

David Diop's *At Night All Blood Is Black*: War's brutality, human connection, and social sustainability

Dr. Babasaheb Kangune

Assistant Professor of English, Chhatrapati Shivaji College, Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil University, Satara, Maharashtra, India

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Abstract

David Diop's novel *At Night All Blood Is Black* is an exploration of human psyche during the Great War. The brutality and savagery of World War I is the primary theme of the novel. The violence and bloodshed in the war affect the mind-set and overall human psyche. Alfa Ndiaye is the protagonist of the novel. He narrates the present and past, and intermingles the brutality of war with inherent goodness in human relations. Human connections are always at the centre, whether the situation is favourable or unfavourable, good or bad, local or global, natural or man-made. The narratives focus on friendship between Alfa Ndiaye and his childhood friend, one who is referred to as his more-than-brother, Mademba Diop. The deaths of Mademba Diop, Jean-Baptiste and a young enemy soldier narrated in the novel present the cruelty and savagery of war. In flashback, the stories of the narrator's father, Bassirou Coumba Ndiaye, his mother, Penndo Ba, his first love, Fary Thiam, and the simplicity, trust and innocence of the Fula shepherds reflect human connections at different levels. The simple practices of the narrator's father, Bassirou Coumba Ndiaye and his arguments regarding cultivating food grains and vegetables instead of cash crops reflect social sustainability goals. The present research is an attempt to explore the brutality of war, human connection, and social sustainability as reflected in David Diop's *At Night All Blood Is Black*.

Keywords: War, David Diop, human connection, social sustainability

Introduction

At Night All Blood Is Black, winner of the 2021 International Booker Prize, was originally written in French by David Diop and was translated into English by Anna Moschovakis. The novel is set against the backdrop of World War I. During World War I, African soldiers like Alfa Ndiaye and Mademba Diop were recruited by the colonial power of France and were referred to as the Chocolates of black Africa. These soldiers were exploited by their white officers. They have little chance of obtaining higher ranks in the army. It is the story of Senegalese soldiers fighting in the Great War. *At Night All Blood Is Black*, is a story of war, friendship, love, and social sustainability. Social sustainability goals are reflected through the character of Bassirou Coumba Ndiaye, a simple peasant and the father of the narrator in the novel. The story is narrated from a first-person point of view by Alfa Ndiaye, a soldier in the French army. The present and past are arranged systematically using a flashback technique in the novel. Alfa Ndiaye and Mademba Diop are childhood friends who hail from Gandiol near Saint-Louis in Senegal and work for the French army. It is also the love story of Alfa Ndiaye and his childhood friend, Fary Thiam.

At Night All Blood Is Black not only explores World War I, but it also portrays basic human relations, friendship, familial relations, and sustainable values. Alfa Ndiaye, a young soldier in the French army, is the protagonist of the novel. The novel begins with the horror of war presenting the savagery of the battlefield and the death of Mademba Diop. Mademba is unable to endure the humiliation and pain as "his guts in the air, his insides outside" (Diop 4); he requests Alfa three times to finish him off, and relieve him. Unfortunately, Alfa undergoes a dilemma between two choices: his love for his friend, Mademba, and his duty as a soldier. Therefore, he does not grant the request of

Mademba. In the later part of the narration, the madness of Alfa is portrayed. He has a collection of seven severed enemy hands and later on, it created fear in the minds of his trench-mates. They started referring to him as a soldier-sorcerer and a devourer of souls. Moreover, nobody wants his company on the battlefield, as he was seen as the devourer of souls. Therefore, the Captain Armand granted Alfa a one-month's leave for rest. Thus, in the second part, Alfa is treated by Doctor Francois, and he goes back into the past to recollect beautiful memories associated with his early life. The present research article is an attempt to study war's brutality, human connections, and social sustainability as reflected in the narration of the novel.

Objectives

The objectives of the present research article are stated as below:

1. To explore the brutality and savagery of war as reflected in David Diop's *At Night All Blood Is Black*.
2. To highlight human connection through friendship, family life, and love with reference to the characters such as Alfa Ndiaye, Mademba Diop, Bassirou Coumba Ndiaye, Penndo Ba, and Fary Thiam.
3. To elaborate on social sustainability goals reflected in the novel through the character study of Bassirou Coumba Ndiaye and the Fula shepherds.

