

Études littéraires africaines

Faat Kine and the Feminism of the Old Man

Kenneth W. Harrow



Numéro 30, 2010

Ousmane Sembène

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1027344ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1027344ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association pour l'Étude des Littératures africaines (APELA)

ISSN

0769-4563 (imprimé)

2270-0374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Harrow, K. W. (2010). *Faat Kine* and the Feminism of the Old Man. *Études littéraires africaines*, (30), 20–32. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1027344ar>

Résumé de l'article

Faat Kine (2000), c'est l'anti-*Xala* (1974) : ce film tardif semble complètement renverser les structures et la pensée à l'oeuvre dans la production antérieure, et l'on peut se demander pourquoi Sembène rompt ainsi avec sa critique du capitalisme. Dans *Faat Kine*, l'auteur aborde en effet les impératifs féministes dans le cadre d'une économie libérale qui limite la libération à une égalité consentie dans un imaginaire phallogocentrique : en somme, « un féminisme à l'ancienne ». De façon plus générale, *Faat Kine* comprend un élément mélodramatique, et dans ce cadre, une opposition binaire et manichéenne entre le bien et le mal qui ne fait pas dans le détail mais verse plutôt dans le déterminisme : nous sommes exposés au tableau misérabiliste d'un ordre injuste, mais cela permet en dernier ressort de prendre conscience de notre opposition à la patriarchie : ce sont là tout à la fois la finalité et les limites de l'idéologie du film.

FAAT KINE AND THE FEMINISM OF THE OLD MAN

Résumé : *Faat Kine* (2000), c'est l'anti-*Xala* (1974) : ce film tardif semble complètement renverser les structures et la pensée à l'œuvre dans la production antérieure, et l'on peut se demander pourquoi Sembène rompt ainsi avec sa critique du capitalisme. Dans *Faat Kine*, l'auteur aborde en effet les impératifs féministes dans le cadre d'une économie libérale qui limite la libération à une égalité consentie dans un imaginaire phallocentrique : en somme, « un féminisme à l'ancienne ». De façon plus générale, *Faat Kine* comprend un élément mélodramatique, et dans ce cadre, une opposition binaire et manichéenne entre le bien et le mal qui ne fait pas dans le détail mais verse plutôt dans le déterminisme : nous sommes exposés au tableau misérabiliste d'un ordre injuste, mais cela permet en dernier ressort de prendre conscience de notre opposition à la patriarchie : ce sont là tout à la fois la finalité et les limites de l'idéologie du film.

*

Faat Kine (2000)¹ is the anti-*Xala* (1974)². In many ways, the patterns and thought of the earlier work are apparently reversed in this anomalous later film, leading us to wonder how to explain why Sembène seems to have departed from his long-standing views. Perhaps it is due to the way in which he envisions the exigencies of a feminist agenda, his being what I have called « the feminism of the old man »³.

¹ Sembène (O.), *Faat Kine*. Fiction, 35 mm, 120 min., Doomireew, Sénégal, 2000.

² Sembène (O.). *Xala*. Fiction, 123 min., Société Nationale de Cinématographie / Filmi Doomireew, Sénégal, 1974.

³ When I first used this term, what I had in mind was the notion of Ngugi, Sembène, and Beti's generation for whom the image of the long-suffering woman, victim of an oppressive patriarchy, was to be countered by the figure of the strong, powerful, even dominant woman who now assumes the positions formerly occupied by men only. The problem I had with this « solution » was that it left intact phallogocentric values, phallogocentric logocentrism in which the binary model of gender identity remains in place, with women joining the club without disrupting the structures responsible for domination. What was needed, in my view (expressed more fully in Harrow (K.W.), *Less Than One and Double : a feminist reading of African women's writing*. Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann, 2002, XXVI-350 p.), was a radical feminism that reconfigured the subjec-

On the surface, the patterns of the two films appear to be opposites. In *Xala*, we have an older man taking a third wife, an act whose inappropriateness is marked by the incongruities of their ages. El Hadj is clearly matched to Adja Awa Astou, his first wife, by age and common life-history. Both came of age as Africa passed into its Independences, and both represented the New African activists, anti-colonialists, modern in their engagement in progressive causes and work. El Hadj was, like Sembène himself, a union organizer. And Adja was not limited by her religion – that is, her family's commitment, in her choice of spouse (in the novel version, Sembène presents her as originally a member of the Catholic community on Gorée). They were embodiments of the agency that made them figures of a new age : they chose the path for Africa's future.

