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EXPLORING THE GENDERED NATURE OF NATIONAL VIOLENCE: THE INTERSECTION OF PATRIARCHY AND CIVIL CONFLICT IN TANELLA BONI'S *MATINS DE COUVRE-FEU* (MORNINGS UNDER CURFEW)

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Abstract:

Placed under house arrest during a period of civil conflict, the fictional narrator of Tanella Boni's *Matins de couvre-feu* uses this time of enforced solitude to review her personal experiences as a woman in relationship to the instability now threatening the country. This reading of Boni's work examines the narrator's perspective on war in the context of feminist theories on the gendered nature of violence in order to better situate the narrative within a more extensive transnational discourse on the role of gender in the waging of war and the preservation of peace.

In her essay, "Écrire dans l'urgence" [Writing Under Emergency Conditions] (2009a), the Ivoirian author, Tanella Boni, reminds us that in an Africa fraught with civil wars literary creativity must often take place in a climate of violence. Her third novel, *Matins de*

couvre-feu (2005), is set in an imaginary African country called Zamba but draws its inspiration from the civil conflict in the Côte d'Ivoire that broke out in 2002. The work serves as a particularly apt illustration of the way that such conditions inform the texts that reflect them. Placed under house arrest for a period of nine months by the Director of Parallel Information, the fictional narrator and protagonist uses this time of enforced solitude to write. Her inner journey reviews her personal experience as a woman and member of her society in the context of her present concerns about the instability that is currently threatening the country. Her analysis leads her to meditate as well on the origins of conflict, the ultimate consequences of violence, and the necessary social changes that would produce national harmony and lasting peace. Repeatedly, she sees parallels between the dysfunctional relationships between men and women on one hand and the ideological and ethnic differences that divide the country on the other. The purpose of this essay is to explore the narrator's perspective on war specifically in the context of feminist theories on the gendered nature of violence in order to better situate the narrative within a more extensive transnational discourse on the role of gender in the waging of war and the preservation of peace.

Much of narrator's thought process demonstrates a profound consciousness of the patriarchal nature of her culture. In this respect, she seems to mirror the thoughts of Boni herself as expressed in her book *Que vivent les femmes d'Afrique?* [What Do the Women of Africa Face?] (2009b) where she writes:

Les femmes d'Afrique subissent encore ces maux liés au système patriarcal . . . même si, ça et là, des lois proclament la fin de ces pratiques. . . encore faudrait-il combattre les idéologies sur lesquelles reposent l'inégalité des sexes et la hiérarchie entre le masculin et le féminin. (pp.16-17)

[The women of Africa still endure those evils linked to the patriarchal system . . . even if, here and there, laws proclaim the end

of those practices . . . they must still fight against the ideologies on which rest the inequality of the sexes and the hierarchy between masculine and feminine].

In *Matins de couvre-feu*, the word “patriarch” occurs variously throughout the narrator’s reflections in reference both to her own grandfather and to the first president of the country; she draws on the concept explicitly in the choice she makes for the name of her restaurant, *Le Repas du Patriarche* [The Patriarch’s Repast] and in the hierarchical relationships characteristic of patriarchy that are repeatedly evoked, explained, or dramatized in the course of the narrative. She further examines how patriarchy informs different kinds of relationships within the nation, not merely gender relationships, but relationships between generations within the same family or clan as well as relationships between the patriarch’s family, the insiders, and those of other families, the outsiders. She illustrates the latter within the text through the presence of foreigners and the descendants of slaves, the children of those who had been defeated in battle in earlier times. By intertwining stories of her own family’s past with the present conflict, she also shows how historical patriarchal traditions have played a role in preparing the soil for contemporary civil wars in West Africa.

