

The Spirit of Migrancy: Mati Diop's *Atlantique*

Gigi Adair
University of Bielefeld

Atlantique (*Atlantics*), directed in 2019 by Mati Diop, produced in France and shot and set in Senegal, is a film about migration from West Africa to Europe that subverts multiple dominant discourses and registers that have dominated the public, and to some extent scholarly, discussion of migration to and in Europe in recent years. The film centers on a community in a beachside suburb of Dakar, from which a group of young men embark for Spain. It tells a story of migration in a visual medium, but refuses the dominant visual regime of migration by focusing not on migrant subjects or their journey, but on the conditions that structure migration and the cultural and social effects of migration, primarily from the point of view of non-migrants, particularly the young women left behind. It understands migration as, on the one hand, an effect of the “world-configuring function of borders” (Balibar 79) re-ordered for the global neoliberal present: one in which the European border regime, as a structuring force of the global labor market and contemporary global capitalism (Mezzadra and Neilson 66-93), generates migration by exacerbating inequality and exploitation in the global South. For that reason, it is deeply suspicious of the promises of capitalist investment and development. Despite its exploration of some of the negative consequences of contemporary migration for young Senegalese people, it also insists upon what I term a “spirit of migrancy”: a protest against contemporary conditions and a vision of an alternative future. This spirit of migrancy may result in migration to Europe at times, but it is not focused on a desire for or dream of Europe, nor on the vision of modernity offered by capitalist modernity. Rather, it is an insistence—not limited to the men who attempt to migration—on the possibility of an alternative future

In recent years, the Mediterranean Sea, the English Channel, and the beaches and coastlines of Greece, Italy, Spain and Britain have been sites of a repeated, performative “border spectacle” (De Genova, “Spectacles” 1181; De Genova, Mezzadra and Pickles 66-68): an enforcement of the border that produces illegal migration and simultaneously renders it spectacularly visible. The so-called refugee crisis in Europe in and since 2015 has generated a distinct “visual politics” (Snow 167) that is highly influential in the shaping the meaning of migration in Europe at the current conjuncture. Diop’s film refuses this visual regime: it does not visually depict the departure of the men, nor their journey, nor their eventual death in a storm, nor the broken boat which may be assumed to have been theirs that is later found by Spanish fishermen. This is just one of the significant ways in which this film evades many binaries—such as “deserving” or “undeserving” migrants—and discourses that have dominated

European debates about migration in recent years.¹ The men's deaths haunt the film, but they are never shown and indeed only narrated and confirmed supernaturally (or, from a European epistemological standpoint, never confirmed and only presumed). This means that they are unavailable for the type of humanitarian intervention and public mourning that aims to generate empathy for migrants among Europeans, but which has been criticized for its ahistorical understanding of contemporary migration and thus its construction of "white innocence" in regard to migrant deaths (Danewid 1681).

By remaining on the shoreline to tell a story about the contemporary migration in Senegal, the film suggests that we can only understand migration to Europe by paying attention to the long reach of the EU, from its border regime in the service of global neoliberalism to its fisheries policy. It draws attention to the cultural and social transformations effected by migration in Senegal, while its location and dominant visual register insist upon the necessity of historical contextualization. Through its exploration of the structural and cultural motivations for and effects of migration, rather than focusing on the journey itself, the film opens up a space for scholarly discussions of the relationship between European slavery, colonialism and contemporary migration. By reflecting on migration to Europe from Senegal, it highlights some of the social formations driving migration in source countries of the global South that are often curiously neglected in scholarship on migration from West Africa (Flahaux and De Haas 3-6), including labor exploitation (Cross 203) and so-called development politics (Bakewell 1342).

This important filmic intervention in ongoing scholarly and political debates about global migration is also striking for its critical and commercial success. *Atlantique* won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival in 2019, making Diop the first Black woman director to be selected for the Competition section of the festival and the first to win the Grand Prix. The film was selected as Senegal's entry for the Best International Feature Film category at the 92nd Academy Awards and made the shortlist for the award. It has been screened at and nominated for prizes at numerous prestigious film festivals. In 2019, Netflix acquired worldwide rights to the film. This attests both to the ongoing importance of African cinema in addressing social questions on the continent, including the emergence of popular cinema (Bisschoff and Overbergh 114-16) and to the renewed interest in African cinema in Europe (Diawara 74), and thus cinema's role in combating stereotypical representations of Africa.

