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‘We are Committed to the Change Agenda’: Tracking Ideological Strategies in President Buhari’s 2019 *Independence Day* Speech

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Abstract: This study critically examines ideological strategies in President Buhari’s 2019 *Independence Day* Speech with a view to demonstrating how the speech subtly but pragmatically functions beyond being a yearly ritualistic exercise but equally projecting the Buhari-led administration’s commitment to its ‘change’ agenda. With insights from van Dijk’s (2004) model of Critical Discourse Analysis, relevant excerpts of the speech were purposively selected for analysis in this study. Findings reveal that the speech is characterised by two ideological strategies: positive self-representation and negative other-representation. While the former is deployed to project his administration as people-oriented, the latter is deployed to blame, berate and condemn the past governments in the country. **Key words:** discourse, critical discourse analysis, ‘Change’ agenda, Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria.

Introduction

The ‘change’ agenda was the political slogan as well as rhetoric device deployed by the current Buhari administration to appeal to Nigerian masses in 2015 when the country was in the democratic process of moving from one civilian regime to another. Against

the backdrop of the perceived peculiar problems of the country at that period, including corruption, insecurity, and unemployment, the slogan became strategic for the All Progressives Congress (APC), on whose platform the current administration got to power to ending the sixteen-year straight rule of

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the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Since the beginning of the administration in 2015, all efforts to represent the APC-led government as committed to the 'change' agenda as promised have been foregrounded in all political activities and speeches, including the Independence Day Speech of President Muhammadu Buhari on October 1, 2019. Perhaps what necessitated the reiteration of the 'change' mantra in the speech was to strategically appease 'angry Nigerians' who believed they had been let down by the administration (see Ajayi 2018, 2019). From observations, there have been criticisms from different quarters among Nigerians, including Nigerians in the diaspora that the promise of change has not been fulfilled. They argue that the current administration has not only failed to fulfil their promises but has also failed at every front. Activists and public analysts have also taken to the conventional and social media to launch serious campaigns against the government (Ajayi, 2019). In particular, the Buhari-led government has been heavily criticised as being selective in their fight against corruption. They have also been viewed as being intolerant to freedom of speech, despotic, and essentially anti-masses.

Political discourse in Nigeria and beyond

The link between language and politics has been established (see Fairclough and Fairclough 2012; Chilton 2004; Ajayi and Ajayi 2014; Ajayi, 2018; Akinrinlola 2015). The relationship between language and politics explains why the field of politics has enjoyed the

attention of language scholars, especially discourse analysts and pragmatians; hence, the many and different approaches to the investigation of the relationship between the two both within the Nigerian context and beyond. As noted by Ajayi (2018), some of the works that have explored the relationship between language and politics in Nigeria include Ayeomoni (2005), Jorda (2007), Adetunji (2009), Okpanachi (2009), Taiwo (2010), Alo (2012), Michira (2014), Akinkulore (2015), Akinrinlola (2015 and 2017), Al-Dilaimy and Khalaf (2015), Halim (2015), Korhonen (2017), Mcclay (2017), and Obiero (2017), among others. These studies provide the foundation upon which the current study is laid.

For instance, Ayeomoni (2005) notes that political discourse as evident in the language of Nigerian political elite, differs from everyday language use. Jorda (2007) drawing data from the British political context, observes that political discourse features preponderant use of impoliteness strategies, especially in parliamentary debates. Adetunji (2009) gives insights into how pragmatic strategies could be deployed to achieve political goals by countries' presidents, particularly as evident in the inaugural speeches of former presidents Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and George Bush of the United States of America. Okpanachi (2009) examines the manipulative rhetorical cues in the national address speech of former President Olusegun Obasanjo delivered on October 8, 2003 in response to the 2003 Labour Congress agitation in Nigeria. Taiwo (2010) is a critical

exploration of the deployment of metaphorical expressions for ideological construction by political actors, especially in the Nigerian context. Alo (2012), operating within the purview of Aristotelian rhetoric and Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis, submits that African political leaders employ persuasive strategies to seek peoples' cooperation and accomplish governmental programmes.

Michira (2014) analysing data from the Kenyan political space, demonstrates how linguistic- persuasive strategies manifest in the campaign speeches of the presidential candidates in the 2013 presidential election in Kenya. Al-Dilaimy and Khalaf (2015), reinforcing the submission of Jorda (2007), demonstrate how political discourse in the media particularly with insights from the 'Opposite Direction' aired on Al-Jazeera Channel), is characterised by impolite expressions. Akinkurolere (2015) explores how cohesive devices are deployed by political actors to achieve their political goals with emphasis on the Nigerian political space. Akinrinlola (2015) comments on the use of rhetorical devices by President Buhari in his 2015 inaugural speech delivered to launch Nigerians into the 'change era'. Akinrinlola (2017), again giving credence to the observation of Jorda (2007), notes that impoliteness strategies feature in political discourse, as evident in the linguistic practice of the two major contestants - Muhammadu Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 Nigerian Presidential Election. With reference to Trump's campaign speeches in the 2016 US Presidential Election, Korhonen

(2017) notes that rhetoric is employed by political actors to appeal to the sentiments of the electorate. Otieno (2017) engages Trump's deployment of linguistic tools to contest unequal power relations in his campaign speeches. Ajayi (2018) focuses on how the Nigerian electorate deployed impoliteness strategies in their Facebook comments on the Nigerian political space, preparatory to the 2019 Presidential Elections in the country. Ajayi (2019) is a critical appraisal of stance and engagement in the Facebook posts of Nigerian electorate on the topical issue 'the gang-up to deal with Buhari' as published in national dailies in the country. Bamgbose (2018) with particular reference to the Nigerian democratic space, submits political actors sometimes make recourse to cultural norms as a politicking strategy, especially during campaigns.

While these studies have examined political discourse in the Nigerian context and beyond, essentially from the discourse and pragmatic perspectives, the present study is a critical discourse analysis approach to political discourse, with particular reference to how political ideologies are achieved in President Buhari's 2019 Independence Day speech.

Analytical tool: Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) takes its roots in Classical Rhetoric, Text Linguistics and Socio-linguistics, as well as in Applied Linguistics and Pragmatics (Weiss and Wodak, 2002). As observed by van Dijk (1998 and 2001), CDA is a form of cultural and

social practice, and as such it allows the description and interpretation of social life as it is represented in talk and texts. He further argues that CDA revolves round, particularly, the nexus between power and discourse, especially how 'social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context' (van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). In other words, it is an approach to language analysis that is interested in studying and analysing written and spoken texts in order to show or depict the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias. To Fairclough (2001), a critical discourse analyst seeks to tease out the social and cultural assumptions and ideologies embedded in all forms of language that people use. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), some of the basic principles guiding the operation of CDA include: the construction and reflection of social and political issues in discourse, the negotiation and performance of power relations through discourse; the reflection and production of social relations through discourse, and the production and reflection of ideologies through discourse. Taking cognizance of these principles of CDA, Reisigl and Wodak (2009) conclude that it is mainly concerned 'with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language'.

In this study, given its relevance, van Dijk's (2004) model of CDA is adopted for analysis. van Dijk's (2004) framework comprises two main discursive ideological strategies:

positive self-representation (semantic macro-strategy of in-group favouritism) and negative other-representation (semantic macro-strategy of derogation of the out-group). These two strategies manifest through the analysis of actor description, authority, categorization, comparison, and consensus among others. Although the list is exhaustive, the two basic categorisations made by van Dijk can accommodate some of the other ideological discursive strategies identified in this study but which are not on the list.

Methodology

Data for the study were drawn from the 2019 Independence Day Speech of President Muhammadu Buhari. In line with the thematic focus of the study, relevant excerpts of the speech were purposively selected for analysis. Data were subjected to qualitative critical discourse analysis within van Dijk's (2004) conception of CDA. Data are presented for analysis based on van Dijk's (2004) categorisations of ideological strategies in discourse.

Analysis and Discussion

Positive self-representation

Following the view of van Dijk (2004), this ideological discursive strategy is employed by a discourse actor to project him/herself positively with the aim of achieving a particular goal. A critical appraisal of Buhari's 2019 Independence Day Speech reveals the preponderant use of the positive self-representation strategy and sub-strategies such as identification of Nigeria's common problems, self-glorification, promise of a better (future)

national life, and expression of belief in collective governance to persuade and appeal to the conscience of Nigerians.

Identification of Nigeria's problems

One of the indices that can be used to measure the competence and popularity of a government, especially in a democratic state is the ability of such a government to demonstrate their knowledge of the problems or issues facing the state (see Guerin *et al.*, 2018). This knowledge is pragmatically demonstrated by Buhari in his speech in order to represent his administration as a responsible and people-oriented one, which is not insensitive to the plights of Nigeria and Nigerians. This is illustrated with the examples below:

Example 1

...In the last four years, we have combatted **the terrorist scourge of Boko Haram...**

Example 2

...We remain equally resolute in our efforts to combat **militant attacks on our oil...**

Example 3

...Our attention is increasingly being focused on **cyber-crimes** and the abuse of technology through hate speech and other divisive material being propagated on social media.

Example 4

...This Administration inherited **a skewed economy**

It is common knowledge among Nigerians that part of the fundamental security problems of the country is the nefarious activities of the Boko Haram sect (see Chilwa 2015). Since its emergence in 2002, its activities, including suicide bombing, wanton killings and abduction, have claimed lives of many Nigerians, especially in states like Borno, Yobe, and Abuja. Given the national embarrassment the activities of this sect have caused Nigeria, the 'change' agenda of the administration in 2015 included promises to overcome the activities of this deadly group. Another issue identified in the speech is the activities of militant groups who are allegedly responsible for the destruction of 'oil and gas' facilities in the Niger Delta region, considered to be the source of the commonwealth of the nation. These faceless 'destroyers' were accused on several occasions of being responsible for some of the economic problems of the country. Similarly, President Buhari highlighted cybercrimes as part of the problems. As reported by Chawki (2009) and Ajayi and Bamgbose (2018), cybercrime has posed a major security and economic threat to the global community and dented the image of Nigeria in the comity of nations of the world. Unstable and bad economy is another major issue among the many problems of the country highlighted in the speech. This is evidenced in the form of unemployment among the youth and poverty among Nigerians generally.

As a matter of fact, the continued existence of these problems, even after four years of the Buhari administration has generated mixed reactions from

Nigerians with many condemning the perceived ineptitude and incapability of the current administration in solving them.

Self-glorification

As an ideological discursive strategy, self-glorification is employed by a discourse actor to demonstrate and emphasise the good they have done. The use of this strategy features prominently in the speech of the President. Examples are presented and illustrated below:

Example 5

Good Governance and Economic Development cannot be sustained without an enabling environment of peace and security. In the last four years, we have combatted the terrorist scourge of Boko Haram. We owe a debt of gratitude to our gallant men and women in arms, through whose efforts we have been able to achieve the present results. We are also grateful to our neighbours and allies – within the region and across the world – who have supported us on this front.

Example 6

We remain equally resolute in our efforts to combat militant attacks on our oil and gas facilities in the Niger Delta and accelerate the Ogoni Clean-up to address long-standing environmental challenges in that region... The recent redeployment of the Niger Delta Development Commission from the

Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, to the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs underscores our commitment to enhance the living standards of our communities in the Niger Delta, through coordinated and appropriate programmes.

Example 7

The Ministry of Police Affairs has been resuscitated to oversee the development and implementation of strategies to enhance internal security. My recent assent to the Nigerian Police Trust Fund (Establishment) Act has created a legal framework to support our Police with increased fiscal resources to enhance their law enforcement capabilities

Example 8

These initiatives are being complemented by the ongoing recruitment of 10,000 constables into the Nigeria Police Force. This clearly demonstrates our commitment to arrest the incidence of armed robbery, kidnapping and other violent crimes across our nation.

Following the identification of Nigeria's problems in excerpt 5, Buhari presents his administration as being active in solving the identified economic and security problems. For instance, Buhari claims that the military has succeeded in combating the activities of Boko Haram

particularly through the strategic alliance of the military with neighbouring countries in Africa and beyond. As far as the administration of Buhari is concerned, the Boko Haram sect has been reduced to a toothless bulldog whose biting power has been 'taken' from it. In excerpt 6, Buhari further claims that the activities of the Niger-Delta militant groups have been tamed, also through the coordinated efforts of the Army under his administration. He argues that his administration has further redeployed the Niger Delta Commission from the office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation to the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs 'in order to strategically take care of the interest of the people of the region effectively'. Also, as a way of sustaining the 'achievements' recorded so far, especially in the area of security, the administration has resuscitated and further equipped the Ministry of Police Affairs to oversee the development and implementation of strategies to enhance internal security (excerpt 7). The administration has also approved the recruitment of 10,000 constables into the Nigeria Police Force (excerpt 8).

As can be deduced from excerpts 6, 7, and 8, in particular, the President indirectly argues that, if the issues of the vandalism of the nation's oil facilities, armed robbery and kidnapping were addressed, which his administration has 'seriously' embarked on, no doubt, the economy of the country would witness a major boost; and there would be peace and order in the Nigerian nation. All these are ideological discursive strategies by

Buhari to depict his administration as being responsible, people-oriented, and ultimately committed to the promised 'change' in 2015. With all these 'achievements' specifically mentioned, the President hopes to appeal to the sentiments of many aggrieved Nigerians who appear to have lost confidence in his administration.

Promise of a better national life and future

Among the fundamental dividends of democracy is better life for the citizenry in particular and the State in general. As such, a democratically elected government is expected to work towards the realisation of these, among some other benefits. Buhari, in his speech, alludes to this as he promises a better future both for the citizens and the Nigerian state. This is illustrated in the examples below:

Example 9

Our journey to food security and self-sufficiency is well underway. We have made remarkable progress in almost all segments of the agriculture value chain, from fertilizers to rice, to animal feed production. We shall sustain these policies to ensure additional investments are channeled, thereby creating more jobs in the sector. We must not go back to the days of importing food and thereby exporting jobs.

Example 10

I recently constituted an Economic Advisory Council to advise me on

inclusive and sustainable macroeconomic, fiscal and monetary policies. This independent body will work with relevant Cabinet members and the heads of key monetary, fiscal and trade agencies to ensure we remain on track as we strive for collective prosperity.

Example 11

Our population growth rate remains amongst the highest in the world, presenting both challenges as well as opportunities. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that we provide adequate resources to meet the basic needs of our teeming youth...Accordingly, we shall continue to invest in education, health, water and sanitation, as well as food security, to ensure that their basic needs are met, while providing them with every opportunity to live peaceful, prosperous and productive lives.

Example 12

We are resolute in reforming the power sector. In August this year, we launched the Presidential Power Initiative to modernize the National Grid in 3 phases: starting from 5 Gigawatts to 7 Gigawatts, then to 11 Gigawatts by 2023, and finally 25 Gigawatts afterwards. This programme in partnership with the German Government and Siemens,

will provide end-to-end electrification solutions that will resolve our transmission and distribution challenges.

As evident in the excerpts above, President Buhari pragmatically deploys the ‘promise of a better life and future’ as an ideological strategy to positively present his administration in the said speech. In excerpt 9, for instance, he claims his administration has done all that is required to ensure future food security and sufficiency. Hence, Nigerians should look forward to a country, which in the nearest future, would have food in surplus - where hunger and lack of food would be a thing of the past. He further promises his administration’s commitment to sustaining this policy which is to be complemented with additional investments that would ensure there are more jobs in the country. This sounds like good news to the teeming Nigerian youths who are unemployed. In excerpt 10, the President hints that within his cabinet, certain competent individuals have been saddled with the responsibility of manning some important trade and monetary agencies so as to ensure the country attain a height of ‘collective prosperity’. What this pragmatically translates to, therefore, is that, other things being equal, with the inputs of these competent hands in the key positions they have been made to function, the country and her citizenry would soon experience the so much desired national prosperity. In excerpt 11, the President ideologically depicts his administration as one that takes cognizance of the rapid

population growth experienced in the country, and as such is futuristic in her plans to address the problems that might likely be associated with it. In particular, he reiterates the commitment of his administration to the 'change' agenda with a promise it shall remain committed to providing adequate resources that would meet the needs of the growing population, mainly constituted by the youths. The administration promises to invest in education, health facilities, water and sanitation, and ultimately ensure there is food security. It equally promises to provide every opportunity for the citizens to live peaceful, prosperous and productive lives (as seen in excerpt 11). In excerpt 12, the Buhari-led administration promises a future Nigeria where the problem of power outage would be gone as there would be constant supply of electricity, reiterating her 'noble' efforts in ensuring this is achieved.

These promises are ideological strategies pragmatically deployed by Buhari to regain the confidence of Nigerians in him and his administration, especially those who have become disenchanted with it. This is highly essential, particularly given the fact his party, the APC, would, in the next three years, turn to Nigerians for their votes. However, a critical appraisal of these promises, particularly within the context of the political trajectory of Nigeria, would reveal they might just be political statements which could be described as empty and mere rhetoric. For instance, many Nigerians still wonder why the president is still sounding futuristic in his administration's proposal to proffer

solution to the problems of education, security, and health, among others (as itemized in his speech) in the country after four years of being in power. One would remember that President Buhari repeatedly promised in his campaign speeches that he was prepared to tackle these problems as soon as he got to power (see Akinrinlola, 2017).

Expression of belief in collective governance

As observed by Ajayi and Filani (2014) and Ajayi (2017), pronouns and pronominals can be pragmatically deployed in discourse as markers of in-group and out-group identities. Following from the position of these scholars, there is the identification of the preponderant use of the inclusive 'we' and pronouns such as 'our and us' to identify Buhari and members of his cabinet/administration, and also used to identify with Nigerians and essentially express his belief in the collective efforts of Nigerians to achieve a haven-like country, perhaps following the basic tenets of democracy as 'the government of the people, by the people and for the people' (Abraham Lincoln, 1809 - 1865). Some instances of this are illustrated in the examples below:

Example 13

The Ministry of Justice, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission will continue to address this menace. *We* are determined to ensure that transparency and good governance are

institutionalized in public service.

Example 14

Furthermore, **we** partnered with our friends abroad to combat tax evasion, smuggling, terrorism and illicit financial flows.

Example 15

We must commit to installing a culture of Good Governance in all **we** do. This Administration has fought against corruption, by investigating and prosecuting those accused of embezzlement and the misuse of public resources. **We** have empowered teams of prosecutors, assembled detailed databases of evidence, traced the proceeds of crimes and accelerated the recovery of stolen funds.

Example 16

On fighting corruption, **our** institutional reforms to enforce the Treasury Single Account policy, introduce the Whistle-blowers' Initiative, expand the coverage of the Integrated Payroll Personnel and Information System as well as the Government Integrated Management Information System have saved billions of Naira over the last four years, and deterred the rampant theft and mismanagement of

public funds that have plagued **our** public service.

As evident in these excerpts, President Buhari employs the use of pronouns and pronominals to express his belief in collective governance (following the principles of democracy). In excerpts 13 and 14, Buhari uses 'we' exclusive to create an executive identity for himself and members of his cabinet as well as other arms of the government. In doing this, he hopes to assure Nigerians he is not running a one-man show in which the president operates with executive order, without due recourse to the other arms of government and essentially members of his administration. In the excerpts, the statement with the exclusive 'we' projects the Buhari-led administration as comprising men and women of integrity, who are determined to ensure transparency and good governance, especially in public and political offices. In excerpt 14, in particular, Buhari projects his administration, including the cabinet members, as one that has struck a deal with friends abroad who have expertise on how tax invasion, smuggling, and illegal financial activities can be combated.

