

The Rejection of Men's Exploitation by Fellow Men: A Literary Approach in *Les Bouts De Bois De Dieu*

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ABSTRACT

The scramble for the partitioning of Africa during the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 in Germany created the ground for the colonialists to make Africans the victims of social alienation and mental dehumanization during that era of colonialism. Thus, African writers that flayed these social and economic vices armed themselves with different approaches both theoretically and stylistically, for the purpose of *engagement littéraire*. Reading the Senegalese Sembène Ousmane's *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* (1960), published few days after the independence of most of the African countries, this paper extrapolates the writer as a Marxist, with the prevalence of Marxist tendencies in his literary creation. The paper seeks to establish the fact that women too could be relevant in the nation's building as they play pivotal roles in the rejection of men's exploitation by fellow men from the perspective of Marxist Theory. With the methodology of textual analysis, the paper gives the synopsis of the novel before the theoretical approach adopted, the Marxist Theory. This is followed by the Marxist deconstruction of the novel on the rejection of men's exploitation by men which also sees the women complementarities of men in the modern African society. The paper concludes by recommending how the oppressed could gain a total freedom from the oppressors.

Son engagement est très prononcé dans la lutte contre le colonialisme et, aujourd'hui, dans l'édification du socialisme. Il faut savoir que Sembene à toujours été un militant syndicaliste et que, d'autre, ses admissions littéraires le portaient vers Richard Wright et les romanciers russe que vers Senghor (Kesterlout Lilyan, 225).

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a creative work of arts that allows the creator to let out his mind consciously or unconsciously on a subject matter that affects nature and humanity in the folklores, culture, customs, traditions, norms, history and other social phenomena through the special deployment of language, plot, characters, setting, and etc to reflect and refract the societal anomalies either in the oral or the written form for aesthetic and didactic purposes.

In view of the above proposition of a modern definition of Literature, *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*, published in 1960 few days after the Independence of the majority of the West African countries, was written by Sembene Ousmane; a Senegalese, born on 1st January, 1923 to a fisherman in Ziguinchor, Casamance (Senegal). As an autodidact, he worked as a soldier, a fisherman, and a docker mechanic. He was one

of the writers of the generation of committed writers that Africa has produced before and after her Independence. The work remains one of the *chef d'oeuvres* of the Francophone African Literature.

In the meantime, since the publication of the novel in 1960, several scholarly researches have been done on it. Starting from the seventies, several scholastic literary criticisms have been effected on it either in French; the original language in which the work is published as *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*, or in English, the translated version - *God's Bits of Wood*. Akowa S. (1976) in his article « La Femme africaine dans *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* », and Tidjani-Serpos (1978) in his own article “ Roman et Société: La Femme africaine comme personnage des *Bouts de Bois de Dieu* de Sembene Ousmane ” have both looked at the roles played by the African Women in the realization of the contemporary Africa. Victor Aire (1978) sensitized the Africans through the text, in his article “ Ousmane Sembene's *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*: A Lesson in Conscience ”. Sacks K. (1978) in « Women and Class Stuggle in Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood* », examined how women/wives could be the backbones of their husbands in the realization of their dreams in the African society as seen in the women's roles during the industrial action. Wallace K.S. (1983) in his own article « *Les Bouts de Bois de*

Dieu and Xala: A Comparative Analysis of Female Roles in Sembene's Novels », did a comparative analysis of the women's roles in *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* and *Xala*, another novel written by Sembene Ousmane, in the realization of the present African State while Babatunde Ayeleru (2008) in « L'Interpénétration de l'Engagement et l'Esthétique dans la création littéraire de Sembene Ousmane: L'Exemple de *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* et *Le Mandat* », did a stylistic deconstruction of the text, looking at how commitment and esthetics are interpenetrated in *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* and *Le Mandat* another work of the writer. S. A. Ogundokun (2014) considered revolution esthetics in his own study, while Rose-line Lung'aho (2014) looked at; *God's Bits of Wood* being a historical novel and how African historical novelists are sympathizers of feminist. However, in our opinion, this article is aimed at contribute to knowledge through the Marxist deconstruction of this literary work.