Diop's film ties into a number of important filmic traditions in Senegalese and African filmmaking. Most importantly, it must be located in relation to both contemporary and older African films about migration, including the pioneering work of Diop's uncle, Djibril Diop Mambéty in *Touki-*

¹ The discourse of "deserving" and "undeserving" migrants has been observed and analyzed across Europe, including in Britain (Anderson 5-26; Dhaliwal and Fokert 49-53), Denmark (Jørgensen and Thomsen 339-59), Germany (Hinger 21-29; Holmes and Castañeda 13-21), Italy (Marchetti 237-46), Slovakia (Kissóva 744-51), and Sweden, Switzerland, Lithuania and Latvia (Borrelli).

Bouki (1973), which it repeatedly references. This is not Diop's first film about migration from Senegal to Europe; rather, it follows her two genre-crossing documentaries, the 2009 short film *Atlantiques* (*Atlantics*) and 2013's *Mille soleils* (*A Thousand Suns*). All three films are part of a large body of contemporary African and diasporic filmmaking about transnational experiences, exile, migration and displacement.² While many of these films adopt the perspective of Africans in the diaspora or of characters who return to the continent and explore experiences and questions of identity, displacement, exile associated with migration and diaspora, Diop's new film instead examines the impact of various transnational flows—of capital, people, commodities, and desires—on contemporary life and culture in Dakar from the perspective of those people, primarily young women, who are not transnational migrants themselves. In doing so, it is not only a film about migration, but can also be seen in relation to other important strands of African cinema: it joins the work of other African women directors exploring female friendships (Bischoff and Van de Peer 88-108) and female emancipation (Bischoff 39-47), and can be read in relation to the tradition of filmic depictions of Dakar, particularly in films by Djibril Diop Mambéty and Ousmane Sembène.³ In both gesturing to the colonial history of contemporary exploitation and thus the coloniality of migration, and criticizing the greed and corruption of Senegalese elites, it updates both the 1988 *Camp de Thiaroye* (*The Camp at Thiaroye*) and the 1974 *Xala*, both by Sembène, as well as films such as Souleymane Cissé's 1978 *Baara*.

The film opens on a large and dusty construction site, among the men working to build a complex around an enormous, futuristic skyscraper on the beachfront in Dakar as several cows amble past another new building resembling a space ship. The first shots of the film thus recall the opening scene of a cattle herd in *Touki-Bouki*, already reworked by Diop in *Mille soleils*. In the earlier film, Diop showed the cattle amidst the urban bustle of Dakar, but as a powerful force in the city, forcing the traffic to a stop as they cross a major road. In *Atlantique*, the cows appear as an incongruous and apparently anachronistic detail in the rapidly changing city. Together with the men laboring with basic equipment next to the gleaming tower, they indicate, but do not influence, the uneven nature of development in the Senegalese capital. In place of the slaughterhouse scenes featured in both *Touki-Bouki* and *Mille soleils*, *Atlantique* returns to the construction site.

Instead of a city seeking “to free itself from the colonial shadow” (Dima 11) as in Mambéty, Dakar appears here as newly colonized by the powerful but impersonal force of international capital. The tower appears to promise that the

² See Petty (423-43) for a reading of journeys, movement and identity in the work of Alain Gomis and Rachid Djaïdani; Estrella Sendra (360-90) on the displacement in the films of Alain Gomis, and Melissa Thackway on contemporary sub-saharan Francophone cinema (“Exile” 5-20) and the thematization of movement in contemporary African and diasporic films (“Crossing” 444-60).

³ See Pfaff (92-99) for a discussion of the representation of Dakar in the films of Mambéty and Sembène.

future, or a certain form of modernity, has arrived. For the workers, however, this future is characterized by material conditions of exploitation and abuse well known from the colonial past. They have not been paid for several months, and on this day too the foreman claims to be unable to pay them their wages. The men's desperation—they are in debt and have families relying on them—is mixed with resignation. The men may be formally citizens, but they have no means of demanding their social and economic rights; throughout the film the Senegalese state is mostly characterized by its absence or corruption. The hopelessness of the workers' situation is soon matched on a more intimate level: Souleiman, one of the unpaid workers from the construction site, and a young woman named Ada are in love with each other, but Ada's family has arranged her engagement to Omar, a successful migrant living in Italy who is due back in Dakar within days for the wedding.