The story begins with the narrator’s present situation as a woman under house arrest in the fictional postcolonial capital city of Zambaville and an account of the violence and corruption leading to her detention. As the woman searches for ways to occupy her time during her months in isolation and for raw material for the journal she keeps, she draws on her memories and finds diversion in reconstructing the past. The second part of the story, entitled “La Bonne Femme” [The Good Woman], tells the story of her mother and father, neither of whom is ever specifically named. Her reveries evoke an era that contrasts markedly with the present, a time when men’s and women’s roles were sharply separated and rigidly defined and when the family was ruled by the desires of the patriarch. During the rite of passage experienced by all adolescent girls in the

community, the mother learned the two great laws that governed the lives of women: “Première loi: silence absolu quelles que soient les circonstances . . . Deuxième loi: tester la résistance à la douleur physique ou morale” [First law: absolute silence whatever the circumstances . . . Second law: test resistance to physical or moral suffering] (2005, p. 86). After her marriage, arranged by her brother, she became aware that her destiny was in every meaningful way pre-determined by the males in her family and gradually assumed the role required of her as the guardian of the home and the nurturing giver of life. Serving as the fixed entity in the traditional male/female equation, she found herself relegated almost exclusively to the domestic sphere. The rules of convention assigned to her the small woman’s stool that placed her both literally and figuratively in a subordinate position with respect to the male.

The father, conversely, is presented in terms of his freedom and mobility. The narrator remembers that he occasionally transgressed the edicts of the patriarch, albeit not with impunity; he loved hunting and women; and, rarely present, he had a yen for travel and adventure. When the First World War threatened in Europe, he left his wife and village to take a ship to France where he was trained as a *tirailleur sénégalais* and learned how to fight the French way. His experiences and training there prepared him on his return to his country to work with the colonial administration and to take on a leadership role in the community. In France, he had formed a relationship with a French woman, Fanny, with whom he fathered a son, Charles. Patriarchy has traditionally been associated with war, and the essentialist virtues ascribed to masculinity and femininity are magnified in wartime. Women across cultures keep the home fires burning while soldiers, generally men, confront each other on distant battlefields. Women wait in place, while men go off to wage war and experience the violence of combat. In this instance, the father was wounded, and although he nearly lost a leg, he recovered, thanks to the ministrations of Fanny, who had assumed one of the few active roles permitted women in that war, that of a nurse. Demobilized, he left Fanny and his child to return home to Zamba.

The narrator says he was greeted almost as a hero, thus fulfilling his stereotypical role as the protagonist in the war story. He continued to hunt and womanize, became a mechanic, and took a special interest in cars, a passion that he passed on to his son and that Boni transforms into a further symbol of the father's liberty in contrast with the restricted sphere of the mother whose reward for patiently waiting was the unexpected sharing of her husband with a difficult co-wife, a younger woman from the village. This chapter in Boni's novel thus reveals a traditional patriarchal society with its clear distinctions between masculinity and femininity, distinctions that are normally preserved in the differences between male combatants and female civilians in the conventional wars between states such as World War I, where women endured the absence of husbands but generally remained sheltered from violence while men alone participated directly in the conflict.

These cherished family portraits, however, belong to the past. By the time of the twenty-first-century events depicted in the novel, women's roles have changed considerably, reflecting the influence of the colonial period and modernization. The narrator's contention that she has replaced her mother's pestle, the conventional woman's tool in African societies, with the pen challenges the regime of silence imposed on her mother. The domestic space that constrained the older generation has been greatly expanded by the daughter whose broader horizons are alluded to with pride throughout her narrative: She has been a successful businesswoman who had had a thriving market stall selling women's shoes, perhaps a reference to her greater mobility. She is an experienced traveler, frequently going abroad on buying trips. At the beginning of the narrative, she is the owner and manager of a popular restaurant. While cars were associated with men during her father's time, the narrator drives her own car, and before the imposition of the curfew, she traveled freely and alone throughout the city. In the place of her mother's traditional woman's stool, the narrator reposes comfortably on her front porch in a royal rattan chair. In defiance of societal expectation, she has no children of her own, although her home is a popular haven for the

neighborhood kids, and she has maintained a long-term relationship with a man outside of marriage, something which would have been culturally unacceptable in years gone by but which the narrator identifies as typical of modern young women.

In recent decades, the customary division between male and female roles in wartime has also been modified by Africa's new civil wars, where civil or ethnic conflicts have come to replace those global confrontations that had historically been, "un conflit armé, mené par une puissance publique contre un autre État" 'an armed conflict, waged by one public power against another state.' Armelle Le Bras-Chopard (2009), in her essay "La reproduction de la division des sexes dans la guerre" [The Reproduction of the Division of the Sexes in Wartime], observes that

le paradigme classique de la guerre qui en faisait un monopole masculin, se trouvait subverti dans les conflits les plus récents, par l'implication de plus en plus massive des femmes, et comme victimes et comme combattantes, qui brouille les repères classiques entre civils (dont elles étaient jadis 'l'archétype') et forces armées. (p. 9)

[the classical paradigm for war that made it into a masculine monopoly has been subverted in recent conflicts, by the increasingly massive involvement of women, both as victims and as combatants, which obscures the classical distinctions between civilians (for which they [women] were formerly the 'archetype') and armed forces].

