

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## Faat Kiné (2000)

Ousmane Sembène

### OVERVIEW

*Auteur* Senegalese Writer, producer, and director Sembène Ousmane was born on January 1, 1923 in Ziguinchor, Senegal. He died on June 9, 2007, in Dakar, Senegal. Sembène attended both a qur'anic school and a French school until age thirteen. He then worked with his father, a fisherman, before moving to Dakar in 1938, where he did a number of odd jobs. In 1944, he was drafted into the corps of Senegalese *Tirailleurs* (sharpshooters) and sent to France to fight in the Free French Forces. In 1944 and 1947, Sembène was involved in union strikes, respectively, in Senegal as a railroad worker, and in France as a dock worker and member of the Communist Party. Having dropped out of school early, Sembène had to teach himself to read and write properly. He went on to write several novels, some of which he adapted into films. Sembène's only film training was one year spent at the Moscow Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography, at the age of forty, under Soviet director Mark Donskoy. Sembène, who liked to refer himself as a griot, an African storyteller and historian, produced nine features: *Black Girl* (1966), *Mandabi* (1968), *Emitaï* (1971), *Xala* (1975), *Ceddo* (1977), *Camp Thiaroye* (1988), *Guelewaar* (1992), *Faat Kiné* (2001), *Moolaadé* (2003).

*Film* After a nine-year hiatus following the release of *Guelewaar* (1992), Ousmane Sembène returned with *Faat Kiné*. The film is entirely devoted to an issue that, although central to the Senegalese filmmaker's concerns, appears in his other films only anecdotally: women's overthrow of patriarchy and their seizure of social, economic and - rather suggestively - political power. Beyond this central theme, *Faat Kiné* also deals with issues of responsibility, honor, tradition, education and so on. This two-hour film is set in Dakar, Senegal, with dialogue in French and Wolof. *Faat Kiné* was nominated for the Grand Prix at the 2001 Fribourg International Film Festival.

*Background* The cast of *Faat Kiné* is made up of mostly non-professional actors. There are nonetheless some professional actors, a few of whom first started in Sembène's films. For instance, Tabata Ndiaye (Amy) was in *Ceddo* (1977) as Princess Dior Yacine, and Ismaïla Cissé (Gaye) and Ibrahima Sane (Jean) appeared in *Camp Thiaroye* (1988), respectively, as the soldier-Imam and Sergeant Diatta. *Faat Kiné* was co-produced by Sembène's own film production, Filmi Domireev, and Agence de la Francophonie. The film was edited in Rabat, Morocco.

### CHARACTERS

*Faat Kiné* (Venus Seye): A Senegalese single mother, who is pursued by Gaye and BOP"

*Aby* (Mariama Balde): Kiné's daughter, from her first pregnancy

*Djib* (Ndiagne Dia): Kiné's son, from her second pregnancy

*Gaye* (Ismaïla Cissé): Aby's father

*Boubacar Omar Payane aka BOP* (Pape Faye): Djib's father

### SYNOPSIS

As a young girl, Fatou Kiné (Faate Kiné or simply Kiné) becomes pregnant twice, by two different men, who take advantage of her naivety and dodge their responsibilities. In a traditional and mostly Muslim Senegalese society, where women are expected to have children only within the institution of marriage, and where being a single mother is a sin, Kiné is rejected by her father, who feels dishonored. After years of perseverance, Kiné climbs the social ladder to become the franchisee of the gas station where she started out as an attendant, and she brings up her two children, Aby (from her first pregnancy) and Djib (from her second), until they pass their high school baccalaureate. Then, after nearly eighteen years, the two men who betrayed Kiné reappear, her former high school teacher, Gaye (Aby's father) and BOP (Djib's

father), the first one a retiree with two wives, the second one a homeless man. Both men hope not only to take credit for the children's success, but also to be supported by Kiné, whose financial prosperity makes them imagine for themselves a comfortable life. At the children's graduation party, where they appear uninvited, Djib exposes both fathers for their irresponsibility and immorality, and Kiné kicks them out of her house, permanently shattering their dream of winning her back. Jean, Kiné's Catholic friend and widower, whom her children hope she will marry, and whom they invite to their graduation party, ends up dancing and spending the night with Kiné at her house.

## SCENES

**Women entrepreneurs** On her way to work, Kiné crosses path with some women hauling water to supply the various offices and residences of Dakar. A woman florist supplies Kiné with fresh flowers every day.



