Exploring the Hegemony of Men in Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle.*

By

Ibiene Evelyn Iboroma (Ph.D.)
Department of English Studies
University of Port Harcourt
Nigeria
Email: iibiene@yahoo.com

Abstract

Jeff Hearn in 2004 proposed a shift from the study of masculinity to the study of men. He argues that it is time scholars focused more on the study of the hegemony of men and about men. This study therefore engages with an emerging area of research in the hegemony of men applying it to the literary world and the text of choice is Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle.* The aim is to highlight how the hegemony of men legitimises gender inequality and the subordination of the African woman. This study is framed on hegemonic masculinity because it plays a role in the hegemony of men but with emphasis on cultural perspective. The paper demonstrates the hegemony of men in relation to wives and daughters in the domain of female genital mutilation, forced marriage and polygamy legitimising the dominant position of men and the subordination of women both at the institutional and individual levels. The paper concludes that through extensive campaigns organised by Malimouna, the protagonist of the novel, the women in Keïta's world and by extension in Africa, have regained consciousness of the implication of their consent to the hegemonic control of their lives and are prepared to challenge the status quo in future. The paper recommends that more Malimounas should arise with grim determination to dismantle hegemonic institutions and embark on enlightenment campaigns that would enable women question the hegemonic expectations of tradition.

Keywords: hegemony of men, hegemonic masculinity, rebelle, Fatou Keïta

Introduction

Jeff Hearn in 2004 proposed a shift from the study of masculinity to the study of men. He argues that it is time scholars focused more on the study of the hegemony

of men and about men. While not denying the fact that studying men is in itself not new, he argues that "men's studies, in the simple sense of studies by men, may or may not be explicitly about men" (49) and that "to study men within the frame of 'Men's Studies…is at the best ambiguous and implies a false parallel with Women's Studies. At worst, it is anti-feminist" (50). Making reference to hegemonic masculinity, Hearn contends that the focus of the concept of hegemony "on masculinity is too narrow. Instead, it is time to go back from masculinity to men, to examine the hegemony of men and about men" (59). He argues further that

> what is at issue here is the persistent presence of accumulations of power and powerful resources by certain men, the doing of power and dominance in many men's practices, and the pervasive association of the social category of men with power… It also includes violations and violences of all the various kinds. (51)

Hearn explains the concept of the hegemony of men as follows:

> The hegemony of men seeks to address the double complexity that men are both a *social category formed by the gender system and dominant collective and individual agents of social practices*. In this view, there is a greater need to look critically at the ordinary, taken-for-granted accepted dominant constructions, powers and authorities of men – in relation to women, children … (59)

This study therefore engages with an emerging area of research in the hegemony of men applying it to the Literary world and the text of choice is Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle.* A few scholars have carried out research on Keïta's *Rebelle***.** For instance, Temidayo Onojobi in her study of the novel identifies female bonding as one of the non-violent strategies employed by women to extricate themselves from patriarchal oppression. The researcher submits that "non-violent strategies and its varied forms … are employed with a desire to restore the ethics of the woman's personhood…" (156). Framing their research on narratology, Joseph Akanbi Adewuyi et al. conclude that « à propos de la voix narrative, on constate que ce roman dominé par une voie hétérodiégétique à focalisation zéro qui fixe la révolte interne de la protagoniste et se concentre sur le passé difficile des personnages » (91). Ismail Abdulmalik and Oguike Gerald Iheanacho on their part highlight

some of the immediate and remote effects of genital incision on the female. They assert that « l'impact de l'excision se manifeste en outre dans la confrontation complexe et largement indicible, pour les femmes concernées, entre sexualité, transmission familiale et stigmatisation sociale » (153). Ifeoma Mabel Onyemelukwe argues that Keïta uses an ugly scene witnessed by Malimouna in the bush « pour démasquer l'hypocrisie sociale ainsi que l'inanité de certains mœurs traditionnelle dans un système patriarcal » (140). The paper concludes that « par un processus de déconstruction et de reconstruction, Keita amène les femmes à se débarrasser de notions erronées concernant les coutumes en cours chez elles afin d'apporter des changements positifs dans la société » (149). Pauline A. Nnabuike examines « la représentation du féminisme par Keita comme une force motrice à la résistance contre les ordres d'une autorité établie » (47). She submits that « nous sommes à une époque où les violences faites aux femmes ont atteint leur point culminant, et où les femmes font des efforts pour qu'elles et les hommes soient au même rang » (59). Martha MZITE's paper explores « le patriarcat et la fille métamorphosée dans *Rebelle* de Fatou Keïta » (215). She makes an attempt to answer Spivak's question: « les subalternes peuvent-elles parler? » in her analysis of the novel. The paper concludes that « le métamorphose de l'héroïne d'un état d'inconscience à un état de pleine conscience établit *Rebelle* comme un roman de croissance, d'éducation, de développement, de découverte et de survie » (224).

