

# **Kinship and Friendship in Hardship: A Comparative Analysis of Aminata Sow Fall's *Le Revenant* and John Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby***

by

Mamadou Dieng  
dienmadou@gmail.com  
Faculty of the Humanities  
Gaston Berger University, Saint-Louis/Senegal

## **Abstract**

This article sets out to look at a number of behaviors that have proceeded from the postcolonial experience in Africa and post-World War I America. The novelists Aminata Sow Fall and John Scott Fitzgerald, respectively through *Le Revenant* and *The Great Gatsby*, tackle specific issues that seem to have escaped the attention of many critics. The quest for happiness that marked the golden twenties and the money-orientated mentality that represents the most conspicuous characteristic of post-independence Africa, including Senegal have given a heavy blow to human relationships, especially within the family and among friends as relations have turned into mere manifestations of self-interest.

**Keywords:** hardship, friendship, kinship, happiness, feminism, post-independence.

## **Introduction**

The two novels we are analyzing in this article have a profound sociological orientation. In that, they demonstrate a particular interest in human relations and their range of potential impacts on human condition. They opt for an exposition of the facets of kinship and friendship in hardship through different contexts. Hardship, in this analysis, can refer to a situation of misery, i.e. economic precariousness, incarceration or death. These circumstances constitute the sample of hard moments chosen by the writers in their specific cultural contexts to disparage the falseness of human beings and human relations or to chant their true-heartedness. It is possible to notice that poverty, imprisonment and death are endowed with the potential to produce different attitudes on the part of kin and friends towards the suffering agent.

The typology of behaviors, in these novels, is a dictate of the type of relations between individuals and the nature of hardship endured by some characters. The cultural environments in which the stories are rooted are also of paramount importance, not to mention the evolution of societies and mentalities which showcases new and different perceptions of human relations.

The representation of kinship and friendship relies, in *The Great Gatsby* and *Le Revenant*, on a narrative technique consisting of two main phases in the lives of the heroes. There is a pre-hardship phase and a post-hardship phase which allow the writers to lay bare the evolution of interpersonal relations in the novels. However, depending on the background against which each novel is set, there is a visible difference in the importance attached to each phase. In *Le Revenant*, for instance, the negative change in mentality that marks the post-independence Senegalese people informs Sow Fall's insight. The continuing decay of human relationships in Senegalese modern society inspired almost a whole generation of female and male writers as the destiny of the people and the future outcome of this process is more than scary. The greed for money and material goods that characterize the Senegalese society spoils all appetites for human relations. Kinship and friendship have received a heavy coup which has turned them into easily-broken relations.

Aminata Sow Fall, in opting for this sociological bias, steps a route that diverges from her African counterparts' pathway. *Le Revenant* came out in a context where women's literature is meant to denounce male chauvinism and deconstruct the patriarchal schema that governs almost all African societies. Female writers like the Senegalese Mariama Bâ, the Nigerians Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa, to list but a few, had shown something referable to a complicity in their approach to gender relations in many African societies. Their writings were nothing else but a collective attack on male dominance and an attempt to restore social justice and women dignity. Sow Fall's inclination looks exceptional among her peers and, in the eyes of many feminist critics, she was deferring the dream to see all women writers castigating the subaltern status that was unfairly allotted to the female "subject".

Sow Fall's choice is the polar opposite of the current ideological tendency. The deterioration of human condition is the outcome of the lingering scorn that human relations in Senegalese modern society are the butt of. To Sow Fall's great astonishment, women are looked on as culprits. The unyielding appetite for money and worldliness that characterizes women in the novel gives birth to a severe tone that charges them with being responsible for the social decadence and the degradation of human condition. And, because she is considered to be mischievous by parting from the track charted by women writers of the moment, Sow Fall appears as the unloved child of the feminist literary criticism. Athleen Ellington (1992) accuses her of representing a tarnished image of post-independence women in Senegalese. I.T.K. Egonu (1991) and Christopher Miller (1990) hold the belief that Sow Fall's writing is simply antifeminist.