With his second wife, El Hadj becomes an arriviste and polygamist. No longer the union organizer, he is now a successful enough capitalist to pay for a second wedding and to maintain a second household. Where the attributes of his first marriage are a wife who was a religious convert, and children whose actions denote concern for others and for education, the second marriage seems to be marked by a fall into less admirable qualities. The elder daughter of his first marriage, Rama, is marked by intellectual attributes : a progressive boyfriend, university education, Senegalese nationalist pride, culture given to film and literature. The children of the second marriage ask for and expect to receive money, as does their mother. She is the semi-stereotypical *assimilée* for whom femininity is presented in the need to be a sexually attractive object for her man, and whose notions of that attractiveness are marked by Frenchness. El Hadj matches those tastes with his own proclivity for French bottled water and for speaking French to Rama despite her preference for conversing in Wolof. He is not simply bilingual, not given to code-switching which would indicate acceptance of both languages and their cultures on equal footing, but chooses to appear to be the sophisticated French speaker when possible. His clothes, too, are European, and « Europe » signifies wealth. Thus his first marriage belongs to an earlier age marked by relations and values grounded in « use-value » ;

tivities, that saw subjectivities being constructed so as to avoid the limitations of the unified, unitary subject and the metaphysics of presence. In short, I envisioned a deconstruction of conventional feminism, not its reform.

his second with the corruption of assimilation into an age given to exchange-value, commodification, late capitalism.

The third wife marks the completion of his decline into an age of commodity-fetishism. As Mulvey points out ⁴, his third wife functions like a fetish object, especially in the Marxist sense : a commodity to be owned, seen, admired for its value as the possession that shows off the owner. The house where the marriage takes place is filled with the nouveau riche class of arrivistes whose presents, clothes, speech, demeanor, all indicate the corruption of the new ruling class, and whose portrayal functions as an indictment of neo-colonialism. The connection between their symbolic roles as corrupters of the New Africa and their portrayal appears to work as a symptomatic reading, so that they can function within a parody, appropriate for the form of critique we would expect in a modernist, pre-postmodern text. In contrast to Jameson's pastiche, which would seem to eschew the certainties of a critique grounded in a grand narrative, we have the vulgar Marxism of *engagé* socialist realism in which characterization functions to explain class value and the abuses of the class system.

If this simple schema doesn't quite suffice to explain *Xala*, it is because the recourse to Wolof, to Africanness, to local sensibilities embodied in dress, music, and mise-en-scène, exceed the ideological parameters. So persistent are these elements that they succeed in displacing the limited horizon of the ideological and even the diegetic frame. Perhaps most memorable is the shot of the beggars returning to the city after being expelled by the police. They return from the unseen location where they had been dumped, crawling and limping over the sandy hills, creeping back until they reach the buvette where they gather for breakfast. They speak to their difficult situation, regrouping around the jokes and solidarity that bring them together as a Wolof community more than as the scattered bits of a lumpenproletariat that would characterize a Marxist view of them. As they were on a mission to take revenge for El Hadj's crimes and sins against them, against the past, against the village community, and against the hopes of Independence and its struggle, they were also on a mission to repair and reconstitute that

⁴ Mulvey (L.), « *Xala*, Ousmane Sembene 1976 : The Carapace That Failed », in *Third Text*, n°16-17, Autumn / Winter 1991, p. 19-37 ; reprinted in Williams (P.) and Chrisman (L.), eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*. New York : Columbia UP, 1994, p. 517-534.

community by amending and reincorporating their lost son. That would be too heavy a message for the film's machinery to bear without rendering it overly creaky. But their demeanor, jokes, music, appearance, and actions present more than the sketch of a message: they redeem the Sembène night school teaching with their anchoring in the culture of Dakar's street people whose days and nights are spent out on the street where they must beg and live out their lives.

