Rolling in the Deep: Mati Diop's Atlantic Histories

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Abstract: Incorporating a blue humanities approach to Mati Diop's 2019 feature debut, *Atlantique* (*Atlantics*), this article discusses the significance of the ocean as a contested political, social, and intercultural space both in the film and in the world today. While Diop's film draws on the symbolic power of the ocean as both a source of life and a site of death to address the contemporary migrant crisis in Senegal, her unique transnational perspective as a Franco-Senegalese filmmaker creates a narrative that is once historical, mythical, and supernatural. Diop both pays respect to the histories contained within the depths of the Atlantic and treats the ocean as a living, breathing entity that continues to write the history of the people of Senegal today.

Keywords: Mati Diop, migration, supernatural, pirogue, Atlantic Ocean, African cinema, blue humanities

The blue humanities, a term first introduced as "blue cultural studies" by Steve Mentz in 2009, seeks to reframe the humanities using bodies of water as the point of reference in the study of the interactions between culture, history, and the environment ("Toward a Blue Cultural Studies"). While maritime literature has long existed as a genre, the notion that seas and oceans play a critical role in shaping narratives across multiple literary genres and forms is relatively recent (Gillis 2013). Considering other forms of bodies of waters, for example, rivers, marshes, and melting glaciers, only broadens the category of "wet narratives" that figure in cultural production globally.[1] "Wet narratives emphasize disorder, disorientation, and rupture; they narrate experiences in which the usual ways of doing things get broken or fragmented" (Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity* 11). Writers and painters since the eighteenth century and now filmmakers have taken inspiration from the ocean, not only as the site of the vast and unknowable deep but also as a metaphor for the sublime and the absolute, and the antithesis of everything that is terrestrial, grounded, civilized, and ultimately, exploited by humans over time. If land represents the tamed natural world, the ocean is the wild frontier with its dark dead zones forever out of reach that will continue to resist human attempts to colonize it.

One is familiar with depictions of the seas as such from *Robinson Crusoe* to *Moby-Dick,* from J. M. W. Turner to Winslow Homer, but less so with Victor Hugo's *The Toilers of the Sea* (*les Travailleurs de la mer*) or Jules Michelet's *The Sea* (*La mer*) yet the obsession with oceans and seas dominates cultural production in French from the colonial period to the present. Oceans connected France to its colonies while island territories such as Martinique and French Polynesia are defined in relation to the bodies of water that surround them. Consequently, contemporary literature and film in French hold water at the center of their stories. Scholars across the humanities have turned their attention to "wet matter" (Bélanger and Sigler) and "critical ocean studies" that reimagine an animated ocean over the historically inert backdrop or the "'aqua nullius,' a blank space across which a diasporic masculinity" was forged (DeLoughrey 22). Far from the "maritime picaresque" adventures of Defoe described by Margaret Cohen in *The Novel and the Sea* (8), recent Francophone film

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engages with the ocean from a different perspective. Neither hostile setting nor exotic *décor*, the ocean appears in the center of the frame as the mysterious stranger, unknowable yet indispensable to those living on land. Neither hero nor villain, it acts on others, seducing and betraying, so that no one is left unchanged by its presence.