**Result Day** Fatou Kiné (Faat Kiné) is a Senegalese gas station franchisee in Dakar. Her two children, Aby and Djib, expect the results of their baccalaureate exam soon. Aby is worried. Her brother reassures her that they will pass because they worked hard this year.



**Jean wants a date** Jean, a customer and friend of Kiné, is visiting her. He, too has one child waiting for his baccalaureate results. Jean asks Kiné if she thought about his invitation for a date. She replies that his wife, Suzanne, was her friend. Jean holds Kiné's hand and retorts that he is not divorcing from Suzanne, and that he has been a widower for years now.



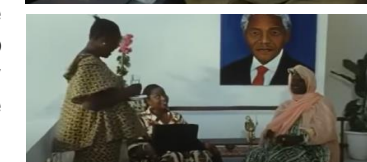
**Aby's father** Aby's father, Gaye, comes to inquire about his daughter's results. As he starts to sit down in the office, Kiné gestures him to stand up. She ironizes that she is touched by his sudden burst of paternal love and interest in Aby's future. She asks him to get out of her office. Kiné promises them a big party. Gaye wants to know what Aby told her mother. Kiné tells Gaye to go back to his wives. Kiné recollects the day she was expelled from school two months before her baccalaureate exam because she was pregnant with Aby, a child she conceived with her teacher, Gaye. At that time, Gaye refused to take responsibility for her pregnancy.



**Kiné's forgetfulness** Kiné's assistant hands her the day's earnings. She puts it in her bag. He worries that she is taking too many risks carrying the money so casually. She reassures him that she will be fine. As she rushes to her car, she forgets to put on her shoes. Her assistant calls her back and hands them to her.



**No cigarette in your father's presence** Kiné and her mother are rejoicing about the children's success. Kiné pulls a cigarette and is about to light it. Her mother tells her that she must not be smoking when her father (meaning her mother's husband) is at home. Kiné apologizes and puts the cigarette back in its pack.



**Mammy's recollection** Kiné's mother recalls what happened when Kiné was pregnant with Aby. Her late father told Kiné that he would never accept a bastard child in his house. He wanted to burn Kiné, but Mammy (Kiné's mother) protected her daughter with her body and was severely burnt. Since that day, Mammy's back and neck have remained stiff from the scars. Gaye refused to marry Kiné when she gave birth, and how this shamed her father. The father disowned Kiné and asked her to start paying him rent or find another place to live with her "bastard." The recollection is painful to Kiné. She sheds tears. Mammy congratulates Kiné for being a good mother to her children and a good daughter to her, but she recognizes



that it was not easy. She worked hard to pay rent to her father every month. Today, she owns her home and she gives her children the opportunities she never had; and she has taken her mother under her wings.

**Aby hurts Kiné's feelings** Djib and Aby have come to their mother's room to give her the good news. Aby tells her mother that she wants to go to college in Canada. Kiné replies that she does not have the means to send her to Canada, and that universities in Senegal are good institutions. Aby hurts her mother by telling her that she does not want to stay in Senegal and end up being a gas station attendant. Djib tries to reason with his sister. Left alone in her room, Kiné cries out her anger. She dares her children to go ask their respective fathers to pay for studies overseas and see what the answers will be.



**A husband for Kiné** Mammy tells the two siblings that their mother needs a husband. The children evaluate their respective fathers. Aby declares that her father is after Kiné now because he is retired with two wives and a flock of children and would love Kiné to take care of him. Djib adds that, as for him, he would kill his father if he came near Kiné again. Djib suggests that Jean would be a good husband to Kiné. He is single, he has his own company, and his son, Joe, is their friend and a member of their club. Aby reminds Djib that Jean is a Catholic. Adèle suggests that if Jean is still single at 72, there must be something wrong with him. Mammy adds that he must be bad luck, for his wife died young.



**Aby and Djib at Jean's office** Aby and Djib visit Jean. They tell him that they know his honorable feelings for Kiné and want him to marry her. They tell Jean that they can arrange a date for him and Kiné. Jean thinks that they have a lot of nerve to come to him with such a proposition. He throws them out of his office.



**A proud man** Kiné thinks she has recognized a handicapped man in a wheelchair. She hails him and runs to him only to discover that she made a mistake. Before leaving, she hands the man some money, but he refuses to take it. He shows her a sign written in Wolof on his wheelchair and tells her that he is a messenger for his own courier company, and that she can pay him when she needs his services. He proudly hands her his business card.