This study explores the hegemony of men in Keïta's *Rebelle*. The aim is to highlight how the hegemony of men legitimises gender inequality and the subordination of the African woman. The study adopts hegemonic masculinity as its framework because it plays a role in the hegemony of men but with emphasis on the cultural perspective.

R. W. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as **"**the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (qtd in Hearn 57). Jeff Hearn et al. contend that "hegemonic masculinity is the masculinity that represents the practices and qualities that legitimate the privileging of men and that result in the subordination of women" (5). They argue further that hegemonic masculinity, can also be understood as part of a process of gender hegemony (6). King et al. submit

that masculinities "become hegemonic only if they "actually legitimate gender inequality and the subordination of women…" (2). In sum, hegemonic masculinity operating either in subtle or obvious ways, portrays men's power and dominance over women which result in the subjugation of women.

Analysis

The concept and practices of the hegemony of men in relation to wives and daughters in Keïta's *Rebelle* include female genital mutilation, arranged marriage and polygamy.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

According to Leila Jahangiry et al., "female genital mutilation (FGM) or female circumcision, refers to all intentional acts that partially or totally remove the external female genitalia or female genital organs of young girls for cultural, traditional, or nonmedical reasons" (1). In the fictional world of Keïta, every female child from the age of eight is eligible for this ritual. Patriarchy has drummed into the ears of every female child that « une femme qui ne subit pas cette épreuve, ne peut être maîtresse de son corps et ne peut devenir qu'une dévergondée… » (21). (a girl who does not participate in this rite would not be able to control her body and can only become a loose woman). Notwithstanding, Malimouna, the protagonist of the novel, does not want to participate in this rite and informs her mother, Matou, accordingly: « je ne veux pas passer cette épreuve » (15). (I don't want to participate in this ritual.) Matou snaps: « Maudite fille! De quoi parles-tu? Tu veux que nous soyons la risée de tout le village ? » (Bloody girl! What are you talking about ? Do you want us to become the laughingstock of the whole village ?) Abdulmalik and Iheanacho inform us that « en Afrique, … celles qui refusent d'exciser leur fille seront affligées d'un nombre des conséquences néfastes » (150-151). This probably informs the reaction of Matou. Not taking Malimouna's subversive decision kindly, Matou reports her to Dimikéla, the operator of the excision. Dimikéla invites Malimouna as a consequence and interrogates her :

> Ta mère m'a demandé te préparer à ta première épreuve de femme qui aura lieu dans deux semaines. Elle m'a dit aussi qu'il t'était venu à l'idée de t'y soustraire. Pour qui te prends-tu, pour oser ainsi te rebeller ? Tu ne même pas encore née. (21)

> (Your mother asked me to prepare you for your first test of womanhood which is coming up in two weeks' time. She also told me that you've decided not to participate in it. Who do you think you are to rebel in this manner? You've never been born.)

She forewarns her **:** « se soustraire à ce ritual la rendrait mauvaise » (21). (Abstaining from this ritual will not do her any good.) This is in consonance with Matou's counsel to her daughter when she informed her that she would not participate in the ritual: « mon enfant …mon seule et unique enfant, tu ne deviendras pas une femme de mauvaise vie » (24). (My daughter, my one and only daughter, you'll not become a loose woman.) Dimikéla and Matou's complicity in the female genital mutilation "brings us to the place of women's 'consent' with the hegemony of men" (Hearn 61).

