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Nation, gender and political consciousness: Souleymane Cissé's *Baara* and Satyajit Ray's *Ghare Baire*

Sarah Jilani

In a 1975 essay, the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe writes: 'The nationalist movement in British West Africa after the Second World War brought about a mental revolution, which began to reconcile us to ourselves' (145). 'Mental revolution' and a 'reconciliation with oneself' suggest transformations in people's thought processes and psyche as much as their outward-facing politics and actions – something that chimes with the 'psycho-political' (Hook 2004) writings of psychiatrist and anti-colonial philosopher Frantz Fanon. Fanon reminds us (1961, 1964) that the historical conditions Achebe here gestures to – those of the decades of anti-colonial struggle and nation-building – were also creative conditions, in that they could, and did, transform people's identities and social relations.¹ In light of this, the lived experience of anti-colonial nationalist struggle, and the effects of its political and social transformations at the level of consciousness are persistent but evolving preoccupations in post-independence or 'early' (1960s and 1970s) cultural

¹I define 'nation' here as a concept of shared community that can 'be imagined without linguistic communality' (Anderson 1983: 123) but which can nevertheless be, in Fanon's sense, a political community of people, whilst having some constructed (Brennan 1989) and some derivative (Chatterjee 1993) elements.

production. Even though the pioneering generation of mid-twentieth-century African and South Asian film directors has been criticized and praised in equal measure as filmmakers who used the medium primarily for national consciousness-raising (Harrow 1980; Armes 1987, 2006; Gopalan 2015), filmmakers of this generation, such as Ousmane Sembène of Senegal, Med Hondo of Mauritania and Ritwik Ghatak of India, were deeply attuned to the contradictions and hidden agendas behind avowedly national aims. Their work often critiqued the neocolonial economic, political and social conditions that followed their respective national independences.

The search for an alternative, socio-culturally relevant cinematic practice interested a younger generation of filmmakers, too. The artistic aspiration to evolve with and depict everyday national conditions informed the cinematic realism of directors like the Malian Souleymane Cissé and the Indian Satyajit Ray, whose active years predominantly fell within the 1970s and 1980s. These decades began to see West Africa and South Asia diverge quite decisively from the Third Worldist political energies of the Bandung era, whose 'revolutionary visions and intimate solidarities' (Pham and Shilliam 2016, 9) were by then over a decade past. Cissé began working at a time of political and economic crisis in Mali. The devastation of the 1972–3 drought was ongoing; the Traoré government's over-confidence in multinational investments had not yet materialized; and local labour was disadvantaged by the financial structures of the CFA Franc, 'Africa's last colonial currency' (Pigeaud and Sylla 2021). Ray, on the other hand, had the majority of his work behind him at the turn of the 1980s, and a heart attack in 1983 meant his final films were completed with the help of his son, Sandip Ray. India's political climate, however, was as turbulent as Mali's; still reeling from the scars of the Emergency (1975–7), ethno-religious schisms were growing. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's heavy-handed response in Amritsar in 1984 would lead to her assassination by her Sikh bodyguards soon after. While the two films considered here interrogate nationalisms in different ways and different contexts, they do so backgrounded by such conditions of fragmentation. They are Cissé's second feature *Baara* (1978), often translated as 'work' from the Bambara language, and *Ghare Baire*, Ray's 1984 adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore's novella *Home and the World* (1919) – two films that articulate anxieties about the trajectories taking their respective postcolonial nations ever further away from the promises of their independence eras.²

²My use of 'postcolonial', as in 'postcolonial nations', is, as Ella Shohat proposes, intended to indicate 'less an "after" than a following, going beyond the moment' (1992: 108) of independence, and towards 'living with the legacies of', in a broad sense. When referring to socio-economic, cultural and political conditions of continued asymmetrical relation to Western capitalism after a nation-state's nominal independence, I follow Kwame Nkrumah's analysis (1965) in using 'neocolonial' and 'neocolonialism' throughout.

