

A Consideration of Socio-Cultural Role of Women in *Yeelen* and *Faat Kiné*

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Abstract

The study examines socio-cultural themes in African cinema with a specific focus on Souleyman Cissé's *Yeelen* (1987) and Ousmane Sembène's *Faat Kiné* (2000). The female characters epitomise the role of women within the Bambara culture as interlocutors and mediators between humans against their fellow humans and the deities. The enduring relevance of *Faat Kiné* (2000) cannot be simply glossed over when it comes to the travails of a 'modern' woman within the patriarchal constructed societies that characterise some traditional African states. The study concludes that traditional African women wield some influence in guiding the moral and spiritual direction of their children. In the case of *Faat Kiné*, Sembène appears to strongly suggest that education, and economic empowerment of females are the ingredients that lead to the collapse of male-dominated cultural and religious influence(s) within society.

Keywords: Mysticism, Chastisement, Motherhood, African culture, Interlocutor, Mediator.

Introduction

Africa has many stories to tell about its people and cultures. Prominent in bringing these indigenous stories to the world via cinema are some of the reputed filmmakers of the continent such as Senegalese filmmaker,

Ousmane Sembène, Nigerian filmmaker Tunde Kelani and the Malian filmmaker, Souleyman Cissé. The attempt of telling authentic African centred stories has resulted in making of some cultural centred films, prominent among many is Cissé's own *Yeelen* (1987) (the Bambara word for brightness) and Ousmane Sembène's eponymous titled film (*Faat Kine*). While giving a historical background to the film *Yeelen*, Murphy (2000), mentions that, "the film takes place at an unspecified moment in the precolonial era, and it tells the story of Nianankoro (Issiaka Kane), son of one of the elders of the Komo. Nianankoro, an adept of society, is impatient at having to wait and learn the secrets of the Komo, so he steals one of the sacred fetishes and flees his homeland. However, he is eventually tracked down by his father, and in the film's showdown, both father and son are killed" (p. 245). The film uses traditional African folkloric narrative structure, and costumes reflecting a thirteenth-century life in Mali. In the words of Gadjigo (2002), *Yeelen* is at least on the surface, a flashback into thirteenth century, precolonial Bambaraland" (p. 99).

Aside from the folkloric narrative structure, which is pregnant with symbolism, there is the need to examine the centrality of women's power as a guiding spirit to the men in the narrative. In a far more contrasting approach, Sembène's *Faat Kiné* highlights to a greater proportion, the socio-cultural and economic challenges of womanhood in modern society – the culture of religion, stampede of women's rights and the sufferings of single and/or widowed mothers. The film, *Yeelen*, offers a picturesque Africa of exoticism, mysticism through the culture of the Bambara people of Mali (Shappate, 2021; Barlet, 2000; Murphy, 2000). According to Murphy (2000), "Cissé had begun his career with social realist films in the mode of Sembène. *Yeelen*, however, took a significant turn by exploring mythology and the paranormal in a rural African milieu, much like Omoera (2017) did with the folkloric Benin (Edo) film, *Okpaniya*. The first African film to win a prize at the Cannes Film Festival, and also a popular success in Europe" (p. 245). There is literature discussing the cinematic approaches of Souleyman Cissé's use of mystic forces, characters and an assemblage of elders and griots (Bouchard, 2022; Fisher, 2012; Fisher, 2016). There is no literature highlighting the socio-cultural roles of the female characters in *Yeelen* while the literature in *Faat Kiné*; is scanty when it comes to unveiling the socio-cultural, religious and patriarchal structures that affect the 'growth' of women. The focus of this study is to examine Cissé's attempts at presenting women within the

culture of the Bambara people, and offer deeper socio-cultural analysis of *Faat Kiné*.

Methodology

The methodological approach used in the study of the two films is content analysis. Content analysis is one of the means of understanding media content of which film is an integral part. This process takes into consideration, the philosophy and ideology of the content producer, the socio-cultural background from which the film is made, and the main themes raised in the films. As Shoemaker and Reese (2016) correctly mentioned, “content analysis examines the philosophy of the producer of a media content, and the, “relationships with culture, power, and ideology” (p. 39). In this study, there is an examination of the relationship between the content of the films against the filmmaker’s depicted world—the culture of the Bambara people, the travails of women in Islamic society of Senegal.