The task before us in this paper is to examine how men react, how they fight back after a long period of repression, subjection to unjust hardships and exploitation in their native land by colonial masters who have subjected them to work under several harsh and inhumane conditions. Moreover, it also examines how they will react in the face of unequal welfare and remuneration vis-à-vis their white counterparts; and having realized that the parlous situations cannot be remedied by natural evolutionary ideologies of the capitalists. While using the Marxist theory as an approach to Literary Criticism and the methodology of textual analysis, the question is what will be the reactions of the proletariat when it dawns on them that their present as well as the future has been mortgaged by the bourgeois?

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

Published in 1960, few days after majority of the colonized West African Countries got their Independence from their colonial masters; *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* narrates the ordeals of the railway workers rising to the cause of rejection of being exploited, degraded, cheated and uncared for by their fellow men, their colonial masters who are whites. They demand for better remuneration and augmentation of their salary structure, family allowances, old age retirement and pension, equal work and equal pay, better housing, among others. The actions take place in several locations - primarily in Bamako, Thiès, and Dakar. The preface at the beginning of the novel shows the story is about a whole country and its entire people. Notably there is a large cast of characters associated with each place. Some are featured players; that is to say some of them are fictional while some are of the actual railway industrial workers - Fa Keïta, Tiémoko, Maimouna, Ramatoulaye, Penda, Deune, N'Deye, Dejean, and Bakayoko. The fundamental conflict is captured in two characters: Dejean, the French manager and colonialist, and Bakayoko, the soul and spirit of the strike. In another sense, however, the main characters of the novel are the people as a collective and the railway itself. The strike causes an evolution in the self-perception of the strikers themselves, one that is most noticeable in the women of Bamako, Thiès, and Dakar. These women go from merely standing behind the men to

walking alongside them and eventually marching ahead of them. When the men are able to work the factory jobs that the railway provides them, the women are responsible for running the markets, preparing the food, and rearing the children. But the onset of the strike gives the role of bread-winner - or perhaps more precisely, bread scavenger - to the women.

Eventually, the women march on foot for over four days from Thiès to Dakar. Many of the men originally oppose the women's march. But precisely this show of determination from the marching women, who the French has earlier dismissed as "concubines", makes the strikers' relentlessness clearer. The women's march causes the French to understand the nature of the willpower that they are facing, and fortunately shortly after, the French agrees to the demands of the strikers. The book also highlights the oppression faced by women in the colonial era. They are deprived of their ability to speak on matters including society as a whole.

It is expedient to note that this can also be considered for further studies with the theory of faction; however, our focus is to deconstruct painstakingly how the literary creation is incorporated in a way and manner that it exhibits several tenets of Marxism.

THE MARXIST THEORY

The history and origin of Marxism is long and complicated, and more often, it is considered as a twentieth century phenomenon owing to the singular fact that it has the basis of the USSR Socialist System of Governance. Etymologically, the theory is really dated back to the thinking of Karl Marx (1818-1883), a nineteenth century German Philosopher and Economist. Being a nonconformist, Marx had an attitude of seeing things non-conventionally; information about him which later appeared in his book titled: *The German Ideology* (1845). It is his believe that all the means of production; land, labor, capital and entrepreneur, should be owned and controlled by the state and that history is progressing toward the eventual triumph of communism. He introduced the concept of dialectical and historical materialism. This theory maintains that these two; dialectical and historical materialism, developed as a struggle between classes contradictions that are eventually synthesized through the dialectical approach - thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

Marx met another like-minded political economist in Paris, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), where he discovered they are sharing the same socio-political and economic view independently of one another. These two socio-political and economic juggernauts collaborated to explain the principles of communism - the metamorphosis of socialism to communism - which later became Marxism. Besides, they organized an international movement of workers and came out with what we call today the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (February, 1848). They identified class struggle as an essential ingredient or the driving force behind history: *The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles*, (Marx & Engels, 14). They foresaw that the struggle will finally lead to revolution in which workers will overthrow and overthrow the capitalist society.

Marxist theory is concerned with economic and political elements of art and it emphasizes the ideological property/message content of literature. It is one of the popular types of sociological criticism. Sociological approach to the study of literature holds that literature and other forms of creative arts should be examined in the cultural, economic and political context in which they are written, produced or received. This literary theory explores the connections between the artist/writer and his society. To understand a writer's literary work, it may probe into his society as well as studying how societal elements are represented in the literature itself. It is believed that literature has certain functions to perform in contributing to the development of human societies through moral or behavior re-orientation.