The blue humanities is, by definition, "an intellectual discourse grown out of investigations of how humans relate to the ocean" (Mentz 2024 xii) and as such, the imperative to write about the present-day migrant crisis has brought the seas and oceans into focus anew, not just in ecological but also existential terms. The seas, oceans, channels, and rivers are now patrolled at key border areas day and night for clandestine vessels and those survivors of modern-day shipwrecks. Risking death for the promise of a decent chance to work and live has driven more than 180,000 people in 2024 alone to brave the sea in order to reach Europe. Of this number, according to new data collected by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), at least 8,938 died on migration routes worldwide in 2024 (a conservative estimate), making it the deadliest year on record. Yet postcolonial and migration studies have failed to acknowledge and engage with the material realities of refugee migration and migrant deaths. One initiative, the Thanatic Ethics Project, begun in 2020, seeks to address this negligence in an effort "to make visible the bodies of the dead" and "the fatal consequences of migration policies" (Banerjee, Misrahi-Barak, and Lacroix 1).[2] By virtue of these grave statistics, the blue humanities must also accommodate the representation of water as the site of the drowned, a "seametary" in the words of Hakim Abderrezak (147), and thus as a contested political, social, and intercultural space. More than a literary trope, the ocean today commands the attention of all the disciplines of the humanities from history to philosophy to languages and literatures to anthrolopology to ethics and law. Given its wide-ranging influence, the study of the ocean deserves an interdisciplinary approach, especially when speaking of the dangers as well as the promises contained within it.

Mati Diop's 2019 feature debut, *Atlantique* (*Atlantics*), which won the Grand Prix at Cannes, provides the perfect model to demonstrate the ways in which the ocean has recently emerged as the subject of the diegesis and ultimately, of the entire cinematic project rather than something the actors must simply traverse in order to move the narrative forward. As one reviewer wrote, "The Atlantic is the enigma of the film. Despite what we know or imagine about the promises of migration in the minds of those who leave, in the movie the ocean offers no perspective; it is always, whether calm or violent, an impenetrable presence on screen." (Montenegro 133). Diop's film transforms the Atlantic Ocean into a siren-like force that beckons and, ultimately, engulfs the central character of the film. Its symbolic as well as aesthetic power visually reminds us of the constant threat of disaster that all bodies of water foretell as sea levels rise and flooding around the world becomes an everyday event. Much has been written about the oceanic imagery and its meaning in Diop's film since its 2019 release, however little has been said about the actual Atlantic ocean in the film beyond its use value as an analytic tool. In light of the body of criticism emphasizing the "oceanic" in *Atlantique*, I would like to draw particular attention to the literal ocean, its history and its political and social dimension as it figures in the film.[3] In what follows, I argue that Diop both pays respect to the histories contained within the depths of the Atlantic and treats the ocean as a living, breathing entity that continues to write the history of the people of Senegal today both as a source of life (fishing is the dominant economic activity) and as a spectre of death for those seeking to leave. As a kind of oral and visual historian and storyteller, a modern-day "griot," Diop expands on previous cinematic representations of migrant ocean crossings from Senegal to Europe in ascribing deliberate agency to the ocean itself (Kayir 135).[4] Ultimately the film can be read as a call to understand the ocean's past and present as part of the political solution to the contemporary crisis of clandestine migration.

First, a brief introduction of the director, Mati Diop, will situate her with respect to other filmmakers who have sought to represent the Senegalese migrant experience in the past. Born in 1982 to a Senegalese father, the musician Wasis Diop, and a French mother, photographer Christine Brossard,

Diop was born and raised in Paris yet made frequent trips to Senegal to visit her father's family, including her uncle, the renowned filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambéty. Like many living in France today, Diop straddles two cultures and represents the rich, diverse background of contemporary French society. This transnational identity figures in her work: her characters are multilingual, they speak Wolof primarily, some speak French, and some speak Arabic. Often on the set, Diop communicated with her actors via a translator as she herself speaks French and English but neither Wolof nor Arabic. Roles were given to ordinary citizens, not professional actors, who Diop selected based on her observations of everyday life in Dakar. Her aim was to focus on representing African people in their specificity rather than according to stereotypes. Six years after its release, Diop reflected on her impetus to make the film:

> What really led me to make *Atlantics* is the urge to have African narratives and Black faces being strongly represented in global cinema. It felt like a mission that haunted me for many years. The more distance I have gained from the film, the more I've understood that the main idea was to create a film that would make us, African people and Black people in general, fall in love with ourselves again. (Hynes)