**Kiné peppers Massamba's wife** A woman knocks on Kiné's car window, and Kiné rolls down her window. The woman tells Kiné that she is Massamba Wade's wife and asks Kiné to stop messing with her husband or she will throw pepper in her eyes and private parts. Kiné laughs it off. As the woman leaves, Kiné gets out of her car, calls her back and asks her to repeat what she said. She does. Kiné sprays the woman's face with pepper spray, tells her that her husband is a mere gigolo she pays for sex, and drives away, leaving Mrs. Massamba crying. Massamba complains to Kiné about the way she treated his wife. He tells her that his wife has asthma, and Kiné could have killed her. Kiné laughs and asks him how does he spend so many hours in bed with her if she is asthmatic. Massamba asks Kiné why she must be so vulgar. Kiné tells him that she does not want to see him anymore, and that she has paid him for his services. Amy, a friend of Kiné, comes to see her. They whisper and laugh at Massamba. He gets angry and leaves. On his way out, Massamba tells Kiné's assistant that Kiné thinks she can walk on people because she has money.



**The interests are too high** Kiné stops at the bank to ask for a loan. She decides that the interest rate is too high and will not be hooked on a bad deal. As she leaves, the bank director compliments her for her generous backside. She seems to like the flattery and retorts that it is a top-of-the-line backside, not for everyone.



**Loan Request denied** Alpha, an acquaintance of Kiné has come to see her for a loan. Kiné tells Alpha that he already owes her money, and that he is known for not paying his debts. Alpha turns to Kiné's franchisor, Mr. Thiam, who has just arrived for a meeting. Thiam will not lend Alpha the money. He tells Alpha that with his four wives and multiple children, he lives in a backward age. Alpha curses and leaves.



**Amy is in a polygamous marriage** Kiné, Mada, and Amy meet at a café. Mada propose that they go tour Europe and Asia and come back with some merchandises to sell. Amy tells them that she cannot, and that her father remarried her to a man without consulting her. Amy's friends are astounded. They want to know who the "lucky man" is. Amy tells them that it is Mademba, her former husband whom she divorced fifteen years ago because he wanted to live a polygamous life. Kiné and Mada are even more shocked. Amy tells them that now she will be his third wife. The two friends laugh at Amy. Kiné asks her how she could accept such a thing. She reminds her that she is financially independent and takes care of her parents, her children, her brother, her sister, and her cousin. She tells her that she must not allow her parents to treat her like a little girl. Kiné advises Amy to leave her parents' home and find a place of her own. Amy replies that she cannot contradict her father. Amy tells her friends that Mademba has bribed her parents with tickets to Mecca and pocket money every month. They laugh at Amy and tell her to protect herself against AIDS, for her husband is a womanizer. Amy does not like their comments. She tells them that they are jealous and leaves.



**Amy is single again** Later on, Kiné apologizes to Amy for her comments at the café. Amy tells her friends that she is not married anymore. She tells them that her husband was offended and lost his erection and interest in her when she asked him to put on a condom before sex. He dressed and left her house never to come back. The three women celebrate Amy's regained freedom.



**Djib's father turns up** Kiné's car is blocked in the parking lot by someone who parallel-parked. As she waits for the motorist who blocked her to arrive, a dirty-looking man in ragged clothes knocks on her window. She has trouble realizing that it is Djib's father, Boubacar Omar Payane (BOP). He tells Kiné that he has learned that Djib passed his baccalaureate and is very proud. Kiné recollects how she met BOP and became pregnant with Djib. She was a young gas station attendant and a single mother with Aby. He seduced her and impregnated her. He took her to a construction site and made her believe that he was building a house for them. She gave him all her savings as her contribution to the common project, and he disappeared and never gave news of his whereabouts until today. Kiné asks BOP where he has been for the last seventeen years. He begs her to forget his past flaws. BOP accuses Kiné of not even thinking of bringing him a dish of rice in jail when he was nabbed by the police for forgery. He accuses her of being vulgar in the way she speaks to him now. She tells him that she is no longer the young girl that he impregnated and tricked. Kiné realizes that it is Jean who blocked her car. She is not happy; and he apologizes. BOP recognizes Jean and hails him. Jean cannot believe what BOP has turned into. He tells him to come with him to his place to take a shower and get some clean clothes.

**Djib tells Kiné that she needs a husband** Aby comes home complaining about Jean. She thinks that he is an insensitive man, who blocked her car for a long time. Djib tries to make her understand that Jean is a man with many qualities. Kiné's children tell her that they want to find her a husband. She gets upset and asks them if they are ashamed of her condition as a single woman in spite of the successes she has in life. Djib tells her that they think that she needs a companion with whom to share her life. She asks them that since they seem to have figured everything out, to which one of their two fathers do they want to assign her. She tells Djib that he is already trying to run her life, thinking that he is a man.



