

**LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, CULTURE, MIGRATION AND NATIONAL
COHESION: EPIPHANY IN AMINATA SOWFALL'S *DOUCEUR DE BERCAIL* : A
MECHANISM FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE
COMMUNITY**

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ABSTRACT: *Aminata Sow Fall's Douceur du bercail is considered a novel of female development because its plot revolves around an adult heroine who is struggling with patriarchal hegemonies leading to emotional growth or character development. This brand position generally includes imaginary or mystic features in anticipation for optimistic ending. Epiphany is a vital concept that is yet to be understood as a narrative device in this literary work specifically, and in contemporary francophone African women novels. Several scholars have examined gender issues in Aminata Sow Fall's Douceurs du bercail (1998) to the neglect of epiphany as demonstrated by the fictional protagonist. This paper is a study aimed at synthesizing how "epiphany" with or without its scriptural allusion, enhances rapid and positive transformational changes in the reconstruction of the heroine's identity. Epiphany is conceptualised as a literary device and its manifestation is brought to the fore through the protagonist in Aminata Sow Fall's Douceurs du bercail. The novel is subjected to close reading as a method of collecting data. This article raises a fundamental question: Can a woman dwelling in male-dominated society still reconstruct her identity when marriage and motherhood roles are successful at first, and they experience failure later? Thus, 'epiphany' is emphasised as an instrument of transformation in the hand of the novelist to trigger the heroine's struggle for the reconstruction of her identity. This paper then concludes that epiphany enhances development that leads to positive ends. Ignorance makes way for wisdom, and life-changing indices have the greatest influence on the life of the fictional heroine.*

KEY WORDS: Novel of female development, epiphany, identity-formation, transformational experience.

INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUALISATION OF EPIPHANY

In a lot of literary works by female African writers, the authors expect their female protagonists to reconstruct their identity, improve their growth, and undergo positive change or transformation. Apparently, 'change' is the hallmark in many of the world's creative writings. Thus, the significance of epiphany in the literary paradigm deserves attention. The term 'epiphany' is generally considered in theological contexts. It originated from Ancient Greek word *epiphaneia*, meaning 'manifestation' or 'striking appearance'. Walzl (2011:24-48) states

that “Christians consider epiphany as a "visible manifestation of a hidden divinity either in the form of a personal appearance, or by some deed of power by which its presence may be known.” Walzl further states that epiphany, when it is used as a verb, means "to display or show forth" and when in the passive voice, it means to "shine forth." (Ibd.)

McDonald (2005:17), states that Greek and pagan describe epiphany as experiences of sudden and significant insight that can and do occur in the normal course of everyday life of an individual. This means that in one’s lifetime, it is possible for every human being to experience a one moment or several events of epiphany.

The contribution of Berkuns (2010:4-11) on epiphany is also relevant. According to him, epiphany is the result of significant work on the part of the discoverer, and it is the satisfying result of a long process. Epiphany carries fulfilling and surprising effects. Epiphany is surprising because one cannot predict when one's labour will bear fruit, and our subconscious can play a significant part in delivering the outcome. And it is fulfilling because it is a reward for a long period of effort. In essence, epiphany in literature is used as a literary device pointing to when a character has a sudden insight or realisation that changes his or her understanding or her comprehension of the world. This is the period when her struggles would come to fruition. Beja (1993:71) postulates that James Joyce, an Irish author, was the person that re-introduced epiphany into literature when he published his novel, *A portrait of the Artist as young man* (1916). Joyce employs epiphany to reveal the profound insight of his central character in the novel. The author believes that “artists used their insight into the events of daily life by transmuting them to the celebration of humanity”. Thus, Joyce sees epiphany as "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether from some objects, scene, event, or memorable phase of the mind” (ibid). The distinctive contribution of Joyce to the development of epiphany is the non-spiritual meaning he gives to it.

