

Textual women Liberation strategies in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*

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Abstract - *Many literary scholarships have examined various forms of oppression particularly in many feminist African narratives with French expression. Undoubtedly, women have been subordinate to men. As a matter of fact, patriarchy which has coloured every aspect of women's space including repressive traditions and obnoxious cultures have made the male feel more strongly and more readily-to manifest macho behaviour in any given situation required for attainment of dominance in a hierarchy of male-female relationship. It is against this backdrop that the article seeks to explore various approaches to women freedom highlighted by Myriam Warner-Vieyra such that if such approaches are applied to real life situation, patriarchal tendencies will be contained in a male centred African states. Myriam Warner-Vieyra's Juletane is employed as our tool of analysis. The Theory of Non- violence and violence shall be our theoretical creed. The paper shall be treated under the following headings: Feminism and women liberation. Women liberation strategies, Violent and non- violent theories, Synopsis of Juletane, Myriam Warner Vieyra's liberation strategies in Juletane and conclusion. Our finding reveals that both methods are potent at eradicating male violence. However, the non-violent approach seems more effective for it is invested to protect the two gender fibres in the society.*

Keywords: *Franco-African's narrative; women; oppression; liberation strategies; Juletane*

INTRODUCTION

Women have always fought for their rights in the matter of equality between women and men. There has always been a struggle for women to be able to have the same job as men, the same salaries as men and permission to vote and affect the society in a positive manner. Oppression and quest for freedom are central concepts in most post-colonial feminist

narrative. The novel under focus is a post-colonial writing where the female characters are subjected to various kind of oppression and fight for freedom in once colonized countries. The thematic preoccupation in this article is to highlight approaches that could bring systemic change capable of providing security for women in the face of patriarchal abuses in selected contemporary Francophone African texts generally and in particular from Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*. Secondly, the paper compares the author's ideological leanings to determine the extent to which they are reflected in the novel under study. This helps in discovering diverse ways the authors remain committed to an integrative approach that seeks wholesome rather than partial resolutions of the issues that confront not just women in creative writings but other women in their societies. The effort highlights the liberation strategies capable of dismantling patriarchal structures and strictures in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane* with the view to paving way to a more just global society.

Feminism and women liberation **Women liberation strategies**

The word liberation is from Latin *liberatio*. It was borrowed into French in the 14th century *Libera* meaning free, while the English Language borrowed the lexicon from old French *liberté*. It means to set free physically. It equally connotes to release a person, group, population or country from political, military control, physical and emotional constraint. Scott Russell [1] defines liberation as the absence of obstacles to the satisfaction of desire while Merriam Webster Collegiate Encyclopedia [2] refers to liberation, as primarily a condition characterised by the absence of coercion or constraint imposed by another person. Liberation Strategy in this paper 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.

For the purpose of this article therefore, liberation means the effort made by the abused woman to thwart male oppression, sexual status, role and temperament as it has been constructed under patriarchy.

Various women liberation movements have evolved. One of such is Feminism which advocates the extension of the right of women the world over. Feminism as a political movement dates back to eighteenth century in America. Its precursors include Virginia Woolf, Betty Friedan, Alice Walker, Mary Wollstonecraft among others. The beginning of first wave feminism can be traced backwards to the French revolution of 1789 during which collective and concerted demands were made for the rights of women. The French Revolution impacted positively on Mary Wollstonecraft and her feminist writings. Her book *Vindication of the rights of Women*[3], which was published in Britain in 1792 is popularly accepted as the first important and systemic treatise on feminism. In the book, Mary Wollstonecraft lamented the state of ignorance to which the society relegated women and by way of solution, she advocated equal access to education for the women, just like their male counterparts. First wave feminism concerns itself mainly with the equality of the sexes: women's attainment of equality with men. In short, this wave focused on the procurement of legislation change.

The second wave feminist began around 1968. It focused on the building of a set of knowledge which torched specifically on the various ways in which women all over the world were historically marginalised. This wave concerned itself with the wider spectrum of political affiliations. It helps in shaping modern feminist thought. While first wave feminism sought women's enfranchisement, right to own property and access to education, second wave feminist concerned itself mainly with the liberation of women from the oppressiveness of a patriarchal society. The third wave feminism has been given various definitions and interpretations by various groups of people. It is described as the feminism of a younger generation of women who acknowledge the legacy of second wave feminism but also identify what they see as its limitations. Third wave feminists are mostly young women with University education and are usually conversant with post-structuralist and post-modernist theories. They are also conversant with academic discourse on race and class distinction and with women studies courses. While second wave feminism moved the debate into the personal lives of women, third wave feminism has moved the feminist

debate into the arena of the mass media. The wave also sees the live of women as strongly shaped by popular culture, particularly music, film, the television and literature. Among the precursors are Rebecca Walker and Shannon Liss.