For purposes of comparison with *Faat Kine*, there is a bottom line to our glance at *Xala*. In the earlier work, the bourgeoisie has become corrupted, has betrayed the sacred trust of the struggle and independence, has generated a society of haves and have-nots where the poor were robbed and are now exploited and mistreated. It is only from the poor that the redemption of society can come, that the rich can be restored to their humanity. That explains why even the sympathetic Rama and Adja Astou are made to be discomfited with El Hadj's humiliation at the end. They need to be redeemed from the stains they bear from their class affiliation as well, which can be seen in their attempts to counter and expel the poor from their expensive home. What Peter Brooks calls the moral occult of melodrama functions here beyond pure ideology⁵. The sense of good and bad that underlies the demand for justice and humane treatment of the other exceeds the strictures of a class-based analysis. It explains how the parody, jokes, and sympathies of the film urge us to embrace the activist's vision for change that can't be reduced to a class-based revolutionary credo. In moving back to Africa, Ousmane Sembène has had to move the struggle to a new habitus, while keeping the class based sympathies alive.

With *Faat Kine*, those sympathies have radically shifted. In fact, *Faat Kine* presents a divided world. In Kine's past, we have the melodramatic story of her youth where she is made the victim of her father and the two men who fathered her children. On each occasion, Kine fails to confront the menace that the men represent. They have the power to abuse her, and she falls prey to them. Thus her father as family patriarch appears as a violent monster who throws a pot of boiling water at her when he learns she is pregnant out of wedlock. He fails to harm her since her mother throws herself in the way, the scalding water scarring Mamie's back

⁵ Brooks (P.), *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, melodrama, and the mode of excess*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1976, xvi-235 p.

horribly. Kine and her mother are ultimately expelled by the father. This is the side of the ugly patriarch depicted as characteristic of the Old Africa : traditional, poor, uneducated ; living in obscurity, untouched by humanistic progress. It is a portrait of an African past in which women were subject to male abuse – an image strikingly conveyed in Sembène's earliest works, including *Vehi Ciosane* (1965) and *Tauw* (1970), where the daughter or daughter-in-law's pregnancy accentuates her victimization.

In melodrama, the Manichean binary of good and evil works in unrelieved fashion and in a deterministic manner : we are shown the miserabilist portrait of an unjust order so that we might be conscientized. There is an unrelieved tedium to such portrayals because both implied author and audience are assumed to have access to a truth that the villainous father would seem not to have. This blindness is matched by his power and conveyed in the abruptness of his language which is seen in his giving orders and abusing his wife or daughter. Thus Tauw's father accuses Tauw of stealing from him, and Kine's father throws her out. Similarly, the Professor Gaye who has relations with Kine when she was a lycéenne throws her out, when it is discovered she is pregnant. He speaks a single word : « Dehors ». That word echoes and returns in the present when the now disempowered Gaye is thrown out of Kine's office in the gas station.

After Kine is expelled by Gaye, thus preventing her from completing her bac, she has a child, and then meets another man, Bop, who deceives her. He cons her out of her money, impregnates her for a second time, and then flees the country. Eventually he is arrested for using false papers and is imprisoned. When he returns, in the present, he has apparently lost everything, and is now repellently odiferous and raggedy in appearance.

In short, the three men of power associated with Kine's hardships in the past are all examples of the abuses and failures of the patriarchy that marked both the Old African and the Africa of the time of transition to independence. What's striking is how they are all also associated with poverty. Kine's father's home is dark, dingy, and especially modest – like those Sembène associated with life in the quartier or village. Bop has become homeless. Gaye appears at Djib and Aby's graduation party to claim his paternal rights over Aby, but when she asks him to help with her university expenses, he is shocked and replies that his pension doesn't suffice to pay for his wives' and children's

food, much less her additional expenses. He sees Kine as rich, now a desirable woman to be added to his connubial arrangement. The three patriarchs are not like El Hadj, rich and powerful, but poor and pathetic. Not only are they morally weak, but they are lacking in character. Bop and Gaye are dressed down by Djib, mocked and hooted out of the graduation party by the youths and women. They are accused of embodying the failures of the generation to lead the country forward.