Nordquist (2017) from the literary perspective, conceptualises epiphany as a sudden realisation, a flash of recognition, in which someone or something is seen in a new light”. Ballard (2017) asserts that epiphany has numerous definitions but she succinctly summarises it as, A realisation; an opening; a portal to the Divine; growing up; a magic moment that impacts you and changes you forever and you can remember it as vividly as you experienced it; a moment that changes the lens through which you view your life; our soul scratching around our head and giving us a signal to guide our lives with; a moment of descending light, open knowledge, and choice; a drastic shift in energy and change of perspective that happens in the form of a moment of clarity; something that gives you the strength to take a different direction or move forward and opens up everything; a sense of wonderment; a clarifying direction; that moment [] you know your life is never going to be the same.

In essence, epiphany in literature emphasises how writers make their protagonists perceive the world they live in or how they can achieve an understanding of what they are going through. Though, an author may not be sensitive to his or her epiphanic device in his or her narrative, it is the critic that foregrounds epiphany in a character and this is why Colin (1994:123) avers: “The critic's function is to find ways of recognising and judging the epiphanies of literature which, like those of life itself, [...] are partial disclosures or revelations, or “spiritual matches struck unexpectedly in the dark”. Therefore, epiphany in this context is like a magic potion or universal remedy or cure that makes a good story about the protagonist of a novel.

Walter (2004:146) refers to Conrad Joseph's definition of epiphany to mean "one of those rare moments of awakening" in which occurs "everything in a flash." This awakening may tend to change the protagonist's perception or increase his or her sense of understanding about certain set of challenges or circumstances. The moments all experiences are put together, the difficulties would be suppressed toward the tail end of the story. Some scholars for example, relate this moment of epiphany to the climax of a literary work. This is the highest moment of tension when the identity and action of the protagonist are reconstructed and from which the author probably draws his or her conclusion.

Epiphany, African Female Writing and Change –The Aminata Sow Fall Example

African women writers have been employing literature as a medium to uncover the way the society works. This is confirmed by Aminata Sow Fall when she submits that "writing is an act of witnessing, a way of filtrating the social realities of the moment" (Orjinta, 2013). Following this declaration, Aminata Sow Fall's *Douceurs du bercail*, which is considered a part of literature of protest, is a close link with reality.

Epiphanic device in literature or specifically in Sow Fall's *Douceurs du bercail* cannot be underestimated. This is because epiphany makes the protagonist to realise or become conscious of something about herself or others, which she is not privy to before. Thus, epiphany opens up new opportunities or potentials which put certain things into vantage point which transforms the protagonist's mode of thinking. The transformative experience in this case triggers the developmental or behavioural change which in turn calls for communal cohesion.

Aminata Sow Fall is among the first group of female writers whose literary production starts in the 1970s in Senegal. She has been exploring the complexities of the conditions of men and women in the African society. Sow Fall, specifically in post-colonial epoch, has taken literature to another level by prioritising women in the construction of social and economic development of the francophone Senegalese community.

Epiphany and the Transformation of The Individual – Asta's Broken Marriage

The term "transformation" in critical literary study is used to describe the internal journey of a fictional protagonist, which brings about radical change in the story. This radical change transmutes the character into a different person, in response to changing circumstances. In either narrative, fiction or real life, the protagonist is stimulated by personal epiphanies, or the influence of another entity to accept an openness to new experiences. Even, the consequences of having committed an evil act, a religious conversion, acts of volition, participation in military combat, a terrible illness, altruistic behaviour, and sometimes mere chance catastrophic encounter may open up to epiphanic volcano, resulting in character development. The quest for self-identity is a core issue in the composition of the novel of female development and construction of identity for women revolve around marriage. In this regard, the epiphanic ambiance in *Douceur du bercail* uncovers the protagonist's marital agony and this helps her to recreate her identity in the hands of her brutal husband in order to further her development. Consequently, Asta's epiphanic moment starts from marriage.