Method

This study employs a qualitative, text-based research design rooted in literary analysis. The research utilizes close reading and thematic analysis to examine David Diop's *At Night All Blood Is Black*. The study is interpretive in nature, decoding the narrative structure, character dynamics, and historical contextualization within the novel to address three primary thematic pillars: the psychological brutality of war,

the resilience of human connections, and the agrarian representations of social sustainability.

To systematically analyze the novel across its three primary themes, this research applies a multidisciplinary theoretical framework:

1. To explore the ‘brutality of war’ and its effect on the human psyche, the research draws upon trauma theory (such as the works of Cathy Caruth or Sigmund Freud’s concepts of trauma and the *death drive*). This framework is used to analyze the protagonist Alfa Ndiaye’s descent into madness, his ritualistic violence, and the psychological fragmentation caused by trench warfare.
2. To analyze ‘human connections’ the study examines the interpersonal dynamics between Alfa and Mademba Diop (the ‘more-than-brother’ bond), as well as Alfa’s memories of his family and the Fula shepherds. This relies on relational and postcolonial sociological frameworks to understand how indigenous kinships and human bonds survive or are distorted under the dual pressures of French colonialism and mechanized global warfare.
3. To investigate ‘social sustainability’, the research applies an eco-critical lens. By examining the agrarian philosophies of the narrator’s father, Bassirou Coumba Ndiaye—specifically his advocacy for cultivating sustainable food crops over colonial cash crops—the study highlights the intersection of indigenous ecological wisdom, anti-colonial resistance, and modern concepts of social sustainability.

Review of Literature

The academic discourse surrounding David Diop’s International Booker Prize-winning novel, *At Night All Blood Is Black*, sits at the intersection of postcolonial studies, trauma theory, psychoanalysis, and critical human security. Set during World War I, the novel chronicles the psychological fragmentation of Alfa Ndiaye, a Senegalese *tirailleur* fighting for the French army, following the agonizing death of his ‘more-than-brother’, Mademba Diop. Existing critical scholarship on the text generally organizes around three interconnected thematic nodes: the brutalizing mechanics of colonial warfare, the dynamics of intimate human connection and desire, and the disruption of identity and social sustainability.

Scholars analyzing the novel’s portrayal of World War I emphasize how imperial conflict functions as a dehumanizing engine that exploits subaltern bodies while destroying their mental integrity. Drawing upon trauma frameworks established by Cathy Caruth, Bessel van der Kolk, and Dominik LaCapra, Sharma (2025)^[8] demonstrates that Alfa Ndiaye’s descent into ritualistic violence—specifically his nightly ritual of mutilating German soldiers and severing their hands—is an “acting out” of unresolved grief and guilt over Mademba’s death. Sharma highlights how trauma in the novel operates non-linearly, where past loss (such as the disappearance of Alfa’s mother, Penndo Ba) merges with battlefield horrors, creating an inescapable cycle of psychological distress.

Infanta *et al.* (2024)^[3] investigate the cognitive dimension of Alfa’s trauma through the lens of Atkinson-Shiffrin’s multi-store memory model and Endel Tulving’s episodic memory. They argue that Mademba’s dying plea (“slit my throat”) acts as a persistent auditory trigger that reshapes

Alfa’s long-term memory. Furthermore, Infanta *et al.* argue that when Alfa is placed under psychiatric observation by Doctor François, his drawings—representing his mother, Mademba, and the seven severed hands—function as visual mnemonic devices and non-verbal catharsis, bridging his fractured past and present.

Critical studies by Bushra Khanam and Anna Branach-Kallas observe that the colonial military machine intentionally leveraged racialized stereotypes, expecting the *tirailleurs* to act as violent “savage” shock troops (“Chocolats”) (Khanam e486; Branach-Kallas 14). Khanam notes that Alfa’s deliberate, systematic savagery exposes the fundamental hypocrisy of European “civilities of war” (e486): while Captain Armand rewards battlefield massacre, he recoils from Alfa’s quiet, individualized mutilation of the enemy (e486). Alfa’s actions thus subvert imperial expectations by reflecting the war’s inherent monstrosity back onto his commanders (Khanam e486; Branach-Kallas 14).