**A proud mother** Kiné proudly displays her children's diplomas on her bedroom wall. Aby informs her that she has changed her mind and will go to college in Dakar. Kiné promises Aby that she will save money to be able to send her to Canada after she finishes her undergraduate degree.



**The graduation party** The children have invited their friends for their graduation party. Kiné, Amy, and Mada join in, too.



**Aby's Father Gaye visits Kiné's house** Aby's father, Gaye, arrives at the party with a gift for her. He is accompanied by a friend. Gaye's friend is impressed by Kiné's place and tells Gaye to do all he can to reconquer Kiné and live a comfortable retirement on Kiné's wealth. Gaye tells his daughter that he is very proud of her. He wants to know if her mother has been setting her against him, and why she never invited him to her graduation party. Aby tells her father that Kiné never said anything to denigrate him. She tells him that, on the contrary, it is his household that has not made her feel welcome each time she visited him. Aby asks her father to help pay for her education. He tells her that he has a lot of people who depend on him, and that she should ask Kiné. Aby joins her friends on the dance floor. Gaye turns to his friend and tells him that he knows that it is Kiné who put ideas into his daughter's head just to draw a wedge between them. Gaye's friend advises him to take Kiné as his third wife and his problems will be solved. He tells Gaye that this way, Kiné will take care of everything, him included. The two men come to sit with Kiné, Amy, and Mada. Amy tells Gaye that Kiné has done a good job with her children and deserves an applause. The two women clap for Kiné, which forces Gaye and his friend to clap, too.

**Djib greets his father coldly** Djib's father, BOP, arrives at the party. He is all cleaned up and dressed in clothes that Jean gave him. He introduces himself to the maid, who goes to fetch Djib. The young man greets his father coldly. Their conversation does not fare well. A crowd forms around them. Kiné and her friends come to see what is going on.



**Gaye and BOP are expelled from the party** Djib reminds BOP of what he did to Kiné. BOP tells Djib that he is ready to marry Kiné and fix everything. Kiné replies that she will never marry a man like him. Djib continues to chastise BOP. Gaye intervenes to tell Djib that he has received a bad education from Kiné. Djib turns his anger to Gaye and reminds him that he is not an example of an admirable man. Gaye lifts his hand to hit Djib, but Djib seizes his hand firmly. Kiné and Gaye's friend beg Djib to let go of Gaye. Kiné asks Gaye, BOP, and Gaye's friend to leave her house. Snapping their fingers, Kiné and her two friends drive the three men out, all the way to the street, under the jeers of Djib's friends.



**Jean spends the night with Kiné** Jean arrives at the party and is greeted by the children. Kiné and her friends are glad to see him. Kiné's friends make insinuations as to Kiné and Jean being married. Jean dances with Kiné. Jean and Kiné spend the rest of the night in Kiné's bedroom.



## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**KINÉ** Kiné is a resilient, liberated and audacious woman. At 40 at the time the film is made, she is exactly the age of independent Senegal. She is therefore supposed to represent the new breed of women the filmmaker envisions for a new Senegal. She is a fearless woman, who overturns prejudices about her gender and occupies roles and spaces hitherto reserved for men.

*Resilient* Impregnated twice, first by Gaye, her high school teacher and the father of Aby, and then by Djib's father, and abandoned by both of them, Kiné overcomes life-testing obstacles. Her father disowns her and would have immolated her were it not for the protection of her mother, Mammy. Kiné perseveres

and climbs to the highest echelon of a gas station company. She raises her two kids and affords them the protection and education she never had. She builds herself a big house and is now taking care of her mother, who once protected her against her father's wrath. Kiné succeeds in a world that is organized around the power of men.

*Liberated* Kiné is a liberated woman. She intends to live her life the way she wants it and have nothing imposed by anybody. Thus, when she suspects that her children, who were arranging for her to meet a man, wanted to control her life, she becomes extremely angry. She likes her freedom of movement and choice. She pays a man, Massamba, for sex, but she will not be tied down in the institution of marriage. In fact, as her mother recalls, she once left a man waiting at the altar. Her freedom is not negotiable, and when at the end of the film she falls for Jean, it is on her own turf, in her own house; and it is she who takes the first step and invites him to come take her.