The subordination of women was the focus of many writings in the 20th Century. Germain Greer's book *Female Eunuch* [4], Shulamith Firestone's *Dialect of Sex* [5], Juliet Michell's *Women's Estate*[6], Sandara Gilbert and Susan Gular's *The Madwoman in the Attic, the Woman Writer and the Nineteen Century Imagination* [7] respectively discuss among others, woman's issues and the recurrent patterns and motifs in the works of female writers. They all call for equal educational opportunities for men and women as a prerequisite for social and economic advancement of the female sex. Elaine Showalter's book *A literature of their own* [8] and finally a most influential publication of a mass circulation women's magazine called MS in 1972 all discounted the subordination of women by men.

Green in *Gender Violence in Africa: African Women's Responses* [9] is a theoretical descriptive analysis of violence against women in Africa and women's attempt at using both the formal and informal power structures to resist male oppression. Some of the informal power sources identified by her, include the use of traditional virtue, irony, satire, humour, arbitration, secret societies, kin support and spirit cult which were further divided into the management of suffering, insulation, collective action and escape. According to Green, the use of each strategy is individually and situationally based. The import of Green's message is that what may work for one individual in one situation, may not work for another individual in the same situation or for the same individual even in another situation. She concludes by saying that the most efficient strategies, however, are traditionally based. Green does a good job of describing pragmatic non-threatening strategies as "effective" means of coping with gender violence by women.

In sum, all the critics and writers reviewed above (Anglophones and Francophones) establish women's oppression and subjugation. Our concern in this study complements existing works by examining strategies that could liberate women from the perceived plight. Although, feminist advocates have dwelt at length on women's education and economic empowerment as liberation instruments, but violent and non-violent approaches have not constituted a major concern of

such works, hence the gap we set out to fill. Therefore, this article is interested in adding to the list of existing works on gender based literary criticism. It identifies and interrogates the narrative under study to yield its multifarious liberation strategies employed by women in the patriarchal societies.

Violent and non- violent theories

Non-violent strategies 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. These forms of strategies include divorce/separation, female bonding/solidarity, economic empowerment, emancipatory programmes, remarrying, among other things.

Violent strategies are ways of combating the male status quo employing violence such as revolt, overt remonstrance or rebuke, disobedience of specific commands, killing and maiming physical obstructions and refusal to cooperate with certain decisions, retaliation or termination of life in some circumstances. For the purpose of this study, woman's violent strategies then would be described as violent activities employed to break free from the stricture and structure of patriarchy [10]

Synopsis of Juletane

In Warner-Vieyra's novel titled *Juletane*[11] the orphaned and utterly insulated Juletane gets to Africa in the heady days before Independence by way of the Metropole, but there she meets her horrific destiny by accident. Raised by her grandmother following the death of her mother soon after childbirth, Juletane is sent to Paris to live with her godmother at the age of ten, when her father dies. Some years later, her godmother also dies. Alone, she is susceptible to the lure of love and the bonds of family that marriage with a handsome and articulate African law student promises. It is on the boat from France to her new home that Juletane discovers inadvertently that Mamadou already has a wife, Awa, and a five-year-old daughter who are awaiting his return. Devastated, confused, and paralyzed with fear, she once again

feels the anguish of being an orphan. Upon their arrival, events unfold differently from the way Juletane anticipates they will, even as they corroborate her sense of marginality and insignificance in Africa. She is warmly received by Mamadou's family, who speak to her in a blend of Wolof and French which she has difficulty understanding. According to Juletane, that is the last time she hears French spoken from anyone other than her husband and the detested Ndeye (his second co-wife). Indeed, she finds herself more and more immersed in her own world, in her own space, the subject of her own melancholy and desperation, an object of derision and misunderstanding. She comes to be known as a "madwoman," a perceptual and behavioral category she effectively calls into question. When Mamadou takes the beautiful, shallow, vain (and French speaking African) third wife, Ndeye, who quickly becomes his favorite, Juletane reads the truth of her own degraded and deviant status in Ndeye 's eyes. Juletane rejects Ndeye's attempts to complete the job of erasing her subjectivity totally. This betrayal attitude of Mamadou leaves her in shock; but it is chiefly the aggravating fact that her husband has not told her of his first wife and daughter that precipitates her melancholy. Her despondency only deepens as she realizes that she has irredeemably lost everything that she holds dear, thus her inexorable slide towards nothingness and death. Juletane is expected to forget the kind of relationship she enjoys with her husband abroad and to submit passively to local rules and customs heavily influenced by tradition, family interference and the pervasive domination of men over their women-folk. Mamadou's betrayal and cowardice in the face of socio-familial pressures are thus at the root of Juletane's undoing.