Central to the novel’s emotional architecture is the deep, unconditional bond between Alfa and Mademba, encapsulated in the recurring metonym “more-than-brother” (Diop 7; Khanam e485; Papp 107). Critical literature explores how this profound human connection stands as both a sanctuary against battlefield terror and a catalyst for psychological collapse (Infanta *et al.* 3197; Papp 108). Joel Papp investigates the subtextual and libidinal dimension of Alfa and Mademba’s relationship (107-08). Grounding his analysis in Michel de Montaigne’s philosophical concept of friendship (“one soul in two bodies”) and Alenka Zupančič’s psychoanalytic theories of desire, Papp argues that the tenderness between the two men—evidenced by Alfa holding Mademba’s disemboweled body “like a child” or wrapping him in his own shirt—contains strong homoerotic undertones (107-09). Papp contends that in hypermasculine, war-torn environments where explicit expressions of same-sex desire are suppressed, homoeroticism manifests through poetic, highly sensory language, elevating their friendship beyond conventional camaraderie (113-15).

Khanam stresses that the tragedy of their connection lies in Alfa’s refusal to fulfil Mademba’s final request to be euthanized on the battlefield (e485). This inaction, rooted in Alfa’s adherence to traditional moral codes and fear of divine judgment, ultimately haunts him, causing his desire for human connection to mutate into an obsessive quest for vengeance (Infanta *et al.* 3198; Khanam e485).

The literature increasingly addresses how Diop’s text critiques the erasure of Black soldiers from historical narratives and examines the breakdown of social sustainability—the ability of individuals, communities, and cultural frameworks to endure and regenerate amidst systemic violence (Khanam e488; Sharma 35). Scholars frequently focus on the novel’s mystical, open-ended climax, where the boundaries of identity dissolve completely (Khanam e487; Papp 109). As Papp and Khanam highlight, the narrative shifts as Mademba’s spirit appears to inhabit Alfa’s body during an intimate encounter with Doctor François’s daughter (Khanam e487; Papp 109). This spiritual metamorphosis—where “he is me and I am him”—signals a total breakdown of the individual ego under extreme traumatic conditions, questioning whether holistic recovery is possible once social and cultural ties are severed by colonial war (Khanam e487; Papp 109; Sharma

39).Khanam and broader literary commentary emphasize the role of language and translation in depicting social rupture (e488). Because Alfa speaks Wolof and lacks fluency in French, his narrative relies on rhythmic repetition and oral storytelling structures (Infanta *et al.* 3197; Khanam e485). Anna Moschovakis's English translation underscores how colonial institutions ("the white man") mediate, misinterpret, and translate the lived realities of subaltern soldiers, symbolizing the broader socio-cultural disenfranchisement experienced by colonized people (Khanam e488).

While existing literature thoroughly analyzes trauma and memory (Infanta *et al.* 3197; Sharma 34), racialized military exploitation (Khanam e485; Lin 79), and homoerotic desire within brotherhood (Papp 107), there remains a distinct gap in synthesized frameworks. Specifically, few studies explicitly connect the tripartite relationship between war's physical/psychological brutality, the preservation of inter-human connection, and the broader requirements of social sustainability in postcolonial contexts. This paper fills this gap by demonstrating how the erosion of individual human connection under the weight of state-sanctioned violence systematically dismantles the social, moral, and agrarian foundations necessary for sustainable human communities.

War's Brutality and Savagery

In *At Night All Blood Is Black*, David Diop illustrates the brutality of war not merely through physical violence, but through the profound psychological fracture and moral inversion it inflicts upon the soldier. The visceral reality of combat strips away conventional human ethics, forcing the narrator, Alfa Ndiaye, to experience war as both a physical slaughterhouse and a space where traditional morality becomes active cruelty.

The physical cruelty of war is initially rendered through raw, graphic imagery that reduces human life to literal carnage. Describing the lingering death of his companion and 'more-than-brother', Mademba Diop, Alfa recalls him lying on the battlefield with "his guts in the air, his insides outside, like a sheep that has been ritually dismembered after the sacrifice" (Diop 4). This animalistic comparison dehumanizes the soldier's body, framing war as a site of ritualistic butchery where men are reduced to meat. The brutality extends beyond the battlefield itself into the surrounding environment, where soldiers must navigate "crevices carved out by mortar shells, filled with blood-stained water, dispersing the rats that had left their burrows to feed on human flesh" (Diop 7). By depicting an ecosystem where scavengers feed on living men and the land itself is saturated with blood, Diop highlights how combat strips soldiers of basic human dignity.