In excerpt 15, the President uses the 'we' inclusive to identify with Nigerians, expressing the notion that achieving and installing a culture of good governance in the country requires the collective efforts of every Nigerian. This assertion is made to make an average Nigerian believe they are part of the government, even when they are not directly given specific political appointments to function in one capacity

or the other. This is with the ultimate aim of giving them (Nigerians) the impression that the government is not so far from them. In excerpt 16, ‘our’ is used to qualify ‘institutional reforms’ to give Nigerians the feelings that the reforms are for the benefit of all and sundry and not just for the Buhari-led administration. This strategy is also deliberately used in the last line of the excerpt to give Nigerians the impression that the public service is the heritage of the government and the governed.

Beyond the use of pronouns and pronominals by Buhari to express his belief in collective governance, there is the express call on Nigerians to join in the State’s fight against corruption, one of the greatest banes of the country. This is evident in the excerpt below:

Example 17

I will also call upon all Nigerians, from every walk of life, to combat Corruption at every turn. By choosing to question and confront corrupt practices, by reporting unethical practices or through whistle blowing. Together, we can overcome corruption and will no longer be a country defined by corruption.

With this express call on all and sundry to join hands with the government to fight corruption in the country, Buhari hopes to convince Nigerians his administration does not pretend to project itself as one that can single-handedly solve all Nigeria’s problems, corruption especially. Meanwhile, it has been difficult to convince many Nigerians that the Buhari-led administration is really serious in its

fight against corruption. For instance, contrary to the impression that the administration is such that gives free hands to the other arms of the government such as judiciary and legislature, to operate, many Nigerians have expressly argued that the ‘unconstitutional’ removal of a former Chief Justice of the country, Walter Onoghen, weeks to the 2019 Presidential Election, was a move to prepare the ground for electoral fraud that Buhari and his party were ready to perpetrate. This is in addition to many insinuations and allegations that the administration is full of corrupt individuals. Thus, in the estimation of many Nigerians, the Buhari-led administration is only paying lip service to the fight against corruption in the country.

Negative other-representation

This ideological discursive strategy is often deployed to emphasise the negative aspect of the ‘other’ in a discourse. As evident in our data, this strategy is purposefully employed by Buhari to discredit the administrations of the PDP, which preceded his. The sub-discourse strategies used to achieve this negative other-representation include blaming, and comparison.

Blaming the previous governments

As observed by Akinrinlola (2017), blaming is a discourse strategy that is very common among political actors in Nigeria. According to this scholar, political actors often blame their opponents for their own failures. This discourse strategy is glaringly used by Buhari in his speech to cast aspersions on the past administrations of the PDP -

the strongest opposition party to Buhari's political party, the APC. Blaming is illustrated in the excerpts below:

Example 18

This Administration inherited a skewed economy, where the Oil Sector comprised only 8% of Gross Domestic Product but contributed 70% of government revenue and 90% foreign exchange earnings over the years. Past periods of relatively high economic growth were driven by our reliance on Oil Sector revenues to finance our demand for imported goods and services. Regrettably, previous governments abandoned the residual Investment-driven Non-Oil Sector, which constituted 40% of Gross Domestic Product and comprised agriculture, livestock, agro-processing, arts, entertainment, mining and manufacturing activities that provide millions of jobs for able-bodied Nigerians and utilize locally available raw materials and labour for production.

Against the backdrop of the complaints by many Nigerians who have lost interest in the Buhari-led administration, particularly as a result of the perceived poor economy of the country, the President sees this speech as an opportunity to further exonerate his government's responsibility to the 'sorry' state of the nation's economy. As presented in the opening sentence of

the excerpt above (excerpt 18), the past government(s), especially the PDP-led past administrations should be blamed. According to the speech, the current administration inherited the present 'skewed' economy of the country. Following the observations of Ajayi (2018 and 2019), for instance, it is common knowledge among Nigerians that the APC used the economic index to score the PDP administrations low in order to 'sell' their party to Nigerians in 2015. In particular, the APC emphasised that the PDP government had performed woefully in managing the Nigerian economy, and as part of her 'change' agenda, promised to salvage the situation. Hence, as can be gleaned from Buhari's speech, the problem of poor economy, which 'his administration is making concerted efforts at addressing', was created by the previous governments. This notion is reiterated in the concluding part of excerpt 18 presented above as Buhari blames the previous governments for abandoning other non-oil sectors of the country which could have contributed immensely to economic growth.

These other sectors include agriculture, livestock and agro-processing, arts, entertainment, mining and manufacturing among others. The failure of the past PDP-led governments to explore these other sources is said to be mainly responsible for the high level of unemployment. However, one of the many questions still being asked by many Nigerians for almost five years that his administration has been in charge of the country is, which of these sectors, particularly among has received adequate attention under his

administration? As far as many are concerned, the Buhari-led administration is as guilty as the previous ones (Ajayi 2019).

Comparing the good self with the bad other

As a way to further tarnish the image of the past PDP-led government, describing them as being ‘penny-wise but pound-foolish’, President Buhari systematically juxtaposes his ‘good’ administration with the ‘bad’ previous ones. This illustrated in the excerpt below:

Example 19

Learning from the mistakes of the past, this Administration is committed to responsibly managing our oil wealth endowments. We will continue to prudently save our oil income and invest more in the non-oil job-creating sectors.

In this excerpt, Buhari projects his administration as one that is prudent and ingenuous and as such has been able to identify the mistakes of the past administrations. As a ‘prudent’ administration, the Buhari-led administration claims in the excerpts to have made calculated efforts and moves to manage the resources of the country, particularly her oil wealth endowments. Thus, the administration is poised to ‘judiciously’ save and manage oil income, and invest more in the non-oil sectors to create more jobs. This strategic comparison of the ‘good self and bad other’ by Buhari to graphically dissociate himself and his administration from ‘bad governance’ that allegedly characterised the past PDP-led governments, is one of the efforts at

ensuring victory for his political party in future elections. With the clear distinction made between his administration and the past ones, Buhari indirectly warns Nigerians against ever trusting the PDP with the governance of the country, as doing so portends unwise economic decisions, poor economic judgement, and ultimately unpalatable living experience for the masses, especially the youths, who are often the worst hit by poor economic policies.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has examined the use of ideological strategies in President Buhari’s 2019 Independence Day Speech. In particular, the study has shown that the speech is not just a ‘yearly ritual’ that marks the celebration of the country’s independence. Rather, the speech is used by Buhari as a pragmatic and face-saving strategy to disabuse the minds of aggrieved Nigerians of the notion that his administration is not committed to his ‘change agenda’ that promised economic growth, peace and order, adequate security and better life for Nigerians. Following van Dijk’s (2004) model of critical discourse analysis, two discourse ideological strategies: positive self-representation (with sub-discourse strategies such as identification of Nigeria’s problems, self-glorification, and expression of belief in collective governance), and negative other-representation (with sub-discourse strategies as blaming the previous government(s), and comparing the good self with the bad other) are identified as the discursive strategies by Buhari, not just to emphasise his administration’s commitment to its ‘change’ agenda, but

also as strategic moves to secure

victories for his party in future elections.

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Expressing (Un)certainty through Modal Verbs in Advance Fee Fraud Emails

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Abstract: Advanced fee fraud is a common form of online financial scam on the Internet. Previous researchers have attempted a broad study of the nature and narrative features of this scam. The current study attempts a linguistic analysis of 200 samples of advanced fee scam emails and examines specifically how modal auxiliary verbs are used to express certainty or uncertainty in the scam. For instance, modal verbs are commonly used to direct, promise, threaten and even serve politeness functions in scam emails. Deontic modal verbs such as “will” is found to be the most frequent verb in the data and is manipulatively deployed at speaker-oriented level of discourse to express commitment on the part of the speaker and impose some obligation such as ensuring the interaction proposed in the letters remain secret. Findings from the study reveal that the manipulative use of modal verbs contributes to the success of the proposed scam.

Keywords: Deontic modality, epistemic modality, scam emails, Internet, deception.

1. Introduction

Deception has been generally defined as a communicative act that is intended to elicit a certain type of belief in the listener with the intention of

manipulating truth and falsifying information (Galanski, 2000). At the thrust of deceptive practice is language use whether verbal or non-verbal. Language including other forms of non-

verbal behaviours can influence a change in people. Bizzell & Herzberg (1990) notes that language is defined by the meaning attached to it, and involves social context and events. Thus, if language is properly utilized by an individual in a given speech situation, he/she possesses the ability to change the thought patterns or will of his/her listeners.

Very often, deceivers use language to manipulate or coerce their victims (Oswald, 2014); however, this form of deception could be regarded as mere persuasive skills embellished in oratory. For instance, in scam mail, a conman sends a letter requesting the recipient to respond to a business proposal. While the letter does not compel the recipient to reply, certain linguistic strategies like emotive appeals, appeal to urgency and even scarcity of financial resources implied in such messages could indirectly prompt response and possibly deceive. Van Dijk (2006) gives a distinction between persuasion and manipulation, noting that an individual is given a choice to make a decision or take an action during persuasion, but is made passive during manipulation. These distinction between persuasion and deception may seem fuzzy within the context of fraudulent emails, because at first recipients have the option to read the email, and disregard the information it contains. However, the content of these emails might prompt their addressees to act either out of sympathy or greed. This is because language used in these emails influence readers' perception and conduct. This study takes a different approach to examining deceptive discourse in scam

emails by looking at modal expressions as deceptive strategies that express strong or weak stance they contribute to the likelihood of deception.

2. Modality

The term modality has received attention in the field of philosophy and linguistics. In philosophy and logic, modality refers to notions of possibility and necessity in a proposition and basically excludes non-propositions (Skorasinski, 2019). In linguistics, modality is described as a semantic category that expresses possibility, probability, obligation, volition, and in recent studies extends to other notions such as doubt, wish, regret and desire (Downing & Locke, 2002, p. 382). However Salkie (2009) notes that the meaning of modals cannot be inferred from loan words but are defined in relation to their context of use. Modality in addition to expressing beliefs and judgements involves a commitment by a speaker in a pragmatic process of speaking.

Several scholars have attempted the categorization of modality; hence there is no unanimous classification or list of categories (See Nuyt, 2006; Coates, 2015; Palmer, 2001). The two most common classifications include the deontic and epistemic modality. *Epistemic* modality refers to belief, knowledge or truth that a speaker holds in regard to a proposition. *Deontic* modality concerns expressions that indicate necessity, obligation, possibility and even inclination (Skorasinski, 2019). Palmer (2001) further notes that it is difficult to classify a modal as belonging to a specific category since

their meanings can only be inferred from their contexts. Modality can be expressed through modal verbs, particles and other linguistic forms that include adjectives, nouns phrases and lexical verbs.

This study focuses on the English modal auxiliary verbs *can/could*, *may/might*, *will/would*, *shall/should*, and *must* (Coates, 2015) as verbs that express speakers' attitudes in discourse. The modal verb *can* for instance, expresses ability in the example *I can move all the boxes* or request in the expression *Can I get the microphone?* In the second case, the request might also be an obligation where asymmetric power relations exist. Generally, modals verbs show the speaker's attitude to actualizing future situation. The verbs *shall* and *will* express predictive future, *would* expresses uncertainty or request and *should* expresses a logical necessity. The functions of these verbs in relation to their context of use are by no means exhaustive. This study however, focuses mainly on how modal verbs act as forms of manipulative discourse in scam mail.

Some studies have examined the functions of modal verbs in persuasion and deception with major interest in the discursive functions of modal verbs in political discourse. Hadjantou and Madja (2019) observe that modal verbs including other modal markers are common in political speeches for rhetoric purposes. In their study of selected campaign speeches of Justin Trudeau - the Canadian Prime Minister, epistemic verbs serve politeness and face-saving purposes. In another study of the influence of modal verbs on

political speeches, Boicu (2007) also adds that modal verbs like *should* expresses medium politeness while *must* might index indirect coercion. The study further adds that when the obligatory modal *must* is associated with the collective pronoun *we*, it tends to motivate collectivity and patriotism.

There are conflicting studies regarding the role of modal verbs in deceptive communication. Newman, Pennebaker, Berry & Richards, (2003), in their linguistic analysis of truthful versus false conversations argue that liars use fewer modal verbs when compared to truth tellers. In contrast, Zhou, Burgoon, Nunamaker, & Twitchel, (2004) in a study of modal verb use among truth tellers and liars in computer mediated communication, suggest that liars used more modal verbs like "maybe" and "could" in deceptive communication when compared to truth tellers. These verbs tend to distant the speakers from their words. Other uses of modal verbs especially during email communication are common. Modal verbs serve as hedges in business emails to soften the tone of conversation and interact with their respondents as well as evade responsibilities in cases of sales marketing emails (Wang & Yue, 2016).

While there is plentiful evidence on the use of modal verbs to express lies and hedges in email communication, this study takes on another form of email communication, the advanced fee fraud. In the advanced fee fraud (also referred to as scam emails in this study), the goal of the discourse is to persuade or cajole their addressees to believe that the information communicated is genuine.

As a result, the writers of the emails use different linguistic strategies to commit to their propositions in a bid to appear genuine. This study extends the research into persuasion and deception using modals, and takes on another aspect of computer-mediated communication to explore how scammers use modal verbs to express certainty or uncertainty in their scam emails.

3. Online Advance Fee Fraud

Online fraud is described as the use of online facilities to carry out dubious activities (Alanezi, 2015). It involves soliciting for funds and or illegal business transactions targeted at vulnerable individuals. Online advance fee fraud can be described as mass marketing scam, a fraud that exploits electronic communication techniques such as emails, instant messages and social networking sites to defraud others (Whitty, 2015). This crime of persuasion or crime of trust occurs in the form of fake services, or fraudulent investment scams, and advance fee business proposals that deceive individuals (Chiluwa, 2009; Alanezi, 2015). Online transactions which occur between two or more parties that are not in a face to face contact promote this type of crime, as individuals sometimes use fake documents and identities that cannot be verified to perpetrate fraudulent acts.

Advanced fee fraud (AFF) or fake business unsolicited email is one of the most prevalent forms of online fraud. It is a type of fraud that requires their victims to send a little amount of money in anticipation of a huge sum of money through inheritance, or deposited in a

dormant account payable to the victim. Other types of the AFF include: the fortune bequeathing scam, charity donation, business proposal, inheritance, contract/over invoiced scams and lottery scams (Chiluwa, 2009). In the fortune bequeathing scam, the conman in the guise of an accountant or bank manager claims to be in possession of a huge sum of money belonging to a deceased client, who has no beneficiary. The conman writes to a foreigner requesting that the fund be transferred to the foreigner's account to prevent the government from confiscating the funds and offers a particular percentage to the recipient. Alternatively, the fraudster claims that the addressee had been chosen as a lucky beneficiary of a deceased client's wealth. The amount supposedly deposited in a foreign bank is huge and difficult to access without the help of the addressee. When the recipient accepts the offer, he later receives a mail instructing him to send his personal details and pay a fee in order to access the money. The scammer fabricates very convincing stories with urgency that lures victims to respond without verifying the claims (Whitty, 2015).

Another form of the advanced fee fraud is the business proposal scam. In this type of scam, the victim receives a request from a supposed government official who suggests a business idea. In the business proposal scam, the scammer sends an initial letter without details. This is done to initiate communication between the sender and the receiver. The nature of the proposed businesses could include oil and gas, infrastructure development contracts with outrageous benefits, or sales of government

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owned properties such as airport or refinery somewhere in Africa. The scammer urges the victim to respond urgently in order to receive further information. When this is done, they begin to build a social relationship. The scammer makes his story more persuasive by sending a breakdown of the expenses as well as benefits to be received by the collaborator/victim once the deal has been concluded. The receiver is expected to send a “processing fee” for the business transaction, which is usually followed by the receipt of some forged business documents.

In the *charity donation scam*, the scammer impersonating as a dying Christian - mostly a female, solicits the support of a reliable individual from a foreign country to help distribute her wealth. When the receiver responds, the scammer gradually extorts money from the victim as fee to help retrieve the will and subsequent monetary donation for charity. The *lottery scam* is written to individuals informing them they had won lottery they never applied for. The recipient is expected to pay a processing fee to access the funds. The *contract/over-invoiced scam* relates to fraudsters impersonating a top government official in an African country. The recipient is told that he has been awarded a contract or is expected to collaborate to transfer over-invoiced fund out of the country. In the case of *inheritance scam*, the fraudster claims to possess some inherited funds and seeks the help of a foreigner to move the funds to another country suitable for investment. In all the narratives, the recipient is often offered a huge amount of money in exchange for their participation.

Several studies have examined the nature, structure and narrative patterns of email

scams. From a sociological viewpoint, Smith (2009) observes that contemporary media coverage of certain events and ignorance of the real state of events in Africa predisposes individuals to being scammed. In one of the samples of the email, the writer assumes the identity of Aisha Gaddafi, the daughter of the late President of Libya - Muammar Gaddafi to defraud the victim. In the sample, the narrator recounts the Libya of 2011, and the conflict between the Algerian President and Aisha Gaddafi reported in mainstream media (*The Telegraph* April 13, 2013) as narrative frame for the scam to request for assistance.

Hiss (2015) notes that the narratives of email scams are written according to different cultures. In addition to the African setting prevalent in some samples, the messages are also akin to traditional folklores and Western practices like the wicked step-mother fairy tales. Hiss (2015) further notes that there is usually a mismatch between identities assumed in the texts and the indexical used to represent the persona. The result is similar to earlier findings that email scams are globalized forms of communication that begin somewhere in Africa and extend to other regions of the world (Blommaert, 2010). Their features resemble those of conventional business emails with opening greetings and request, apology, introduction, body of the message and closing remarks. Scam emails use identity categories that relate to gender, origin, age and even profession to create a supposed mutual relationship between the sender and the receiver (Hiss 2015). Schaffner (2012) in a linguistic study of the scam emails, notes the use of first second and third person pronouns as linguistic choices that

attempt to legitimize the stories portrayed in the mail.

In addition to the few studies regarding email scams, the way scammers express their views and judgement contributes greatly to the success of the scam. This study builds on the existing literature reviewed here to explore modal verbs common in the emails and how these linguistic units are likely to influence recipients of email scams.

4. Methods

This study combines quantitative and qualitative approaches - the quantitative method identifies linguistic features and their relevance in texts. The qualitative analysis attempts to explain how the identified data are used discursively in the text. The data for this study consist

of 100 samples of emails randomly selected from two scam-baiting sites: (i.e. www.hoaxslayer.com and www.scamdex.com). 20 mail samples were obtained from hoaxslayers, while 80 were from scamdex). All samples were selected from the advance fee fraud navigation bar section of both websites. The emails were manually coded to identify the narrative themes of the samples. To identify the frequency and occurrence of each modal verb (i.e. can/could, may/might, will/would and must), the data were coded into the *AntConc* software. Table 1 is the summary of the frequency of the modal verbs in the two data sets obtained from the *AntConc* analysis.