As woman's role in war has evolved, so has her place in that formerly most masculine of literary genres, the war story. With women articulating their gendered experience of war and woman's experience itself constituting an appropriate focus for literature and film dealing with war, a whole new corpus by African women culture producers has emerged to challenge a historically masculinist narrative. These works testify to the myriad ways in

which the domestic space traditionally assigned to women has been invaded, altered, and ultimately destroyed by war and how families have been displaced, transformed into refugees, and sent into exile. Civil conflicts such as the Algerian war for independence, the Biafran War in Nigeria, and the genocide in Rwanda have each furnished writers with the raw material through which women's experiences in civil conflict may be explored and incorporated into the reader's imaginary. While all of these engagements have shared similar characteristics, including devastating outcomes for civilians, each conflict has its own specificities. Consequently, protagonists of these various works have their lives disrupted in different manners. Although for most the effects are traumatic, some have recognized that wars may actually provide a brief window of opportunity that allows women to challenge the prevailing social order. Meredith Turshen (1998), for example, has noted: "war also destroys the patriarchal strictures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up and creates new beginnings" (p. 20).

In Assia Djebar's narratives of Algeria's struggle for independence, women who have been sequestered behind haram walls find themselves implicated in the conflict in ways that draw them beyond their normally limited horizons. In *Children of the New World (Les enfants du nouveau monde)* (2005), for example, the character of Cherifa, an ideal Muslim wife who spends most of her day in her apartment and rarely goes beyond her own courtyard, enjoys a personally liberating experience when she must cross the town in order to warn her husband that he is being sought by the police because of his activities in the resistance, an act that shatters the world she has known and opens up a host of new possibilities: ". . . a different way of seeing, of being seen, of existing" (p. 84). For the most part, however, the fictional narratives of civil conflict reveal the disastrous effects of war on women's lives.

According to the United Nations, women and girls in intrastate conflicts make up around fifty percent of any refugee, internally

displaced, or stateless population. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's epic tribute to those caught up in the Biafran War, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, focuses on several characters, including two sisters, Olanna and Kainene, who are both forced to join the throng of displaced persons as the conflict progresses and the borders of the state of Biafra shrink. Olanna, with her family, repeatedly sets up and provisions her household in increasingly reduced circumstances, and Kainene eventually opens a refugee center before finally disappearing during a mission into enemy territory to find food for her family and her charges. Similarly, Yolande Mukagasana's autobiographical account of the ethnic violence in Rwanda describes the physical destruction of her home, the murder of her husband and children, and the horror of fleeing from neighbors bent on killing her. In her memoir, Marie Beatrice Umutezi, a Hutu social worker who was not herself a participant in the ethnic violence, shows how she nevertheless felt obliged to leave the country for her own safety and endure the insecurity of a refugee camp in Zaire before fleeing into the forest and ultimately crossing the continent on foot to reach the Atlantic coast in order to avoid the uncertainty implied by forced repatriation. In these two non-fiction accounts of the genocide, both women, one a Tutsi and the other a Hutu, describe the anguish of having to leave the sanctuary of their homes and ultimately seek asylum in Europe. While all of the works described here preserve the dichotomy between combatants and non-combatants that is in itself increasingly being challenged both in its reality and its representation, they nevertheless extend the war narrative beyond the binary of battlefield and home front to include narratives of women's perspectives and women's experiences when war intrudes on women's space.