They communicate their shared but differently inflected preoccupations with the question of whether, and how, anti-colonial nationalisms invest in future neocolonialisms when they work to minimize the risk to patriarchy, and to class and caste hierarchy. To that end, *Baara* and *Ghare Baire* reveal how, and why, anti-colonial nationalisms that failed to challenge these hierarchies only partially and selectively fostered an awareness of the structural workings of imperialism.

I will refer to this awareness throughout as 'political consciousness', to mean an awareness of the political dimension (the power relations) underscoring virtually all facets of lived experience. Or, as Derek Hook helpfully paraphrases from Fanon, an 'awareness both of how one is crucially a part of the world and its conditions, and of how one can and should attempt to change that world on the basis of a carefully considered political project' (2004: 92). One of the major unfinished projects of historical decolonisation was a crisis in what several anti-colonial writers, politicians and revolutionaries from the Global South called consciousness-raising. This crisis was one wherein political, social and economic forces delayed and deterred *ways of being in the world* that many had hoped the twentieth century's anti-colonial struggles would precipitate in the global South. For Burkinabé leader Thomas Sankara, this social and psycho-political way of being would see formerly colonized peoples confidently 'accept themselves as they are' (Sankara in Murrey 2018, 82), ridding themselves of any internalized racism and colourism as part of their struggles for liberation. For Ousmane Sembène, it was similarly about the 'mentalities that remain to be decolonised' (2008: 73), and for Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, it was the 'mind[s]' themselves (2011) of both colonized and colonizer that needed to be decolonized. We know these complex psycho-political hopes did not transpire fully, with promising activities such as those within Afro-Asian networks (Halim 2017; Stolte 2019; Djagalov 2020) running out of steam in the global crises of the 1970s, and many anti-colonial figures being assassinated with the aid of the CIA (Williams 2021) before their policies could bear full fruit. Yet political consciousness remained an avowed concern for several African and Asian filmmakers. Sam Okoth Opondo, for instance, notes that FEPACI filmmakers engaged 'with micro-political and transgressive practices of everyday life ... [disturbing] statist forms of cultural governance' (2014: 41).³ Similarly, Utpal Dutt, Bijon Bhat Ghosh and other members of Indian progressive film societies were 'struggling with the question of form as part of their questioning of what constituted

³Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes.

a “good” cinema’ (Majumdar 2012: 732) at this time, seeking aesthetics suited to mass political pedagogy.

While much can be said on the philosophical nuances of the notion of ‘political consciousness’, for the purposes of this critique and within the periodizing limitations of this chapter, I work with the above ideas from the thinkers of the independence era in Africa and Asia in order to consider some of those ‘micropolitical and transgressive practices of everyday life’ (Opondo 41) in *Baara* and *Ghare Baire*, focusing especially on their consciousness-raising effects. A series of lived experiences, tacitly and overtly classed and gendered, result in the politicization – to different kinds and degrees – of these two films’ protagonists. Cissé and Ray suggest consequential shifts in political consciousness occur when the nationalisms certain characters are exposed to fail to resolve the intersecting inequities they observe within their everyday lives. The formal tools of the visual medium come to the aid of dialogue and plot to express how the systemic oppressions of colonialism produce and reproduce themselves after the independences at the level of intersubjective relations, space and place, and gender. They entwine with patriarchies that sometimes preceded, but are continually remade by colonialism, neocolonialism and global capitalism. A comparative approach that considers these two films from different postcolonial contexts, produced within six years of each other, can prove conducive to examining these dynamics between nation, gender and political consciousness.

In Cissé’s *Baara*, which follows a young textile factory manager caught between the demands of his boss and his desire to help workers organize, facial close-ups, ‘haptic visuality’ (in Laura Marks’ theorization [2000]) and the decisive role of women in its climax all map the workings of capitalist and patriarchal conditions in a neocolonial Mali. However, these tools also gesture to how and where such conditions have fostered a degree of political consciousness in those who are exploited most thoroughly in the film’s context: workers in general, and especially women – of all classes. In *Ghare Baire*, Ray focuses on the gendered dichotomy of home/world against the backdrop of an early-twentieth-century manifestation of Indian nationalism. In this period film, the discourses of both colonial class norms and Indian nationalism are utilized politically and psychologically by the two male characters in order to delimit the female protagonist’s growing political consciousness. Working both at the level of their diegetics and in their aesthetic choices, *Baara* and *Ghare Baire* examine how, and where, these very same conditions can give rise to consciousness of their workings.