Of course, our adoption of the sociological approach of literary criticism can be justified since this critical theory is believed, according to Abiola Irele, to be "the most apt to render a full account of modern African literature" because it takes into consideration "everything within our society which has informed the work" (quoted in Ogundokun, 74).

Tyson Lois affirms that; "Marxism works to make us constantly aware of all the ways in which we are products of material and historical circumstances, and of the repressive ideologies that serve to blind us to this fact in order to keep us subservient to the ruling power system" (57). We shall, in view of the above, lay our hands on *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* (hereafter refers to as *Les Bouts* and *LBB* followed by the page number) and wear the garment of Marxist criticism on it. We shall also attempt to see the rejection of men's exploitation by men while considering the basic tenets of the Marxist Theory; the economic power, the class struggle, radical Marxist feminism, representation of obscenity, materialism and spirituality, from which the text largely benefited in the subsequent paragraphs.

THE MARXIST DECONSTRUCTION OF *LES BOUTS DE BOIS DE DIEU*

Sigmund Freud in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, postulates;

The motive of human society is in the last resort an economic one; since it does not possess enough provisions to keep its members alive unless they work, it must restrict the number of its members and divert their energies from sexual activity to work. It is faced, in short, by the eternal, primeval exigencies of life, which are with us to this day (3382).

This postulation takes us to the Economic power being one of the basic tenets of Marxism. It remains the driving force of every capitalist class which gives them the willpower to exploit the proletariat. With this power, they determine when to rarefy, avail and inflate the prices of goods and services provided by the proletariat, willing political wand to themselves when the proletariat are famished. Being option less, they run back to the capitalist who will give them an ounce of wages from the goods and services they had produced. This is exhaustible within a twinkle of an eye, and cyclically the trend continues.

In *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*,¹ the capitalists depicted are the White colonialists; Dejean, Isnard, M. Leblanc, Victor,

Pierrot, Béatrice, with some black accomplices such as; El Hadji Mabigüe, Hadramé and Sérigne N'Dakarou. They use the economic power arbitrarily on the powerless class, the proletariat. An instance is Mamadou Keïta and Fa Keïta who are arrested for no reason which result in the killing of Niakoro in the process (*LBB* 164-165); Tiémoko, Mame Sofi, Ramatoulaye, even the young Ad'jibidji, Bakary - the tuberculosis patient, Ibrahima Bakayoko, *brief*, all the railway workers making up the proletariat. These two classes are not depicted the same way in the text. While the "European Quarter" is well planned and orderly arranged with optimal maintenance of law and order, Bambara, the residential quarter of the railway workers is a slum, a ghetto described thus:

Des taudis, des soupentes branlantes, des tombeaux renversés, des tapâtes en tiges de mil ou de bambous, des piquets de fer, des palissades à moitié écroulées. Thiès: un immense terrain vague où s'amoncellent tous les résidus de la ville, des pieux, des traverses, des roues de locomotives, des fûts rouillés, des bidons défoncés, des ressorts de sommiers, des plaques de tôle cabossées et lacérées puis, un peu plus loin, sur le sentier de chèvres qui mène vers Bambara, des monceaux de vieilles boîtes de conserves, des amas d'ordure, des monticules de poteries cassées, d'ustensiles de ménage., (*LBB* 35)

The above excerpt crafted stylistically gives a vivid description of the deplorable residential quarter of the railway workers, showing to us that they dine in squalor and live in squalid. This shows the height of poverty on ground and that it is an "unsafe environment which can cause an epidemic of air or water borne diseases" (Ogundokun 77). It also reminds us of the despicable residential quarter of the proletariat in *Le Mandat* (1966), (*Le Mandat* 125). The capitalists derived and inherited their economic power from race, color as well as military while some of their local accomplices; El Hadji Mabigüe and Sérigne N'Dakarou got theirs from their connection with them.

The unequal distribution of the means of production and economic power in favor of the capitalists at the detriment of the proletariat and their marginalization by the bourgeois propel the masses to confront their oppressors via hook and crook means for their economic and social rights; hence, the class struggle, the conflict between the bourgeois (the rich who control the means of production, owing the economic, political and militia power) and the proletariat (the lower class, the suppliers of the labor required by the bourgeois to allow them make profit). Karl Marx refers to the conflict between these two classes as dialectical materialism because there has always been the cause(s) of the conflict/the plight of the proletariat conceived as the thesis, the harsh and exploitative policies and demands of the capitalists which is the antithesis and the resolution of the conflict which is the synthesis.

Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu which revolves around the proletariat being the railway workers shows how the proletariat decide to use the first available instrument in their possession; the strike action, to clamp down the daily activities that take place at the Railway Stations. This has series of deleterious effects on the economy, the main source of pow-

er of the oppressing capitalists. These capitalists are fat and good looking; enjoying their retirement, but their hosts are mere *kwashiorkored* skeletal walking ghosts; emaciated and haggard, begging for urgent pity and attention. Penury and sickness are etched all over the faces of the poverty-stricken and hungry-looking black *cheminots* as death is not found wanting in their midst. As Bakary puts it;

Je suis plus malade que toi Souunkaré. regarde, nous ne sommes plus nombreux, les vieux ! Où sont les Fouseynou, les David de Gorée, les Aliou Samba et Abdoulaye et Coulibaly; ils n'ont pas eu de retraite eux et ils sont morts. Quant aux aînés des toubabas, ceux qui nous ont appris le métier, les Henri, les Delacolline, les Edouard, où sont-ils ? Ils sont chez eux avec leur retraite. (LBBD 42-43)

Besides, they can no longer buy anything tangible with the peanuts given to them as salaries - very low - as there is no difference between them and animals; « *Il n'y a plus de différence entre les bêtes et nous tant nos salaires sont bas* », according to Mamadou Keïta, (LBBD 24), on the land which heavenly belongs to them. They have to struggle with their oppressors to have *un gain de cause* of their demands. Their demands are never too high; augmentation of their salaries to commensurate with the work and tasks they execute, retirement for the aged, auxiliaries in terms of machines, family allocation in order to take good and proper care of their families and other things that the white enjoy which will make a better life of them. Their demands are made known through Dejean's correspondence with Europe. He says:...*Allô, allô !... Oui, lui-même. Non, ils n'ont pas encore repris. Ce qu'ils demandent ? Une augmentation de salaires, quatre mille auxiliaires, allocations familiales et retraite. (LBBD 58)*

This study brings to the foreground the fact that the oppressors deployed all the machinery at their disposal to repress and manipulate this revolting black *cheminots*. It is the interest of the Marxist critics to reveal the wiles of the capitalists to put an end to the struggle between the two classes through the back door, which is not also found wanting in the text. However, they failed, since the masses have been able to achieve class unity as noted by Karl Marx. This corroborates Rosemarie Tong's opinion that "as soon as a group of people is fully conscious of itself as a class, it has a better chance of achieving its fundamental goals. There is power in group awareness" (100).

The escapades of the capitalists as they try every available means to break the struck of the strike action through their dishonest means are revealed. This includes the seizure of water and electricity, inflation of the prices of foodstuffs, unlawful arrest made to them, killing of their children as in the case of Kâ and his other friend, and even to the extent of trying to bribe some of the leaders of the strikers with a certain amount of money. An instance is in the case of Isnard, one of the colonial lords, who believes that every African is corrupt, tries to bribe Doudou, the secretary of the black railway workers with three million francs. In his response, Doudou makes him understand that Africans are not corrupt but they, the white, corrupt them. He maintains that, although, the three million francs is money to a black of his status, but nevertheless, he stands in the defense of his

class's cause as well as Africa's integrity. He says the money cannot make him white but rather, he prefers being a black with dry and broken crust of liberty;

...Trois millions, c'est une somme pour un Nègre, pour ajusteur-tourneur nègre, mais je préfère rester nègre car les trois millions ne pourront pas me blanchir. J'aime mieux les dix minutes de casse-croûte (LBBD 236).