The attitude of the feminist critics with regard to Sow Fall's writing is understandable though it might not be altogether convincing. Sow Fall is not writing to put the blame on women alone. Men, too, are attacked in different manners as their responsibility for the current social crisis is dramatic. The contribution of women to the downfall of old-school socio-cultural values is serious and deserves a radical representation from all writers, be they women or men. The representation of the degradation of human condition that stems from the rejection of usages and customs is as imperative and urgent as the question of feminism and the inadequacy of the patriarchal system that keeps the interest of many women writers of the moment. The substitution of humanism by money and material cares is surely the rationale behind Sow Fall's position. The novel is the manifestation of a desire to interrogate in an iconoclastic manner the mentality of the Senegalese modern society succinctly captured by the following lines: "(...) aux yeux de cette société, (...) les pauvres ne méritent aucun intérêt, fussent-ils nantis des meilleures qualités humaines" (39). Sow Fall's narrator castigates this rising mentality that tends to ignore the traditional guiding principles related to the sacredness of the human agent on the one hand, and the social object, that is society and human relations, on the other hand.

### **Interpersonal Relationships in a Pre-Hardship Phase**

In Senegalese traditional society, human relationships in general are of paramount value and those who are reputed to be not kin-oriented and friendly are often considered to be non-conformist. In Sow Fall's *Le Revenant*, this conception of human relations is highly valued and the writer even puts it at the forefront of the storyline. The first stage of *Le Revenant* as in *The Great Gatsby* is a phase of good time with active and good human relationships. Bakar and Gatsby, the respective protagonists of Sow Fall and Fitzgerald, are presented as popular people. Bakar is sympathetic and open-minded, an attitude that has earned him great popularity and love from his surroundings, especially in the family of his best friend, Sada.

Furthermore, Bakar is loved in his family and maintains good relations with his parents, his sisters and daughters. Although he is, in this part of the story, jobless and this situation negatively affects his state of mind, his parents express no contempt towards him. The representation of kinship, no matter how important it can appear, is overshadowed, in this part of the story, by the outstanding representation of friendship. Even in *The Great Gatsby*, the attitude of the narrator with reference to the question of kinship, in this opening phase of the novel, is too sober. The narrator and the reader have no clear idea of Gatsby's parents and family. The hero's origins and family are simply, in the novel, source of all sort of polemics and the narrator keeps this gloom almost until the end of the novel when the father appears, for the first time, to take part in the morning ceremony of his son, Gatsby. In Fitzgerald's novel, contrary to Sow Fall's story, kinship is absent and severely neglected.

The majority of the characters live alone (Gatsby, Nick Caraway) or in pairs of lovers (Tom and Daisy, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson). Moreover, the narrator seldom pays heed to their families. In Sow Fall's *Le Revenant*, though kinship is present, it does not constitute a problem-solving framework to family members in hardship. As a result, it plunges each and every into fatal loneliness and vulnerability. In the absence of kinship, security and assistance are embodied, in the novels, by friendship.

The strength and the biggest asset of Bakar remains his friendship with Sada who is depicted as a means to fill in the wide gaps that scatter in Bakar's life. The narrator describes Sada as the only way out, the indispensable answer to Bakar's social difficulties. His existence next to Bakar is simply a remedy to the weaknesses inherent in kinship and carnal friendship. Besides, the profits and advantages that stem from their relations are represented not as reciprocal, but rather as operating in a unique direction: "Maintenant il ne lui restait que Sada, son ami d'enfance et de toujours; et c'est seulement au contact de la petite famille de Sada qu'il oubliait sa solitude" (15). The narrator, further describes their friendship as follow:

Une affection réciproque était devenue au fil des ans une amitié indestructible que ni la séparation, ni les épreuves de la vie n'avaient pu altérer. Sada était un peu plus âgé que Bakar mais cette différence d'âge n'avait jamais constitué d'écueil à leur compréhension et à leur amour. Bakar trouvait chez Sada ce qui lui manquait le plus, quelqu'un à qui se confier (19).