El Hadj took three wives and asserted traditional, Muslim, patriarchal claims over them, signs of the abusive power of the *nouveau riche* generation of Africa's new ruling class. Kine is victim of three men in her past, men who are now poor, dismissed, rejected, repugnant. The reversal is not only generational – even Kine's mother is now shown as dependent on her daughter – but engendered. Kine rules over the men in all her relations – business as well as personal. She dismisses Moss, her lover ; commands the huge Sanga, her employee, along with all the other men who work for her or come to her for various needs. She pays the male talibe who come to beg ; helps buy a wheelchair for Pathé, a handicapped man who is strong enough to kill two people with a knife ; mockingly dismisses Alpha, another gas station owner who beseeches a loan from her ; laughs off the advances of the bank manager when he refuses her terms to a loan – every imaginable relationship that Sembène has used in the past to show the African woman as victim has now been reversed.

The image that marks this reversal is that of Kine driving her children, smoking, and berating those who are obstacles to her path. As Kine now drives, is now in control, in charge of her life and her relations, she is seen to occupy the man's place. The revolution of yesterday seems as distant as a flashback to a long-gone past, as yesterday's Africa. The images of the successful woman she embodies have no correlation with Rama, the « modern » daughter of El Hadj, the former model of the revolutionary woman, the Senegalese cultural nationalist. Kine gives alms, and the silent subalterns who receive them have no more illusions about creating a New Africa, aside from money. In fact, it is her patron, the smart looking head of the Total Station owners, who dismisses Alpha as representing the Old Africa ; now what is new is measured in terms of monetary value. And Kine is what is new, the New Africa, autonomous and well off. Her success is entirely assured by her and her women friends' capacity to consume the commodities available to them like

candy : surplus consumption, trips around the world, ice-cream for the wealthy to offer each other on the occasions of their celebrations.

The men of the contemporary Africa now seem to have fallen to these New Women, to Kine and her friends. Even the Europeanized Senegalese woman whose car had been held when she had attempted to pass off counterfeit bills to Kine's station, even she is visually presented as being in charge of her relations with men : she is last seen pushing her white French husband out of Kine's office. As for the patriarchs, we are offered two models : the failures, constituting the three botched fathers – Kine's own father, and the fathers of her two children – and the successful Jean, Kine's softer Catholic suitor. Yet even Jean is victim of her tirade when he inadvertently blocks her car in. She yells in vulgar terms, You don't mind costing me time and business while you go about doing your business, and all he can do is shake his head and say, Kine ! Jean serves at her command at the end. In the final shot in the film, we see her toes wriggling with pleasure as she orders him to come to her.

As for the true male heroes, again there are two models. Those of the old generation – Mandela, Sankara, Lumumba, Nkrumah, and Cabral – whose portraits adorn the walls of Kine's home. Indeed, the camera tellingly frames her alongside them when she argues with her children. The second heroic model, the new generation, is provided by her own son, Djib, aka Presi. He is a strong, assertive lycée graduate, about to enter the university – significantly named after Sembène's great cinematic compatriot, Djibril Diop Mambéty. Though Aby's junior, Djib takes charge of his relationship with her, and attempts to manage his mother's affair with Jean. It is he who tells off the older generation of failed fathers at the graduation party, and extols the virtues of his mother. Ironically, Presi would seem to restore the « Law of the Father's » honor lost by the old patriarchs, just as Jean restores Kine to the position of a future spouse. The current order of the women, of Kine and her two friends, constituting the triumvirate of the New Women, thus appears to be an interregnum.