Isnard's failure lies in his inability to think that the subservience of the workers to the rules and regulations of the Railway Stations is not a matter of race, color or ideologies, and that they are not nincompoops and puppets that are daft and docile. For there is a reason for every African's humility and honesty passed to them from their ancestors and they are proud of it. This view corroborates Léo Frobenius, quoted by Lilyan Kesterlout that:

C'est n'est pas une affaire de race. Ce n'est pas parce qu'il est noir que l'Africain a telle manière de danser, de prier, d'aimer, de concevoir le travail, l'autorité, la justice ou la famille. L'Africain est aujourd'hui encore différent des autres parce qu'il hérite d'une civilisation différente et de laquelle il réapprend à être fier.. (81)

It is worthy of note that there is an overlapping of critical theories in this canon in the Marxist-Feminism. Unlike the women in Achebe's canon, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), who leave the affairs of the development of the village of Umuofia to the men; thereby being objectified and reduced to their punching bags in form of domestic violence among other abuses, (see Olugunle Wole, 2018), the complementarities of male and female in the societal development which is the distinctive tenet of Radical Marxist-Feminism is so rife in *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*. This foregrounds the Yoruba maxim that "the comfort of the branch of the tree where a bird roosts determines the comfort of the bird too". Thus, the class struggle takes us to another tenet of Marxist Criticism, Radical Marxist-Feminism which will be seen in later. Besides, bearing in mind that the money their husbands drop for them to buy foodstuffs in the house and even to shop for themselves did not reduce but stop, the women take the leading role in the strike action, even with violence. Since violence is involved in radical Marxist feminism as seen in Ilboudo's *Les Vertiges du Trône* (1990) where the women take to a street-march against the tyrannical Benoît Wédraogo to the extent that they go to *Le Palais Royal* - the Presidential Residence - each of them with a penknife.

Violence is "any form of behavior directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment" (Baron 1997). Another view is that violent actions are "actions that inflict, threaten, or cause injury. Actions may be corporal, written or verbal; injuries may be corporal, psychological, material or social" (Jackman 2002). In the field of criminology, psychology and other related disciplines, the issue of violence has caused hot debates among experts. Many scholars see violence as a function of nurture while other scholars believe it is a question of nature. It is worthy of note at this juncture that, no doubt, through literature an indeed effective weapon "for fighting oppressive ideologies such as capitalism, fascism and other totalitarian hegemonic structures" (Vazquez 1973). As stylistically incorporated in the literary work under study,

these workers advocate reforms and revolution as the women who for violent approaches in their dealing in the course of the strike action and Tiémoko who never ceases from using Bakayoko's library where he is able to find the book that reveals his condition to him, *La Condition Humaine*, of André Malraux, respectively (LBBD 141-145).

The complementarities of male and female cut across the text. Filomena Chioma Steady, the Sierra Leonian anthropologist, in Lung'aho, maintains that; "African feminism can be seen as having developed within a context that views human life from a total, rather than dichotomous and exclusive perspective. For women, the male is not 'the other'. But part of the human same. Within the metaphysical realm, both male and female principle encompasses life and operate jointly to maintain cosmological balance" (115), this position is extrapolated in the class struggle that erupted in the novel. The female characters in the prose work complement and support the plight of the male characters in every way. The setting, plot, characterization and themes show how their complementarities and interdependence are intertwined. The setting shows several identities of the community dwellers; men, women and even children, to hammer the complementarities and cooperation that leads to the victory of the workers. Marx and Engels in Gérard B & George L. also see to the complementarities of the women in the men's social struggle when they posit that "the women will not see themselves as a party but as a proletariat: and not as women competitors with their husbands but as fellow combatants" in the revolution (455).

Mame Sofi, Deune's wife is a portrait of Radical Marxist Feminism as she is the one to champion every revolting move orchestrated by the women. In recognition of her ferocious activities and contributions toward the success of the industrial action, the writer deems it fit to make a whole chapter eponymous to her. An instance of her radicalism can be seen when she revolts against the police who come to arrest Ramatoulaye. She is the first to fill some bottles of water and pelt the police with them. In another development, her radicalism is put in place when she organizes other women in the village to El Hadji Mabigué's house at night, after the departure of the policeman who has earlier arrested Ramatoulaye, meeting with the guards on ground in defiance. Without wasting much of her time, she orders the rest of the women to *open fire* on the guards and when she sees that they are prevailing, she tells them to go to the man's kitchen to fetch and carry what they, their husbands as well as their children will eat. She believes that El Hadji Mabigué is in collaboration with the White Masters who have locked the taps, the electricity, and other basic amenities. She continues to dare Mabigué to come out and face her if he is man enough, that he is only bold and courageous in the presence of the White. She puts it; *Mabigué, sors ! Sors si tu es un homme ! Tu n'as de courage que derrière les toubabs ! Tu as fait fermer les robinets, viens fermer ma bouche maintenant !* (LBBD 176).

