

REBELLION AND REVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS: A CRITICAL READING OF SELECTED FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Neo-liberalism, democracy, or whatever paradigm you call it, the post-colonial experience in Africa has shown that the quest for a balanced system that includes social justice and an equitable distribution of resources (the wealth of the nation) remains a mirage. Hence, the citizenry, having been predisposed to their fundamental human rights, continues to demand good governance and accountability from the authorities that be. Based on the theory of Marxism and psycho-cultural conflict theories, selected African novels in French: Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Sow Fall's *La grève des bâttu*, Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Ilboudo's *Les vertiges du trône*, and Keta's *Rebelle* are critically reviewed to harvest the information needed for this study. Marxism focuses on class struggle and condemns social imbalances caused by capitalism on economic and political fronts. The psycho-cultural conflict theory regards the role of cultural beliefs in conflicts as fundamental and critical to possible conflict resolution solutions. Findings suggest that both collective and individual revolts can bring about the desired social change in human societies. The study concludes that in a genuine search for enduring development, therefore, political leaders, particularly in underdeveloped countries, should step up their political will and be more responsible as well as accountable to the common men who elected them to power.

Keywords: By-product, Francophone African novels, Marxism, Revolutionary consciousness

INTRODUCTION

Protest, or rebellion, is the outcome of revolutionary consciousness. It remains one of the major instruments employed by any oppressed group to demand their rights. It is obvious that most African writers engage in protest writing to bring about positive social transformation in their various communities, both during the colonial era and now. This idea of fighting for one's rights reminds one of Frederick Douglass, who observes:

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters (Ameh Akoh, 2012: 3).

The bitterness of racial discrimination, bad governance, docile followership, and women's oppression are the major concerns of novelists such as Ferdinand Oyono, Mongo Beti, Sembène Ousmane, Emmanuel-Yves Dogbé, Henri Lopés, Mariama Bâ, Aminata Sow Fall, Calixthe Beyala, Fatou Keta, Ramonu Sanusi, and Adelaide Fassinou. Their artistic creations are a practical demonstration of revolutionary consciousness by Francophone African writers. In Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960), it was the Africans' self-awareness and self-identity that drove them to take industrial action and fight their colonial masters to a halt. The marchers, the Thiès women, who marched to Dakar to protest the colonial brutality that the railroad company represented in the 1940s, provide a relevant example in this case. The women dared the soldiers, the militiamen, the police, and their guns and pressed on with their demands. African society in particular has, more than any other, relegated the woman to the status of a mere slave and an object of domestic value in the home (Simeon Osazuwa 2000). But the women, created by Sembène Ousmane in most of his novels, say no. They are significantly needed in the affairs of the state. Indeed, the actions of these women can be justified by applying the principles of Marxism.

Sordid socio-economic conditions occasioned by the unjust distribution of wealth have led to poverty. In fact, social stratification imbalance is a major indicator of the cause of social unrest and a justified or ethical revolution. The blacks were the ones doing the work, but still, their wages were so poor that their "take home" could not take them home. It was even very difficult to differentiate them from the lower animals. The relationship between literature and economic production is captured in Marx's words by Obielo-Okpala (2009: 84–85):

La production des idées des conceptions de la conscience est tout d'abord immédiatement liée à l'activité matérielle des hommes et à leurs relations sociales, elle est le langage de la vie réelle. Les conceptions, les pensées, les relations spirituelles entre les hommes apparaissent ici encore... comme l'expression immédiate de leur comportement matériel. Il en est de même pour ce qui est de la production intellectuelle, telle qu'elle exprime dans le langage de la politique, du droit, de la morale, de la religion, de la métaphysique, etc., de tout un peuple. Les hommes sont les producteurs de leurs conceptions, de leurs idées ; etc, mais en tant qu'hommes réels, agissants, déterminés par un développement donné des forces de production et des rapports sociaux correspondant à celles-ci et ceci tout au long de l'histoire.

The production of ideas and concepts of consciousness is basically connected with the material being of men and their social relationship; it is actually, the language of real life. Concepts, thoughts, and spiritual relationships between men seem to exist here also... as the exact expression of their material behavior. It is the same as regards intellectual production, as expressed in the language of politics, law, morality, religion, and metaphysics among others, but as real men, actions are determined by a given development in terms of the productive forces and corresponding social realities therein and this has been the case from time immemorial [Our Translation].

Poverty is depicted in Sembène Ousmane's novel *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* with the image of constantly hungry, naked children with sunken chests and swollen bellies, as well as houses made of wood and easily blown off by the wind (pp. 35-36).