Nothing in Sembène's previous work would seem to have prepared us for this bizarre celebration of class privilege, this bizarre « feminist » reversal of male power –nothing except the endless series of expressions of male anxiety over the loss of their privileged position, a continual motif in contemporary African film and literature. We have to turn to the question of genre-gender to make sense of Sembène's new

turns in this film. For if the gender politics are those of the « old man », the genre politics are those of the New Africa, *i.e.* liberationist politics. And those were always there in Sembène's work, from his magisterial *Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960) to *Tauw* (1970) to *Xala* (1974), to *Moolade* (2004). I am referring to the subordinated genre-work accomplished in melodramatic form : 1. the work of family romance in the past, then passing by way of 2., the melodrama of the present to 3., the soap opera of the future. Three women's modes, women's weepies as they were called in the 50s in Hollywood. Women's films, films about women and their struggles, their griefs, they overcoming of obstacles, their moral order.

If there is a feminism of the old man, there is a womanism of the old order, and its refurbished modes have now become dominant in contemporary African literature and cinema. It is easiest seen in Nigerian video dramas, Ghanaian video dramas, and their many offshoots across the continent. The central features of melodrama are typically present, and were early signaled by Jonathan Haynes. A consumerist capitalism, featuring overstuffed couches, at times garishly appointed residences, shiny sports cars, bejeweled and sexily bedecked women – all the features of those who have arrived and are prepared to show it off. We do not see this, so much, in *Faat Kine*, though those more familiar with the Dakar scene recognized its muted features in the cityscape of Point E and its ice cream parlor LGM, and the shots of cars circulating around the downtown Place de l'Indépendance. Kine's home is the real locus for the woman's private drama, and as a Dakar villa it represents real success in its furnishings, size, and grandeur. It is also built in a newly developed area – that emblematic of the New. This overvaluation of consumerism is a feature of globalization's new hold on the dominant social order, but melodrama was always about two things : the anxiety over the passage into the modern, and the pleasures of owning and consuming. The triumph of consumerist capitalism, commodity fetishism, has had to be negotiated with the older versions of national liberation ; but the contradictions are sublimated into the crypto-feminist vision of the rise of the woman. Whereas womanism entailed a form of liberation gendered purple ⁶, now it is dyed with

⁶ The term womanist first appeared in Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens : Womanist Prose* (San Diego : Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983, XVIII-397 p.), in which the author attributed the word's origin to the black folk expression of mothers to

the colors signifying wealth, wealth being the signifier for a success that subsumes all other earlier forms of struggle.

The earlier form alluded to above, that of the family romance, entails the struggle of the child to reject the oppressive Name of the Father by repudiating all genealogical ties to the figure of the patriarch. Like Superman, the child sees himself or herself coming from Elsewhere, an Elsewhere where the true, superior parents can assert their claims to true parentage of the child. Kine could not have possibly come from such a horrible father as the one who tried to kill her, who oppressed her and ejected her from their home. Similarly, Kine's two children could not possibly be the offspring of such inferior types as Bop and Gaye. When Djib rejects the two men's claims to traditional paternal respect, he states that when he was young, he thought he and Kine were siblings, and that his birth certificate indicated this was the case. He now substitutes a new claim to family ties : he is the child of a mother who served as both mother and father, thus qualifying as the child of the new non-Œdipal order. His revolt establishes the goal of the Family Romance, the total break with the order of authority and repression associated with the Name of the Father. It is significant that it is the son who marks this new genealogical order since it is he who would be the repository of the continued patrilineal authority were he to accept the father's roles, and in his rejection of them he enables Kine to supplant their places. Aby is necessarily sidelined in this struggle as the Family Romance is primarily about the revolt against the Œdipal order where her role is subordinated to Presi's.

This subordination might be seen as culminating in the ending which prefigures Presi's projected triumphal future as President of West Africa, following his and his entourage's tour of the region. Aby's dreams of study abroad are to be deferred ; her « revolt » never going beyond her dunning of her father, not her rejection of him.

female children : « You acting womanish, *i.e.* like a woman... usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one ... [A womanist is also] a woman who loves other women sexually and / or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture... and women's strength... committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist... Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender » (p. XI-XII).

