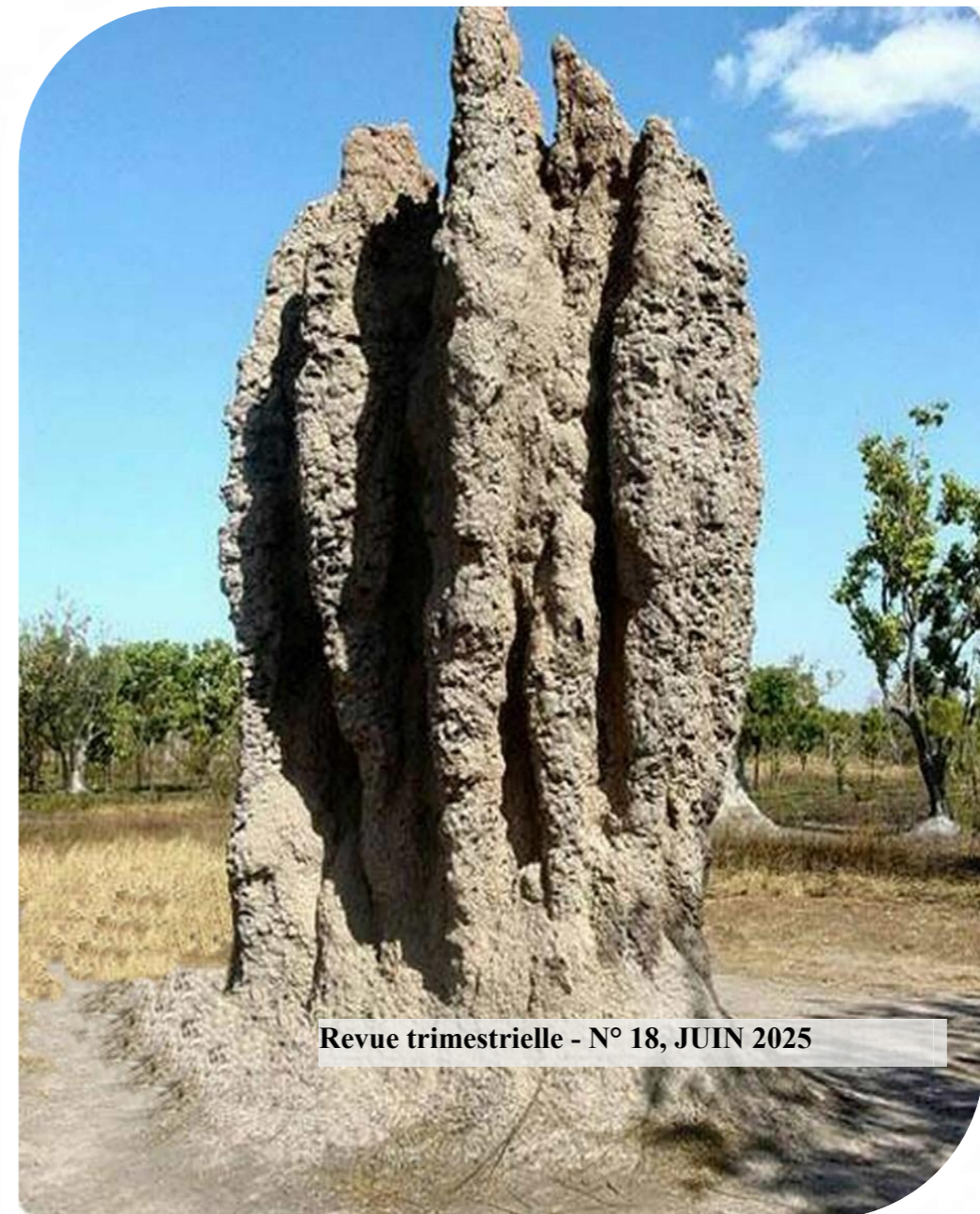


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"Dama Ninao" est une revue scientifique interdisciplinaire qui accepte et publie tous les articles relevant des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines. A cet effet, elle s'intéresse aux études et théories littéraires, linguistiques, sociologiques, philosophiques, anthropologiques et historico-géographiques. La Revue "Dama Ninao", entendu "L'Entente" en langue kabyè du Nord Togo, est créée dans l'intention de matérialiser la mondialisation ou la globalisation qui s'opère avec l'esprit d'équipe et d'échanges et la désuétude du monde autarcique. Le monde scientifique universitaire ne peut échapper à cet esprit d'équipe qui fonde un creuset où « le fer aiguisé le fer », les échanges se croisent, puis s'entremêlent pour aboutir à une reconstruction des connaissances scientifiques individuelles dans la collectivité.