‘Were those your own thoughts?’: *Ghare Baire* and the gendering of nationalism

Originally published in 1916 and translated into English in 1919, Rabindranath Tagore’s *Ghare Baire* is a story where ‘home’ and ‘world’ blur into one another during a period of Indian anti-colonial nationalism. This period saw the Swadeshi movement from 1905 to 1917, which responded to the 1905 partition of Bengal with a boycott on British goods. While a fierce opponent of British rule in India, Tagore was both a dissenter and reformer where nationalism was concerned (Nandy 1994). His critique of nationalism foregrounded the regional so as to cast nationalist discourses against the materially lived life of a locality (Tagore 1917), which tended to challenge notions of mutually exclusive spheres of culture or human activity that narratives of nation stand on, such as private/public, Hindu/Muslim, spiritual/secular. Yet, at the same time, the affective charge of the idea of ‘home’ in anti-colonial nationalist discourses of this time was enabled through its feminization – something Indra Nath Chaudhuri (2013) finds Tagore partook of, to a degree. This feminization enabled the symbolism of ‘home’ to be overlaid onto the land mass of the Subcontinent itself, the realm of Hindu spirituality and to upper-caste Indian cultural norms.⁴ The story follows Bimala, a young woman who, at first, seems to embody these meanings. She emerges from *purdah* at the urging of her British-educated husband Nikhil, a *zamindar*, just as Nikhil’s boyhood friend Sandip, one of the leaders of the Swadeshi movement, is visiting their estate.⁵ For both Nikhil and Sandip, the ‘world’ is a male realm: one of intellect and moral philosophy, for the humanist Nikhil, and one of politics and struggle, for the nationalist Sandip. Sandip and Bimala’s meeting sets in motion the dissolution of the gendered delineation of these spaces; as Bimala grows attracted to both Sandip and Swadeshi ideology, she is faced with a choice that calls on her own political consciousness.

Satyajit Ray’s 1984 film adaptation sustains most of this plot but chooses to emphasize where Nikhil and Sandip are shown to be blind to how gender and capitalism operate – to how, in other words, nationalism and colonial capital

⁴*Bhārat Mātā* (Mother India), for example, is a personification of India as a mother goddess: a trope popularized after the Indian Rebellion of 1857. In *Ghare Baire*, Sandip implies Bimala embodies her.

⁵*Purdah* is the religious and social practice of female seclusion prevalent in some Muslim and Hindu communities. A *zamindar* is a man of the hereditary landowning classes in various regions of India, whose powers were further entrenched during British rule (Ray 2000).

are and always have been of the 'home', too. In doing so, it foregrounds the story's triangulation between the structures of Indian (bourgeois) nationalism, gender and colonial capital. This is not necessarily because Swadeshi represents a reactionary kind of nationalism, but because the class entitlement of the upper-caste *bhadralok* (Bengali gentleman) Sandip – an entitlement that British colonial rule frustrates – is something he mistakes for nationalist feeling. Meanwhile Nikhil, the benign landlord who believes in Indian self-rule but rejects Swadeshi for its violent tactics, still wishes to see Indian nationalism produce a new *bhadramahila* (Bengali gentlewoman), whose education and good taste will make her an ideal helpmeet for the modern Indian man. This triangulation between anti-colonial nationalisms, capitalism and patriarchy is revealed, though not resolved, when Bimala begins to expose Nikhil's and Sandip's nationalisms as contingent upon safeguarding these class and gender positions.