As in Sow Fall's novel, the first phase of Fitzgerald's story is a moment of ecstasy. The philosophy of the characters that people the novel rests on fulfillment as they believe that life is made to be fully lived from day to day. It is important to remember that the novel came out just after the First World War and people had hardly recovered from the wounds and trauma of this chaos. This event had heavily impacted on people's perception of life. From then on, they hold the belief that life should be turned to profit, especially in peace time. Peace is, therefore, a moment to profit from, because death can always knock at our doors and put an end to life. That is why the literature born in this period is but a promotion of the cult of peace, happiness and love. The quest for happiness prevails through the novel and determines the nature of interpersonal relations.

The importance attached to the representation of kinship and friendship in the pre-hardship time varies according to the socio-cultural contexts that inspired each story. In *Le Revenant*, the author devotes only two chapters to this first phase. Interpersonal relationships, in good times, are of no major value in the eyes of the narrative voice. This narrative approach brings out a new devaluation of human relations in this Senegalese modern society. In *The Great Gatsby*, on the contrary, the first phase is far longer than the second, and this tendency, faithfully, renders the mentality of individuals in the very context of the novel and ideology embodied by the characters specifically.

Gatsby is the protagonist of the novel and his main aim is to win back her former lover (Daisy) who is now married to Tom Buchanan. His strategy is based on impressionism through public displays of wealth. He organizes the biggest parties of the area in his gorgeous house in order to gather almost all the residents of West and East Egg, including Daisy, his main target. These various shows have made him one of the most popular persons of the area, with the nascence, around him, of a visibly strong network of new friends and acquaintances. In *The Great Gatsby*, the narration is essentially focalized on the celebrity of the protagonist, due to the parties he often organizes. Though people don't know exactly the hidden purpose of his initiatives, Gatsby remains cherished and admired for his constant participation in the satisfaction of the wants of a whole people. In any case, though it is not easy to make out the real friends, the attention of the reader can be captured by the beauty of the relations between Gatsby and his neighbors. The first moment of the plot is an attention paid to the peaceful moments and good relations that occur especially in Gatsby's house. The narration exhibits a decelerating tendency whenever it comes to describe the atmosphere that goes on in Gatsby's house and his relations with people.

It is important to point out the importance of the protagonist's inner character in the construction of friendship and kinship. In both novels, the conditions of friendship and kinship lie in the psychology of the heroes, their sociability and open-mindedness. Bakar and Gatsby share the same features in their way of interacting with other people. Bakar is a well-bred man, reputed to be respectful of everybody, including the youngest kids. He is finally represented as lacking of "manliness" due to the extravagant tolerance he embodies in his relations with the other characters (12-13-14). Likewise, Gatsby is described as a generous rich man, always inclined to make people happy. He forgives those who offend him and asks for pardon to those he even does not do any harm. "He doesn't want any problem with anybody" (41) is the testimony about this attitude released by one of his guests.

All in all, Sow Fall and Fitzgerald have shown a certain parallelism in their approach to kinship and friendship in moments of peace and happiness. Though Sow Fall's narrator casts a glance both at kinship and friendship, and Fitzgerald's attention is rather drawn by the manifestations of friendship in a post-World War era, the conclusions are everywhere similar. Friendship and kinship in peaceful times are usually faultless, and such moments of happiness are even inconvenient to determine the earnest nature of human relationships. That is probably the reason why Sow Fall devotes the shorter part of her plot to the nature of interpersonal relations before hardship. In any case, the reader is under the impression that this phase is not the motivation of the novel as it is accelerated and quickly finished. The rest and longer part of the plot is a representation of human relations in times of joblessness, imprisonment and death. The insertion of the novels' protagonists in a situation of victimhood acts as an evaluating technique of the degree of sincerity that marks interpersonal relations represented in the first phases of the plots. In the mind of the narrators, it is not always possible to evaluate the trueness of human relations in the absence of hardship.