As if Mame Sofi is not contented, she also demonstrates her weird eccentric radicalism when she roars the order to the other women to get prepared at night as they will lurk the soldiers that would be coming. The police that are being

overpowered by the forces of Mami Sofi call for back up and immediately, the military men show up. Hardly had the soldiers stepped their foot on the village with their horses when Mame Sofi and her battalion launch a ferocious reprisal attack that makes the soldiers retreat. She says; *Venez dans la rue, ordonna Mame Sofi, et rangez-vous de chaque côté. N'allumez pas la paille tout de suite, attendez que je vous le dise. ...Allons-y !* » (LBBD 180). It is to be noted that Mame Sofi also dares Toucouleur, the water-seller, a man from whom she buys water and refuses to pay him not even compensation, and even threatens him.

Ramatoulaye is another radical Marxist feminist who dares his influential Uncle, El Hadji Mabigué by killing his ram, Friday. She does not also mind striping herself naked in the process of fighting with the ram to its eventual killing. She goes to the extent of refusing to tender her apology to him in the Police Station even when he says he has dropped the case against her. Another radical female is Penda, the naughty and haughty young lady who does things the ways she likes. She does not sympathize for no tangible reason. She does what no woman ever did. In the village it was never recorded that a woman, not only does she slap a man, but in the public! Penda is the first woman to do that in the flagrant show of the level of her radicalism. Lahbib confirms this:

...Un jour qu'au syndicat où elle venait assez souvent et se rendait utile, un ouvrier lui avait maladroitement touché les fesses, elle le gifla publiquement ce qui n'était jamais vu dans le pays. (LBBD 224)

It is she who raises the idea and goes ahead to champion the eventual Women's Protest, *La Marche des Femmes* from Thiès to N'Dakarou, a journey of more than four days trek. But in the meantime, there are several other radical Marxist feminists in the novel but these three are singled out with each of them having an eponymous chapter. These chapters show their roles of complementing the efforts of the men in the episodes. The two chapters, the Vatican - *le Vatican* and the Women's Protest - *la marche des femmes*, show the inception and the apogee of the women's complementarities and as co-fighters in the struggle of the nation building. Women are presented to the readers that they are "conscious introspective thinkers, strategists, organizers and brave fighters in solidarity with men constituting women league".

In another interplay and overlapping of critical theories, relying on Ayeleru who posits that "the representation of obscenity is a tenet of postmodernism" (7), this show the adverse effects of masses actions in their rejection of exploitation by the capitalists. Since confrontation and contestation, chaos and violence, revolt and revolution are inseparable from these attitudes, it is thinkable that the representation of obscenity is also a tenet of Marxism craftily injected in this novel. In *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*, while the women having taken the laws into their hands, sit together at night making jibes of the policemen they have just dealt with, N'Deye Touti who has learnt in school that it is illegal for them to have done justice for themselves, reproves them and at the same time alerting them that they would still come back. The women bicker and banter with her. No sooner have they finished than the soldiers on their horses arrive. The women, having really prepared for their coming back, launch a reprimand

sal attack on them and the soldiers retreat. In the process, the obscenity of inferno creeps in as the whole places are burnt into ashes. They start calling for both water and sand to put out the inferno:

...De l'eau, de l'eau ! Apportez de l'eau ! entendait-on crier. D'autres demeuraient immobiles comme fascinés par le spectacle et leurs visages éclairés par le rougeolement des flammes ressemblaient à des masques de sorciers. Les planches goudronnées ou enduites d'huile de vidange brûlaient comme des allumettes, les toitures de zinc, les murettes de bidons aplatis, chauffées à blanc, dégageaient une chaleur qui faisait reculer les plus braves et le plus curieux. (LBB 176-182)

The level of destruction in the above scenario can be likened to that of the concomitant effect of "Iya Femi's going back to reclaim and destroy her father's landed property illegally appropriated by her uncle", in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010). It can also be analogized to the one that takes place on the street of the Presidential Palace where blood of the innocent school pupils flow and wet the street as they are shot by the guards (Ilboudo 1990). However, a pertinent question that needs an answer is; why is Sérigne N'Dakarou, the Islamic clerics, beguilingly brought into the matter?