According to Krippendorff (2018), “Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” (p. 403). This data, in the case of this studies is qualitative in nature and includes language, characterisation and cultural representation. In the words of Kassarian (1977), content analysis is the, “use of the fictional or historical character as the recording unit is often employed in the studies of fiction, drama, movies, radio, and other forms of entertainment material” (p. 12). The historical characters for which this study concerns itself are: the representation of the potency of motherhood in the characters of the river goddess of the Nile, and the characters of: Mah (Soumba Traore) mother of Nianankoro and his wife, Attou (Aoua Sangare). In the case of *Faat Kiné* characters like Samba Wane, Mamady, and of course Faat Kiné herself become the central focus of the study. In order to conceptualise the representation of women within the socio-cultural worlds of the films the following were used as guidelines: Who are the female characters in the films and what socio-economic challenges do they face? How does the socio-cultural challenges of the women characters resonate with other challenges of women in Africa culture or highlighted by other filmmakers? What is the main source(s) of conflicts in the film and how are they demonstrated in the plots of the films?

Feminism emerged not only on the grounds of women’s rights for universal suffrage, but as a conscious struggle to examine gender roles and how they disadvantage women in the area of politics, culture, economic

(Delmar, 2018, Luxton, 2014, Moses, 2012, Amin & Amīn, 2000). The focus of feminism is to look at how women are disempowered and the apparatuses used in these disempowering processes so as to alter them (Omoera, 2020). There is a general belief that films to a large extent, mirrors society. And that most filmmakers cannot resist the temptation of representing women in films in ways that reflect the society—docile, economically dependent, objects of sexual gratification. The feminist film theory gained grounds in cinema in the 1970s, when it became very obvious that it was necessary to examine the male gaze of the female body otherwise known as scopophilia. Before feminist film theory was conceived, feminist film criticism had emerged in the United States of America in the 1960s as one of fiercest ways of critiquing women disempowerment Cobb and Tasker (2016). In the words of Smelik (2007), the Feminist film theory emerged with the aim of understanding: cinema as a cultural practice that represents and reproduces myths about women and femininity. Theoretical approaches were developed to critically discuss the sign and image of woman in film as well as open up issues of female spectatorship.

Feminist film theory criticized on the one hand classical cinema for its stereotyped representation of women, and discussed on the other hand possibilities for a women's cinema that allowed for representations of female subjectivity and female desire (p. 2). In the cinema, the feminist film theorist is not always out with a negative intention of gauging the stereotypical representation of women, patriarchal myths, voyeurisms and semiotics but to view the filmmaker's evaluations of their world as represented in their films. In its analytical processes used by the filmmaker, "three levels of the cinematic gaze – camera, character, and spectator" vis a vis... the position of women in the film industry, ranging from actresses, producers, and technicians to directors (Smelik, 2007, pp. 1- 2) are examined. In using feminist film theory as a qualitative approach to analysing the films, *Faat Kine* (2000), and *Yeelen* (1987), the study examines the visual components of the movies, the socio-cultural backgrounds of the characters, the camera angles, the locales, the mise-en-scene, the props, the narrative structure, the lighting, and how the filmmakers deal with the cultural images of gender.

Literature Review

Over the years, the use of women in films as a tool of awakening in human beings is very crucial to the path of redemption which is not a new

phenomenon (Aketema & Ladzekpo, 2021, Kwaw Ansah, 1987; Gaston Kaboré, Wend Kuuni, 1982). In the film, *Heritage Africa* (1987), Kwame Bosomfield, the puppet of a local governor did not hesitate to offer his powerful and priceless traditional heirloom to the white governor. It emerges that this heirloom is his spiritual strength. In the words of Aketema and Ladzekpo (2021), “apart from changing his name to ‘rhyme’ with those of his master’s, the lead actor was naked in power and in spirit. This is because he gifts the 500 years old traditional heirloom, the source of his power that was given to him by his mother to the British commissioner, Sir Robert Guggiswood (Peter Whitbread). He clearly disassociates himself from his culture” (pp. 180-181). Eventually, it is his mother who awakened in Kwame Bosomfield the spirit of self-realisation and consciousness. This resulted in the retrieval of the heirloom, one that holds the spirit of his people together and from which he himself would have defeated the colonial forces. Within some African cultures, women continue to face untold sufferings in traditional practices such: as widowhood rites, early and forced marriages (Avogo & Somefun 2019; Stark, 2018; Kyari & Ayodele 2014; Omoera 2020). Besides, most mothers in societies are blamed for the waywardness of their children especially, when it comes to the girl child.