An early scene in Ray's film introduces Bimala as intelligent and headstrong, with a degree of political awareness that exceeds her husband Nikhil's expectations. When she correctly answers him about what Swadeshi is, Nikhil exclaims, 'You know so much!' Bimala responds with, 'I read the newspaper'.⁶ Her confinement exists to a degree in Nikhil's mind, where he fails to assume that the newspaper that informs him of the world – a particularly 'national' form of media (Anderson 1983) – has also informed Bimala's understanding of her present. This exchange, and its evidence of Bimala's interaction with the 'world', is augmented by Ray's formal choices. Framing technique and *mise-en-scène* prove key to his communicating the emotive and narrative undercurrents of scenes like these. Here, Ray favours single light sources on the actors' faces; his framing is tight, directing attention to the unspoken words found in facial expression and gesture. Dialogue is layered, as brought to life by actor Swatileka Sengupta's complex tonal delivery – teasing, yet barbed.

Meanwhile, the materiality of this scene functions with as much depth. Setting is rarely if ever merely indicative of where or who characters are in *Ghare Baire*, but also of 'structures of feeling' in Raymond Williams' sense (1978) – of what Ray's characters are preoccupied with, what social forces are presently at work, and what 'affective elements of consciousness and relationships' (Sharma and Tygstrup 2015: 5) are present. An abundance of textiles – cotton Edwardian blouses and silk saris – lie draped on the furniture around them as Bimala explains to Nikhil that Swadeshi demands the boycott

⁶ All subsequent quotes from *Home and the World* (1984), Dir. Satyajit Ray [DVD]. New York: Criterion Collection Eclipse Series 40 – Late Ray.

of Manchester cotton.⁷ Ray's camera shoots in close-up the myriad objects in the room as Nikhil points out, one by one, that Bimala's comb, mirror, perfumes, dressing table and four-poster bed are all imported. Seeing her material surroundings anew in light of this information, Bimala immediately understands she is implicated, and demonstrates her political will in asking: 'then what should we do?'

The significance of props and set design continues throughout the building action, when Bimala agrees to then venture into the semi-public space of the sitting room to meet Nikhil's childhood friend Sandip. The heavy Edwardian drapes, the patterned silk of the couches, the men's *dhotis* and *kurtas*⁸ as well as Bimala's fiery red sari all saturate the frame with patterned textiles, visually overwhelming the audience. For this class of Bengalis at this particular period of time, 'non-clothing textiles helped to negotiate the novel conditions of urban life, where homes were increasingly open to non-kin visitors, and men and women shared space in new ways' (McGowan 2016: 518). This crowded *mise-en-scène* also suggests the characters' class separation from the politics that is the subject of their conversation; the three characters are surrounded by material indicators of colonial tastes. These objects, Ray's direction suggests, have reached a degree of familiarity from use and now exist in a 'homegrown' register: Bimala adorns the English silver vases with local flora, and Nikhil serves his guests Darjeeling tea in Derby porcelain. Indeed, the accouterments of the colonial economy inform the characters' actions, organize their movements through space and even indicate their thoughts. Bimala interacts with objects in her sitting room almost incessantly throughout her stolen meetings with Sandip. Dedicated close-ups of particular props implicate the characters within the multi-directional flows of colonial capital in their lives – as oppressed colonial subjects from an oppressive class and caste. Coins facilitate a pivotal plot moment, where Bimala starts to grow wary of Sandip's motivations upon seeing him visibly exult at the touch of gold. Not just a matter of stylization, *Ghare Baire's* 'visual excess' (Choudhuri 2013: 94) thus serves to communicate how Sandip and Nikhil's assumptions about Bimala's sheltered life have no basis in reality. With the home being populated by these objects, Ray renders it as an always-already historicized, 'worlded' space (WReC 2015), in the sense of colonial capital's penetration.

⁷ The Swadeshi movements aimed, amongst other things, to put economic pressure on the British Raj via a cotton boycott. Historians have pointed out there was little alternative, however, to imported cotton in the colonial market: Indian textile markets were only allowed to expand sufficiently to meet domestic demands after the 1930s (McGowan 2016: 519).