Meanwhile, before her summons, Malimouna caught Dimikéla making love to Seynou in the bush on a fateful day: «Dimikèla était toute nue…le jeune Seynou… Il était dévêtu lui aussi, … sa mais droite descendait plus bas entre les jambes de Dimikéla » (9-10). **(**Dimikéla was stark naked…the young Seydou…He also got undressed…his right hand finding its way into Dimikéla's laps.) Malimouna could not believe her eyes. She was traumatised: "à huit ans Malimouna n'était plus un bébé … Elle pensait que c'était mal et c'est pour cela qu'elle avait eu si peur, et que cette vision la perturbait souvent la nuit, troublant son sommeil » (19). (At eight years, Malimouna was no longer a baby. She believed it was bad and that was what really frightened her, and this scene troubled her all through the night, disturbing her sleep.) Onyemelukwe remarks :

> Le comportement de Dimikéla loin d'être exemplaire, est méprisable…En plus, avoir des relations sexuelles dans la brousse est aussi bestial et répugnant que le fait d'avoir le coït hors du mariage. Cette scène obscénité n'est qu'un procédé qu'utilise Keïta pour mettre à nu l'hypocrisie de l'exciseuse, ce qui reflète aussi l'hypocrisie sociale. (141)

So when Dimikéla underscores the moral implication of this ritual in an effort to convince Malimouna to participate in it, Malimouna confronts her: « si je ne le fais pas, est-ce que je me comporterai comme toi avec Seynou ? » (21). (If I don't do it,

will I behave like you and Seynou?) Dimikéla shocked and angry, lifted a pestle to hit Malimouna's head. Malimouna took to her heels.

However, Malimouna eventually submitted herself to the ritual. Dimikéla avenged on her for sharing her secrets with her by not performing the excision on her. She rather put a cut on her left thigh: « dés la première nuit, Malimouna avait glissé sa main entre ses jambes. Non, la douleur ne venait vraiment pas de là. Elle s'endormait en souriant » (28). (From the first night, Malimouna put her hands between her laps. No, of a truth, the pain did not come from there. She slept off smiling.)

Noura, the daughter of Fanta, is another victim of clitoridectomy. Fanta complains to Malimouna : « Elle a onze ans à présent, et on doit l'exciser demain, mais elle ne veut rien entendre…Mon mari me tuera si ce n'est pas faire demain » (123). (She is eleven years old and she has to go through the excision tomorrow, but she won't listen …My husband will kill me if it's not done tomorrow.) She continues: « elle s'était déjà sauvée la première fois que cela devait avoir lieu, et avait disparu pendant deux jours » (124) (She had escaped from it the first time it was going to be done, she disappeared for two days.) Noura's parents though living in France do not see anything wrong with this brutality. They eventually forced her into it which led to her death: «Noura était morte d'une hémorragie » (126). (Noura died of haemorrhage.) Noura's parents and the woman who performed the excision were arrested and imprisoned as a result.

Forced Marriage

« Le mariage forcé se produit lorsqu'une femme ou une fille est contrainte, menacée ou trompée afin de se marier sans consentement » (MZITE 219). Three female characters will be considered: Malimouna, Fanta and Fami Kana.

Malimouna

Louma abandoned his wife, Matou, and his daughter, Malimouna, because Matou could not bear him a son. After a period of time, « Il se souvint brusquement qu'il avait une fille » (29). **(**He suddenly remembered that he had a daughter**.)** So, he paid them a surprise visit with this information: « Malimouna devait venir avec lui, … Il allait la marier à son ami Sando » (29). (Malimouna must go with him…he

was going to marry her to his friend, Sando.) Meanwhile, Malimouna is only fourteen years old. «Malimouna pleura beaucoup à cette annonce» (29). (Malimouna wept sore upon hearing this.) But her mother in her naivety accepts the news with joy. She consoles her daughter saying : « tout irait bien…Une femme devait se marier et avoir des enfants » (30). (You'll be fine…A woman ought to get married and have children...) Louma in his shrewdness did not want Matou who brought up this child with her sweat to accompany them for the ceremony and she did not raise any objection even though she did not like it: «avec beaucoup de réticence, Louma accepta que Matou les accompagne pour la cérémonie » (30). (With much reluctance, Louma allowed Matou to accompany them for the ceremony.) This scene clearly demonstrates "the doing of power and dominance in many men's practices" (Hearn 51). It also corroborates Abdumalik and Iheanacho's argument that "men negatively determine women's fate; in the meantime, women just say nothing to contribute to theirs, and are content to serve and please men" (176).