## Evaluating Interpersonal Relations While in Hardship Circumstances

The second part of Sow Fall's novel is a short time of fulfillment for Bakar, followed with a litany of suffering. Bakar has got a rewarding job as he has become a respected agent of the post office. Thanks to his new position he has easily succeeded in finding out the wife of his dreams. But the pressure he undergoes from some relatives and in-laws, who are anxious to see their financial and material desires satisfied, thrusts Bakar into embezzlement. After an audit, he is arrested and sent to prison. Following his release, he experiences the predicament inherent in unemployment in a Senegalese society that no longer recognizes the validity of financially-handicapped people. The situation of loneliness that has become his daily lot, as a consequence of the repulsive attitude of his relatives and many ancient acquaintances, pushes Bakar to come to a strange decision. He makes up his mind to flee away from home and society and pretend to have died of drowning. The objective of Bakar is to observe the attitude of his relatives and his society in general with reference to his death.

It is at these different stages of Bakar's life that Sow Fall begins the exposition of her real vision of the post-independence Senegalese society. The Senegalese people she represents are generally hypocritical. Human relations have lost their traditional importance to give way to a rampaging collective lust for material goods and pecuniary privileges. In hardship, only friendship is sometimes resistant and inalienable. In the novel, this primacy of friendship over kinship and love is inserted via some literary devices the narrator often resorts to. Thus, the use of the gradation, as a literary trope, puts systematically the friends in a position of leader in the narrative discourse. For example, as early as his first minutes in prison, Bakar's thoughts are directed towards his different relations. But his meditations appear as an effort to set a classification by order of importance of the persons who are dearest to him. Sada, his childhood bosom friend, shows up before anyone else on the list. Hence the implicit superiority of friendship over the other interpersonal relations:

La première nuit de Bakar en prison fut la plus froide et la plus noire qu'il n'eut jamais connue. (...) A ce moment il comprit son malheur et son impuissance. (...) Les avertissements discrets de Sada retentissaient dans sa tête, cette fois-ci clairs, nets, distincts. Il pensa à sa famille, à sa femme, à sa petite Bigué (48-49).

Bakar's presumptions are not altogether fallacious. The position of Sada in the classification is accurate, and the recurrent visits he pays to Bakar in prison are evidence of the honesty that characterizes their friendship. He, therefore, cannot help praising the generosity and sincerity of Sada. But Bakar is mistaken by the attitude of some of his relations during his golden days. The classification that the discourse exhibits is valid in happy and peaceful times. In hardship, things and attitudes can change, and Bakar needs to tax his patience all over again in order to establish a classification that faithfully reflects the position of each one.

While the position of Sada is undeniable, the rest of the classification remains questionable and even erroneous if the attitude of the family, the wife and Bigué during Bakar's imprisonment and desertion is fully considered. Bigué plays an important role in Bakar's life. She is a cousin of Bakar though their relations are more based on friendship than on family ties. Bigué is recurrent in Bakar's discourse as she constitutes a constant source of relief and moral assistance for Bakar, be it in hardship or in good times. Consequently there is a kind of change in discourse that occurs in the sequel of the story. The family and Mame Aïssa (Bakar's wife) have lost their initial positions in the classification. Some relatives are considered to be unfaithful and mischievous. It is the case of Yama, Bakar's sister who has never brought any support to his brother. As for Mame Aïssa, her love has stepped a downward curb since the imprisonment of Bakar. Their subsequent divorce is therefore no surprise for the reader. On the other hand, Sada and Bigué are often times put together as they constitute the constant benefactors.

In this perspective, the representation of kinship and friendship in hardship has shown an intersection between *Sow Fall* and *Mariama Bâ*. The predominance of friendship over kinship is a shared tendency in their writings, while the values attached to love relations and kinship are perpetually fading away. In *Une Si longue lettre* (79), Bâ's narrator praises the magnanimity of friendship throughout its capacity to withstand the impediments of life. In *Un Chant écarlate* (289), Bâ sets a high value upon friendship before discrediting kinship and love relations in view of their fragility.

Bakar and Gatsby have parallel destinies in many ways. Bakar is not known to many folks before he enters the post office. After this promotion, he becomes the beloved child of a whole community which adulates him and praises his generosity. Upon his dismissal from the post office, Bakar is thrown away by his society. Likewise, Gatsby was unknown to the community during his childhood. Besides, no character in the novel is able to deliver a trustworthy account of the origins of his wealth. Yet, no matter how shadowy the origins of his riches can be, Gatsby has actively taken part in the construction and liveliness of the American dream of happiness and fulfillment of the period. However, this contribution does not save him from humiliation during hardship, especially on the occasion of his death.