*Bold* Kiné is a brave woman. Her assistant is worried about her coming home at night with so much money in her purse. She tells him not to worry. The bankers want to give her loans at exorbitant interest. She tells them she'd rather go her own way. The men who betrayed her years ago want to come back and conquer her. She lets them know that she does not need their company. When Jean parallel-parks in a commercial district and blocks a car not knowing it is hers, she shouts angrily her disapproval at him, accusing him of wasting her time and preventing her company from making money. Kiné's bravery and audacity are those of a woman who has decided not to let her march to success be impeded by anyone, and who assumes control of her life.

**DJIB** Djib is a character rooted in his African culture, with his eyes set on the future. The African culture Djib celebrates is that of proponents of African sovereignty, such as Mandela, Sankara, Cabral, and Lumumba. Djib's Africa is not that of the reactionaries who made a chaos of African independence. So, he boldly condemns reactionaries such as his father and his sister's father, whom he sees as the corrupt heirs of Africa.

*Ambitious* Djib reveals his agenda to his mother: explore Senegal from top to bottom for a year. Continue his studies in Senegal until he obtains his bachelor's degree. Go abroad for higher education, and return to serve Senegal. Djib's vision is transnational, but first and foremost national. So Djib rejects the advice of his father, BOP, to avoid African universities. This advice clashed with Djib's pan-African awareness, which he expresses by decorating his mother's house with portraits of pan-Africanists such as Mandela (South Africa), Lumumba (Congo), Nkrumah (Ghana), Cabral (Guinea-Bissau).

*Bold* Djib, as the maid, Adèle, says, has the heart of a lion. While his sister, Aby, greets her father, Gaye, with diligence, Djib's reception of his father, BOP, is quite the opposite. Disgusted to see BOP at his graduation party, Djib vilifies and humiliates him in front of the audience. He reminds him of his swindling of Kiné and his paternal failings, and tells him that he is not worthy of lecturing him. Djib is the audacious prosecutor of men who keep Africa in inertia in the name of tradition.

*Transitional* Djib represents Africa in transition. This Africa cannot live with the dead weight of antiquated traditions and the insane morality of its men. Djib is the antithesis of figures like BOP, Gaye and Massamba, a gigolo. His role model would be a man like Jean, successful businessman, responsible father and citizen of irreproachable morality, ready to overcome prejudice to hold hands with another person, on the other side of religious barriers.

**GAYE and BOP (Aby's and Djib's fathers)** Gaye and BOP are negligent and decadent characters. They are not only failed and absent fathers. They also represent the morally crippled postcolonial African elite, who have kept the continent in a degenerating state. Having abdicated their familial and social responsibilities, they are pushed aside by the Senegalese women, who step in to do the work they failed to accomplish.

*Negligent* The father of Aby (Gaye) and the father of Djib (BOP) are absent fathers. After impregnating Kiné, they dodge their paternal responsibilities, leaving her to face her father's anger, society's disdain and difficult living conditions alone. Both have an alibi for their disappearance: BOP was in prison and Gaye was on a mission in Gabon. For Djib, they simply fled out of sheer selfishness and negligence.

*Decadent* For Djib, who is certainly Sembène's mouthpiece, Gaye and BOP are representatives of a patriarchy in disgrace, but which is still clinging to the last vestiges of a debased and aging Africa. This Africa, as Gaye and BOP's condition indicates, is now retired. Its capacity to influence the future is, if not non-existent, at least very limited. What's more, these fathers are being chased out of the youth assembly by Kiné and her friends, Amy and Mada. The only adult male allowed in is Jean, a responsible father.

## THEMES

**Gender inequity** The social expectations placed on men and women by Senegalese tradition reflect gender inequality. While women are expected to have a sober sexuality, exercised within the strict framework of marriage, and preferably for procreation, men can give free rein to their sexual impulses. For example, Kiné, an unmarried woman but financially responsible for an entire family, is treated like a child by her mother. She is not allowed to bring a man into her own home. She is not even allowed to smoke in her own home when her mother's husband visits. And Kiné's occasional encounters with men when she craves sexual pleasure stigmatize her as a flighty woman of unbridled immorality. Kiné also has to watch her language, at the risk of being called vulgar by the men or frustrated by her children. All these social restrictions to which Kiné is subjected do not apply to the men. BOP, Massamba, and Gaye are all polygamists, always on the lookout for women to add to their harem. Despite Kiné's refusal to be pinned down by the social restrictions erected by men for the benefit of men, the social pressure is such that Kiné ends up buckling. She falls for Jean, and as she offers herself to him on the night of her children's graduation party, it is easy to imagine that in this conservative society, their union will end in marriage, thus tidying Kiné up and saving her from her wandering.

