
**On the power of positive thinking: a reading of Diana Bamford
McBagonluri's *Tears of a Rain Goddess***

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Abstract

This paper uses Martin Seligman's (1942) theory of Positive Psychology to demonstrate that one's thinking is instrumental to one's achievement and happiness in life. The theory holds that a person's outcome in life depends on their thinking. The paper seeks, therefore, to establish an intrinsic link between McBagonluri's protagonist's achievement and her thinking. On the one hand, it elaborates on how the author has succeeded in deconstructing the existing sexist representation of women. On the other hand, it sheds light on indispensable traits that have helped McBagonluri's protagonist to rise beyond the social limitations imposed by patriarchal ideology on women.

Keywords: Positive Thinking; social limitations; patriarchy; sexism; positive psychology

Résumé

Cet article utilise la théorie de la psychologie positive de Martin Seligman (1942) pour démontrer que la pensée d'une personne est essentielle à sa réussite et à son bonheur dans la vie. La théorie soutient que le résultat d'une personne dans la vie dépend de sa façon de penser. L'article cherche donc à établir un lien intrinsèque entre la réalisation de la protagoniste de McBagonluri et sa pensée. D'une part, il précise comment l'auteur a réussi à déconstruire la représentation sexiste existante des femmes. D'autre part, il met en lumière des traits indispensables qui ont aidé la protagoniste de McBagonluri à s'élever au-delà des limites sociales imposées par l'idéologie patriarcale aux femmes.

Mots-clés : Pensée positive ; limites sociales; patriarcat; sexisme; psychologie positive

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Introduction

Evolution in human history depends heavily on their ability to think or to rethink their society. A person's life is shaped after their thinking. The New King James Version of the Holy Bible would say: "...as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). In this regard, every man or woman can be said to be the reflection or the projection of their mindset. *Tears of a Rain Goddess* offers a perfect illustration of this assertion, in that Diana Bamford McBagonluri's protagonist, Tamara, has been able, through her thinking, to reshape her life and by extension the history of her society. Arguing on the power of a person's thinking, James Allen said: "Man is made or unmade by himself. In the armory of thought he forges the weapons by which he destroys himself. He also fashions the tools with which he builds for himself heavenly mansions of joy and strength and peace" (5). In this line, I argue that Tamara distinguishes herself from the rest of the characters in the narrative by thinking differently. She refuses to see herself as society wants. She dares to have a different picture of herself. The narrative proves her right as she successfully rises above her predicaments and barriers of social construct and eventually becomes what she has pictured about herself.

This paper uses Martin Seligman's (1942) theory of Positive Psychology to demonstrate that one's thinking is instrumental to one's achievement and happiness in life. The theory holds that a person's outcome in life depends on their thinking. The paper seeks, therefore, to establish an intrinsic link between McBagonluri's protagonist's achievement and her thinking. On the one hand, it elaborates on how the author has succeeded in deconstructing the existing sexist representation of women. On the other hand, it sheds light on indispensable traits that have helped McBagonluri's protagonist to rise beyond the social limitations imposed by patriarchal ideology on women.

1. Deconstructing Sexist Representation of the African Woman

The author has constructed her protagonist, Tamara, to be different from the rest of the female characters in the novel in order to deconstruct sexist representations of the African woman. Actually, I can safely assert that Tamara is made to think outside the box. As a matter of fact, right from her tender age, her attitude and actions and words prove her dissatisfaction with the existing tradition and a desire to break free

from the status quo inflicted on women. In fact, Tamara is a young princess born and raised in a traditional African society. She evolves in a patriarchal setting that believes in and promotes male superiority, while females are trapped in the traditional roles of housekeeping and child raising.