A graduate of the renowned film school, Le Fresnoy, Diop made history as the first Black woman ever to premiere a feature film at the Cannes film festival and yet her inclusion in the 2019 Cannes film festival was a first, prompting calls for more diverse voices and perspectives at Cannes. When Netflix bought the rights to distribute the film on its streaming platform, her audience grew exponentially. Perhaps that is how former U.S. President Barack Obama saw it, naming *Atlantics* among his favorite films and television series of 2019 in his annual list of favorite films.[5]

Her feature length film, *Atlantique*, was inspired by a fifteen minute short she made during her time at Le Fresnoy. Whereas her 2019 film's title is in the singular, referring to the ocean, her earlier title, "Atlantiques," is plural which makes reference either to the men departing Senegal for Spain, or the mythical mermen or "fish-men" of whom the main character, Serigne, dreams at night before he embarks on his journey. The idea for the earlier film emerged from the social reality of the time, the "pirogue phenomenon" of 2005 and 2006, "which saw thousands of young Senegalese men braving the hazardous sea journey to Europe, their mission summed up by a Wolof slogan, *Barca mba barzakh*, that translates as 'Barcelona or death'" (Lim 37). At the heart of the 2019 film is a young Senegalese woman, Ada, played by Mama Sane, and her boyfriend, Souleiman, played by Ibrahima Traoré, who goes missing in the Atlantic ocean after he and fellow construction workers leave Dakar by boat to search for better jobs in Europe. When we first see Souleiman, he is a young man frustrated by both being exploited as a worker and in his love for Ada who has been promised to a wealthy suitor. Feeling doomed in both work and love, he is lured by the siren of a better life across the Atlantic. This plot line recalls *La Pirogue*, the 2012 Senegalese film directed by Moussa Touré, as well as the 1973 Senegalese classic film about migration, *Touki Bouki*, made by her uncle, Djibril Diop Mambéty. All three films share a common subject matter: the impulse of Senegalese youth to make the journey by sea to reach Europe. Unlike these precedents, Diop's film incorporates a supernatural element as a narrative device to underscore the sense of doom haunting an entire generation left out of Macky Sall's revitalization plan for Dakar during his presidency from 2012 to 2024. In an interview, Diop recalls speaking to a young man in Dakar planning to immigrate who said, "When you leave, you're already dead." From this conversation, Diop "started to envision Dakar as a ghost city, a city of the living dead. The idea for the feature really came from that experience — of grappling with a generation of youth being sacrificed" ("Spirit Riders").

In Diop's film, the ocean, not the migrants' journey, becomes the focal point of nearly every scene. As Lawrence Kent summarized, "In Diop's *Atlantics*, the ocean provides a contradictory embodiment of this symbolic quest: it is a site of alienation and death, but also the primordial source from which humanity evolved and the source of (neo)colonial division engendered by the Transatlantic slave trade" (182). Moreover, unlike other films that treat clandestine migration to Europe, the focus

is not on the Mediterranean Sea but on the Atlantic Ocean, as the site of dreams both full of promise and also forever unrealized. We see long shots of the sea change from a deep indigo at dusk one day to blood red at sunset the next, mirroring its symbolic value as a depthless well of hope to a watery grave. At times the ocean takes up the whole screen, even swallowing up the sun on the horizon as it sets. The frequent shots of the stark ocean by itself underscores its significance as a site of memory whose visual power summons other stories of migration over time leading back to the story of the Middle Passage when slave ships carried Africans against their will across the Atlantic. Then, as now, the journey was perilous and not without shipwreck, disease, and death. Ada makes reference to this history in the film when she says to the camera, "Some memories are omens," after a shot of the sea in a foggy pink haze. At this point the viewer realizes that the over fifteen shots of the sea are meant to remind us of the watchful and beckoning gaze of this monstrous character without a body. *"You're always looking at the ocean, you're not even looking at me,"* Ada says to Souleiman in one of only two scenes showing the two lovers together. All along the ocean has been the main antagonist of the film that will forever keep them apart.[6] In an insightful comment about the film's representation of the Atlantic, Patricia Pisters writes that "the sea becomes a ghost. One feels the presence of all the perished lives, hears the whispering of countless voices through its murmuring, their screams in the howling wind and the fierce force of the waves" (177).