Other consequences of such so-called new wars in Africa are amply illustrated by events in Boni's fictional Zamba where a large part of the conflict takes place in an urban milieu in which civilians—men and women—are often victims of violence. The narrator describes a universe where ordinary people can be arrested or assassinated in the course of their daily activities. The curfew has implications for

all the inhabitants of the city, even limiting the mobility of pets since members of the opposition are thought to be sorcerers who can transform themselves into cats and dogs. When the protagonist is suspected of having information about massacres of civilians committed by the militias, she is placed under house arrest for nine months. Boni's novel shows that such conditions can have negative consequences for the modern African woman's new-found empowerment, consequences that might be viewed as a virtual resurgence of the patriarchal regime inasmuch as they lead to the shrinking women's spaces, the diminishing of their liberty, and the limiting of mobility. Confined to her home, both by the curfew that protects citizens from the violence of the war and by the edict enforced by the militias that consider her to be a threat to their activities, the protagonist finds her life restricted to the domestic space of women in the previous generations. Similarly, her destiny is no longer her own but at the mercy of agents of the male-dominated revolution. While both men and women are indeed victims of national conflict within the novel, Boni depicts the agents of violence as almost exclusively men.

Patriarchy thus manifests itself in both traditional culture and the contemporary civil conflict through its hierarchical construction of gender roles. As it is classically defined in feminist literature by theorists such as Sylvia Walby (1990), patriarchy is "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women" (p. 20). Elaborating on this basic definition, Errol Miller, who studies the relationship between patriarchy and war, provides a number of corollaries, certifying, for example, that patriarchy is also responsible for at least two additional social characteristics that have implications for civil conflicts. The first of these characteristics is the dominance of older males over younger ones, despite the resentment of the latter. Miller notes that Max Weber had in fact taken the importance of generations into consideration in 1947 when he defined patriarchy as the fact of women and young men being governed by older men (Miller, 2001, p. 81).

In the majority of new wars, militias that support revolutionary governments, such as those in Zambaville and Abidjan, are made up chiefly of young men whose complicity in terror represents a form of rebellion against the dominant male figures of the previous generation. Is it any coincidence that the individual at the helm of Zamba's first independent regime—a figure who seems to incarnate Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the first president of the Côte d'Ivoire—is called “The Patriarch” by the narrator, or that it is against his accomplishments and ideas that the young militias are rebelling? In a traditional patriarchal society, these young men would have been subordinated within the hierarchy as befitting their age, but in Boni's urban war, the Parallel Police are seconded by the groups referred to as the Angels, young men who enforce the curfew, profit from the opportunities for corruption offered by the destabilization of law and order, and provide surveillance and suppression of the opposition. It is chiefly these militias who are responsible for the violence and death. The Angels of Zamba bear a strong resemblance to the organization of *Jeunes Patriotes* [Young Patriots] in Côte d'Ivoire's civil war:

The “patriotic” mobilization in Abidjan and throughout the rural areas, as well as the mobilization of the youth by the rebellion, reflects a major sociological phenomenon: youths becoming men through war and affirming their power in the face of their elders. These youths have seized a unique opportunity to impose themselves as power holders in local politics. (Banégas & Marshall-Fratani, 2007, p. 108)

The activities of these organizations, both fictional and real, confirm Miller's analysis of the relationship between generations of men in the context of Africa's wars and show how violent conflict serves explicitly to propagate a patriarchal culture.

A second aspect of patriarchy that may be less immediately obvious but one which is recognized by security studies scholars as a key

factor contributing to war is its role in asserting the family of the patriarch, males and females, young and old, over the members of outside groups. According to Miller (2001), Weber's definition of patriarchy should be enlarged to include kin and the importance of the family group's broader interests:

Further, historically, patriarchal collectives had major difficulties with other collectives that fell outside the covenant of kinship, particularly with the men of those collectives. When patriarchal collectives interacted outside the boundaries where kinship could be established, whether factual or fictive, then one group had to submit to the hegemony of the other. Failing such compromise, violent confrontation became the means of establishing dominance. (p. 82)

In her memory of her parent's lives, Boni's narrator shows us that the country of Zamba had a long tradition of enslaving outsiders, chiefly prisoners of war. The hierarchy between slave and free has led to the creation of a caste-like system within the modern nation that results in discrimination against the descendants of slaves and against foreigners. The narrator tells how the Angels regularly round up members of these groups in Zambaville based merely on physical appearance—men, women, and children—to be massacred, their bodies burned and interred secretly in mass graves. It is because the narrator has learned about one of these tragedies that she has been condemned to house arrest. In Côte d'Ivoire, similar xenophobia and ethnic conflict provided fuel for violence and ultimately similar unprovoked massacres. In 2000, for example, over 57 bodies, mostly northerners, were discovered buried together in a working class district of Abidjan. The text draws explicit parallels between the patriarchal society of Zamba's historical past, with its practice of slavery, and the policies promoting ethnic purity in contemporary civil strife.