However, in spite of this sexist context, the protagonist's main pursuit in life is to become the next "king" after her father. This dream seems utopic in the sense that the customs and traditions of her society have no provisions for female leadership and for a woman to hold the position of a queen. In fact, patriarchal societies believe that women are less intelligent than men, and therefore less likely to make good leaders (Nwankwo 198). Nawal el Saadawi confirms that this belief is deeply rooted and strongly upheld by religious fundamentalists in all societies (Nwankwo 198). Nevertheless, Tamara discards all these ideologies and strongly believes in her dream of succeeding her father. The reader can notice this in the following statements she utters to her father: "Naaba, anytime I see your throne I dream of becoming a ruler...So that I can castrate all enemies of Sasakawa. I will sit on my throne and command my well-trained warriors to fight, fight and exterminate our foes" (McBagonluri 6). It is important to note that these words come from a little girl of less than ten years old. Tamara is unique in that a young girl, born and raised in a patriarchal society is not programmed to dream of taking such leading roles as kingship. The best thing her society wants her to dream of is to become a good housewife, that is, secure a husband, bear and nurture children. Lois Tyson writes in this respect: "[t]o [the good woman] are attributed all the virtues associated with patriarchal femininity and domesticity: she's modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing, and nurturing. She has no needs of her own, for she is completely satisfied by serving her family" (Tyson 86). The evidence in Tamara's context is that no woman has ever sat on the throne of Sasakawa before. Even though she does not have a pattern to emulate, so to speak, Tamara still can boldly express her goal with details about it. As one can readily observe, Tamara is endowed with an emancipated mind when it comes to the place and role of the woman in the society. She does not believe in the stereotyped and predetermined type of woman the African society has so far produced. While everybody, women included, seems to be satisfied with traditions, Tamara speaks out her dissatisfaction: "[t]he African woman is a wife, a

housekeeper and a mother by choice. She is not destined to be one” (McBagonluri 24). It is crucial to not the importance of choice in the outcome of the African woman. Pauline Ada Uwakweh is supportive of this as she writes that “[v]oicing is self-defining, liberational, and cathartic. It proclaims an individual as a conscious being capable of independent thought and action” (75). Tamara openly disagrees with social programming and takes a clear stand: “... I have my own drum I will beat and dance to its tune. Society will only have to watch” (McBagonluri 25) From both declarations, we see Tamara tackling a core issue that handicaps women’s fulfillment.

The African Woman is psychologically programmed to accept the patriarchal concept of femininity, which is linked to frailty, modesty and timidity, and which disempowers women in the real world (Tyson 84). This is a psychological enslavement that should be dismantled. In fact, “patriarchy continually exerts forces that undermine women’s self-confidence and assertiveness, then points to the absence of these qualities as proof that women are naturally, and therefore correctly, self-effacing and submissive” (Tyson 82). The metaphor of the drum festival in Tamara’s last declaration gives a striking explanation of the matter. The person who dances in the circle is obliged to go by the tune and rhythm of the drummer. Taken from this perspective, it is the drummer who controls and determines the outcome of the dancer. The drum, here, stands for a person’s thinking, once the thinking changes the outcome changes too. Tamara proves through this utterance that if the dancer desires to go by their own new rules, they will have to beat their own drum. That is why Ebele Eko, holds that “women must assert their voice or remain silent and frustrated” (210). It takes, therefore, a change in women’s thinking for a paradigm shift.

Moreover, on issues of childbirth and motherhood, Tamara deconstructs traditional assumptions about the ‘good’ or the ‘bad’ woman. “Patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she’s a ‘good girl’; if she doesn’t, she’s a ‘bad girl.’” (Tyson 85). And the “good girl” is rewarded for her behavior by being placed on a pedestal by patriarchal culture: she is regarded as a happy and fulfilled woman (Tyson 86). Nevertheless, for Tamara, being a ‘good’ woman never made any woman happy (McBagonluri 24-25). The truth of the

matter is that what society calls a happy woman is actually the one who makes others—husband, children, and society at large—happy at her own expense. Her so-called happiness is then defined not from her own standpoint but from others’ point of view. Simply put, the patriarchal happy woman is not the one who says she is happy but the one whom society says is happy.