Similarly, the beggars in Aminata Sow Fall's *La grève des battus* (1979) protest the insensitivity of the government with regard to the piteous condition in which the poor find themselves. They are forcibly removed from the streets, where they make their living. In the story, the character of Salla Niang is significant. As a revolutionary leader, she is outspoken, brave, talented, and a good strategist. She makes the right appeals to her fellow beggars whenever she addresses them.

She advises them thus:

Organisons-nous! Pour commencer, n'acceptons plus qu'on nous jette ces petites pièces blanches et légères qui ne peuvent même plus servir à l'achat d'un bonbon, d'un tout petit bonbon. Eh ! Petits talibés, vous entendez ! Crachez sur les trois morceaux de sucre, crachez sur leur poignée de riz. Vous avez entendu ? Montrons-leur que nous aussi, nous sommes des hommes ! Et surtout plus de vœux avant d'avoir reçu une aumône bien grasse ! Les gars, êtes-vous d'accord? (*La Grève...* p. 48).

So, let's get organized! For a start, don't let's accept any more of those worthless coins they throw at us, that won't even buy a lollipop. Eh, my little tales, d'you hear! Spit on their one franc and their two francs; spit on their three lumps of sugar; spit on their handful of rice! D'you hear? Show them we're men as much as they are! And no more prayers for their welfare till we've received a good fat donation! Do you agree, lads? (*Beggars' strike*, p. 23).

Even before the beggars decided to embark on a strike, they had shown their anger. One of them revolted: "Ah! Because we are mendicants, we believe we are dogs! We're getting close to having enough!(p. 12). The beggars are fed up with being treated like dogs that deserve nothing

but leftovers. And the truth is that hunger and poverty compelled some of them to beg, which of course should remind the rich that paupers too exist.

Again, Salla Niang displays her courage when she bluntly answers Mour Ndiaye about what made the beggars not return to their former places. She says, "I don't know." Demand it; they are adults, and I am not their mother. »I do not know. (Ask them; they are adults, and I am not their mother) (p. 157). From this statement, it is evident that Salla Niang has tactically humiliated Mour Ndiaye both emotionally and physically, and the politician has been swept off his feet. With all the available resources at his disposal, Mour Ndiaye is unable to win over the beggars. His political power becomes useless. He ends his political career on a sad note. He loses his bid to become a vice president. On the contrary, Salla Niang, a mere wrecked beggar, is able to pull the crowd because her behaviour is accommodating. Her compound is filled with men and women of all ages. As a good leader, Salla Niang effectively wins and keeps the beggars who represent the masses in society.

Mour Ndiaye is ill-fated as he suffers a reversal of role. It is ironic that Mour, who sends the beggars away from the streets of Dakar, the capital of Senegal, as undeserved elements, eventually goes back to the beggars, lobbying them to return to their former places in the city centre so that he can use them to achieve his personal goal. Unfortunately for him, the beggars refuse. As a result, he meets his match! This is an ethical revolution that works. It can be deduced from what happens in *La grève des bàttu*, *Les bouts des bois de Dieu*, *Xala*, *Les vertiges du trône*, *Une si longue lettre*, *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, as well as *Rebelle*, that a breakdown in social cohesion leads to social conflict, which eventually brings about positive social change. Demonstrating her sympathy towards the oppressed, symbolised by the beggars, the novelist criticises the superstitious attitude to life adopted by the majority of Africans, especially those in positions of authority. Cyril Mokwenye (2009: 77) captures Aminata Sow Fall's reaction as follows:

I am, in the novel, denouncing the attitude of society towards the poor, the beggars as it were. One must, by the way, properly understand the beliefs which cut deep into our society. From the outside, I have the same perception of beggars as the Western world which is an indigent people to whom one throws a coin from time to time. But within themselves, these people conserve what their culture has bequeathed to them, which stipulates that if you are ill, giving charity to a beggar can help you to recover your health. From that point, the beggars become the mysterious representatives of something extra-natural and their strike, their refusal to accept alms, can take on unsuspected dimensions as I describe it in the novel...

It is therefore correct to say that any government that neglects the poor masses is a failure. Both physical infrastructure and stomach infrastructure should be prioritized. The novelist underscores the need for governance to have a human face.

Protest against poverty is equally a form of revolutionary consciousness, which is common to all the selected African novels. Mariama Bâ, in her novel, *Une si longue lettre*, kicks against the deplorable social structures in society. This is what can simply be described as poverty. According to Ebele Okey (1998: 35),

The sordid state of most African communities is evident today; the rural communities have been cut off from the urban areas because their roads have become impassable. Most, if not all our communities, are smarting from their rustic eerie darkness. The people of our hinterland are hungry for development and desirous of the opening up of their villages to beat back the forays of want, deprivation, poverty, primitivism, superstition...Generally, they long for better living conditions and the benefit of science and technology.

Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* discusses not only material poverty but also moral poverty. The inability to access basic infrastructural amenities is a major determinant of material poverty. On the other hand, a lack of will, interest, purpose, or attitudinal disposition, which can bring development, is moral poverty. Availability of good roads, decent houses, and potable water, as well as functional hospitals, an adequate food supply, security of lives and property, a stable electricity supply, good schools, and employment opportunities, among other things, are signs of a good standard of living or a better living condition for all (see Ogundokun, 2014). In her argument on social services in African states, Mariama Bâ (1980: 18) maintains:

Even though primary schools are rapidly increasing, access to them has not become any easier. They leave out in the streets an impressive number of children because of the lack of places...Apprenticeship in traditional crafts seems degrading to whoever has the slightest book learning. My dream is to become a clerk. The trowel is spurned. The horde of jobless swells the flood of delinquency.

The atmosphere of the hospital where the young Nabou works in *Une si longue lettre*, as pictured by the novelist, reflects the kind of poverty that exists throughout the black continent. Painting the concern of young Nabou, the narrator says:

Elle revenait de son travail harassée, pestant contre le manque de lits qui renvoyait, trop tôt à son gré, les accouchées à leur domicile, butée contre le manque de personnel, d'instruments adéquats, de médicaments. Elle s'émouvait : « Le bébé fragile est lâché trop tôt dans un milieu social où

l'hygiène manque. » Elle pensait à la grande mortalité infantile... (*Une si longue...* p. 93)

She would come back from work railing at the lack of beds led to the discharge, too early in her opinion, of the mothers; worried about the lack of staff, inadequate instruments, and medicines. She would say, with deep concern, a fragile baby is let loose too quickly into a hygienically unsound social environment. She thought of the great rate of infant mortality ... (*So long a letter*, p. 47).

The economic situation and the general well-being of the citizens are even more deplorable now, with the issue of insecurity in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. According to a careful reading of Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* in accordance with Marxist ideology, women's work and social status are severely marginalised by their actual "dual role" as child-rearing and workers. In this light, employers are able to exploit them by paying them lower wages. Men are able to take advantage of their "unpaid services" in the home. As a result, this treatment keeps women at bay and drastically reduces their chances economically and in other areas, both at home and in society at large. Consolidating all that has been said about the sordid human conditions in African states, Fafowora (2001: 248) remarks:

But without controlling its birth rate, Africa will be facing a decade in which social services and public utilities will decline. Already under SAP, Structural Adjustment Programme, the gains of the 70s in health, education, and other public utilities, have been badly eroded. In the case of Nigeria, per capita income dropped from US\$800 in the 1970s to less than US\$300 in the 1980s.

The revolt against materialism is also under the searchlight in Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Aminata Sow Fall's *La grève des bàttu*, and Fatou Keta's *Rebelle*. The novelists kick against the tradition of marrying out young girls of school age to older rich men for the love of money on the part of the girls' parents. This dirty practise of exchanging innocent girls for material things is seen in the case of Binetou in Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*. The schoolgirl is compelled to marry Modou, a man who is old enough to be her father. In fact, Modou's daughter, Daba, is Binetou's friend and classmate. As an exchange for the lady, Modou sent Binetou's mother and her father to Mecca for a religious pilgrimage, built a three-bedroom apartment for Dame Belle-mère (Binetou's mother's nickname), and provided her with a large sum of money and other gift items. Daba, Modou's daughter, recounts to her mother, Ramatoulaye:

Binetou, navrée, épouse son 'vieux'. Sa mère a tellement pleuré. Elle a supplié sa fille de lui 'donner une fin heureuse dans une vraie maison' que l'homme leur a promise. Alors, elle a cédé (*Une si longue...* p. 55).

Binetou is heartbroken. She is going to marry her sugar daddy. Her mother cried so much. She begged her daughter to give her life a happy end, in a proper house, as the man has promised them. So she accepted ... (*So long a letter*, p. 36).

In the case of Aminata Sow Fall's *La grève des battus*, Lolli is the victim. Her parents enticed her into marrying Mour, a supposedly successful man. When the latter picked a second wife, Lolli ran to her parents to protest against Mour's action, but surprisingly, her parents did not approve it. Even her friends did not see the reason why Lolli should think about leaving Mour. They advised her to go back to her husband so that the other woman would not think Lolli was afraid of her. The excerpt below captures the atmosphere in Lolli's country home:

Mais la mère de Lolli, la vieille Sanou Cissé, célèbre pour sa vertu et sa probité, est venue. Elle a fondu en larmes parce que Mour lui a dit que Lolli était allée jusqu'à l'injurier et que, n'eût été l'existence des enfants, il aurait divorcé. Son père, malade et tenant à peine debout, s'est traîné jusqu'à la maison: «Veux-tu achever mes jours, Lolli? Sache que si Mour te laisse tomber tu seras couverte de honte. Quand on a huit enfants dont quelques-uns sont en âge de se marier, on ne doit plus se permettre des comportements de petite fille. Mour est ton mari. Il est libre, il ne t'appartient pas. »

Ses amies aussi lui ont donné des conseils : « Tu serais bien bête de perdre ton mari et de le laisser à une autre ; celle-ci se moquerait de toi en disant qu'elle- t'fait peur (*La Grève...* p. 63/64)

Then Lolli's mother arrived, old Sanou Cissé, with her reputation for virtue and honesty. She burst into tears when Mour told her that Lolli had insulted him and that, if it hadn't been for the children, he would have divorced her. Her father, ill as he was and scarcely able to stand, dragged himself to their house. 'Do you want to be responsible for my death, Lolli? You must know that if Mour divorces you, you will be covered with shame. When a woman has got eight children, some of them old enough to be married, she can't allow herself to behave like a child; Mour is your husband. He is free. He doesn't belong to you (alone)'.

Her friends also gave her advice: 'You'd be really stupid to lose your husband and let another woman have him. She'd laugh at you and say you were frightened of her (*Beggars' strike*, p. 33).

In Fatou Keta's *Rebelle*, Malimouna violently rejects marrying old Sando, a rich man who happens to be her father's friend. Similarly, female African writers are conscious that infidelity among men is a blow to women. It is a serious cause of female annoyance. It can be described as a social, cultural, and moral mess. While men promote this practice, women frown on it

because it often breaks marriages or leads to polygamy. Polygamy, according to Marxist feminists, is harmful to the progression of the couple and the home. It does not permit a true sense of belonging on the part of women. Infidelity is the cause of Jacqueline's psychological disorder in Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*. Sonia Lee (1994; cited by Ibiyemi Mojola, 2000: 249) notes:

Pour les femmes-écrivains, la polygamie nuit à l'épanouissement du couple... Et même si elles sont conscientes que le mariage monogame n'est pas une garantie de bonheur, il reste à leurs yeux une marque de respect pour la femme, partenaire à part entière dans le mariage.

For female writers, polygamy is injurious to the development of the couple... And even if they are aware that the monogamous marriage is not a guarantee of happiness, it still remains for them a mark of respect for the woman, a full-fledged partner in the marriage.

Another major aspect of human life that is used to illustrate the revolutionary consciousness of African writers is religion. Through the character of Ibrahima Bakayako, Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* reveals that, apart from the family, school, and mass media, religion is another important agent of socialisation and mobilization. It is people's way of life through worship. Religion is also an integral part of a person's culture. It concerns a person's mode of life and the avenue through which people relate with God, their Creator, or the Supreme Being they believe in. Different forms of worship are characterised by rites or are ritualistic in nature.

All over the world, religious issues are archetypal subjects, both in real life and in literature. Marxists believe that the capitalists, the controllers of economic power, often turn to religion when political power fails. In his artistic creations, Sembène Ousmane is mindfully and ideologically dissatisfied with Islamic culture, particularly on the issues of polygamy and fanaticism. He also condemns the idea of using religion to adjust, direct, or control people's minds for personal interests. He observes that the practise is, in most cases, laced with exploitative tendencies. The character of El Hadji Mabiqué, who refuses to help his own sister, is a classical example. Rather than helping his relatives in their time of need, he preaches the gospel to the poor woman. He says:

Crois-tu réellement que les toubabs céderont ? Moi, non. Je suis sur qu'ils auront le dernier mot. Tout ici leur appartient : l'eau que nous buvons, les boutiques et les marchandises. Cette grève, c'est comme si une bande de singes désertaient un champ fertile : qui est-ce qui en bénéficie ? Le propriétaire du champ ! Et puis nous n'avons pas à lutter contre la volonté divine... Je sais que la vie est dure, mais cela ne doit pas nous pousser à désespérer de Dieu... Il a assigné à chacun son rang, sa place et son rôle ; il est impie d'intervenir. Les toubabs sont là : c'est la volonté de Dieu. Nous

n'avons pas à nous mesurer à eux car la force est un don de Dieu et Allah leur en a fait cadeau. Vois, ils ont même fermé les robinets... (*Les bouts de bois...* p. 83)

Do you really think that the *toubabs* will give in? I know better – I know that they will have the last word. Everything here belongs to them – the shops, the merchandise in the shops, even the water we drink. This strike is like a band of monkeys deserting a fertile plain – who gains from that? The owner of the plain! It is not our part in life to resist the will of heaven. I know that life is often hard, but that should not cause us to turn our backs on God. He has assigned a rank, a place, and a certain role to every man and it is blasphemous to think of changing His design. The *toubabs* are here because that is the will of God. Strength is a gift of God, and Allah has given it to them. We cannot fight against it – why, look, they have even turned off the water ... (*God's bits of wood*, p. 44/45).