Diop's story in *Atlantique* about lives lost at sea between Africa and Europe incorporates a narrative structure that one could say flows from African beliefs to European popular culture and back again with her inclusion of the supernatural that blends the Senegalese belief in the *jinns*, or spirits, with the Hollywood horror genre ("Spirit Riders"). The young Senegalese men have been working for a real estate developer for months without pay. The fruit of their labor, the CGI-created luxury skyscraper, the Meijiza Tower, looms over the inhabitants of Dakar as a symbol of worker exploitation and corporate greed. The film tracks the ghosts of the young men as they return from their fateful voyage to terrorize their Senegalese boss, Mr. Ndiaye, played by Diankou Sembene, who exploited them until he pays their back wages. The ghosts are invisible at first but then take possession of the living bodies of the girlfriends, wives, mothers, and sisters they have left behind. As zombies with milky blue eyes, the women exact justice on behalf of their menfolk. Eyes glowing they rise up in the night and walk through the city *en masse* until they reach Mr. Ndiaye's mansion who has enriched himself with foreign cash while stiffing his workers. Sometimes the *jinns* are just invisible forces wreaking havoc, for example, when Ada's lavish matrimonial bed catches on fire on her wedding night. Whereas in life the young men went unnoticed, in death they terrorize the man and his family and in the final scene, escort him to the field where he will dig their graves as they watch, so they will rest at last. It is a powerful fantasy of wish fulfilment for all viewers who come to sympathize, if not identify, with the workers. This affective moment shared by spectators of the film around the world demonstrates more generally the political potential of film in a globalized world (Enzerink 54).

Diop's haunting and supernatural story of loss, grief, and social injustice belongs to the network of diasporic identities and narratives that Paul Gilroy has heuristically called "the black Atlantic world" (3). Her film echos the overtly political tone that Toni Morrison employed alongside the supernatural in writing her novel, *Beloved*. Both *Beloved* and the film *Atlantique* share an investment in representing history and social memory of the Black diaspora while also performing, as Gilroy aptly puts, "the vital work of enquiring into terrors that exhaust the resources of language amidst the debris of a catastrophe" (218). Diop's choice to deliver her political and social message within a genre, horror, encompasses at once the social reality of contemporary Dakar, Senegalese spirituality, and historical trauma. As she said to a reporter upon winning the Grand Prix at Cannes:

> The political, fantastic and social dimensions are not separated. From the outset, *Atlantique* is both a cinematic object and an internal personal journey. The ocean as a character is among the first visions I had: showing this immense mass of water as a living magnetic force that sucks the young down into

> its depths before spitting them back out again. The fantastic dimension, with the revenants, is inherent in reality as I saw it in Dakar, because the supernatural, the sacred and the invisible are part of Senegalese culture. My own personal sensibility, which is fairly gothic and romantic, encountered that culture. And I often give the elements an important role in my films.[7]