Table 1: Comparative Frequencies of Modals in the Scam Mail Corpora

Rank	Modal verb	Number of hits	Frequency % (n-449)
1	Will	268	59.6
2	May	44	9.7
3	Can	43	9.5
4	Shall	21	4.6
5	Should	19	4.2
6	Would	17	3.7
6	Could	17	3.7
7	Must	10	2.2
7	Might	10	2.2
Total words	26000	449	100 (Approx.)
Total modals	449		
Total			

The data represented in Table 1 shows the frequency of modal verbs used in the entire data. From the analysis, *will* is the most frequently used modal verb in the

sample and the fourth most frequent lexical items in the data with 268 hits representing approximately 60% of the modal verbs used in the text. One of the

limitations of the automated frequency is its inability to distinguish the grammatical functions of a verb (e.g. *will* as modal verb, and *will* as noun). However, further n-gram cluster analysis reveals the frequency of this modal associated with verbs that direct, instruct, predict and even express wishes seen in the table 1.1 and 1.2. The epistemic *may* and *can* also occur frequently when compared to other verb forms with a percentage mean of 9.7 and 9.5 respectively. The frequency of these three verbs illustrate that scam emails use strong epistemic and deontic modal forms in their writings. The contextual

meanings of these verbs are further explained in the sub sections.

5.2 Modal Verbs in Scam Mails

Modal verbs are relevant in discourse as they express a state of event - past present or future (Palmer, 2014). In email narratives, these verbs can express permission, and obligation in which case they compel recipients to act in a certain way. In addition, other pragmatic functions identified through the use of modal verbs in the emails include hedging and reinforcing authorial identity. The n-gram analysis of the modal verb *will*, shows its interaction with self- referential and direct pronouns.

1	above requested information,	I will furnish you with fu
2	at made to send this to you.	I will introduce myself t
3	ny name appearing any where.	I will have to let you kno
4	s this one. Talk to me 1-on-	1. I will be waiting for y
5	for your full co-operation.	I will give you details ar
6	xCA hamidoukader1@gmail.com	I will be waiting for you
7	profitable business venture.	I will be ready to comper
8	ure that you will assist me,	I will let you know were :
9	ersonal notice.\$18.5Million?	i will offer you 40%. You
10	really need your assistance.	I will be waiting for yo

Figure 1.1 screenshot of collocates/ n gram analysis of modal auxiliary verb “will” with the personal pronoun I

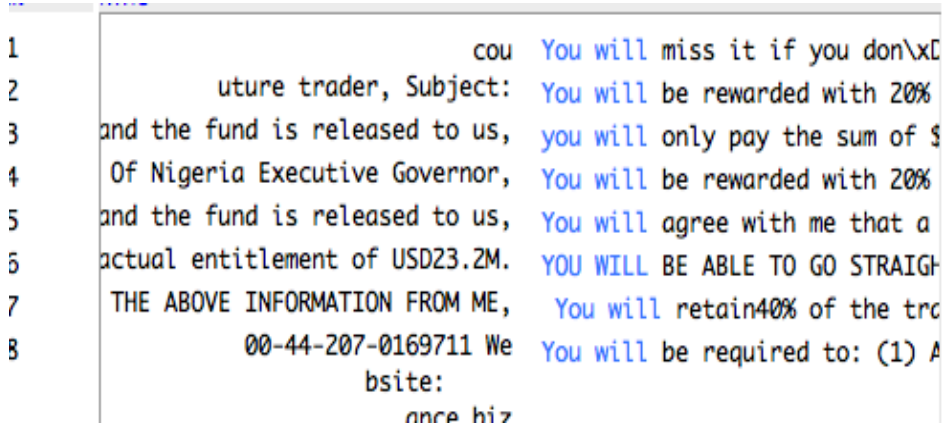


Figure 1.2 screenshot of collocates/n gram analysis of modal auxiliary verb “will” with the personal pronoun I

The screenshots above represent the collocates of the modal verb with 77 hits for the singular personal pronoun *I + will* and 8 hits for the direct pronoun *You + will*. The disparity in frequency in the dataset shows the functions of the modal verb where the writer of the mail assumes authorial position by giving directives and also making commitments to the writer that would perceive him as really involved in the business proposals made.

Expressing Authority through Conviction Rhetoric

Conviction rhetoric is a term that expresses a speaker’s ability to provide a powerful and convincing image (Chataris-Black, 2013) and can be expressed through modal verbs that make promises, threaten or declare a state of event. In the context under study where the hearer relies on the information provided by the speaker, conviction rhetoric are expressed by making categorical statements, predictions and promises that convey

both the speaker and the information presented as authentic. Some deontic and epistemic use of *shall*, *will* and *should* are explained in the samples below:

(1) ...i need an investment Partner, however, I am curious in you for an investment project assistance in your country I am willing to negotiate Management Sharing Percentage after the confirmation of the funds in your account. I **shall** expect to hear from you urgently as this is of high Priority. I **shall** make available to you all necessary documentations, directives and possibly arrange a meeting prior to the commencement of the transaction at the bank where the funds is deposited. **your urgent reply will be needed** Take note; After the whole deal and the fund is released to us, You will be rewarded with 20% of the total

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amount for your participation and also be rewarded with 10% of any profit we invest the money into. I **shall** tell you more about this transaction as soon as i get your readiness concerning this transaction. Waiting for your reply, (ex 69)

(2) My Beloved, I was informed by my doctor that I got poisoned and it affected my liver, and I can only live for some few days... I have a little adopted child named David Vennie that I adopted in this Country when my late Father was alive and \$3.5 million Dollars I inherited from my late Father. Give 20% of the money to handicap people and charity organization. The remaining 50% should be yours for your help to David. Note; *This should be a code between you and my son David in this transaction "Hospital" any mail from him, the Lawyer he will direct you to, without this code "Hospital" then it is not from David, the Lawyer or myself as i don't know what will happen to me in the next few hours.* Finally, write me back urgent so that David will send you his pictures and his international passport to be sure of whom you are dealing with. David is 14years of age, therefore guide him. *Again if i don't hear from you i will look for another person or any organization.* May Almighty God bless you and use you to

accomplish my wish. Pray for me always. Ms Susan Vennie

The repetition of *shall/should* in examples 1 and 2 serves different pragmatic functions. In the first instance,

- a. I **shall** expect to hear from you urgently as this is of high priority (1); This should be a code between you and my son David in this transaction (2)
- b. I shall make available to you all necessary documentation/ I shall tell you more about this transaction.

In the first instance of *shall*, the speaker makes a wish by using the strong obligatory verb 'shall'. In this context, the speaker does not just express a desire to receive a response from the recipient but subtly initiates an obligation on the receiver to respond. Unfortunately, the authors of scam emails are predators and the success of their operations rests solely on the ability of the recipients to respond to such mail. The demand for response is strengthened by the expression *high priority* that leaves the speaker no other choice than to respond. Again the use of the obligatory *should* attempts to establish the writer as a credible person giving instructions that the speaker is expected to respond to. Again, there is a sense of commitment initiated by the speaker to express authority in the second instances through personal pronouns.

Dontcheva-Navratilova (2012) notes that the interaction of deontic verbs and self-referential pronouns emphasizes the presence of the speaker in discourse. The speaker attempts to commit to the recipient even though the mail is fraudulent by

imposing a responsibility on himself through the verb *shall*. Such strong commitments help to reduce doubts in the recipients who would tend to rely on the speaker's stance.

- a. You **will** be rewarded with 20% of the total amount for your participation the Lawyer he **will** direct you (1)
- b. if I don't hear from you, I **will** look for another person or any organization (2)

In Example 1, the modal verb *will* expresses epistemic stance in certain samples showing a sense of commitment to the expression. The first two representation of *will* in the samples above expresses a deontic commitment of promising. There is a shift from the first person to second person directive pronoun in the examples 1 and 2 diverting the focus of discourse to the recipient. The writers of both emails by using the direct pronoun, ascribes authorial position to themselves and through the directive verb expresses their ability to reward and even direct the affairs in the text. The mail proposal (Ex. 1) is a request for a foreigner to transfer a non-existent inheritance to a foreign account. Although the addressee had not accepted the deal, the speaker expresses a sense of commitment in sorting out all challenges that may transpire during the transfer of the funds. This adoption of certainty is relevant as it is targeted at portraying the speaker as legitimate. The inclusion of a legal backing also attempts to prove that the proposed transaction is genuine when in reality, it is not. While the story itself is distorted with poor linguistic expressions typical of scam emails

(Hiss, 2015), the speaker's commitment to his statements are reinforced by strategic choices of modal verbs that show a commitment to honesty (providing documents) and fair deal (rewarding the recipient). The pragmatic function of threatening using modal verbs is expressed in the example 2 above. The writer uses the *if*-conditional and the deontic verb to emphasize the consequence of the recipient's refusal to comply with the proposal, making the proposal seem genuine and urgent. The author takes an authorial stance by suggesting his ability to leave out the speaker supposing he was not interested in the deal. This indirectly shows an obligatory position that would motivate the addressee to take action immediately.

In addition to the expression of authorial stance, modal verbs serve coercive functions in discourse. Huddleston and Pullum (2002) notes that tag questions and declarative questions are biased towards specific answers making them coercive. The modal auxiliary verbs that reinforce the speaker's position and moral responsibility that must be taken by the recipient are *must* (not), *should* (not) and *will*. The following examples illustrate how scam emails covertly use modal verbs to coerce their recipients to act in a certain way.

(3) Attn: Beneficiary,

This is to let you know that your case has repeatedly coming to my Office every day and all the complain that I have been getting all in regards to your payment with the Federal Government which the CBN has been

involved to pay to you...you will only pay the sum of \$580.00 for your payment to be paid to you... Please if you are not ready to receive your payment and you cannot pay this fee, I guess you shouldn't write me as I will not entertain any unpleasant response from you.

(4) Dear friend

I am working with one of the bank of Africa (BOA) here in Burkina Faso, can you help me repatriate the sun of US\$10.5million dollars to your overseas Account Based on percentage. Can you handle this project? Can I give you this trust? I expect your urgent response if you can handle this project, Or kindly reply to my alternative email address below.

Example 3 is a letter supposedly coming from the office of the Central Bank of Nigeria. Given such pretext, there is a need to express the authority that the institution represents. Modal verb of obligation *should not* serves the pragmatic function of warning the recipient on what not to do. The verb expresses a status quo that must be adhered to and attempts to incite fear in the recipient who might not want to offend the writer. Again, while the instruction to the recipient is not to reply, there is also an indirect action that the message attempts to elicit - a situation the writer might want to reply to understand the implication of the message or even the true identity of the sender. The tone of the message is formal depicting the institutional authority the mail claims to represent.

Modal verb of coercion in example 3 can be seen in the inverted use of *can*. The sample is a request for the recipient to participate in a business proposal involving huge 'task.' By using the interrogative, *can you handle it?* the expression no longer expresses the basic function of a modal verb in the example but reorients the conversation toward the recipient. The discourse now directed to the recipient only, compels him to question his inner ability to carry out the task of handling the proposal. While the act of coercion is not explicitly expressed in the question, there is a form of mind manipulation realized as the question appeals to the mental models of the recipient (van Dijk, 2006) who might want to prove his ability.

Discourse of scam emails in examples (3) and (4) are supposedly dialogic, meaning that they elicit interaction by asking recipients to respond or carry out specific actions. While sample (3) tries to imitate formal business mails, the language structure is poor, contradicting the identity of the Governor of Central Bank depicted in the text. This form of inconsistency in narration supports the findings that these emails are in some cases, written by inexperienced, non-English speaking individuals (Blommaert, (2010). Another deontic use of modal verb can be seen in sample 5 below.

(5) I brought you a business proposal worth twelve million five hundred thousand US dollars only. If you know that you are able to involve and participate in this business

transaction, let me know before I come back to you with more details. Be assured that I will provide you with forms and details you need to know about the origin of this fund *and you must promise to keep everything confidential until the fund get to your bank account there.*

In example 5 above, the speaker invokes some moral obligation of secrecy towards the business. Secrecy by convention is a moral duty that binds certain groups, professions or parties. The strong deontic modal *must* in example 5 attempts to establish a moral premise where the business transaction supposedly a secret, must be kept within the parties involved. Bliss (2005) notes that deontic verbs have manipulative effects, because they presuppose a moral belief system. If something is a must, there is an underlying moral obligation that must be adhered to. In the case of the sample above, the scam narrator draws on this conventional premise of the moral perception of secrecy to coerce victims into hiding information. The implication of this obligation is that once the scam victims expose the information, the plans might fail. Previous studies regarding scam emails reveal that one of the features of such fraudulent schemes is that they require their victims to remain silent (See Dion, 2010). As the scam begins to succeed, the victim finds it difficult to talk to anyone with the hope that the actions are genuine.

Expressing Solidarity

Modal auxiliary verbs as category of modality can contribute to expressing

solidarity and in-group relations. The choice of the collective pronoun *we* identifies the speaker as a member of common group with the same goals. The interaction of modal verbs and collective pronouns in political discourse are persuasive strategies that implore audience to accept the speaker's point of view as *we* specifically suggests the possibility of deliberation, cooperation and collective good (Bramley, 2001). When interacting with epistemic or deontic modals that shows judgement, possibility or even certainty, collective pronouns can trigger manipulation and deception. In the case of deceptive communication, modal verbs express solidarity and attempt to reawaken a desire for cooperation. The epistemic use of *can* to express possibility in the example below is subtly constructed to influence the interlocutor.

(6) I am Mrs. Juliet Annita Khubeka, am the wife of late Mr. John Khubeka who was murdered by the Zimbabwean veterans and irate black people along with other members of the family... Since the death of my husband, there have been threat to our lives, but I and my only son Frank Numa Khubeka succeeded to work for our escape to South Africa as political asylum seekers. In view of this development, our position in South Africa do not^[sic] permit us to normalize this fund for any meaningful business transaction in South. That is why I want this fund to be transferred into your Nominated account so that you will assist us to invest it in your country in any meaningful business venture. Hence, if you

agree to assist us, we have two options for you, *we can go into partnership with you and your family the moment this fund is moved or transferred out of South Africa* or in the alternative, we offer you 25% of the money for your assistance.

The collective pronoun *we* interacting with the epistemic verb *can* in example 6 expresses a desire that signals a mutual interest and the desire for cooperation. While the story illustrated is completely untrue, the speaker's involvement in sharing the claimed money goes to indicate a lack of greed on the part of the speaker. The letter is intended to elicit cooperation from the recipient and using collective pronoun *we* advances commitment moves on the part of the writer and also indirectly suggests a strong possibility of achieving success through cooperation. Again, the modal *can* suggest a strong possibility that the deal would come through and masks the fraudulent intentions of the writer. Although *can* does not out rightly express certainty in the example, it strengthens the content of the message by indicating that the funds may be realistic dependent on the cooperation of the recipient.

Expressing desires

Modal verbs serve as volitives in which case they express desires. Verbs that express desire serve manipulative functions as they implore the hearer to accept events based on the speaker's own perception.

(7) I am the Credit Manager A. D. B Bank of Burkina Faso Ouagadougou and in one way or the other was *hoping* you will

cooperate with me as a partner in a project of transferring an abandoned fund of a late customer of the bank worth of \$18,000,000 (Eighteen Million Dollars US). (Ex2)

(8) I am sure that this letter will come to you as a surprise, *but I shall be grateful if you would read with the interest of assisting in this proposal* tendered herein. My name is Barrister ADAMU IBRAHIM, Attorney at Law and Legal advisor to Mr. ISSAH LONTHAN a lebaneses by nationality.

(9) I am Willian Joseph. I have emailed you earlier few weeks ago without any response from you. On my first email I mentioned about my late client whose relatives I cannot get in touch with. But both of you have the same last name so it will be very easy to front you as his official next of kin. *I am compelled to do this because I would not want the bank to push my clients funds into their treasury* as unclaimed funds. If you are interested you do let me know so that I can give you Comprehensive details on what we are to do.

Modal verbs *will* and *shall* also serve predictive and volitive functions in discourse. In examples 7 and 8, the modal verbs *will* and *shall* are used to express the desire of the speaker and serve as face saving strategy. In example 7 specifically, the writer acknowledges that the mail is obtrusive and uses the volitive to save face while imploring the recipient not to discard the mail. Politeness strategies are indirectly represented in both samples in an

attempt to create a mutual relationship with their addressees.

In the example 9, *would* signals a state of concern that is not obviously in the interest of the addressee but the speaker. Epistemic modals are believed to construct manipulative information or propaganda (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018). A propagandist discourse may seem like an interaction that promotes the interest of the parties during communication when in reality they serve the interest of the speaker. The ultimate goal of any scam email is to extort money from their preys or instruct them to provide their personal details that may be used for phishing. In the narratives embedded with soft words and pathetic stories common to inheritance and charity scams, the underlying intention of the scammer is hidden here through manipulative verb forms that expresses the writer's desire to cooperate with the addressee. *Would* is an example of epistemic modal that suggests a strong desire in sample 9 to save a deceased client's funds when in reality it is aimed at defrauding the addressee. Just like propagandist discourses, scam emails use informative communication that makes it difficult to identify fraud.

Evasive Strategies

Modal verbs in addition to their obligatory functions also show commitment or lack of commitment to certain discourse using expressions that indicate possibility or uncertainty. Like hedging, these strategies show a lack of commitment but are used to build relationship with the speaker. *May* is the second most frequent modal in the scam email samples and serves the function of suggesting a possibility, a probability or

evading responsibility. Hyland, (1998) suggests that *may/might* are considered prototypical hedging devices that reduce the speaker's commitment to a proposition. The pragmatic functions of modal verbs as hedging devices are found in scam emails.

(11) Dear Friend/Partner,

This message may come to you as a surprise, but be assured it is in good faith from a widow in need.

(12) Compliment to you and your family, My name is Amos Majola the elder son of Mr. David Majola, from the Republic of Zimbabwe. It might be a surprise to you where I got your contact address. I got your contact from the South African Chamber of Commerce in Johannesburg

(13) I trust that, you and your family are well. I hope my request will find favour with you but under any circumstances will appreciate to have sufficient time to talk with you about this matter. *I know, you may or may not be related to Richard Kellam who unfortunately died with no written specification about his country of origin as all the information related to him was pointing to his address locally here, I have no specific target where I could get useful information about him hence I make a choice from a range of possibilities to use google archive where the description I got revealed your contact and I thought I could share this information with you with the impression to present you to the bank as the family relative to claim the \$7,597,000.00 he left in a bank...*

In the first instance of *may* in sample 11, the speaker is unsure of the recipient's reaction and adopts a hedging device

may to create to request the addressee's indulgence. A weaker epistemic verb *might* in example 12 also serves a hedging function where the outcome of the addressee's reaction to such an obtrusive letter is unknown.

In example 13, the writer is completely aware that the recipient is unknown, and uses a deontic *may/may* not to shield his knowledge of events. Scam emails are chain letters written to others and in the context of example 13, the addressee is presumed to bear similar surname with a deceased "Richard Kellan." The addressee is indeed not expected to know Richard Kellan since there may be a lot of people bearing such name. The hedging device in this context is a disclaimer that the writer may not know the addressee. In addition to the verb *may*, other verb forms such as *can/could* are used in the samples as hedging device to indicate possibility, ability or generally as politeness strategy.

(14) I want to transfer this fund into your bank account in your country, so that **we could** invest it wisely. I have contacted the Director of the bank where the fund is deposited in Burkina Faso, and asked if the fund could be loaded into an ATM VISA CARD and he said it is possible to load some of the funds into an ATM VISA CARD, while most of it will be wired to your account via online bank transfer.