La Revue Dama Ninao nous renvoie à la Civilisation de l'Universel du poète sénégalais Léopold Sédar Senghor, qui prône la porosité des âmes avec l'acceptation de l'autre, de ce qu'il dispose d'utile pour mon avancement : sa civilisation, sa culture, sa langue ... Elle se fonde notamment sur la philosophie de Paul Ricœur qui préconise la perception de Soi-même comme un autre. Considérer soi-même comme un autre aux yeux de l'autre, nous amènerait à faire taire nos distensions et ressentiments afin de redimensionner notre espace, reconstruire notre histoire et notre société.

La Revue Dama Ninao s'est inspirée de la nature. Des insectes en miniature nous produisent de bels chefs-d'œuvre architecturaux, conjuguent leur génie créateur et leur force dans la patience et dans la tolérance. Ils créent des œuvres monumentales qui dépassent l'entendement humain, les termitières. A cet effet, la nature semble nous parler, nous guider, nous instruire dans le silence. Seules ces créations nous interpellent sans autant faire de nous des disciples. Comme la termitière qui, pour la plupart du temps, est une composante de maillons surgissant de la même matière, la Revue Dama Ninao se veut une termitière scientifique dont les enseignants-chercheurs en sont les maillons.

Au confluent de diverses sciences, la Revue Dama Ninao se propose de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

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Volume : 10 à 15 pages ; interligne 1.5, police 12 pour le corps du texte et les courtes citations ; police 11 pour les longues citations, Times New Roman, les références des citations doivent être incorporées dans le texte. Exemple : Guy Rocher (1968, p. 29), pas de référence en foot-notes à l'exception de quelques commentaires.

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- Un **TITRE** en caractère d'imprimerie et en gras. Le titre ne doit pas être trop long ;
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2-2- Pour le **Titre** de la deuxième sous-section

3- Pour le **Titre** de la troisième section (si l'auteur de l'article le souhaite)

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Objectifs et portée

La revue Dama Ninao, de par son nom qui signifie « entente », a pour objectifs :

- de matérialiser le monde universitaire qui est un creuset où « le fer aiguisé le fer », les échanges se croisent, puis s'entremêlent pour aboutir à une reconstruction des connaissances scientifiques individuelles dans la collectivité ;
- de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

La revue Dama Ninao a une portée scientifique et sociale. A cet effet, elle publie tous les articles relevant des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines et s'intéresse aux études et théories littéraires, linguistiques, sociologiques, philosophiques, anthropologiques et historico-géographiques sur appel à contribution thématique (colloque) ou varia. Elle est un espace de rencontre, de construction et de reconstruction des réseaux relationnels et scientifiques.

Professeur Koutchoukalo TCHASSIM

Université de Lomé

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**PATRIARCHY AS A GENDERLESS PRAXIS IN MAXINE HONG
KINGSTON'S *THE WOMEN WARRIOR***

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Abstract : Patriarchal society is generally perceived as the foundation of male domination. This article intends to demonstrate a new perception of patriarchy that transcends the traditional notion of male domination. This transcendent form of patriarchy is observed in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Women Warrior* — a novel in which strong female characters exhibit dominance over both vulnerable men and weaker women. The paradoxical domination of women in the patriarchal system reveals that the concept of patriarchy requires deeper exploration to develop a more nuanced understanding of its complexities. The study is theoretically based on Paul Camy Mocombe's concept of feminine patriarchy.

