

Analysis Of Non-Violent And Violent Strategies In Combating Patriarchal Violence In Francophone African Narratives Of Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle* And Aminata Ka Maïga's *La Voie Du Salut Suivi De Le Miroir De La Vie*

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Abstract

Previous studies in literary scholarship have highlighted various forms of violence against women as patriarchal strictures in Francophone African creative writings. However, not many of them have explored the possible ways out of the patriarchal hegemony. This effort, therefore, focuses on the analysis of both violent and non-violent approaches employed by female fictional characters in setting themselves free from the male violence. This study employs a combination of Non-violent and Violent strategies as its theoretical framework and adopts the French "explication de texte" as its methodology. Two (2) Francophone African narratives are investigated. They are Aminata Ka Maïga's *La Voie du Salut suivi de le miroir de la vie* and Fatou Kéïta's *Rebelle*. The scope of the work covers both the mild approach and the radical method of combating patriarchy. Kéïta espouses female bonding as a possible route to women's liberation. She creates Malimouna who rallies round the oppressed women and protects their interest while Maïga in her own case, highlights suicide as possible means of eschewing men's violence. She depicts Fatou Fane who hangs herself as a result of depression subjected to by her seducer thereby yielding herself to death in order to discard the limiting tradition. Political and socio-cultural non-violent approaches are effective than violent ones in thwarting patriarchal strictures in female Francophone African fictions. These non-violent approaches, if applied to real-life situations in Africa are capable of providing a lasting solution to patriarchal violence.

Introduction

Undoubtedly, political, socio-economic, cultural and religious domain are replete of patriarchal context. Women are hemmed in every space by the iron bars of traditions and fetters of gender discriminations politically, academically, legally, culturally just to mention but few. They are confined by structures, cultures and rules invented by men to maintain the privilege and pleasure of men. However, women have been organizing themselves around issues relating to this seemingly gender imbalance with the view to thwarting the perceived hegemony in order to achieve their much desired liberation. Women's movements, like many other social engagements, have been largely responding to an unending catalogue of women's discrimination and rights' violations related to violence, education, healthcare, reproduction, citizenship and economic well-being in the different parts of the world.

In the literary scene too, various forms of violence against women including sexual, physical, psychological, emotional and economic violence have been highlighted as a leitmotif and thorny issues that dominate much of Francophone African feminist novels. Also, a high percentage of literary studies have focused on women's oppressive thematic exploits with insignificant remedy to their unenviable plight. The women's more decisive and effective ways of combating patriarchal vulnerabilities, therefore, are located in this paper. Their struggles vis à vis patriarchal cravings have birthed a lot of approaches of which Non- Violent and Violent strategies are one.

Non-violent strategies

Strategy in this study is considered any human struggle particularly from the end of the battered woman whose ultimate objective is also the preservation of the female essential humanity.

Non-violent strategies therefore, are ways of challenging different layers of violence against women albeit through covert remonstrance without any physical activity. This approach does not involve any physical activity or arm bearing. In other words, women's reactions to macho behaviors towards them are non-articulated. They are employed by women who are victims of male oppression and violence in order to break away from same. These strategies afford women to continue their lives in spite of their depressing situation thereby attaining their earlier intended objectives. The forms of this strategy include divorce/separation, female bonding/solidarity, economic empowerment, emancipatory programmes, remarrying, among other things Onojobi (2012)¹.

Violent strategies on the other hand are ways of challenging the male status quo employing violent activities such as revolt, overt remonstrance or rebuke, disobedience of specific commands, physical obstructions and refusal to cooperate with certain decisions, retaliation or termination of life in some circumstances. For the

purpose of this effort, woman's violent strategies then would be described as violent activities employed to break free from the stricture and structure of patriarchy Onojobi (2012)².

Résumé of the two texts

The synopsis of the selected texts affords the readership a panoramic view of the story line. The two selected fictions are Aminata Ka Maïga's *La voie du salut suivi de le miroir de la vie*³ and Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle*.⁴

Aminata Ka Maïga's *La voie du salut suivi de le miroir de la vie*

Aminata Ka Maïga's La voie du salut suivi de le miroir de la vie's novel domiciles two short stories. In the first part which is *La Voie du salut*, the author uses the female sexuality as an issue to launch into a more serious social problem; clitoridectomy, interpreted as a form of cultural oppression in feminist circles. As contained in the novel, clitoridectomy is regarded as a criminal act punishable by imprisonment under the colonial judicial system. This event enables Doctor Baba Kounta to blackmail Fatoumata's parents so that they will allow him marry Bokhaya, Fatoumata's cousin, instead of the parents going to jail. The second novel *Le Miroir de la Vie* describes the shameless exploitation of a young maid called Fatou by her seducer, Mamadou Sène when the latter abandons her and her pregnancy. This tragic turn of events leads to her suicide.

Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle*

In Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle*, the female protagonist, Malimouna, is presented as a rebellious character right from her childhood. She rebels against various forms of oppression suffered throughout the novel. Although she is an innocent victim of a broken marital union between father, Louma and mother Matou, however, by a stroke of luck coupled with a strong determination, she is able to create a name for herself and thus helps the underprivileged, women in particular. The latter, recognized that they too can rise above their social and other forms of limitations, rebel against sexual, physical, social, conjugal, psychological oppressions among others to become social figures that people are forced to reckon with as leaders and reformers in their own right. The emphasis in this novel is on formal education of the female which is capable of making a woman a light bearer in the dark tunnel of dewomanisation.

Analysis of violent strategies in Aminata Maïga Ka's *Le miroir de la vie*

Violent strategy involves both physical and material arms with destructive impart. The forms are suicide, killing and maiming, death, physical assault among others. Suicide is our tool of analysis here.

Suicide

Suicide (Latin *suicidium*, from *sui caedere*), means to kill oneself or the intentional taking of one's own life. Suicide may occur for a number of reasons, including depression, shame, guilt, desperation, physical pain, emotional pressure, anxiety, financial difficulties, or other undesirable situations. The World Health Organization noted that over one million people commit suicide every year, and that suicide is one of the leading causes of death among teenagers and adult especially women under thirty- five (35) years⁵. A suicide attempt is sometimes interpreted as a cry for help and attention, or to express despair and the wish to escape, rather than a genuine intent to die. In a characteristic violent style, some victims of male violence who desperately need liberation from patriarchal agents employ suicide. In Aminata Maïga Ka's *Le miroir de la vie*, after Mamadou Sène, Fatou Fane's seducer has impregnated and abandoned her, the latter in an attempt to get out from the sexual and emotional violence, plans to commit suicide. She resolves to throw herself into a well or dose herself with a whole packet of nivaquine tablet wanting to experiment the stories of frustrated women who committed suicide through those means with the aims of neutralizing patriarchal vulnerabilities. Again, following Fatou Fane's arrest for throwing her still born baby into a canal as a result of the fallout of rejection and abandonment suffered in the hand of Mamadou Sène, her seducer she decides to hang herself in the cell while seeking to totally eschew the embarrassment of social and emotional violence caused her. She throws herself down, then after regaining her composure, she gets up, unties her wrapper, lifts her eyes, and looks for a rafter on the ceiling. Having discovered a hook, she fastens her wrapper onto it. While trying to make less noise, she pulls the pallet serving as her bed around her neck and leaps off her balance in the void. The thinking of Fatou must have been that after her death, the news will be everywhere, and that it will not be judged as the height of absurdity, but rather her courage shall be saluted thus; *here lies the remain of a brave girl who allowed death cleanse her of her battered image*.

Equally, the corollary is found in Aminata Maïga Ka's *La voie du salut*, when Sokhna, Rabiadou's friend reveals Racine's (Rabiadou's husband) infidelity and the mismanagement of the family's income to her, she is too disappointed to hear that her husband, gets wedded to another woman outside the wedlock, builds her a mansion with the sweat of their joint savings. She does not only see him as a traitor but also a callous personality. Therefore emotionally overwhelmed, she gets up, staggers, falls backwards, motionless and, unable to bear the emotional and social violence inflicted on her, yields herself to death.

Similarly, in an attempt not to suffer the same fate like her friend, Sokhna, Rabiadou's friend who spills the bean of Racine infidelity to the former, commits suicide by jumping into a well. The incident was announced in the newspaper thus:

The following morning, the National Dailies captioned the incidence < a dead young girl named Sohkna was rescued from a well she fell into late last night. **(Our translation)**

Rabiatou like her bosom friend Sohkna is prepared like the typical violent feminist she is, to pay the supreme sacrifice valiantly. Her death is a voluntary personal sacrifice towards the eventual victory of the whole. Individual revolts often do give way to a well organised revolutionary movement involving the entire people seeking liberation. Taking one's life to discard a limiting tradition characterises battered women's violent responses to patriarchy in some Franco-African narratives. A similar occurrence is depicted in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*,⁶ when the protagonist, Juletane prefers suicide to living in an atmosphere of hypocrisy that characterizes polygynous arrangement made by her husband, Mamadou.

The instances of violent reactions by frustrated women cited above are forms of protest against patriarchy. All the victims of male violence are disenchanted with various forms of violence experienced as slaving wives which feminism sees as inimical to women emancipation. The oppressive system of patriarchy results in their great suffering, and this in turn, generates their frustration and makes them react in violent manner.