However, the novel demonstrates that the most insidious brutality of war lies in its capacity to invert moral reasoning, twisting concepts of honour and duty into sources of psychological torment. Adhering to civilian morality and military rules of conduct, Alfa initially refuses Mademba's pleas to end his suffering. Reflecting on this decision, Alfa realizes that his adherence to civilized norms was an act of unintended cruelty:

"I offered him only mistaken thoughts, thoughts commanded by duty, thoughts condoned by a respect for human law, and I was not human... I let Mademba cry like a small child, the third time he begged me to finish him off,

peeing himself, his right hand groping at the ground to gather his scattered guts..." (Diop 5)

Here, the absolute brutality of the trench environment forces a complete inversion of values: mercy becomes murder, and the preservation of law becomes a form of torture. By obeying "the voice of duty" rather than granting a mercy killing, Alfa leaves his friend to "suffer like an old solitary lion, eaten alive by hyenas" (Diop 6). Ultimately, war's supreme brutality is psychological: it forces soldiers to internalize the logic of violence so deeply that killing a friend becomes the ultimate act of love, leaving survivors consumed by guilt for having obeyed the very laws of humanity they were sent to defend.

The narrator Alfa Ndiaye exposes how war forces soldiers to perform violence for the benefit of colonial powers. Alfa recognizes that the brutality expected of him is not innate, but a calculated role designed to instill fear in the enemy: "The captain's France needs for us to play the savage when it suits them. They need for us to be savage because the enemy is afraid of our machetes" (Diop 15). The text does not shy away from the horrific realities of combat, detailing how soldiers are driven to "slash the enemy's flesh, we maim, we decapitate, we disembowel" (Diop 15). However, Alfa distinguishes himself from his comrades—such as the Toucouleurs, Sérères, and Bambaras—by choosing to embrace this role with deliberate intent rather than giving into frantic panic. Through Alfa's grim self-awareness, Diop highlights the true cost of war: to endure the trauma of the trenches, a soldier is forced to abandon his own moral limits and willingly turn himself into a weapon.

The novel traces how the trauma of frontline service systematically unspools the mind of Alfa Ndiaye, a Senegalese *tirailleur*. Through acts of calculated, ritualized mutilation, Alfa's role within the war's immediate landscape undergoes a stark shift: grief over a fallen comrade curdles into something calculated and uncanny, transforming him from a soldier following orders into a figure of quiet terror to his enemies and French commanders alike.

Diop uses repetitive phrasing to emphasize how thoroughly combat reduces a person to their physical function:

"I brought back, at the end of every battle... an enemy rifle, along with the hand that went with it. The hand that had carried it, the hand that had gripped it, the hand that had cleaned it, discharged it, and reloaded it" (Diop 16).

By itemizing the mundane, learned physical acts—gripping, cleaning, loading—Diop strips the enemy soldier of his humanity, leaving behind only the muscle memory of his routine. Taking the severed hand alongside the weapon is more than just collecting a trophy; it is a literal dismemberment of the enemy's identity. The human hand, usually a gesture of connection or craft, is reduced to an attachment for a firing mechanism.

There is also a tension between the open violence of "no-man's-land" and the claustrophobic retreat of the lines. Alfa speaks of returning to "the earth's womb after the others, sometimes under enemy fire" (Diop 16). Classifying the trench as a "womb" presents a striking contradiction. It promises a maternal, subterranean sanctuary, yet it is simultaneously a grave where men "bury themselves alive in [its] damp protection" (Diop 16). Seeking refuge in the soil that daily consumes their peers reflects a deep

psychological retreat—a retreat to the dirt as both a shield against artillery and a grim preview of burial.

Finally, the reaction of the French officers and fellow soldiers brings the unspoken racial logic of the colonial war machine into focus. Their reaction to Alfa's routine settles into an uneasy pattern:

"First: 'Will Alfa Ndiaye come back to us alive?' Second: 'Will Alfa Ndiaye come back with an enemy rifle and the hand that carried it?'" (Diop 16).

This response exposes how colonial armies utilized the archetype of the "savage" fighter when it suited tactical morale, only to react with revulsion when that violence became too visible. Alfa's solitary hunting trips do more than secure rifles; they sever his ties to his fellow soldiers, locking him in a loop of performative violence driven entirely by unspoken grief.