The representation of funerals across the two novels is but a human scandal. However, it is worth mentioning that the attitudes of individuals towards the dead people and the organization styles of funeral ceremonies are totally divergent. Each culture, in accordance with its current philosophy, holds a specific view of death. But in any case, the writers expose a heartbreaking trend which stems mainly from the changing mentalities and the rejection of traditional values. In *The Great Gatsby*, the unyielding long for life and happiness has negatively impinged on people's perception of death and funeral. Death has turned into a tragedy and nobody wants to hear something of the kind. That is why Fitzgerald's reader is unavoidably taken aback by the attitudes of Gatsby's former collaborators and supposedly friends. Whereas in happy moments they all agree to cooperate and befriend Gatsby, there is a general reluctance to take part in his mourning ceremony.

In Fitzgerald's novel, the part dedicated to the representation of hardship is the shorter one. The reader is under the impression and even the conviction that the narrator has nothing else to tell but the tragedy brought in by Gatsby's death. Life in this part of the story, contrary to the first one, is inactive and morose. It is because the characters that would enliven the atmosphere are now totally resentful of the new turn of events. The treason is total and friendship has revealed itself to be superficial in peace times. Among Gatsby's collaborators and friends, only Nick Carraway remains constant and faithful. And yet, he is one of the last friends to get acquainted with Gatsby.

From Nick Carraway, the narrator shows the hazardous nature of friendship in this society. Friendship has become a matter of hazard and chance in people's existence. This conception of friendship as a product of hazard and chance matches up Fatou Diome's standpoint in her novel, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (80). According to the Senegalese writer, real friendship does not depend upon people's intention and will. It is a natural link that unites different individuals in their existence without even their voluntary making. Nick is, consequently, nothing but an exception in accepting to offer assistance to his friend in good moments as well as in death. He is aware of this loneliness when he states: "I found myself on Gatsby's side and alone. [...] I was surprised and confused (...) because no one else cared" (150). Though this part of the story is short, the narrator, at least, takes the required time to highlight the exceptionality of Nick Carraway, just as Sow Fall does to chant the faithfulness of Sada. Here, the narrator's action looks like a sampling plan for the detection of Gatsby's real friends. The particularization of Nick's attitude among a network of reluctant and unfaithful friends is the implicit objective of this narrative device. The outcomes of the friends sample survey conducted by Nick following the death of Gatsby are more than astonishing. Here is a series of reactions from some friends. Wolfshiem is the first to disclaim Nick's invitation:

This has been one of the most terrible shocks of my life. I can hardly believe that it is true at all. (...) I cannot come now as I am tied up in some very important business and cannot get mixed up in this thing now. I hardly know where I am when I hear a thing like this. I am very upset about it (152).

Wolfshiem's attitude is not different from Klipspringer's reaction:

Well, the truth of the matter is that I am staying with some people here in Greenwich. They expect me to be with them tomorrow at a picnic. [...] What I called up about was a pair of shoes I left there. I wonder if it would be too much trouble to have the butler send them on (156-157).

From this event onwards, Fitzgerald's story appeals to what some critics call 'participatory reading'. According to Claudia Tate (1983), good literary writing should always be undermined with 'holes and spaces'. The task of the reader is to fill in the voids intentionally created by the writer. Brigitte Buffard-Moret (1998: 78) refers to this literary technique as "implicit aesthetic" which corresponds to "a refusal of interpretation on the part of the speaker." That paradigm of reading is necessary for the analysis of the friends' refusal to make of Gatsby's hardship their own. The great question which everybody is asking remains "why no one came" to Gatsby's burial whereas "hundreds of people used to go to his parties?" (163). There is an attempt to respond to this questioning when the narrator/character (Nick) relates the fate of Gatsby to the condition of immigrant in the milieu in which they are all evolving (163).