Paul Gilroy suggests that cultural historians could "take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (15). He suggests the imagery of the ship could signify the "living means by which the points within that Atlantic world were joined" (16). Ships are mobile, cultural and political units that connect, via the amorphous space of the ocean between them, fixed coordinates on land. Ships also embody the triangular slave trade for they refer back to the Middle Passage and the history of industrialization and modernization (17). Visually the word "shipwreck" conjures J.M.W. Turner's celebrated painting from 1840 of a slaveship in a storm during which the dead and dying were thrown overboard. Or Gericault's controversial 1819 painting, "Le Radeau de la Méduse," which depicted the fifteen lone survivors (out of 150) on a drifting raft off the coast of Mauritania. At the time it was one of the worst maritime disasters in French history. Drawing on Gilroy's use of the ship as signifier of the Black Atlantic, I would posit that the *pirogue* is a comparably useful image to speak about the corner of the Atlantic world between Africa and Europe, specifically the corridor between Senegal and southern European countries such as Italy and Spain. Gilroy's Black Atlantic world referred to the transnational oceanic space between the New and Old World, the triangular route that linked Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The twenty-first century conception of human migration over the Atlantic is, however, perhaps best visually represented by the brightly painted, artisanally constructed, wooden fishing boats made on the West African coast normally used in daily life by local fishermen. The image below of a pirogue boat race from a 1961 Senegalese postage stamp indicates its centrality to life in Senegal.

If these mobile units define the current wave of African diasporic travel more than ever, the humans aboard are rarely identified individually. Mati Diop's film, although fictional, attempts to give a face to at least one of those belonging to what has been called the "human sea" of people moving from one continent to another (Mentz, "An Introduction" 64). Not surprisingly, the zombie figure appealed to Diop for its historical resonances. For her, the migrant figure was one that exists in a liminal space between past and present, dead and alive:

> This archetype of the black figure with white eyes was very evocative to me. It drew on the image of the black Atlantic, the story of the Middle Passage, which to me mirrors contemporary migration. I wanted the spectator to be able to project different mythologies related to black history onto this figure: the zombies of Haiti, the ghosts of the transatlantic trade, and the spirits of the boys of today. Like one and the same story, one and the same myth. ("Spirit Riders")

Another key difference between the Black Atlantic concept in twentieth century scholarship and the trends in migration by sea of this century, symbolized by the *pirogue*, is the reversal of the desire for displacement. If once the Old World powers of Europe forced enslaved Africans to migrate interna-

tionally, those powers today try futilely to resist the arrival of migrants upon their shores. Like Steve Mentz said regarding the plot of the novel *Gun Island* by Indian writer Amitav Ghosh: "Unlike the imperial and colonial projects of years past, twenty-first century migrants move independently of European desires…The 'angry young men' flooding into Europe from Asia and Africa represent forces that Old World powers cannot make orderly" ("An Introduction" 86). At a moment in history when borders are increasingly fortified and controlled, oceans and seas present alternatives to land crossings, exemplifying what Etienne Balibar said in 1998, that "borders…are no longer at the border" (217) or, as the main character of *Atlantique* muses, "look at the ocean. It has no borders. [Pause]. No borders." Achille Mdembe goes so far as to theorize in *Necropolitics* that borders are the root and the end of the problem:

> In truth, the problem is neither the migrants nor the refugees nor the asylum seekers. Borders. Everything begins with them, and all paths lead back to them. They are no longer merely a line of demarcation separating distinct sovereign entities. Increasingly, they are the name used to describe the organized violence that underpins both contemporary capitalism and our world order in general— the women, the men, and the unwanted children condemned to abandonment; the shipwrecks and drownings of hundreds, indeed thousands, weekly…(99)