Conventionally, marriage is an act of bringing man and woman to become husband and wife based on love; but in this contemporary era, the institution of marriage to some people, is just for procreation and to relegate women. Proctor (2008: 113) posits that:

A husband is. . . an elective obligation. This is the position many feminists ... take on the institution of marriage. Yet, [...] women are coerced into the institution of marriage as a result of their gender inequality and male domination. ... This group of feminists advocate for the complete eradication of marriage because of the inherent danger and inequality perpetuated by the institution... the institution of marriage was set up as a method to further subordinate women.

Calder, (1976: 63) corroborates the above assertion when she says: “If women’s claims were granted, if they could secure a liberty as great as men, in all the relations of life, marriage as we now understand it, would cease to exist.” Unfortunately, women are not as free as men. This is because women are confined and enslaved in marriage under religious or cultural laws and also because of the selfish nature of some men.

The protagonist of *Douceurs du bercail* takes marriage to be a ‘child’s play’ but later discovers that it is an institution, surrounded by spikey string. In the novel of female development, every questing heroine seeks a role model or a mentor in order to be properly guided. In *Douceurs du bercail*, Sow Fall establishes mother-daughter relationship between Asta and her mother, Fanta. The relationship is partly to guide the girl in matters of marriage. Asta in pursuit of her independence and because she thinks that getting married early would probably free her from domestic or childhood roles, turns down her mother’s advice:

- Mère...Je voudrais me marier [...]
 - J’ai essayé mille fois, je ne savais pas comment te dire...
 - Qui est-ce ?
 - Diouldé Lam.
 - Ce garçon n’est pas beau ! Il est même trop vilain!
 - Il est vrai qu’un bon mari n’est pas forcément le plus beau
- (*Douceurs du bercail*, 173)

- [-Mother, I would like to get married [...]
- I have tried a thousand times; I did not know how to tell you...
- Who is it?
- Diouldé Lam
- That boy is not handsome! He is even much ugly!
- it is true that a good husband is not necessarily the most handsome...]

Fanta wisely states :

- “Avec beaucoup de sagesse”
 - Pas forcément le plus riche, mais le plus humain, le plus brave,
- Pour protéger son épouse et toute sa famille...
- Pour moi, c’est celui qui saura m’aimer, m’écouter, me comprendre....
- (*Douceurs du bercail*, 173)

[With full wisdom

- Not necessarily the richest, but the most humane, the most courageous, to protect the entire family...

- For me, he is someone that will love, listen to and understand me.]

Fanta asks Asta what Diouldé does for a living:

- Football.

- Football ! Avec le baccalauréat en poche, tu vas épouser un footballeur ! [...]

Asta, la vie n'est pas un rêve !... Le mariage, c'est du sérieux...

- Nous serons heureux, j'en suis sûre. Si tu veux mon bonheur...

(*Douceurs du bercail*, 173-174)

[Football! Football! With a senior secondary school in your pocket, you are going to marry a footballer!...

Asta, life is not a dream! ... Marriage is a serious issue.

We shall be happy, I am sure of it. If you want my happiness...]

In novels of female development, like (Fatou Keita's *rebelle*, Regina Yaou's *Le prix de la révolte* etc.) daughters are expected to look up to their mothers as role models or mentors because of their rich experiences in marriage, but most of them usually view their mothers as anti-social or the ill-fated women who probably do not experience the sweetness of marriage. Asta finds her mother's opinions oppressive, and believes instead that early marriage is a 'bed of roses' and a way to live an active life. Asta abandons her studies and gets married to Diouldé. Asta's marriage to Diouldé, a professional footballer, is like a hell-on-earth. Sow Fall depicts Diouldé as a womaniser, a brute and a domineering husband who turns Asta, his wife, into a punching bag whenever they quarrel. Asta in her melancholic mood says that:

“La vie ne m'a jamais rien offert sur un plateau d'argent sauf l'enfance » [Life has never offered me anything on a platter of gold except during my childhood.] (*Douceurs du bercail*, 86). The marriage that has a good start later “hits the rock” as a result of vague and contradictory promises. Asta also accuses Diouldé of diverse escapades and antics.