The marriage ceremony between Malimouna and Sando eventually took place. However, Malimouna did not think of the sexual implication until the moment she was handed over a piece of white cloth to spread on the bed that night**.** Blood stains on the white sheet proves her virginity according to the custom of the land. Malimouna trembles with fear not because she would be found wanting in this regard but because a stranger would soon trespass on her privacy:

> Son cœur bondit dans sa poitrine au point qu'elle pensa qu'il allait exploser. Cet homme allait découvrir sons corps, son intimité…Elle était désemparée, une angoisse extrême l'envahissait. Elle tremblait, comme prise d'une fièvre subite. (34)
>
> (Her heart began to beat at such a rate that she thought it was going to explode. This man was going to see her body, her privacy…she was devastated, an unspeakable anguish invaded her spirit. She shivered as if she had come down with a serious fever.)

Malimouna's agony resonates with MZITE's argument that « le mariage forcé…Il est considéré comme une violation des droits humains fondamentaux de la personne impliquée. Il représente la forme la plus courante d'abus et d'exploitation sexuelle des filles principalement à l'âge de l'adolescence » (219).

Meanwhile, Malimouna met her husband for the first time in the bedroom that night. This clearly shows the patriarchal denigration of the woman as an object. Sando pounces on this innocent child like a beast : « Elle aurait hurlé de douleur s'il ne l'avait pas baillonnée de sa large main. Il l'écrasait de tout son poids » (39). (She would have screamed in pains if he had not covered her mouth with his big hand. He crushed her with all his weight.) Not taking her pains into account, Sando « avait voulu la reprendre une deuxième fois… le vieux Sando bondit sur elle et lui écarta violement les genoux… » (39). (Desiring to have her again for the second time…the old Sando climbed on her and violently opened her laps.) But Malimouna violently resists his hegemonic desire this time around:

> Malimouna se débattait comme un beau diable …Malimouna bondit sur lui, la statuette au poing. Elle frappa une seule fois, de toutes ses forces. Il s'écroula sans un cri…Elle enjamba son corps inerte…Elle s'habilla rapidement…et ouvrit la porte. Elle enleva la clé et referma la porte derrière elle…Elle courut aussi bien que ses jambes purent la porter. Il faisait nuit noire. Elle ne savait même pas dans quelle direction elle avançait, mais elle avançait. (39-41)
>
> (Malimouna fought tooth and nail…Malimouna jumped on him with the statute in her hand. She hit him once with all her strength. He collapsed without screaming…She jumped over his lifeless body…She dressed up quickly …and opened the door. She removed the key and locked the door after her…She ran as far as her legs could carry her. It was pitch dark. She had no idea where she was going, but she continued.)

Knowing that it would be dangerous to go back to her mother, Malimouna moves from place to place seeking a home until she finally lands in France where she pursues her education in l'Institut d'Études Sociale**.**

Fami Kana is another victim of forced marriage. She was forced to marry an old man at age fifteen: « une fois chez son mari, elle avait dû évidemment subir les assauts de cet homme » (221). (She suffered assaults from this man while living with him.) Consequence upon this, she ran back to her parents' house. But her parents « considérant cette fuite comme une humiliation, administrèrent une sévère correction à leur fille avant de la rendre manu militari à son mari » (221). (Seeing this escape as an embarrassment, her parents subjected her to severe

punishment and forced her back to her husband.) Exasperated, « une nuit, prise de folie, Fami égorgea son mari » (221). (Fami went nutty one night and killed her husband.) Her action though criminal, signifies a revolt against this outdated tradition of patriarchal hegemony. She would have faced the full wrath of the law but for the timely intervention of the members of l'Association D'Aide aux Femmes en Difficultés who make a strong case in her defence.

Fanta is betrothed to Barou, a man she has never met in her life. He works in France but promises to visit the family of Fanta back in Africa every year but fails to do so. In consequence, her parents post her to him for fear that he may abandon their daughter and marry a white woman. The poor girl almost dies of emotional wreck from Barou: « cet homme noir était une brute égoïste» (95). (This black man was a brutal egoist.) He makes Fanta a baby producing machine : « à vingt-quatre ans…elle avait déjà quatre enfants et était de nouveau enceinte » (92). (At twenty-four…she already had four children and was pregnant again.) Her dream of going back to school is shattered. Overwhelmed, she politely asked Barou if she could consult with a medical doctor to have some contraceptives. He was mad at her for conceiving such an idea:

> Il avait presque giflé en lui disant que c'était contre leur religion et que seules les femmes volages avaient besoins de ce genre de protection…De toute façon, c'était lui qui les nourrissait, pas elle. La discussion était close. (93)
>
> (He almost slapped her saying that it was against their religion and that only wayward women had the need of such protection…In any case, it was he who would feed the children, not she. This discussion was closed.)