El Hadji Mabigué sees the strikers as a band of monkeys deserting a fertile plain and believes that Allah has given the superiority of mankind to the Whiteman. El Hadji Mabigué's hypocritical disposition is more revealing in Ramatoulaye's comment about her brother, who is a self-acclaimed devoted Muslim. Ramatoulaye describes him as a fornicator, a thief, and an old goat (p. 83). In addition, the chief imam of Dakar is implicitly an agent of French imperialism. The role El Hadji Mabigué plays when he mediates between Ramatoulaye and the police, as well as in his speech at the racecourse, vindicates Ramatoulaye. The Imam rejects the strike action embarked upon by the railway workers:

...les imams et les prêtres des différentes sectes. Après les prières il y avait un sermon dont le thème était toujours le même : Nous ne sommes pas capables de créer le moindre objet utile, pas même une aiguille, et nous voulons nous heurter aux toubabs qui nous ont tout apporté ? C'est de la démente ! Vous feriez mieux de remercier Dieu de nous avoir apporté les toubabs qui adoucissent notre vie par leurs inventions et leurs bienfaits. (*Les bouts de bois...* p. 318)

...imams and the priests of other sects. After the prayers and religious services all over the city, there would be a sermon whose theme was always the same: By ourselves, we are incapable of creating any sort of useful object, not even a needle; and yet you want to strike against the toubabs who have brought us all of these things! It is madness! You would do better to be thanking God for having brought them among us and bettering our lives with the benefits of their civilisation and their Science (*God's bits of wood*, p. 206).

The position of the religious leaders and the likes of El Hadji Mabigué, who support the colonial masters, only reflects the selfishness of some African elites and beneficiaries of the old order. It

also demonstrates a clear betrayal of trust on the part of these shameless leaders, who have made themselves unaccountable to their fellow Africans. However, Sembène Ousmane loves the kind of faithfulness displayed by Fa Keta, who continues to observe his prayer despite the humiliation he suffers at the hands of Bernadini, the commandant in the prison, believing that what is worth doing at all is worth doing well. See the following image of the scene at the detention camp:

Comme Fa Keïta se baissait avant de s'agenouiller, le pied du gardien-chef vint le frapper aux reins et l'envoya la tête en avant dans le double réseau des barbelés. Il y entra jusqu'aux hanches ; de ses épaules, de son dos, de ses flancs, des gouttes de sang perlèrent. (*Les bouts de bois...* p. 361/362)

And as Fa Keïta began to kneel, the commandant's boot caught him in the kidney and hurled his head first into the strands of barbed wire. Little drops of blood flecked the skin of man's shoulders and back and sides (*God's bits of wood*, p. 236).

In his effort to enhance positive social change through literature, Ousmane exposes and condemns the unacceptable use of religion to enslave people's minds. Bakayoko, Ousmane's protagonist, in *Les bouts de Bois de Dieu* remarks:

Je vous remercie tous de m'avoir donné la parole, dit-il en oulof. Il était anormal que tout le monde puisse parler sauf les grévistes. Je vais donc parler en leur nom. Depuis plus de quatre mois nous sommes en grève et nous savons pourquoi. Cela nous fait vivre une vie dure, sans eau, sans feu, sans nourriture. C'est un destin cruel pour un homme, davantage pour une femme, plus encore pour un enfant et pourtant nous le supportons. Il n'y a plus d'eau dans la Médina. Qui parmi ceux qui ont parlé avant moi vous a dit pourquoi? Personne ne peut mettre en doute les paroles de ces personnes mais que vous ont-elles dit, à qui ont-elles parlé dans une langue que la plupart d'entre vous ne comprennent pas? Le grand Serigne N'Dakarou vous a parlé de Dieu. Ne sait-il donc pas que ceux qui ont faim et soif désertent le chemin qui mène aux mosquées? (*Les bouts de bois...* p. 336)

I thank you for having let me speak, he said, in Ouolof. It would have been very strange if everyone had been able to speak here except the men who are on strike. What I have to say, then, I say in their name. For more than four months now I have been on strike, and we all know why. It has been a hard life in that time – without food, without water, without even fire. It is a hard path for a man, and harder still for the women and the children, but we chose it and I have trod it. There is no longer any water in the whole district where we live. But among the men who spoke to you before me, did anyone tell you why? No one is questioning the words of these

men, but what did they tell you, and to whom were they talking, in a language most of you do not understand? The imam spoke to you of God. Does that mean he doesn't know that people who are hungry and thirsty are likely to forget the way to the mosque? (*God's bits of wood*, p. 219).