Asta is madly in love with Diouldé but the latter does not have any regard for her. She is so blindfolded by his platonic love regardless her mother's warnings and advice. She continues to be with him irrespective of the ill-treatment. Asta admits every trouble, every insult and whatever else that the marriage brings; always hoping that one day Diouldé will change for better. The reality dawns on her when she suddenly realises that

Diouldé is never going to change, and will never accord her any dignity or respect in life. This is the moment of truth which triggers the reaction of Sow Fall's protagonist, Asta.

... Dis-moi si tu as des leçons à donner sur ce chapitre. Tu as trahi tous les beaux serments que tu m'avais faits et auxquels j'ai cru comme une idiote! Serments d'amour, de fidélité [...] et tu m'as menti sur tous les plans. J'ai été stupide au point de laisser tomber mes études quand tu m'as fait crier que toi et moi n'étions qu'une entité et que tes gains astronomiques n'étaient pas pour toi, mais pour l'entité que nous constituions. Aujourd'hui, qu'en est-il de toutes ces

promesses ! Je suis devenue une esclave qui vit à ta charge, qui doit donc accepter tous tes caprices et maintenant ta violence! Je n'en peux plus! (*Douceurs du bercail*, 168)

Tell me if you have some lessons to give on this matter. You have broken all the beautiful promises that you made to me and which I believed like an idiot! Oaths of love, of fidelity ... and you lied to me on all issues. I was stupid to the point of abandoning my studies when you made me cry that you and I are nothing but one entity and that your astronomical gains are not for you, but for the entity we constituted. Today, what has become of all those promises! I have become a slave that depends on you to live, that must therefore put up with all your whims and endure your violence! I can't take it anymore! (Translation Ours)

Here, epiphany strikes from within; it is a divine instinct that defies instruction or counselling from anyone. The moment epiphany gives her the signal, the marriage becomes worthless and undesirable. Divorce suit ensues :

Nous ne pouvons plus vivre comme ça...Ce n'est pas digne, ni pour nous, ni pour les enfants...Demain lundi, je déposerai une requête de divorce (*Douceurs du bercail*, 172)

[-We can no longer live like that... It is neither worthy of us, nor of the children....Tomorrow Monday, I am going to file for divorce! (Translation ours)

The significance of the epiphanic moment for Asta in this scenario permits her to resolve two opposing selves: first, she has jettisoned that old subservient self and, second, she has realised the truth which gives her personal autonomy and independence. At the same time, epiphany allows her to achieve tranquillity by presenting herself as a modern woman, who is freed from prescribed traditions thereby establishing individual self-worth. Consequently, it was her marriage breakdown and divorce that operated as the epiphanic moment as well as a transitional moment. Asta puts an end to the hell-on-earth marriage and this decision changes her life forever.

At this juncture, all the weak points of Asta become her greatest strengths. Epiphany gives her the power to challenge her husband in a warlike manner. This is aligned with Ballard's assertion of epiphany as "a moment of clarity [] that gives you the strength to take a different direction or move forward and opens up everything; a sense of wonderment; a clarifying direction; that moment [] you know your life is never going to be the same." (Ballard 2013) Asta's epiphany rouses to clarify the lies, betrayals and the deceptiveness, which make her to have a breakthrough.

Labovitz, (1986: IV, 646) maintains that, "in one way or another, men and women are incompatible... Only in silence, in complete self-possession, possession of the inwardness of being, can lovers fully meet..." In reality, epiphany propels Asta to jettison silence, fear, anxiety, and distress, which had forever beclouded her sense of reasoning since the inception of her marriage with Diouldé.

Felski (1986:134) too has this to say on separation: "The act of leaving a husband, lover or family, [...] is an awareness of the falsity of existing gender stereotypes; in turn, this psychological shift requires a physical departure, given that autonomy cannot be asserted in a repressive environment. Thus, the divorce scenario gives signal to physical departure.