Barou's self-centeredness blinds him to the fact of his wife's situation. Her health and future mean nothing to him.

Polygamy

Malimouna and her husband, Karim, enjoy a blissful married life. However, with the passage of time, Malimouna begins to notice some change of attitude in her husband. She wonders if he is having an affair with other women more so having smelt feminine perfume on his shirt one of the days he returned home late. But she advises herself not to read any meaning into it: «Elle avait décidé d'oublier

I'odeur de la chemise. Elle n'allait pas devenir une de ces épouses soupçonneuses. » (176). (She decided to forget about the smell on the shirt. She wouldn't want to become one of those jealous wives.) Besides, « son marriage avec Karim était fondé sur la confiance et le respect mutuel » (176). (Her marriage with Karim was founded on trust and mutual respect.) However, the more she gives him more attention and affection, the more he distances himself from her:

> Il ne lui adressait pratiquement plus la parole. La nuit, lorsqu'il rentrait tôt, ce qui était rare, il se couchait sans un mot et lui tournait le dos. Elle n'osait pas le toucher, ne sachant pas de quelle nature était son problème…Elle avait un mari, mais elle était seule, très seule. (184)
>
> (He hardly spoke to her. In the event he returned early at night which had become rare, he slept without a word and turned his back on her. She didn't have the courage to touch him not knowing what the problem was …She had a husband, but she was lonely, very lonely.)

Disturbed, she approached him one day asking : « tu peux me dire ce qui ne va pas…J'en ai assez de tes sautes d'humeur, de tes bouderies, de tes sorties… » (187). (Would you like to tell me what is wrong…I have had enough of your mood swings, your sulks, your outings.) Before she could finish talking, «Karim se retourna et la gifla violemment» (Karim turned around and slapped her mercilessly saying: «En voilà des façons de parler à son mari ! Pour qui te prends-tu à la fin ? Je crois que ton association de femmes aigries te monte à la tête. Tu penses avoir tous les droits ? » (187) (This is how to talk to your husband! Who do you think you are after all? I think your association of embittered women has gotten into your head. You think you have all the rights?) Malimouna could not believe her eyes: « jamais elle n'aurait imaginé que Karim puisse se comporter de la sorte avec elle » (188). (She has never imagined that Karim could behave towards her in this manner.)

Meanwhile, Karim has secretly married a second wife. Malimouna gets to know about it through her friend, Laura: « je viens d'apprendre que son mari a une maîtresse attirée avec laquelle il a même fait un mariage coutumier. Et cette femme vient d'avoir un enfant de lui. C'est écœurant » (191). (I just got the information that your husband has an allured mistress with whom he has even performed traditional marriage. And this woman just had a baby for him. It's unbelievable.)

Malimouna is shocked : « elle comprenait à présent le comportement de Karim. Son irritabilité, son indifférence, ses sorties tardives…Et cette chemise, l'odeur de cette chemise » (193). (She now understood the behaviour of Karim. His irritable temper, his indifference, his late outings…And that shirt, the smell on that shirt.)

Karim eventually informs Malimouna his attention to marry a new wife : « je veux prendre une deuxième femme. J'en ai le droit, tu sais que je viens d'un milieu polygame, et toi aussi » (200-201). (I want to marry a second wife. I have the right to do so, you know I come from a polygamous family, and you too.) Karim's utterance demonstrates the doing of power and dominance. It shows disrespect. Malimouna is shocked to the bone listening to her husband. She ponders :

> 0ù était l'homme qu'elle avait tant aimé et pour lequel elle aurait donné sa vie ? Où était celui qui disait ne pas comprendre l'autorité abusive des hommes sur les femmes et qui avait détesté son père pour les mauvais traitements infligés à sa propre mère ? … Où se trouvait l'homme qui disait l'aimait plus que sa vie ? Le visage d'une autre femme pouvait-il avoir, si facilement, effacé tout ce qui les avait liés ?...Qu'était-il advenu de leur amour, de leur amitié ?(201)
>
> (Where was this man that she loved so much and for whom she was ready to give her life? Where was the man who said he did not understand the abusive authority of men over their wives and who had hated his father for the maltreatments he meted out on his mother? … where would one find the man who said he loved her more than his life? Could the face of another woman so easily erase all that made them one?...What had become of their love, their friendship?)