(15) I am the only Son/Child of my parents. My Mother and Father died during the escalation and climax of the Syrian war. **As you may know, or may not know**, the monetary

sanctions imposed on Syria, and the ongoing war have made it nearly impossible to successfully operate any type of investment here in Syria, or to even transfer money from here to other parts of the world. For this reason, I am contacting you in great confidence, with the hope that you could help me, and get this money into your country, for investment purposes. **I believe I can trust you?** I will give you 20% of the total money (\$5.8 Million US Dollars) for your assistance, I hope, I'm fair with the offer? Right now, **Where I am now, we can only communicate through the Red Cross communication facilities**, Please, you are in a position, to help me start a new life, and I would owe you my life, if you help me. I wait for your fast response, so i can give you further details, upon hearing from you. Please consider my request for our mutual benefit, and life ahead.

The verbs *can* and *could* are used in example 15 to solicit support and as hedging devices. The hedging device of *could* serves two functions in this context; first as a politeness strategy and the second is to show the writer's lack of commitment to the proposal given the nature. While the writer strongly desires that the recipient believes the story, he shields his intention by using a weak epistemic stance that portray him as desperate. In the second instance, the writer uses the verb *could* as emotive appeal to request the help of the addressee. The interaction is further strengthened by the epistemic verb *can* again used in this context to show not just certainty but the possibility of future interactions.

Conclusion

This study examines the use of modal auxiliary verbs as manipulative and deceptive strategies in scam emails. Modal verbs contribute significantly to the success of these scams as they serve to direct, promise, threaten and even serve politeness functions. Deontic verbs such as *must*, *will* and *shall* are used at speaker oriented levels to show some level of commitment on the part of the speaker and impose some obligation on the addressee. These manipulative use of deontic modal verbs attempts to suggest that the transactions offered in the emails are genuine.

In addition, epistemic positions are also reproduced in scam mails. The second

most frequent verb *may* from the study, serve as hedging strategies to signal politeness, and ensure the writer refrains from making factual statements when the email writer is unsure of the speaker's reaction. Epistemic verbs also strongly suggest the possibility of the success of the proposals and serve as emotional appeals to demand help from the recipients. Generally, modal verbs in scam emails serve as subtle linguistic devices that shield the main intention of the email by reinforcing authorial identity of speakers and in other cases portray the writers as weak. The present study paves way for further investigation on other forms of expressing modality in scam emails.

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Appendices

www.hoaxslayer.com/advancedfeefrauds
www.scamdex.com/advancedfeefrauds

Notes

1. The email samples are reproduced with the poor grammatical structures of their writers.

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Contradiction and its Manifestations in *Arrow of God*

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Abstract: For many years, scholars have inexhaustibly studied *Arrow of God* in relation to pride, over-ambition, extreme conservatism and fear. In addition to these dimensions already studied, this paper examines *Arrow of God* as a text that thrives in ambiguity, which accrues from the contradictory and dynamic portrayal of characters and events in the text. Characters and events turn out to be the opposite of what they are initially depicted as, and this ultimately makes the text thought-provoking. This paper studies how contradictions are creatively interwoven to sustain the suspense of the text and how they, as well, contribute to the tragic development of the text. **Keywords:** Arrow of God, contradiction, Ezeulu, Ulu, conflict, interpretation, Chinua Achebe.

Introduction

Arrow of God, an obviously timeless text has proliferated in different dimensions because of its contradictory and ambiguous quality. Ezeulu, the highly debated protagonist, for example, has been deconstructed by critics either as a pitiable character who deserves sympathy or as an over-ambitious, proud, fearful and power

obsessed character who deserves the eventual punishment he gets from the gods for his extremities.

The former, represented here by Emeyonu (1991), claims that Ezeulu's tragedy is as a result of his strict dedication to the services of Ulu, which he cannot compromise with any other being or interest as the case may be. Ezeulu exhibits this unalloyed

relationship in accordance with his beliefs that, “no situation could make him defy the postulations of his god” (15) and that “no one is above the law (107)” Therefore, no true judge should allow personal feelings to over-shadow his strict interpretation of the law. This position of his is actually made manifest in the text when Ezeulu refuses to yield to Umuaro elders’ passionate pleas to eat up the remaining three sacred yams that traditionally mark the end of the year’s calendar and name the date for the New Yam Festival. He maintains that, “those yams are not food” (207) and equates the action with “eating death.” He believes that the people of Umuaro underestimate the situation of things and are trying to influence him to do what is contrary to the will of Ulu. Another problem which Ezeulu had to battle with in the text, according to Emenyonu, is that of contempt with which his god, Ulu, is treated by his enemies - Ezeidemmili and Ogbuefi Nwaka, and Ezeulu’s humanly struggle to prove the strength of Ulu to them. In order to buttress this point of his, Emenyonu opines that,

The circumstances of the creation of both Ulu and its priest are thus controversial and Ezeidemmili, the priest of Idemmili (the most likely supreme deity of Umuaro in the absence of Ulu) has a bias against the new hierarchy. He holds Ezeulu in contempt and secretly assets his own god as supreme deity to Ulu. It is to stem the tide of this personal animosity with Ezeidemmili that Ezeulu indulges in some

of his most dramatic and extraordinary actions (55).

For this group of critics, Ezeulu’s tragedy actually emanates from Ulu’s betrayal of Ezeulu as contrary to his expectations and that Ulu did not join him in the fight or, better still, shield him against all his opposing forces. After all, “a child’s fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam, which its mother puts into its palms.” (15). Still under the first category, but differing a bit from Emenyonu’s opinion, is Chukwumah (2016), who thinks that the tragedy of Ezeulu rather emanates from the outcome of the circumstance and historical period in which Ezeulu existed. For him, therefore, Ezeulu is a victim of “a clash between the old (Umuaro) order and the new (Hegel’s) order.” He further interprets Hegel’s History as that which “accounts for the evolution of mankind from one stage to the other owing to the contribution of individuals, subjective beings, to the entity, the ‘objective mind or a ‘universal spirit’...” Chukwuma therefore, concludes that “the modern History with all the inconsistencies in its inherent drive to make progress meets history of Umuaro and Okperi, crises ensue and the villages are subjugated” (8).

The latter group feels that Ezeulu, who has collected the proverbial ‘ant-ridden faggots,’ should face the consequences of his action. Critics under this group believe that he actually gets appropriate punishment for over-stepping his boundaries. (Nwahunanya, 2003), in his dogged argument, describes Ezeulu’s actions as desperation to cling

to power and his down fall comes as a result of his extraordinary fear of losing the priestly throne. Accordingly, Nwahunanya upholds that;

Ezeulu's predicament as a tragic hero is also linked with the ambiguity in his relationship with his god. His impulse to resolve this ambiguity is fired by selfish ambitions fired by his fear that certain people are working to destabilize and supplant him. 'Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real (175).

Buttressing his stand further, Nwahunanya argues that Ezeulu is insatiable with his position of a "watchman" in the text as exemplified in his constant musings on and the analogy to the child's ownership of a goat. Again, Ezeulu is presented as one who in recognition of the vulnerability of his enviable position and stops at nothing to protect it as any loophole left by him could be used against him by his enemies. That is why for Nwahunanya, fear is the tragic flaw that leads Ezeulu to self-destruction. Nwahunanya believes that Ezeulu's fear is made manifest in his disappointment in the fact that his family could lose out in the lineage of the priesthood since none of his grown-up children exhibits "unique qualities that would qualify them for candidature." He, therefore, wishes he "could have a say in the choice. Since he fears that the office would be debased if a riff-raff is nominated into it (177).

The artificial nature of Ulu is also seen by Nwahunanya as a source of worry to Ezeulu as his greatest premonition in the text is to make Ulu's power be felt in Umuaro so as to compel their obedience. Furthermore, Nwahunanya does not fail to acknowledge earlier oppositions to his opinion, because, according to him:

It is not uncommon to come across critics who absolve Ezeulu of a crime he purposely committed (or is it not criminal and callous to starve a whole clan under false pretenses?) The usual argument of such critics is that Ezeulu was acting sincerely in consonance with the dictates of his god. Such critics are quick to point out at the official Calendar of the Chief Priest for eating the ritual yams, the termination of which ushers in the New Yam feast. Again, they point at his unconvincing consultation with Ulu at the point at which Umuaro is locked in crisis, consultation that, in any case, yields no results. Such critics even use Akubue's reflections (212) to buttress their points (178).

Ezeulu's tenacious obedience to Ulu is undisputable quite all right and in as much as we tend to sympathize with Ezeulu's fall, we cannot deny the fact that Ezeulu in the guise of his office as Ulu's Chief Priest wanted vengeance on his enemies and Umuaro for allowing him to be taken to Okperi without a fight. He never on his own mediated to Ulu on the people's behalf and the sarcastic undertones that underline his remarks whenever the

issue is discussed suggest Ezeulu's insincere intention to the people's plight. Emmanuel Obiechina, on the other hand, argues that Ezeulu's tragic end is as a result of isolating himself from the communal wish by standing against his townsmen in the major conflicts of the text. For him, it could be disastrous for any single individual to fight the community because:

Social and political institutions of the traditional society have perfected the art of exerting conformity from the individual and discouraging deviations and subversion of the common will. In all their workings, these institutions emphasize the primacy of the group over the individuals who compose it. The careers of important characters like Okonkwo (*Things Fall Apart*), Ezeulu (*Arrow of God*), and Araba (*Panda*) illustrate the primacy of the society over the individual. All of them are shown to be powerful, in their communities, the primacy of the latter is soon established. In the cases of Ezeulu and Araba, it is shown that the individual cannot find fulfillment outside the protective wing of his country (85).

Furthermore, (Egudu, 2014) also investigates the significance of the use of irony in *Arrow of God*, and the study focuses on the "negation of expectation, deflation of inflation, recantation of laudation, and contradictory transformation in the text" (28). His conclusion is that the ironic implication of the text is a

demonstration of life, which is full of contradictions. He also contends that irony as used in the text sustains the suspense.

In such diverse ways, Ezeulu, the protagonist of *Arrow of God*, has generated so many controversies among critics. With the view of the fact that nothing is employed into a text without a specific purpose, this study explores the contradictions in line with the Reader-Response theory of Wolfgang Iser, and it aims at revealing the ambivalent thoughts generated from the readers, which result in the timelessness of the text.

Contradiction, Ambiguity and Reader-Response Theory.

Contradiction

According to Dale (1992), the term contradiction manifests itself in several forms. In the literal sense, contradiction simply means "to speak against" or "the opposite of something" such as Aristotle directly contradicting Plato, and so on. In another sense, contradiction manifests itself as "inconsistency of sincere or insincere assertion and behavior otherwise known as hypocrisy" (366). For instance, Corbett (2015:1) defines contradiction as "something about a person that piques our interest, because it betrays what we expect, given what else we know or see about him." The latter definition is exemplified in an individual as self-contradiction when he/she suddenly changes from an opinion he or she previously had just to fit into the present seemingly better or favourable situation. There is also a third form of contradiction, which is

logical and classified as syntactical inconsistency which manifests itself in constructions that cannot be necessarily true or false. Mayes (2014) explains that, “logical contradiction arises when one arises when one assumes that the premises are true but the conclusion is false.” The last one could be deduced as ambiguity whereby words or actions could proffer several meanings at a time.

Ambiguity

Sennet (2016) explains ambiguity as “an idea or situation that can be understood in two or more than one way.” This situation, according to him, “extends from ambiguous sentences” (1). In other words, ambiguity applies when a phrase enjoys multiple interpretations. Sennet asserts that for some disciplines like philosophy, this multiplicity of meanings is unacceptable because of its constraints on clarity and truth. Accordingly, he opines that “arguments that may look good in virtue of their linguistic forms in fact can go wrong if the words or phrases involved are equivocal” (1). However, on the contrary, Sennet also observes that the same concept could be very skillful to writers as he further states:

Authors, poets, lyricists and the like on the other hand, have often found ambiguity to be an extremely powerful tool. Thomas Pynchon’s sentence “we have forests full of game and hundreds of beaters who drive the animals towards the hunters such as who are waiting to shoot them” (2).

Interestingly, *Against the Day* (p.14) utilizes the referential ambiguity of “them” to create an effect when said Shakespeare’s fictionalized Archduke, Ferdinand, says: “ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man,” (Romeo and Juliet, Act III, Scene 1 line 97-98). This statement plays cleverly on the double meaning of “grave.” Also, comedians have often found ambiguity useful in some forms of comedy. Groucho Marx’s “I shot an elephant in my pajamas” is a classic of this genre.

Ambiguity is not only made manifest in literary works; an illustration in applied arts is also ambiguous when it is subject to many interpretations from viewers, for example the artistic illustration of the Caterpillar for Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s adventures in Wonderland by Sir John Fennel. The illustration can be viewed as being a man’s face with a pointed nose and chin, or as the head end of an actual caterpillar with the first two legs visible.

Ambiguity, when employed in the above manner will definitely increase the interest in a work of art, because it refuses to allow easy classification and interpretation. In other words, the effort to resolve ambiguity in any literary work gives more insight to both thought and interpretation.

Reader-Response Theory

This is a school of thought or critics whose focus is on the reader rather than the author, context or form. Originated by I. A Richards in 1929, the group also known as *Structuralists*, later had scholars such as Norman Holland,

Stanley fish, Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Robert Jauss, and Roland Barthes among others. An opinion strictly held by this group of theorists is that the meaning of a text is incomplete without its various interpretations from the readers. These multiple interpretations are essential because the readers generate new meanings through different interpretations, approaches and textual analysis. For this group of theorists therefore, the ideal text, according to Bressler (2003), is one “with many possible interpretations” (66). The reader’s purpose is then to examine, explain and defend his/her personal reaction to the text. Although, Reader-Response theory is criticised of anarchic subjectivism because it allows readers to interpret the text anyhow, they like, its use is necessitated by this study because of its in-depth ideal of engaging the reader with the text. By exploring *Arrow of God* using the Reader-Response Theory, the study intends to reveal the text’s significant structural interweave of contradictions and their ambiguous implications, and how the different interpretations of the text by readers reveal the contradictions and ambiguity in the text. This study also aims to ascertain the literary relevance of the outlined concepts to the success of the text.

Textual Analysis

With the land dispute between Umuaro and Okperi, *Arrow of God* sets itself off on a contradictory note by selecting two orators - Ogbuefi Nwaka and Ezeulu - to present the land issue to their people. Ezeulu has it that: “...my father said this to me that when our village first came here to live, the land

belonged to Okperi. It was Okperi who gave us a piece of their land to live in. They also gave us their deities - their Udo and Ogwugwu...” (15) On the other hand, we have Ogbuefi Nwaka arrogantly stating his own version with reference to Ezeulu’s thus: “...my father told me a different story. He told me that Okperi people were wanderers. He told me three or four different places where they sojourned for a while and moved on again...” (16). Akukalia, on his emissary mission to Okperi, tells how he used to go with his father to the land (in dispute) to cut grass when he was young.

The contradictory and ambivalent portrayal of the land ownership by the text give the readers room for various interpretations as Donatus Nwoga’s which has it that “it is in this context that the confused leadership of Umuaro is first exposed” (25), since the incident ends in splitting the villagers between the two orators. It could equally be an exposure of the rate of escalation of mere personal indifferences to a serious communal conflict and tragedy. This stance of a text to elicit various interpretations is in line with the reader-response theorists. Iser (1978) has argued “that texts contain gaps or (blanks) that powerfully affect the reader, who must explain them, connect what they separate, and create in his or her mind aspects of a work that are not in the text but are incited by the text” (169). The indecisive nature of the stories reveals the fact that Nwaka could have fabricated a counter story merely to garner support against his rival - Ezeulu, as suggested in his later comments:

But I have been watching this Ezeulu for many years. He is a man of ambition, he wants to be king, a priest, a diviner, all. His father they said was like that too...We have no quarrel with Ulu...But I will not see with these eyes of mine this priest making himself Lord over us (27).

Nwaka's jealousy and envy are maliciously portrayed in this speech, because he never at any point cited how Ezeulu had wronged him in any way, and in essence, he could go to any length to strategize his victory over his deemed enemy. Nwaka intelligently manipulates his disciples to the extent that the death of Akukalia and his brother in the same war against the Okperis, which ought to have turned the majority to Ezeulu's side since they had already agreed that *Ekwensu's* (Satan's) hand is in it, waxes them stronger unto Nwaka's faction. The land dispute episode, therefore, goes a long way to prove Nwaka a shrewd fighter of his course.

In another episode in the text, Captain Winterbottom, in a contradictory twist, relays the cause of the war to Clark. He tells him that:

This war started because a man from Umuaro went to visit a friend in Okperi one fine morning after he'd had one or two gallons of palm wine - it's quite incredible how much of that dreadful stuff they can tuck away-anyhow, this man from Umuaro having drunk his friend's palm wine reached for his *Ikenga* and split it in two...The outraged host reached for his gun and blew

the other fellow's head off...
(37).

This story contradicts the real cause of the war, which was that Akukalia (one of the emissaries) sent to Okperi was shot by Ebo, because of his arrogance. Akukalia splits on Ebo's *Ikenga* because he unconsciously referred to him as a "castrated bull" and coincidentally, Akukalia is impotent. The reader is again left to fill the missing link of how Winterbottom got the distorted information and its role in the text.

Another contradiction, which serves as a comic effect and as well as sustains the suspense is when characters and events contradict their initial portrayal in the text. This is vividly depicted in the people of Umuogwugwu (Ibe's people), whom Obika has described as aggressive and invites his friend, Ofoedu, to lend him a hand in the fight against them. Ofoedu expresses his disappointment when he learns that he would not follow in the fight, but Obika reassures him that; "there may be work for you. If Umuogwugwu are what I take them to be they will come out in force to defend their brother. Then there will be work for you" (11). This statement actually prepares the reader to eagerly anticipate a riotous fight in Umuogwugwu but all expectations are mellowed down when eventually no villager was around and Ibe was beaten to the extent of tying him up and bringing him to Umuaro, where he is dumped under the *Ukwa* tree. Ibe's kinsmen, on the contrary, accuse him of stretching his hand too far while they "patiently waited for three market days' before they could

ask after him. Again, the utmost display of humility in their peace-seeking statement, “we have not come with wisdom but with foolishness...” (12) negates the image the reader must have had about them from Obika’s point of view.

Furthermore, Ezeulu is portrayed by the text as a contradictory character. He is dynamic and conservative, prophetic and shortsighted, sincere and insincere and all of these interweave to make the text complicated and, all the more, confusing. He tells Oduche that;

The world is changing... I do not like it. I am like the bird Eneke-nti-Oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied, men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching. The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place...My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had I known tomorrow (45).