⁸ Traditional Indian tunic and trousers for men.

This visual language not only acknowledges 'home' and 'world' as mutually effectual, but undercuts any easy gendering of home as feminine and world as masculine – groupings that theorists of anti-colonial nationalism like Partha Chatterjee (1993) have not fully queried. Feminist analyses do continue to reveal the gendered nature of nations and nationalism (Spivak 1987; Mohanty 2003; Vergès 2019), however, and find that an important aspect of this gendering is spatial. 'The assumption that "the nationalist mind" was always already male and that the issue of national "self-identity" was fundamentally a crisis of masculinity' (Gopal 2012: 61) rests on the gendering of space, which then makes it possible to posit that – in *Ghare Baire's* context, for instance – women like Bimala existed outside the economic life of India under British colonialism, and therefore could not have any claims to the kinds of lived experience that may foster a so-called 'nationalist mind'.⁹ As such, this is necessarily about the location of the development of political consciousness. The risk for patriarchy lies in that the instability of the demarcations between 'home' and 'world' is the very source of Bimala's growing political consciousness, which shows up the contradictions of an anti-colonial strategy that not only excludes women as economic subjects, but also asks the most from those who have the least.

This exposé also functions through the embodied experience of everyday life. One scene where Sandip sings a Swadeshi poem, uplifting and collectivist in its vision of India's freedom, is affectively charged for Bimala. Ray's close-up emphasizes a degree of internalization is taking place: ideology put to art has the rhetorical power to (re)inform people's perceptions of themselves in their world. But with the interruption of the servants with refreshments, Sandip confesses boyishly that he has not gotten over his weakness for sweets or foreign cigarettes. The fervour in his song, followed immediately by a return to bourgeois material comforts, now rings of Frantz Fanon's assessment of the colonized intellectual, who undertakes works of art

in a style that is meant to be national but which is strangely reminiscent of exoticism. The colonised intellectual who returns to his people through works of art behaves in fact like a foreigner.

(Fanon 1961, 160)

It is Bimala's interjection that brings the 'world' of Sandip's politics into the 'home' that is Sandip's bodily pleasures: 'Can't you give [smoking] up? Don't you have the willpower?' Chuckling with discomfort, Sandip covers his exposure by urging Bimala to join the movement, but his revolutionary credentials have already been undermined. Ironically, it is Sandip who relegates the bodily

⁹See also Ashis Nandy (1994) and Indra Mitra (1995) on the gendering of space in Tagore's original.

realm to women, frequently hinting that elite Bengali wives like Bimala can socialize Bengali men into nation-love because they already embody nationalist feelings. While some therefore read his elevation of Bimala as empowering (Mitra 1995), his worship rests on the idea that women exist in some kind of idyllic state prior to intellectual faculties. Their revolutionary desires arise from their biology, instead of from their lived experiences, material conditions or acquired knowledge. Not only is Sandip attributing Bimala's nationalist sympathies to the sensual realm, but also throwing his own ideology into question. What are *his* motives, if *his* nationalist feeling does not arise from a place of embodied experience, as he so performatively celebrates in Bimala?

As Anirudh Deshpande points out (2009), this class of Bengali men often viewed the early Indian nationalist project through European colonial interpretations of 'progress'. For Sandip, power – when wrested from the British – would by the natural order of things go to those of his gender and background. And while scholarship agrees (Peacock 2011; Sengupta 2012) that Nikhil's 'good' nationalism is in contrast to this, Ray's adaptation suggests Nikhil's views rest on adjacent thinking. In a scene located in the symbolic space of a balcony, where the film's colour scheme is a meaningful duality of warm and cool tones (Bimala stepping away from the home fires and out into the world), Nikhil asks: 'Those things you said tonight: were those your own thoughts?' Despite urging Bimala out of *purdah* to see her demonstrate free will, Nikhil still holds Sandip's influence as the sole possible explanation for Bimala's growing interest in anti-colonial nationalism. His anxiety on this front presupposes 'the nationalist mind was always already male' (Gopal 2012: 61), and resents the encroachment of the 'world' into the spiritual-sexual realm (Bimala) that is meant to be his alone. Nikhil's is less a commitment to what *swaraj* (self-rule) could mean for societal transformation, and more a desire to see Bimala fit a twentieth-century colonialism that now requires a little more – but not too much – education in its upper-class women.

