe that the way in which the beggar was avenged is anti-revolutionist?

SE: No, there is not a single, fixed manner to carry out a revolution.

OB: But according to Marx, there is a...

SE: Listen, the society evolves. Marx wrote at the time a scientific book about London or Germany but more about London....Good. China made its revolution in its own way. Vietnam in fact had her revolution in its own way. Cuba made its revolution the same way... and Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe... one should not take the revolution as solidified, it is necessary to be able to adapt from Marxism, which is a science, one of its aspects which does not belong any more to anybody.

OB: Thus one can domesticate Marxism in one's own way.

SE: Yes, yes, in one's own way, on the basis of one's own realities.

OB: So far so good. On page 163 of the novel you said and I quote: "Did the beggar always direct a similar operation?" Can you tell me in which work of arts, personal, critical or sociological where beggars played the part of invaders?

SE: They are not invaders. I do not like the word because then you seem to protect the private property –when you say that they invade the private property.

OB: Yes....

SE: But any private property of a certain dimension implies struggle and exploitation of the sweat of others, right?

OB: Of course, one can describe their role like that of militants.

SE: Very well, militant role, that goes.

OB: On page 170 of the novel, we see a disabled person ordering Adja Awa Astou (wife of El Hadji) to spit in the eyes of her husband, El hadji Abdou Kader Bèye. Why do you use a disabled person, and still a woman, in this manner? Is this to further the work of female liberation?

SE: Yes, because Africa cannot develop or make the revolution, without the participation of the women. They are more than half of the population. Yes, they are more than half.

OB: According to what you have just said, can we draw the conclusion that it is to this end, perhaps, that you made the educated girl of El Hadji say to the police who came to arrest the beggars in his residence that they are “the guests of dad”?

SE: Yes.

OB: Thus they can also take part (by doing this) in the revolution of society. Is it?

SE: Yes, it is.

OB: They take part with the beggars in the new crusade to purge the society of dishonest individuals.

SE: Yes, they are... how do you say that in the university?

OB: Progressive.

SE: Yes.

OB: Thus the new vision of the world of the beggars is just as that of the educated feminists.

SE: And yet the beggars did not go to school.

OB: Yet their situation revolts them.

SE: Yes.

OB: This is to say that it is their state of begging, their condition, which obliges them in spite of diversities of their forms, their state. It is the condition which joins them together in a common front.

SE: Yes, there.

OB: What do you mean by making the beggar say (on page 169) that in the country where he lived, the prisoner is happier than the workman and the peasant?

SE: Yes, yes.

OB: What do you want to say by that?

SE: Yes, look at our current society, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, etc. The prisoner is fed and kept safe.

OB: Yes.

SE: When he is sick, he is taken care of. The peasant does not have that; the workman does not have that. The workman must work to the pain of death.

OB: Do you mean that in the current difficult economic situation which we suffer it is better to be a prisoner than a workman: better to go begging because then one will enjoy things which one would not have the privilege even if one worked?

SE: That is not for me to say. The beggars know, not me. I know that in our present African countries the prisoners live better than the beggars do.

OB: In other words,

SE: They drink very freely. They eat and when they are sick one looks after them and they do not pay a tax. They do not have to be even worried –the prisoners.

OB: In other words, if I understand you well, in the absence of thrush, one eats the blackbird.

SE: Yes.

OB: Or if one does not manage to have work for one becomes prisoner....

SE: No, it is not that one must be a prisoner. For Marx, it is a kind of parallel which he made and which is true. You know... in the film "Xala", this passage was censored in Senegal and thus it was removed, cut out.

OB: Oh... because of this passage which I have just quoted?

SE: Yes, yes.

OB: It was cut out of reel?

SE: Yes, it was cut out.

OB: The Senegalese penal code prohibits begging. Is it begging in itself which is proscribed or the way in which people beg?

SE: Well, if it was formerly prohibited, it cannot be prohibited begging in the current situation any more.