**Responsibility** One of Sembène's favorite themes is the question of responsibility. In *Faat Kiné*, the filmmaker addresses the question of family responsibility, but also that of national responsibility. The Senegalese, and Africans in general, have failed in their family and national responsibilities. The failure of family responsibility is that of patriarch, who has managed the family inheritance as an absolute and selfish master, unable to take into account the challenges of the future. This is what Djib blames Gaye, Bop and Massamba for. Responsible men are rare, and Jean and Thiam, the franchisor of the gas station, are only survivors of this evanescent race. The failing patriarchy has already been replaced by women like Kiné, Mada and Amy, whose hard work and insights hold the rudder of the family and the nation, until - and this is the unfortunate aspect of what Sembène seems to be suggesting - a new breed of men emerges to wrest it from them. Indeed, as if to suggest that the weight of responsibility is too heavy for the emancipated Senegalese woman, it naturally falls to Djib, Kiné's male child, foreseen by his high school friends as the future president of Senegal, to define Senegal's future. While Senegal's stability seems compromised by the disgraceful behavior of truculent, sexually promiscuous women fascinated by the West and its failed conception of femininity, male wisdom will triumph and peace will ultimately prevail. It is thus from Djib's mouth, and not from Kiné's or Aby's, that the filmmaker's dream of a new Senegalese order unfurls, precisely because Djib represents less the birth of a new social force than the restoration of an old and dignified Afrocentric might symbolized by the leaders whose portraits are hanging all over Kiné's house.

**Patriarchy/honor** In Senegal, as in many African communities, while the father is the repository of the family's honor, this honor rests on women's respectability. Women must ensure that their actions conform to social morality because otherwise they would sully the respectability of the father, who is the mirror of the family in society. For women, conforming to social morality means having a well-regulated social life, not having sex outside marriage, being legally or religiously married (preferably before the age of thirty), and not being divorced. Kiné has failed to meet these requirements on several occasions: as a teenager, she became pregnant by her married teacher, Gaye. This fault would be excusable if Gaye had saved her by marrying her and recognizing her child, which he refused to do. Disgraced by his daughter's condition, Kiné's father tried to burn her but only succeeded in severely crippling Kiné's mother, who covered her daughter with her body. Kiné's father decided to disown his daughter. Then, as a young gas station attendant, Kiné was impregnated a second time by Djib's father, who also fled after promising her marriage. A single mother for the second time, Kiné raised her children and persevered in her job until she became the manager, secured a comfortable income and bought her own home. Kiné's social success did not, however, spare her the stigma associated with being a single woman. Nor did the upward mobility of her friends, Amy and Mada, spare them the negative judgments of society. Kiné's children and her mother insisted that she marry, and set out to match Kiné with Jean. As for Amy, she was remarried without her

consent to her ex-husband, whom she had divorced to avoid a polygamous union. It is as if social harmony could only be established if a woman's sexuality conformed to her father's laws. For Kiné, her tumultuous life and her language, which Massamba, her friend Jean and even her son find vulgar, are tamed as soon as she falls under Jean's sway.

**Marriage** When young Kiné reveals her pregnancy to her parents, her father rejects her and tells her that he will not accept a prostitute and a bastard child in his home. For the father, unless she has conceived her child in wedlock, Kiné is a prostitute, and the child she carries is a dishonorable bastard. Marriage, then, is the moral institution by means of which one is automatically purified of all deviance. Sembène turns this logic on its head. He presents us with individuals who, within the institution of marriage that is supposed to make them irreproachable, are in fact despicable beings. Gaye, married to three wives, struggles to meet his family responsibilities, cannot pay for his daughter schooling, and relies on Kiné for a happy retirement. BOP is a crook. Massamba is a gigolo. Clearly, marriage is not the measure of morality. Kiné and her single friends are more responsible than any of these men. And yet, the stigma attached to single women haunts them. They are portrayed as vulgar, materialistic and immoral. Their relatives insist that they marry to curb their deviance, which stems from being single. Kiné's mother and children ask her to marry. As for Amy, her father remarries her, without her consent, to her first husband, whom she had left because she refused his desire for polygamy. At the end of the film, Sembène succeeds in romantically tying Kiné to Jean, making their children's plan to marry them highly probable, as if to emphasize that a woman can only blossom if she unites her life with that of a man.