Human Connections in *At Night All Blood Is Black*

In the novel *At Night All Blood Is Black*, human connection is shown as the most important thing that holds people together during hard times. This unique bond of friendship is beautifully presented through the narrator, Alfa Ndiaye, and his childhood friend, Mademba Diop. Right from the beginning, Alfa Ndiaye does not call Mademba just a friend or a brother; he repeatedly refers to him as his "more-than-brother." This special phrase shows that their connection is deeper than biological blood relations and is built on pure love, trust, and mutual understanding.

Both friends hailed from the village of Gandiol near Saint-Louis and were brought up together. The real depth of their human connection comes out during a time of personal tragedy. After the painful disappearance of Alfa Ndiaye's mother, Penndo Ba, Alfa was left with deep sadness and loneliness. Seeing his friend's suffering, Mademba Diop showed pure compassion and requested his mother, "I want Alfa Ndiaye to live with us, I want you to become his maman" (Diop 106). Aminata Sarr accepted Alfa into her family and treated him just like her own son. The warm company of Aminata Sarr and Mademba helped Alfa to forget the gnawing pain of losing his mother. This shows how true human connections and family support can heal emotional wounds.

Even though they had a strong connection, both friends were very different in nature. Mademba had a strong interest in studies, but Alfa lacked interest in school education and loved traditional wrestling. Yet, their different interests never came in the way of their friendship. At the age of twenty, when Mademba decided to join the war for France, he was rejected by the recruiters because he was "too frail, as light and delicate as a crowned crane" (Diop 110). Seeing his friend's disappointment, Alfa took special efforts to train Mademba's body. He describes it: "So, for two whole months, I forced Mademba's feeble strength to grow and grow. I made him run in the heavy sand beneath....hot milk and peanut butter, as fighters worthy of the name do to put on weight" (Diop 110-111).

Finally, because of Alfa's hard work and care, Mademba got selected for the war. Alfa did not just train him, but he also joined the war alongside Mademba so that his friend would not be alone. They wanted to achieve so many things together by joining the war. This self-sacrificing behavior of Alfa shows that human connection is not just about sharing happy moments, but about standing together in times of struggle and facing danger hand in hand.

The love story of Alfa Ndiaye and Fary Thiam is another strong example of human connection in the novel. Their relationship highlights emotional closeness, individual choice, and social pressure. Their bond goes beyond physical attraction. Alfa describes Fary's voice as soft and moving, and her presence brings him deep joy (Diop 90).

During a winter gathering at Mademba's compound, Fary publicly chooses Alfa over all the other young men (Diop 90-91). That night, Fary sits right beside Alfa and holds his hand. Her quiet action gives Alfa a strong sense of happiness and belonging (Diop 91-92). However, Fary refuses physical intimacy for four years (Diop 92). She strictly follows an ancestral rule that forbids young people from the same age set to marry (Diop 92). While Fary respects this tradition, Alfa secretly rejects this "peasant law" (Diop 92). His love for her makes him think critically. It causes him to question rigid cultural rules long before he goes to war (Diop 92). Fary keeps her decision until the night before Alfa and Mademba leave for the front lines (Diop 92). Ultimately, their bond protects Alfa's humanity, anchoring his identity in personal love, memory, and quiet resistance to social limits.

Social Sustainability Goals in the Practices and Arguments of Bassirou Coumba Ndiaye:

In *At Night All Blood Is Black*, the character of Bassirou Coumba Ndiaye—the narrator's father, serves as an ethical anchor whose actions bridge social divides and redefine communal responsibility. Positioned within the agrarian setting of Gandiol, Bassirou distinguishes himself from his peers through an ethos of radical hospitality and unconditional generosity. While local agrarian norms often foster hostility toward migratory groups, Bassirou's interactions with the Fula shepherd Yoro Ba demonstrate how resource sharing can transform potential socio-economic conflict into enduring cross-cultural solidarity. Through his open-field access policy, his respectful reception of Yoro Ba's gift, his union with Penndo Ba, and his adherence to principles of social sustainability, Bassirou embodies a model of communal harmony that transcends traditional boundary lines.