Nick's explanation is posing the problematic of adaptability and immigration rather than touching on the relational issue that is raised by Gatsby's death. In fact, even as a stranger in the milieu, Gatsby has succeeded in settling down easily and peacefully among his host people. Moreover, Gatsby is not the only immigrant living in this place. Nick, Tom, Daisy and Jordan come from the same country as him. Yet, they all refused to show up during their compatriot's death while they used to collaborate and share good time with him. This argument based upon the immigrant's status can lose its relevance as we consider the motives set forth by some of the friends to justify their absence. The reasons respectively put forward by Wolfsheim and Klipspringer, are altogether illustrating the hedonistic character of this society. The real tragedy that is displayed in the story is the propensity of people not to take trouble to mourn the departed. The philosophy that lurks behind the characters' attitude rests on friendship in peace and adversity and separation in hardship, as one character sums it up overtly upon the announcement of Gatsby's death: "Let's learn to show our friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he is dead" (159).

We have to confess, however, that the fate of Gatsby can find its illustrative evidence through the quest for happiness that is rooted in race construction which, according to Hisham M. Amin & Donald Klein (1994), constitutes the landmarks of Jim Crow era. Consequently, Nick's assumption about the immigrant's status as a root cause of Gatsby's fate can be given full sense, especially when the "participatory reading" perspective is applied. It is beyond doubt that there is an implicit racialization of some characters' identity. The people in the story are all white in color. But this reality does not prevent the existence of contemptuous reflexes towards some individuals (Gatsby is an example) due to their origins or ancestry that, in the words of Ronald Takaki (1993), constitute real "racial borders" even among people belonging to the same biological race. The first chapter of *The Great Gatsby* takes a look at the issue of race when, after Gatsby's name is mentioned, Tom brings out in the debate the preeminence of Goddard's book, *The Rise of Colored Empires* with its basic positions related to races. The attitude of the characters towards Gatsby, as well as his incapacity to win back Daisy despite his enormous fortune, are evidence of the consideration of race in the story. To this, we need to add the gloom that covers Gatsby's family and which ends up turning him into a man with no fixed-abode, roaming around Europe and America.

This situation reminisces about Morrison's conceptual framework and critical perspective delineated in her tremendous work, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992). According to Morrison, the construction of race in the American literary canon consists of three main metaphorical representations. One of these metaphors is the tendency among writers to resort to a "rhetoric of dread and desire" in the representation of black characters. This "dread and desire rhetoric" refers to the embodiment, by the black character, of binary oppositions which consist of one extreme being positive and the other negative. Morrison states: "...images of blackness can be evil and protective, rebellious and forgiving, fearful and desirable" (59). Gatsby is, in this perspective, a metaphorical representation of the duality and ambivalence that mark the American Dream. His fate, which is projected throughout the attitude of the other characters towards him, matches up the destiny of black characters in American literature.

If we apply the critical perspective suggested by Morrison, we come to the conclusion that Gatsby inspires the same dual feelings on the part of many characters, especially those who would collaborate with him. Actually, during his lifetime, he is popular and friendly, loved and admired by all and sundry. And yet, at the same moment, people express feelings of fear, jealousy and even scorn towards his economic success and his past. There is a conspicuous stereotyping of Gatsby's origins and numerous displacements around America and Europe, which acts as a textual strategy for the social construction of race. The reluctant attitude of the friends upon Gatsby's death can be seen as a mere extension of the negative extreme of the binary opposed views he had always been the subject of. The negative side of the American Dream refers to this double-edge perception of the *other*. Fitzgerald's standpoint, through the fate of Gatsby, is an allegorical criticism about the hypocrisy that is inherent in the American Dream. Ignorance of this reality will always lead to chaos and death since individuals are inclined to believe in futures (dreams) they will never reach out (167).