The path towards individuation at times requires a total rejection of certain actions in order to assert one's identity. Instead of conforming to societal expectations, the act of epiphany prompts Asta to call it quit with her husband and this enables her to reconstruct her identity as an independent woman. She rejects domestic violence which Sow Fall integrates as one of the thematic issues in *Douceurs du bercail*, to awaken the consciousness of adult women. Sow Fall uses her fiction to warn the society in general that domestic violence is inimical to women's development.

Bâ Mariama (1960 :107) in *Une si longue lettre* declares « Le mariage n'est plus une chaîne- c'est une adhésion réciproque à un programme de vie » [Marriage is no longer a chain; it is a mutual agreement over a life's programme.] The epiphanic moment frees Asta from the marital imprisonment and this makes her to redefine her identity as an active subject, to take the 'bull by the horn' in divorcing Diouldé and walks out of the obnoxious marriage. Mortimer (2007:76) opines that:

Through her portrayal of Asta, (Sow Fall) the Senegalese novelist subverts the paradigm of the African woman defined in terms of her domestic role; she proposes instead a new female subjectivity located in a place beyond the double restriction of African patriarchy and European colonialism.

This is possible because a writer is expected to speak for others. Thus, "the writer serves as both a voice for the voiceless and as a witness for the inarticulate. This is because, "the writer can reveal that what we thought to be a private hallucination is actually a collective thought, and literature can grant us sanity" (Stimpson 2003:238). It is believed that any woman searching for independence in a male-dominated society is doomed but in Asta's case, with the spirit of epiphany, she breaks boundaries and redefines her identity. She declares to Diouldé that she is a subject and not an object to be decorated with gold: « Mais je n'ai pas besoin d'être couverte d'or et considérée comme une marionnette [...] Je n'en peux plus. » (*Douceurs du bercail*, 169). [But I don't have to be covered with gold and be considered a puppet [...] I can't take it any more]. (Translation ours)

In this regard, the philosophical words of Emerson (1998:1623-1632) align with epiphanic theory and Asta's decision:

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself.

Asta is now her real self; she has achieved inner peace and integrity and she swears never to remarry: « Asta lui avait juré qu'elle ne se mariérait plus jamais. Jamais, au grand jamais! » (*Douceurs du bercail*, 151) [Asta vows to him that she will never remarry any longer. Never, big never!] (Translation ours). Sow Fall portrays Asta as a woman who has successfully developed, learnt and grown up. Epiphany brings out a completely different standpoint which acts as a catalyst for creating new awareness on reconstruction of identity.

Changing a Whole Community through Epiphany-A Return to the Homeland

Another epiphanic experience of Asta stems from anxiety and tension through an encounter with her fellow citizens at the dépôt who are desperate to migrate to France in quest of greener pasture in *Douceur de bercail*. This encounter serves as an indicator that marks her journey of self-discovery towards an independent selfhood in which she made her own decisions.

The journey of self-discovery is a vital component in the narratives of female development.

Aristotle asserts that “knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom” cited in (Kurdi, 2017). To Asta, “knowing herself” becomes a pointer or turning point which helps her to see things in a new way. The words of Christian-de-la-huerta (2014) expatiate on the journey of self-discovery:

The journey of self-discovery is the most important journey we can take. It is an inner journey, and a heroic one. The dragons to be slain are our own fears and insecurities and outgrown belief systems, behaviour patterns and life situations. Challenges to be overcome include family, social and cultural conditioning.

This is interrelated with Asta’s independent life as a “New woman”. She has slayed the dragon of fear, of being a battered wife and of being dependent on any man. She has equally overcome the fear of the social and cultural conditions that put her life on hold.

Epiphany triggers people to answer questions and to resolve conflicts or crisis. Asta wakes up from her shadowy thoughts and the memory of her grand-father’s words comes to mind like a flash or as if she falls into a trance “Dieu est grand et la terre ne ment jamais. Je veux y croire... » ... J’ai toutes les raisons d’y croire. [God is great and land never lies. I want to believe it. I have all reasons to believe in it. They also said that there was hope and certitude in it.] (*Douceurs du bercail*, 88).