In the same perspective, years later, Tamara forbids her daughter to call her mother, because, as she often says, “...I hate the word ‘mother’ because it is a word that brings painful memories to me (McBagonluri 156). The assertion seems to allude in part to her late mother’s rape and murder, but it goes beyond that. For it is my contention that Tamara’s voice, here, speaks for thousands of women who are silenced or who do not have any chance to speak out the pains they endure as mothers. In fact, “[s]ilencing comprises all imposed restrictions on women’s social being, thinking and expressions that are religiously or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control, it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or ‘muted’ female structure” (Uwakweh 75). For Tamara, motherhood is synonymous with yoke, slavery, and servitude; a handicap that shuts personal dreams. She seems to be of the same view as Anthonia C Kalu who thinks that the mother is subject to her society’s requirements of family and community survival and continuity through biological reproduction (83). She is the one who is mainly responsible for the upbringing of the children: feeding, clothing, protecting, and educating them to succeed in life, i.e. giving them “the moral guidance needed to eventually assume their own traditional role in the adult world” (Tyson 86). Tamara does not think it is compulsory for a woman to have a child or even to get married, for she does not believe that becoming a mother confers any special status on the woman or adds anything to her value. To corroborate her uniqueness, the author has one of the characters, Asana, confess “[the princess is] dangerously ambitious. She [is] a woman all right but not a marriage material. She never mention[s] marriage or motherhood. All her dreams [are] centred on ruling.” (McBagonluri 23-24) And Tamara confirms this as she tells her daughter Mbozi: “...the only thing I regret is carrying you in my womb. I should not have conceived you in the first place and when I found out I was pregnant I had two options, to kill or keep you. Keeping you is the biggest mistake I ever made, I regret it” (McBagonluri 156).

It stands out that Tamara is made to think differently, not the way society thinks about women, marriage, and motherhood, which are believed to be the assets of a happy and fulfilled woman in Africa. She holds that a happy woman is a free woman. She is not happy because she satisfies other people's requirements. She will be happy if she can invest in her own dreams and convictions. She says: “[t]he African woman will be happy if allowed to make choices but will never be happy if forced to dance to the tune of society” (McBagonluri 25). McBagonluri contends through this characterization of Tamara that as long as the African woman is reduced to an inanimate thing, a “marriage material” incapable of making choice, she can never be happy. However, Tamara's thoughts are so challenging that they seem insane to her surroundings. That is why she is excluded from her own village. The society, thinks Tamara is, “a ‘dissident’ character. And in a patriarchal society as hers, dissidence has echoes of the rebellious, the violent, and the vandalistic; the iconoclastic and the blasphemous; and, indeed, the needless...” (Nwankwo 98).

When she is banished from Sasakawa, Tamara surprises more than one: “At the outskirts of Sasakawa ...the Princess was behaving so strangely that they did not know whatever [...] she was up to.” (McBagonluri 17). She looks strange because it is the first time that somebody who is banished behaves that way. The common, traditional, or “normal” reaction would have been the shedding of tears and beating of chest. By reacting differently, Tamara shows that she does not think of her banishment as fatality. She sees in what the ordinary character would call a tragedy, a strategy to achieve her dream of avenging Sasakawa on their enemies. That is why she chooses to take refuge in Kumbungu, whose king attacked their kingdom and defiled her mother.

While Asana is afraid for her choice, Tamara says: “where would you go if your own father banished you? You will surely seek refuge with his enemy and that is exactly what I am going to do.” (McBagonluri 26) These words sound strange, for no one in their ‘normal’ sense is expected to take an enemy's land for a place of refuge. However, Tamara's choice can be seen as an efficient strategy for her to go into her enemy's territory to fight him. It is definitely a valiant decision.