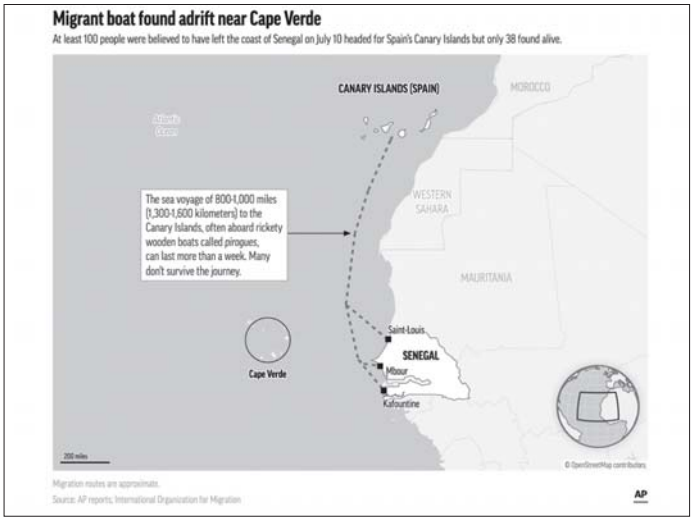
Blue humanities' scholarship accommodates this discussion of borders and the sociopolitical and economic dynamics of migration today by focusing on the fluid pathways, both west and east, that drive a desperate population to leave their homelands and cross the borderless sea. Mentz echoes Mdembe's insight into borders as a term synymous with violence both *at the border* and in spaces where there is no physical border present, such as the ocean. The sheer numbers of those migrating literally floods the boundaries between nations and regions which proves the permeability of what we think of as a border. "Like climate change, and to a large extent fueled by climate change, mass migration rewrites the borders of nations, regions, and cultures ("An Introduction" 86).

Migrants are often presented as a homogenous group lacking individual identities. In part this is the desired effect of those migrating: they have shed their identities in order to make the passage, in the hope of creating new ones when they reach their destination. Reports on the migrant crisis in Europe likewise focus on the numbers, particularly of women and children, as well as the rescue missions to find life aboard the drifting, overpacked and unseaworthy vessels. For example, since 2014 the United Nations has recorded 32,431 deaths in the Mediterranean Sea alone, although the real death toll is likely much higher.[8] This staggering number represents just a fraction of how many lives are lost trying to escape war, poverty, corruption, and abuse. Like the men in Diop's film, migrants knowingly take this risk because they feel they have no other way out of poverty and famine. As one Associated Press reporter put it, "These migrants are as invisible in death as they were in life. But even ghosts have families."[9]

In *Atlantique,* Diop draws attention to this phenomenon while also making an important social commentary. The young men who disappear along with their *pirogue* are *doubly* invisible—their labor is evident in the final product, a futuristic tower, but as lower class workers they are not recognized or compensated for their work. The product they have arduously constructed, a glass tower amidst low-lying concrete buildings, financed by foreign investment is, like the Eiffel Tower, clearly visible from every point in the city except when one is inside it. Echoes of the history of architecture globally reverberate in the film's opening scene in which the eerily futuristic tower looms over the bay. We see a timeless scenario played out in which slave labor produces the finest, longstanding monuments and edifices in the world. It recalls what we know about the construction of Versailles or Notre Dame in France and in the United States, the building of some of the most elite universities in the Northeast.[10] Countless laborers and enslaved people sacrificed themselves for little or no pay to create the symbols of human ingenuity and grandeur for future generations to behold.

While clandestine immigration across the Mediterreanean Sea dominates the world news, a more dangerous journey to reach Europe involves crossing the Atlantic Ocean. Perhaps because the

Mediterranean has become militarized and under constant surveillance for migrants, entering Europe through the islands off the Spanish coast has become more common. The Atlantic route remains today the deadliest migrant journey in the world even though the actual numbers of dead and disappeared vary widely. An estimated 9,757 people perished in 2024 on this route according to the aid group *Caminando Fronteras* (Walking Borders).[11] This is a significantly higher number than the 1,167 figure reported by the IOM's Missing Migrants Project. According to Spain's Interior Ministry, those who made the voyage successfully on what is known as "The Canary Islands Route" via the Atlantic jumped from 2,687 in 2019, the year of *Atlantique*'s release, to more than 22,000 two years later.[12] Out of the reported 32,000 migrants to reach Spain's Canary Islands in 2023, most were Senegalese, affirmed the Associated Press.[13] The details of their travel are chilling: they leave in overcrowded *pirogues* to make the 1000 mile journey across the Atlantic often paying on average $490 or 300,000 CFA francs to a smuggler. And because the smugglers wish to avoid border controls and international maritime authorities, they take a detour west into the wide open Atlantic before turning north toward the Canary Islands. The detour requires sailing upwind which makes it longer and extremely hazardous given there is no dedicated search-and-rescue mission operating in this region. Migrants are at sea for days to weeks with inadequate food and water for those onboard. The Missing Migrants Project website states that "the length of the journey, as well as the fact that many migrants are believed to have lost their lives due to starvation or dehydration while at sea, means that the hundreds of deaths documented en route to the Canary Islands is likely a vast undercount of the true number" (missingmigrants.iom.int/region/africa). Below is the map of a migrant boat found near Cape Verde which represents spatially the common route the *pirogues* take to get to the Canary Islands.