Almost before the love story can begin, however, it appears to reach a premature end. That same night, when Ada climbs out of her bedroom window to meet Souleiman at a local beach bar run by her friend Dior, she learns that he and the other men have left in a boat: "ils ont pris la mer" 'they have gone out to sea' (00:19:44).⁴ In *Touki-Bouki* the hopes and desires associated with migration are attached to a concrete destination, Paris, and clearly stated (if highly simplified). In *Atlantique*, in contrast, no desired or intended destination is named, nor the hopes associated with migration named. The men's motivations are only implied: the exploitation of their labor on the construction site is clearly one; social norms around intimate relationships a possible second. The film thus depicts migration as driven by factors located in Senegal (albeit tied into global forces) rather than by the pull or dream of Europe; whether the men's migration is to be understood as freely chosen or forced is also left unresolved.

By following the women of the community, rather than the migrant men, *Atlantique* suggests that migration affects the whole community, culture and society, and that its effects are strongly gendered (Ifekwunigwe 7). The film shows the grief of family members, like Souleiman's mother, and the collective loss experienced by the young women from the neighborhood who are left behind, as well as the existential threat that the men's departure means for Dior's business. While some of the young women were family members of or romantically involved with the migrant men, others seem to have been only loosely associated with them. Their shared grief therefore suggests that the men's departure is a loss for the women in some other, as yet unspecified way, and that the desires bound up with the beach bar go beyond the personal, romantic or sexual. The film will go on to suggest that the beach bar is the location of a shared vision of being in the world and a vision of alternative futurity. This is a futurity not dependent upon migration but rather one that is

⁴ The film is in a mixture of French and Wolof, frequently involving code switching within sentences. For this reason, all further quotations are given in English only, using the subtitles of the film.

lost through the men's desperate departure.

It soon becomes clear that two storylines that open the film—one about global capitalism, local corruption and labor exploitation, the other about social norms of marriage—are structurally intertwined, one a cause and one a result of transnational migration. Omar's arrival makes apparent one of the ways in which global capitalism, migration and intimate relations are intertwined in contemporary Senegalese society. His first scene with Ada—possibly their first meeting—takes place in the expensive beach club of the futuristic tower. Ada may not make it to Europe herself, but it seems Europe—or the globalized capitalist modernity that it is often understood to represent—has come to her. Omar presents her with an iPhone, promising her that “it will change your life” (00:29:33). Marriage to a successful migrant does indeed promise Ada a previously unknown level of material comfort, as indicated by the large house with new furniture that Omar's family has prepared for the young couple after their marriage, presumably financed by Omar's remittances. Ada's family and friends consider her lucky: while Omar lives and works most of the year in Italy, she can expect to stay in Dakar in comfort. In all other ways, however, the life that Ada's and Omar's families envision for her is a socially and religiously conservative one. The “change” that Omar promises, the “social remittance” (Levitt 927; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 3-7) he brings, is measurable only in commodities and most certainly not in Ada's gendered position in society. It soon becomes clear that the value of the expensive gifts that Omar gives her is to be repaid by what Ada's childhood friend Mariama calls “her worth” (00:36:02). In the form of a typical “patriarchal bargain” (Kandiyoti 275) updated for the twenty-first century, Ada's material comfort and the status acquired by becoming the wife of a migrant is to be repaid with her acceptance of strict norms of femininity and in particular with her chastity, as the virginity test that Omar's family later demands makes clear.