**Religion** Kiné's marriage to Jean, Sembène wants us to understand, is that of two religions, Islam and Catholicism, which in Senegal coexist peacefully, observing and respecting but also distrusting each other. The Muslim religion is very strict in its conception of marriage: it has a negative view of inter-religious marriage, unless the non-Muslim partner converts to Islam. This view of marriage has often held back inter-religious marriages. When they see their parents infatuated with each other, Djib, Kiné's son, and his friend Joe, Jean's son, already imagine them breaking with strict religious exclusivity and leading a married life. For their parents, they advocate marriage outside the mosque and the church, a marriage celebrated by the secular power, that of the mayor. Although timid, this overtaking is not new, and did not wait for Sembène's film to take place. Muslims and Christians have been marrying and living in Senegal for decades. However, financial means have had a significant impact. When one or other of the partners is financially well-off, his or her will has imposed itself on that of the clerics, who prefer to pretend they have not seen anything, allowing the couple to continue practicing their respective faiths. Sometimes, too, the richer partner imposes his or her religion on the other. Sembène's film, by putting Kiné and Jean on the same financial footing, shows that a union that respects each other's religion is possible beyond financial considerations.

**Tradition** There is a Senegalese tradition of shameless begging in the name of religion, which the social authorities are finding hard to curb because of the weight of religion and the power of the clerics. This degrading behavior, which is rationalized by religion, is a gaping wound that undermines the Senegalese's will to appear dignified and independent. In Senegal, beggars are to be found on every street corner, in front of every shop and mosque, aggressively accosting passers-by to the point of snatching their money out of their hands. In the film, Kiné's boss complains that the beggars no longer "ask, but attack". In *Faat Kiné*, we also see *talibé* (beggar children from qu'ranic schools) queuing up to accept coins from Kiné, as the Koran requires believers to give alms to the poor. This precept has become a business plan for some people, who have made begging their livelihood. Madras masters use the children entrusted to them for instruction in the Koran for begging. These little beggars (or *talibés*) bring their masters alms in money and kind, which these masters shamelessly resell. In 2013, Senegalese President Macky Sall announced that "strong measures to put an end to child exploitation" would be taken. These measures have yet to be introduced into law.

**Tradition vs modernity** The struggle between tradition and modernity is played out between the men in Kiné's life, within Kiné herself and between Kiné and her children. Indeed, Kiné symbolizes the modern Senegalese woman. As manager of a gas station, she is financially independent and immune from the urges of patriarchy, which has traditionally used its financial dominance to subjugate women. There was a time when, as a young woman, Kiné was subjugated by the laws of patriarchy. However, by dint of hard work and perseverance, she has emancipated herself and even dictates her laws to patriarchy (Massamba,



for example, becomes her sex toy), which, resting on its laurels, has lost its preponderance, become obsolete and irrelevant. For the children of Kiné, however, the modernism that Kiné represents still has a long way to go and attitudes to perfect. Kiné's children speak to their mother with an audacity that would never have been possible in the traditional society in which she grew up. Aby's words, telling her mother that her profession as a service station manager is not a noble aspiration for her, or that she is no longer a virgin, are shocking and hurtful to Kiné's traditional ego. Djib's words, telling Kiné that her daughter knows more about life than she does, offend the mother's traditional sensibilities. And of these bold, almost irreverent children, the grandmother says they have been brought up by television, not by parents. If Kiné's modernism is transitional, her children's is revolutionary. And just as she shocks traditional patriarchy, which finds her vulgar and pretentious, Kiné is also shocked by the modernism of her children, whom she finds bold, mean and insensitive.

**Transience** (crippled men and powerful women) Senegalese society, Sembène seems to suggest, is in a state of flux. With this evolution comes a change in the roles and spaces previously assigned to men and women. Senegalese women, once submissive and exploited, are asserting themselves and increasingly occupying roles that were the private spheres of men. Kiné and her friends, Amy and Mada, are part of this new breed of women. They no longer wait to be taken care of by men. These are women entrepreneurs or businesswomen, who are financially responsible for their families, and who now leave the house or the country as they please. Despite pressure from society and family, this new breed of women feels under no obligation to marry, and lives comfortably as single women. Kiné even allows herself the sexual services of a man, Massamba, when she feels like it. If women have taken the place of men, it is because men have failed. They have become a race of physically, morally and financially handicapped men, dependent on women. It is Kiné who feeds the city's disabled beggars. It is Kiné who supports the families of gigolos like Massamba by paying them for their sexual services. It is Professor Gaye or Bop, who once impregnated and abandoned her, who now dream of marrying her to guarantee themselves a nice retirement. It is one of Kiné's male colleagues who comes to her in the hope of being lent a million francs to save his business. Through these failed men, Sembène criticizes those who have made a mockery of Senegalese independence. It is, he seems to be saying, that the hope of saving Senegal rests, if not exclusively, at least for a great part, on the Senegalese woman.