Again, he tells Oduche that if anybody asks him why he is being sent to learn the white man’s ways that “a man should dance the dance prevalent in his own time” (189). By sending Oduche to represent him at the white man’s religion and education, Ezeulu is portrayed as a dynamic individual who moves with the tide of time with regard to change. This is seen in his appropriate and intelligent prediction of the white man’s religion taking over the indigenous practices, which later occurs in the text. The same Ezeulu is presented as highly conservative when the issue of eating the sacred yam

comes up. He says to the ten titled men of Umuaro; “...You all know what our custom is. I only call a new festival when there is only one yam left from the last. Today I have three yams and so I know that the time has not come” (207). Despite the fact that the elderly men had explained that the harvest should rot in the farm if not harvested – also suggesting that the rules be adjusted since they had never had such an experience before, Ezeulu remains adamant in his position. He believes that the elders rightly know the custom and ought to know the consequence of what they are pushing him to do. He, therefore, in total shock replies to them that “those yams are not food and a man does not eat them because he is hungry” (207). This statement of his has been very controversial because some critics like Obiechina (1975) have argued that it displays the height of Ezeulu’s sense of duty as he had foreseen the eventual consequence of the action and exonerates himself early enough from it by saying that he is “only an arrow in the hands of the gods”(60). In addition, Obiechina opines that inasmuch as Ezeulu nurses war against his people that “his unyielding non-compromise can be found more in his natural strong will and high moral principles than in any pre-mediated vendetta against his people” (61). This line of thought takes us back to Chapter Eighteen, where we ponder on the narrator’s account of the events.

In literature the narrator of this nature is referred to as “omniscient,” because he knows everything and sees the inner hearts of the people, which the other

characters may not be obliged to see since it is impossible to read other characters' minds. At the beginning of the chapter, just immediately after Ulu had warned Ezeulu to leave the fight with his detractors for him, the narrator states the eagerness of Ezeulu to continue with the vengeance thus: "after a long period of silent preparation Ezeulu finally revealed that he intended to hit Umuro at its most vulnerable point - the Feast of New Yam (201)." Again, after the assistants who came to ascertain Ezeulu's accuracy of the months had left, the narrator relays that: "If anyone had come into Ezeulu's hut after the men had left, he would have been surprised. The old priest's face glowed with happiness and his youth and handsomeness returned temporarily from across the years" (204).

If the narrator's account is anything to be considered, would it not be to prove that the following utterances by Ezeulu are mere pretenses, since the closest clue into his mind is what the narrator reveals? When the ten elderly titled men came to him to find out Ulu's grievances, Ezeulu, off-handedly replies that, "Ulu did say that two new moons came and went and there was no one to break kolanut to him and Umuro kept silent" (208). He further reminds them that he and his households are not exonerated from the suffering since he equally has his own yam fields. The sincerity of these statements becomes illusive at this moment, because Ezeulu at Okperi had thought out this as a rightful excuse upon which to stand to fight back at Umuro. There is no evidence from the

text where Ezeulu had gone into consultation with Ulu to get such a response. Rather Ulu had rebuked him in a vision saying;

Ta! Nwanu! ...Who told you that this is your own fight? ...I say who told you that this was your own fight to arrange the way it suits you? You want to save your friends who brought you palm wine he-he-he-he... Beware you do not come between me and my victim or you may receive blows not meant for you (191).

Arrow of God also highlights a contradiction of intentions where characters' intentions and actions are misunderstood and misinterpreted by the other characters. Ezeulu bears almost all the brunt of these misinterpretations. When he sends his son Oduche to be his "eye" at the white man's religion, he merely wants his family to be represented in case something good accrues from it. He tells Oduche that; "...If there's nothing in it you will come back but if something is there you will bring home my share" (45). This action of his (which is apparently selfish considering his speculations on page 42 that if "the white man takes over the land, it would be wise to have one's family in his band" is grossly misinterpreted by both his kinsmen and the white man. Nwaka and his group chide Ezeulu for seeking the white man's face and betraying their common course of fighting the foreigner together, just like he did when he told the truth about the land and solely stood against his kinsmen.

Moreover, Captain Winterbottom's extension of favour to Ezeulu is misinterpreted by both Ezeulu and his kinsmen. The administrators at the headquarters insist on sustaining the Warrant Chief system despite Winterbottom's negative report of its abuse by James Ikedi (the former Warrant Chief). James Ikedi's behavior contradicts the white man's expectations of him as a mission-trained man. He exploits his own people to unbearable limits and this earns him a suspension. Surprisingly, Ikedi is reinstated by the senior Residence just three months after he had come back from his leave. Since the administrators did not agree with Winterbottom in doing away with the title, he therefore decides to change his method of selection- this time by going for an illiterate person who may not have the effrontery to exploit his people and that is what prompts his choice of Ezeulu. Jacobu, the court messenger, with his errant character, distorts the motif for fetching Ezeulu. He frightens Ezeulu in his house and tells him: "I have not come all the way from Okperi to stretch my legs... When the White man sent me here, he did not tell me he had a friend in Umuaro... But if what you say is true we shall know when I take you to him tomorrow morning" (138).

Jacobu's countenance, coupled with Umuaro and Nwaka's reaction of disdain for Ezeulu's summon to discuss the White man's invitation, elicits in Ezeulu a resentment for both his people and the white man. That actually explains the arrogance in his response: "Tell the white man that Ezeulu will

not be anybody's king except Ulu" (139), when the offer is made to him by Clark at Okperi. The white man, on the other hand, misinterprets Ezeulu's rejection of the offer. Ezeulu is subsequently locked up in order to teach him a lesson. Interestingly, Winterbottom's coincidental sickness is tied to the enormous power of the "witch doctor from Umuaro."

In addition, even Ezeulu's limited relationship with his half-brother (Okeke Onenyi) is given several interpretations by the Okekes and the villagers, which contradicts Ezeulu's intentions. Okeke thinks that Ezeulu is jealous of him because their father split the powers of herbs and priesthood between them while the kinsmen say that Ezeulu refuses to acknowledge his brother's powers out of pride. In the text, however, Ezeulu explains the reason behind his aversion for all the new generation medicine men and not just Okeke. According to him, all medicine men had died with his father's generation. "Practitioners of today are mere dwarfs" (146).

The Christian converts and teachers in *Arrow of God* - Moses Unachukwu and Mr. Jaja Goodcountry, disagree on teachings of faith. While Mr. Goodcountry regards the sacred pythons as fetish that should be done away with, Moses Unachukwu warns Goodcountry against his extremity and upholds the deity by terrifying the congregation with frightful experiences of those who had dared the act. According to Unachukwu:

...I have been to the fountain head of the new religion and seen with my own eyes... So I

want to tell you that I will not be led astray by outsiders who choose to weep louder than the owners of the corpse. You are not the first teacher I have seen; you are not the second; you are not the third. If you are wise you will face the work, they sent you to do and take your hands off python (49-50).

Ogbuefi Oforka, on a visit to Ezeulu's house to welcome him back from Okperi, summarizes the confused state of mind of the villagers as well as the readers on the plot of the text, which are exemplified in Ezeulu's contradictory actions thus;

...I want you to know if you have not already known it that the elders of Umuaro did not take sides with Nwaka against you...Why then did we agree with him? The elders of Umuaro are confused...We are like the puppy in the proverb which attempted to answer two calls at once and broke its jaw. First, you, Ezeulu, told us five years ago that it was foolish to defy the white man. We did not listen to you. We went out against him and he took our gun from us and broke it across his knee. So, we knew you were right; but just as we were beginning to learn our lesson you turn around and tell us

to go and challenge the same white man. What did you expect us to do? (188)

Conclusion

The contradictions in *Arrow of God* as we have seen, accrue more from the incongruence in the narrator's and the characters' points of view. The characters' actions sometimes negate the text's foreshadow of them, and in some characters, are depictions of some kind of inconsistency. These skillful interweave of surprises and disappointments contribute in the successful creation of a character with a huge depth in Ezeulu. He ends as a complex, round and dynamic character whose personality could generate a multiplicity of ideas. *Arrow of God*, therefore, manipulates the reader's suspense until the end of the text. Again, the text does not portray any sentimental support for any of its characters or events. To that effect it does not assert itself as a moralist text with lessons to be learnt from; it rather depicts man in conflict with the diverse challenges of survival in his environment. The readers by drawing their own diverse conclusions about the text, make the text inexhaustible.

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Esthétique et enjeux du Dysphemisme dans *La joie de vivre*

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Résumé : Pour susciter l'intérêt du lecteur, les créateurs littéraires utilisent certaines ressources qu'offrent les figures de styles pour rendre expressif leur message. Par figure de style, on entend un mode d'expression qui s'éloigne des moyens habituels utilisés dans un discours anodin. L'usage récurrent d'une figure de style comme le dysphémisme dans une création littéraire n'est pas le fruit d'un hasard. Si l'usage de l'euphémisme et ses enjeux dans un discours sont assez connus, il n'en est pas le cas en ce qui concerne son opposé, le dysphémisme. Cet article basé sur l'approche discursive montre les particularités du dysphémisme et ses enjeux dans *La joie de vivre* qui est le désir du peuple bamiléké de combler les lacunes de l'histoire politique d'un groupe social opprimé. L'article conclut que le dysphémisme permet ici de réveiller la conscience collective sur les vérités historiques tels que le génocide bamiléké, devenues polysémiques ou effacées de la mémoire collective.

Mots clés : dysphémisme, esthétique dysphémique, *La joie de vivre*, vérités historiques, génocide bamiléké.

Abstract: To arouse readers' interest, literary authors use certain figures of speech to make their message more expressive. A figure of speech generally refers to a mode of expression, which departs from the usual and above all, neutral means used in social discourse. A recurrent use of a specific figure of speech like dysphemism in a literary work is not meaningless. If the use of euphemism and its takes are well known and understood, it is not always the same with regard to its opposite, dysphemism. This article based on discursive approach shows the particularities of dysphemism and its targets in *La joie de vivre* which is the desire

of Bamileke people to fill the gaps in the political history of this oppressed group. The article concludes that dysphemism in the studied novel awaken collective consciousness on some historical truths such as the bamileke genocide, which have become polysemic or completely erased from collective memory.

Keywords: dysphemism, dysphemistic aesthetic, historical truths, bamileke genocide.

Introduction

A l'exception d'Allan et Burrige (1991) puis Fernandez (2011) cité par Zouheir (2016) qui montrent la dimension figurative du dysphémisme, la plupart des études consacrées portant sur le dysphémisme cherchent à établir comment les expressions tabous sont euphémisées en fonction des contextes socioculturels pour ne point choquer les mœurs sensibles. Allan et Burrige (1991 : 9) cité plus haut distinguent trois manières de parler : « l'euphémisme qui a trait à l'embellissement du discours, le dysphémisme qui consiste à parler de manière abusive et l'orthophémisme qui consiste à s'exprimer de manière habituelle et surtout neutre. » De ce qui précède, il en ressort que l'euphémisme consiste à atténuer l'expression de faits ou d'idées considérées comme désagréables ou interdites. Le terme opposé de l'euphémisme est le dysphémisme qui renvoie en revanche au durcissement à l'exagération des aspects négatifs d'une chose ou d'une idée en les exprimant de façon plus dure ou plus vulgaire. Autrement dit les dysphémismes sont les termes qui soulignent ou exagèrent les qualités négatives d'une personne ou d'une chose. L'objectif de cette réflexion est de relever, dans un premier temps, les marques de ce qui est convenu d'appeler une écriture dysphémiste, c'est-à-dire ce qui peut être appelé esthétique dysphémique. En deuxième lieu, il

s'agit de relever du roman en étude les figures dysphémiques, les analyser afin de déterminer les enjeux de l'usage de ces figures de style dans *La joie de vivre*.

Bref aperçu du roman en étude : *La joie de vivre*

La Joie de vivre est un roman de 401 pages paru en 2003 aux éditions Le Serpent à Plumes. Ce roman est le troisième volet de sa série « d'histoire de sous-quartiers ». En effet, celui-ci raconte l'histoire des habitants des quartiers pauvres des villes camerounaises. Patrice Nganang peint à travers l'histoire d'une famille, la famille Tagni, les méandres de la misère que vivent les Camerounais des quartiers pauvres. Sous un ton dysphémique, ce roman questionne également l'origine des souffrances atroces de l'ethnie bamiléké du Cameroun qui semble être des habitants des bas-fonds les plus victimes des injustices sociales de toutes sortes. Une lecture attentive permet d'y voir que l'auteur retrace l'histoire du Cameroun de la période post-coloniale jusqu'à l'ère actuelle pour rendre vivant le passé occulté de l'histoire camerounaise. Sans contournement, camouflage, ajustement, masque ou atténuation, l'auteur montre « la laideur menteuse de la réalité » (p. 98) en retraçant l'origine du génocide du « grasfield ». au Cameroun. Ce qui touche de prime abord dans la lecture de ce roman est le style narratologique qui

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se détache entièrement des procédés de l'euphémisme pour se hisser sur ceux du dysphémisme comme nous le montrent les paragraphes ci-dessous. Mais avant d'y arriver, il convient de s'appesantir sur le concept du dysphémisme.

Encadrement théorique : L'esthétique dysphémique

On ne saurait théoriser le dysphémisme sans faire recours à l'euphémisme qui se situe aux antipodes du dysphémisme. L'euphémisme permet de déguiser les idées tristes, odieuses, désagréables en faisant usage des noms, adjectifs, verbes, expressions ou phrases qui ne sont point les noms propres de ces idées mais qui en expriment en apparence de façon moins choquante l'idée envisagée. Le terme anglais « euphemism » apparaît pour la première fois dans l'ouvrage de Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* en 1656 [Burchfield 1985 : 13]. Il est défini par le Dictionnaire de poétique et de rhétorique d'Henri Morier [1998 : 480] comme une :

Figure de pensée par laquelle on adoucit l'expression d'une idée jugée brutale ou trop amère. Par conséquent, une écriture est dite dysphémique lorsqu'il fait fi de l'euphémisme qui représente un détour par rapport au contenu immédiat. Un langage dysphémique est donc tout langage qui explore ouvertement sans aucun détour ni « déodorant du langage » Jamet et Jobert (2011 : 11) ce que la bienséance voudrait qu'on contourne afin d'éviter de heurter les interdits et d'évoquer les tabous.

Les analyses critiques basées sur le concept de l'euphémisme ont généré

beaucoup de recherches scientifiques dans le domaine linguistique contrairement à son antonyme, le dysphémisme. Les critiques tels que Johnson et Murray (1985), P. Bacry (1992), H. Morier (1998), D. Enright (2005), et L. Berdoll, (2007) pour ne citer que ceux, ont bien exploré les contours de l'euphémisme. C'est d'ailleurs la raison pour laquelle cette étude se penche sur cette figure de style : le dysphémisme afin de déterminer ses enjeux. L'usage de cette figure de style dans la littérature semble être assez récente dans la mesure où les grands mouvements littéraires tels que le classicisme exigeaient l'art de bien écrire pour ne point choquer les mœurs. L'intensification dans l'usage du dysphémisme en littérature est probablement due à un changement dans le statut de parole avec l'époque postmoderne qui voudrait que les non-dits ne soient plus relégués aux oubliettes. Les dysphémismes deviennent beaucoup plus populaires, leur utilisation va bien au-delà de la portée de la parole quotidienne. L'augmentation de leur utilisation serait peut-être due à l'abandon des règles du classicisme, de l'interdit linguistique pudibond en vogue à l'époque victorienne qui est aussi connue pour la complexité du code social qu'elle impose ; et à la revendication des libertés qui n'exclue par la liberté de parole. Les dysphémismes deviennent beaucoup plus populaires et abondent dans les œuvres littéraires contemporaines qui veulent décrire avec minutie tous les différents domaines de la vie sociale. Par conséquent, la narration des discours politiques avec

ses épisodes tragiques ou des scènes de ménage dans tous leurs états amènent les romanciers à étaler ce qui était jadis considéré comme sujet tabou, engendrant par là une utilisation des figures dysphémiques.

Le romancier camerounais Patrice Nganang, est l'un des écrivains d'Afrique noire francophone les plus prolifiques en ce début du XXI^e siècle qui se singularise par son style. Ce jeune romancier s'impose désormais comme une des voix les plus novatrices du continent africain qui à travers son choix de prédilection formelle se fait cette voix qui dit haut les souffrances des démunis d'un pays en proie au tribalisme sans se soucier des sentiments de ceux qui voudraient atténuer la gravité des faits sociaux. Patrice Nganang est originaire de l'ouest du Cameroun, de la tribu bamiléké, mieux que tout autre écrivain camerounais sans doute, il a su traduire l'histoire de cette tribu camerounaise en proie à la rejection en ce qui concerne la sphère sociopolitique camerounaise. Nganang, affecté soi-même par la rejection qui fait du bamiléké l'autre au Cameroun, on se rend très vite compte que le contexte socio-historique et politique dans lequel il a vécu serait révélateur d'une certaine attitude, d'un certain comportement que trahit son écriture dysphémique qui apparaît comme un moyen de dévoiler et de dénoncer cet univers nauséabond et affreux.

Les enjeux de l'usage du dysphémisme dans la joie de vivre

Le style de Patrice Nganang dans le roman en étude semble ne pas respecter les règles de convenances et de la bienséance caractéristiques du langage

euphémique. L'euphémisme permet de manipuler dans une certaine mesure la vérité et peut servir une idéologie. La fonction principale des euphémismes est de dissimuler un effet désagréable qu'un sujet quelconque peut produire. Cette fonction de base permet par le principe de l'interchangeabilité de l'euphémisme et du dysphémisme de définir la fonction principale des dysphémismes. Ainsi, la fonction principale des dysphémismes est d'exposer, c'est-à-dire, de rendre notoire toute influence désagréable en la portant à l'affichage public. Il faut noter que cette publicité amplifie les valeurs désagréables à dénoncer en cherchant à sublimer ou en revanche à désacraliser. Sur le plan pratique on note l'existence des surcharges expressives, des emphases, des épithètes et des suites d'insultes ou d'adjectifs blessants.

Une déconstruction du roman en étude permet de se rendre compte que l'auteur veut porter à l'affichage public le génocide bamiléké, les exactions des colons blancs et les multiples violations des droits de l'homme donc fut victimes la tribu bamiléké du camerounais désirant tout simplement de s'autogérer à leur guise.

Indépendantistes de vos mamans, allez tous vous pendre(98) ...Nous ne nous pendîmes pas, ...l'histoire du Cameroun se faisait...marquant sont chemin de ses nombreux cadavres que personnes ne comptait...ses cadavres qu'on enterrait précipitamment dans des fosses, oui, ses cadavres sur lesquels on crachait dix milles fois et qu'on laissait parfois asticotés dans la rue, comme des

chiens. Ah que ne dit –on pas... il est vrai que la guerre civile est toujours absurde, mais parfois je me demande si nous ne comprenions pas tout ce que cela voulait dire, parce que dans notre réclusion peureuse, nous ne croyions finalement plus qu'à la vérité des journaux, et surtout de ceux qui titraient : événement historique là où autour de nous s'étendait le Crime, qui comptaient des millions de francs là où il fallait compter des milliers de cadavres, qui organisaient une quête là où il fallait ouvrir une enquête.(100-101)

Nganang met à l'affichage public sous un ton dysphémique le comportement du colon français qui déroge à la règle de bienséance pour insulter les camerounais.