Keywords: patriarchy, male, female, domination, genderless praxis, novel

Résumé : La société patriarcale est généralement perçue comme le fondement de la domination masculine. Cet article entend démontrer une perception différente du patriarcat qui transcende la notion traditionnelle de domination masculine. Cette forme transcendante du patriarcat se lit dans le roman *The Women Warrior* de Maxine Hong Kingston où la romancière met en scène des personnages féminins forts qui exercent une domination non seulement sur des hommes vulnérables, mais aussi sur des femmes plus faibles. La domination paradoxale des femmes fortes dans le

système patriarcal révèle que le concept de patriarcat nécessite une exploration plus approfondie afin d'en avoir une compréhension plus nuancée de ses complexités. L'étude se fonde théoriquement sur le concept de patriarcat féminin de Paul Camy Mocombe.

Mots clés : patriarcat, male, femelle, domination, praxis sans genre, roman

Introduction

One of the most significant changes that have occurred in society in recent years has been the establishment and consolidation of equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities for men and women in mainstream discourse. As society progresses, human living conditions within patriarchal system evolve. However, the relationship between women and men continues to shape human society. In recent years, patriarchal society has become increasingly neutral regarding gender superiority. Recognizing patriarchy as genderless suggests that it is not solely about men dominating women; it can also involve women dominating other women or individuals of any gender exerting power over others.

Praxis, in this context, is understood as a set of actions, behaviors, and attitudes that disrupt traditional power imbalances, which may include stereotyping, discrimination, and violence. Viewing patriarchy as a genderless praxis implies that power imbalances can occur between anyone, not just between men and women. For instance, a female employer might treat her female employees differently from her male employees, which still constitutes patriarchal dynamics, despite being enacted by a woman.

Women in the patriarchal society exhibit certain patriarchal traits, portraying themselves as powerful individuals among men. Their strength enables them to fully integrate into the patriarchal system, sometimes adopting traditionally male characteristics. This phenomenon is evident in female soldiers and women in leadership positions. King (2015) highlights that female soldiers describe their successful integration as becoming “one of the boys”, “one of the lads”, or “one of

us,” recognizing that they are accorded a masculine gender status despite their sex. Similarly, Malmi (2009) argues that alpha females in patriarchal societies wield authority over both vulnerable men and women, possessing dominance, leadership qualities, and decisional power. Marcia Yonemoto (2020) further underscores how women in leadership’s roles seek retribution, citing the historical examples of Miyagino and Shinobu of Sendai, Japan, who avenged their father’s death.

The objective of this article is to demonstrate that patriarchy functions as a genderless praxis, where both men and women can exercise dominance. Additionally, the study examines feminist writings to illustrate how women adopt warrior-like attitudes in society. The research focuses on Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, an Asian-American novel that provides a compelling perspective on how women exhibit patriarchal traits.

The novel, which constitutes the primary corpus of this study, centers on dominant female characters within patriarchal society. In *The Woman Warrior*, female characters, particularly the unnamed warrior and Brave Orchid, exert control over vulnerable individuals in Chinese society. These women possess decisional power and are not subjugated by men within the patriarchal system. Notably, their masculine behaviors illustrate that authority can belong to women as well as men in a patriarchal society.

The choice of *The Woman Warrior* is significant because it shows how women can behave as patriarchs and overpower vulnerable individuals. This analysis is guided by the following research question: How can women exhibit patriarchal traits in a traditionally male-dominated society? To answer this, the study critically examines the portrayal of women with patriarchal attitudes in *The Woman Warrior* through the lens of Mocombe’s (2022) concept of feminine patriarchy. Mocombe argues that women, in their pursuit of equality, paradoxically reinforce and commodify patriarchal structures by assuming traditional male roles and behaviors.

To achieve the study’s objectives, the analysis is structured into three sections. The first section explores the transcendence of patriarchy in *The Women Warrior*. The

second examines the powerful position of women in the patriarchal societies. The third and final section discusses women's leadership at the social level.