In *Faat Kiné*, Tabata Ndiaye (Mamady), mother of Faat Kiné received the scorch from her husband when her daughter became pregnant. This is similar to what happened in *Adaze*, where one of Adaze’s wives is blamed for her daughter's pregnancy while the philandering husband spends his time drinking and frolicking with other women (Omoera, 2020). The very foundation of this punishment is found in the perception of some men that women are the only parents to form the moral and spiritual life of their daughters. The emotional challenges faced by women when they lose a husband in traditional patriarchal society is highlighted in *Wend Kunni* (Chirol, 1995). The story, which is set within the Mossi and Islamic culture share a similar universal theme of neglect, coercive force to deprive mothers and daughters their rights as shown in the film *Faat Kiné*. According to McLeod (2011), “*Wend Kuuni*, by director Gaston Kabore from Burkina Faso is another film in which the unusual woman plays a predominant role in the story line. In this film, a woman refuses to remarry after the death of her husband. As a result, she and her son are chased from the village. They wander lost in the wilderness until she eventually dies” (p. 84). In *Faat Kiné*, there is a recall of events which highlight the repressive schemes against women in a

patriarchal community. In a series of *Flashbacks* mother Mamady and daughter Kiné, kneeling in front of their husband and father.

Mamady: Forgive her

Samba Wane (Faat Kiné's Father): You knew your daughter was pregnant. Her school wrote she was expelled. Your shame, you keep it to yourself. A bastard will never be born in my house. Never!

Eventually as it is to be expected, Samba Wane expelled wife and daughter for crimes they did not have full control over. It is clear from this, the reason for the pregnancy Faat Kiné is not a thing of importance to her father Samba Wane. Resistance to culture or forms of modern enslavement in the name of culture comes in many forms including escaping, eloping with a much younger spouse or suicide. This is evidenced in *Faat Kiné* and in the example of Mah (Soumba Traore) in *Yeelen*, who was forced to flee with her son, Nianakoro, to an unknown destination (later to the land of Fula people). The changing mode of resistance is often blamed on a generation that has sheer disregard for culture and humanity. Even in the face of human cruelty in the name of culture, or even if the culture has outlived its usefulness, some elements of society still feel the need to perpetuate that undesired culture because it serves the interest of others.

In the case of Wend Kunni, her mother's defiance, an example of resistance to archaic culture saw the women and the men in the Mossi culture beginning to despise her. This ideology of Kabore is to be found in how he challenges society as its own suffocating traditions. According to Martin, and Kaboré (2002), "when people speak of traditional societies, they think of them as being monolithic, as if there were no personal ideals. We show in the film that the personal exists, though perhaps not expressed in the same way as in other societies. It exists in the young woman whom no one was prepared to hear and that caused her husband, Bila, to hang himself. Her words were violent and transgressive of the norms of that society" (p. 168). It is important to mention that seventeen-year-old Wend Kunni was presented as not having a choice as to who to even fall in love with. Martin and Kaboré (2002) explain that, "Kabore at once 'returns to the sources of his ancient culture to address the problems of modern Africa and denounces the archaic and repressive aspects of custom and tradition, and the inferior and debilitating status of women in a complex narrative that invokes the oral story-telling form" (p. 163).

Similarly, the people to have been scorched by fire is not Mamady, mother of Kiné but professor Diop who took advantage of her and later neglected her.