Tagore's text enacts such anxieties about nation and gender, but it does not solve them. In Ray's adaptation, Bimala's growing political consciousness leads her to act in a way that rejects both Nikhil's Enlightenment liberalism (by committing to the nationalist movement) and Sandip's provocation-as-politics (by refusing to scapegoat Sandip's innocent protégé, Amulya). Ray's script and visual techniques present the troubling ease with which nationalist feeling can serve as a cover-up for the class frustrations of Indian male elites, and how this is often performed upon and via women and lower-caste men. In light of this, the film's dark resolution makes legible the full substance of Ray's critique. Bimala herself utters it before Nikhil leaves to intervene in the riot that will cost him his life: 'I knew it. I knew I'd be punished.' Social punishment awaits a woman who has not moved through 'home' and 'world' embodying

the roles she should have, and certainly if she has begun to demystify this false dichotomy.

‘I know how you made your fortune’: Women, labour and neocolonial space in *Baara* (1978)

While the contradictions of both the nationalist line and colonial capital are equally central to Souleymane Cissé’s film *Baara*, the spaces of ‘home’ and ‘world’ in his film have undergone transformations. Cissé deliberately uses the built environment as a vehicle for themes familiar from *Ghare Baire*, while making distinctly spatial formal choices around framing, sequencing and texture to depict an urban locale where Western capital cheapens African labour with the help of ostensibly ‘nationalist’ African governments. *Baara* locates political potential in the ‘homes’ and the ‘world’ within which this exploitation occurs. As such, those experiencing multiple and overlapping forms of exploitation within the film’s spaces – from the young men awaiting casual work to the women in social reproductive labour – are crucial to the dialectical relation Cissé sets up between characters’ political consciousness and those spaces where gendered and classed struggles take place. *Baara* follows two young men whose fates are intertwined by their distant kinship: Balla Traoré, a middle manager at a textile factory, and Diarra, a good-natured but oftentimes naïve porter who keeps getting harassed off the streets by the police. Although Balla is instructed by factory owner Sissoko to lay off workers to cover the factory’s 200 million Franc debt, he secretly disobeys. Balla gives Diarra a job at the factory, then encourages a workers’ meeting on conditions and wages, leading to tragedy.¹⁰

The late 1970s in Mali, sketched briefly earlier, also saw General Traoré hurl a particular accusation at the national factories for ‘draining the resources of the peasants, inducing drought, famine, and corruption’ (Diawara 2003: 70) as part of a privatization push. As a fraught terrain of national and international dynamics, textiles in *Baara*, as in *Ghare Baire*, prove a key trope. In historical context, textiles evoke those markets that colonialism and neocolonialism forcibly created in Asia and Africa. The profit in destroying the Bengali muslin industry in the nineteenth century was to the British Empire what

¹⁰ All subsequent references from *Baara* (1978), Dir. Souleymane Cissé [DVD]. Ennetbaden: Trigon Film.

Malian cotton today may be to the global fast fashion chain.¹¹ In *Baara*, the chasm between the conditions of (neocolonial) labour and the value of their productivity is at its most obvious in the setting of the textile factory, which is also where manager Balla – of a generation of educated young Africans who grew up hearing the rhetoric of national independence – acts in favour of labour over capital. And it is this setting that especially reveals what Fredric Jameson coins the ‘primordial crime of capitalism’ (1986: 84), the theft of collective wealth in which cotton has been of major consequence since the plantation. As such, *Baara* asks whether solidarities can be forged against the exploitative labour conditions of postcolonial urban spaces, and whether these can bring about shifts in political consciousness. Although, like Ray, Cissé poses no clear answer to this question, asking it through attention to space, power, labour and gender proves revealing in its own right.