This excerpt from Asta’s testimony is a remarkable signal for many sequels to epiphany. Ability to remember the exact words used by her grand-father when she was small is a kind of epiphany or a moment of realisation that has the greatest impact in her life and the lives of her whole compatriots or citizenry in general. Epiphany gives Asta the insight to create a rational justification on the significance of land which eventually makes her to reconstruct her identity and consequently to become self-reliant. In this regard, Sow Fall through Asta awakens the spirit of the immigrants to embrace farming on their own land instead of making the foreign colonialist country, France, a ‘paradise’. This excerpt testifies:

Le plus dur aujourd’hui est que l’espoir s’en va. Malgré tout, je continuerai à prêcher: aimons notre terre.... La lumière de notre espérance nous guidera, nous récolterons et bâtirons. Alors seulement, nous pourrions emprunter les routes du ciel, de la terre et de l’eau sans être chassés comme des parias. Nous ne serons plus des voyageurs sans bagages. (*Douceurs du bercail*, 88).

[It is most painful today that hope is disappearing. Despite everything, I will continue to preach: let us love our land ... The light of our hope will guide us, we will harvest and build. Then only, can we make our way to our skies, over our land and water, without being chased about like outcasts. We will no longer be passengers without luggage.] (Translation ours)

The declaration “land does not lie” pronounced by her father during her childhood days and which she is able to recall is an example of epiphanic moments. Sow Fall builds on her retentive memory and this tends to become the tool of transformational identity not only for Asta but entire citizenry. Land thus, plays a vital role in Sow Fall’s *Douceurs du bercail*, inspiring Asta’s to set up an Agricultural cooperative project. She determines to create a vision of reality by transforming the “exodus syndrome” into “stay-in-your-homeland” principle. The assertion “Life is a creation, self and circumstances [are] the raw material” (Labovitz, 1986:40) reflects Asta’s thought-provoking decision. Giving herself a new and clear sense of bearing, Asta summons the courage to create something new and be of service to humanity, beyond her own individual self to her national terrain, the African and universal reaches.

Thus, epiphany, that “strike in the dark like matches”, gives Asta total round development. As Asta moves on, she ponders on past occurrences and actions and she remembers her mother’s words: “Tant que va la vie, tout peut arriver” [While there is life, anything can happen.] (Translation ours). This adage fortifies Asta right from the *dépôt* (prison in France) while she is seeking freedom from racial tyranny. After recovering from the *dépôt*’s experience, she takes her destiny in her hands and opts for a different approach in the quest for individuation. Another instance of epiphany occurs when she says:

Je pense que l’occasion m’est donnée de tester l’adage: « La terre ne ment pas ». Je n’ai pas de moyens matériels, mais j’ai la fois, j’ai des idées, j’ai la volonté et j’ai l’espérance, vois-tu...c’est l’occasion de ma vie. Je crois en mon intuition; avec la terre, ça marchera! (*Douceurs du bercail* 188)

[I think the incident made me to verify the adage that says: “Land does not lie”. I do not have the material means, but I have faith. I have the ideas, I have the will and I have the hope, you see....it is the chance of my life. I believe in my instinct; with land, things will work]. (Translation ours)

It has been said earlier on that when epiphany is employed in critical literary discourse, it describes an unforgettable or a striking phase of the mind. In essence, epiphany here signifies a vital occurrence that changes Asta’s life. This is the time she begins to see things in a new way. Though, she lacks everything that can set the project in motion but she believes in her instinct that things would take shape. She re-integrates back to Senegal and starts mobilising men and women together with her fellow immigrants in her agricultural project. She aims to form, reform and transform the identities of the immigrants who have been struggling to survive. Epiphany makes her to become conscious of the adage “L’eldorado n’est pas au bout de l’exode mais dans les entrailles de notre terre” (*Douceurs du bercail*, 87) ‘Eldorado is not at the end of the exodus but in the depths of our land’ (Translation ours). This means that running to the Western world cannot solve the problems of Africa and Africans.