The rejection of the father, of the paternal order, of the Name of the Father, is an old story in African literature. *Une vie de boy* (1956) turns on the replacement of the African father by the white priest and commandant, both of whom reject the child as their successor due to the racist terms of the colonial order. The revolt against that order could not lead to a reversion to the old paternal order, it having been rejected at the outset. Instead, the New African, the child of the Independences, was to be seen as leading the way into the future, a future in which the rule of the sons, and of their urban sophistication, as in *The Interpreters* (1970) or *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960), was to be the order of the day.

In *Faat Kine*, though Mamie has sacrificed herself to save her daughter, she cannot sustain her role as family matriarch. When the children debate the question of how to arrange Kine's future romantic relations, Mamie is not brought into the discussion, and she stalks out in a helpless huff. In the end, her authority seems no greater than that of the maid, who is appreciated but not obeyed.

In the family romance, the new parents are impersonations of the real ones ; as in fetishism, the choice is made so openly and noisily, it cannot hide its artificial role. They are figures in a dynamic struggle for life and death, as easily shuffled off the scene as Œdipus's Corinthian parents. We turn from them, we turn from Kine's oppressive father and deflated mother to her powerful presence, expressed, as Bop ruefully remarks, in vulgar invective ; imposed with force and almost cruel pleasure, as Moss's wife is to learn when she instigates an altercation with Kine and receives a spray of Mace in her face. This is administered with almost sadistic pleasure, as Kine insults and laughingly rejects her lover Moss in the presence of her female friend Amy. This New Woman is not only tough and independent, she is hardened to the familial call to order. There is no more authority to that call, so she has had to create her own. The family romance itself cannot survive this new charge of presence, it has to cede to the new order of the day that only melodrama can instantiate. In this regard, the total rejection of the father goes beyond the fantasy that one's real parents are merely adoptive parents who have supplanted the real ones. It is a repudiation of the paternal order, leaving the mother in place of both parents. Kine's mother has remarried, but her stepfather is a minor actor in the drama, with no more paternal authority over her. Kine's children now see themselves as offspring only of a mother. If the family romance is about the struggle to contest the painful imposition of the Father's Law

in the course of the *Œdipus*, its end here is signaled by the new matriarchal order in which what matters now are the mother's love and happiness : Kine as mother has replaced Kine's father as fearsome family patriarch. As such, it is less important that she establish her authority over the children, although this arises in a minor fashion with Aby's attempts to assert her own authority to study abroad in Canada despite her mother's disapproval ; rather, it is the children's attempts to restore Kine's affective ties to Jean that take the center of the plot. In melodrama it is Her Happiness that really Matters the Most.

Melodrama is about the exaggeration of affect. It is about binary absolutes of good and evil, of victim and oppressor, of pity and tears. It is about the woman whose virtues are hidden, though not from the audience, who pities her for her unjust victimization. It is about ultimate triumph over evil or misfortune ; about chance and coincidence working to save the day, and so about a moral order, hidden or occulted as Peter Brooks puts it, until its final revelation and working out of problems ; it is about deferred resolution, about tension over the audience's certainties concerning her unjust treatment and the delay in her ultimate justification. More, it is about how this is the story of the woman, the middle-class woman, the woman still available for love, the woman to be saved by love, the suburban woman, the upper west side woman, the somewhat freer than her grandmother woman, the not yet New Woman but no longer Old Woman. Not yet Revolutionary Woman ; not old-time moralizing woman.

We have had a hard time situating the African feminist within this paradigm for a number of reasons. One was that the ultimate justification of the victim has not yet accommodated the miserabilism of African feminist texts that underscored the need for change by depicting women as victims of patriarchal abuses. Not only Sembène has been marked by this, but Emecheta and Bâ, the foremothers of much early African women's literature, as well. The revolutionary demand for change is ill-matched by melodrama, a mode that is conventional and that tends to reinforce dominant social values. That is why none of the women in Sembène's *Xala*, the three wives, the aunts, or Rama, the daughter, fit the model of a figure like Kine. And yet, she is not a purely melodramatic figure either.