The norms of femininity demanded by Omar and his family are not traditional but rather reinvented for the age of migration and new technologies. The film shows how migration has made uneven but steady inroads into the culture, including into the parent's own behavior, from norms of communication to folklore and dreams. Ada's mother advises her daughter that, as the future wife of an absent migrant, she must use the telephone to make her husband happy and preserve her own position: a traditional role reinvented for new technology and a new model of migrant marriage. For some of Ada's friends, Omar is an attractive husband not only because of his wealth but because of his absence, further suggesting how migration is generating new relationship norms. Migrant absence also takes another form, however: that of the many young men who die trying to cross the ocean. When Ada dreams of Souleiman's (presumed) death, it resembles a folk tale, in which a group of fishermen believe they have caught a giant fish, but instead find Souleiman's corpse in their nets upon their return to the shore. Ada's grief is thereby incorporated into a wider cultural narrative, suggesting how the repeated deaths of migrants have become part of the cultural unconscious. The loss of lives

during the crossing is thereby also obliquely connected to the loss of the livelihoods of Senegalese fishermen, whose nets increasingly come back empty of fish, suggesting the wide scope of and a commonality between the forces that are driving migration and those that are destroying traditional cultures and making other lives in Senegal unlivable.

In her book *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Avtar Brah develops the concept of “diaspora space” to think about the forces that drive migration. Diaspora space is a “point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes” that “is ‘inhabited’ not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous” (Brah 78). In this work, Brah is writing about the destination countries of migrants; her interest is in moving from a narrow focus only on diasporic subjects to a consideration of a social formation: one that is a site of migrancy but shaped by the broader range of “economic, political, cultural and psychic processes” highlighted by Brah (78). All of these processes are clearly also at work in *Atlantique*, which tells a story of contemporary migrancy almost without international movement, suggesting that so-called source countries of migration can also be understood as diaspora spaces. In this way, migration is de-individualized, first by rejecting a liberal or neoliberal notion of migration as an individual choice and instead shifting the focus onto the “conditions of immigration ... the material systems and histories that create, shape and manage it” (Foster 119); secondly by demonstrating how migration, embedded in the conditions that generate it, is a collective experience that is both class-based and community-based.

The historical context of contemporary migration is conveyed above all in the setting, imagery, and sound of the film: often beachside, and deeply shaped by the ocean which gives the film its name. Ada’s vision of the sea as Souleiman’s grave invites a comparison, and a recognition of continuity, between the enslaved Africans drowned on the Middle Passage and the migrants who perish crossing to Europe today. The film thereby offers a history of the present: an understanding of contemporary migration from Africa to Europe that locates its genealogy in trans-Atlantic slavery and European colonialism, similar to analyses pursued by scholars in recent years under the sign of the “Black Mediterranean” (Danewid 1679-81; Maio 42). This historical resonance with slavery is joined by another: numerous beachside scenes of the film were shot at the site of the 1944 Thiaroye massacre of French West African troops by the French Army in response to the African soldiers’ demand for fair and equal pay (the subject of Sembène’s film *Camp de Thiaroye*); Diop has commented on this context in interviews (Freeman n.p.). The men’s migration, and their unpaid labor which precedes it, is thereby connected to the twentieth-century history of European colonialism and labor exploitation in Senegal. The film’s beachside setting therefore insists on a historical contextualization of both contemporary social relations within Senegal and relations, including of movement and migration, between Senegal and Europe. The film suggests that the history of slavery and colonialism is essential to understanding

contemporary migration, and the forces which shape it, but not in the sense of earlier, more direct waves of migration between former colonies and former imperial metropolises, nor in the sense of direct European colonial rule. In Diop's film, the men are not headed for France, the former imperial metropole (later it will become clear they sailed toward Spain) and it is Senegalese elites—powered, of course, by global capital—and negligent authorities who are responsible for the corruption and exploitation at the tower site. The men, and other migrants like them, can thus be understood as a twenty-first-century iteration of the diasporas of globalization or “diasporas of structural adjustment” (Zeleza 55), driven by an “extracolonial logic” (Ifekwunigwe 2).