Unbelievably, this is the same Karim who « n'arrive jamais à pardonner à son père le mauvais traitement perpétré à sa mère quand celui-ci a pris une nouvelle femme » (159). (could not forgive his father for the mistreatment his mother suffered from him when he took a new wife.) Karim's conduct confirms Amjad Alysouf's submission that "the mentality of men who belong to patriarchal societies is drastically unchangeable. This calls some women to drive the wheel of change and construct a struggle for self-realization" (176). Karim's indulgence in polygamy actually makes Malimouna to drive the wheel of change as she moves out of his house in search of self-realisation. When Karim asks her to come back,

she refuses saying : « je ne reviendrai pas à la maison…tu as choisi de réorganiser ta vie et je ne peux pas t'empêcher ; mais je refuse de vivre une vie que je n'ai pas choisi. » (209). (I'll not come back to the house. You've chosen to reorganise your life and I can't stop you; but I cannot live a life I've not chosen.) MZITE submits that « le refus de Malimouna de suivre son mari chez lui implique qu'elle veut être libre de tout lien matrimonial ou de tout abus qui l'empêchent de progresser » (223-224).

The hegemony of men in the novel under study does not only operate at the institutional level as discussed above, it also operates at the individual level. Louma, Sando, Barou and Karim are good examples. These male characters exert hegemonic authority over their wives and daughters through psychological, physical and emotional violence as this study has earlier demonstrated**.** For example, Karim's hegemonic conduct is summarised as follows :

> Karim, le mari de Malimouna est un homme instruit. Malgré son éducation moderne, son comportement est influencé par quelques valeurs traditionnelles. Avec Karim, Malimouna est soumise à la violence domestique, à la fois physiquement et émotionnellement… (MZITE 221)

Deconstruction of the Hegemonic Constructions of the African Woman in Keïta's *Rebelle*

Malimouna's personal experiences with some of the hegemonic cultural practices coupled with the objectification of Fanta by her husband, the death of Noura and the knowledge she acquires from her studies in l'Institut d'Études Sociale in France, help to sharpen her vision of helping women: «Aider les femmes» (83). (Help the women.) «Elle lutterait pour aider ses sœurs. » (95). (She would fight to help her sisters.) In keeping with her vision, she floats an organisation named l'Association D'Aide aux Femmes en Difficultés (I'AAFD) upon her return to Salouma from France**:**

> À côté de son projet d'alphabétisation des femmes, l'Association avait également prévu de lancer une vaste campagne de lutte contre les violences subies par les femmes…Violences qui …partaient de l'excision, … le mariage forcé de très jeunes filles, …les brutalités domestiques qui s'ensuivaient souvent. (189)

> (Beside their project of educating the women, the association had equally planned to launch an extensive campaign against different forms of violence against women…Violence such as… genital mutilation…subjecting young girls to forced marriage… and the domestic brutalities which often followed.)

Malimouna and the other members of I'AAFD organise a conference in pursuance of their goal. The theme is "Les dangers de l'excision" (194). **(**The dangers of female genital mutilation.) «Plusieurs mères avaient perdu leur enfant à la suite d'infections » (194). (Many mothers have lost their children as a result of infections.) Malimouna and the other members of the association are able to convince the parents who lost their children to female circumcision «de venir témoigner» (196) (to come and testify) during the conference. Many volunteer to do so: « pour la première fois des femmes oseraient parler en public » (196). (Women would boldly speak in public for the first time.)

Malimouna gave a powerful rhetoric speech concerning female genital mutilation during the conference which provoked the thought of the women and the men present. Hear her :

> Aujourd'hui, les femmes n'avaient plus le droit d'ignorer non seulement l'inutilité de cette pratique – ce rituel sans fondement religieux – mais aussi et surtout son caractère nocif. Il s'agissant, … d'enlever à la femme ce qui ressemblait à un pénis, … Mais les seins n'étaient-ils pas le symbole suprême de la féminité ? : Alors pourquoi n'avait-on jamais pensé à enlever aux hommes cet attribut féminin : leurs mamelons ? (197**)**
>
> **(**Today, women would no longer ignore not only the futility of this practice – this ritual without any religious foundation – but also and more so its harmful nature…It is all about removing from the woman that which looked like the penis…But the breasts are they not the supreme symbol of femininity? So why have they not considered removing from the men this feminine symbol: their breasts?)