L'expression : « Indépendantistes de vos mamans, allez tous vous pendre » (98) fait fi de l'euphémisme et porte à la connaissance du lecteur le caractère odieux du colon blanc qui insulte sans dédain les nationalistes camerounais qui exigeaient leur autodétermination. L'enjeu du dysphémisme ici est de produire des contres vérités des idéologies politiques françaises. La surcharge expressive permet à Nganang de mettre en relief le mot « cadavres » auquel il attache des qualificatifs très blessants : « nombreux cadavres » (98), « cadavres enterrés précipitamment dans les fosses » (98), « cadavres asticotés » (98), « milliers de cadavres. » (100-101) La publicité dans cette affiche vise à désacraliser la sublimation opérer par les journalistes supporteurs des blancs en rendant notoires leurs comportements passibles de crimes contre l'humanité. La

narratrice montre à travers le passage cité qu'il ne s'agit point d'un « événement historique » mais d'un « crime » qui nécessite une enquête pour déterminer et traquer les coupables du génocide « des centaines de cadavres, des centaines d'enfants au visage pourfendu, des centaines de mères au ventres ouverts ». (96) Mais contre toute attente les livres d'histoire disent « qu'à part les maisons rasées et quelques bosses sur le front des vieillards, le seul mort dont ils se souviennent avec netteté c'est un médecin prêtre blanc, un saint assassiné...mais ces livres d'histoires sont écrits par les Blancs ou , au mieux, par des prêtres » (96). La narratrice à travers le dysphémisme reconstruit l'histoire du génocide bamiléké en fournissant des récits contraires à ceux de la classe dirigeante qui sont pour la plus part des cas euphémiques.

Ayant défini la fonction de base des dysphémismes, nous procédons à l'examen des mini-fonctions de ceux-ci dans *La joie de vivre*.

Les euphémismes peuvent être utilisés pour éviter les insultes ethniques ou sexuelles. Ceci implique des lors que le dysphémisme permet de mettre en relief ces insultes ethniques ou sexuelles. Les insultes par conséquent, sont un champ pour le fonctionnement abondant des dysphémismes. *La joie de vivre* fait voir au lecteur attentif l'usage abondant des insultes ethniques.

L'auteur montre le dénigrement de la tribu bamiléké par les autres tribus pour dénoncer cette attitude malsaine. Les bamiléqués selon ces derniers prennent :

du savon pour du fromage.
L'homme bamiléké ne sait pas
porter les chaussures. Ses pieds

ne sont pas faits pour les chaussures de blancs...ni ses grosses fesses pour les vestes...ni sont cou pour la cravate,...on reconnaît le bamiléké de loin au nom de Dieu à la saleté, ce sont des juifs ...des sangsues, des envahisseurs...Les bamiléké sont un caillou dans la chaussure du Cameroun (89-90)

Les insultes ethniques ci-dessus permettent de voir le caractère dysphémique de l'écriture du romancier qui montre sans contour l'attitude des tribus côtières envers le peuple bamiléké du Cameroun. En les taxant de sangsue et d'envahisseur, l'auteur porte à la connaissance du public que les bamiléké sont sous-estimés au Cameroun. Par là il invite le lecteur à une prise de conscience devant déboucher sur un changement de comportement social. Les scènes sexuelles sont bien présentes dans le roman en étude. On constate que l'auteur fait fi des tabous linguistiques, l'usage de la langue dans ce roman n'est pas du tout euphémiste. Le signe dysphémique de son langage se révèle dans la manière dont il parle de sexe. Nganang présente à ses lecteurs des scènes sexuelles les plus ignobles sans rien cacher, en narrant celles-ci avec des mots qui ne prêtent pas aux équivoques. Un matin raconte la narratrice :

les tamtams de deuil annoncèrent la mort du Chef, et ce qu'ils ne dirent pas c'est que le chef avait été trouvé dans le lit de la quatre-vingt-sixième épouse, pour tout dire dans le lit de la dernière femme de son père, le sexe dressé encore, mais le cœur et la cavité des yeux vides(116)

Le passage ci-dessus fait comprendre sans équivoque que le chef du village fut tué lors d'un acte sexuel peut-être par sa quatre-vingt-sixième épouse qui fut elle-même épouse du père du défunt chef. De même à la page (120) l'auteur décrit le viol de Mirabelle par les deux chasseurs sans détours en ces termes:

ils s'arrêtèrent devant elle qui dormait. Ils n'eurent donc pas besoin de se frotter réciproquement le sexe pour le mettre debout. Ils lui passèrent et repassèrent dessus, à tour de rôle et en cadence, comme un exutoire, eux qui depuis des lunées n'avaient pas vu de sexe de femme...Ils lui passèrent et repassèrent dessus...rendus fous par leur trop violent manque de baise. (120)

Les deux exemples sont une déviation de la tradition des bamiléké et par ricochet de la culture africaine qui naturellement n'encourage pas le fait de parler de viol encore moins des expériences sexuelles en public surtout celles du chef du village considéré comme un divin. L'auteur choisit cette façon de parler pour intensifier son esthétique dysphémique. La narratrice Kemi reconnaît d'ailleurs que « la société bamiléké est un poulailler de tabous et qu'elle, comme la parole folle des on-dit, ne connaît pas de tabous ».(25)

Il convient également de signaler que l'euphémisme renvoie à une réalité extralinguistique en revêtant une autre forme, un autre signifiant ; c'est ainsi qu'on en parle souvent comme d'un « voile » jeté sur le signifié, comme pour le camoufler. Ainsi les euphémismes sont utilisés pour remplacer différents

concepts qui dénotent des sécrétions corporelles, telles que la perspiration. Les dysphémismes dans cette catégorie d'utilisation sont comme un indicateur de l'obscénité qui constitue un examen public de tout sujet ou impact désagréable de ce sujet. Cette mini fonction du dysphémisme se voit dans ce roman lorsque le médecin blanc et ses aides soignantes reprochent au protagoniste Tagni le manque d'espacement de naissance.

Vous ne pouvez pas attacher votre bangala un instant hein ? Attacher votre bangala, vous voulez tuer votre femme ? Il faut apprendre à espacer les naissances hein ? Vraiment, vous ne pouviez pas attendre un peu ? Ah, ces villageois ! Toujours en rut.

Les expressions du médecin et de ses aides soignantes ayant leurs corps toujours couverts de tenue blanche symbole de la pureté ne reflètent pas la pureté qu'on devrait recevoir d'un corps soignant. Les mots utilisés sont crus et blessants. « Le bangala » est un emprunt aux langues locales camerounaises qui signifie « pénis ». On devrait en principe voir le médecin inviter Tagni pour lui expliquer la nécessité d'espacer les naissances dans un endroit serein comme son bureau lors d'un tête à tête. Tagni reçoit au contraire des moqueries, des injures publiques.

Les euphémismes sont aussi utilisés pour marquer des endroits sales, désagréables ou dangereux. Les dysphémismes dans ce cas d'utilisation caractérisent plus précisément les particularités de ces lieux et expriment souvent l'opinion de la population locale sur ces lieux. Effectivement

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Nganang ne s'attarde pas sur la profession de la famille Tagni pour le simple plaisir de le faire. Tagni cherche en vain un boulot dans la ville métropolitaine de Douala pour nourrir ses trois enfants et sa femme. Le travail de chauffeur qu'il obtient en fouillant la presse ne dure que quelques jours. Sa femme quant- à elle était vendeuse de condiment (46) avant de se retrouver dans le chômage à la suite de violences meurtrières qui ont transformé son village en un abattoir où l'on égorgait des êtres vivants. Il convient d'ailleurs de mentionner le fait que Tagni voit en la ville de Douala une ville dans laquelle retrouver « le travail relevait de la merde à boire » (42) En effet, « il arpente les rues des quartiers blancs de Douala. C'est là seulement qu'il y a le travail ». (133) « Douala est un enfer – Douala-des-maux-de-Tête » (126). Tagni loge à Douala chez son frère Cadet Gabriel, avec sa femme et ses trois enfants dans « une chambre aigüe que ce dernier appelait pompeusement et sans honte « la Pagode ». Cette description révèle l'état alarmant du mode de vie de cette famille. L'enjeu consiste à étaler devant le peuple les méfaits de la colonisation en montrant jusqu'à quel degré le peuple bamiléké fut objectivé par les colons qui n'avaient que pour seul intérêt sauvegarder les richesses du peuple camerounais qu'ils s'étaient accaparées.

L'euphémisme peut être utilisé pour montrer la courtoisie et le respect. En conséquence, le dysphémisme est utilisé pour montrer l'absence d'une telle qualité comme la politesse, le respect ou la courtoisie ; par conséquent une esthétique dysphémique vise à montrer

la manifestation intentionnelle de l'irrespect.

Par exemple dans *La joie de vivre* Tagni, parlant de Mirabelle qui est sa belle-sœur vivant sur son toit déclare sans embages « c'est toi qui tourne la tête de ma fille, C'est toi qui viens lui apprendre la bordellerie ici...voilà déjà que ta sœur transforme ma maison en un bordel...Tagni ne veut pas de femme libre dans sa maison ! (236-237). Tagni affirme sans souci de rien que sa belle-sœur se livre à la prostitution. L'euphémisme est utilisé pour rendre hommage aux professions indignes. L'esthétique dysphémique exerce la fonction de se concentrer sur la profession indécente ou obscène ou sur les qualités négatives de ses représentants comme dans l'exemple

suivant où Mirabelle raconte sans honte ses exploits avec les hommes mariés.

Conclusion

Contrairement à ce que suggère le titre, *La joie de vivre* de Patrice Nganang ne révèle point des circonstances de bonheur ou de joie dans lesquelles se végétent les personnages du roman. Dans la mesure où le romancier dénonce avec véhémence les exactions sociales et culturelles qui objectivent les ressortissants de l'ouest Cameroun qui veulent exprimer leur droit de vote. Il n'y a point d'euphémisation dans l'expression des expériences et de vision de ce peuple. Les scènes littéraires montrent en revanche des effets traumatisant du colonialisme et de la marginalisation qui continuent de hanter les esprits de ce peuple.

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Mythopoïétique du cosmos et symbolique des personnages dans *Le jujubier du patriarche* d'Aminata Sow Fall

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Résumé: Pour certains critiques tels que Médoune Guèye, Samba Diop, Jean-François Durand, et Chahinda Ezzat, *Le jujubier du patriarche* d'Aminata Sow Fall se lit comme un roman entre oralité et écriture. Le roman regorge esthétiquement d'une mythopoïétique extraordinaire qui, à la fois, traduit sa valeur esthétique et sa complexité. A travers une approche stylistique, nous montrons comment l'auteur a fondé la fabrique de son roman sur un mythe qu'elle a créé et dans laquelle elle invite ses lecteurs à décoder le message. Un tel exercice fait l'objet de notre réflexion sur la mythopoïétique du cosmos et de la symbolique des personnages dans le roman de Sow Fall. Au terme de notre analyse, l'approche utilisée a permis de procéder à une étude stylistique détaillée du roman et a contribué à l'éclairage du texte qui semble hermétique.

Mots clés : mythopoïétique, poïétique, imagerie, symbolique, mythe, personnage, stylistique

Abstract: For some critics such as Médoune Guèye, Samba Diop, Jean-François Durand, and Chahinda Ezzat, *Le jujubier du patriarche* by Aminata Sow Fall reads like a novel presenting the interplay of orality and literacy. It is aesthetically imbued with extraordinary mythopoetics which, at the same time, shapes its

aesthetic value and its complexity. Through a stylistic approach, I have shown how the writer builds the fabric of the novel on a myth that she creates and invites readers to decode the message. Decoding the message is the main objective of this paper on the mythopoetics of the cosmos and the symbolism of characters in Sow Fall's novel. Through this approach, I have come up with a detailed stylistic analysis of the novel and contributed to a understanding the text which seems to be hermetic.

Keywords: mythopoetics, poetic, imagery, symbolic, myth, character, stylistics

1. Introduction

Célèbre écrivaine sénégalaise d'origine saint-louisienne, Aminata Sow Fall n'est plus à présenter au public africain francophone. Cette grande figure littéraire (née le 27 avril 1941 à Saint-Louis du Sénégal) a reçu de hautes distinctions dont le Grand prix littéraire d'Afrique noire en 1980, le Commandeur de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres en 2012, et le prix francophone de l'Académie française en 2015.

Sow Fall a exercé la fonction d'enseignante (professeur de lettres). Son amour pour les lettres se justifie aussi par la vision et l'engagement dont elle fait montre dans la promotion de la littérature et de la culture africaines. De 1978 à 1988, elle fut directrice des Lettres et de la Propriété intellectuelle au ministère de la culture du Sénégal et du centre d'Etudes et de Civilisations. Elle est la fondatrice de la maison d'édition Khoudia, du BALDE (Bureau Africain pour la Défense des Libertés de l'Ecrivain), du CAEC (Centre Africain d'Animation et d'Echanges Culturels) et du CIRLAC (Centre International d'Etudes, de Recherches et de Réactivation sur la Littérature) implantés respectivement dans les villes historiques de son pays natal: Dakar et Saint-Louis.

Ecrivaine contemporaine prolifique, Sow Fall a, à son actif, plus de sept romans dont les plus célèbres: *Le Revenant* (1976), *La Grève des battù* (1979) *Ex-père de la nation* (1987), *Le jujubier du patriarche* (1993), *Douceurs du bercail* (1998). Dans son œuvre en générale, elle essaie de dépeindre avec beaucoup de réalisme la société africaine particulièrement celle sénégalaise. Dans cette fonction d'artiste, Sow Fall invite son public à une relecture et à une revalorisation de la tradition orale africaine. C'est ce qui apparaît le plus en lisant son cinquième roman, *Le jujubier du patriarche* qui fait l'objet de cette étude qui repose sur une approche stylistique ; laquelle approche nous permet de faire ressortir l'esthétique du roman de Sow Fall.

Dans cette étude, nous attirons l'attention des lecteurs sur des marques stylistiques aidant à mieux comprendre ce roman de Sow Fall qui a l'allure d'une épopée difficile à comprendre pour une catégorie de lecteurs moins outillés. L'analyse se veut d'abord une contribution à la vulgarisation et au partage des études critiques sur l'œuvre de Sow Fall. Elle facilite également la compréhension du roman dont la critique reste moins abondante par rapport aux études menées sur les autres œuvres du même auteur. A notre

connaissance, les plus connues afférant à notre étude sont celles de Médoune Guèye (*Aminata Sow Fall : Oralité et société dans l'œuvre romanesque*, 2005), de Jean-François Durand (« La tradition orale dans *Le jujubier du patriarche* d'Aminata Sow Fall », 1997), de Samba Diop (*Discours nationaliste et identité ethnique à travers le roman sénégalais*, 2003) et de Chahinda Ezzat (*Le jujubier du patriarche* », *roman africain entre oralité et écriture*, 2013). Même parmi ces critiques, c'est seulement Ezzat qui a consacré un ouvrage entier sur le roman. Les autres sont soit des articles ou des sections de parties d'ouvrage. C'est d'ailleurs ce qui justifie notre choix sur *Le jujubier du patriarche*. Le sujet de notre article s'appuie sur la métaphore du titre du roman. Ainsi, le mot clé «mythopoïétique » est très important.

Nous donnons d'abord quelques précisions sur l'orthographe et le choix du mot. Parlant de son historique plutôt que de son étymologie, le mot est peu utilisé en langue française. Dans les quelques cas rares trouvés chez Pierre Brunel repris par Véronique Gély, c'est l'orthographe « *mythopoétique* » qu'on voit. Selon Gély, Brunel lui-même « a emprunté le mot à N. Frye qui l'emploie comme adjectif dans son *Anatomie de la critique*, en 1957 » (4).

C'est pourquoi Gély précise avec prudence que «c'est dans le monde anglophone que l'association des deux termes grecs est aujourd'hui à la fois la plus répandue, et la plus fréquemment rattachée à un domaine analogue à celui-là. *Mythopoeitics* et *mythopoetic*, présentés comme équivalents, sont

d'usage assez courant dans la langue anglaise contemporaine... »(3). Brunel comme Gély essaient de rendre le mot plus accessible en le définissant ainsi : «*mythopoétique*» signifie simplement qui fabrique des mythes ou qui fabrique du mythe» (3).

Ce rappel est très important pour nous. Car le mot clé que nous avons préféré utiliser dans cette étude accrochera de nombreux lecteurs. Il attirera attention de ces derniers non seulement sur la «*poïétique* » de Sow Fall mais surtout sur sa « *mythopoïétique* ». Dès lors, il est important d'évoquer la théorie et la distinction faites par Gilbert Bosetti: «il vaut mieux ne pas confondre la poétique d'un écrivain qui désigne l'ensemble des procédés stylistiques explicites ou implicites auxquels il recourt pour accomplir son art et sa poïétique, c'est-à-dire sa faculté d'inventer des histoires, des contes, des fables, des mythes (on parle alors de mythopoïétique ») (32). Bosetti se réfère dans sa définition à « Aristote pour qui le récit est d'abord *mimesis*, à savoir représentation d'événements de l'ordre de l'imaginaire (même si le référent est historiquement ou biographiquement vécu). »

Nous partageons entièrement l'idée de Bosetti dans la mesure où une étude sur la *mythopoïétique* du cosmos dans *Le jujubier du patriarche* contribue à une meilleure compréhension du roman de Sow Fall qui semble hermétique pour certains lecteurs moins imprégnés de l'histoire racontée. De surcroît, la compréhension de la fabrique du roman reste toujours un gros problème pour cette catégorie de lecteurs que nous venons de citer plus haut. Pour ces raisons, nous jugeons nécessaire de nous

lancer dans cet exercice littéraire et critique. La pertinence de notre analyse peut aussi se justifier dans ce que Bosetti explique en ces termes :

L'attrait d'une œuvre narrative ne relève pas que de son style et du travail sur la langue. Certaines histoires captivent plus que d'autres, indépendamment de la manière de les raconter. Les auteurs de fictions puisent dans un matériau mythique universel qui transcende les différentes cultures et véhicule des images, symboles et scénarios imaginaires qui s'adressent à l'esprit humain par d'autres canaux qu'un discours rationnel. (32-33).

Ce sont ces traits stylistiques et cette façon particulière de créer et de recréer qui marquent *Le jujubier du patriarche* de Sow Fall dont le contenu se résume dans ces lignes :

Le cinquième roman d'Aminata Sow Fall, *Le jujubier du patriarche*, nous plonge dans la complexe mémoire africaine, tissée autour d'un chant, le chant qui célèbre les lignées des héros antiques, des bâtisseurs et des grands guerriers. L'enjeu de la mémoire c'est la place qui revient aujourd'hui à chacun au sein de la société. Mais le tissage peut aussi être déchiré par l'intrusion du monde " moderne " qui suit les Indépendances...

Un foisonnement de personnages, de temps, de castes, et partout, toujours, les mots qui figent ou qui brisent. Narrations et dialogues, paroles de griots, de femmes, de chefs nous emmènent en procession jusqu'au jujubier du patriarche où devra s'accomplir la

renaissance (note de la quatrième de couverture du roman).

Pour mieux cerner notre sujet, nous articulons l'analyse autour de deux parties. La première sera une étude détaillée sur la «mythopoiétique» du cosmos et se focalise essentiellement sur la belle métaphore du titre et quelques images marquant l'univers du roman. La deuxième analyse la fonction symbolique de quelques personnages principaux.

2. De la mythopoiétique du cosmos

Une mythopoiétique du cosmos marque la création imaginaire d'Aminata Sow Fall dans *Le jujubier du patriarche*. Cette talentueuse écrivaine sénégalaise présente, dans son roman, une scène fabuleuse du village de Babyselli autour de la famille de Yelli. La scène se déroule précisément en milieu rural, au sein d'un village fictif dont le nom, selon Samba Diop, est identifiable à Seylibabi en Mauritanie, un village du Fouta de la zone mauritanienne :

Si 'Almamy est synonyme de chefferie traditionnelle toucouleur, Babyselli, quant à elle, paraît être l'inversion d'un vrai village, Seylibaby qui se trouve en territoire mauritanien à l'Est du Fouta, le pays toucouleur (Samba Diop, 2003 : 119).