With this, the writer manifests his ideological position on religion through his major character, Bakayoko. It is obvious that Sembène Ousmane is upset because he sees religion as a tool employed by the ruling elite to manipulate the masses so as to achieve their own gains. The killing of Vendredi, El Hadji Mabigué's ram, symbolises the death of "Islam" in prose fiction. The self-rediscovery of Meka is the death of Christianity in Cameroon, as demonstrated in *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*. Assatou's refusal to accept polygamy is a revolt against Islamic injunctions on the one hand and African culture on the other. This has, however, enhanced the revolutionary consciousness of those committed Africans to stand up for their rights in an attempt to put in place an egalitarian society. Therefore, until the African women, the peasant men and women, and the urban workers unite in control of the helms of the state, the present leaders shall continue to divide Africans on the ground of religion, sex, and geographical origins (Hagher Iyorwuese, 1991).

Furthermore, in Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, the writer paints the European quarters of Thiès as the "Vatican" to highlight the link between the established political system or order and the Christian religion. El Hadji Mabigué and Sérigne N'Dakarou, the Chief Imam of Dakar, are the clear beneficiaries of the worthless medals in Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*. And this explains their hypocritical tendencies as agents of the imperialists. With this, the writer demonstrates his ideological point of view on religion. It is obvious that Sembène Ousmane is unhappy because he believes that religion is used as a means of deceiving and manipulating the masses by the elite and those in the corridors of power so as to achieve personal gains. One can say that religion is a confirmed agent of neo-colonialism. Yalem Barango (1980: 5) observes: "By neo-colonialism, we mean the practise of granting a sort of independence with the concealed intention of making the liberated country a client state and controlling it effectively by means other than political ones." From everywhere in the world, one notes that the fellowship and relations between religious institutions and the inhuman political system have worsened human living conditions. For instance, in Africa, the poor masses are the products of bad leadership, wicked governance, and selfish religious orders. The trend has enslaved the minds of the downtrodden Africans and endangered their future.

As a matter of fact, one can see that racism is another dominant issue in Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts des bois de Dieu*. The most troubling fear is that some blacks are already set against their fellow African brothers through the "divide and rule method." For example, in Isnard, the foreman confronts Doudou and tells him to make himself a white man so that he can have the same form of treatment and the same luxuries a white man enjoys. It's not surprising, then, that

the foreman books any black who arrives late to work and eventually loses that day's pay. The pictures of the Imam and El Hadji Mabigué in the novel under review show them as agents of the colonial imperialists to entrench their divide-and-rule policy in an attempt to subject the system to perpetual darkness. As a result, the Africans remain blindfolded, and the political situation is tense and volatile.

Still on religion, in *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, Father Vandermayer's attitude and action towards Meka illustrate the church's hypocrisy and non-charitableness. In recent years, it has been noted that religion has made mutual understanding among tribes, people, and nations very narrow. Ethnicity, racism, and religion have turned out to be strong dividing factors across climes. There is an unacceptable romance between religious institutions and the existing political system. One is, therefore, pushed to assert that colonialism, Christianity, commerce, and civilization have brought complicity and confusion to African states. In effect, people are set against people and nations against nations. According to Fafowora (2001: 248):

Religion can either make men wise and virtuous, or fanatical and hypocritical. And, as most nations get poorer, the struggle for power and control of the declining resources of many nations gets fiercer. Hence, many will be disposed to use religion to promote their own selfish interests, by emphasizing religious differences and promoting religious antagonism.

The use of an inexperienced character, irony, sarcasm, humor, hyperbole, and symbolism enables Oyono to actualize his themes and intentions. Meka's understanding of the world of whites is very low. This is shown in his simple-mindedness, innocence, and limited grasp of European culture. The very first sentence of the novel suggests that Meka does not understand the sophistication of the European way of life:

Meka était en avance sur le "bonjour du Seigneur", le premier rayon de soleil qui lui tombait habituellement dans la narine gauche, en s'infiltrant par l'un des trous du toit de raphia pourri et criblé de ciel (*Le vieux nègre...* p. 9).

Meka was already awake when the first ray of sunlight (God's good morning to him) found its way through one of the holes in the rotten raffia thatch that was full of chinks you could see the sky through and fell, as it did regularly every morning, into his left nostril (*The old man and the medal*, p. 3).

The illusion that the ray of sunlight deliberately seeks him out and gets into his left nostril is childish. This manner of perception goes with superstitious interpretations of events, which are common to most illiterate people. Meka's ability for abstract and speculative reasoning is

indeed poor. In short, Oyono portrays Meka as a stupid man in his interactions with the colonial government and Christianity.