OB: What kind of society would you like to see existing in Africa?

SE: Scientific Socialist.

OB: With the Marxists...?

SE: But adapted to our realities. It would be neither Chinese socialism nor Russian.

OB: That is to say, Socialism conceived according to African realities.

SE: Yes, yes.

OB: Why the translation of text to screen, the translation of the novel...

SE: To the image?

OB: Yes.

SE: Me, I prefer the books, but the majority do not read and the books are expensive, while everyone goes to the cinema.

OB: Thus it is from an economic standpoint that you made this adaptation.

SE: Yes... yes, because of those who did not read the book. It is in my book, *The Mandate*. It is not in *Xala*.

OB: Begging is a problem; what can you propose for its solution?

SE: I do not know. It is necessary to change the society. Everyone can produce. Yes, everyone. The society can use all the valid hands, and then perhaps we would not have any more beggars. The one who begs is not proud. No woman, no man likes to beg yes, in any country of the world.

OB: Doesn't begging in *The Mandate* go in the same direction as that described in *Xala*?

SE: No, it is different.

OB: What is the difference?

SE: You should find out.

OB: I have searched but it can be seen that in *The Mandate* the women of Ibrahima Dieng beg to feed themselves because their husband is poor; in *Xala* also, people are obliged to beg to contain the hunger. So I'm afraid it is the same begging.

SE: Yes, it is the same objective yet the situation grows increasingly bad. In Africa, if attention is not paid, we will have more of beggars than peasants and workmen.

OB: In other words, all these two works, *The Mandate* and *Xala*, seem to be signals, warnings.

SE: For our countries.

OB: So that they can take some action.

SE: Yes. What actions should be taken? It is clear that when we arrest, or raid the beggars and disperse them, they return. Yes, they return because of the famine where you can only hope to eat; I did not say that you find what to eat, but you hope to eat.

OB: Because the city with its problems, or its difficulties, is better than the village?

SE: Yes.

OB: But the African governments of today encourage the policy of return to grassroots. Do you not believe that such a policy is more promising than false hopes to find fortune in the cities?

SE: It is quite beautiful to promise, to say to people "go to countryside" but when they return to the countryside, the ground does not yield any more, people die, the children die, the animals die... the disease.... What will one make of these?

OB:

SE: Eh? ... I ask you the question. What will one make of these? You will remain on the spot?

OB: No, I am obliged to go into the cities.

SE: There you are.

OB: Sir, *The Radiance of the King* by Camara Laye...

SE: Yes.

OB: It spoke about a beggar, but it did not capture the image of this beggar well.

SE: Yes?

OB: The manner in which he introduced this beggar; it is as if the beggar really has a power.

SE: Yes, it is in the subconscious of people.

OB: The marabout in *The Radiance of the King*...

SE: Yes, *The Radiance of the King* is far back.

OB: It goes back to 1954.

SE: It was few years before independence then. Eh? The villages had a beggar who is a well-read type....he can recite the Koran.

OB: Yes, he works in the court of the king.

SE: Like what?

OB: Like a guard.

SE: Here, very true. That is not the beggar who goes to beg.

OB: It is an advanced beggar.

SE: Yes.

OB: Which is to say that all works which speak about the beggar after 1954 only try to recapture this image of a great beggar?

SE: No, that was the image of the beggar presented in a purely African feudal society.

OB: Oh, the image of beggar presented in...

SE: *The Radiance of the King* yes. It is in the feudal period.

OB: Yes, and the form of begging described in *Xala* is in the modern capitalist system.

SE: Yes, they are in the city and the struggle is harder.

OB: Can one say that the beggar introduced in *The Radiance of the King* is cynical and philosophical?

SE: Yes, blindness is not begging.

OB: Blindness, sir?

SE: Yes.

OB: Is the beggar there blind?

SE: Yes.

OB: But he played a very dominating part. He could order the white man Clarence around— just as your beggar did to El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye.

SE: You are right.