Gérard B & George L maintain that "spiritualism bothers on the *spirit* against *reality*, the individualized synthesis to the multiplicity of elements, and against the *nature* as a major factor of spontaneity. It is discernible in the young Marx, a refutation of the concept of the spirituality of life for naturalism which specifies materialism" (1085). Marx maintains that reality is material; that what is real is material and concrete, not spiritual. He believes that our culture is not based on some divine essence of the platonic form or contemplation of timeless attraction. He opines that our philosophical or religious beliefs do not make us who we are because we are not spiritual beings but we are socially constructed ones. We are not products of divine design, but we are creations of our cultural and social circumstances. Hence, we should look for the concrete and the observable world in which we live day by day as the material world shows the reality of the world. It will show that people live social groups and this will show that the society is inter-related and by examining the relationship among the social classes and by analyzing super-structure, we can achieve an insight into ourselves and our society. Materialism is human while spirituality is God. Thus as response to the question posed in the succeeding paragraph, Sérigne N'Dakarou is beguilingly brought into the matter by the capitalists with a view to cloaking the revolting masses - the railway workers together with their wives - with religion, what Karl Marx called the opium of the masses, in order to perpetuate the masses' repression.

Besides, it is seen that both power and wealth are not evenly distributed among these two classes, and that the capitalists do not value things for their usefulness, rather, things are used for their potentials, first their trademark for power in order to convey their social status. This is fore-grounded in the character of El Hadji Mabigué in collaboration with Hadramé to inflate the prices of foodstuffs and their refusal to sell on credit to the wives of the strikers, including her

cousin, Ramatoulaye. When she goes to Hadramé to buy two kilos of rice on credit and he refused, for her to go and meet her uncle who has earlier paid for someone else, he starts to flaunt his wealth by dressing as if he wants to go for a ceremony. He is described thus:

Surpris, Mabigué bafouilla. D'un geste théâtral il fit glisser les larges manches de ses boubous, passa son ombrelle d'une main à l'autre, puis tel un pélican qui s'envole, agita les bras... 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. (LBB 82-83)

No wonder Ramatoulaye is less conscious of stripping herself nude to make sure she kills Friday which comes to overturn her hard-earned kilos of rice.

Moreover, when it comes to the realization of the capitalists that all their wily approaches to hoodwink both the strikers and their co-fighters in the struggle, and with the maxim "religion is the opium of the people" in mind, they resort to the weapon they use to exploit and extort the poor, Religion. Sérigne N'Dakarou is the character that represents religion in the text. As earlier noted, seeing that their strategic magic spells can no longer hypnotize the obdurate strikers and their sympathizers, their wives, Sérigne N'Dakarou, the Chief Imam of N'Dakarou is invited to speak to the strikers. This plays out during the episode of Ramatoulaye's arrestation and to see that the women have burnt everywhere while trying to counter-attack the soldiers. He reprimands them and threatens never to intervene for them if he still meets the women there:

Voilà votre œuvre, femmes ! Depuis quelque temps vous vous comportez comme des athées. Non seulement vous incendiez les demeures des gens paisibles, mais vous entravez la marche de la loi. Je vais voir Ramatoulaye et Dieu merci, les toubabs aussi. Sans mon intervention, ils vous mettraient toutes en prison. El Hadji Navigué à retiré sa plainte sur ma demande, soyez raisonnables maintenant. À mon retour du bureau du commissaire je ne veux plus vous retrouver là sinon je ne serai plus en mesure d'intervenir. Sachez que vos maris sont des jouets de quelques infidèles, sachez que ceux qui dirige en réalité cette grève sont les communistes et si vous saviez ce qui se passe dans leurs pays, vous prierez Dieu et vous imploreriez son pardon sur eux. (LBB 195-196)

Another development where religion is used to repress the striking masses but also fails is after a meeting is summoned. Series of Imams are invited to come and preach to make them see the White as the special people that God has sent to them to cushion their pains and agonies through their unparalleled inventions. They preach to make them see themselves as the cause and culpable of the poverty, famine and death that is rife in their midst, and pray for the revolutionists. Unfortunately when they discovered that their own approaches are not working out, they have no other options than to accuse the rebels to have committed series of sins ranging from atheism, alcoholism, prostitution to child immorality, and even go to the extent of predicting the miscreants would cause the end of the world. It is put thus:

...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 imans, furieux de la résistance des ouvriers à leurs injonctions, se déchaînaient contre les délégués, les chargeant de tous les péchés: l'athéisme, l'alcoolisme, la prostitution, la mortalité infantile; ils prédisaient même que ces mécréants amèneraient la fin du monde... (LBBD 318)