In its redefinition of national identity in terms of exclusion, Boni's fictional nation of Zamba evokes the ethnic divisiveness that characterized the political situation in Côte d'Ivoire following the

death of President Houphouët-Boigny in 1993. According to Banégas & Marshall-Fratani (2007), “the theme of *Ivoirité* rapidly came to be used as a powerful instrument of exclusion at the service of every maneuver of stigmatization and discrimination throughout the entire society” (p. 85). The civil conflict that began in 2002 was animated in part by resentment against the demonized other, especially the more recently arrived immigrants from such countries as Burkina Faso and Mali. Their citizenship was placed in doubt to such an extent that Alassane Ouattara, eventually elected to the presidency in 2010, had on more than one occasion been disqualified from running for office because of concerns about his nationality, even though he was born in the country and had served as Prime Minister under Houphouët-Boigny.

The persecution of immigrants and outsiders that characterized hostilities in Abidjan are best illustrated in the novel by a subplot dealing with the character of Kanga Ba, who sits at the center of a web of transcultural themes. Born into a family of slaves, foreigners vanquished in a long-ago war who served the narrator’s grandfather, the Patriarch, Kanga Ba is among those whose otherness makes him a potential target of the militias. His wife, a victim of a police raid, is one of those interred in a common grave, “Cent sept corps furent donc brûlés vifs . . . parce qu’il fallait nettoyer la ville de tous les étrangers, notables ou fils d’esclaves au moment où Zamba empruntait résolument le chemin de la prospérité” [One hundred seven bodies were burned alive . . . because it was necessary to cleanse the village of foreigners, whether eminent or the children of slaves, at the moment when Zamba was setting out resolutely on the path of prosperity] (Boni, 2005, p. 62). Since his wife’s tragedy, Kanga Ba had undertaken the mission of keeping track of the dead and disappeared in the capital. He is accompanying the narrator to a clandestine burial site when the two are stopped by security forces. She is put under house arrest awaiting trial, but his fate is unknown till the end of the story when the narrator discovers that Kanga Ba has been helped to flee the country and is now under the protection of a Frenchman whom she recognizes as her half-brother, Charles,

her father's son by the French nurse whom he had met during the war. Ironically, Charles had been denied entry into the country because the authorities, unaware of his history, considered him a white foreigner. Both Kanga Ba and Charles are living examples of the flaws in the politics of ethnic purity, the family of the former having lived in the country for generations and the latter, despite his French citizenship, being a descendant of one of the nation's patriarchs. The author of *Matins de couvre-feu* thus proposes a counter-narrative to the prevailing Ivorian ideology of ethno-nationalism. Edmond Hounfodji (2013) has noted:

Matins de couvre-feu est aussi un discours sur l'histoire. Tout en faisant régulièrement allusion aux temps de la colonisation et ses corollaires dans le présent, la narratrice a, à plusieurs reprises, fait recours à l'histoire de son pays pour examiner la question de l'altérité, du rejet de 'l'autre', pour des raisons politiques. Elle tourne en dérision les partisans de cette politique de division opportuniste en montrant les liens séculaires de sang et de solidarité entre les peuples. Cette remontée historique lui permet de fustiger le comportement des apôtres de la politique de 'l'ivoirité'. En effet, par cette malheureuse politique de diviser pour régner, ils entendent conserver le pouvoir politique en encourageant la xénophobie et la haine contre les "étrangers", c'est-à-dire une sorte de puritanisme politique et ethnique. (p. 108)

[*Matins de couvre-feu* is also a discourse on history. While regularly making allusions to the period of colonization and its corollaries in the present, the narrator on several occasions makes use of the history of her country to examine the question of alterity, the rejection of 'the other' for political reasons. She ridicules the partisans of such opportunistic politics by showing the age-old bonds of blood and solidarity among peoples. This historical journey permits her to denounce the behavior of the apostles of the politics of 'Ivoirité.' Indeed, by this unfortunate policy of dividing to rule, they intended to maintain their political power by encouraging xenophobia and hatred against "foreigners," that is to say, a sort of

political and ethnic puritanism].