In the face of these social cruelty, it is the victim not the perpetrators who receives the chastisement from parents, society and surprisingly too, their fellow women. As Martin and Kaboré (2002) correctly observes, "The young wife is criticized by both the older women and the men in the village for her defiance and rejection of Bila, her husband. In one scene, Wend Kunni's adopted father comments that the young wife is not properly educated and that times must be changing" (p. 168). Clearly from the film, emphasis is laid on the socialisation or the failure of it. The elders and those who criticised the young woman, together with the society may conclude that they have failed to socialise her or rather, she may have failed to submit herself to the Mossi teachings thereby resulting in her culturally absurd action—refusing to marry a man old enough to be her grandfather. Away from the culture of mysticism and exoticism and how they impede the growth of women is the life of Faat Kiné. Akudinobi (2006) correctly mentions that, "In *Faat Kiné* the eponymous heroine Kiné, a forty-year-old unmarried mother of two teenagers, born in the year of Senegalese independence from France, survives abuse, rejection, and abjection to become a successful gasoline station manager" (p. 182). Inherent in the film are themes of resistance. It is important to notice that in the house of Faat Kiné, posters of Amilcar Cabral, Thomas Isidore Sankara and Patrice Lumumba adorns her halls. But why would Ousmane Sembène labour so much to 'celebrate' this anti-imperialist in a story set in a Moslem community and in a Moslem house of Kiné? The answer to this is to be found in the revolutionary nature of Sembène himself and the character Faat Kiné—single, morally capable, economically independent and more as we would later see in the analysis. The challenges of rejection in one's family requires them to work extra hard to surmount their challenges. The mother of Faat Kiné eulogises her daughter who, an epitome of mother Africa, is abused, exploited and rejected by many. The abuse of Mamady is captured in the dialogue below:

Mamady: Every day I begged God to kill me so I could escape public shame. I also prayed for you to die... he abandoned me. When he died, I did not mourn him. Every month I saw you pay rent to your half-brother; I was hurt Kiné, thanks for everything. You gave to your children what you did not have as a child. When we first moved here, I told you I was lonely.

You told me to choose the man I wanted to marry. (Sembène 2002; 24:00-24:40)

In the words of Sembène himself, he states, “For us, cinema is always a revolution; it has to be an object of revolution. The revolution, being carried out at the practical level, must go through our mentalities. ‘Urbanity’ only allows for the social circulation of things, so it is necessary that it first happens in the head’ (Rapfogel & Porton 2004. p. 83). In this regard, *Faat Kiné* may have been raped, exploited and cheated as the men did to her but she has her own choice. This choice is not to dwell too long in the past, blame others for her woes but rather challenge herself to greater heights. The culture of resistance, of oppression in the name of religion, politics, and economics should equally be met with uttermost resistance even if it means rejecting the undesired past. While highlighting on the film, Fernandez (2019), argues that, “*Faat Kiné* also resonates with the portrayal of women as everyday heroines, resisting the patriarchal system, and standing up for everyday justice for ordinary people” (p. 9). This paradigm of celebrating the socio-cultural resistance of women falls directly in line with earlier calls made by (Nnaemeka, 1997; Sheldon, 2016; Omoera, 2020). They suggested that apart from celebrating women as builders of empires, presidents and queens, it should not make us forget the common but most debilitating challenges of women such as: single motherhood, domestic and religious abuses as well as the right to ‘voice’.

The posture exuded by some men within some African societies are not entirely different from the men in *Faat Kiné*. It is clear while two grown up men: one a professor (Monsieur Boubacar Omar Payane) had impregnated Kiné a senior high school girl and disowned her together with the child. A second man (M. Gaye) would come as a saviour but ended up giving Kiné her worse nightmare—impregnated her and swindle her of her money before fleeing to France. All these happened in a society where decency of elders is a hallmark of excellence. Akudinobi (2006) correctly mentions that, “whereas Kiné’s early pregnancies are framed within the dynamics of power rather than undisciplined sexuality, it is remarkable that the issues of propriety and morality were directed at the men who failed her, including her father, whose patriarchal sense of honour sees his daughter’s predicament as personal failing that confines the family at the margins of respectability. Not surprising, the fathers, from Kiné’s to her children’s absent fathers, are figures of derision through whom her betrayals at the hands of men are indexed” (p.183). After years

of roaming around and meshing up their lives, these men returned to find a well-established business woman of great influence.