The French colonial imaginary conceived of space as external to the self: one ‘lived “in” space, one did not create space by interaction with it. It was thus an inert realm which could be remodelled, not a realm which was in process’ (Langford 2005: 103). Its configuration as such helped facilitate the erasure and oppression of the Indigenous inhabitants of a place. Such ‘spatial strategies’, Henri Lefebvre explains (1991: 112), not only unfold in space, but are also about its appropriation, deployment and control. For example, middle-class Balla is introduced to the viewer as an educated, idealistic young man who defies the class hierarchies inherent in the spatial layout of the factory (he is more on the factory floor than in his air-conditioned office). Yet Cissé’s tracking shot charting Balla’s movement among his workers gives the viewer a sense of purposelessness. His attempt to talk over the noise of the machines is fruitless, and his workers know their tasks without his instruction. Cissé presents the factory’s spatial order as one that compels its users – whether middle manager or worker – into their compartmentalized roles, producing or overseeing production for the neocolonial demands of global capital.

On the workers’ part, physical work cripples their political life, minimizing the possibility of organizing. When Balla tells Diarra to be at the labour meeting, Diarra answers, ‘I’m too tired.’ The difference in their embodied experience of the same space is unmistakable thanks to the intense physicality of this scene, which contrasts Balla’s crisp white shirt with Diarra’s naked torso, glistening with sweat and dye. Cissé here perhaps highlights the paradox of educated young Africans who want to be the vanguard of working-class consciousness,

¹¹ See also Bhadra (2014) for a study of the impact of the British Industrial Revolution on Bengal. Mali, on the other hand, has recorded its highest cotton production for the 2021–2 season; however, only 2 per cent of the cotton is processed in Mali, and 15 per cent of their national GDP depends on its sale, in what is sometimes referred to as ‘cotton imperialism’ (Haas 2021).

yet cannot relate to their barriers to political organizing, such as overwork. This physicality is, in fact, a major tool amongst Cissé's aesthetic techniques in *Baara*. In addition to several intimate close-ups of the men in this particular factory, it also focuses tightly on the faces of various male and female inhabitants of the city – from the chorus women who accompany a travelling *griot*, to an imam resting in a mosque's shaded courtyard. When in the factory, the viewer's attention is held by sequences featuring the faces, hands and creations of the welders, dye makers, assemblers, weavers, printmakers, cotton spinners and machinists at the factory. Walter Benjamin (1969), Bela Balázs (2010) and Gilles Deleuze (2013) amongst others have all described the affective power of the close-up, usually utilized to reveal hidden meaning and disclose inner states. Cissé's extreme close-ups (forehead to chin) work via Marks' notion of 'haptic visuality' (2000): this describes a tactile connection that vision enables between the spectator and objects on film, where the eye functions as a faculty of touch in especially sensorial and embodied filmic moments. The physicality of the workers' labours is foregrounded through these close-ups, where the sweat on their faces, the fumes of the machinery, hair texture and the layer of red street dust on skin are discernible. An almost kinaesthetic experience for the viewer, these impart the sense that enduring such spaces and going through such motions cannot but transform body and consciousness. This connection implies that their labouring is not just a source of exhaustion and neutralization, but also a facilitator of knowledge in that their work informs their embodied experience of space, creativity, collectivity and hierarchy. I will return to the visual power of the body, for Cissé's climax is marked by the naked and invulnerable body of Sissoko's wife Djeneba, suggesting both the forms that women's exploited labour can take and their consciousness of this exploitation.