In its understanding of contemporary migration as informed by colonial history but shaped by neo-imperial processes of global capitalism, the film joins a chorus of similar voices from diverse fields of scholarship in recent years. To cite just a few examples, scholars of, respectively, Arabic literature and East African writing have called for a “global and postcolonial” (Sellman 754) analysis or an engagement of “the material histories of migration and Empire to challenge systemic violence against immigrants under neoliberal globalization” (Foster 110); political scientists in Britain have argued that it is necessary to account for “the deregulated presences of past economic, political and cultural colonialities transformed within the postcolonial present to naturalise and depoliticise the world order” (Hesse and Sayyid 16-17); and sociologists working from a Latin American tradition and perspective have demanded an understanding of “migration and the coloniality of power” (Grosfoguel, Oso and Christou 641). Scholars in postcolonial studies have also turned increasingly to questions of migration and, in particular, asylum.⁵ *Atlantique* shares much with this work in its understanding of the forces shaping contemporary migration and the necessity of a historical and materialist analysis. The majority of this scholarship, however, is focused upon the experience of and response to migration in the Global North: on the legal regimes that attempt to regulate migration and the “increasing illegality of asylum” (Dauvergne 51), for example, or on the relationship between migrants and nation-state or its citizens, often as imagined in narratives of migration to the Global North, thereby “imagining and brokering an ethical response to asylum” (Woolley 10). This important work has done much to analyze the global forces shaping migration and to recognize the agency and political subjectivity of refugees, who have otherwise long been silenced and represented only via a “semiotics of suffering” (Cox et al. 9).

Nonetheless, Diop's film suggests a certain blind spot in this scholarship: the film suggests that the experience of contemporary migrancy, which is a process of subjectification by the history of colonialism, globalized capitalism, corrupt post-colonial regimes, and border regimes based on racism,

⁵ Important scholarship in this area includes David Farrier's work on postcolonial asylum; John McLeod's reconceptualization of diaspora as a result of recent migration patterns; Mireille Rosello's work on postcolonial asylum; and Agnes Woolley's analysis of asylum narratives and representations of refugees.

does not begin once the borders of Europe are crossed, nor even at departure. Rather, it is a social and cultural condition that pervades the society in the homeland, motivating some to try to preserve traditions and leading others to imagine alternative futures. As such, it is insufficient to understand migration as only “a derivative or dependent variable” (De Genova, Mezzadra and Pickles 83) of global economic disparities. Rather, as with all processes of subjectification, the condition of migrancy can also become the basis for an alternative collective identity.

Diop adopts a genre-crossing strategy to represent this dual process of subjectification, that is, of being both “subjected by power and the subject as imbued with the power to transcend the processes of subjection that have shaped it” (De Genova, Mezzadra and Pickles 83). The film turns to the cinematic traditions of the ghost story and zombie film and the cultural traditions of West African spirit possession and Islamic djinns to illustrate how this subjectivity, which I term the spirit of migrancy, is both present and disavowed in the community. On Ada’s wedding day, the first of a series of strange events takes place: Ada and Omar’s marital bed is set alight, interrupting the celebrations and preventing the consummation of the marriage. In the coming days, various members of the community are struck with fainting spells; reports accumulate claiming that Souleiman has been seen and Ada receives messages and phone calls from him, or someone claiming to be him. The film thus begins as a realist migration and marriage drama, before unexpectedly moving into the mode of, alternately, a detective film and a ghost story. This strategy of shifting form and genre can also be found in some twenty-first-century literary texts that rethink migration and its relationship to both the colonial past and contemporary capitalism, such as Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* (*The Belly of the Atlantic*) and Shailja Patel’s *Migritude*—a book, based on a theatrical show, that combines poetry, memoir, reportage, illustrations, and performance notes. Diop’s film might nonetheless be best compared once again with the avant-garde, genre-crossing *Touki-Bouki* and its blurring of the real and the imaginary in order to “try out hypothetical futures” (Hulstyn 186) and “open up a space of reflection that allows for thinking through a future that might not yet exist” (Hulstyn 182).

In Diop’s film, the generic shift and split both transports a vision of an alternative future generated by the spirit of migrancy and makes visible a hauntology of lost futures. A group of neighborhood women, mostly but not exclusively the young women from the beach bar, stride through the dark streets of the town to converge on the luxury villa of Mr N’Diaye, a local businessman and the contractor responsible for the tower site. The women, white-eyed, zombie-like, and apparently possessed by the spirits of the migrant men, seek justice by demanding the men’s unpaid wages. This literal haunting is also a hauntology in Derrida’s sense of the term: the return of the men upends temporality and insists upon history and the possibility of justice. The returned men/possessed women curse Mr N’Diaye that “every time you look at the top of the tower, you’ll think of our unburied bodies, at the bottom of the ocean”