At this moment, they feel they are more entitled to Kiné and 'their' children. These are children who even barely know their fathers. Having looked at the challenges of females within the Bambara, and Mossi communities, Sembène brings in a new twist and dimension when he looks at society from the point of view of Islamic communities, a faith he himself professed his entire life. Through flashbacks the viewer is able to infer that when Faat Kiné was impregnated by her Prof, her own father, felt ashamed this would be happening to her daughter. In his attempt to chastise her with fire, he ended up burning Faat Kiné's mother who used her body as a shield. The reasons for these absurd and cruel actions are to be found in the teachings of the Koran and sharia whose morality abhors to a greater proportion, sex or childbearing before marriage. For a crime of fornication that takes two to tango, the men are hardly the victims of Sharia punishment. In the words of Ekhaton (2015), "under the Sharia Penal Code, a husband cannot be guilty of marital rape. Section 127 of the Zamfara harmonised Sharia Code states that:

A man is said to commit rape if he has sexual intercourse with a woman in any of the following circumstances: (a) against her will (b) without her consent (c) when her consent has been obtained by putting her in fear of death or hurt (d) with her consent when the man knows that he is not her husband and that her consent is given because she believes that he is another man to whom she is or believes to be lawfully married (e) with or without her consent when she is under fifteen years of age or of unsound mind.

This provision is similar to the Penal Code. Furthermore, "under Islamic law, a husband may be liable for injury caused or occasioned by forced sex with his wife, but he can never be liable for rape so long as there is a valid subsisting marriage between them" (p. 288). For these reasons, men will not hesitate to execute this religious rights almost to the point of absurdity. Faat Kiné's mother suffered for her daughter's iniquities because father was looking at her crime on face value.

Analyses of the Films

Motherhood as a Guardian and Keeper of Man's Power

In the words of Crowley (2008), "as with other cultures, the Bambara home is seen as a place of refuge and wellbeing" (p. 19). In Sembène's *Faat Kiné*, a mother is simply the home. In this supernatural encounter, of the Bambara society, two women, Mah (Soumba Traore) mother of Nianankoro and later his wife, Attou (Aoua Sangare), becomes the protection and driving force behind the unending legacy of the Nianankoro. It is important to mention that their roles in the films have not received scholarly insight and appeared to be dwarfed or shrouded by the other cinematic styles and proverbial languages by the griots. The guidance of motherhood, however, is the sustaining pillar in the life of the main character Nianankoro. The focus then is not to dabble in what has been discussed about the griots or the mystic power of the Bambara people or offer a critic or review of the narrative structure, but to examine the socio-cultural roles of two women— Mah (Soumba Traore) and Attou (Aoua Sangare).

Examining the Throes of Motherhood in African Culture

One of the assumptions of critics of this film is that, it would be difficult discussing the films without understanding Bambara and Fula cosmology totems and rituals. It is however, important to note that the spiritual and moral direction offered by motherhood sometimes do have universal themes that defy some basic cultural boundaries. Murphy (2000), citing Christopher Miller (1999), states, "it is vital to reject the notion that only Africans can 'accurately' interpret African texts" (p. 246). Nianankoro like most Africans rely on their mothers for direction. Nianankoro have done his divination, looks at his mother for counsel.

Nianankoro: Mother, it is done. But I dislike what I saw?

Mah: What you saw worries you? Son, what did it tell you?

Nianankoro: My father is coming...following his post. He is only two villages away. Wherever we go, he will find us.

Mah: My son, your father is a terror. You don't know him but I do. No one can withstand his magic poison. I know him. You are different. I have braved some fearsome forests, suffered dire humiliations to save you. But I am worried. (Souleymane Cissé, 1988, 0: 05- 06: 55)

While Nianankoro and his mother admit to being terrified by their father, her mother warns him not to fight him. "It would be like preparing your own shroud," his mother said. He would burn you to ashes in one blow. He's a terror. Enough talk let's go. Let us leave this land for good." The film demonstrates that women are not only mothers who offer divine and spiritual guidance, they are also interlocutors for their children. In the film it is noticed that the fleeing Nianankoro, dying out of thirst, started chasing a herd of cattle apparently to milk in order to quench his thirst. Having been accused of being a thief, the director cuts to his mother Mah, making supplications to the goddess of the river Nile to protect her son. Here, motherhood as supreme, motherhood as spiritual supplicants for their children is clearly stated. While it is a father's pursuit that drives a son to the midst of the unknown, to a dried desert, a mother's supplications would as it is inferred save the Nianankoro.