As *Baara* moves towards its conclusion, a series of scenes cross-cut two spaces that are explicitly political and gendered: the street and the bedroom. During the workers' meeting that sets the finale in motion, Sissoko's informants lure Balla to his office and strangle him. We then cut to Sissoko himself, who is being driven home by his chauffeur; then to Sissoko's much younger wife Djeneba, who is at that moment in bed with a lover. Sissoko comes home; the lover flees; the couple argue. We cut to the street, where Balla's wife M'Batoma has called at Sissoko's mansion in the midst of the quarrel. Inside, Djeneba is holding the upper hand; she speaks what is to be her last truth to power in a striking, static mid-shot, where Cissé positions the camera slightly above her eye-level. The technique uncomfortably places the audience in Sissoko's position, looking down on a vulnerable but accusatory woman. 'I know how you made your fortune. Your father, a small clerk, misused public funds, and you dare to brag about it', Djeneba says; Sissoko chokes her. That

Baara shows Djeneba to be committing adultery just before her own moral accusation of Sissoko is a telling choice. Sissoko murders Djeneba in a fit of rage that stems both from his perceived emasculation and from hearing the humiliating truth that his power is bought, his wealth stolen.

The physicality of the murder; the vulnerability in Djeneba's half-clothed body; and the surroundings full of imported luxury brands (Marlboro cigarettes, JohnnyWalker whiskey) make the supposedly 'private' motivations of this crime entangle with its politically motivated aspect: the silencing of a whistleblower. Given what an integral role public and private spaces have together played in constituting the gendered body,¹² for Djeneba to thus politicize the bedroom speaks to how 'women face a form of hyper-exploitation under patriarchal, neoliberal capitalism' (Krishnan 2018: 120). For this character to use her last words to politicize the bedroom as an extension of the hypocrisy and violence of the neocolonial nation-state suggests that the structures that make possible her material conditions are known to her.

Like *Ghare Baire*'s triangulation between patriarchy, colonial capital and its ostensible opposite in anti-colonial nationalism, the governing systems of post-independence Mali, *Baara* suggests, function through the violence of Western capital in collusion with the neocolonial state. Both are always also empowered by a third factor, that of patriarchal violence within so-called private space. The vast majority of Cissé's characters suffer the consequences of knowing either through lived experience (such as Djeneba and M'Batoma) or learning through collective organizing (such as Diarra) – the spatial, sexual and social mechanisms of neocolonial patriarchy. At the same time (and this is what makes Cissé a dialectical filmmaker indeed) this mutually constitutive relationship between spaces and the knowledges of those who labour within them means that neocolonialism lays itself open to the risk of cultivating political consciousness within, and through, any location of its workings. For instance, despite the obvious differences in Djeneba's and Bimala's times and places, it is significant that two upper-class women – both seemingly sheltered from the political and economic strife of the 'world' outside – thwart the attempts of men who seek to control their consciousness of class and gender. The two women's growing political consciousness culminates in choices that spell class betrayal precisely because they are acts of spatial trespass.

¹² The city, as Elizabeth Grosz argues, 'is one of the crucial factors in the social production of (sexed) corporeality'; and 'the built environment provides the context for, and coordinates contemporary forms of, the body' (1995: 104).

Conclusion

This chapter's discussion has not intended to flatten the contextual and cultural differences between these two films, and cannot. *Ghare Baire* gestures towards an important question for its context of Indian nationalisms, before and after independence: whether these did indeed seek as radical a break with colonial hierarchies as they are today remembered as having done, and to what extent these nationalisms' investment in patriarchy complicates this. *Baara*, too, presents us with post-independence national conditions that are marked by accumulation and divestment, production and social reproduction, but offers a way in which we can understand the relation between neocolonial exploitation and political consciousness in its own particular context of 1970s Mali. Sustained throughout both films is that the intersections of patriarchy and (neo-)colonial capitalism are revealed when women's experiences are attended to, and also when shared material conditions ultimately disprove the false demarcation of social, political and economic forces into those shaping the 'home' and those shaping the 'world'. *Ghare Baire* and *Baara* look to shifts at the level of political consciousness in order to chart where and how moments of ongoing class and gender struggle in the (post-)colony, large and small, always give rise to lived knowledge of the structures of oppression. This consciousness precedes the very possibility of political action.

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