Asta and her fellow deportees start seeing life from another perspective; strategising how Natanguée (Agricultural project) would become a reality, their aspirations are to achieve the following:

Nous pourrions creuser un canal, irriguer les deux hectares, acheter une camionnette tous terrains pour écouler la production” (*Douceurs du bercail* 200).

[We could excavate a canal, irrigate two hectares, and buy an all-terrain pick-up to distribute the produce]. (Translation ours)

Asta sources for money from three financial organisations for rural projects. She procures two hectares in an area where land is very fertile and states:

C'est l'ineffable bonheur de sentir la terre, de communier avec elle quand, de son sein, jaillit la vie, la nourriture qui donne vie et consistance...c'est très profond dans mon cœur... (*Douceurs du bercail*, 200)

[It is an inexpressible joy to feel the land, to be in communion with it when, from its bosom, springs forth life, food, which brings life and energy...it is very deep in my heart...] (Translation ours)

Here, her realisation becomes true. She is able to ascertain her inner strength and accentuates her autonomy by initiating farming; only that she cannot do it alone but she remains the founder and proprietress of Natanguée. The establishment of Natanguée turns out to set the space for the transformational process which ranks Asta a harbinger of social change.

NATANGUEE est en effervescence. Depuis les premières heures de l'aurore, hommes, femmes et enfants viennent de partout en tenue de grands jours pour assister à la fête de la première vraie moisson dans le domaine des Waa Reewu Takh. (Ceux des villes en béton) (*Douceurs du bercail*, 203)

NATANGUEE is bubbling with excitement. Since the wee hours of dawn, men, women and children come from everywhere in festive dresses to take part in the harvest feast in the area of Waa Reewu Takh-Those of the surrounding town (Translation ours)

Asta realises her dreams at last in collaboration with the ex-immigrants forming this highly functional agricultural cooperative society. Members plant cotton, groundnuts, maize, Okra and so on. They even plant some foreign seeds that Anne sends from France. They label their products *Douceurs du bercail* (217) [Sweetness of the folds].

According to them, Natanguée symbolises:

Les bonheurs, les angoisses, les jours de grisaille et les matins de soleil; avec les joies, les difficultés et le combat quotidien, comme dans toute œuvre humaine. (*Douceurs du bercail* 216)

The joys, the anguish, the dull days and sunny mornings; with the joys, the difficulties and the daily struggles, as in all human efforts. (Translation ours)

Epiphany as Strategy for Art and Life

Epiphany as a creative device strategy in *Douceurs du bercail* helps the plot or the storyline to reach climax because of the 'sudden realization' that leads to a new perspective that clarifies the problem of immigration, as of marriage discussed earlier on. Eventually, their dreams of the would-be African emigrants' come true after the abortive travel, like those of Asta after the aborted marriage. « Le rêve enfin » and their lost dignity are reclaimed. « Leur dignité retrouvée » (*Douceurs du bercail*, 217). « Douceurs du bercail, c'était un label de réconciliation de soi, c'était une griffe, c'était un style » ((217) [Sweetness of folds, it was a label of reconciliation with self, it was a label, it was a style]. *Douceurs du bercail*, as the title suggests, is a resolution

of the dilemma of the “self”, within and with the component of epiphany. Asta through epiphany resolves the conflicts of migration and goes back home (Senegal).

Douceurs du bercail (1998) creates a narrative framework that epitomises the constructions of immigration and racial discrimination against the Black race in European countries. The author takes a unique position in exposing the problems confronting the black immigrants, most especially the Senegalese in faraway France. Sow Fall, a true representative of cultural values, takes the bull by the horns by providing an enabling environment for Senegalese community and African society as a whole. As a visionary writer, she has already previewed the crazy ideas of the Senegalese people transiting to France. This is revealed in one of her interviews when she says,

Pour *Douceurs du bercail*, je n’ai pas choisi un thème d’actualité ... Mais j’avais déjà perçu la mentalité de la jeunesse africaine à cette époque... Et j’ai pensé qu’il fallait écrire pour sensibiliser. (Sow Fall 2005 interview granted to D’Edwige)