Moved by Malimouna's expotulation, a religious man of great renown, informs the audience that « ces pratiques n'étaient nullement recommandées par Dieu mais étaient véritablement née de la seule volonté des hommes » (197). (These

practices were not at all ordained by God but were actually borne out of the will of men.) The religious man's speech concurs with Onyemelukwe's argument that « la jouissance sexuelle s'avère un privilège exclusif de l'homme. Ceci explique en partie l'instance de patriarches sur de l'oblation du clitoris, cet organe qui biologiquement excite l'appétit sexuelle de la femme » (143). It also recalls Abdulmalik and Iheanacho's contention that « l'excision est aussi faite pour réduire les plaisirs sexuels des femmes parce que son mari peut s'absenter du foyer pendant des années » (151). Still in this connection, Klein et al. submit that Female Genital Mutilation ensures marital fidelity as it reduces the woman's "desire for extramarital sexual acts. When the vaginal opening is altered to create a smaller orifice, the fear of opening it further discourages extramarital sexual intercourse" (2). « Malimouna considèrait la démarche de cet homme de fois comme une grande victoire qui ouvrirait le chemin vers la l'abolition de ce rituel » (197-198). (Malimouna saw the contribution of this man of faith as a great victory which would pave the way for the abolition of this ritual.)

The narrator remarks :

> Elles (les femmes) n'avaient plus honte de leur corps et se sentaient libre d'en parler, de le défendre. Dieu les avait créés avec un clitoris. Pourquoi, et au nom de quoi, un simple être humain pouvait-il décider que l'œuvre du « Tout Puissant » était imparfaite ? Certes, il avait des erreurs de la nature…mais de là à faire que la moitié de la population mondiale – c'est-à-dire toutes les femmes de la terre – avait une même malformation. Il y avait là une exagération dont elles se rendaient soudain compte. (218)
>
> (The women were no longer ashamed of their body and were at liberty to talk about it, to defend it. God has created them with a clitoris. Why, and in what name, a simple human being would have the audacity to decree that the work of the "Almighty" was imperfect? Admittedly, there are biological disorders…but to say that half of the population of the world – that is all the women on the earth – had the same malformation. That was a falsehood that they suddenly became aware of.)

Malimouna also debunks the patriarchal myth that the African woman is a weaker vessel during the meeting:

> On disait la femme faible, mais qu'en était-il des hommes auxquels, dans certaines cultures, il fallait cacher toutes les parties du corps féminin, y

> compris les cheveux, de peur de susciter chez eux des réactions incontrôlables ? Qui donc, finalement était incontrôlable, l'homme ou la femme ? Lorsque l'un des arguments en faveur de la polygamie était qu'il paraissait difficile à un homme d'être astreint à une abstinence sexuel le temps que son épouse se mettre de ses couches après la naissance d'un bébé, qui encore, avait des pulsions incontrôlables ? (219)
> **(**They said the weak woman, but is it not because of men that in certain cultures women are forced to cover their entire body, including the hair, with the fear that if otherwise, it would elicit in men uncontrollable desires? Who then in the final analysis was weak, man or woman? One of the arguments in favour of polygamy was that it would be difficult for a man to abstain from sex when his wife is still putting on sanitary towels after the birth of a baby, who again, has uncontrollable desires?)

Malimouna also speaks against the evil consequences of forced marriage using Fami Kana's case as an example : « Il était urgent de faire comprendre au monde entier que le mariage forcé de mineures pouvait avoir des conséquences inimaginables » (221). (It was urgent to make the whole world know that forced marriage of minors has unimaginable consequences.) With this understanding, many women sign the petition that makes a strong case in favour of Fami Kana who killed her so called husband out of frustration. Evidently, Malimouna represents the feminine voice of freedom, the wind of change that interrogates the patriarchal hegemonic practices that perpetuate the objectification of the African woman.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the hegemonic constructions of the African woman in the domain of female genital mutilation, forced marriage and polygamy in Keïta's *Rebelle*. Evidently, underlining all these obnoxious mores is the hegemony of men, the doing of power and dominance to objectify the African woman in every aspect of her life. This finding corroborates Onyemelukwe's submission : « Keïta révèle que de telles mœurs sont perpétues dans l'hégémonie traditionnelle Africain afin de maintenir, à perpétuité, la femme africaine dans sa situation de rejetée, d'humiliée, de damnée, de chosifier. Bref, de néant » (149).