The spirituality of motherhood in African culture

Diawara (1989), explains that, "*Yeelen* which puts into motion conflict between father and son" could have resulted in serious consequences (p. 125). It would be noticed that Mah's charm offered to her son is partly the reason why he Nianankoro did not die at the hands of the bandits. Indeed, it was from these great deeds that he found favour with the king and married his first wife even though through some unpalatable conditions. Nianankoro's "son Nankama (destined for), a title also used to the praise songs of Sundiata and Kambili" (p. 124), becomes the brightness that would shine in the family of the Diarra. Without the birth of Nankama, the spiritual battle that eventually saw father and son dead would have resulted in a total extermination of the house of Diarra. This is after both father and son are each destroyed in their mystical and spiritual fights in the final showdown. These are the supplications of Mah as she undertook her ritual bath in the river: *Don't let weeds overgrow the house of Diarra* (Souleymane Cissé, 1988, 22:10- 22: 30).

To offer deeper insights on the power of Mah require us to understand the position of women in the spiritual and socio-cultural position of women in the Bambara society. According to Crowley (2008), "Colonials and early western anthropologist and historians may have been quick to overlook or underestimate the early African woman's role in society; the honoured position of Malian women historically held is apparent throughout the culture's oral tradition...in fact, the god of the Bambara people, Ba Faro, is represented in form of a beautiful woman—goddess of the Niger. It is the Faro who is said to empower things

to happen, and it was she who taught the first men-with whom she descended on the earth—the main creative activities (agriculture, fishing, forging)” (p. 13). Mah is very much aware that her son cannot stand her evil husband. Aside of that she knew her son would wander off to enemy territories where the worst of hostilities await him. For this reason, she hastened to the river goddess of the Nile and with four calabashes of milk, offer her supplications.

Mah: Do you hear this forlorn creature?
Do you hear me, mother of mothers?
Do you hear me goddess of the waters?
Do you hear this helpless mother?
Save my son! Keep him from harm.
Save this land from ruin! (Souleymane Cissé,
1988, 22:10- 22: 30)

It is instructive to add that these four calabashes are each positioned in four cardinal points. This in itself suggest that she does not only supplicate for the peace of the world but the household of the Diarra’s and of course her beloved Nianankoro who has wandered off to the unknown due to the threat of his father. Souleymane Cissé, appear to suggest that men take the glory when the women labour for their sons. When Nianankoro returns from the Fula people with a wife, one he could not have got without the intervention of his mother, his kindred extoled him saying:

Dejiue: Nianankoro, your coming gives me boundless pleasure. Thank the gods for this favour. I thank them in the name of our family. Even if I were to die today, and the same is true of you, our family would not perish. Your wife is pregnant. A child with lunar radiance. It is a boy. A child filled with lunar radiance to be one of the brightest stars.

To crown it all, Diawara (1989) extols her saying, “the old woman (Soumba Traore) Nianankoro’s mother is beautiful, thoughtful and resourceful” (p. 125). The same could be said of Faat Kiné.

Single Motherhood and Widows in African Culture

Jean finds himself in a situation where he lost his wife. A very good and successful man, he feels that his life would be better if he falls in love or

marry Kiné. When Jean requested that Kiné accepts his invitation and ‘go out’ with him, Kiné was mindful of what Jean was requesting from her.

Jean: What about us leaving the children and the problems aside? When will you accept my invitation?

Faat Kiné: Jean, don’t forget that Suzanne was my friend!

Jean: Suzanne and I did not divorce; I am a widower. And for years, I am being honest (Ousmane Sembène, 07: 00-7: 50)

Mwenda (2007) claims that “widows are generally trodden upon, poor and least protected as their lives are determined by local, patriarchal interpretations of tradition, custom and religion (p. 1). The mother of Faat Kine, Mamady, found herself in that situation and Kiné herself though not a widow per se finds herself sacked in the patriarchy of tradition, custom and religion. Her reason for not hastening to the invitation of Jean is that his late wife Susana, who passed more than a decade ago is her friend. It is important to understand the cultural challenge of public propriety, which is to be found in most African cultures. A man loses his wife, and could marry within a year with no one asking any question. However, if a woman does so, she receives scorn and chastisement from her culture (Ezejiolor 2011; Young, 2006). Indeed, Kiné struggles every day to reject the pestering of men including: M. Gaye, Massamba Wade the gambler, Boubacar Omar Payane and others. A scene of her on the phone and other suggest her travails of being beautiful, yet single:

Faat Kiné: Do you want my opinion? Don’t whine; take care of your wife.