In fact, the secret of the princess is what she thinks of herself. On the basis of surrounding conditions, one can say that Tamara is vulnerable right from her early years. However, she does not allow this reality to

condition her self-esteem. She rather sees herself beyond it. Psychology agrees with the fact that “positive thinking in some way involves holding positive expectancies for one’s future. Such expectancies are thought to have built-in implications for behavior. That is, the actions that people take are thought to be greatly influenced by their expectations about the likely consequences of those actions” (Scheier and Carver 26). This statement corroborates the attitude of Tamara in that as a female, society expects her to see herself as weak, dependent and submissive, but she sees herself as strong, tough, and capable of harming even more dangerously than weapons can do. That is why she says: “Tell that idiot that arrows are not the only weapons that defeat men [...] I am more dangerous when unarmed” (McBagonluri 153). Her words reveal that she believes in herself more than she relies on arms. In fact, as people can testify, Tamara thinks of herself as invincible. This sounds pretentious, and yet the princess can still go further. Towards the end of the narrative, we see Tamara alone with her daughter in the royal palace of Kumbungu surrounded by elders and warriors. Having planned to publicly disgrace Tamara, they force her to go on her knees on the marketplace to beg for pardon. Nevertheless, despite their death threats, Tamara confronts them saying: “...I can’t imagine Tamara going on her knees. It will be easier for me to go naked before your people than to go on my knees” (McBagonluri 155). Tamara’s defiance shows the extent to which she is ready to defend and protect her self-esteem.

In the light of the preceding analysis, the protagonist in *Tears of a Rain Goddess* represents a break from tradition, an epitome of novelty and innovation. Tamara Tamara is a symbol of mental power, which is absent in other female characters. It can be inferred that unless our vision defies common sense, there is little chance we make an impact. But a great vision followed by a practical change of thinking can be a gamechanger.

2. Indispensable Traits for the Achievement of Tamara’s Dream

McBagonluri’s protagonist is not only a peculiar character in terms of how she thinks, but she is also the embodiment of virtues and traits that will definitely help her achieve her dream. Tamara is constructed to be a revolutionary type of character, and her peculiarity lies in the depth of her self-confidence. As we stick to the plot, we discover that her thoughts are not mere assumptions or a simple worldview, but unwavering

convictions, and a standard that she lives up to. Tamara believes strongly in her ideals and fearlessly defends them. This is a positive indicator, a sign that she is likely to reach her objectives, for as Scheier and Carver assert, “[p]eople who see desired outcomes as attainable continue to strive for those outcomes, even when progress is slow or difficult” (26). In the same vein, Allan Wigfield and Jacquelynne Eccles, two prominent practitioners of positive psychology hold that “[people] who believe that they are capable of a task are more likely to make positive choices” (Bailey 265). Tamara’s belief in her dream makes her never to give up despite the odds opposing her fate. Let us recall that as a single motherless young girl among her step-mothers, she is conditioned to be vulnerable, yet, she remains strong and does not allow anyone to influence or divert her attention from her dreams. This attitude permeates her relationship with the household. For example, when Naaba’s intention to make Tamara the heiress to his throne becomes known to all, it generates envy and jealousy. No wonder, “ever since [Asana] walked into the palace she [watches] with pity how the others [treat] Tamara. [...] For no reason everyone [is] plotting her down fall. [...] But she [sees] it as a waste of time because all Tamara [is] concerned of is lacing her beads, weaving and thinking of how to rule Sasakawa. She ha[s] no time for visionless enemies.” (McBagonluri 23). The fact that Tamara does not get distracted is due to the conviction she has that nothing can alter her dream. That is why she does not falter despite the manifest opposition of her household. Tamara reveals thereby a crucial step in achieving one’s dream: believing in the dream. It takes confidence to fully invest in and wholeheartedly defend something we hope for.

Another trait that is particular to the protagonist is aggressiveness. Note that patriarchy does not cast aggressiveness as a female character trait. Men are highly praised by society for their aggressiveness. However, in woman this character is associated with the ‘bad girl’ (Tyson 85). The young girl boldly asserts herself and does not give anyone the chance to look down on her. In the palace, both young and adults know that nobody challenges Tamara and goes away with it. When her rights are trampled down, she does not wait for anybody to fight for her. Many a time her sharp response turns mere misunderstandings into domestic disputes. It is up to the extent that two young girls’ quarrel turns into a fierce dispute

that implicates the entire house. In effect, during a quarrel over water, Aisha, one of her step-sisters, provokes Tamara:

...Is there something on my face that resembles your mother's ghost?" [...] Before anyone [can] tell that a volcano [can] explode, Tamara rush[es] at her opponent, g[ets] hold of her neck, pull[s] her to the pot full of water, and push[es] her head into it. [...] Aisha struggle[s] to get free from Tamara and in her struggle pull[s] the piece of cloth around Tamara. This [does] not make her loosen her grip on her victim. She h[olds] on tight. (McBagonluri 9)

Tamara exhibits an exceptional attitude in that she is the contrary of what society expect her to be. That is why Aisha's mother runs in, stands for her daughter, and insults Tamara: "“You are as worthless as your mother. Thank God she did not live long to give birth to generations of idiots.” [But] before she punctuate[s] her words Tamara sp[its] in her face.” And without giving her the chance to retaliate, “Tamara look[s] around her and as swift as an eagle she pull[s] out a burning wood from under the cooking pot and head[s] towards her stepmother. Her stepmother and all onlookers run for their dear lives” (McBagonluri 10).

It is my contention that Tamara is never a victim because of her aggressiveness. And this same trait is what later on helps her prevail over her greatest enemy. She defends herself and does not hesitate to use anything available, provided that she is not beaten. This attitude of hers is highlighted by the narrator who compares her to a volcano and an eagle. In effect, the volcano is known for its unpredictable but highly destructive eruptions, meanwhile the eagle is used here as a metaphor for swiftness and agility. As a volcano, the princess might be dormant, but her reaction is uncontrollable when stirred up. And as an eagle, she is not the biggest, but she capitalizes on her assets to impose herself.

Elsewhere, the narrator recognizes that Tamara never goes back on her word (McBagonluri 94) and people testify that “she is indeed a stubborn princess.” (McBagonluri 154) In effect, her stay in Kumbungu, as the youngest wife of the king, confirms the latter's assertions. In actual fact, Kumbungu is a foreign land and Tamara is the only stranger among the wives of the Yiri Naa. Nevertheless, her actions do not show fear or shyness. On the contrary, by the power of her determination Tamara commands the realization of her dreams. The narrator observes that “[h]er dreams [start] unfolding before she finish[es] dreaming.” (McBagonluri

36) As evidence, Nafisa, the eldest of her co-spouses undertakes to discuss with Tamara, because ever since she joined them, she does not abide by the customs in the palace: she does not care about her role as a housewife and the king does not have time for any other apart from her. Even spending the night with the king is exclusively controlled by Tamara. Surprisingly, the princess rejects her rivals' complaints and boldly defends herself:

...is it my fault if the great one finds me irresistible? [...] “You talk about greeting my rivals every morning. That is a stupid custom. In my father’s palace I greeted only when I was willing to. As for cooking for the whole household may I ask what the errand girls are doing in this compound? In my father’s palace errand girls were in galore and there was no need lighting the fire.” [...] Standing up she face[s] Nafisa [and says]: “...This should be your last attempt to get me to discuss your problems (McBagonluri 44-45).

The princess’s reaction in this excerpt reveals that she does not lose sight of her identity. I can argue that neither the status of a foreigner—Kumbungu is not her homeland—nor that of a married woman—she is supposed to be submissive to rules that govern a marital home—is as important as her royal identity. The proof is the fact that she repeatedly mentions her father’s palace as a reference. She is of a royal descent and destined to rule: she never gives up on that. As a result, even when she is not in the best of conditions, Tamara does not lose her pride and self-esteem, lest she be looked down upon and, before she knows it, trampled down. Instead, amazed by the capability of the young woman, her fellows agree on the fact that Tamara “has taken complete possession of the Yiri Naa [king] and is riding him like a horse [...] she has turned Yiri Naa against his wives, elders, and soon she will turn him against Kumbungu” (McBagonluri 47). This quote best summarizes the feminist agenda of the novel. The imagery is deep in meaning. The writer rejects society’s opinion that casts the woman as the ‘mule of society’. The text posits that the woman can also be a ruler and be as effective as man. As for Tamara, even before she sits on a throne, she is already in control of the king himself and the whole kingdom along with him. The strong message here is that neither gender nor position can make a good leader, but leadership has to do with the content of one’s mind, whether they be a man or a woman.