1. The Transcendence of Patriarchy Notion

The transcendence of the notion of patriarchy suggests that the attitude of dominance in a patriarchal society is not exclusively a male affair. Beyond the stereotypical image of men as the sole dominators, one can observe the domination exercised by strong women over vulnerable men and women in the patriarchal system. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston reveals an alternative way of interpreting the patriarchal society, showing that male domination is not absolute. The limited male domination is illustrated through the authority of the unnamed woman warrior over her husband. As a woman, the unnamed woman assumes a position of leadership over her husband by instructing him to take care of their child. This is indicated when she says: "I gave my husband the baby and told him to take it to his family, and I gave him all the money we taken on raids to take to my family" (Kingston, p. 41). Through this statement, Kingston unveils the idea that domination in a patriarchal society is not static or confined to men alone; rather it is accessible to those who possess strength and authority, regardless gender. The sentence powerfully illustrates the strength of women within a patriarchal system and simultaneously demonstrates that power to dominate belongs to the strongest, whether man or woman.

The female writer underscores the fact that the patriarchal society should be understood beyond the mere domination of men. Patriarchal society, therefore, becomes a place where domination is shared between men and women. Domination remains balanced in the sense that everyone, regardless of their gender, has the ability to exercise authority over others, provided that they are granted some form of power. The unnamed woman warrior deconstructs the idea that men exclusively hold power in the patriarchal society through her commitment as a soldier in the army. Through her military achievements, she challenges male authority, even wearing male garments to show that within the patriarchal system, a woman can be dominant if she possesses strength. To emphasize the authority of women in a patriarchal society, the

unnamed woman warrior declares: “I put on my men’s clothes and armor and tied my hair in a man’s fashion” (Kingston, p. 36). This sentence highlights the idea that a woman can adopt the attitudes and appearance traditionally associated with men. The unnamed woman warrior affirms that one can be a woman and still be strong, provided she decides to be so. This assertion corresponds to S. de Beauvoir’s (1949, p. 26) famous statement: “On ne naît pas femme, on le devient⁴³”. Through Beauvoir’s statement, it becomes clear that being born female does not automatically confer the social identity of being a woman. According to de Beauvoir, femininity is a social construct that transcends biological sex – just as one can be born female and display characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, one can also be born male and display female traits.

Through the portrayal of her female characters, Kingston sheds light on the fact that women in a patriarchal system are likewise capable of holding leadership roles. Kingston allows the reader to grasp that power of domination is relative, being a man is not synonymous with being dominant in patriarchal society. In fact, the strength embodied by the unnamed woman warrior expresses men’s authority over women is limited. She represents the idea that women can be the protectors of men. This idea is reinforced when she declares: “I’m good enough now to save the boys” (Kingston, p. 32). This statement underscores how a woman can also act as a protector of men, while simultaneously revealing the limitation of male power. Thus, the unnamed woman warrior proves that strong women in a patriarchal system can also hold authority. This authority of women over men is further illustrated through Kingston’s aunt, who gives orders to her uncle. This can be seen in the line: “‘Shout,’ my aunt ordered” (Kingston, p. 51). This imperative sentence testifies the fact that within the patriarchal system, women can also dominate vulnerable men. The fact that Kingston’s aunt orders her uncle to shout expresses the weakness of vulnerable men in the presence of strong women.

⁴³ We are not born a woman, we become one.

Nowadays, women and men enjoy the same privileges in patriarchal societies in terms of human rights and equality. They often work together under the same conditions, a fact supporting the theory of equal opportunity between women and men within patriarchal systems. According to the Conseil de l'Europe, the theory of equality between women and men can be defined as follows:

L'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes implique de considérer de quelle façon il est possible d'aller plus loin afin de changer les structures de la société qui contribuent à maintenir des relations de pouvoir inégales entre les femmes et les hommes et d'atteindre un meilleur équilibre entre les diverses valeurs et priorités aussi bien féminines que masculines⁴⁴ (Conseil de l'Europe, 2024, p. 2).