Against the backdrop of this urgent situation, *Atlantique* delivers a clear and persuasive message: the ocean is once again the tablet upon which the history of racial injustice toward the Senegalese is written. Diop explained in a 2021 interview the significance of the coastal location of her film: "it was both confusing and terrifying to me, the fact that the coasts for which these young people were leaving were also the starting points for the slave trade their ancestors took part in hundreds of years before. How could history present such vicious cycles?" ("Spirit Riders"). And yet history, like the ocean, appears to repeat itself in an endless cycle. The Atlantic Ocean, the same blue water in which suffering bodies drowned four hundred years ago and to which bones and bodies are still consigned, lures the camera's eye toward it in nearly every scene of *Atlantique*. Even when we don't see the waves, we hear them like a funeral dirge or a siren's melancholic song. Diop layers the voice-overs

of the lovers with the murmurs of the Atlantic Ocean. In the scene in which the ghost of Souleiman describes his catastrophic death to Ada in a voice-over ("I saw you in the enormous wave that consumed us"), the ocean becomes, as Oğuz Kayir suggests, "the bearer of the lovers' mourning for each other and, on a symbolically larger scale, the nation's mourning for all the lives that it has swallowed" (135).

Like a contemporary "griot," or oral transmitter of history, Diop uses filmic language to tell the story of Senegalese youth at a particular crossroads in the country's history. Yet by narrating visually the effects of neo-slavery and migration on this generation and harnassing the power of the ocean as a "magnetic force," viewers of the film understand most affectively the pull of the European promise. If only they could make the passage, paradise awaits. And as a cultural mediator and transnational citizen who has oscillated between two continents and two cultures her whole life, Diop shares a unique perspective on the migrant crisis. Perhaps she identifies most with the character that is in between France and Senegal, the eponymous Atlantic, with its unknowable potential for both change and loss. For Diop, her numerous crossings over the Atlantic have deepened her cinematic vision of the relationship between her two worlds which has in turn granted her the authority to speak from both sides as a composite and hybrid voice. In this regard, it is as if she, too, is speaking through Ada in the final scene when she says, "I am Ada to whom the future belongs."

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Notes

[1] The idea of "wet narratives" appears in current discussions among architects and urban planners who have extended the term to include "wet urbanism" as a theoretical approach to designing and redisigning urban space. "A wet narrative asks for a new design intelligence that is perhaps better conveyed by the term 'waterness' than a tagged-on qualifier like the 'aquatic', 'liquid' or 'hydraulic'. In overcoming the deep dichotomy of a wet and dry ideology, and a prejudice of the dry land codified, for example, as 'land use' in planning vocabulary, new motivations entail a phenomenological appreciation of 'water as ground', and an urban and landscape strategy: wet urbanism." Ashraf, Kazi Khaleed, "Wet narratives: architecture must recognize that the future is fluid." *The Architectural Review*. 25 May 2017. www.architectural-review.com/essays/wet-narratives-architecture-must-recognise-that-the-future-is-fluid. For another relevant source regarding architecture and the blue humanities, see Bélanger, Pierre, and Jennifer Sigler, eds. "Wet Matter." Special issue. *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 39 (2014).