**Education** Sembène's hope for a new Senegal, indeed a new Africa, lies not only with women. This hope also rests on youth, but educated youth who want to break the chains of tradition that keep African societies in inertia. To this end, Aby, her brother, Djib, and all their friends in the "Perspectives et Utopies" club, of which they are members, have set themselves the goal of making Djib the future president of Senegal. The traditional roots of these young people lie in the ideology of African sovereignty and pride bequeathed to them by predecessors such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Congo's Patrice Lumumba, South Africa's Nelson Mandela, and Bissau-Guinea's Amilcar Cabral. It is from the source of these heroes that the young people draw in order to embrace their future. Djib also castigates BOP and Gaye, the spoilers of the emancipatory struggle. For Djib, these anti-heroes are a poor example and do not deserve the respect of young people. What is more, the way these elders look at Africa is one of disdain and contempt. BOP, the swindler who has just come out of prison, asks his son, Djib, to avoid African universities and go study in France, where he can put his knowledge to good use. Djib replies that he has no intention of studying in Europe, nor of taking advice from a moral failure like his father.

**Selfishness vs selflessness** Polygamy, the tradition practiced by men in Africa under the cloak of Islam, is a selfish practice. Indeed, Islam recommends not only that the polygamist should have the means to look after his wives properly, but also, and above all, that he should love them and treat them fairly, which makes polygamy virtually impossible, unless one is a saint. However, as can be seen in *Faat Kiné* through the lives of characters like Alpha (an acquaintance of Kiné) and Gaye, the polygamists cannot live by the rules of Islam. They marry one woman, then a second when they find a younger one, then a third when the second wife no longer attracts them. What dictates their polygamous practice is less a spiritual reason than the satisfaction of their libido. Moreover, once married to several wives, they leave them to fend for themselves and look after their children, when they are not begging to feed their families. Very often, it is the youngest of the wives who is lucky enough to benefit from the husband's attention, while the older ones see him only very sporadically. These marriages have nothing to do with the Koranic prescription of polygamy. They are the realization of man's selfishness.

Gaye's return to Kiné, one might be tempted to think, is to finally play his role as a father in the life of his daughter, Aby. But this is not the case. Gaye is a retired man, struggling to support himself and his large family. As it is customary in Africa for children to take care of their parents, Gaye already sees in Aby's passing of her baccalaureate, the blueprint for a daughter who in a few years' time will be employed and have some financial means. So, for Gaye, it is necessary to start getting closer to Aby, with a view to her helping him support himself in his old age. It is this same motivation that leads BOP to his son, Djib, whom he has not seen for seventeen years. And for each of these two men, the jackpot would be to marry Kiné. While Gaye thinks so, but does not say it, BOP says it outright: he is ready to marry Kiné. However, Kiné, who is not fooled and understands that their sudden paternal impulses towards her children are mere artifices, kicks them out of her house under the booping of Djib's friends.

If the men in the film rarely give selflessly, if they only give to themselves, the women, on the other hand, seem to give without expecting anything in return, purely altruistically. To protect her daughter, Mammy, Kiné's mother, gave her back to the flames of a selfish, honor-seeking father, and emerged scarred and disabled forever. Kiné sacrificed herself for her children, confronting her father's chauvinism and society's gossip, to set them on the road to success. She also took care of her mother, to thank her for what she did for her. And it is not only to those closest to her that Kiné gives without expecting anything. She also gives alms to beggars, helps the handicapped, and supports bereaved or needy families through her membership fees to a charity.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does the film illustrate the saying that "the last become first, and the first become last"?
2. What do the characters of Kiné's father, Gaye, BOP, and Jean symbolize?
3. What is your interpretation of the lingering camera shot on women hauling water in the streets of Dakar between the city's high-rises?
4. Kiné leaves her office, forgetting to put on her shoes. What does that suggest?
5. In Djib's character, we can also see the return of a certain patriarchy, even if it is not the same as the old patriarchy. Explain this.
6. To what extent is *Faat Kiné* a feminist project?