This definition reflects the image that Kingston presents in *The Woman Warrior*, particularly through the figures of the old man and the old woman. They symbolize the cooperation and equality of rights between women and men in a patriarchal society. Their collaboration illustrates the balance of power between both genders – male and female. Kingston portrays a society where women and men share the same rights and responsibilities. The image of the old man and the old woman embodies the equal distribution of empowerment between women and men within the patriarchal society. This balance of empowerment is perceived when Kingston (p. 21) writes: “The door opened, and an old man and an old woman came out carrying bowls of rice and soup and a leafy branch of peaches”. The sharing of food in this scene symbolizes conviviality and solidarity between women and men within the patriarchal structure. This harmonious relationship between the old man and the old woman indicates that men are not always superior to women.

The domination of men is, at times, limited because it does not necessarily surpass female power. In short, both genders can be perceived as similar. This idea is supported by L. Batalha *et al.* (2011, p. 796) who state: “gender differences occur

⁴⁴ Equality between women and men involves considering how it is possible to go further to change the structures of society which contribute to maintain unequal power relations between women and men and to achieve a better balance between the various values and priorities of both women and men

only in a few areas: that they are context dependent and that women and men are more similar to rather than different from each other”. According to Batalha *et al*, men in patriarchal societies can no longer claim unquestioned superiority over women, as both genders share similar living conditions and rights.

The existence of equal rights between women and men indicates the individual liberty present in patriarchal societies. These societies have thus become spaces where anyone is the master of his or her own life. The female writer shows that men are no longer the sole dominators or decision-makers; women also exercise power and authority within the patriarchal system. In modern patriarchal societies, women hold leadership positions and sometimes exert authority over vulnerable men. When a woman holds decisional power, she can subjugate weak men under her authority, thereby asserting her feminine identity and capability. P. Mocombe (2022, p. 77) argues that when women demonstrate the ability to achieve what men can do, they want their male counterpart to recognize and celebrate their success. He states: “[women] have the ability to be and do as men despite being women, a gaze they would like their male counterparts to also assume by celebrating their success in the system as, originally, constituted by men.” The quote highlights the idea that women desire their success to be recognized not as something extraordinary or rare, but as proof of their equal abilities and potential. They wish for men to change their mindset, to view women not as intruders who managed to succeed in a male-dominated world, but as legitimate and competent individuals whose accomplishments should be valued, respected, and celebrated just like those of their male counterparts.

Kingston (p. 155) further reinforces the vulnerability of men in patriarchal societies through the behavior of Brave Orchid toward her sister Moon Orchid’s husband. Brave Orchid reveals a strength that sustains female authority within patriarchal settings when she confronts the man, saying: “Why didn’t you write to tell her once and for all you weren’t coming back and you weren’t sending for her?” Brave Orchid’s assertiveness highlights the power women can exercise in patriarchal societies. Consequently, the patriarchal system becomes a space where both women

and men share dominance, as women are no longer confined to subordination. At the same time, Kingston, through *The Woman Warrior*, reveals that some women within patriarchal societies can even subjugate men under their authority.

2- The Powerful Position of Women in a Patriarchal Society

Tackling the powerful position of women in the patriarchal society involves analyzing how, under the influence of feminist ideology, women tend to reverse traditional gender roles by asserting authority over men. In *The Woman Warrior*, one can observe the dominant position of female characters over their male counterparts. The female writer portrays a society in which men are not always the sole dominators over women. The image projected by the unnamed woman warrior suggests that human society should not revolve exclusively around male. Rather, a patriarchal society must recognize the importance and strength of women. In this context, the unnamed woman warrior shows that a woman is capable of protecting vulnerable men and women from danger. This idea is reinforced in the statement: “I ran back to my soldiers and gathered the fastest horses-men for pursuit” (Kingston, p. 42). This quotation puts light on the fact that women should not be regarded as weak in a patriarchal society. The female warrior proves that being a woman should not serve as a justification for marginalizing her or excluding her from male-dominated spheres. A woman is equally capable of leading a group of people if she possesses the necessary strength and determination.