(01:34:04-16), thus transforming the tower from the symbol of a modern, capitalist future to the sign of the futures lost to capitalism. The doubling effected by spirit possession—both the spirits of the drowned men and the young women speak the curse and the accusation—implies that the present is not only haunted by the lost futures of the drowned men, but also by the lost futures of the (living) women and the broader community. As such, the film echoes with the lost futures of a long line of post-independence African texts frequently categorized as the literature, cinema and drama of disillusionment (Wright 797-808).⁶

These lost futures are not only attributed to anonymous international capital, but also the failure of the Senegalese authorities to put the rights of citizens above the rights of capital. The police commissioner quashes any suggestion that there might be a connection between the break in at Mr N'Diaye's villa and the unpaid wages: "What unpaid wages? That's not our problem. They broke in, that's all. [...] Mr N'Diaye has done a lot for us" (01:07:37-50). Whether the police commissioner is corrupt or simply in thrall to the promise of capitalist development, the failure of state institutions to protect the rights of its citizens, already implicit in the opening scenes of the film, is here confirmed. His focus on questions of security and law-and-order also echoes the enormous securitization of migration that has taken place in policy and discourse in recent decades and locates this shift in Senegal rather than, or in addition to, Europe. The attitude of the police commissioner matches a broader discursive shift, so that "if social relations of border crossing were previously heavily inflected with a politics of labor or a language of rights, they have since been subordinated to a discourse of security, order and interdiction" (De Genova, Mezzadra and Pickles 67).⁷

Just as the authorities turn a blind eye to the real cause of the "break ins" at the villa, the families of the young women and the some of the women themselves are unable to understand the real cause of their nighttime behavior, which is instead attributed to improper femininity. One woman is informed by a *marabout* that she has been possessed because she does not "dress correctly" (01:01:07); the mother of another is told by an imam that the spirits will not return "if your daughter behaves like a good Muslim, says her prayers five times a day and wears the veil" (01:12:43-51). The women's possession makes apparent a social conflict that has bubbled barely below the surface throughout the film: for some people in this community, the local and geopolitical forces driving inequality and migration and restructuring their society in myriad ways are less of a problem than changing norms of femininity. Or rather, attempting to control women's bodies and behaviors is their response to the broader forces restructuring their society. The young women in the neighborhood who flout conservative demands for modesty and possibly chastity are presumed to be

⁶ See also Haas for a discussion of disillusionment in Zimbabwean spoken-word and video poetry and Millar for a study of the phenomenon in Cuban and Angolan narratives.

⁷ For a discussion of the connection between securitization, particularly deportability, and labor, see De Genova ("Alien" 91-109).

possessed by evil spirits and driven to commit crimes as a result of their refusal of such gender norms. The women's possession by the unpaid migrant men and their involvement in the men's quest for justice suggests that there is a connection between migration and the women's refusal of conservative gender norms. This does not imply, however, that the women's desire and struggle for liberation and autonomy is a foreign influence, an import from Europe, a "social remittance" of migration. Rather, the women's struggle for gender justice is portrayed as complementary to the men's struggle against exploitation, as part of a shared vision for a livable life and future. This vision, which I term the "spirit of migrancy," emerges from the global present of mass transnational migrancy and its local effects in Senegal, but it is not limited to, or even dependent upon, actual migration, and it goes beyond the oppressive and often deadly reality faced by migrants. It is located in an important space in the film: the small beach bar run by Dior.