We share the day with you and at night we are your queens.

Ok, your car is ready. Send your driver for it (Ousmane Sembène, 09: 10: 09: 56)

Here, she tries desperately to tell the married men who try to woo her heart to hang onto their wives.

Gaye: Is that Aby on the phone?

Faat Kiné: You are getting on my nerves. Can’t you go back to your wives?

From this moment Faat Kiné recalls her expulsion from school because of her pregnancy. It is important to mention that Sembène tells of

some average thinking men and what they want from women. It is their fame, economic status but not the love of the woman. Sembène captures this in the dialogue:

Aby: When Kiné was a poor high school student, my father did not want to marry her...now that he is retired with 2 wives... and a house full of kids. He is looking for a heaven... He wants Kiné to take care of him... I do not agree with such arrangement.

Mamady: Wow! What about you Djib, your thoughts?

Djib: If today my father tries to take advantage of Kiné, I could kill him!

Mamady: God forbid ...never go that way.

Flash back (friends walking)

First Friend: What did he say?

Faat Kiné: Less than 2 months before the exams, he expelled me from school.

First Friend: What about Prof. Gaye? He has to do something. Isn't he your child's father? (13: 10)

Second friend: Professor Gaye is really a jerk

Mamady: When you got pregnant out of wedlock the first time...Your father was so furious that he wanted to burn you alive. I intervened to shield you with my body.

Mamady: The scars from the fire stiffened my back like a dead tree. At school, you wanted to be a lawyer. I was proud and flattered at the thought. I counted on you so much. You got off the camel to get on the donkey. When you brought the world your first baby daughter, her father refused to marry you. Who blamed me for what you did, he repudiated me; then he disinherited you? (Ousmane Sembène)

The above words from Mamady affirms an observation from Olayiwola (2020) who having analysed Nigerian films concludes that "the mothers often function as sacrificial lambs who save the family from disaster, chaos, and anarchy" (p. 30). The self-acclaimed righteous one in the person of Samba Wane, before his abuses had attempted to burn Faat Kiné. It was her mother who received the burns in her stead. It is strange

why the father would feel absolved from the 'waywardness' of her daughter, worse still, lay every blame on her mother. Having said this, it has now been culturally and economically confirmed that most single mothers "in the home understand their motherhood responsibility and as role models to their children and society" (Oghogho, Ojoboh & Oboh 2020, p. 26). It is important to state that society including Faat Kiné's father, Samba Wane, a man notoriously steeped in the culture and traditions of Islam could not judge the predicament of Kiné on its own merits. The fact that she had children before marriage reduces her to a prostitute. Let us consider the following dialogue in the context of our discussion:

Samba Wane: I don't support prostitutes. You will pay rent, water and electricity. Otherwise you will have to leave my house.

If a father would carry this kind of ill-treatment to her daughter, be rest assured the rest of it would come from society. However, over the years the same society that chastised her begun to welcome her back or rather, accept her for who she is. A Malam, an Islamic scholar of spiritual and moral worth supplicates for Kiné.

Malam: Kiné, let's thank the Lord and his prophet Mohammed! Your mom and I are praying to God for you to have a worthy husband

Mamady: Amen

Lamentations of Motherhood

The challenges of motherhood are sometimes to be found in the lives of the very children they have suffered so much to protect. These children unaware of the pains of their mother's past and present offend mothers in many ways. The reason for this is partly due to what Mamady in the film calls the children cultured by the 'TV generation'. Imagine the following encounter of Kiné with her children:

Faat Kiné: My dear, the door to the university are open to you
(Ousmane Sembène, 27:00-27: 58)

Aby: All I'm thinking about is a trip to Canada.

Faat Kiné: Aby, you will have to reconsider your plans.