Through the othering of Kanga Ba and Charles by the revolutionaries in different ways, Boni supports Miller's thesis that patriarchy not only creates a hierarchy between male and female but also defines relations between the family group and its perceived others. Through the events of the narrative, she further shows how the criteria for otherness can become blurred and ineffectual, challenging the patriarchal order.

The differences in the lives of mother and daughter show the evolution of gender roles under the influence of social change. In several respects, however, Boni seems to suggest that certain tendencies can be categorized as inherently male or female in both periods. Men, for example, are consistently associated with violence. In addition, almost all male characters in the text, including the narrator's father, her brother and half-brother, and her lover, have proved to be unfaithful to the women in their lives. The men involved with the protagonist have also turned out to be untrustworthy. Timothée, a mysterious man who seduces the narrator, lives largely off her income when he induces her to move in with him. She leaves him after he turns out to be in league with the Angels, overseeing a sophisticated surveillance network. Even the male chef that she placed in charge of her restaurant during her period of confinement will eventually betray her trust, going over to the side of the Angels and Timothée and eventually becoming an assassin. The propensity of men for infidelity and unreliability in their relationships with women is consistently paralleled by the betrayal of the people by the Angels, who pretend to be their saviors.

Likewise, certain attributes are considered to be intrinsically feminine within the gendered universe of the text. Despite the changing roles of women, Boni's narrator shares at least one important characteristic with her mother, that of nurturer. She is after all the proprietress of a restaurant. During the period of her isolation when she can no longer depend on the restaurant for

income, she has to find some way of supporting herself. A well on her property allows her to sell drinking water to her neighbors, and she also makes and sells juices from her own fruit trees. She considers this not only a way of assuaging their thirst but also a way of raising their spirits: “Le petit peuple sait qu’il faut se ménager le cœur et le foie afin de tenir le coup face au chaos causé par le couvre-feu qui perdure” [The little people know that it is necessary to care for the heart and the liver in order to stand up to the chaos caused by the ongoing curfew] (2005, p. 22). She also distributes the water and juices to children who come to play in her house, seeing herself as assuming her mother’s nurturing role: “Je devenais une bonne femme à mon tour sans en avoir vraiment la trempe” [I was becoming a good woman in my turn without really having the temperament] (2005, p.166). By becoming the guardian of the land producing the water and the fruit trees that serve as a source of sustenance and refreshment for her neighbors, she might also be read as an incarnation of Gaia or an African deity of place.

This concept of woman as the protector of nature is a fundamental principle of ecofeminism and the basis for one of the arguments that have traditionally depicted woman as peacekeepers while ascribing violence and the waging of war to men. The concept of ecofeminism, whose origin is often attributed to Françoise d’Eaubonne in 1974, is relevant to the text and to this analysis not merely because many of its branches, including cultural ecofeminism, view women as having an inherently protective role with respect to nature, but also because ecofeminism responds to the hierarchical dominance of patriarchy, viewing both women and nature as victims of male hegemony. According to M. Mies & V. Shiva (1993), “We see the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, as feminist concerns. It is the same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality, and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way” (p.14). Some forms of ecofeminism draw a parallel between man’s tendency to construct nature as irrational, chaotic, and needing to be controlled

and the propensity to impute similar characteristics to women. Within this framework, men perceive themselves as rational, ordered, and capable of providing control and direction for both nature and women.

In the same way that Boni's narrator is restrained through house arrest, the militias also strive to control the behavior of both humans and animals by means of the curfew and the violence by which it is enforced. Furthermore, in "both ecofeminist theory and ecofeminist political activism, *ecology* and *peace* have been inextricably linked . . ." (King, 1995, p. 15). Ynestra King has elaborated extensively on the relationship between ecofeminism and peace: "For ecofeminists 'peace' is understood as being connected to a new definition of national and planetary security which includes societies free of violence, with nature-friendly technologies and sustainable economies that are respectful of place and culture" (p. 15). While recognizing that violence is not exclusively a masculine attribute, ecofeminists nevertheless view violence as a function of the patriarchal and hierarchal systems of male-centered societies. Likewise, Boni's narrator recounts how it was the men in the family who were mobilized for the wars in Europe in the past and how the exclusively male militias in the current ethnic conflict have been responsible for its mass executions and for the threat of death to both the human and animal denizens of the city. Specifically, the Angels are regularly killing cats and dogs, eventually leaving the body of a dead cat in the narrator's precious well, poisoning the life-giving waters.