Ce beau village fictif en terre mauritanienne reste un point de rencontre des cultures tel que Samba Diop (2003) le décrit: « Seylibaby est ainsi placé au carrefour de plusieurs influences culturelles et linguistiques : toucouleur, maure, saraxolé, peul, wolof. » (119). Au-delà du symbole de carrefour des cultures, ce village reste un lieu de culte pour les habitants sous

les yeux desquels se développe le mythe de l'ancêtre :

Parallèlement, dans *Le jujubier du patriarche*, la religion en l'occurrence l'islam, y est déterminant à travers le charisme d'un homme, certes mort, mais qui commande d'outre-tombe. Cette situation met en jeu un ancêtre charismatique, donc le passé et une communauté moderne synonyme de présent (Diop, 2003 : 119).

Une telle représentation fondée sur un réalisme culturel pousse des critiques à décrypter l'anagramme en faisant un rapprochement entre le village fictif de Babyselli dans le roman et Sélibabi le vrai village mauritanien situé dans la région de Guidémakha à l'Est de la Mauritanie. L'orthographe varie souvent et le nom peut être transcrit comme Sélibabi ou Sélibaby qui est maintenant une capitale départementale de la région administrative de Guidimakha.

Le village fictif de Sow Fall est considéré comme un lieu de culte où viennent des pèlerins, chaque année, pour célébrer la mémoire de leur ancêtre. Le narrateur l'évoque dans ce passage: «Un monde hétéroclite est arrivé à Babyselli, venant des quatre coins de la planète [...] Au petit matin, les pèlerins plieront leurs bagages, et Babyselli se retrouvera avec sa solitude (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, p. 11).

Cette mythopoïétique du cadre physique est renforcée par la métaphore du titre du roman même, *Le jujubier du patriarche*. C'est une forte image symbolique référant à la tombe de l'ancêtre sur laquelle les habitants du

village ont, un jour, trouvé un jujubier mort reverdir. Jean-François Durand explique avec finesse cette mythopoïétique du titre du roman sur lequel repose le mythe de l'ancêtre :

À la fin du roman, le griot Naani rapportera à Yelli une curieuse nouvelle : dans le Foudjallon, à la suite d'un hivernage particulièrement pluvieux, le sol a reverdi, et, sur la tombe du clan, la souche du jujubier sacré a bourgeonné (p.99).

Après cette révélation miraculeuse, Yelli le héros décide de se rendre à la terre de ses ancêtres pour se recueillir et renouer avec le passé nostalgique. Un tel événement en terre ancestrale n'est pas une mince affaire pour Yelli. De grands moments à ne point rater s'annoncent. Jean-François Durand magnifie l'événement en mettant l'accent sur son caractère mythique :

L'événement prend immédiatement une portée mythique: on connaît la signification du jujubier, le *n'dali* des contes initiatiques peuls dans les cultures africaines. Le jujubier est dans la tradition islamique, l'arbre de la limite. Il marque la frontière du paradis. Les soucis retirés dans la brousse, se nourrissent de ses fruits. Ses feuilles sont signes d'immortalité et de résurrection. Il est aussi, selon les traditions peules, recueillies par Amadou Hampaté Bâ, le symbole de l'initiation parfaite, qui précède la connaissance divine ineffable (99).

Ce pèlerinage à effectuer est alors fondamental pour Yelli. Durand y voit une perspective d'ouverture vers la

modernité ainsi que des solutions à la crise sociale qui sévit dans la famille de Yelli. Cette représentation est aussi, par hyperbole, une renaissance africaine, un signe d'espoir contre le pessimisme de certains fils du continent qui ne croient pas à son changement. Durand (1997) défend cette idée en ces termes :

Yelli décida donc de se rendre à Babyselli, berceau de sa famille, aux sources mêmes de la tradition orale. Naarou l'accompagnera. Ce pèlerinage permettra de reconstituer l'unité de la famille de refonder l'identité : « vivre la réalité de Babyselli et du Natangué et du Bourrou et du Kankamé. Marcher, sans le savoir, dans les sables muets du Foudjallon. Voir que les mythes sont accessibles non plus seulement par le plaisir extatique que leur évocation suscite (p.99).

On retrouve dans le roman une sorte de croyance et de « sanctification mythique » qui, pour Durand, pourrait être « une solution à la crise du sens et de l'humain. » Ainsi, cette sanctification sous forme de « resacralisation » est une façon pour l'auteur d'échapper au pessimisme qui se dégage de la plupart des romans sénégalais contemporains grâce à une reconstruction épique du passé africain. » (99).

L'image du jujubier du patriarche est donc ce mythe qui se développe autour de la tombe de l'ancêtre de Yelli. Pour mieux l'éclairer, la révélation s'est faite après une dure sécheresse qui avait frappé la zone. A la suite, une pluie s'est fortement abattue sur tout le terroir. Ainsi, l'espoir renaît sur une base mythique autour d'un miracle sur la

tombe de l'ancêtre. Le narrateur focaliseur marque cette image par une exclamation de stupéfaction pour attirer l'attention du lecteur sur la mythopoïétique qui fonde la quintessence du roman de Sow Fall :

Quel miracle quand on sait que le sol est resté stérile depuis des décennies ! Les jeunes générations n'ont jamais vu ça. Tant d'eau... Dieu merci [...]

La souche du jujubier de la tombe du patriarche s'est mise à bourgeonner. /.../

Au fil des ans, la réputation de l'arbre extraordinaire avait dépassé les frontières et on accourait de partout pour se procurer du fruit porte bonheur qui ne cesse d'attirer la richesse et de soigner tous les maux (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 109-110).

C'est un miracle plein de sens pour les habitants de Babyselli. Car, après tant d'années de sécheresse, la bénédiction de Dieu s'est déversée sur la population. Ainsi, le mythe redonne plus de sens à la vie de Yelli qui est un petit fils du patriarche dont la vie connaît un tournant difficile. Il prend ce mythe pour un refuge. Le narrateur dit beaucoup de choses sur le sort de Yelli :

Il (Yelli) s'est senti heureux comme il ne l'a jamais été pendant longtemps. Il a eu le vague sentiment que tout est voué à la renaissance. Ces bourgeons sur le moignon, il les sent fortement plus intéressant qu'au moment du récit de Naani. » (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, pp. 111-112).

Le jujubier est alors conçu comme un mythe. Il a un effet psychologique et curatif au malheur de Yelli dont la vie

n'a plus de sens à cause de sa paupérisation. Presque tout le monde l'a abandonné sauf son griot. Il n'a que son jardin comme refuge et lieu de méditation pour oublier son amertume. Ce jardin aussi est un élément du cosmos qui traduit l'atmosphère sinistre dans laquelle vit le héros Yelli. Dans ses commentaires, Jean-François Durand (1997) montre comment Yelli s'attache au jardin durant ses moments de faiblesses :

Le récit sera donc, dans une large mesure, la minutieuse chronique de ces dysfonctionnements jusqu'à la perte du *jom*, de l'honneur individuel et communautaire, dont les conséquences peuvent s'avérer irréparables. Dans les pires moments de crise, Yelli refuge dans un jardin public, parmi les « détruits partout éparpillés », d'où il contemple la maison des jours fastes et de la paix perdue (95).

Pour Jean-François Durand, le jardin public a une fonction symbolique : « le jardin a une fonction symbolique évidente : le miracle remarque narrateur, « territoire bien délimité où chacun respecte et protège le domaine de l'autre (p.95). » C'est un espace de méditation et précisément une sorte de refuge pour Yelli qui s'efforce tant bien que mal de tourner la page de cette phase difficile de sa vie. De ce fait, le jardin est un lieu de disculpation des problèmes sociaux auxquels Yelli est en proie :

Sur le banc public, dans un petit jardin rectangulaire qui ne méritait plus son nom. Les parterres de gazon avaient laissé la place depuis belle lurette à des carrés de terreau piqués ça et là

de quelques touffes d'herbes brûlées par le soleil. [...] Malgré les détritiques partout éparpillés, Yelli trouvait l'Endroit agréable parce que, de son banc, il pouvait apercevoir sa maison. [...] Au-delà de ces considérations sentimentales, le « jardin » l'attirait par la paix intérieure qu'il lui procurait et pour la sécurité qui y était assurée. [...]

Le havre de tranquillité après les foudres de Tacko. L'île-miracle des bouffées d'air salutaires pour se redire que le bonheur, finalement, c'est dans les choses simples (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 62).

Cette séquence illustre le caractère désemparé du héros. Yelli s'exile et se réfugie pour se ressourcer de bonheur, dans ce jardin, en vain. Après cet épisode de souffrance, le mythe de l'ancêtre le hante davantage. Il le prend comme son ultime recours et moyen de renouer avec le passé pour bâtir un avenir meilleur. Jean-François Durand évoque cela: «Le jardin refuge anticipe, dans le récit, la fonction de la ville mythique, Babyselli, où la famille disloquée finira par se rendre rituellement, afin d'entendre l'épopée, et reconstruire l'univers symbolique – brisé à Dakar – du groupe identitaire.» (95).

La poétique du mythe qui repose sur l'image du jujubier nous permet également d'établir un rapport avec celle du fleuve Natangué. Sow Fall fait une représentation fabuleuse du cosmos auquel l'individu se voue sans réserve avec une croyance mythique. Ce mythe révélé à Babyselli suite à de fortes

pluies ayant fait écho dans le village et à au-delà des frontières, laisse des traces sur le cosmos. Pour preuve, le fleuve Natangué est un grand signe de continuité marquant le miracle du village de Babyselli. La description mythique du canal et du fleuve Natangué évoque son rapport au mythe du jujubier :

Vénéralisé comme un génie tutélaire, le long canal continuera à exposer aux ravages du soleil l'argile craquelée de son fond.

Il s'étire au loin, ce canal. Il va, va, va, ... se perd sans le désert comme pour entretenir le mystère et la permanence des rêves qu'il suscite. Pour ceux de Babyselli, il est censé jadis avoir été le berceau du fleuve Natangué qui a été le témoin – souvent actif – des pages les plus belles, les plus émouvantes et aussi les plus sombres de leur histoire. Il a tari depuis bien longtemps, mais il a eu le temps de se cristalliser pour mieux rendre l'écho du chant épique qui conte les aventures extraordinaires de leurs glorieux ancêtres (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 12).

Le canal revêt un support mythique des ancêtres de Babyselli. La manière dont le narrateur le décrit lui procure une place importante dans la vie des villageois. L'éternité et le caractère mystérieux du canal se traduisent par l'énoncé et la répétition dans ces termes : « Il s'étire. Il va, va, va ... se perd dans le désert... » (p.12). Cette phrase reste une parfaite illustration du mythe que l'on voit pérenniser dans l'épopée. Il génère une croyance

religieuse de par la sanctification du lieu où repose l'ancêtre. Pour rappel, pendant une quarantaine d'années, une sécheresse avait frappé Babyselli. Enfin, une bénédiction de Dieu se déverse sur ce village qui va encore se ressourcer au canal et au fleuve Natangué. Cependant, le grand signe se trouve sur la tombe du patriarche sur laquelle la souche du jujubier a bourgeonné.

Un tel miracle fait revivre le mythe de l'ancêtre plus que jamais. Par conséquent, un pèlerinage se prépare. L'événement gagne plus d'ampleur grâce à un communiqué de presse. Les descendants de l'ancêtre lancent un vif appel à leurs confrères pour célébrer la mémoire de leur ancêtre :

Le convoi prit l'allure en atteignant l'autoroute. Une vingtaine de véhicules de tourisme dont certains de grand luxe, autant de cars et deux camionnettes chargées de vivres et d'ustensiles pour un voyage à inscrire en lettres d'or dans les annales déjà prestigieuses du Foudjallon (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 113).

Plus loin, le narrateur marque l'événement annoncé à la radio avec une mise en relief sur cette édition particulière du pèlerinage :

Un communiqué de presse parut dans le journal par lequel les descendants de l'Almamy Sarebibi conviaient toute la communauté sans distinction de sexe, d'ethnie ou de religion, au pèlerinage à Babyselli pour honorer la mémoire du saint homme (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 117).

Tout devient sérieux et mystérieux et le culte regagne sa force dans l'âme

africaine que Sow Fall montre à travers cette poétique du culte. Progressivement, le narrateur se focalise sur l'événement dans le temps et dans l'espace. Le convoi arrive à sa destination et il précise ce qui relie l'homme et le cosmos ainsi que la foi et l'esprit :

Exténués par un si long voyage sur des pistes cahoteuses que, de mémoire d'homme, aucune voiture n'avait jamais traversées, les pèlerins arrivèrent enfin à Babyselli, à l'aube, un vendredi. [...]

Babyselli ! Des cases, presque pas d'arbres mais des épineux régénérés par les pluies de la dernière saison. Des hommes et des femmes chaleureux. Une tranquillité émouvante. En contrebas de l'horizon, des dunes sur fond de ciel bleu. Sur un autre côté, le canal, le Natangué, «le fleuve simplement les quelques habitants dont la doyenne, tante Salimata.... (Le jujubier du patriarche, 119).

Sans nul doute, Yelli s'était réfugié dans le jardin public pour oublier son passé ; un remède qui s'avère moins efficace à cause de la pression sociale. Cependant, sa grande consolation se fait sentir le plus à travers le mythe qui, pour lui, est une grâce divine par laquelle il faut faire un retour à la source pour vivre aisément. On perçoit nettement cette réconciliation de Yelli lors du pèlerinage sur la tombe du patriarche :

La tombe du patriarche ! Une motte plus large que les autres et le jujubier debout, seule force vivante dans ce paysage de silence

et de nudité. Les tiges qui s'élèvent du moignon, les feuilles vertes et tendres qui bavent le soleil, le sentiment de béatitude que leur vue suscite ! Yelli respira hors de la matérialité du temps de l'espace. (Le jujubier du patriarche, 121).

C'est un air d'exaltation qui donne un signe de renaissance et d'espoir chez Yelli. C'est une réconciliation et un renouement d'un présent sombre à un passé glorieux qui fait sans doute rêver d'un lendemain meilleur. D'une autre manière, Sow Fall fait comprendre à travers cette belle allégorie et analogie l'influence du passé sur le présent qui est symbole de la modernité.

3. De la symbolique des personnages

L'étude des personnages occupe une place centrale dans ce travail. Elle permet de décoder leurs rôles et de faire ressortir la dimension esthétique et symbolique de l'œuvre. Pour ce faire, nous allons déchiffrer le «*Who is Who ?*» (*Qui est Qui*) tel que les anglophones aiment le dire. Il va de soi que les théories de Mikhaïl Bakhtine (*L'effet personnage*) et de Roland Barthes nous intéressent dans cette section qui analyse l'incarnation des personnages. La théorie de Barthes sur le personnage sous-tend notre argument de base:

Support de l'action, support de l'analyse psychologique, point nodal du récit, le personnage apparaît comme un des vecteurs fondamentaux de l'intérêt romanesque. L'analyse traditionnelle l'appréhende comme un moyen, pour le lecteur, de reconnaître un certain nombre de données

psychologiques concentrées dans un être fictif mais fidèle à une réalité qu'il condense et transcende en conciliant le général et le particulier et qu'il rend, ainsi, signifiante (126).

La représentation des personnages souvent dénommée « caractérisation » est l'une des marques stylistiques du roman de Sow Fall. À travers cette technique, l'auteur met en exergue soit la valeur soit le talent de ses personnages. À ce titre, *Le jujubier du patriarche* nous présente trois personnages symboliques majeurs : Naani, Naarou et Yelli.

Les deux premiers (Naani et Naarou) sont des artistes/griots et mémoires de leur société. Dans *Le jujubier du patriarche*, Naani est perçu comme un griot et un grand artiste traditionnel. Il maîtrise l'histoire de l'épopée du Foudjallon et il joue très bien le *xalam*. Avec son talent et son rôle de mémoire de la société, il ne rate pas les cérémonies culturelles solennelles organisées au sein de la communauté. Il y est convié à son titre exceptionnel de gardien de la tradition. Naani s'approprie et préserve dignement cette valeur. Le narrateur partage ce fait sur une scène où il joue son *xalam* lors d'une veillée culturelle à Babyselli pour saluer la mémoire de l'ancêtre fondateur, l'Almamy Sarébibî» (Diop, 2003 :117)

Aux yeux des lecteurs qui «ont l'impression de tendre l'oreille à Naani en plus de le lire », l'auteur fait de lui un artiste très passionnant :

Naani se tut. Trois petites notes lentes, mongues et plaintives, s'échappèrent de son *xalam* et se

dissipèrent dans les vapeurs de rosée qui annonçaient une aube décidément paresseuse. Naani se racla la gorge, déplia ses jambes engourdis, s'appuya sur les bras vigoureux de son fils Khouredia et se tint debout, face à la foule. Sa vue depuis longtemps défaillante ne lui renvoya qu'une masse informe derrière l'opacité du petit matin brumeux. Sa voix éraillée le couvrit :

Ô fils de Babyselly, Dioumana est ainsi partie. Elle a fermé la douzième porte du chant, n'est-ce pas... Mais, Yellimané reviendra. Il ouvrira la treizième. (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 163).

Naani a une voix charmante. Elle fait revivre à la communauté ce qu'elle a de plus cher dans son patrimoine culturel. Le narrateur nous en dit plus quand sa voix fut interrompue par le déclenchement du chant d'un coq :

Le coq du village ne le laissa pas terminer. Comme chaque matin, à l'heure où les semblants de lueurs se débattaient dans les limbes de la nuit, il joua sa partie : sa voix résonna jusque dans le fond strié du Natangué. La foule trouva son chant déplacé ; horrible. Les villageois eux-mêmes s'offusquèrent de l'insolence du coq : il aurait dû quand même savoir que ce jour n'était pas comme les autres. Est-ce que les chats faméliques avaient miaulé comme ils avaient l'habitude de le faire à pareille heure? (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 163).

Dans ce passage, le narrateur montre avec humour la déconcentration ainsi que la frustration des villageois qui

tendaient une oreille attentive au talentueux artiste traditionnel. Ce dernier jouait son *xalam* et chantait l'épopée de Sarébibi, l'ancêtre fondateur. Malheureusement, le chant du coq avait tout gâché. Cela n'a perturbé en rien la place et l'honneur accordés à Naani.

Selon Jean-François Durand, «Naani s'illustre dignement comme un vrai griot, irréprochable et gardien de la tradition (...) «Il savait être fidèle jusqu'à l'anachronisme. Tout fier d'être le descendant de Lambi – le seul homme au monde qui eût pu dire si l'Almamy Sarebibi avait jamais ri de son vivant.» (p.98).