In every fight, the forces are not equally powerful. It simply tells us that when two classes struggle with each other, the more powerful, the capitalists in most cases, eventually triumph over the proletariat as the case may be in every capitalist society. *Cependant*, the Marxists believe in the eventual victory of the proletariat in the class struggle. Sembène Ousmane rewrites the story of the 1945 Dakar-Niger Strike and appropriates the winning to the proletariat. This eventual triumph of the proletariat is captured through Bakayoko. He says:

Bakayoko lut à haute voix: « Conditions acceptées. Grève terminée. Reprise demain. Train directe Bamako-Thiès. Mettre roulant disposition comité. Lahbib. » La grève est finie, dit Bakayoko après un moment de silence. (LBBD 364)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the proposed modern definition of Literature and the critical theory of Marxism, this study discovered that Sembène Ousmane has painstakingly documented a small portion of the Africa's contemporary history in fictional terms to foreground that no literary creation; fiction or nonfiction can actually hold ground when created outside its societal context because literature reflects and refracts the society through self-evaluation. It must, however, be stressed that such evaluation should take into account the contemporary social realities which are anchored by the existing moral ethics, societal norms and values in African context. Besides, as a Marxist writer, it is important to accentuate that Sembène Ousmane carefully appropriated the eventual triumph and victory to the proletariat in their conflict with the capitalists, which is the basic intent of the theory, deeply rooted in the text.

This study revealed the parlous and deplorable conditions; social, political, economical, cultural and psychological, that the blacks/masses were living in during the colonial era and has also showed to us the various means they unanimously deployed what they have at their disposal, and how women are instrumental in their rejection of their oppression, repression and exploitation by their fellow men whose color or race never placed them above them, not even on the land that heavenly belongs to them simply because they have so much allowed the ill of the society to fertilize the ideologies of the capitalists. François-Marie Arouet maintains that when the means of production is in the hand of government there will be a better life when he says; "private ills make up the general good. It therefore follows that the more numerous the private ills the greater the general good".

Ousmane Sembene used his novel to sensitize his (our) generation with a view to mobilizing them (us) against the

entirety of (neo-)colonialism, exploitation, oppression, racism among other inhumane treatments of the masses by the capitalists. Now in the contemporary Africa, the colonial lords have left our governance to us; still the situations are even getting worse. This simply implies that the only difference between the colonial and post-colonial Africa is just the color of the hand that holds the wand of governance. This literary creation raises our consciousness to come together in unity as a class - both men and women - of conscious introspective thinkers, strategists, organizers and brave fighters in solidarity, to reject neo-colonialism and exploitation, oppression, the government of the day - *the native authority* - foisting nepotism, mediocrity, corruption, poverty, and moral decadence among others on us. Bearing in mind the reality of the fact that we are in postmodern slavery, even in our own land, it is unarguable, reasonable, valid and sound to position that those who were taken by force, chained and sold as slaves are the real slaves were not the real slaves, but those who are culturally, economically, psychologically, ideologically, morally and physically accepting the contemporary neocolonialism and imperialism through oppression, exploitation, misappropriation of the public funds. We should be more proactive, pragmatic and practical and be less theoretical this time around. We should not think of when the time will come, rather see it as the time has come for us to consider David Diop's recommendations for us in his *Coup de Pilon: Toi qui plie, toi qui pleure*.

In conclusion, this article pitches its tent with Antonio Gramsci, the Italian thinker, in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971), who maintains that the only surest way to guarantee the total freedom of the oppressed from the oppressors is for the oppressed to determine to secure a "permanent victory" which is only achievable through resistance to oppression. He advocates rebellion from the part of the subaltern - in Spivak's word - as a result of what is done to him by being subjugated as well as suffering and poverty foisted on him in the hands of the ruling class. The time has come, as said by the Marxist scholar, for the oppressed to stand up to fight the system that oppresses him so as to achieve permanent victory.

END NOTES

1. Sembene Ousmane's *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* was published in the year 1960 and all the references in this research are made to this edition. Besides, in this study, LBDD is the abbreviation of Sembene Ousmane's *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* (1960), references in this research are made to Ousmane, S. (1960). *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*. Paris: Pocket, followed by the page number.

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