Apart from exposing and condemning the hypocrisy of the colonial lords, their excesses in terms of the brutality of their hosts, and the double standard of the missionaries, the novelist also blames his fellow Africans for the insincerity of purpose among those who claimed they accepted Catholicism. For example, Engamba, Meka's brother-in-law, denounces his African religion, which makes him inherit his father's ten wives, only because he does not want to be ridiculed by his neighbors. Mbogsi marries only to stop to confess his "impure thoughts" to the priest.

The social, political, and economic structures in the railway industry demonstrate the hostile human living condition in a capitalist state, where the means of production and distribution of wealth on the land are solely in the hands of a few rich investors. Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* also presents a fight against social injustice directed towards the masses, particularly women. Ramatoulaye killed Vendredi, Mabigué's ram, to press home a point. She preaches that if people's lives depend on one, one needs to be courageous and play one's role adequately:

Quand on sait que la vie et le courage des autres dépendent de votre vie et de votre courage, on n'a plus le droit d'avoir peur... Même si on a très peur ! Ah ! Nous vivons des instants cruels, nous sommes obligés de nous forger une dureté, de nous raidir. Plus ça va, plus les temps deviennent durs (*Les bouts de bois...* p. 117)

When you know that the life and the spirit of others depend on your life and your spirit, you have no right to be afraid – even when you are terribly afraid. In the cruel times we are living through we must find our own strength, somehow, and force ourselves to be hard (*God's bits of wood*, p. 69).

Having resisted the arrest of Ramatoulaye (p. 125), the women in large numbers protested against her eventual arrest and in the process, Houdia M'Baye was killed. The ironic twist in this is captured by the narrator:

La foule s'était arrêtée à quelques mètres et lorsque Houdia M'Baye tomba, les premiers rangs se portèrent en avant, un instant les jets puissants les continrent mais la poussée des centaines d'hommes et des femmes qui s'étaient agglomérés fut plus forte que celle des pompes et la distance fut vite franchie. Les pompiers qui craignaient pour leur vie s'enfuirent dans toutes les directions tandis que les miliciens et les gendarmes, qui n'osaient faire usage de leurs armes, étaient acculés aux

murs du commissariat et des maisons voisines (*Les bouts de bois...* p. 195).

The crowd had reassembled a few yards away, and when Houdia M'Baye fell the first ranks surged forward again. The powerful jets held them back for a minute or two, but the massed pressure of hundreds of bodies was stronger than any pumps, and they burst out of the clouds of water and raced across the square. The firemen fled in panic, while the policemen and soldiers, not daring to use their weapons, were pushed back against the walls of the police station and the neighboring houses (*God's bits of wood*, p. 123).

The citation above paints a mental picture of hostility, which is to be expected in a typical class struggle, and to Marxists, such instances are normal and part of the expected experience. Even white women are conscious of the hostility in society during colonial rule. They are always escorted to the market by law enforcement agents. According to the narrator, "the white women no longer went to the market without being accompanied by a policeman."

From the foregoing discussion, one can establish that *Les bouts de Bois de Dieu* and *Le vieux nègre et la médaille* are Africans' fictional revolts against socio-cultural, economic, political, and religious exploitation of the Africans by colonial lords. The writers denounce colonialism, and like Walter Rodney in his 1972 book, "*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*," they are of the view that colonialism is the cause of underdevelopment in African countries. Rodney's hatred for colonialism is, however, total and more serious than what Sembène Ousmane and Ferdinand Oyono demonstrated in their novels. Rodney does not see anything good in colonialism. It is "a one-armed bandit" (Rodney, 1972: 223).

In Patrick Ilboudo's *Les vertiges du trône, Le Républicain*, the only independent newspaper, is the people's talking drum, their spokesman through which their public opinions are expressed and which allows them to design or project agendas for the government. Hence, the destruction of *Le Republic* could be seen as misrule. It could also be interpreted as a crackdown on press freedom, not just on the opposition. President Benoît Wédraogo and his associates have declared war on the citizens' fundamental human rights. It is the self-consciousness of this denial and other forms of social injustice that make the students organise a protest, which eventually marks the beginning of serious trouble for President Benoît Wédraogo.

La nouvelle de l'incendie du Journal a surchauffé l'esprit des élèves et des étudiants, au point qu'ils ont décidé d'organiser une marche de protestation à la fois contre la suppression de la liberté d'opinion et contre le non-paiement des bourses d'études (*Les vertiges* . . . p.42)

The news about the setting ablaze of the Newspaper house (*Le Républicain*) punched the spirits of the pupils and students, to the point

that they decided to organize a protest march against the suppression of the freedom of speech and at the same time, to fight against the non-payment of their bursary allowances [Our Translation].