The role that nature plays in *Matins de couvre-feu* reflects environmental concerns expressed by the author in other works, such as *La fugue d'Ozone* [Ozone's Fugue] (1992), a children's book, and *Wangari Maathai: Celle qui guérit la terre* [Wangari Maathai: The Woman Who Heals the Earth] (2016), her biography for young readers of the Kenyan environmental activist and Nobel laureate. Boni's thoughts concerning the responsibility of Africa's culture producers to address environmental issues is developed at length in her keynote address to the 36th Annual Meeting of the

African Literature Association in 2010, “La pollution du monde et le silence des écrivains africains” (2013a) [The Polluting of the World and the Silence of African Writers] (2013b), a speech which might well be interpreted as an environmentalist manifesto for African writers:

Notre rôle consiste à mettre en scène, à imaginer, à raconter des histoires autour de ces pollutions multiples naturelles ou non auxquelles le continent africain semble désormais abonné. . . . Poursuivons donc cette forme d’engagement au long cours par-delà les modes littéraires, en défendant notre maison à tous, notre lieu d’habitation et, pour le dire en d’autres termes, *l’habitabilité* du monde. (2013a, p. 17)

[Our role is also to imagine and present stories centered on the various natural and non-natural types of pollution to which the African continent seems to be accustomed. . . . We can make a long-term commitment that goes beyond our literature and we can fervently defend our common home against extreme occurrences that are likely to be repeated and which threaten the place in which we live, or to put it in other terms, the habitability of the world.] (2013b, pp. 30-31)

In his essay on *Matins de couvre-feu* as an expression of Boni’s ecological consciousness, Hounfodji has effectively demonstrated the author’s appreciation for the beauty of nature and the subsequent contrast established in the text by the narrator’s representation of villagers as being closer to nature than those city dwellers who have lost touch with their roots and the traditional beliefs that made them one with their environment. Accordingly, “l’urbanisation, telle qu’elle se présente à Zamba (et dans la plupart des nations africaines), se caractérise comme un tsunami. Elle rase tout sur son chemin avec des conséquences indicibles” [urbanization, as presented in Zamba (and in most African nations), is characterized as a tsunami. It destroys everything in its path with unspeakable consequences] (2013, p.116).

Within the feminist binary of the narrative, men are life-destroyers; women are life-givers. While scholars have identified numerous fallacies in the essentialist association between women and peace, the concept is currently enjoying favor, with Human Rights protocols increasingly requiring the participation of women in peace talks and the Nobel Peace Prize having been awarded in 2011 to three third-world women—Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee from Liberia and Tawakkul Karmen from Yemen—for their achievement in the areas of peace and reconciliation. Boni's narrator clearly associates men with war and women with peace, but the end of the novel is far from optimistic about what women can do in the face of a community deadened by the curfew and divided by the war. The narrator observes somewhat resignedly that “les femmes avaient perdu la foi en la vie d'ici-bas. . . . Et curieusement, elles ne savaient plus se battre pour l'amour et la paix” [women had lost faith in life here below. . . . And curiously, they no longer knew how to fight for love and peace] (2005, p. 313). With the death of her principal adversaries, the narrator is able to resume her normal life at the end of nine months and is determined to start a new restaurant since *Le Repas du Patriarche* has failed under the direction of Timothée and the treacherous male chef. She vows not to replace the chef with another man but rather to go into partnership with a local woman who has a bank of traditional recipes and who has already shown herself to be exceptionally trustworthy. There is a sense that the self-examination the protagonist has undergone during her period of isolation has given her both a greater wariness with respect to men and a new consciousness of her own possibilities as a woman despite the chaos that surrounds her.