Myriam Warner Vieyra 's liberation strategies in Juletane

Myriam Warner Vieyra highlights divorce as a liberation strategy in her novel *Juletane*. This strategy is articulated in her female fictional character who doubles as her protagonist. Juletane's divorce's decision stems from her inability to bear the magnitude of Mamadou's (her husband) deception and betraying attitude. She finds herself in a despicable position of having to share a husband (Mamadou) who keeps her in the dark regarding his first wife (Awa) who has already got a daughter for him back in Africa.

Her characteristic revolutionary nature pushes her to revolt against Mamadou and his family who constitute themselves as agents of stress to her. She considers matters of principle and personal desire to be more important than social attachment or family tradition. She typifies an idealistic representative of the emerging generation of radicals or youths who downplay racial and other artificial barriers created to separate human beings.

Coupled with social and cultural differences or problems are Mamadou's betraying attitude towards her. She suffers from alienation which affects her psychologically. What all these boil down to is that, both of them underestimate the propensity of the differences that exist between them- culturally, emotionally, socially and psychologically. Their relationship suffers because it is more of an idealism than a thing that can be easily concretized within the local setting.

The insensitivity and irresponsibility of Mamadou towards his wife Juletane, later contributes naturally to her loss of interest in the relationship with her husband, co-wives and more importantly to her emotional upset. She is so psychically disoriented that she perceives other women not only as enemies but also as easiest means of letting out her pent-up feelings of anger and frustration. Her self-liberation comes to fore when she decides to violently retaliate by pouring hot water on Ndèye who daily provokes her, poison the three daughters of Awa (the senior wife of her husband) and tries to kill Mamadou.

Juletane appears to have been trapped in an African cage where there is no way out either to France where she meets Mamadou or to her Country in West Indies. Her long diary which forms the main contents of the novel is a shocking revelation on the harm that cultural monologue can do to marriage. On hearing for the first time on board en route to Africa, about the first marriage of Mamadou to Awa, Juletane decides to divorce him:

Le premier weekend de Mamadou chez Awa. J'essayai d'accepter, me disant que de toute manière tout était fini entre nous; que dès la première occasion, je retournerais en France. Je divorcerais. Ce fut cependant une épreuve au-dessus de mes forces.p50.

(During the first week of Mamadou's stay with Awa, I tried to accept the arrangement having told myself that judging from the scheme of

things that every thing has ended there between us. I would go back to France. I would divorce. It was however, a challenge beyond me)

Warner reveals another strategy of liberation through Héléne, who determines not to trust any man after his fiancé, Hector leaves her for another woman in the eve of their wedding ceremony:

Une femme pouvait bien vivre seule. Elle s'était jurée de ne plus jamais souffrir à cause d'un homme. p56.

(A woman could live well alone. She has vowed never to lose her sleep because of any man again.)

The writer again, articulates non-cooperation with men by battered women in her novel. The author depicts this strategy through Juletane when the latter stops communicating with Mamadou, having become aware of his double standard living and hypocrisy.

Warner reveals another liberation strategy when she encourages victims of men's violence in her novel to engage in intellectual venture such as writing. Writing is a channel through which an author unwinds his/her bottled anguish. In this sense, writing becomes therapeutic to the heart that is psychologically traumatized and wrecked. Also through writing, an awareness and conscious awakening can be aroused. In other words, writing can become a source of emancipation to readership. This strategy is evident in Juletane's habit of keeping a diary of daily experience suffered in the hand of her husband. The diary latter becomes a point of reference to Héléne.

The author equally reveals killing or maiming of a stressor as a liberation strategy though Juletane's elimination of Ndèye (Mamadou's third wife) who serves as the latter's axe on Juletane:

Je suis heureuse. Je pense à Ndèye que Mamadou va découvrir morte, elle aussi. Je tiens ma vengeance. J'éclate de rire en pensant à tout ce beau sang rouge qui s'échappe de la poitrine de Ndèye. Ndèye, enfin muette. Elle ne m'insultera plus, elle ne me frappera plus... la préférée de Mamadou hors du circuit! p 124-125.

(I am now happy. I begin to imagine how Mamadou shall feel on discovering the death of

Ndèye. I hold sway to my vengeance. I burst into laughter about the clean blood gushing out from Ndèye's rib. Ndèye at last is as silent as grave. She will neither be able to insult nor punch me any longer. Now, Mamadou's favorite is completely out of touch.)