Amadou Touré, the leader of the students' body further adds:

L'instant est grave. Le gouvernement vient d'incendier le seul journal indépendant du pays. Il ne paie pas nos bourses. Il met en chômage technique nos parents. L'instant est grave et nous devons agir (*Les vertiges* . . . p. 43).

The case is serious. The government has just burnt down the only independent newspaper in the country. It does not pay our bursary allowances. It subjects our parents to unemployment technically. The case is serious and we must act (Our Translation).

The minors, as it were, call for the removal of a dictator, an unfriendly and shameless regime that has succeeded in reducing them to nothing. During the protest march, some of the inscriptions on the students' banner read: "We want pain and freedom." "Benoît Wédraogo, démission." "Non à la dictature" (*Les vertiges*... p. 51). "We want food and freedom," says Benoît Wédraogo. "No to dictatorship" (our translation)

The students frown at the charlatans, who have nothing to offer society. It can also be understood that the conflict between the government and the students symbolises a divorce between the government (the state) and the masses. The body of the students is to readers and novelists, Marxists and Communists, who demand the replacement of the old social order that closes its eyes to the progress of the suffering tax payers. The revolutionaries' primary concerns are the restructuring of an unfavourable social order and the restoration of trust, which will result in permanent victory. True democracy should permit constructive criticism and objective opposition. The revolutionaries also see the ideas of freedom and responsibility as crucial to social transformation and human development.

Rebelle, as Keta's novel is entitled, is indeed a revolutionary piece. The writer criticises a lot of social injustices, especially those vices that incapacitate women in African societies. Malimouna, Keta's protagonist, protests against the tradition of circumcising young African girls (*Rebelle*, pages 14, 15, 21, 26, and 27). "I don't want to take this test," Malimouna declares flatly (*Rebelle*, p. 15). "I do not want to go through this test," Malimouna declared bluntly (our translation). Sanusi (2015: 121) notes:

Keita in her novel (*Rebelle*) strongly condemns the practice of female circumcision and advocates for its end because, to her, this rite causes harm to women and has no reasonable justification to be carried out on

them any longer.

The heroine also condemns forced marriage (*Rebelle*, 29 & 39) and the abandonment of women. According to the narrator;

Louma, le père de Malimouna, les avait abandonnées depuis longtemps, sous prétexte que Matou ne faisait plus d'enfant, et qu'il lui fallait des fils qui porteraient son nom et seraient sa fierté (*Rebelle*, p. 24).

Louma, Malimouna's father had abandoned them for a long time on the pretense that Matou could no longer have any child, and that he would like to have sons that would bear his name and make him proud [Our Translation].

In *Rebelle*, Keïta again frowns at rape (*Rebelle*, P. 6) and arranged marriage between young couples even though they are not forced (*Rebelle*, p. 86). For instance, the writer rejects abnormal behaviors that most men display towards their female counterparts, especially in an arranged marriage as readers can see in the case of Barou and Fanta. Such a marriage must be discouraged if Africa must develop. Sanusi (2015: 113) notes:

The subaltern person, generally speaking, when fighting to overthrow the system that oppresses him or her, functions within a group with which he/she is affiliated. It is generally assumed that it is after the subaltern becomes conscious of his or her condition that he or she seeks a change of situation by attacking the oppressors.

It is observed that seeking compromise does not often work in the settlement of issues, hence, the oppressed result to the use of force in destroying religious, cultural, and other forms of shackles that imprisoned them. And this is exactly what Malimouna has done.

There is also a non-violent protest against racism (*Rebelle*, p. 137). Malimouna's relationship with Philippe Blain, a French man hits the rock because of color difference. Keïta tries to correct the idea of treating women as doormats by removing the established double standard of sexual morality and equality in African society. For example, Frascchetti (2001: 2) observes:

Every woman's life was surrounded by a thick silence imposed upon her by the outer world and by the woman herself. It was considered unseemly for outsiders to praise a woman's virtues, for talents and abilities could find expression only within her home. No one but her closest relatives could know anything of her merits, and the members of her family were the only persons permitted to speak of her to others.

CONCLUSION

Both collective and individual revolt can bring about the desired social change in human societies. In this study, we have demonstrated that rebellion is a product of consciousness—politically, culturally, religiously, and economically. It is, therefore, important for the constituted authorities to have listening ears and do the needful when it comes to the plights of the people they govern. The masses will rise up and demand their rights if they are conscious of them, whether peacefully or violently. In a genuine search for enduring development, therefore, political leaders, particularly in underdeveloped countries, should step up their ability and be more responsible, as well as accountable to the common men who elected them to power.

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