The concept of an army symbolizes the capacity of women soldiers to overcome difficulties during time of war. The unnamed woman warrior embodies the power of women to integrate into male-dominated domains, particularly professions traditionally reserved for men. In line with this argument, L. Holmgren (2009, p. 1) states: “Today, women are in increasing numbers taking part in traditionally male professions within militaries and being incorporated in combat units”. Holmgren’s statement shows that women are no longer marginalized in the domain of the military professions but are integrated alongside men, enjoying the same privileges and responsibilities. Indeed, the unnamed woman warrior represents a transgression of

traditional gender boundaries within a patriarchal society. She symbolizes the idea that women are capable of inserting themselves into male-dominated spheres. The woman warrior proves that women can be protectors, even of men, in a patriarchal system. This role reversal is illustrated in the statement: “I’m good enough now to save the boys” (Kingston, p. 32). This sentence highlights the woman warrior’s confidence in her ability to protect vulnerable men in times of danger.

The female warrior demonstrates that, in a patriarchal society, men are not the only ones capable of providing protection. The protection that women offer extends beyond the moral or emotional sphere to include the physical domain. This physical strength allows women to undertake activities traditionally perceived as male-exclusive. The unnamed woman soldier exhibits a physical prowess that rivals or even surpasses that of some male soldiers. Her strength is further exemplified by her ability to assemble her own army to fight her enemies. The creation of her own army signifies her powerful position within a patriarchal system. This leadership is understood in the passage: “When I won over a goodly number of fighters, I built up my army enough to attack fiefdoms and to pursue the enemies I had seen in the water gourd” (Kingston, p. 37). The unnamed woman warrior shows that women are also able to assert her leadership in a patriarchal society. Her ability to build and lead an army expresses women’s commitment to establishing their authority within a society traditionally considered the domain of men. Furthermore, the leadership of women in a patriarchal society is not only perceived in the military context but also extends to the social sphere.

3- The Leadership of Women at the Social Level

Women’s leadership at the social level in a patriarchal society often results in women gaining respect and authority over men. Indeed, it is difficult to provide a single, universally accepted definition of leadership because its meaning depends on contexts and situations. However, L. Denmark (1993, p. 343) provides a relevant definition, stating that “leadership is a process that takes place in groups in which one member influences and controls the behavior of the other members toward some

common goal.” From this perspective, leadership involves the ability to guide and influence a group towards a shared purpose.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston highlights the capacity of women to lead and exercise authority within a patriarchal society. The unnamed woman warrior underlines this ability through her actions as a military leader. Her leadership is revealed when she orders her army, demonstrating control over her soldiers. This is illustrated in the following excerpt: “Stop! I ordered my riders. Our horses are exhausted and I don’t want to chase any farther south” (Kingston, p. 42). By commanding her riders to stop the pursuit, the unnamed woman warrior asserts her authority and leadership within the army she has built.

Moreover, the unnamed woman warrior’s leadership extends beyond the battlefield to her personal life and her community. She assumes responsibility for protecting her people against their enemies, showing self-confidence and courage despite living in a patriarchal system. Her determination to restore justice and reclaim her community’s property taken by invaders is displayed in the statement: “To avenge my family, I’d have to storm across China to take back our farm from the communists” (Kingston, p. 49). This underlines her commitment to fighting not only for personal revenge but also for the well-being of her community. Her actions challenge the traditional idea that only men can be warriors and protectors in patriarchal societies.

This dimension of leadership aligns with A. Basu’s (1996, p. 71) perspective: “We want to encourage our members not to think in terms of individual rights but in terms of responsibility to the nation.” The unnamed woman warrior embodies this collective responsibility, proving that women, too, can lead and serve their country.

Her leadership is also evident within her own family, particularly in her relationship with her husband. Despite being partners in the army, she assumes the role of decision-maker, guiding not only the soldiers but also her husband. This dynamic is illustrated when she entrusts her husband with their child’s care so she can continue fighting:

I gave my husband the baby and told him to take it to his family, and I gave him all the money we had taken on raids to take to my family. Go now, I said, before he is old enough to recognize me. While the blur is still in his eyes and the little fists shut tight like buds, I'll send my baby away from me. I altered my clothes and became again the slim young man (Kingston, pp. 40-41).

The passage above underlines her leadership and authority even in her marital relationship, reinforcing the idea that women in patriarchal societies can hold power and make significant decisions traditionally reserved for men.