Besides, the best of dreams can fail if the carrier misses the preparation phase. In *Tears of a Rain Goddess*, I see that the protagonist manifests a particular readiness to learn and to sharpen her skills. This is another one of her distinctive traits. Tamara is not content with her situation so far as she has not seen her dream come true. In fact, let us note that from a princess in Sasakawa, Tamara becomes the most cherished wife of the king of Kumbungu. At such a peak, she could have considered this as a great privilege and ignore her dream. However, her initial plan is to rule Sasakawa, and not to become the wife of a renowned king. Her choice of getting married to her enemy should be seen as a “strategy of redemption” (Mazrui 103).

Therefore, Tamara would not allow her new position to prevent her from equipping herself with the qualifications of a future ruler. In this vein, she takes delight in hunting with one of the best warriors of Kumbungu: Khalid, the king’s son, next to the throne. “Even though Khalid th[inks] she need[s] no more training because she [is] far better than most men in the army,” the princess’s desire is to “be a mistress of the bow and arrow” (McBagonluri 48). According to the prevailing socio-political context, a ruler is the commander in chief of the army. Thus, after diligent and consistent practice, she becomes so skilled that “she [can] shoot without missing. Khalid [has] also given her ten of the most poisonous arrows ever made in Kumbungu” (McBagonluri 71).

Another trait that should be praised in Tamara’s life is her ability to adapt quickly to situations. Very often in the pursuit of a goal, we are faced with unpredicted circumstances. In the words of Scheier and Carver, these are critical times whereby people’s expectancies provide a basis for engaging in one of two very different classes of behavior: continued striving versus giving up (26). As for Tamara, she promptly adapts to every situation. Anytime circumstances change, we see that the protagonist adopts a new approach without losing sight of her goal. Initially, nothing could tell that Tamara would be one day forced out of her hometown, where all her hopes and dreams are and where the road to the throne seems to be paved for her. However, unexpectedly, she gets banished from home, and forced into exile. But, as mentioned earlier on, her reaction to the exile is not the usual tear shedding and beating of chest of an African woman (McBagonluri 17). Instead, she shows a strong confidence of her return. She does not see her banishment as a dead end,

she rather sees it as a strategy she will use to achieve her dream. That is why she agrees to marry the murderer of her mother, the Yiri Naa, the king of Kumbungu. Against her own will and initial agenda, we see that Tamara using her beauty as a means to achieve her goal. Henceforth, she has to share the same roof and even her intimacy with someone who is her sworn enemy. And when she finds out that she is pregnant, Tamara says: “...I never dreamt of breastfeeding but now that it is inevitable I plan to do it with joy...” (McBagonluri 67). In substance, the message the princess conveys is that, as long as she does not lay hold on her dream, all that might befall her is of minor importance. In all circumstances, she adopts the appropriate coping strategy advocated by Scheier and Carver (28).

When one compares Tamara to Fathia, for instance, the protagonist's virtues are highlighted. Even though a minor character, Fathia is a distinctive woman in the narrative. She is one of the most popular, if not the first, female attraction of the whole of Kumbungu. She is known for her beauty and her unparalleled dancing skills, being the only girl who has been able to hold the title of the best female dancer for three years in a row. Because her character and natural virtues command admiration, after rejecting the proposals of many men, she is chosen to marry into the most exalted family in the kingdom: she is engaged to Hameed, a contender for the throne (McBagonluri 27-28). Despite all these assets, when Fathia is raped by Khalid, she resorts to suicide. Her words reveal that she sees her situation as being helpless: “I have been defiled. Before the river gods my dignity was taken. I can't live with that scar. A scar that will never heal. I must die” (McBagonluri 62). After that, she drinks poison and dies. I posit that Fathia's situation does not differ from Tamara's. In fact, both of them lose their virginity to men they neither love nor want—note that Tamara never considers the Yiri Naa to be her husband. Moreover, Tamara gets pregnant for the Yiri Naa and later on gives birth to a child. Definitely, Fathia is a defeatist character compared to Tamara, whose capacity of adaptation in challenging circumstances is outstanding. Tamara succeeds in overcoming her predicaments, because she is always optimistic. According to Michael F. Scheier and Charles S. Carver,