This tendency to leave the suffering agent alone, in Fitzgerald's novel, is the opposite extreme of the situation represented by Sow Fall. In Senegalese literature, death has become a welcome event, and characters like Bakar are unpleasantly surprised to realize that funeral ceremonies are no longer what they used to be. In the past, they were frightening moments that reminded individuals of their own impending death and, in that, inspired piety, spirituality and meditation on the part of the livings. That's why funeral ceremonies were organized in the soberest way. The main objective was the assistance of the bereaved families and the organization of the ceremony in accordance with the religious principles or the rites set by the traditions. Mariama Bâ, in *Une Si longue lettre*, recalls nostalgically this social solidarity during funeral ceremonies in the past, where all acts were "intrinsically motivated", that is devoid of any personal interest (Nabila: 2006).

The presence of Bakar in prison represents a narrative technique for a better understanding of the society's new way of functioning. Prison looks like a mediating space on the nature of society and, therefore, allows it to pass judgment in a more accurate way. Bakar realizes a growing inclination towards the mediatization of death and funeral in Senegal.

It is at this specific point where the Senegalese modern people's conception of death and funerals diverges from the American society's philosophy. In the world created by Fitzgerald, no one wants to be informed or involved in something related to death (152-159). In the Senegalese novel, the situation is totally different. There is an overt willingness to popularize death and mourning ceremonies via the different existing radio channels. The narrator renders this new spirit through an ironic tone. The radio programs have become very poor as their main preoccupation is to broadcast obituary notices (52).

Sow Fall's narrative orientation is seeking to unveil the negative post-independence evolution of the Senegalese society, especially with reference to money and material goods. The choice of mourning ceremonies for the representation of this mentality is not fortuitous since many other Senegalese writers have resorted to other circumstances to castigate the same evil. It is more than serious when the death of a human being is turned into a feast or a business hunting occasion. Moreover, what unavoidably entertains the wonderment of Sow Fall's hero along with the reader is the foregrounding of other people's interest and the rejection or oblivion of the departed. For instance, the obituary notices that are daily broadcast consist of people who often have no relation with the deceased. "Pourquoi ces listes interminable de parents, d'amis et même de connaissances vagues" (52)? What is noticeable, to the reader's great surprise, is the transformation of Bakar's death into a social misfortune. And yet, he should not have deserved such attention and importance if the status he had been allotted during his hard lifetime is closely considered. But in reality, this apparent sensitiveness towards Bakar is not as earnest as one may believe. Bakar is not given any importance. If there is a massive mobilization around his death, it is simply thanks to the profits his funerals are likely to generate. Sow Fall has discretely printed this implicit but real lack of significance devoted to the dead person through the tendency to pass over in silence his/her identity on the obituary notice: "Et le paradoxe des paradoxes était que, fréquemment, les annonceurs, plus soucieux de leur identité que d'autres choses, oubliaient de faire figurer le nom du défunt sur la liste, (...)" (53).

Death, as it is represented in Sow Fall's novel, creates artificial friendship and kinship. In fact, who is not willing to show up friendship or kinship to Bakar after his death? The obituary notice, established by his sister Yama, illustrates the falseness of many folks' external appearances. Besides, the presence of the name of the Minister in charge of Commercial Affairs should not be considered to be a hazard in the narration. In fact, it renders figuratively the inner commercial nature and motivation of the ceremony. The people who compose the obituary notice are those who openly gave Bakar short shrift. On the one hand, Yama, who has never lent a helping hand, is at the core of the funeral, preparations and organization. Mame Aïssa, who divorced with Bakar because of his imprisonment and subsequent joblessness, is also as active as Yama. On the other hand, the real friends, like Sada and Bigué, are simply set aside. Sada is present at the ceremony but as a mere spectator since he is involved in nothing related to the event. As for Bigué, her name has not been mentioned through the narrative discourse since the announcement of Bakar's death. So, the actual friends and relatives are now put behind the scene whereas the "deceptive cognates" are foregrounded.