Between the ambivalent, even impassive ocean, and the hopes, fears and horrors associated with it, and the social norms of the neighborhood lies the interstitial space of beach, which functions in the film, as so often in cinema and in coastal cultures, as a liminal space of various and possibly opposed forms of transition and transformation. It marks a boundary, a transition from the known to the unknown, from the present to the future. If the border produces known quantities, such as illegal migration and particular labor regimes, or the "times and spaces of global capitalism" (Mezzadra and Neilson 4), the beach functions as a threshold of change in a more ambivalent and undetermined way. One possible transformation is symbolized by the enormous beachfront tower, the other by Dior's small beach bar. The tower promises globalized capitalist modernity for wealthy Senegalese, that is, the "change" that Ada was promised by Omar. For all others, however, it threatens no change: it cements into place exploitative social and economic relations and functions "to eradicate the very prospect of alternative cognitions and social organizations, and to reorganize lifeworlds for the economic and political benefits of elites" (Deckard 84). As such, the tower is a simulacrum of futurity that instead produces the end of history and the impossibility of a future significantly different from the present. The beach bar, in contrast, is a space of transgression and experimentation in social relations; at the same time, it is depicted as a space of selfhood, even of momentary apparent wholeness. For example, it is only space where the spirits of the returned men can be seen in their own bodies, reflected in the large mirrors of the club. For the women, it is a liminal space and a space of freedom that enables transition not to the adulthood envisioned by the community, with its conservative roles for women, but to some form of female autonomy within a community of female solidarity. As such, it becomes the locus of the film's vision of the future.

Atlantique ends with another scene of labor: Dior preparing her bar for the day's trade. She is joined by Ada, who has left her arranged marriage and spent the night in the club with the spirit of Souleiman. Their work together suggests both the "struggle" (00:37:58) that Dior has warned Ada that she, as

an independent woman, will now face, and the solidarity between the women of the neighborhood that supports them in their struggle for a livable future in the city. It is in this scene of communal labor that Ada declares, in the final lines of the film, that her ghostly sexual experience “will stay with me, to remind me of who I am, and show me who I will become. Ada, to whom the future belongs” (01:41:01-14). She thereby insists upon her power to shape a viable future, invested with the spirit and memory of the migrants and their joint quest for justice. That is, Ada looks to the future while refusing incorporation in the empty homogenous time of the neoliberal present. Ada does not offer a programmatic vision of the future, nor the film a happy end, but her embrace of the spirit of migrancy equips her to refuse the world offered by the tower, its conception “of the world as the only one possible, as the culminating product of time” (Marcos qtd. in Deckae 84).

The spirit of migrancy is the resistance to and transcendence of the conditions of migration born out of globalized contemporary economic and social conditions. Its historical awareness is also an insistence upon history and the possibility of change. The spirit of migrancy that drives the men toward Europe is not a desire for Europe nor for Europe’s modernity, but a drive towards the unknown in preference to the unlivable neoliberal present. In her reconceptualization of diaspora, Brah suggests that diasporic subjects are marked by a “homing desire which is not the same thing as a desire for a ‘homeland’” (177). In a similar way, the spirit of migrancy, in its transcendence of the empty time of neoliberalism in which no change is possible, inscribes the migrants and the young women not with a desire for the future often associated with migration—understood as reaching Europe, or as a certain set of material circumstances or commodities, that is, the change offered by Omar and the tower—but with the longing of a future-desire, a belief that their societies and their being in the world can change.

In ending on this note of “resilient optimism,” understood as a “pragmatic, makeshift mode of futurity that eludes the perils of utopianism” (West-Pavlov 9), the film once again refuses discourses of African migration to Europe which emphasize either homemade disasters and tragedies or celebrate the occasional “super-refugee” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh n.p.). The spirit of migrancy is not about an exultation of migrancy, the kind of which the field of postcolonial studies has sometimes been accused (Lazarus 21), nor does it condemn or regret migration. Rather, it begins from the fact of migration. This is not to say that migration is force of nature; on the contrary, the film portrays migration as generated by state institutions, political decisions and the force of capital. Nonetheless an understanding of those forces does not suffice for the people in the community to substantially alter their conditions or, therefore, the fact of migration. It is therefore a question of how to respond to the contemporary age of migration. Some people in the community seek to minimize or reverse the effects of migration and the social, cultural and subjective changes it brings, in particular by controlling women’s lives, bodies and sexualities. For others, however, the fact of migration offers them a

graspable image of transformation and a conviction that historical change is possible: they are invested with the spirit of migrancy which refuses to accept current conditions and demands an alternative future. Diop's film both acknowledges the deadly cost that this striving for a livable future inflicts on West Africans under the current European border regime in the service of global capitalism, and yet maintains that the hope for futurity that motivates the men's departure might also create significant social and cultural change in Senegal and other migrant source countries of the global South, thereby inscribing the world to come.

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