[2] For more information about the Thanatic Ethics project, see the Special Issue of *The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (Volume 26, 2024) entitled *Interventions* and the website, https://www.thanaticethics.com. As stated in the introduction to the special issue, "this project is necessarily an interdisciplinary project bringing together postcolonial scholars, urban geographers, art historians, filmmakers, anthropologists, visual artists, choreographers, performers and activists. The project attempts to develop a dialogue between scholarship and practice, between academics and activists."

[3] The "oceanic" as an analytical tool has been developed by Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, for example, in her article, "Seawater" in *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* (vol. 25, no. 2, 2021), in which she writes, that focusing on seawater "redirects epistemological engagements from the sphere of knowledge to that of experience as the sea becomes a space of intimate familiarity, not simply one to reflect on, but one where one comes to live—or die" ("Seawater" 209). See also "The Residual Migrant." See also Elisabeth Hodge's 2024 article, "Oceanic Feeling in Mati Diop's *Atlantique*" and Lawrence Kent's 2023 article, "Untamed Storms: Cinema's Oceanic Contingency and Mati Diop's *Atlantics*." On the other hand, growing interest in the history of the ocean is reflected in the publication in 2024 alone of two best-selling non-fiction works: John Haywood's *Ocean: A History of the Atlantic before Columbus* (Pegasus Books, 2024) and

Hampton Sides' *The Wide Wide Sea: Imperial Ambition, First Contact and the Fateful Final Voyage of Captain James Cook* (Doubleday, 2024).

[4] Christopher Miller described the role of the *griot* best when he said they act as the "spokespersons and ambassadors, matrimonial go-betweens, genealogists and historians, advisors and court-jesters" who preserve local history through storytelling, thereby transferring the wisdom of this history from one generation to the next (Miller 81).

[5] Erin Nyer, "Barack Obama's Favorite Movies and TV Shows of 2019." https://variety.com/2019/film/news/barack-obama-favorite-movies-tv-shows-2019-1203453173/. Accessed 13 May 2024.

[6] Pisters, Patricia. "Political Gutting, Crushed Life and Poetic Justice," *New Blood in Contemporary Cinema: Women Directors and the Poetics of Horror*. Edinburgh University Press, 2020. "The main protagonist, however, is actually the sea" (175).

[7] Joyard, Oliver. "Mati Diop, the First Black Woman Selected in Cannes Film Festival." *Numéro*, 8 October 2019. <https://www.numero.com/en/cinema/mati-diop- cannes- film- festival- atlantique- senegal- grand-prix- dakar- director. Accessed 13 May 2024.

[8] https://missingmigrants.iom.int/data. According to the Missing Migrants Project, since 2014, 76,265 people total have died in the process of migrating internationally and this is considered an undercount. "In 2024, Africa, Asia, and Europe experienced the highest number of migration-related deaths during migration ever recorded." Data obtained from the website, The Migrant Data Portal: The bigger picture https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/migrant-deaths-and-disappearances. Accessed 13 May 2024.

[9] "These "ghost boats" — and likely many others that have vanished — are in part an unintended result of years of efforts and billions of dollars spent by Europe to stop crossings on the Mediterranean Sea. That crackdown, along with other factors such as economic disruption from the pandemic, pushed migrants to return to the far longer, more obscure and more dangerous Atlantic route to Europe from northwest Africa via the Canaries instead." Renata Brito and Felipe Dana, "Adrift," published 12 April 2023. https://projects.apnews.com/features/2023/adrift/index.html. Accessed 5/13/2024.

[10] "Profits from slavery and related industries helped fund some of the most prestigious schools in the Northeast, including Harvard, Columbia, Princeton and Yale. And in many southern states — including the University of Virginia — enslaved people built college campuses and served faculty and students." https://hechingerreport.org/how-slavery-helped-build-many-u-s-colleges-and-universities/. Accessed 13 May 2024.

[11] https://caminandofronteras.org/en/monitoreo/monitoring-the-right-to-life-2024/. Accessed 6 August 2025.

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