Bassirou's defining trait is a profound commitment to hospitality that operates outside the conventional prejudices of his settled agricultural community. While the local peasants of Gandiol view the seasonal migration of the Fula pastoralists with suspicion and hostility, Bassirou intentionally carves a path through the middle of his own fields to grant Yoro Ba's herd direct access to his artesian wells (Diop 96). When questioned by fellow villagers regarding this sacrifice of land and water, Bassirou offers a succinct rationale: "everyone must live" (Diop 96). He does not view vital natural resources through a lens of scarcity or zero-sum competition; rather, he treats access to water as a universal human and ecological right. By stating that he has "hospitality in his blood," the narrative establishes his generosity not as a calculated transaction, but as a foundational moral imperative (Diop 96).

This act of radical kindness restructures the social dynamic between the settled farmer and the nomadic shepherd, triggering a deep cycle of reciprocal respect. In Fula culture, an unreturned gift causes profound dishonour; as the narrator notes, a Fula who receives a favour he cannot return "may die of shame" (Diop 96). Recognizing Bassirou's gesture as the "hospitality of a prince," Yoro Ba seeks to

bestow a gift of equal magnitude (Diop 97). He offers his most prized possession—his only daughter, Penndo Ba—in marriage, explicitly waiving the customary, substantial dowry of cattle or camels (Diop 96–97). Bassirou's acceptance of Penndo Ba as his fourth wife reflects his understanding of Fula cultural dignity. Refusing such an offer would inflict dishonour upon Yoro Ba; thus, Bassirou humbly accepts the proposal, ensuring that his kindness elevates rather than diminishes his guest.

Furthermore, the marriage between Bassirou and Penndo Ba carries rich symbolic weight, representing a synthesis of distinct socio-ecological modes of existence. As Yoro Ba observes during the proposal, the union reconciles “immobility and mobility, the stillness of time and the flow of time, the past and the present” (Diop 97). The marriage bridges the rooted, land-bound existence of the Wolof/Gandioul farmer (“rooted trees,” “earth”) with the fluid, migratory lifestyle of the Fula pastoralist (“wind,” “sky”) (Diop 97). Additionally, Bassirou enters into this union only “with the agreement of the three others”—his existing wives—demonstrating domestic consultation and household harmony (Diop 97). The marriage thus functions as a living treaty, converting potential inter-ethnic friction into kinship. From the perspective of modern social sustainability, Bassirou's practices offer a compelling model for equitable resource governance and conflict resolution. By establishing shared access to artesian wells during the dry season, Bassirou mitigates the structural drivers of pastoralist-farmer conflict that frequently plague semi-arid regions. His actions align with contemporary principles of social cohesion: reducing inequality by accommodating migratory populations, fostering inclusive community frameworks, and prioritizing collective survival over exclusive ownership. Through his belief that “everyone must live,” Bassirou demonstrates how localized, ethical stewardship of natural resources can sustain both ecological stability and human dignity across generational and cultural divides.

In conclusion, Bassirou Coumba Ndiaye represents an ideal of nobility that arises not from high status or material wealth, but from moral character and social responsibility. By extending hospitality to Yoro Ba, honouring Fula cultural codes, and integrating his household with pastoralist lineages, Bassirou transforms potential division into enduring unity. His legacy illustrates that true sustainability requires both the open sharing of physical resources and the intentional cultivation of human empathy.

The narrative of Bassirou Coumba Ndiaye presents a profound articulation of social sustainability, positioned in direct opposition to the extractive economic model of colonial cash-cropping. While the village chief, Abdou Thiam, champions the cultivation of peanuts by promising infrastructural modernization—such as “brick houses, a permanent school,” (Diop 118) and “clinics and maternity wards” (Diop 118)—Bassirou recognizes that true sustainability must be rooted in community resilience, food sovereignty, and cultural preservation. His arguments can be analyzed through four distinct pillars of social sustainability.

Food Sovereignty and Localized Supply Chains:

Bassirou's foremost argument centres on the necessity of diverse, localized food systems over monolithic cash crop integration. Social sustainability requires that a community's basic physiological needs be met independently of volatile external markets. Bassirou

explicitly rejects the substitution of edible crops for a monetized agricultural model, stating, “I will not refuse to dedicate one of my fields to the cultivation of peanuts, but I refuse to dedicate all of my fields to peanuts. Peanuts cannot feed my family.” (Diop 119). Instead, he practices holistic, self-sustaining agriculture and local trade. He notes, “I feed my family with millet, tomatoes, onions, red beans, with the watermelons that grow in my fields” (Diop 119). Furthermore, this self-sufficiency relies on familial trade networks rather than currency: a cow for milk, sheep for meat, a fisherman son for dried fish, and wives who extract salt from the soil. The text exalts this method, describing Bassirou as “a soldier of everyday life who only lived to protect his wives and his children from hunger”(Diop 118).