The melodramatic mode, so very different from that « serious literature » of engagement that had been dominant in both earlier national liberationist, anti-colonialist African literature, and subsequent African feminist writings, permits

us to consider the question of the female subject and her standpoint as the basis on which to construct a notion of political subjectivity. To be precise, it is possible for one to have viewed one form of subjectivity – let us call it the male political subjectivity – as engaging the kind of public activism that was needed for independence, and that is now needed for social justice. Let us consider the other subjectivity as one oriented toward the private sphere, where issues of male-female relations and motherhood are typically played out : this the subjectivity of the « other », constructed as female. The inferiority generally accorded the popular modes like melodrama match the gender hierarchy privileging the man of action over the caring woman.

What I have been calling the feminism of the old man is simply a vision of woman joining the male club, that is, assuming the subjectivity outlined above as conventionally associated with the male political subject. Her task, in this version, is to acquire the rights, given as universal, previously enjoyed by men alone. This translates into political rights and, eventually, economic rights and social status. The notion of this subject being gendered, and therefore different, is never raised – her universality obviates her gender ; the notion that this gendered subject is defined in terms of individual rights, as conceived by a liberal order, is also never raised. Finally, the limits to the notion of the unified subject of a universal political order is also not raised : when subject positions are conceived as unified, as universal, they are basically essentialized, and the only challenge one faces with such conceptions of gender is to assume positions of equality and liberty that are presented in non-problematic terms.

The category of economic New Woman is everywhere present in *Faat Kine*. Clearly the pressure to extend that subjectivity to broader spheres of autonomy is the burden of the film as in every relation Kine experiences we witness the pressures of the older models that entail female subordination. But outside of the economic, the other forms of autonomous subjectivity are shown as more difficult to attain. The melodramatic female subject's apotheosis is realized in emotion, in conventionality, and in terms of support and pleasure. And it is also the subject whose crisis is framed, entirely, through the encounter with the pressures of the New, that is, with modernity. A politics of feminism grounded either in notions of women attaining universal rights (previously given as the male domain) or as adding a new subject position, that of the womanist, motherist, sisterist,

sustainer of life, reduces the notions of politics to forms of liberal humanism grounded in unitary subjectivities.

We are presented with a liberalism that gives priority to individual rights within the frame of a national government whose function is to assure individual freedom – the « individual » in question here historically based on the male public subject. The second notion of the old-school feminist ideal, that of the caring woman whose concerns for family translate into private moral values, is based on what Carol Gilligan calls an « ethics of care ». The choice between these two positions poses a dilemma for old school feminists like Sembène. I believe this is why the film concludes with the privileging of Presi as the best hope for the future while Kine finds her ultimate pleasure in the bedroom scene with Jean. The structure of freedom, which is to be traced back to the struggle for independence, and the conceptions of the subject appropriate to that struggle, have not changed, nor has the dilemma posed by the limits of that subjectivity.

If Kine can be cited as an example of an overly limited individual model of subjectivity that is ultimately subservient to a liberal political order, one might argue that in *Moolade* (2004) Sembène is able to reformulate a model for the female activist as a member of the community, as we had seen earlier in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960) and especially in *Emitai* (1971). This would seem to fit the communitarian notion of a subjectivity given to a more progressive political model. Here what is emphasized is « the value of political participation and the notion of the common good, prior and independent of individual desires and interests »⁷.

The ending of a melodrama reinscribes a dominant social order, a « moral occult » (Peter Brook) that vindicates the woman-victim. Kine's drama doesn't end with her vindication, but rather with the prospect of an endless continuation of her triumphal march over those failed men of the Old Africa, and the triumphal succession of her children into the future. There will be setbacks, there will be commercial breaks, there will be tears of sadness and joy. And the politics of a new liberal economic order will continue its smooth ride into the New Africa.

■ Kenneth W. HARROW⁸

⁷ Mouffe (C.), *The Return of the Political*. London, New York : Verso, 2005, p. 83.

⁸ Michigan State University.