Similarly, leadership is also embodied by Brave Orchid, who strives to support her sister Moon Orchid in restoring her dignity. Brave Orchid encourages her sister to confront her husband and reclaim her place within the family, despite the challenges she faces in the United States. Her commitment shows the social responsibility and leadership that women can display in difficult situations.

Confronting the husband of her younger sister unveils the self-confidence of Brave Orchid as a woman within a patriarchal society. Indeed, Brave Orchid embodies women's freedom of speech in a society traditionally regarded as male-dominated, namely the patriarchal system. Through her demand for reparation for the injustice her younger sister has suffered, Brave Orchid reveals the powerful leadership role women can assume in such context. In support of this idea, she declares: "He deserves your getting angry with him. For abandoning you and for abandoning your daughter" (Kingston, p. 125). This statement highlights Brave Orchid's determination to confront and challenge the misconduct of Moon Orchid's husband. By encouraging her sister to confront her husband, Brave Orchid seeks to instill the principle of female leadership within the patriarchal society.

Moreover, Brave Orchid urges Moon Orchid not to accept passively the disrespect shown by her husband. She insists: "He deserves to be bothered. How dare he marry somebody else when he has you? How can you sit there so calmly?" (Kingston, p.125). These questions show Brave Orchid's strategy to awaken her sister's consciousness and to incite her to resist oppression.

Brave Orchid thus positions herself as a feminist figure whose leadership is oriented towards defending and restoring the rights of vulnerable women in a patriarchal society. In *The Woman Warrior*, Brave Orchid is presented as a feminist leader who strives to challenge the injustice that weak and vulnerable women endure under male domination. She achieves this by encouraging them to adopt the same spirit of resistance and empowerment.

This idea is reinforced by S. Wakefield (2017, p. 28) who explains:

Women with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilize others—especially other women—around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic and political transformation for equality and the realization of human rights for all

This quotation unveils the crucial role feminist women leaders play in promoting the rights of vulnerable women in society. The commitment of Brave Orchid to encourage her sister Moon Orchid to take responsibility for her own life exemplifies her leadership in the patriarchal context.

Conclusion

This study has examined patriarchy as a genderless praxis in Kingston's *The Women Warrior*. The novel provides evidence that the patriarchal society is not exclusively dominated by men; women also exercise domination within this system. The female domination is manifested in their ability to demonstrate imposing strength over the vulnerable members of the patriarchal society, regardless of gender. Through Mocombe's concept of feminine patriarchy, the study reveals the powerful position of women in the patriarchal system, particularly through the symbolic figure of the unnamed woman warrior.

The analysis has shown that women in the patriarchal society exert authority and control over both men and women, just as powerful men do. The warrior status

of the unnamed woman signifies that women, too, can exercise supremacy over men. As a female leader and soldier, the unnamed woman warrior illustrates that one can be a woman and still possess the ability to dominate and command men in a patriarchal society.

This study also sheds light on women's leadership within a patriarchal society. As the leader of her own army, the unnamed woman warrior proves that women are capable of leading men and organizing them for collective action. She mobilizes her army to defend her community against its enemies, which reinforces her commitment of protecting vulnerable members of society, including men. Her actions attest to her strength and authority within the patriarchal system. Her attitude proves how powerful she is in the patriarchal society.

Moreover, the investigation has revealed women's leadership at the social level within the patriarchal society. Brave Orchid exemplifies such leadership by influencing her sister, Moon Orchid, to reclaim her husband after he abandoned her in China for a new life in America. Brave Orchid's involvement in encouraging her sister to confront her husband and demand respect highlights women's capacity to assert their authority and dignity in a male-dominated society. Her decision to challenge the authority of her sister's husband indicates that Brave Orchid embodies feminist leadership within the patriarchal structure.

Through the portrayal of female characters in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston reveals that not only men but also women impose respect and authority in the patriarchal society. The literary narrative constructed by Kingston represents the reality that strong women can exert influence over both vulnerable women and men within this context. The dominance exercised by the unnamed woman warrior and Brave Orchid underscores the concept of patriarchy as a genderless praxis, where power and authority are not exclusively reserved for men but are accessible to women as well.

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