optimists cope in more adaptive ways than do pessimists. Optimists are more likely than pessimists to take direct action to solve their problems, are more planful in dealing

with the adversity they confront, and are more focused in their coping efforts. Optimists are more likely to accept the reality of the stressful situations they encounter, and they also seem intent on growing personally from negative experiences and trying to make the best of bad situations (27-28).

In Tamara, McBagonluri breaks new grounds by dealing with die-hard traditions rooted in the collective mind of the African society, because the picture painted of the woman in Africa is, to say the least, negative, unrepresentative and condemnatory (Eko 212). She constructs a ‘new African woman’, not the shy one who is always behind the man, but the bold woman who is ready to assert herself and have society change its mind.

This new mindset will eventually help the protagonist achieve her dream. Alone, she entertains the ‘strange’ thought to kill at an appointed time the king of Kumbungu, who is the commander of the army and the most protected person of the land: “...by the time a cock crows this morning, I will be out of your life or you mine” (McBagonluri 76-77). The weight of these words can be better appreciated in light of the following quote. Mazrui writes: “On the whole, Africa has sometimes expected its women to be ready to die for their society. But Africa has rarely expected women to kill for their society. The patriotic duty to kill is gender-specific—it is a man's duty” (88). The woman sounds out of her mind, at the end of the day, she sees her dream come true. With a bow and arrows, she defeats the best warrior of Kumbungu exactly as she planned: “On the ground [goes] the history maker of Kumbungu. A big wind bl[ows] slamming all opened doors and windows in the palace, then a cock crow[s]” (McBagonluri 81). Furthermore, she defeats the whole army of Kumbungu and makes a triumphant return to Sasakawa, where she is crowned queen (McBagonluri 89). The narrator confirms that her dream has been translated to reality (McBagonluri 89).

The truth of the matter is that Tamara has not achieved her dream the day she kills the Yiri Naa or the day she is crowned. She has defeated the king many days before their physical confrontation and she has been ruling in her mind long before she has access to the throne. This means that she does not achieve her dream by the means of weapons but mainly by her ability to think aright. Kumbungu people, “knew Sasakawa could revenge someday but they never made room for that revenge to end so

shamefully. A woman ha[s] stirred their history with her filthy hands” (McBagonluri 89). According to patriarchal gender roles distribution, “[w]omen till the land, the means of production. Women control the womb, the means of reproduction. But women do not control the means of physical coercion: the spear, the bow and arrow, and later the gun” (Mazrui 95). Tamara has proved that this role distribution can be dismantled. Here lies the real achievement of the heroine: she is an iconoclast and demystifier of patriarchal power. It comes then as no surprise that Kumbungu marvels at her. Tamara might be said to have ‘filthy hands’ because her power and personal abilities make of her a threat to patriarchy, but she has achieved her dream, which is also McBagonluri’s dream, that of laying a female finger print on the history of her society.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, this paper has shown Diana Bamford McBagonluri has constructed her protagonist to be an epitome of change. Tamara has been endowed with the ability to challenge socially constructed stereotypes that disempower women. The paper purports that what patriarchal societies have so far painted as the role of the African woman is man-made and can be dismantled. Tamara’s ascension to the throne of Sasakawa is the author’s craft to contend that leadership does not have to do with gender. It takes a change of mind, courage, optimism and adaptation to change the plight of the African woman. Definitely, from a dreamer, Tamara has become an achiever. McBagonluri has not only uncovered the situation of the woman, but she makes “alternative statements about gender and its institutions” (Uwakweh 83), by empowering her protagonist to change it.

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