Cultural Preservation and Social Obligation:

A vital component of social sustainability is the maintenance of cultural identity and communal ethics. For Bassirou, agricultural surplus is not intended for capital accumulation, but for fulfilling deep-seated social duties, primarily hospitality. He views the monetization of agriculture as a direct threat to this cultural fabric. He argues that his diverse crop yield allows him to “perform the sacred duty of hospitality” (Diop 119). By transitioning entirely to peanuts, the monetary yield would be insufficient to maintain this community safety net: “Money from peanuts can't feed them all” (Diop 119). He refuses to compromise his moral obligations for economic gain, declaring, “I also do not want to close my door to a hungry traveller because I myself am hungry”(Diop 119).

Community Resilience and Crisis Mitigation:

Social sustainability is tested by a community's ability to withstand and recover from external shocks. Bassirou utilizes historical institutional memory—specifically “the year of hunger”—to demonstrate that resilience stems from shared resources, not capital. Recalling a catastrophic period involving locusts and severe drought, he illustrates that financial wealth would have been useless without tangible food resources. He notes:

“...if we hadn't shared our stores of millet, of red beans, our stores of onions, of cassava, if we hadn't shared our milk and our sheep, we would all have died” (Diop 120).

In times of absolute crisis, the market fails, and only communal solidarity survives. He bluntly reminds the chief that “peanuts wouldn't have saved us then, and the money from peanuts wouldn't have saved us either”(Diop 120).

Economic Autonomy and Resistance to Exploitation:

Finally, Bassirou exhibits a sophisticated understanding of macroeconomics and debt dependency, identifying how forced integration into global markets erodes social equity. He predicts the inevitable market saturation that follows mono-cropping mandates: “...the day when all of the villages in our area only cultivate peanuts, the price of peanuts will go down”(Diop 120).

He exposes the inherent conflict of interest in Abdou Thiam's proposal, pointing out that shifting from subsistence farming to cash crops will force the villagers to buy their food from the chief's own store. Bassirou views this debt cycle as the ultimate destruction of social equity, refusing to “beg for rice on credit, for oil on credit, for sugar on credit” (Diop 119). He warns that consuming their own seed crops in a bad year to survive would force them to buy

on credit from the very people who dictated the prices, leaving the community:

“...poor forever, beggars forever”! (Diop 120).

Bassirou’s resistance represents a clear, holistic defense of social sustainability: prioritizing self-sufficiency, equitable resource distribution, and cultural integrity over precarious financial modernization.

Findings

Through the detailed study of David Diop’s *At Night All Blood Is Black*, the research brings out four clear findings:

1. War Destroys Mind and Morals:

The novel shows that war does not just kill bodies; it breaks the human mind. The horrors of the battlefield turn kindness into cruelty and push soldiers like Alfa into shocking violence to cope with grief.

2. Human Bonds Keep Us Alive:

True friendship and family love act as a shield in hard times. Alfa’s bond with his “more-than-brother” Mademba and his love for Fary show that human connections help a person stay human, even in terrifying situations.

3. Traditional Life Teaches Sustainability:

The character of Bassirou Coumba Ndiaye shows a simple way to build a lasting community. His decision to grow food crops like millet and beans instead of cash crops like peanuts protects his family from hunger and economic traps.

4. Sharing Resources Brings Peace:

Bassirou shares his water wells with migratory Fula shepherds instead of fighting them. This simple act shows that real social sustainability comes from kindness, sharing, and helping your neighbors.

Conclusion

David Diop’s *At Night All Blood Is Black* is much more than a simple war story. It shows us how terrifying combat can be and how easily war destroys a person’s spirit. Alfa Ndiaye’s painful journey proves that violence leaves deep mental wounds that are hard to heal. At the same time, the story gives us hope through human relationships. The deep brotherhood between Alfa and Mademba and the wisdom of Alfa’s father, Bassirou, remind us of what truly matters. Bassirou’s choice to farm for his family’s basic needs and welcome strangers teaches a valuable lesson about living together peacefully. In the end, the novel tells us that wars and cruel systems may break our bodies, but genuine human connection, love, and care for our community will always keep our humanity alive.

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