For *Douceurs du bercail*, I did not choose a recent happening for theme ... but I had previewed the mentality of African youths at this period... In addition, I thought it is better to write in order to sensitise. (Translation Ours)

It is obvious in the text that the author is melancholic about the exodus syndrome of the Senegalese people to European countries. Exile, to most Senegalese people, is like a “garden of Eden” or *Eldorado* where people achieve goals with ease. They are not conscious of the pains, the frustrations and humiliations behind black skin. However, Sow Fall’s depiction of *dépôt* (cell) in France Airport symbolises alienation, frustration, exploitation, incarceration, racial discrimination and even death. Exile is deconstructed because overseas do not always yield an optimistic fruition. The idea of homecoming emphasised by the author deconstructs migration to those who are bent on running away to the European countries. She intentionally portrays migration as a disaster-prone effort. She urges the African youths to go back to the land, because the alienation from their ancestral land has disorganised the political, economic and socio-cultural order of the entire Africa. In this regard, the author uses literary medium to correct the existential mindset of the Senegalese toward migration. Sow Fall (1987) further says:

La littérature doit évoluer et dépasser le stade de réhabilitation de l’homme noir. J’ai pensé que l’on pouvait créer une littérature qui reflète simplement notre manière d’être, qui soit un miroir de notre âme et de notre culture. Je me suis mise à écrire comme modèle la société dans laquelle je vivais. (Sow Fall cited in Lambert, 1987:20-22)

Literature must evolve and move beyond the period of rehabilitation of the black man. I thought one could create a literature that simply reflects our way of being, which is a mirror of our soul and our culture. I started eulogising the society in which I lived. (Translation Ours)

The author, in her bid to preserve the African culture, preaches the value of land to African society. The sermon on “back-to-the-land” or stay back-home in your father’s land deconstructs the myth of Europe in the mind of Africans, regard her as “Paradise” or “*Eldorado*.” Sow Fall challenges the youths through her protagonist Asta, urging them to go back to the ways of the

ancestors (farming). The people's agonising experience at the *dépot* reinforces her vision that migration to Europe is a fallacy.

CONCLUSION

Sow Fall presents a creative and new structure of narrative style (epiphany) to expose a female hero's self-development. She portrays a single woman's high level of competence, which later becomes an optimistic channel for positive communal transformation. Asta first "assails her womanhood" (Labovitz, 1986: 252) before she defines herself and her true role in the society. By rebelling against and resisting patriarchal norms, Asta becomes a revolutionist. The heroine symbolises a real agent of change, both locally and internationally.

Sow Fall does not only suppress and jettison racism, she also foregrounds homeland as a vision of hope transformed into reality. She makes African races as a whole to understand that exile is a foreign land that can never be like one's fatherland. Homeland is the originality of vision. This explains why the author lays emphasis on Africans loving their homeland. The author undermines the rigidly structured environment of racial discrimination, and constructs Natanguée, a place flowing with milk and honey in an Africa that is extolled, operating with social justice, freed from racial oppression and raised to an egalitarian society. Sow Fall broadens the bliss of the heroine, Asta, who under the oppression of patriarchal hegemony creates an ideal social ideology for communal survival.

Thus, the journey of self-discovery as represented by epiphany moves Asta from hegemonic problems and racial oppression to female empowerment. By so doing, she awakens possibilities of a bold world, where men and women coexist. Thus, Sow Fall makes a wonderful contribution in creating a narrative of female development through *Douceurs du bercail*. In the context, therefore, the epiphanic device is elevated to the level of a subversive tool that can help every individual to reconstruct their identity and also facilitate their developments.

Through the portrayal of Asta in *Douceurs du bercail*, Sow Fall asserts that women are equal to men socially, economically and even politically. Therefore, epiphany as a narrative device is used to restructure the protagonist's character development in male-dominated societies. This suggests that when marriage and motherhood roles prove deficient in male dominated society, women can still develop and rise to highly heroic levels, locally and internationally, to the betterment of all humanity.

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