However, with the help of Malimouna and I'AAFD, the myths surrounding the practices of female genital mutilation, forced marriage and polygamy are successfully debunked. The blinkers have been taken off and the women are prepared to interrogate the status quo**:** « elles avaient compris le message de Malimouna. Elles cesseraient d'être les complices passives d'une auto-destruction… Vigilance était le mot d'ordre ! Elles seraient vigilantes » (220-221). (They have understood the message of Malimouna. They would cease to be passive accomplices to self-destruction. Vigilance is the Watch Word ! They would be vigilant.) Abdulmalik and Iheanacho assert that « la prise de conscience chez la femme africaine dans ce roman montre que la femme africaine actuelle est prête à lutter pour se libérer. Ce n'est plus comme auparavant » (153).

All in all, women in Keita's world and by extension in Africa, have regained consciousness of the implications of their consent to the hegemonic control of their lives and are prepared to challenge the status quo in future. They now have the understanding that certain mores are fabricated by men to maintain and sustain their power, privilege and pleasure. The paper recommends that more Malimounas should arise with grim determination to dismantle hegemonic institutions and embark on enlightenment campaigns that would enable women question the hegemonic expectations of tradition.

Works Cited

Abdulmalik, Ismail and Oguike Gerald Iheanacho. "l'Excision et Ses Effets Néfastes dans *Rebelle* de Fatou Keita." *Journal of Modern European Languages and Literature* (*JMEL*), vol.9, pp, 142-154. https//journals.unizik.edu.ng/jmel

Adewuyi, Joseph Akanbi et al. "Instances Narratives et la Dénonciation Des Pouvoirs Socio Phallocratiques dans *Rebelle* De Fatou Keïta." *International Journal of Arts, Humanities & Social Science (IPRPD),* vol. 3, no. 2, 2022, pp. 84-91. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358637510...

Alsyouf, Amjad. "Hegemonic Masculinity in Archetypal African Novels." *Informasi: Kajian Ilmu Komunikas*i, vol. 48, no.2, 2018, pp.169-179. https://doi.org/10.21831/informasi.v48i2.2165

Hearn, Jeff. "From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of men." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 5, no.1, 2004, pp.49–72. www.sagepublications.com

Hearn, Jeff et al. "Hegemonic Masculinity." *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Sociology*, edited by G. Ritzer, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2016, pp.1-12. https/www.researchgate.net/publication/325097684

Jahangiry, Leila et al. "Attitudes Towards Female Genital Mutilation/Circumcision: A Systematic Review and Meta-Anaysis." *Healthcare,* 2021, 9, 1184, pp. 1-16. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354464958

Keïta, Fatou. *Rebelle.* Dakar, Présence Africaine, 1998. (Translations, mine).

King, Neal et al. "The Hegemony in Masculinity." *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2021, pp. 432-450. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X20981759

Klein, Elliot et al. "Female Genital Mutilation: Health Consequences and Complications: A Short Literature Review." *Obsterics and Gynecology International*, 2018, vol. 16, pp. 1-7. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326322170

MZITE, Martha. "Le Patriarcat et La Fille Métamorphosée dans *Rebelle* de Fatou Keïta." *ALTRALANG Journal,* vol. 4, no. 1, 2022, pp. 215-225. https //www.ajol.info/index.php/altralang/article/view/254029

Nnabuike, Pauline A. "Le Cours de la Rébellion : Violence, Sexualité et Féminité dans *Rebelle* de Fatou Keïta." *Covenant Journal of Language Studies (CJLS)*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2011, pp.47-59. https//www.academia.edu/40748337

Onojobi, Temidayo."Analysis Of Non-Violent And Violent Strategies in Combating Patriarchal Violence in Francophone African Narratives of Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle* And Aminata Ka Maïga's *La Voie Du Salut Suivi De Le Miroir De La Vie*." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol.5, no.2, 2015, pp.154-158. www.iiste.org

Onyemelukwe, Ifeoma Mabel. "Obscénité, Déconstruction et Reconstruction dans *Rebelle* de Fatou Keïta." *RANEUF,* vol 1, no.1, 2004, pp. 136-150. https/www.researchgate.net/publication/343008287