## Conclusion

Hardship, in the analyzed novels, is an effective and efficient evaluating tool for human value. In both African and American novels, it is necessary for the writers to resort to hardship in order to measure the veracity of human relationships. The conclusion that comes up from *Le Revenant* and *The Great Gatsby* is a chaos, a heavy blow given to human relations. The quest for happiness usually dictates interpersonal relations in pre/while/hardship moments. The literature under study is then a loud alarm cry with respect to a continuum of attitudes leading to the degradation of the human being. Interpersonal relationships are presented in the novels as being indispensable to the fulfillment of all individuals. Money and material goods are not only the guarantees and input of happiness as many people fanatically believe. In *The Great Gatsby*, the tycoons are the unhappiest people. The few moments the reader can take notice of their feelings of happiness are when they interact with other people, be they friends or lovers.

Fitzgerald's representation of interpersonal relationships and hardship is symbolically a denunciation of many people's perception of the American dream. For the writer, it is simply absurd to yearn for happiness without taking into consideration a number of conditions that are not necessarily related to money. What happens in *The Great Gatsby* is a false conception of the American Dream that alas leads to its failure. The past and the traditional values, including human relations, are considered to be essential aspects for any attempt to accede to happiness. Ignorance of this indispensable dimension of the past is always conducive to failure. The death of Fitzgerald's hero is figuratively an illustration of the incapacity to be happy when one leaves aside the past, the values, and the family. As for Sow Fall, literature is meant to anathematize the negative and progressive transformation of traditional values and people's mentalities (Pfaff: 136). It is a tragedy when death is turned into a peaceful and profitable event. In the Senegalese society she represents throughout her novels (*La Grève des battu* is a good illustrative example), there is a patent relativization of human value. The individual is worth existing only when s/he can generate riches and take part in the satisfaction of a collective aspiration of money and material cares. Like Gatsby, Bakar's death responds to a need from Sow Fall to question the validity of existence in some postcolonial societies. The existence of Bakar has become senseless. Life is made of ups and downs, and families, friends, relations and society in general are not ready to accept it as such. The incapacity to put up with the vicissitudes of life cancels the rationale behind existence. So in similar circumstances, people can nourish wishes of death to other people, but they may also wish death to themselves, just as Bakar did in Sow Fall's text.

## Work Cited

- Albert, Christiane. *L'Immigration dans le roman francophone contemporain*. Paris: Karthala, 2005.
- Bâ, Mariama. *Une Si longue lettre*. Dakar: NEA, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Un Chant écarlate*. Dakar: NEA : 1981.
- Bodia, Rosa. "L'écriture et la vie: Entretien avec Aminata Sow Fall". *The Literary Griot* 2.2, 1990, pp. 121-29.
- Buffard-Moret, Brigitte. *Introduction à la stylistique*. Paris : Dunod, 1998.
- Davies, Carole Boyce. Ngambika: *Studies of Women in African Literature*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1986.
- Debila-Henia, Nebila. "Applying Metacognitive Strategies to Skimming Research Articles in an ESP Context" in *English Teaching Forum*, Volume n°44, 2006.
- Diome, Fatou. *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*. Paris: Editions Anne Carrière, 2003.
- Egonu, I.T.K. "Aminata Sow Fall: A New Generation of Female Writer". *Neophilologus* 75, 1991, pp. 66-75.
- Ellingthon, Athleen. "Aminata Sow Fall's 'Demon' Women: An Anti-Feminist social Vision". *Black Studies*, 1992, pp. 132-146.
- Fitzgerald, John Francis. *The Great Gatsby*. The Classic House, IBM The Text, [1925] 2006.
- Klein, Donald & Amin, Hisham M. "Racial Legacies - *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* by Toni Morrison" in *African American Review*, vol. 28, n°4, Winter 1994, pp. 659-663. Retrieved 22 April 2016 from <http://www.clarkedailynews.com>
- Miller, Christopher. *Theories of Africans*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Pfaff, Françoise. "Aminata Sow Fall: l'écriture au féminin". *Notre Librairie* 91, 1985, pp.135-39.

Toni Morrison. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.

Sow Fall, Aminata. *La Grève des bàttu*. Dakar : NEA, 1979.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Le Revenant*. Dakar : NEA, 1976.

Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. New York: Back Bay Books: 1993.

Tate, Claudia. "Toni Morrison", in *Black Women Writers at Work*. New York: Continuum, 1983, pp.117-131.