The author also articulates the use of drug in the time of marital distress. She depicts this strategy through Juletane when the former frustrated by her husband's life style uses drug to suppress her anger and discontent:

... buvais en cachette, esperant ainsi m'étourdir et ne plus penser à rien, p69.

(Drinking secretly thinking such an act can drown my grief and make me think about nothing.)

Myriam Warner non-violent ideology reflects in the portrayal of woman characters who are dependable, strong, capable and educated. Her womanist stance is also reflected in her dominant strategy which is divorce and non-cooperation with oppressive male. She aligns with Buchi Emecheta in an interview with Marie Umer (cited in Kolawole 1979:11) where she corroborates the strategy of divorce in this term "*Personally I'd like to see the ideal happy marriage. But if it doesn't work, for goodness sake, call it off.*" On the other hand too, the author depicts instances of violent responses to patriarchy in the novel. The forms are killing and maiming. For instance, the protagonist kills her agent of oppression in self defence to avoid the inherent danger of polygyny. Juletane narrates how she kills Ndèye in a calculating manner :

Elle dort bien profondément comme toujours...Elle est couchée sur le côté droit et recourverte jusqu'à la taille.Ses gros sein nus sont découverts. Je calcule un instant l'emplacement du cœur sous un amas de graisse et je plonge, tenant le couteau des deux mains. La lame pénètre jusqu'à la garde, taillant son passage entre deux côtés.Tout son corps tressaute avec un mouvement convulsive... p124

(She sleeps very profoundly like he does always... She lay on her side and wrapped herself to the waist. Her bare big breasts

uncovered. I quickly make my calculation; location of her heart under the mass of fat and I thrust, holding the knife with two (2) hands. The blade penetrates to the marrow, cutting through the two (2) sides. Her whole body shivers uncontrollably.)

The incidents of killing and maiming that characterise the above violent feminist characters' reactive behaviour are the psychological consequences of frustration and oppression. As the female victim is unable to come to terms with her degradation and powerlessness, she compensates for their deprivation by engaging in violent activities. Her commitment to the struggle is profoundly rooted in their lived experiences and hence the aggressiveness is sharp and lasting. They understood the necessity of internalizing positive definitions and rejecting the denigrating stereotypical and controlling images related to them. They realized the need for active struggle to resist oppression and attain individual and group empowerment. It is observed that postcolonial feminist fictions appear to be challenging forms of male oppression. Post colonialism seems to be a male-centred field which now is obvious when discussing the feminist francophone novels and feministic struggle against the male-centred field.

CONCLUSION

Myriam Warner-Vieyra's alignment with both non-violent and violent ideological creed is invested in restoring women back to personhood. As mentioned earlier, Myriam places the focus on restoring women's voices back to history, without any doubt, the novel is an excellent first step towards redeeming the image of women portraying a horrible daily life of African women with abuse, brutal husbands and retrograding tradition and cultures. Despite many terrifying and deplorable conditions in the women's lives, the novel is replete with hope for a better future. The small glimmer of hope is there for a purpose, the author of the novel want the readership to feel that there is hope for women in real and similar situations as the protagonist in the novel. It is also one's individual and human ethics to know and be aware that all human beings, no matter what sex, race, ethnics or religion one belongs to, are equal, for the sake of women in a situation similar to that of the female character in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*.

The orphaned protagonist Juletane seeks love in Africa in the heady days before Independence. Warner-Vieyra uses the device of the fictional first-person journal mode to examine Juletane's disillusionment as well as the interplay of colonially-produced cultural differences among Caribbean and West African women in a traditional West African community.

The phenomenon of violence in this work touches on the writer moral and social responsibilities. Indeed, it forms the central point of their artistic purpose which is best understood when considered against the background of the position of women in the patriarchal societies. The feminist Francophone African writers sensitize the patriarchal African societies to the injustice which contemporary realities represent.

The journal is the transcription of a woman's coming-to-writing and the various scenes of writing mirror stages of self-consciousness and psychic disintegration. Juletane's textual activity begins as a way for her to record her thoughts. Then it evolves into a relationship, a means of clinging to something, a friend, a confidante, across the closed space that becomes synonymous with the sterility of her life.

In fact, the feminist Francophone African narratives are both a recreation of experience as well as a means of communicating ideas to specified audiences. The writer's art is inspired by the urgent need to re-order his or her society, as his or her works explore the human condition and then express positive ideas that are designed to enhance a movement towards the establishment of a just social order.

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