In an interview with Eloise Brezeault (2010), Boni appears reluctant to be labelled a feminist:

Je n'écris pas seulement pour exprimer ma féminité. Je suis d'abord un être humain avec sa sensibilité, sa 'peau,' ses émotions, ses désirs. Un être capable de prendre la plume et de s'exprimer. Ce

qu'exprime cet être peut avoir à exprimer la condition féminine ou non, parfois toute autre chose. Je me sens libre d'écrire ce que je veux. (p. 57)

[I am not writing for the sole purpose of expressing my femininity. I am first of all a human being with her sensitivity, her "skin," her emotions, her desires. A being capable of taking up a pen and expressing herself. What this being expresses may relate to the feminine condition or not, sometimes to other things entirely.]

Nevertheless, *Matins de couvre-feu* deserves to be included among those texts, largely by women, that are interrogating the situation women in Africa today, including their roles as actors and observers in the continent's civil wars. By choosing to depict one such upheaval from a woman's perspective and in a woman's voice, Boni integrates women into the traditionally male domain of the conventional war story, replacing the image of the soldier as hero by the figure of the woman as survivor and putting the accent on the well-being of the community and reconciliation instead of on the victory of the military. In addressing issues of gender and the relationships between men and women in the context of war, she joins those political scientists, such as Cynthia Cockburn and Cynthia Enloe, who have similarly proposed the need to include women's experiences of war as part of the larger feminist project. Cockburn (2010) asserts categorically that "a theory of war and its causation is flawed if it lacks a gender dimension" (p.152). She continues:

Most theories of war, however, in sociology and in international relations, do indeed lack this necessary element. To those who evolve and deploy them, they seem perfectly complete and satisfying without it. When women, feminists, come along and introduce our insights into discussions of war, when we talk about women and gender, we are often told we are being trivial, we are forgetting 'the big picture.'

Cynthia Enloe (2005, p. 280) speaks from a feminist standpoint when she boldly interjects “but suppose this IS the big picture?” (p. 152). To a very large extent, Boni’s narrative dramatizes a response to Enloe’s question.

Conclusion

By reading the protagonist’s reflections on gender and violence in conjunction with various feminist theories, this analysis has demonstrated the extent to which Boni’s *Matins de couvre-feu* illustrates some of the characteristic patterns of behavior in patriarchal cultures that are associated with ethnic conflict and that may indeed contribute to them. In both the traditional and modern relationships between men and women in the fictional state of Zamba, Boni (2009b) dramatizes the “ideologies on which rest the inequality of the sexes and the hierarchy between masculine and feminine” that she has identified in *Que vivent les femmes d’Afrique?* and against which she has urged African women to continue fighting. The nature of the dysfunctional personal relationships between the narrator and the opportunistic and disloyal men in her life is echoed in the exploitive relationships between the people of Zamba and the self-serving rebels who have terrorized them.

The hierarchical bias of patriarchy that views women as inherently inferior to men similarly establishes a pecking order between older and younger men within the society and also places the male members of any family in confrontation with all others, a feature of patriarchy that breeds rivalries between ethnic groups and between insiders and outsiders. The same notion of male hegemony that justifies violence against women likewise justifies the devastation of the natural world as a function of war, and Boni illustrates ecofeminist theories through the depiction of her female protagonist as a protector of the environment and through the link she establishes between women and peace, a reflection of the role that women have been playing in the wake of civil wars throughout the

African continent. In many ways, the end of the protagonist's incarceration and of the rebellion heralds an opportunity for the narrator not inconsistent with the window of empowerment for women that Turshen (1998) has observed elsewhere with respect to civil wars in general; the insightful tapestry of gender relations woven from both the past and the present and thoughtfully inscribed in the narrator's journals have made her more cautious in her dealings with men and more aware of the social consequences of a culture informed by patriarchal values.

In contrast with the conventional war story as told by men and where the hero is almost always the soldier, Boni's narrative, which emphasizes the impact of war on civilians, is less about victors and vanquished or winners and losers, and more about those who perpetrate violence and those who survive it. The death or defeat of the rebels involved in the belligerence has temporarily removed obstacles to survival and opened up possibilities for the narrator to rebuild her life on new foundations and for the oppressed citizens of Zamba to reclaim their freedom. What the future holds for Zamba—or the Côte d'Ivoire, is at best uncertain at the end of the novel, and it remains to be seen whether the appropriation of the war story by African women writers will ultimately help lead to new perceptions of the practice of war on the continent and to a better understanding of the gendered social structures that sustain it.

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