Aby: What? The baccalaureate 'a' isn't worth anything according to you? In Canada, I'll work to supplement what you will send me.

Faat Kiné: Come down. I have looked at it. Foreign students are not allowed to work in Canada.

Aby: You want to waste my future!

Faat Kiné: Of course not, my dear. It's a question of money. You can't understand that?

Aby: I've passed my British Accreditation Council (BAC) and don't want to become a gas station manager (Ousmane Sembène, 27:50-28:30)

Here is a clear case of a culture of ignorance and impunity, which is most probably influenced by television. As a single mother of two Kiné, struggles to fend for her children's education as a gas station manager now receives these words from her very children.

Faat Kiné: You are mean and cruel.

Djib: You know we decided to get our BA at Chiekh Anta Diop University in Daker. After that, we will go to European Universities and come back here.

Faat Kiné: Egoistic! Mademoiselle does not want to become a gas station manager. Go! Go ask your father to pay for your studies in Europe. Go on. Go on both of you. (Ousmane Sembène, 28:50-29:30)

Problematizing Marriage

Sembene did not hesitate to mention that Islam at a certain point in Senegal was a problem for women. This he situates to the reign of Abdou Diouf president of Senegal 1981 to 2000. In this era marriages had a more theocratic sanctioning under the laws of Islam than the more secular approach under his predecessor, Senghor. Perhaps, it is this decree by Abdou Diouf, which propelled men to lean on 'Koranic' teachings to uphold certain entitlement, which benefited them to the detriment of their mothers and daughters. Mamady explains: She once had one ... when we moved in here.....after about a year, when Senghor handed power to Abdou Diouf...The marriage was sealed in a Mosques but Kiné kicked everyone out.

Aby: Tell me mommy, how can you marry a woman without asking her?

Mamady: It is called authority But since then I learned my lessons. Mamady: I did not bring you up; you belong to the TV generation.

Women as Oppressors of Other Women

In most societies, and in some African films too, single, widowed and successful mothers are sometimes accused of deriving their success through husband snatching. Women are those who, out of jealousy accuse their fellow women on this. Mamady is a single mother who toiled to raise Faat Kiné and her children in a culture of Islamic society that strongly detest childbearing before marriage. Ousmane Sembène tries to very much help us understand that motherhood is not only supreme, but that there are very hard working and single mothers whose economic power and independence is hinged on their own personal innovations and hard work. According to Odi (2016), “This exhibition of strength may probably be due to the fact that they are widows and do not have visible male family members to make and take decisions on their behalf. They are thus emboldened by their circumstances and take charge of their lives and issues concerning their children” (p. 205). In the dialogue below, it would be noticed that the woman, Massamba Seck accuses Faat Kiné of exploiting her husband economically.

Massamba Seck: I want you to stop messing with my husband.

Faat Kiné: Who are you? Who is your husband?

Massamba Seck: I am Massamba Wade’s wife.

Faat Kiné: Massamba Wade the gambler? That is your husband? (*Laughs scornfully*)

Massamba Seck: Folks like you don’t get married they destroy other people’s marriages...listen, if I catch you sleeping with him, I’ll kick your ass. Did I make myself clear? That is all.

Faat Kiné: (chases Mrs Wade and peppers her eyes), who are you to talk to me like that? When I need a man, I pay your husband for his services. He is the king of gigolos and you are the queen of whores. (Ousmane Sembène, 40: 00- 41: 35)

Kine has gone through hell to resist the lustful advances of Massamba Wade. Now for the mere fact that Massamba has been trailing her and talking to her has given the indication to Mrs. Massamba that she,

Kiné is after her husband. She calls Kiné a marriage destroyer, and an exploit.

Conclusion

The travails of women in some African communities are steeped in culture, religion and general nurtured perception. In the films, *Yeelen* and *Faat Kiné*, women remain the protectors of man's power, they are the builders of homes and they ensure that the lineages are perpetuated. The socio-cultural challenges of women most of which are immersed in religion, their very being as women within patriarchal constructed societies continue to be the bane of the development of women economically and socially. In light of *Faat Kiné*, *Yeelen*, and Kabore's *Wend Kunni*, it is evident that social-nonconformity remains one of the most effective means of combating socio-cultural and religious injustices in the name of culture.

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