Naani est symbole de la dignité et de la tradition orale africaine. Même quand le malheur et la misère avaient frappé la famille de Yelli, tout le monde avait déserté la maison sauf lui qui est resté son fidèle compagnon:

Progressivement, la solitude. Les courtisans avaient disparu. Les griots aussi, sauf un: Naani. Lui était un griot pas comme les autres. Il savait être fidèle jusqu'à l'anachronisme. Tout fier d'être le descendant de Lambi- le seul homme au monde qui eût pu dire si l'Almamy Sarébibi avait jamais ri de son vivant __, Naani ne donnait un sens à sa propre existence que par l'héritage des cent dix milles vers qui constituaient l'épopée née depuis sept cents ans d'histoire de la lignée des Almamy et de celle des chasseurs du Foudjallon /.../ Après la tragédie, la paix. Et l'épopée n'en était que plus belle pour Naani qui la portait tout entière dans sa tête et dans son

cœur, comme un sacerdote. Naani, une fois, rendait visite à Yelli, même dans le « cagibi » qui semblait avoir donné à Tacko le goût de la parole. Habillée d'un boubou bleu surmonté d'une cape rouge assortie à la chéchia, chaussée de bottes jaunes crispant à chaque pas qu'il entraînait dans la maison en appuyant sur la chanson, histoire d'installer le décor (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 20).

Ce long passage marque un retour à la source, un souvenir qui dépeint le folklore africain à travers Naani comme personnage type. Cette touche culturelle et esthétique de l'œuvre apparaît aussi dans sa thématique: les problèmes sociaux dans la famille africaine et sénégalaise en particulier à travers la famille de Yelli dont l'ami, le griot (Naani) est témoin.

Un vrai griot, Naani l'est jusque dans l'âme. Il assure pleinement son statut dans la communauté. C'est un monument qui a marqué la société au point que tout le monde se demande qui va le remplacer. Sa mort a touché toute la communauté. Cependant, sa place ne sera pas occupée par son fils Khouredia comme le veulent certaines traditions des griots. C'est plutôt, Naarou, très talentueuse et habile dans le rôle que Naani jouait qui le remplacera.

Naarou est aussi un personnage passionnant. Nous pouvons l'appeler «griot» si nous nous contentons seulement du rôle essentiel qu'elle doit jouer comme Naani sans évocation singulière de l'appartenance à un clan ou de la représentation des individus par classe sociale. Naarou, de par son talent s'illustre comme une artiste, une

cantatrice et une poétesse traditionnelle. Elle s'est forgée comme potentielle remplaçante de Naani et a mérité sa place malgré certaines considérations sociales. Elle épouse cet art avec amour et avec passion en sus de son don. Pour Samba Diop (2003), ce don s'exprime à travers «ses talents de poète [...] notamment sa capacité de mémoire et son habileté à déclamer des poèmes, à l'âge de treize (13) ans, un poème très long composé d'un millier de vers.» Evidemment, Jean-François Durand (1997) confirme le talent de Naarou dans son commentaire :

Naarou enfin, a grandi dans le culte de l'épopée. Le roman la dépeint comme une possédée du poème.» A treize ans, elle pouvait, déjà réciter un millier de vers de l'épopée du Foudjallon. Son rapport au fonds épique est comparable à celui de Naani.» (p. 98).

Le narrateur lui-même révèle les talents de ce personnage :

Naarou était conforme à sa personnalité et au rapport mythique qu'elle entretenait avec l'épopée. Le chant : un amour, une passion qui ne le quittera jamais et dont la flamme - non dévastatrice heureusement- brillera peut-être au dessus de sa tombe quand elle rejoindra Dioumana dans le lit du fleuve Natangué.

Il fallait comptabiliser une évidence : Naarou était une possédée du poème. A treize ans, elle pouvait déclamer sans trébucher un millier de vers, ce qui, vu son âge, était une performance d'autant plus étonnante qu'elle était la marque du génie. De nombreux griots qui

prétendaient être dépositaires reconnus du chant apparaissent comme des piètres figures lors des grandes occasions où il était de bon ton de faire revivre l'histoire. L'épopée coulait alors comme jadis le fleuve Natangué, et chacun se faisant un devoir de la grossir d'extraits plus ou moins longs pour montrer avec une grande fierté que l'on avait perdu l'héritage.

En ces occasions, Naarou entrait dans le chant comme dans un sanctuaire, en accordant sa voix dont elle faisait prendre toutes les tonalités et les tons voulus (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, pp. 89-90).

Naarou a un talent extraordinaire. Elle a un don d'après les commentaires de ses confrères et sœurs. Cette posture lui donne la chance de succéder au grand griot Naani, gardien de la tradition. Comme *Le jujubier du patriarche* se présente sous les allures d'une «généalogie épique» selon Samba Diop, il y a une harmonieuse technique narrative qui l'accompagne à travers la typification des personnages : «*Le jujubier du patriarche* se présente comme «une généalogie épique, une longue épopée qui en fait l'oubli, l'amnésie et les ravages du temps ainsi que la recherche d'une identité pour revivre dans le présent.»(p.118). Effectivement, parmi ces caractéristiques identitaires que le roman souligne, Sow Fall célèbre vivement «la sauvegarde de la mémoire », «le rempart contre l'oubli » à travers le duo Naani et Naarou.» C'est dans ce sens que nous jugeons nécessaire de les analyser parallèlement comme un duo d'ainé et de cadette dans

cet art de la tradition orale qui les unit. Cependant, il n'est pas commode de distinguer Naarou comme une griotte vu plusieurs détails de la généalogie, mais dans un sens littéraire du terme et en tant que mémoire de la société, nous pouvons la nommer ainsi.

Pour revenir sur certaines préoccupations majeures soulignées par Samba Diop dans la généalogie, Sow Fall ne manque pas de le gérer dans la classification de ses personnages. Naarou peut bien être distinguée comme «griotte» de par son rôle et de par son talent qui lui accorde un tel statut par respect et par mérite. Pour preuve, nonobstant la mort du grand griot Naani, considéré comme «la mémoire de la société», l'histoire et l'épopée du Foudjallon ne sont pas jetées dans l'oubli. Il y a eu une bonne sauvegarde et une relève pour sauver la société de l'oubli de leur histoire. C'est Naarou, la talentueuse poétesse ayant fait ses révélations depuis l'âge de treize ans qui l'a assuré après la mort de Naani. Samba Diop insiste sur ce fait qui coïncide avec la quatorzième porte de l'épopée du Foudjallon :

Enfin, «l'épopée du Foudjallon» chantée cette fois-ci par Naaru l'année suivante durant le pèlerinage. Naani le griot qui avait pour mission de déclamer le geste est décédé et Naaru l'a remplacé. Il incombe donc à Naaru de perpétuer la mémoire de la tribu à travers cette belle épopée orale (p.117)

C'est vers la fin du roman, suite au décès de Naani que Naarou a succédé à celui-ci pour jouer pleinement le rôle de griot «pour perpétuer la mémoire de la

tribu». C'est par surprise qu'elle est montée sur scène pour déclamer le chant. Le narrateur raconte:

L'année d'après, l'affluence augmenta mais Naani manqua à l'appel ainsi que Bouri tuée bêtement par un chauffeur ivre alors qu'elle traversait la rue, à un feu rouge. A Babyselli, on se souvient d'eux. Les pèlerins prièrent avec ferveur pour le repos de leurs âmes, puis Naarou supplia Khouredia, le fils de Naani; «laisse-moi chanter pour Bouri ! »

Et sa plainte se perdit au loin, vers les dunes du Foudjallon. (*Le jujubier du patriarche* pp. 164-165)

Talent caché, Naarou n'est apparue sur scène qu'après la mort de Naani qui, normalement, devrait être succédé par son fils Khouredia. Cependant, ce qui a donné à Naarou cette chance, c'est sa capacité à mémoriser et à restituer l'histoire telle quelle. Naarou n'est pas née griotte, mais elle l'est devenue ici par talent et par passion. Ainsi, Sow Fall lui a fait jouer ce rôle même si cela semble donner une confusion dans la généalogie qu'elle fait lire dans *Le jujubier du patriarche*. Jean-François Durand a fait ce constat quand il affirme à propos de Naarou : «Humiliée par Tacko, elle décidera de revendiquer sa part de l'épopée, en proclamant la parenté qui la lie à Tacko, par l'intermédiaire de Sadaga, sa grand-mère esclave, que Waly, frère de Biram Penda avait prise pour épouse. »(p. 98). C'est à l'occasion des obsèques de Macodou qu'elle déclame ces vers :

*Ô Waly le dieu des fauves
Tu te reposais dans l'ancre du lion
En attendant que le maître des céans*

T'apportât la proie convoitée.

Le sang ne mentira pas

Waly fils de Penda Sarr

Kor Kantôme Kor Sadaga

Penda Waly Penda eyôô

Je te salue Tacko Biram Penda (Le jujubier du patriarche, 97).

Selon Durand, ces vers de Naarou constituent une infraction à la règle: «Par cette soudaine modification de l'épopée, Naarou jette une lumière cure sur Sadaga, l'esclave, et fait ressurgir aux yeux de tous « la lutte épique entre Sadaga la mère de Penda et Kantôme » jusqu'au jour où la médisance était cachée dans la pénombre des secrets de famille. » (p.99). Certains critiques, comme nous, diront qu'il n'y a rien de négatif dans tout cela, car Naarou y voit juste le moyen d'exprimer son talent d'artiste prouvant ainsi qu'elle connaît la vraie histoire et la maîtrise parfaitement. Cependant, on sous-entend un petit règlement de compte avec Tacko qui voulait l'humilier. À l'instar du griot dans *Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue* (1960) de Djibril Tamsir Niane qui défend qu'ils sont les sacs à parole, Naarou aussi fait comprendre par cet acte que malgré sa non appartenance au clan des vrais griots, son talent artistique garantit une survie de la tradition orale. C'est cette passion qui l'anime et que Sow Fall essaie de montrer à travers son personnage. Elle est bien préparée dans les circonstances et reste très consciente des valeurs culturelles de sa société. Le narrateur décrit :

Puis la voix progressivement, gagnait en intensité et entraînait Naarou dans une des vingt et une portes de l'épopée dont chacune,

dit la légende, symbolise un temps – autant dire une vie- dans la longue trame des péripéties d'une histoire merveilleuse. Le chant alors, s'emparait d'elle, et maître absolu de tout son corps, distillait la séduction – comme air de sirène. Et Naarou vivait sa passion dans une atmosphère de magie, et le temps glissait doucement subtilement, sans le poids mystérieux d'un empire flottant sans autre contour que le ravissement profond que la scène produisait. Et la vie passait sous les flots torrentiels du fleuve Natangué jusqu'au réveil. (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, p.90).

Dans toutes ces astuces de révéler passionnément son talent, Durand retient du personnage symbolique de Naarou ses actes idiosyncratiques. Il remarque chez elle «une dimension théâtrale» qui pousse les gens à l'admirer: «Il y a aussi chez Naarou une dimension théâtrale: «Naarou savait se créer des scènes: l'espace des jeux quand elle n'était qu'une enfant; dans la cour de l'école, les cérémonies familiales.» (p.99).

Il y a une dimension esthétique et rhétorique derrière le portrait de Naarou. Ce personnage symbolise une idée d'esprit de dépassement et de réconciliation malgré la «subversion» qu'elle a faite. Pour Médoune Guèye, c'est une démarche symbiotique qui est au cœur du discours d'Aminata Sow Fall dans *Le jujubier du patriarche* et elle manifeste de manière coopérative la subversion qu'opère Naarou, car le retour à la tradition revêt l'aspect d'une [dé]-construction idéologique marquée par l'actualité.»(pp.156-157). Sans

équivoque, la figure de Naarou est esthétiquement très symbolique dans l'œuvre de Sow Fall. L'auteur même, échangeant avec Médoune Guèye dans une *interview*, fait un témoignage sur son personnage :

C'est pourquoi dans [*le jujubier du patriarche*,] il y a Naarou qui est une espèce de synthèse, cette descendante d'esclave, qui a permis, en même temps à ses ancêtres, à l'épopée de revivre. Si sa grand-mère ne s'était pas sacrifiée, c'aurait été la honte pour la lignée des aristocrates. Et le sang de Naarou est mêlé au sang des royaumes puisqu'elle est en même temps esclave et descendante d'aristocrates. Elle est le personnage central par rapport au symbole que je veux développer puisqu'elle est le mélange de tout cela. On voit bien qu'elle dépasse toutes les contradictions qui sont en elle pour aller vers l'avenir (157).

Le dernier personnage symbolique du roman est Yelli. En lisant l'œuvre, l'on se retrouve dans deux récits principaux qui se tissent avec une généalogie entre l'épopée de Sarebibi l'ancêtre et leurs descendants Yelli et sa famille. Yelli est un pilier dans la société et il incarne le patriarcat par son statut. Il est non seulement descendant direct de Yellimané mais aussi son représentant dans les familles reliées par la généalogie. Jean-François Durand explique l'histoire de la généalogie en ces termes :

Pour bien comprendre les liens qui unissent les deux familles (Il relève de l'éthique du *woleré* si forte aujourd'hui encore au

Sénégal), il faut avoir recours une fois de plus à la tradition orale. Dans la famille de Naarou, fille de Penda, on a coutume de confier les enfants aux descendants de Yellimané : « c'était une façon de perpétuer l'histoire qui, un jour que personne ne se rappelait plus, avait fait porter le joug de l'esclavage aux aïeux de Warèle, l'ancêtre presque mythique de Naarou. L'héritage, plus tard avait placé Warèle sous tutelle de Thioro, la mère de l'Almamy Sarebibi. (pp. 95-96)

C'est cette histoire qui lie les familles, selon leur descendance. Ainsi, Yelli est une référence en ce sens qu'il constitue le cordon ombilical qui raffermi les liens fraternels entre les familles. C'est pourquoi sa sœur Penda lui confie Naarou à l'âge de six ans jusqu'à son mariage avec Amsata, un instituteur d'école. C'est aussi la raison pour laquelle la sœur de Yelli tient à préciser qui sera la mère de Naarou. Ce dialogue renseigne sur cette histoire :

--Tacko, je dois dire que je te confie Naarou.....pas à Yelli mais à toi....

--Ah bon !plaisante Yelli. Alors, va chercher un frère ailleurs.

__Tu es un homme, Yelli... La femme est reine de son foyer..... Tacko, tu es la nouvelle mère de Naarou. N'est-ce pas Naarou ? A partir d'aujourd'hui, c'est ici ta maison. (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 34).

Fort de ce statut social dans le renforcement des liens familiaux, Yelli ressent beaucoup de fierté d'être un descendant du patriarche.

Malheureusement, dans son portrait, il n'a rien d'un patriarche. C'est juste une incarnation liée à l'importance de sa descendance. Dans l'épopée, il s'est réfugié comme le dit Durand: « Yelli de même trouvera dans l'épopée un remède «à sa fragilité morale et, de plus en plus, physique ». Mais son drame est qu'il ne sera pas à la hauteur des personnages épiques, ses modèles» (98). Ceci est vrai et même sa femme «ne cessera de lui faire cette remarque ». Selon Durand, «Tacko ne cessera d'insister cruellement sur cette contradiction évidente» (98). Cependant, Yelli se glorifie en disant à Tacko «Et n'oublie pas que c'est le sang de Sarebibibi de Dioumana qui court dans mes veines ! (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 14). Le dialogue se poursuit et Tacko rétorque à son mari avec mépris : « Ecoute : tu es Yelli, tu vis la fin du vingtième siècle avec ses dures réalités. Tu dois te rendre compte, sinon, c'est moi qui continuerai toujours à te braver. » (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 16).

Pour ce qui est des liens entre Yelli, Naarou et Naani dans notre analyse de la symbolique et de l'esthétique du roman, ils sont tous des gardiens de la tradition, comme Durand l'a dit: « il y a dans *Le jujubier du patriarche* au moins trois gardiens de l'épopée qui par ce rapport privilégié à l'héritage ont un regard qui va plus loin et plus profond que les laideurs contemporaines : Naani, Yelli et Naarou» (97).

Cependant, ce qui lie Naarou à Naani le griot est artistiquement plus fort. C'est un lien d'amour pour l'être qu'il est, ses qualités d'artiste, de personne humble dans l'habillement et son incarnation de mémoire de la société. Bref, Naani est

une idole pour Naarou. Car il l'a marquée depuis leur premier contact dans des circonstances où Naarou n'était pas psychologiquement forte. Elle était tragiquement abattue parce que c'était à l'occasion de la visite de sa mère Penda lors du mariage de Tacko à son oncle Yelli qu'elle a eu la chance de découvrir Naani le griot de Yelli. Avant son retour, Penda a confié Naarou à sa tante. Malgré cette séparation avec sa mère biologique qui lui rongeaient le cœur, elle retient les grands moments du mariage que Naani a marqués. Le narrateur raconte cette émotion :

Ignorant tout du bouillonnement qui désoriente sa mère, Naarou était enchantée. Changer de cadre. L'aventure, quoi. L'évasion. Mais surtout, surtout : l'espoir de revoir Naani, le seul souvenir qu'elle avait gardé des cérémonies grandioses du mariage. (*Le jujubier du patriarche*, 35).

Naarou s'est artistiquement bien forgée pour mériter la place qu'elle a occupée: avoir l'honneur de remplacer le griot modèle de sa communauté qu'elle admirait tant. Ces personnages sont, aux yeux des lecteurs avertis, des monuments. Ils célèbrent l'héritage de la tradition orale comme mémoire de leur société.

4. Conclusion

Aminata Sow Fall s'est inspirée de la réalité culturelle de la société africaine pour créer un mythe qu'elle magnifie dans son roman avec une belle mythopoïétique du cosmos doublée d'une symbolique des personnages principaux. Cette représentation poïétique, à la fois, nourrit le roman

d'une certaine originalité et d'une créativité qui ne sont point surprenantes sur l'auteur. L'amour de cette dernière pour la littérature ainsi que pour la culture africaine se lit dans *Le jujubier du patriarche*. Sow Fall a puisé dans la tradition orale africaine et a ancré l'œuvre dans ce merveilleux univers culturel.

L'on peut lire sa force de création que nous avons démontrée à travers la mythopoïétique du cosmos et de la symbolique des personnages à travers son pouvoir imaginaire de recréer un mythe autour d'une histoire fictive qu'elle donne à l'épopée du Foudjallon. Autour de ce mythe et de cette épopée, elle invite son public aussi à créer une certaine «harmonie entre passé et présent entre soi-même et l'Autre.» (Chihanda Ezzat, 2013 : 9). Il ressort de l'analyse de Chihanda Ezzat que *Le jujubier du patriarche* se lit comme un roman entre oralité et écriture :

Le roman devient un réceptacle et un véhicule de la tradition des valeurs esthétiques, idéologiques, sociales, morales et culturelles. Insérer la tradition orale dans les textes écrits relève

de l'intérêt de l'écrivaine à conserver le patrimoine culturel et verbale, la parole des origines, à valoriser les traits culturels définitoires et nationaux afin de mieux se situer par rapport au monde moderne mais aussi de la volonté de rechercher sa propre identité ethnique et culturelle (Ezzat, 2013 : 9-10).

Sow Fall fait également ressortir l'esthétique de son roman à travers un style frappant caractérisé par un récit épique raconté à travers une narration cosmogonique. Cet aspect du récit regorge d'une mythologie inspirant ainsi la mythopoïétique qui nous a préoccupé dans cette étude stylistique. L'on peut aussi retenir que Sow Fall a réussi son projet d'écriture pour la revalorisation de la tradition orale africaine en mettant en évidence et de façon fictive l'épopée du roi Almamy. Elle présente également une scène fabuleuse du village fictif et mythique de Babyselli. Ce caractère mythopoïétique du roman montre les valeurs cardinales et ancestrales de la société traditionnelle à laquelle appartient l'auteur qui s'efforce de faire vivre à son public l'âme africaine.

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