Analysis of non-violent strategies in Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle*

Non-violent strategy involves no physical or material bearing of arms. It includes female bonding, economic empowerment, divorce, remarrying among others. Female solidarity is our apparatus of analysis here.

Solidarity as a mode of resistance by repressed women is not only possible but crucial for effective resistance, despite the problematic indices presented by engagement across different climes, appeals to solidarity by womanists in response to oppression have witnessed both the expression of shared identity and an affirmation of difference by way of grounding protests in local subjectivities. Womanism and its search for neo-solidarities are concerned with women interrogating their own positions of privilege and power in references to interaction with others across race, class, age, ability and sexuality. Undoubtedly, there is a need to codify solidarity firstly so that, the callous men wont seize the divides between and among women to pitch them against on another and secondly to avoid the perpetuation of men's whims and caprices using sisterhood as axe-men against themselves.

In Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle*, Malimouna makes up her mind to assist her fellow sisters due to their financial handicap. She reiterates this decision when Philippe Blair, the Director of Institut d'Etudes Sociales samples her opinion regarding the less privileged women. As if the words were magical, she repeated it severally. She wants to help the African women in France. Such is the challenge she wants to meet. Malimouna knows that women's help comes sometimes through female bonding. This is why she enjoins Laura, another battered but working class woman in the fiction to join her Association (AAFD). She maintains that women who come from socially deprived milieu need to be assisted. And the help must come from women themselves. She demonstrates the gesture further by assisting a distressed woman, Fanta (Baron's wife), who suffers a cultural violence in form of forced marriage. From childhood, Fanta has been betrothed to Baron, a distant nephew of her father. The man who she has neither known nor met but working in France. He promises to visit the family of her finacée back in Africa every year, but he does not fulfill his promise. Exasperated and for fear that the Baron may abandon her for a white woman, her parents posts her to him. The poor girl almost dies of both emotional and psychological wreck from Baron, but for emotional support from Malimouna.

To pontificate the pursuance of her course of assisting the less privileged women, Malimouna decides to work in the centre where she will be able to have a close contact with women suffering from various forms of violence, she works specifically in Woman Guidance Centre of her quarter. This center is particularly in charge of immigrant women who have difficulty to settle down in an environment.

She also stands by Fami Kana, an adolescent of fifteen (15) years, married by force to an old man. In her matrimonial home she is always beaten. She eventually runs away and goes back to her parent. The latter further subject their daughter to cruel punishment before forcefully taking her back to her husband. Without any hope in sight and disgusted, one night, raving madness, she slaughters her husband. As the crime attracts being jailed, Malimouna and other women rally round the poor woman to fault the condemnation maintaining that no one should judge Fami kana's act at the surface but rather look at the circumstances surrounding the action.

It is evident here that the maturation of three principle of solidarity is crystallised in the personality of Malimouna. The crucial point of note is that far from fighting a personal cause, Malimouna and the AAFD women are fully committed to the collective struggle for the salvation of the oppressed people particularly women.

The protagonist's personality as a liberated woman is defined; her success and courage help her stand up to men's intimidation. Keïta's non-violent strategy reflects in her dominant strategies which is female bonding among others. She portrays female characters who are independent, strong, capable and educated who get liberated from patriarchal structures employing non-violent strategies.

Conclusion

Non-violent strategies and its varied forms on the one hand are employed with a desire to restore the ethics of the woman's personhood. All the forms of non-violent strategies such as female bonding, divorce/separation, re-marrying, and economic empowerment among others are indices of rejection of the status quo. They are pointer to the facts that victims of male violence have refused to be the *other*, they have become *self* with needs, wants, and interests of their own. Non-violent strategy allows its actresses to pursue its intended goals and aspirations. The violent strategies and its forms examined above on the other hand are weapons of violent feminism aiming at destroying patriarchy and its sources. These strategies are directed against the oppressor or their agents. But the harm done is mainly to demonstrate or release their frustration in protest against unfavorable conditions.

Furthermore, violent strategies may also take the form of self-inflicted injuries especially if the source of oppression and violence appears unattackable. This sometimes results in suicide, infanticide, maiming and killing, consumption of drug, alcoholism and cigarette-smoking. Generally, victims of patriarchy who employ violent strategies may not necessarily change or even, challenge the offending system because if the female violent approaches eventually culminate into loss of life, their offenders (the male) in this instance may perceive the loss as good riddance to bad rubbish. Therefore, it appears, the non-violent strategy would be more affective in challenging patriarchal vulnerabilities.

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